# My Military History.  2005

Riemer, Win
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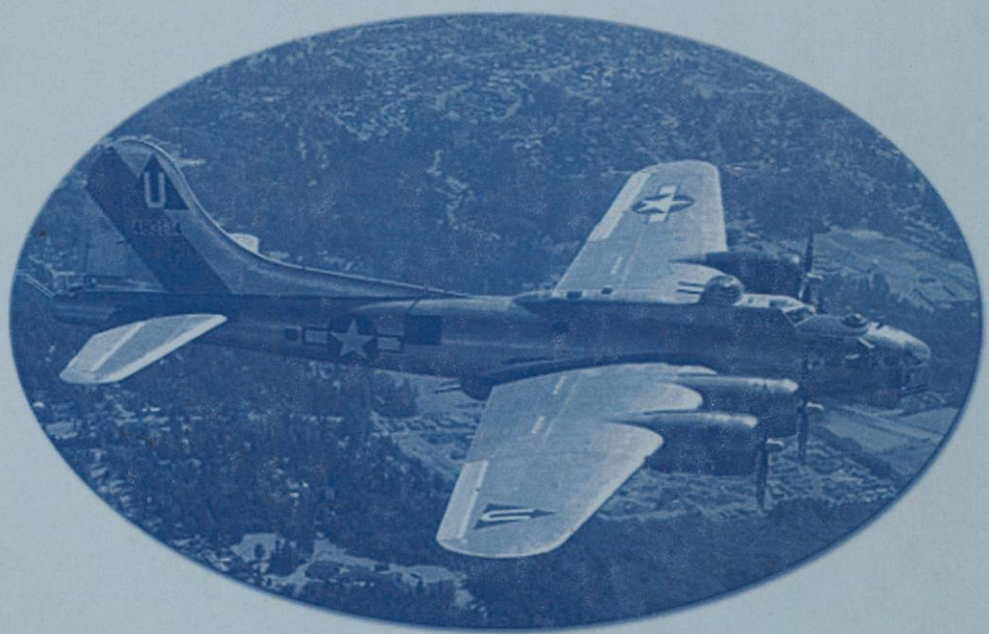

## "We live in Fame or go Down in Flame"

By Win Riemer

# "My Military History"



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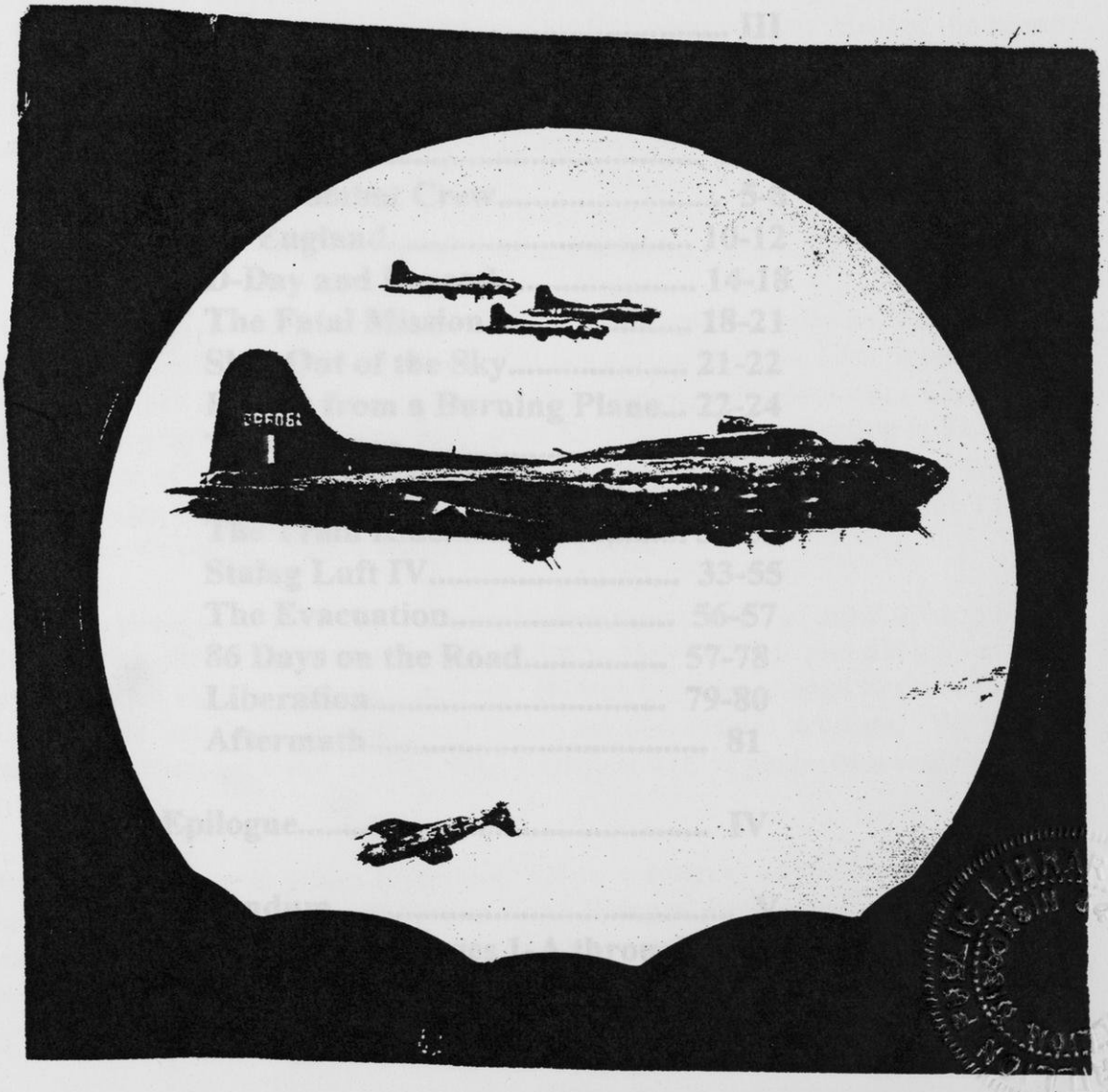


