

Trautenau to Hamburg

February-April 1945 – Manci

I don't know how many of us made it. I do know that they took all of us from Reichenbach. But this time there was no transport. We were forced to walk 25 to 30 kilometers a day through the mountains. They just gathered us up and started to march. I don't know if they thought they wouldn't be bombed, or maybe they didn't have any fuel. But we were on foot, closely guarded as usual.

Besides our group from Auschwitz, there were other women slave laborers, too, maybe a few hundred in all. We were in the Sudeten Mountains of southern and eastern Germany. The snow was deep and the cold would have been difficult even if we were dressed well. But we weren't.

We would stay wherever we could. One night we'd be in a barn, the next night in a church and then in a granary. It didn't matter as long as we could get a roof over our heads. In the morning we would be ordered to begin marching again.

One time we went to sleep in barracks where Russian soldiers were held as prisoners. But in general, wherever you were, you just laid down and slept. That was it because you were so tired. Some of the women would march as far as they could and then they would quit. They could go no farther. A shot would ring out and the march would continue.

On February 16, we arrived in Trautenau where we were put into open coal cars. After another ten days on the move, we arrived in the rundown Camp Porta. I think we were making radios or telephones; it was always something for the war.

Conditions at Porta were horrible. Within hours of our arrival, we were infested with lice. Manci, Edith and I would spend time picking the lice off one another, but we couldn't stop them. It seemed that every second of our day would be focused on the bites, the itchiness, and then the ultimate bleeding and infection from the sores. There was little or no food except for rotten potato peels. But there was a German guard who snuck food to me that I could share with Ipi and others. He was decent and he even gave me a little pocketknife with my name on it. I still have it today.

We left Porta after a month and traveled in closed cars to Bensdorf, and after that to a place called Ludwigslust. It seemed as though we were just steps ahead of the Red Army. At some point we were at a plane factory that appeared to be carved out of a mountain. The space was massive—it was filled with fighter jets, airplane parts, and different tools. We were led to worktables and ordered to assemble parts for different sections of the airplanes.

Then we were on the move again. This time we ended up going even farther north in Germany, to Hamburg and Altona. We were on a chain gang, digging ditches and fixing roads with shovels and wheelbarrows. That lasted for only two weeks or so. Then there was another SS-escorted transport for us. But the size of the transport was smaller by then because there were a lot fewer of us.