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Jazzletter

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Mail Bag

As a Canadian, I am proud of our Medicare system. Even with its warts and occasional foul-ups, I wouldn't trade it for any other scheme about which I have heard. Let's hope that those with the powers to act (in the U.S.) see copies of your article, and recognize the lucidity of your thinking.

Harry R. Nehrlich, Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada

I am writing to request two copies of your February-March issue. A friend told me it was one of the best-researched and most compelling articles about the Canadian system that he had ever read. I am a free-lance political fundraising consultant. One of my clients is Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota. I'd like him to have a copy.

Noris A. Weiss, Goleta, California

Senator Wellstone is pressing for a single-payer system.

My wife and I moved to Canada from the U.S. in 1970. Over these past twenty-four years we have been continually impressed by the humaneness of Canadian socialized medicine. When we visit friends and relatives in the States, we are often quizzed about the Canadian system. The misinformation is astonishing. Americans believe that we cannot choose our own doctors or that we must wait in long lines in clinics. Neither is true. But the worst distortions and downright lies about the Canadian system are those fostered by U.S. politicians and the American Medical Association, for their own self-interest. I hope Americans hear the truth.

David Topper, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Far from having a good health system, as in Canada, ours is currently in a state of chaos, with the government trying to turn it into a series of *profit*-making concerns. Every day there is news of hospital boards returning "loss" figures. There is also shocking asset-stripping of the elderly, length queues of waiting patients who can't afford their operation costs, etc. etc.

I intend forwarding your Jazzletter to my local Member of Parliament, leader of the Alliance Party which, while a fledgling party, did well in last year's election. According to the latest polls, he is today's most-preferred prime minister. He is bound to be very interested in your rational, well-researched essay on this health problem and the Canadian answers to it.

Devon G. Huston, Christchurch, New Zealand

Your latest issue is perhaps the most informative piece of journalistic literature I have ever read. It is a major social document, and I wish to order twenty more copies. I have already underlined it and sent forty copies to friends.

About twenty years back, I had occasion to pay the medical bills for another person. They came to just over $40,000.

I could handle that because of my general earning level, but I remember thinking that a bill of that magnitude would either wipe out the average person or place him seriously in debt.

About three years ago I spent a day and a half at a hospital in my neighborhood. There was nothing at all dramatic about the treatment I required. The bill came to $3,000.

A few years ago, my oldest son, Steve Jr., himself a physician, and I were in Mexico. I had run out of some quite common medication—I think it was for asthma—and Dr. Steve said, "There must be a pharmacy in town."

On the dusty, poor main street of Tecate, we did eventually find a *pharmacia*. The woman behind the counter said, "We have that."

The charge for that medication in Los Angeles was something like $15.

When I asked, "How much do I owe you?" the woman said, "Seventy-nine cents."

When we were back in the street, Dr. Steve said, "Now you have a better idea of the mark-up on common drugs."

But what such experiences taught me was the proverbial grain of sand compared to the Sahara of evidence you've gathered and so clearly conveyed.

Applause, applause!

Steve Allen, Sherman Oaks, California

Congratulations! Every time you reach out beyond the subject of jazz, you broaden the audience for the music. It is a magnificent piece, and I hope the Jazzletter will continue in this direction.

Edith Kiggen, New York City

Didi Kiggen is a well-known talent manager and booker of major jazz artists. Née Adams, she is, interestingly, a direct descendant of John Quincy Adams.

The Screen Actors Guild is vitally interested in this matter. I am sending you a check for twenty copies of that issue. And please subscribe me to the Jazzletter.

Richard Masur, Los Angeles, California

Mr. Masur is an actor and a vice president of the Screen Actors Guild.

I am so glad you're dealing with the health-care issue. This concerns many of us here in the trenches. Please send two copies to my mother, who is president of a national non-profit organization called the Older Women's League, which deals with issues concerning older women. She spends a great deal of time working towards trying to get Americans the kind of health-care system we so desperately need.

Paul Glasse, Austin, Texas

Mr. Glasse is a composer and recording artist

Your Jazzletter on health care was superb. Please send two more so I can send them to our senators.

Esther Sparks Sprague, Chicago, Illinois

From my viewpoint that issue was ludicrous. Your viewpoint is *yours*, not mine. Please don't try to tell me that Canada's socialistic medical system is a huge success. Canada's overall economic plight says otherwise, and the medical system has played a major role in that morass. Funny, but valid methods of payment never seems important or address. Clinton's plan is government bureaucracy at its "finest". Furthermore, your trashing of the insurance companies shows a tremendously inept concept of Economics 101.