by Win Riemer

# "My Military History"





by Wm Riemer

# *CONTENTS*



*= major categories

## *PREFACE*

**This account of my military history was begun in 1995. It was written in short drafts, in part, in preparation for talks that I gave to various organizations and schools, as well as for Memorial and Veterans Day observances. Most of the history was written from personal memory and a newspaper article that was published shortly after I returned home. This was supplemented with visits to other POWs, many of whom were also shot down, captured and confined in the same camp and were on the same forced march from Feb. 6 to May 2. In addition, there have been numerous accounts (some of which have been published) that have stimulated my memory and have filled in the events and incidents that had been forgotten.**

**I am grateful to the numerous people who have contributed information for this narrative, but can't recall all of them. The one person to whom I am most indebted is Don Kremper of Ocala, FL. To begin with, it was a rare coincidence how I met Don several years ago. We were both at an Ex-POW chapter meeting in Ft. Meyers, FL when out of the "clear blue" he approached me and said, "I remember you--you were in Stalag Luft IV". I was shocked that he remembered me but it didn't take long before we began sharing the same experiences.**

**Don was among those rare individuals who had the presence of mind to keep a daily diary during the forced march from Feb. 6th to May 2nd. He also did a lot of research from various authentic sources. He was gracious enough to share them with me. He originally lived in Cape Coral, but now resides in Ocala. We have had several visits with him and his wife, Cathy, as well as phone conversations and letters.**

**My two bunk-mates in prison camp and "fellow travelers" on the forced march--Jim Richardson of South Bend, IN and Hugh Remp of Yerington NV have both passed on, but I did keep in close contact with Hugh for many years. He struggled from Parkinsons disease for a long time and was confined to a VA nursing home in Reno in his later years. We still keep in touch with his widow in Yerington.**

Since the three of us shared such a close relationship during the most critical times in our lives, both Hugh and Jim will always be a major part of the memories of my POW experience.

## *DEDICATION*

**While many people are responsible for the contents of this history, it is most important that it be dedicated to someone "special". Those special people are our grandchildren. We hope that this collection of their grandfather's military history will some day find its proper place in their family archives.**

**To *Aaron Kabat*, oldest of the group--thank God that you are a sophomore in college (UW-O) ratner than dodging bullets, or on a starvation diet as a POW, which I was at your age.**

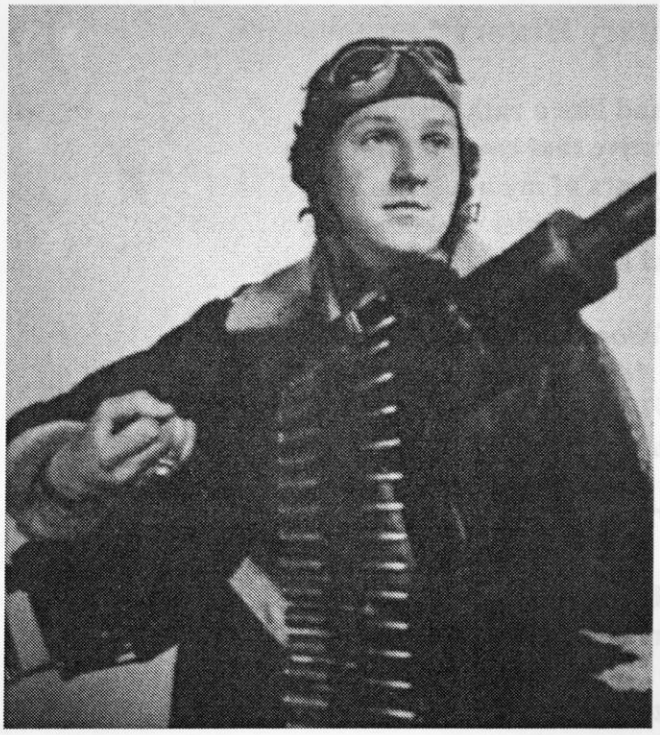
**To *Robby Tieman*, a "veteran" in his own right (on the soccer field) and an avid fisherman and hunter (who uses a gun as a piece of sporting equipment, rather than as a weapon); who has displayed his talents as a good student.**

**To *Seth Kabat*. who has heard me talk about my POW experiences several times at his grade school and who has combined his athletic talents and academic skills to be regarded by his peers as a natural leader.**

**To *Kate Tieman*, our only grand-daughter and "princess", who represents the feminine side of the group. She is emblematic and symbolic of what will be the "new" generation.**

**To them this history is dedicated. They have been the inspiration and incentive that has kept Melva and me enthused with life. They have rewarded us a thousand times over with their affection and respect. *We are truly proud of every one of them!***

# MY MILITARY HISTORY



This photo was taken at Wendover Aerial Gunnery School, which was located in the mountains of Utah, bordering Nevada, in November, 1944 when I was 20 years old. The weapon in the picture is a .50 caliber machine gun. Our B-17 was equipped with 12 of these guns, giving it the name "Flying Fortress".

