

## **Evacuation to Moosburg**

[Narrator] As the Russian armies were advancing from the east, three of the Stalag Lufts were ultimately evacuated. Stalag Luft III's time came in the midst of the worst European winter in decades. Some of the POW camps were liberated by the Russians, but not the airmen. Adolf Hitler personally saw to that.

[LtGen Clark] "It was perfectly obvious that when they got thirty miles or so away that the Germans were going to have to make an important decision – whether to let us be liberated by the Russians or whether to try to keep us. And Hitler's personal decision was 'Don't let the Luftgangsters be liberated by the Russians. I want to keep them as hostages.'

[Narrator] The march began late at night in a blizzard. Within hours, the bitter cold along with the malnourished condition of the prisoners began to take its toll.

[Norman Grant] "I think that column of personnel, POWs, from the five compounds must have totaled 20,000 to 25,000 people. To move out at midnight, in the dark of night, ill-prepared for cold weather, certainly ill-prepared for survival in any way from the standpoint of foods, and moving out with all your possessions. As we went through the night, why, the cold weather attacked some and they didn't make it. Can't speak the numbers or names, but there were people not in the column the morning following from the night before.

[Tom Thomas] "We started out in the worst blizzard that they had in Germany in about 25 years. It was cold, there was snow, it was blowing like you wouldn't believe. During the walk, once you sat down, you had to keep your feet moving, your toes in your shoes, because if you didn't, they would freeze. It got so bad, a lot of the guys would start throwing all their packs away and I remember that I was one probably of those more fit than the other ones, and I would take packs from the other guys and carry them on my back so that guy could get up and start walking without his pack."

[Milt Shalinsky] "We walked for three solid days before we even stopped. I was in the South Compound. Well, they did stop sometimes right in the road and everybody just fell down in the snow. We were so frozen stiff, we couldn't be frozen any more."

[Burton Joseph] "I lay down in the snow because I was tired. I probably would have been left there and frozen to death if Junior Couch hadn't taken a look at me and become obsessed with the fact that I was goofing off. And in whatever his condition was, he became angry and ended up kicking me good and hard until I finally, suddenly, came to, got up, and tried to hit him as hard as I could for kicking me, which was probably like a love tap, but he got me up and going."

[John Cordwell] "We wished we had died, sometimes. We reached the end of our physical endurance. We couldn't survive marching like that, all the time. It's interesting. You're writing a story about it, you never realize what ice beating in your face will do

over time. After a few days, our gums were all raw and bleeding, from gasping for air as we marched and the ice slashing in our faces. All the skin was ripped off our gums there. And our mouths were bleeding all the time.

[Narrator] The march ended at Stremberg where they were put in boxcars. Another kind of horror soon began.

[Norman Grant] "They put us on boxcars, herded us in there like cattle, the old forty and eight boxcar, crowded in there -- sickness, dysentery, fear, all the emotions that go with that -- to proceed to our next destination. Somewhere around Dresden, they stopped the train and let us down, out to stretch. It must have been an awful sight to see all those bare buttocks of thousands of prisoners relieving themselves because of the dysentery.

[Tex Shields] "The boxcars were called 'forty and eight' -- supposed to be forty men or eight horses. We were about fifty men to a boxcar. The conditions were foul. If animals had been in there before us, they didn't bother clean them out, so we were right in the manure. I guess while the train was taking on water for the boiler, we were permitted to evacuate our bowels. There must have been hundreds of Americans lined up, dropped their drawers and had a bowel movement, and it didn't matter if there were German women, children, civilians watching. We were treated like animals. We were treated like subhumans."