Enough of that "difference of opinion" (and I could go into a myriad of facts as substantive as yours)—but the real point of this protest is that you would "occupy" sixteen and two-thirds of my annual subscription in espousing your own opinion of this country's health care quality. I subscribe to several woodworking magazines. Suppose one of them decided to pummel me with an entire issue devoted to the editor's opinion that some woodworker does not have "adequate" health care. The idea is preposterous—and so it is with your February/March issue.

Frankly, I do not care if *all* your other subscribers agreed with you—what you did was wrong. All of your erudite rationalizations will not erase your original error in judgment.

Oh, by the way, I will not be renewing my subscription. Also I suggest you change the name of your publication to the Pulpit Letter.

Don A. Beggs, Greeley, Colorado

Mr. Beggs is the retired manager of an insurance company.

Please send my copy of your letter to any poor soul that is interested in the debut (sic) over health care, so they can use the $3.00 bucks to buy a beer.

Robert Kulasik, Chicago, Illinois

Mr. Kulasik, a consulting engineer, returned his copy of the issue.

In Comment

There were two more letters like these last two.

As I have repeatedly said, the Jazzletter is not about jazz musicians, it is for jazz musicians. No issue is printed without consultation with representative readers. I found the health-care crisis is of vital (literally) interest to musicians. See below.

When Bill Crow's story of the Benny Goodman band's Russian tour, being honest, brought to the fore that Benny was no angel, the response from a few readers was like that of Messers Beggs and Kulasik: do not tell me what I do not want to hear.

Bill's piece was not opinion, it was reporting. Every example of Goodman's cruelty was corroborated by others.

My piece was an objective examination of medicine in two countries, including the lies of insurance industry and politicians. It pointed out that the Canadian system has flaws and delineated them. I expressed almost no "viewpoint" myself, but let others express theirs. Yet Mr. Beggs refers to facts as "opinions."

To such persons, freedom of speech and the press consists in this: You have the right to say anything I agree with. Note the statement that he doesn't care if all the rest of you wanted the piece. He alone may determine policy of this publication, he alone will define right and wrong. So much for democratic discussion.

On April 1, the Miami Herald carried a front-page story on Deborah Hughes, thirty-six, of Liberty City, Florida. She needed a lung transplant. Her insurance company ruled the operation experimental, though it had been removed from that category four years ago, and said she could not have it. Her friends desperately held raffles and other events to raise the money for it. On March 1, she died. It may or may not be significant that Deborah Hughes was black. Again, see blow.

The Herald Reporter wrote, "More than any other Western nation, the United States allows its private insurance companies to determine who is entitled to what treatment."

That, too, is a fact, not an opinion. Or a "viewpoint".

The Englewood Samaritans

"I was never ill," Irene Reid told a New York Times reporter. "I raised five children alone and I was able to maintain a certain life style, but I couldn't afford health insurance. Then I had a heart attack in '92 and found that if you don't have any insurance, you can't get any kind of medical attention."

Irene Reid once sang with the Basie band. She suffers from thyroid problems and a heart condition. She is one of countless American musicians—in jazz and other fields—who can't afford or can't get at any price insurance coverage. But she is undergoing treatment free at the Englewood Hospital and Medical Center in New Jersey in a joint project of the hospital and the Jazz Foundation of America. Jamil Nasser, the bassist, a friend of Reid's, arranged transportation from her home in the Bronx to the hospital, where she has undergone testing and treatment by specialists.

She said, "When Jamil told me, 'Irene, you're going to get the best medical care, all the help you really need, and it won't cost you a penny,' I thought he was kidding."

Applicants for treatment must have been professional jazz musicians for ten years. The hospital expects that about fifty would be treated this year. It seeks additional funding, without which it might have to limit what treatment can be given free.

The program began in February with a memorial concert for Dizzy Gillespie, who died at the hospital of pancreatic cancer a year earlier. There is a Dizzy Gillespie Cancer Institute there. Nasser and trumpeter Jimmy Owens asked Herb Storfer—who directs the New York Public Library's Center for Research in Black Culture—to head the group. The group solicited the services of physicians who had played their way through school as jazz

musicians to treat at least two musicians a year. Owens approached Ellsworth Havens, senior vice president of the medical center, and also an amateur trumpeter, who in turn approached the hospital's board of directors. They approved the idea.

Owens pointed out that since jazz musicians are freelance workers, most of them are without health-insurance plans. And, he added, there is less work for them these days. The rise of the synthesizer and the loss of the studio work that kept them going two decades ago, the disappearance of hotel bands, and other factors have caused hardship among jazz players.

He did not say, though he well might have done so, that it doesn't help to be black, either, as Irene Reid is.

Researchers at the Rand Institute in Santa Monica, California, analyzed the records of nearly 10,000 patients at 297 hospitals in five states and concluded that blacks and older people with low incomes received poorer treatment than other Medicare patients at both small rural hospitals and urban teaching hospitals.