**My military training in the U.S. took about 14 months: (1) Basic Training in St. Pete, FL, (2) Radio School in Salt Lake City, (3) Aerial Gunnery School at Wendover Field in Utah and (4) Combat Crew Training at Rapid City, SD. In combat, I flew 25 missions with my regular crew in June and July of '44. I was shot down on August 6 while flying with a different crew and was a POW for the next nine months. By the Grace of God I returned home on June 6, '45.** ***It was truly an amazing and unforgettable adventure– one that I would not trade for anything, but wouldn't give five cents to repeat.***

—Merl Reiner



Third Printing_August, 2005

## "My Military History"

**This might sound like a rather simplistic title for a narrative that covers 32 months of the earliest years of my adult life. There are many other titles that come to mind that might be more intriguing such as,**

***"The Echoes of Captivity"***
***"From Youth to Adulthood in 32 Months"***
***"I Will Fear No Evil"***
***"Growing Up Real Fast"***
***"Live in Fame or Go Down in Flame"***
***"The Valley of the Shadow of Death"***

**But no matter how you title it, the story is the same--an amazing experience that I wouldn't trade for anything, but wouldn't give five cents to repeat.**

***-Win Riemer***

## My Military History

After graduating from Brillion High School in May, 1941, I took a job at the Brillion News, where I had been working in my senior year. While we heard about Hitler, and how he was over-running the small countries in Europe, we were not really concerned about the U.S. involvement. However, as the months of summer passed, the news became more and more foreboding. But it still seemed like Germany and Europe were a great distance away, across a wide ocean.

On December 7th I was in the woods in northern Wisconsin, helping Bill Scharbarth cut Christmas trees for his treelot in Brillion. Since we didn't have portable radios we didn't hear the news until we got out of the woods and were on our way home. Of course, it didn't take long for Pres. Roosevelt and the Congress to declare war on both Germany and Japan and I knew it was only a matter of time before I would receive the call in the draft.

Two of my former classmates--Jim Kleiber and Neale Caflisch had decided to enlist in the Air Force. But before they could be accepted, they had to expand their chests by several inches. As a result, they started running several miles every day. I decided to join them, not as a candidate for the Air Force, but merely for the exercise. Incidentally,, both of them did pass their examinations and ended up as second lieutenants in the Air Force, as pilots.

When I went for my induction into the service, I didn't realize that I, too would end up in the Air Force, but not as a pilot, but as a radio operator on a B-17.

When we went to Milwaukee to be inducted, Eric Enneper was my ":partner". By this time I had decided that I would like to join the Marines. But as a draftee, I didn't have much choice, so I ended up in the U.S. Army. Eric got into the Navy.

At the Induction Center in Milwaukee I also met two other inductees, Ray Mc Hugh from Racine and Harry Raznowski from Milwaukee. We were a real "Continental Trio"--an Irishman, a Polak and a German! Before we went to Ft. Sheridan, we had a little time in Milwaukee and Harry showed us around the "town". He took us to some of his favorite jitterbug haunts--this was at the time when zoot suits were the rage.

What I can remember about Ft. Sheridan was that they had huge steam boilers to heat the barracks and the smell of coal and steam were very pronounced--it reminded me of the steam engine that used to power the threshing machine at Norman and Paulas, I will never forget my first meal in the army. I had heard that in the army you have to eat *fast!* So I practiced at home and thought I was doing pretty good. So when I got into the mess hall that first night in the army I took my tray to a table and really "wolfed it down". But to my surprise, when I had finished and got ready to leave, the place was *empty.* I also remember seeing a sign as you entered the mess hall that read: "Take all you want, but eat all you take". However, I can't remember what we had for supper.

We were never told where we were going for our basic training. The *rumor mill* speculated that it might be Ft. Benning, Georgia.--at any rate, it was going to be somewhere in the South.

As the train headed in that direction, we looked forward to a warmer climate--away from the snow and cold. I don't remember how long the train ride was, but as we passed beyond Georgia and we were in Florida,--and it was warm. Not bad for mid February. I rather enjoyed the trip because I had never been this far away from home.

As we soon learned, our destination was St. Petersburg. When we finally got off the train, we were assigned to a downtown hotel, taken over by the army. Others in the group were not so fortunate They were sent to Tent City, out in the "jungle". Actually, this was the beach. But it was a far cry from what it is today with groomed sand and condos. At that time it was a combination of sand dunes, sea grass, mangrove swamps, dust and snakes. Our hotel had been converted into a barracks with several bunk beds in each room. However, it was located right downtown and we did our drilling and marching on the paved streets.

Our room was on the first floor and faced the parking lot in the back. When we assembled in the morning, we would wait until the last minute and jump out the window just in time to make the roll call. While we were kept busy, I still was homesick since it was my first time away from home for such a length of time. But my buddies and I did get occasional passes to go into "town" for shopping and going to a movie. Which was more than.the guys in the "jungle" got. The natives did not particularly appreciate this invasion of recruits. St. Pete was called the "city of green benches" and there were a lot of retired people living there, even then--but this was still at a time when only the wealthy could afford it.