The Los Angeles Times reported: "Only 47 percent of the black and poor Medicare patients considered to be seriously ill when admitted were put into intensive care units, compared with 70 percent of the more affluent Medicare patients . . . .

"The researchers also said that nurses more frequently checked for breathing difficulties in new pneumonia patients who were affluent than those who were poor and black and that doctors were less likely to find out what kinds of medicines the poor and black patients were using before they were hospitalized.

"The researchers said that 19 percent of black and poor patients were discharged from hospitals in unstable condition, meaning that they were still suffering from at least one serious health problem, compared with 14 percent of the rest of the group. At the same time, the poorer care received by black and low-income patients tended to be minimized because they were nearly twice as likely to be treated at higher-quality urban teaching hospitals."

Those involved in the program at Englewood hope it will become a model for treatment of jazz musicians across the country.

The second largest group of subscribers to the Jazzletter are doctors. If any of them would be willing to contribute services to alleviate the medical problems of jazz musicians, I can put them in touch with the appropriate people in New York.

The Hot Potato

Between September 8 and November 2, 1944, the B-17 had flown fifteen missions over Germany, including two against Merseberg, thirty miles southwest of Leipzig. These were the waning days of the war, and Allied bombers were pounding German cities. The plane was part of the 322nd Squadron of the 91st Bomb Group H of the Eighth Air Force, flying out of Bassingbourne, England, near Cambridge. There had been flak but no German fighters during the previous attacks on the oil refineries at Merseberg.

Now, on this third assault on the refineries, there were. The bombardier, in the nose of the aircraft, was lining up his run when the Messershmitts came from behind.

"This time they surprised the hell out of us," he told me. "All of a sudden our two left engines were on fire.

"I called the pilot, Lee Brant, of Nebraska. He was frantic, which I'd never heard him ever. He was, under the worst conditions, always very calm and cool. He said, 'Bail out, bail out, bail out!' I took the headphones off, put them on the gun controls. I was really scared when I saw them floating in the air.

"The navigator was right behind me. I pulled his flak suit off. He went out and I followed him. Somebody I met later, who had been shot down when we were, said he thought our plane had exploded in mid-air. The pilot didn't get out. A lot of our aircraft were shot down that day.

"We were close to thirty thousand feet, just about the ceiling for that aircraft. We probably got out at twenty thousand feet. The oxygen is very thin. We delayed opening our chutes. We were pretty well trained. I could hear rifle fire below. When the chute opened, I thought, 'I guess I did it too soon.' But it had barely opened when I hit the ground."

The navigator's chute never fully opened, and he was killed. He was nineteen. Excepting the navigator and pilot, the crew survived, although the waist gunner was injured when his parachute caught in a tree and the crew chief broke his ankle on landing. The bombardier was the only member of the surviving crew who was neither injured nor wounded. "I was twenty-two," he said. "The oldest guy was about twenty-six.

"I was picked up by a couple of farmers with pitchforks. They took me over to an anti-aircraft battalion. Nobody spoke much English. I was sitting there by myself, being guarded by a guard who was probably not over eighteen years old. Some other young guys marched up, headed by somebody who told them to halt in front of me. They loaded their rifles, and I thought, 'This is it.' It was just a bluff, I guess. They were having fun with me. Then they marched off.

"A lot of prisoners were taken that day. Some of them were wounded, some couldn't walk. I was reunited with my engineer, who had injured his ankle and I had to help him around. They put a bunch of us in a basement overnight. A lot of badly wounded guys, moaning. No sleep. No medical attention.

"The next day they separated us from those guys. I guess they must have taken them to a hospital. They put the rest of us on a truck. We were all scared, not knowing what the hell was going to happen to us. Two young guards started whistling a popular American song of the day. *Goody-Goody*. Unbelievable. Some war.

"We got on a train. We got to Frankfort. There was no transportation out to the camp. We had to walk through Frankfort, which was devastated. You could tell it had once been a beautiful city. We had just ruined that city. The civilians spit on us and

called us awful names that they knew in English, and tried to get to us.

"We finally arrived at the camp and they put us in solitary confinement. We had been told what to expect if we were captured. Straw mattress on the floor, no light. We got a little food, not much—soup and bread mostly. Occasionally we'd be walked down the hall to be interrogated by a German officer who spoke almost perfect English.

"He told me the date I graduated from bombardier school. They tried to break us down, get us to give them military information. But we'd been told: only name, rank, and serial number. That's all we were supposed to say."

Name: John Bunch. Rank: second lieutenant. Civilian occupation: pianist, although he didn't tell them that.

John was born in Tipton, Indiana, a little town north of Indianapolis, on December 1, 1921, and started studying piano and harmony at the age of eleven. His mother was a cook who ran a little diner. He heard Fats Waller, Benny Goodman, and Duke Ellington on its jukebox. A stride pianist named George Johnson moved to Tipton. John became his pupil, eventually subbing for him in a local band.