I think our basic training lasted 13 weeks. So, if we got to St. Pete in late February, it probably was the end of May when we finished. One of the things I remember about this tour in Florida was that we had KP (kitchen duty) ever so often. This got to be a long day--from about 5 a .m. to 8 p.m. On the morning of that day we would be called out about 4 a.m. for inspection. in the parking lot. We had to extend our arms as the inspection officer walked by and show him the back of our hands so he could check our fingernails to see that they were clean. It was always very humid at that time of the morning.

I can't remember much of the training, but I do recall having hand-to-hand combat, but without weapons. It was a "no-holds barred" fight and you could use any technique you wanted to get your opponent to the ground.

When I joined the army I probably weighted between 150 and 155 pounds. By the end of basic training I was close to 175, A lot of this was due to our diet of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. plus a lot of exercise

*HOTEL DENNIS*
*Army Air Forces Technical Command,*
*St. Petersburg, FL*


**This is the Hotel Dennis in St. Petersburg, FL where I lived during my basic training for 13 weeks during Feb.-Apr. 1943. The Army Air Forces Technical Command took over this civilian hotel, like they did so many others. Our room was on the first floor and we had several bunks in the room. All of the amenities that were available to the civilian customers had been removed from the hotel. We were right downtown and our area for assembling and roll calls was the former parking lot.**

**We were among the fortunate recruits, since the other "choice of residence" was living in tents out in the "jungle"--which was actually the beach. But at that time the beaches were not what they are today. They were areas of sand dunes, saw grass, snakes and other pests--a far cry from living in a hotel!**

**At that time St. Petersburg was known as the city of "green park benches" used by the wealthy retirees and vacationers at the time. We did our marching on the streets and were not entirely welcome by the civilians.**

**The message on the back of this post card mentioned that I had just completed 17 hours of KP (kitchen police) duty, from 3 a.m. to 8 p.m., at the mess hall where they served 1500 men at every meal. I can remember peeling potatoes and washing a lot of pots and kettles.**

Before we left basic training. I was assigned to the Signal Corps, attached to the Army. I could visualize myself in combat, crawling up telephone poles with shells flying all around.

It seems to me that I received a furlough about this time, before I was shipped out to my next camp, which was in Fresno, California for Signal Corp training. While I was in Fresno, there was an opportunity to sign up for a possible transfer to the Signal Corp attached to the Air Force. I was really excited about the chance and when I went in for the medical exam my blood pressure was too high. But the examine officer realized it was due to the excitement, so he told me to try to relax and later it had gone down to an acceptable level. I passed the written exam and lo and behold I was in the Air Force.

With this change, I was transferred to Hammer Field, Air Force Base, which also was in Fresno. According to my calculations, this would have been sometime in June, 1943. As a result of this new assignment, I was sent to Radio School in Salt Lake City, Utah. This was "right up my alley" since I had no problem with getting proficient in the Morse Code, which made up the major part of the classes. As a result of getting good grades in my tests, they kept moving me up to higher levels. I helped many of my buddies and they were grateful, because Salt Lake City was "good duty"

The following is an excerpt from the *Radop Operators* section in the *pilot's training manual.* It's interesting because it tells of the radio operator's responsibilities.

**"There is a lot of radio equipment in today's B-17's. There is one man in particular who is supposed to know this equipment. Sometimes he does, but sometimes he does not. And when the radio operator' deficiencies do not become apparent until the crew is in the combat zone, it is then too late. Too often the lives of the pilot and crew are lost because the radio operator has accepted responsibility indifferently.**

**"Radio is subject that cannot be learned in a day. It cannot be learned in six weeks. But sufficient knowledge can be imparted to the radioman if he is willing to study. It is imperative that you (the pilot) check your radio operator's ability to handle the job before taking him overseas as part of your crew".**

The radio training lasted five months, with the heaviest concentration placed on learning Morse Code. For four hours each day we learned to identify the dots and dashes for each letter of the alphabet. Each student had his own code machine and headset. He could set the speed of a coded tape to whatever speed he could receive. Within three months I was able to receive and write down more than 25 words per minute. We also practiced sending code to other students and setting up networks we would be called upon to use in combat. Our afternoons were devoted to radio theory. We learned about schematics, resistors and condensers, We actually built simple transmitters and receivers, The training was too accelerated. but the instructors told us not to worry because in combat all that we would have time for was to "jiggle and look for loose wires".

Because we were in school, we didn't have a lot of marching, drills and the usual Army routine, We received frequent passes and saw many interesting sights, including the Mormon Tabernacle (SLC is the home of the Mormon Church). The Great Salt Lake was also a great experience since you could easily float in the water because it was so salty. But you didn't want to swallow any of it. While I was there I got to know a Mormon girl whose name was Chris Kemp. She invited me to her house to meet her parents. They were wonderful people and treated me very well. I wastreated even better when they found out I could speak their second language--German, But there was never any attempt to convert me to their religion.

Our radio school was located at the Fairgrounds in SLC and the state fair took place while we were in class. It was an interesting time and I was disappointed when I learned that I was being transferred. My MOS, or job description was radio operator/gunner since all enlisted men on a bomber (to which I was assigned) had two duties. I was sent to Gunnery School at Wendover Field, Utah, in the mountains, on the border with Nevada. It was a real contrast to life in SLC. It was late in the fall and much colder than Salt Lake City.

When we arrived at Wendover, there was a huge sign (made of white rocks) that spelled out *"Kill or Be Killed"*. This kind of set the stage for what was to come. We practiced with the whole gamut of weapons--everything from 22's to .50 caliber machine guns. We fired .45 revolvers, shot guns, .sub-machine guns, .30 cal... and .50 call. machine guns both on the ground and from our B-17's. We did a lot of skeet and trap shooting. It was a real sport for most of the guys, especially if you had any experience with a shot gun. Since my experience was nil, I had a hard time getting any decent scores. As a result, I had to "set the birds" in the low house To accomplish this, you had to enter from the front of the little house that contained the powerful sling that sent out the birds.

The sergeant who was in charge of the practice, was wearing a bandage over his forehead and a patch over his eye. Foolishly, I asked him what had happened. He was quick to inform me that one of his "students", who was setting birds in this low house called the instructor to help him. Just as the sergeant was entering the house, from the front, the arm that threw out the birds, broke free and hit him in the face He told me in no uncertain terms that he never expected this to happen again!

As time went on, I got more proficient at shooting and eventually "qualified". But I never did master the .45 pistol and hoped I would never have to use it in self-defense. We shot about 100 rounds of skeet every day. and for the first while I had a very sore right shoulder There was a shot gun shell black market going on at the range. Guys were stealing the shells and selling them on the outside for a good price, since these shells were difficult to get by civilians.

The purpose of skeet shooting was to get you used to leading the target. The skeet range was laid out in a half circle with a high house at one end and the low house at the other end.

We practiced with .50 cal. machine guns while flying in our B-17 (from the waist gunner's position). Our targets were long cloth sleeves towed by a B-26 (medium bomber) Each gunner was allowed to fire ten rounds. Each projectile was color-coded to identify the gunner. We also had some sport--shooting at hay wagons standing in the fields and other objects of no importance. Sometimes we would buzz the ground so low that we could see tire tracks in the ground (through the camera well in the radio room).This was highly "illegal", of course, but we never got caught.

And we had a lot of practice "stripping" these machine guns. Blindfolded. we would *field and detail strip* the many components of each piece. I couldn't imagine why we had to learn this--even in total darkness and while wearing gloves. But I guess the powers-that-be figured we had to know how to correct malfunctions or even make repairs, Fortunately, in combat we had good ground crews who kept our guns in good shape. I can't ever remember a time in combat where anybody made a gun repair. It would have been a real test of courage to do something like that while you were under attack by enemy fighters.

Some time in December, 1943 I was transferred to the Air Force Base at Rapids City, S.D. This was described as a Combat Crew Training School. It was here that we became organized as a flight crew that would train together and eventually fly combat in Europe with the 8th Air Force. Our crew consisted of four officers and six enlisted men. In some cases, later in the war, the crews were cut back to nine members. One waist gunner had to man both waist guns. The change was made at that time because they were running short of personnel (we had suffered a lot of planes and crews being shot down) and eventually we gained the upper hand in the air war with better fighter protection with the advent of the P-51.

Rapids City was a typical South Dakota Indian town . It was not at all unusual to see any number of Indians in town. They weren't wearing feathers or carrying tomahawks, but you couldn't mistake them for Caucasians, We got along well and there was no problem . I don't remember a lot about Rapids City. It was serious business preparing for combat.

Because we weren't far from Mt. Rushmore, we made a lot of flights over the carving of the four U.S. Presidents. We got a lot closer to the figures than most tourists. Eventually, the Air Force put some limits on how close you dared come.

As I mentioned earlier, this was the place where our crew came together. As usual, it was a combination of guys from all parts of the country with different backgrounds and personalities. But it was a wonderful combination.

Our pilot was Frank Muhleman, from California. He was a handsome, tall, athletic-looking man who fit the role perfectly. He could have played the role in any Air Force movie. commanded the respect of everyone on the crew and among other officers. Because of his ability to fly the plane and never look for glory or take chances, his crew (except for me) completed their tour without any injuries..

Our co-pilot, Carl Rogge told me that he regarded Frank as a better pilot than many others in our Group. He had a knack for avoiding flak and never took any chances or tried to be a hero. Frank always treated us fairly, including the other officers and never "pulled rank". Carl told me that Frank was a heavy smoker and would "light up" after the bomb run, even while we were still on oxygen--which was very flammable. Frank was promoted to captain before the end of his tour.

Frank went into business for himself, in his native California--flying aircraft. He did very well, both in the States and overseas. None of us ever heard from him.

Carl Rogge was our co-pilot. He was originally from Milwaukee, but later moved to Libertyville, IL I did not know that he was married and had a child (while we were flying together). He was the macho type and always wore his officer's cap "crunched down". He was usually quite casual, but all business when it came to flying. He got along well with Frank and the entire crew.

After the war, when we got home from Europe, we got together and I was told that I spent sometime at the Rogge hone, and that we went shopping together for suits. But, for the life of me I couldn't remember this. But some time ago Mrs. Rogge sent me a copy of a letter I had sent thanking them for their hospitality, so I guess it did happen. Then we lost track of each other for many years. I can remember calling Carl when I was at a Lions bowling tournament but did not get to talk to him. Then in 1993, when Carl and his family were moving to Mc Henry, Illinois, he found our telephone number and he called me.

We got together two times after that, in West Bend where his brother-in-law lived. The first time we got together, we met at a motel. He came up to the reception desk and asked for us, but I did not recognize him, except for his voice. He had gained a lot of weight and was not well. He had heart trouble and diabetes. He died in 1996 and we went to the wake in Libertyville. We still keep in contact with his wife.