John said, "This tenor man and I, when we were fifteen or sixteen, started hitch-hiking to what they called the Colored Elks in Anderson, Indiana, to sit in with the band. Tipton still has no black people, not one. One time Cab Calloway's band came through Anderson. They came out to jam with the local guys, and I got to play with Cozy Cole."

Shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, John joined the Army Air Corps.

"It was so long ago," he said. "I think that German officer even told me where I came from. How could they know where I was born? They probably had a spy on our base.

"After about a week of that, we finally got on another train. The Red Cross gave us some decent clothes to wear. And shoes. And we got to take a bath. We were taken to Sagan, which is ninety miles southeast of Berlin. And they had a band at the camp!"

It was at Center Compound of this camp, Stalag Luft III, maximum security camp for aircrew officers, that John met Lieutenant Henry W. (Wally) Kinnan, founder of the Sagan Serenaders. The band had been formed by Pilot Office Leonard Whiteley of the Royal Air Force and Kinnan, who had played trumpet with Jimmy Dorsey before becoming an aviation cadet early in 1942. Whiteley had been shot down over Cologne in July, 1943, Kinnan on a mission against Schweinfurt the following month.

An article by Kinnan recounted the formation of the band in the Ex-POW Bulletin of February, 1994. He recalled:

"Things were pretty well disorganized in Center Camp in September 1943 from the July departure of British non-coms and the recent influx of American aircrew officers. (We were) forced to make the most of a very few musical instruments of dubious heritage, which had been acquired through the auspices of the Germans and international charitable organizations such as the Red Cross and YMCA. It was readily apparent that the available instruments were entirely inadequate to support an orchestra (of) four to eight brass, four or five saxophones, and a rhythm section of piano, bass, guitar, and drums. As a result, the early efforts, characterized by the Christmas program of 1943, were pretty much of an ad lib nature, and the shows were rather long on dancing 'girls' and comedians and somewhat short on ensemble music.

"The real classic among a number of instruments . . . was a trombone which apparently was of early Polish origin. (The nearby town of Sagan, which gave our orchestra its name, and Stalag Luft III itself, were actually in Upper Silesia, near the Polish border.) This trombone . . . could best be described as a plumber's nightmare. While it served us well enough as an interim instrument in our early . . . brass section, it was not the easiest trombone to play, since only six of the classic slide positions were attainable on the slide. The seventh position required the player to reach over his shoulder to pull a chain which, in turn, operated a rotary valve in a veritable maze of tubing to produce the desired result.

"Happily, our antique trombone finally came into its own several months later, after its retirement from active duty, when some of the more inventive lads determined that the extensive tubing in the old horn would help make a wonderful distillery for producing a local home brew of lethal proportions out of our aging potato crop. It was much more popular in its new role.

"With new prisoner groups coming in almost daily by the close of 1943, a surprising wealth of professional musical talent was becoming available and it was easy to convince the senior camp officials to do what they could to acquire the instruments necessary for . . . an organized musical program . . . .

"(In) early 1944, through the largely unheralded efforts of the International YMCA, and the senior Center Camp staff, a full set of American-made instruments arrived through Swiss channels for the use of the increasing number of former professional musicians now quite eager to maintain their skills while in captivity. Unfortunately, at about the same time (March 1944) the German authorities decided to move the British airmen to a new camp a few miles away at Belaria with the result that some excellent talent was lost just as we received the instruments we'd all been working for."

"I couldn't believe they had a band there," John Bunch said. "They were all flying officers in that camp. The enlisted men in our crew were taken to another camp. The band was looking for a piano player, and I got the job."

A number of arrangers came into the camp, among them Tiger Ward, John Brady, Hi Bevins, and Nick Nagorka, and began writing out the big-band hits of the time. One of the arrangers was a trumpet player named Vince Shank. James Cullen, who lives now in Passo Robles, California, remembers:

"Vince was somewhat of an institution in camp. He was

shipped up from Italy during the bleak winter of 1943 with other American prisoners the Italians held. But he was apart from the crowd, really, and he and he alone owned a horn. It wasn't much to look at, but it was, at the time, the only trumpet in camp. Literally battered and beaten, this meager little instrument gave recognition to its owner and solace to its audience.

"Night after night, month after month, for almost a year, the mellow, resonant tones of Vince's horn were free for all who cared to listen. His repertoire covered the pop tune spectrum and once in a while he'd elevate himself and his admirers with driving, foot-stompin' jazz."

The growth of American music in Europe during that time is an amazing cultural phenomenon. Though jazz was officially prohibited by the Nazi regime, it flourished nonetheless. The Belgian arranger and composer Francy Boland told me that when he attended or took part in jazz performances, there were usually German officers in the audiences, there only to listen. A jazz band of Jewish musicians performed in one of the death camps.