Bob Hilliard was our navigator . He was the more quiet type and appeared as one of the younger guys on the crew. (I found out later, that he was actually older than me).He was from the state of Washington. There was never any doubt about his capability--we all had the utmost faith in him and he never let us down.

We did not hear from him for many years Then in mid-summer of 2001 we received a letter from his wife, Luella. She was planning a surprise for him on their 50th wedding anniversary in early September. The "surprise" was a collection of letters from his former crew members in WWII.

Naturally, we responded immediately and were delighted to have re-established our connection. Bob called us a few weeks later and we had a very emotional reunion. He was kind enough to send us a copy of a book he had published on the history of his family. In the book he mentioned his old crew-mates, including me.

"Benny" Benton Rose was our bombardier, He was from Philadelphia, PA and probably the biggest "character" on the crew. He was Jewish and rather short. He was also the most easily frightened. One time on a mission, he called our pilot to tell him we had been hit by enemy fire because there was a hole in the plexi-glass, near his station in the "nose" of the plane. Actually, what had happened was that one of the ground crew, on routine maintenance, had dropped a wrench on that spot and had made a small dent in the glass. Also, he was always looking for extra flak vests that he could sit on in his position during the mission. When we were issued these flak vests, it was always *one per person.* After the war he became an optometrist, but for me it was difficult to imagine him as an eye doctor. He was a competent bombardier and we never heard any complaints. He died a few years ago and I never had a chance to talk to him after the war.

Pete Mangus was our engineer and top turret gunner. He and I were probably the closest of all the crew members. He was actually the opposite of me from the standpoint of personality--since he was from New York and I was from a small Wisconsin town. Despite his hard core outer shell, he harbored a very warm heart. We got along well while we were in the air, as well as on the ground. We spent a lot of time together when we had a pass or time off. He was a terrific engineer and commanded the respect of the other crew members, especially the pilot.

He had loaned me his watch while mine was in for repair and I was wearing it on the day I was shot down (and, of course, the Germans confiscated it when I was captured).. I had left $100 in my foot locker at the base to be used for the trip we were planning to take to Scotland on August 6th. Later, I learned from him that this was his "compensation" for the watch that he had received from his grandparents for graduation from eighth grade He also became a member of the 351st Bomb Group Association and this is how we got back together many years after the war ended. I had written a letter to the Polebrook Post, which is the 351st's quarterly publication, asking that if any of my former crew members saw the letter, that they would contact me. Since that time Pete and I have been in close contact. We have exchanged letters, phone calls and even got together in Florida in 1997.

Pete and his wife, Rosemary have a condo in Boca Raton. They met us at a little town at the south end of Lake Okechobee and we had a very wonderful and emotional get together. He had planned another get-together this year, but we had not planned a Florida vacation in 2000.

Argonne Renninger was our tail gunner. He appeared to be among the "older" guys on our crew. I can remember that he had a heavy beard and had to shave two times a day. He was a good-natured guy, who was short in stature. a requirement for his position, since there wasn't much room in the tail of the plane. He was from Pennsylvania. I don't know if he was married or not. We lost contact with each other after a few years of exchanging Christmas cards, but renewed our acquaintance last year and have had several interesting phone conversations.

Hugh Scuyler was our ball turret gunner. He was the oldest member on the crew. probably 10 years older than the rest of us. He looked like a real cowboy, but was shorter than most, but he was rough and tough and very agile (which he had to be to get into the ball turret).Pete Mangus told me that Hugh died at age 86 and that he still corresponds with Mrs. Scuyler We considered him the "father" of our crew.

Francis Ryder was one of our waist gunners, also from Pennsylvania. He joined our crew somewhat later in the States. I can remember that he was quite a drinker and lots of times we had to hold him in the cold shower to sober him up for the next day. This was during our training at Rapids City. But he was reliable when we got into combat. He was among the taller members of our crew and pretty well built.

John Rickett was the other waist gunner. He was from "the hills" of Kentucky and had very little education. We used to write his letters to his family, for him. But what he lacked in schooling, he made up in patriotic dedication to his job. He would tell us some very: interesting stories about his life in Kentucky.--how he was the "watch" for his dad and uncles who were making illegal moonshine. It was his job to watch for the revenuers who tried to stop the moon-shiners. John had a tendency for air sickness and very seldom did we complete a flight, even in training, that he didn't have to convert his helmet into a basin. But he was determined to fly in combat and lasted for nearly 25 missions. But finally, our pilot had to replace him on the crew.

However, a most interesting development took place after the war involving Pete and John. What happened is this: Pete had loaned John $20 while he was still on the crew. Pete really didn't expect to get it back. However, quite some time later, after Pete had finished his tour and was back home in New York, he received a letter from John with a $100 bill. After the war John had taken some courses to get his high school diploma and had passed the test for Officers Training School (OCS) and emerged as a 2nd Lieutenant. What an amazing "turn-around" for a kid that had never even finished grade school before he went into service!

We named our plane "Umbriago". This was the fictional, invisible character that the famous radio comedian, Jimmy Duramte talked about in his programs. We hoped that we, too, would be invisible to the enemy. We proudly painted that name on the nose of our ship. When another crew borrowed our plane, and was shot down, we were assigned a new plane, which we called "Umbriago 2", It was a wonderful crew and we were fortunate to be able to fly together for 25 missions. We were from all parts of the country with a variety of personalities. We all knew our jobs and had confidence and respect for one another. Pete told me that things were not the same after I was shot down. He doesn't even remember my replacement.

We were all relatively young. Hugh Scuyler was the oldest--probably in his early 30's. Argonne Renninger probably the next oldest; then Carl Rogge and Frank Muehlman; then Francis Ryde. Bob Hilliard and Benny Rose. Pete and I were 21 and John Rickett maybe a year younger.

Our training at Rapids City was quite intense. Landings, take-offs and formation flying were practiced almost daily. In simulated missions we "bombed" Denver and Omaha. We also flew some night missions to different parts of the country. Actually, we never flew at night while we were in England, since the RAF (Royal Air Force) flew their missions at night. It was only after we got our bombers over there that daylight missions became so common.

When the weather curtailed flying, ground school occupied our time. We logged more than 100 hours of flight time in B-17s. This sturdy plane was called "The Flying Fortress" because of its heavy armament.--13 .50 cal. machine guns Except for the new B-29, the B-17 was the most heavily armed aircraft. The newer Model G, added a "chin turret", which could be operated by either the navigator or bombardier. It was added to counter the vulnerable area in the front of the plane (which the German fighters discovered).

When loaded with 6,000 pounds of bombs, the B-17 weighed 27-1/2 tons. It had a cruising speed of 150-170 miles per hour and a maximum speed of somewhere between 225-250 mph. It had a range of 1850 miles (which could be increased with a lighter bomb load) and could fly up to 35,000 feet. The B-17 was a very durable airplane and could take a lot of punishment and still get its crew back home. Some of these planes were reported to have made it back to the base on one of its four engines.

Many times when we weren't flying we could go down to the air strip and watch the planes come back from a combat mission. There was a code that was used by the returning planes by shooting off colored flares as they came in. A red flare would indicate that there were wounded men on board. There would always be a string of ambulances and fire trucks ready to rescue those in trouble. We saw, first-hand the unbelievable battle damage that was inflicted by the German flak and fighters. There were holes in the wings sometimes as big as two feet in diameter where a shell had gone through. Or a ball turret that was hanging on by only a few strips of metal.

I can remember at one of the briefings that they had for radio operators, that one of the guys told how a shell had gone through the radio room. Fortunately, the operator had swung around in his chair, away from his desk. The shell took out the desk and a part of the bulkhead next to the bomb bay It was not uncommon to have as many as several hundred small holes (from pieces of flak) in the wings This was a real target area for the German gunners since the wings on a B-17 were over a hundred feet from wing tip to wing tip.

There was a lot of rivalry between the crews on a B-17 and on a B-24 Liberator. Actually, each plane had its distinctive advantages. But the B-17 had a more dynamic look with its sleek tapered design. The B-24 had a more "box-like" look. The B-17 used more electric controls, while the B-24 used more hydraulics. When I had a chance to walk through a B-24, it seemed like it had a lot more head room, especially near the tail.

## We Are Now "Combat Ready"

After completing our training in Rapids City, our next stop was in Kearny Neb. We didn't know if we were going to be sent to Europe or the Pacific. But someone (with "inside" information) said that this was a "jumping off" place for combat crews going to England. Here we went through one more processing--got more shots, clothing, equipment, etc. We expected to be assigned to a new B-17 that we were to fly over the Atlantic (with fuel stops in Iceland and at Gander, Newfoundland).

## A "Tub" on the High Seas

But we never got the airplane. Some said it was due to a shortage of B-17's. Others said it was because of the bad weather. Now, our crew was sent to Camp Kilmer, NJ and then to New York harbor. From here we set sail for "Jolly Ole England" aboard a British troop ship, which had been converted from an old cargo ship. It was an old "tub" with not much concern for our comfort. It was devoid of any luxuries and some necessities.

The officers were separated from the enlisted men and we felt that they probably had much better quarters than we did. But, when we compared notes, we discovered that they also slept in hammocks, slung from the ceiling, Conditions were crowded. The hold was filled with the hammocks, so close together that you could hardly walk between them. We were fortunate that it was April and that the weather was not too hot, just yet--but it was still uncomfortable and we went on deck whenever the weather was favorable, and not too stormy.

## Stewed Tomatoes, Stewed Kidneys, Stewed Everything

To put it simply--the food was bad. Since it was a British ship, we had British cooks and British food, prepared in British "style". Everything was stewed. Stewed tomatoes, stewed meat, stewed prunes, stewed kidneys. They gave us small loaves of bread which were crusty on the outside, but doughy in the center. We ate the crust and made doughballs out of the rest and used them as baseballs.