Joseph Skvorecky, the Czech writer who now lives in Toronto, made this proliferation of jazz under the Nazis a theme of his writing in such works as the novel *The Bass Saxophone*. Skvorecky wrote a short story about a group of teen-aged Czech musicians who stage a jazz concert in defiance and mockery of the Nazis and their local satrap. It is a funny story, up to a point, but in middle Europe writers don't hesitate to do something we avoid: mix comedy with tragedy. All the young players are executed. Their girl singer becomes the mistress of a German officer, and kills him. When I told Skvorecky I found it a very touching story, he told me it was not an invention at all. And then he sent me precious photos of these young musicians, his lost friends. I returned them safely to him, but I cannot forget those hopeful young faces. The story gave poignant meaning to something Dizzy once said. On hearing someone refer to jazz and serious music, he said, "Men have died for this music. You can't get no more serious than that."

We have heard and read much about the depletion of the personnel of the big bands during the war, and the replacement of their absent members by, for example, teen-aged musicians such as Johnny Mandel and Gene DiNovi in the band of Henry Jerome in New York. What we haven't read much about is what happened to those who went into service.

And one of these was Wally Kinnan from the Jimmy Dorsey band. And Kinnan, as we now know, formed a band of airmen in the camp near Sagan.

Kinnan largely credited Tiger Ward, "so-named because he was about as mild-mannered a man as you could find anywhere," for the quality of the Serenaders. Arranger, composer, and trumpet player, he made contributions to the band, Kinnan said, that gave it a "growing library of contemporary big-band swing hits (that) were incredibly accurate reproductions of the sounds of the day."

Five of the prisoners held degrees in music education. They interviewed the new personnel and put the best musicians among them in the band. Some of the "classical" players formed a chamber-music group. So up to date was the swing band, Kinnan said, that some arriving prisoners went almost into shock when they heard it play tunes they'd been listening to only a few days earlier in England.

"We rehearsed almost weekly," Kinnan wrote, "as new arrangements became available through much of 1944 and presented almost weekly concerts in the camp theater, a converted barracks which had been provided with relatively comfortable seating by some rather ingenious carpentry work on the large plywood cartons in which Red Cross food parcels were shipped."

The German guards and officials condoned the band, and some of them even enjoyed it.

The band finally comprised four trumpets, two trombones, five saxes, and four rhythm, including guitar. By the summer and fall of 1944, all the chairs were filled by professionals, and they were playing on brand-new instruments. The brass and saxophones were Martins, made in Eklhart, Indiana. The band doubled as a pit orchestra for plays presented by the camp's drama group, and it performed special holiday programs. A brass sextet drawn from the band strolled through the camp playing carols at Christmas.

"What a band!" James Cullen remembered. "And Wally himself was a talented entertainer. He had one skit with a puppet on his left hand that inspected his horn while Wally valved the trumpet with his right. Hilarious. A point of light in a depressing, dark time."

"By this time," Kinnan wrote, "we were beginning to talk seriously about . . . taking the band on tour in the USA when and if we could manage to survive the war. Besides the obvious musicianship, we felt there was certain to be an audience appeal in the attractive novelty of the ex-POW orchestra just after the war, wearing our Red Cross issue G.I. uniforms just as in our captivity, and performing our original arrangements, plus the hits of the days."

The winter of 1944-45 was one of the worst Europe had experienced in many years. The German Eastern Front was under relentless Russian assault. Russian soldiers, unlike Americans, had seen their villages burned, their families slaughtered. I remember a Royal Canadian Air Force officer who had been shot down and imprisoned describing the liberation of his camp by Russian troops. He said the Germans had been particularly brutal to Russian prisoners, one guard more than any of them. The Russian troops gave guns to some of these prisoners. They poured gasoline over the guard, set him afire, and shot him down as he ran in flames through a field.

"We knew the Russians were near," John Bunch said. "We could even hear the rumbles. We were aware of what was going on. We had our own security and intelligence system. We had brilliant guys in that camp. Guys who had been electrical engineers assembled a radio out of bits of string and wire and

whatever they could scrounge. Every night they would disassemble it and each guy would take a part back to his barracks. The next night at a secret meeting, they would reassemble it and get the BBC news from London. Every morning we would get the official German version and every night we got the English version."

John made a diary of the events of the next few days. He noted that at 7 p.m. on Saturday, January 27, Tiger Ward, Hi Bevans, and another musician were jamming in the music room of the camp theater. "At 8:40 a goon came in and told us we were leaving and for us to rush to our blocks," he wrote. "The Germans gave us two hours to pack. This developed into six hours. We got started finally early on the 28th, Sunday."

On that Saturday evening, as John and his friends jammed, other prisoners of Stalag Luft III were watching a performance of *You Can't Take It With You* by the camp's drama group. At intermission, the prisoners stood speculating on whether they would be liberated by the Russians or moved. Soviet troops had advanced twenty miles the previous day and were within forty-five miles of the camp. As the prisoners settled down for the second act a senior American officer held up his hands and said, "Sorry to stop the show, men. Go back to your barracks immediately. We are moving out in a half hour."

Anticipating this, the prisoners had been assembling clothes in packs and now added blanket rolls and food, eating whatever they had hoarded in lockers and now could not carry. Starting at 10 p.m. that night, they marched out of the gates of Stalag III, the musicians of the Sagan Serenaders among them. The evacuation—twelve thousand airmen—was not completed until noon the next day. Other camps were also being evacuated. Wally Kinnan remembered hearing a rumor that he and his fellow prisoners would be marched into the forest and executed. Thinking that carrying his trumpet was "redundant", he leaned it against a fence and left it as he and the others went into the night.

"January 28, 1945," John wrote. "Still dark. We began to walk. Snow was five inches deep. It was cold but still. As we left, we saw barracks being burned. After walking half the night and all day we arrived at Hablau. A raging blizzard was blowing. I thought my face had frozen just before they jammed us into a church, eighteen hundred men in a church built for five hundred people in 1725. My box of cheese, prunes, 1/5 loaf of bread, and sugar won't last long."

One of the airmen who took part in that forced march was Major Maury Herman, who described it in the February 1994 Ex-POW Bulletin. "The snow lay deep and it was cold," he wrote. "A biting wind blew from out of the east. Guards were on all sides, some with dogs, all with ready weapons to prevent escapes. Those (prisoners) too sick to walk had been left at the prison camp hospital. As the march progressed, the roadside became cluttered with discarded articles."

Some of them were the band instruments treasured by the Sagan Serenaders. Only two musicians, the band's guitarist, Nuffy Brancato, and Vince Shank, held onto their instruments throughout the march.

The inactive life of the camp had ill-prepared the prisoners for a long march in bitter weather. "Packs were lightened at each halt," Major Herman wrote. "Halts were five minutes every two hours. The march was hindered by German refugees in carts, cutting in and out of the column, who were also running from the Soviets; and by German troop movements, reserves going up to the front. March, march, march, with a half hour stop each six hours when the Germans issued a half loaf of bread and a quarter pound of margarine as march rations. Blisters, lameness, chilblains, frozen feet, and soon chills and cold from lying in the snow whenever halts were called."

At a small village called Gros Graustein, the column of prisoners encountered farm workers, mostly imported from conquered nations. Major Herman said they were kind to the prisoners, giving them water—the first they'd had in twelve hours—and trading vegetables and bread for soap and cigarettes.

"January 30, 1945," John wrote. "What a miserable night; it was so crowded! We got a sled this morning for a pack of cigarettes, so our load will be lightened. Scores of refugees on the road now. Several of the men are getting sick now. It's a cold windy snowy day. It's getting awfully rough going now. Thank God for the sled. We finally get to a big barn in the afternoon. Reese, Vihon, Pentz and I slept together on the straw as warmly as possible. No food from the Germans yet."

"It began to snow harder and harder," Major Herman recounted. "The wind strengthened and chilled us to the marrow. The line crawled, for now many were lame and blistered. Lightened packs were still further lightened . . . . as men began to fall back, and back to the end of the column to become stragglers. The march began to tell on the guards. They, too, threw away items from their packs and became stragglers. The first men to drop by the wayside were put on the one German ration wagon accompanying the column, but it could only hold five or six, and soon these were only the unconscious and the paralyzed. Now complete packs were being thrown away, those of the German guards as well as the POWs. The whole line straggled, strung out for miles. POWs were helping their buddies until it was all they could do to help themselves. Men were walking in their sleep and men were dropping to the road, being implored, threatened, and urged to keep on, for they would freeze to death where they fell . . . . "

One who fell was John Bunch. That was on the morning of January 30. "It was a death march," he said. "A lot of guys died, and some were killed trying to escape.

"I was so weak from the lack of food and from marching and the cold. I said, 'I can't make it, I can't go on.'

"I guess I must have looked terrible. Wally Kinnan had built a fire on the ground and was cooking a potato he had traded for some cigarettes. He was getting ready to eat when he looked at me and gave me the potato. It gave me back the physical and

moral strength to go on. I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't gone on. Possibly I'd have been shot. They had no prison to put stragglers in."

At the time, John wrote: "I woke up this morning. Begged hot water from a kid, but almost fainted. Guess I'm pretty weak. Wally Kinnan gave me a hot potato. It sure tasted good. We are living on what little we have and can trade for. It's a hell of a life. This is as bad as anything I've read in history or seen in movies. I hope I survive through this. Still no food from the Germans."

On January 31, the column stumbled on through a blizzard. "My feet are soaked up to the ankles from sweat and leaky shoes," John wrote. "Vihon traded for bread to keep us alive. We walked [illegible]rty kilometers today to Muskau. I'm so tired tonight I can't stand up very long at a time. They put us in a brick factory. It's warm and dry up here. We are over the ovens . . . . The Germans haven't fed us yet and it is a matter of hours if they don't.

"February 1, 1945: A wet and cold day. Looks like a thaw. We hear explosions all the time and wonder if it's the Russians. We got half a loaf of bread per man. Thank God for that . . . . No walking today. The Russians are forty-eight miles from Berlin, so say the Germans.

"February 2, 1945: It finally thawed today. Finally got one cup of barley and a cup of soup. This for two men, yet a feast compared to the past few days. We stayed again all day (at) the brick factory."

James Cullen too remembers that thaw.

"As if by a miracle," he wrote in the April 1994 Ex-POW Bulletin, "the wind stopped blowing; the drab, cold grey disappeared; and a blue cloudless sky was everywhere. The sun danced along the snow-covered fields and among the snow-covered trees, turning everything into a wonderland of gold and white.

"But the brilliant reflection of the sun on the snow painfully dazzled the eyes of the . . . prisoners . . . . And their heat-starved bodies began to sweat in the sudden warmth . . . . Frozen shoes thawed and feet squished water with each step. The sense of strength the sun brought rapidly dissipated as clothes dampened with perspiration. Breathing became labored and a heady weakness caused many to stumble and fall in the wetness, adding to the misery. Such would be the order of the day, forcing more frequent rest periods. It was during one of these moments of respite that Vince Shank played his trumpet.

"The beautiful, vibrant tones of Vince's horn bit softly into the azure sky. Like warming slivers of sun, those notes danced from the rear of the column to the front, touching everyone with their upbeat life. It didn't last long, but it lasted long enough so that the melody *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* came through loud and clear."

The prisoners at last reached an armory in Spremberg, where they got some soup, then were put aboard a freight train, fifty men to a car—"We had to take turns sitting down," John said—and taken to a camp at Moosburg, thirty kilometers northeast of Munich.

"There were rumors that it had been a concentration camp," John said, "but I'm not sure about that. It was near Dauchau. Things were bad there.

"On April 29, 1945, the Germans told us to stay in the barracks, not to go outside. There was a battle going on. Patton's Third Army came in the next day. He gave a speech, standing on top of a tank. I was too far back to hear him, but I could see him at the distance. There were thousands of us. The guys who were closer told us what he said. He used a lot of cuss words that we thought were so colorful.

"The Americans took over. We thought we were going to be released right away and saw ourselves being taken to a wonderful place, getting a lot of food and medical care. But it wasn't that way at all. They kept us there. They had liberated so many prisoners in so short a time that they didn't know what to do with us. So we had to stay in that camp. And they started bringing food in.

"We all looked so weird. We were dirty and covered with lice. Vince Shank was very good at catching them. I'd be standing next to him and he'd say, 'Don't move, don't move!' and he'd get one. Vince had been a prisoner for three years, so he was desperate to get out. They'd told us we'd be court martialed if we left. But Vince and some others did. They took off, escaped from the Americans! He and his buddy hitch-hiked all the way to Paris, and had a great time. He wasn't court martialed.

"Every guy that was in there was a flying officer who'd been shot down. We all said that we would never get on an airplane without a parachute.

"But when they started taking us to an airport to fly us out in DC-3s, nobody said, 'I'm not getting on that plane without a parachute.' They had camps for us, all named after cigarettes. I was taken to Camp Lucky Strike near LeHavre in France. They got us cleaned up and de-loused and gave us new uniforms and tried to get us back to health before sending us home.

"We ate a lot of boiled chicken. They were very big on boiled chicken. It was to fatten you up, and not hurt your stomach. I was almost six feet, and I weighed a hundred and thirty when I got there, down from a hundred and sixty-two. I gained some weight.

"I went home on a boat, the General Butner, in May, a few days after the war ended. We came into Newport News, Virginia. Then they gave ninety-day furloughs to us prisoners of war, and I took a train to Indiana. I drank too much beer with my father and got sick. My stomach just wasn't used to it.

"You know, I was very lucky. The fatality record for the Eighth Air Force was shocking.

"I got my discharge, and went to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, taking business administration. I got into college bands. The second year I got a chance to go with a bebop band, that new stuff! I had a ball, playing mostly around Indiana. One

of the bands I was in was led by Med Flory, who's also from Indiana. I ended up getting a degree in speech. I went out to Phoenix, Arizona, to take a job as a radio announcer. I got in with some musicians out there and I was making more money in two nights than I was in a week at the radio station.

"I played in Florida for a couple of years. Then I made some connections in Indianapolis, where I met the Montgomery brothers. J.J. Johnson had already left there. Leroy Vinnegar was the bass player. A black-and-white band was pretty unusual then. We packed the place every night. I worked with Wes Montgomery quite a lot. Some of the Basie guys would come through and jam. I began to have more confidence in my playing, and I moved out to California. I knew Jimmy Rowles, and I began to do well. Through Rowles I got with Woody Herman in 1956. I went to New York with Woody, and I stayed there. Best move I ever made.

"Luck's got a lot to do with it. I was lucky. I went with Benny Goodman. I was about thirty-six by then. He could be so awful, and then he could be so polite. You can't explain Benny to anybody. I played Birdland a lot with Maynard Ferguson around 1958.

"Fifty-second Street was just about finished but it was still there. I loved Bud Powell, but my idol still is Teddy Wilson. I thought he had the most beautiful touch.

"When I was with the Gene Krupa quartet with Charlie Ventura, we played opposite Cozy Cole at the Metropole. I told him about playing with him in Indiana when I was a kid. He got a big kick out of it. Gene was such a sweetheart. He was so good to me. To everybody.

"The steadiest gig I had was with Tony Bennett. I was with Tony six years. I remember meeting you about that time."

It was indeed about then that I met John. "I think it was on the *Yesterday I Heard the Rain* date," I told him.

"Yeah, I was on that date," John said. By then John had become an exquisite accompanist, a modest, self-effacing player, generous and giving. *Yesterday I Heard the Rain* was a lyric I had written at Tony's request to a melody by the Mexican composer Armando Manzanero. It was reissued not long on CD, and you can hear John on celeste in Torrie Zito's lovely arrangement.

"I never had any children, and I've never had any big expenses in life," John said. "So I've never done very much just for the money. I've never been the leader type. I enjoy taking my solos, but I sincerely enjoy playing behind the other guys. I just like to try to make someone like Tony or Benny Goodman sound as good as they possibly can. If you have that attitude, you'll be in the background a lot.

"I still suffer from a little insecurity about being the boss."

"Did the war have anything to do with it?"

"No. I can't blame that."

"Have you been back to Germany?"

"Yeah. It was a funny feeling. I remember playing Frankfurt with Tony, the place where I'd been in solitary confinement. We had a couple of days off. I asked a guy at the hotel where the camp was. I just wanted to go out and see if it was still there. I even went to a library. I could never get any information about it. I got the feeling they just didn't want to be reminded of it."

In New York City, John met an English girl, a jazz fan then a secretary at Life magazine who'd been born and raised in India, the daughter of a British colonel. After the war, still in her teens, Chips Gemmel had been one of Winston Churchill's secretaries. She and John have now been together twenty-seven years.

In November it will be a half century since John jumped out of that burning B-17 and into the Sagan Serenaders. He looks surprisingly less than his seventy-two years. His hair, eyelashes and brows still retain a blondish tint.

What happened to Wally Kinnan's dream of setting up the Sagan Serenaders after the war? Kinnan wrote for Ex-POW Bulletin: "By the time we reached home and family once again, and picked up our lives where we had left them, the . . . band was but a pleasant memory standing out from the grim months we spent as combat airmen and prisoners of the Third Reich.

"In spite of the current wave of nostalgia about the war years, we've never been able to arrange a reunion of the band members, and relationships have largely been limited to an occasional personal contact . . . .

"Only a few of the members went on to professional careers in the music business after the war. Several became school music teachers . . . . Johnny Bunch (is) one of the nation's leading jazz pianists . . . . "

"Vince Shank did well," John said. "He played with Russ Morgan for a while after the war, but mostly in Las Vegas. And he bought a large parcel of land in Vegas. It was right where they built the airport later on. Now he lives in Vegas and spends his winters in Hawaii. We're still friends. Great guy."

"And what about Wally Kinnan?" I asked.

"Well I lost track of him after the war," John said. "And then when I was in Philadelphia with Benny Goodman, I turned on the TV news and the announcer said, 'And now here's Wally Kinnan, the Weather Man!' I got in touch with him."

Kinnan is now seventy-four and leads a sixteen-piece band in St. Petersburg, Florida. He wrote: "I've often wondered . . . who got my beautiful Martin trumpet, and where it finally found a home. I hope it's with someone who could play it and appreciate it."

Good people tend to remember the kindnesses that others do for them and forget those they do for others. Wally Kinnan has no memory of giving that potato to John, even telling John it never happened. John is adamant that it did, and his note of the incident was written at the time.

John said, "I believe Wally Kinnan saved my life that day. He gave me that potato he was going to eat, and that turned me completely around. One potato can change your whole life."