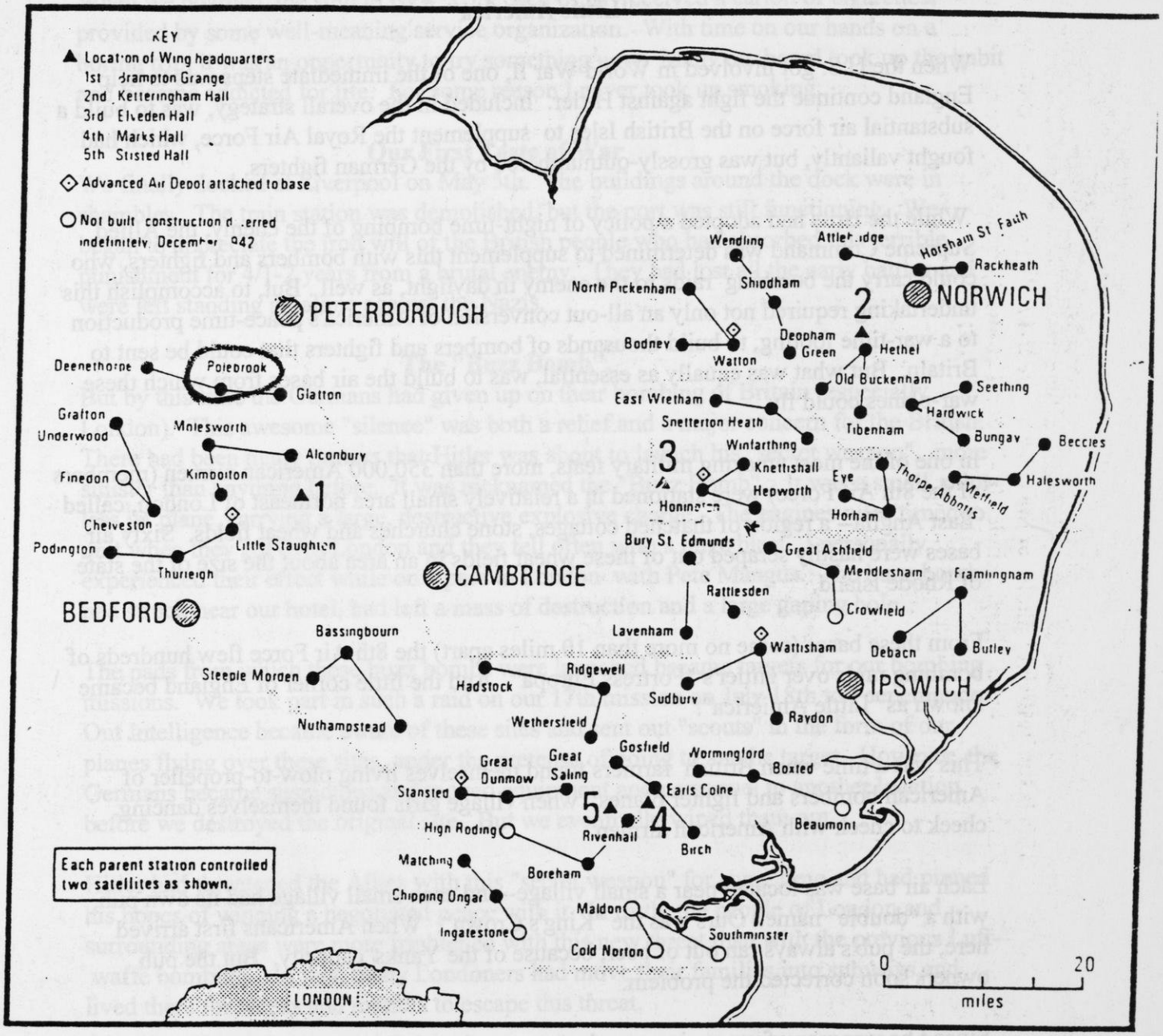
We reverted to Oreo cookies and crackers that we could buy at the ship's store. Pepsi was really the only thing that reminded us of home. We played cards--Poker, Pinochle, Hearts, Bridge and Rummy. We had dominoes, checkers, chess and lots of books etc. to read.

We left New York on April 23rd, It was a 14-day trip because we had to zig-zag a lot to avoid the German submarines that were out in force in the Atlantic at this time and the seas were rough a good share of the time. We were part of a convoy of about 40 ships. Our warship patrolled around the perimeter, guarding against the subs.

We traveled very slowly, the equivalent of 10 to 12 miles per hour. Several days out at sea, we had an "alert" --either a suspected attack or a false alarm. At least the general alarm sounded and we grabbed our life jackets and rushed to the top deck. We watched while our sub-chasers dropped depth charges about a mile away .... .

This is the "official" photo of the crew of our B-17, that we called "Umbriago". Back row, l. to r.: Hugh Scuyler (ball turret gunner), Francis Ryder and John Rickett (waist gunners), Argonne Renninger (tail gunner); Pete Mangus, top turret gunner and flight engineer) and Win Riemer (radio operator). Front row: Carl Rogge (co-pilot), Bob Hilliard (navigator), Frank Muehlman (pilot) and Benny Rose (bombardier), I flew 25 missions with this crew before being shot down while flying with another crew. Our original crew completed its tour of 35 missions.

## THE DEFINITIVE MAP OF VIII BOMBER COMMAND BASES




**This map shows the location of the air bases in England under the control of the VIII Bomber Command. The area was located in the part of the country called East Anglia, nick--named "Little America", since more that 350,000 US airmen were stationed here during WWII. We were with the 351st Bomb Group at Polebrook, near Peterborough, about 60 miles north of London. From the scale of miles you can see just how close the bases were to each other.**

**"Little America"**

When the U.S. got involved in World War II, one of the immediate steps was to help England continue the fight against Hitler. Included in the overall strategy, was to build a substantial air force on the British Isles to supplement the Royal Air Force, which had fought valiantly, but was grossly-outnumbered by the German fighters.

While the Brits had adopted a policy of night-time bombing of the enemy, the Allied Supreme Command was determined to supplement this with bombers and fighters, who could carry the bombing raids to the enemy in daylight, as well . But, to accomplish this undertaking required not only an all-out conversion of America's peace-time production to a war-time footing, to build thousands of bombers and fighters that could be sent to Britain. But what was equally as essential, was to build the air bases from which these war-planes could fly.

In one of the most amazing military feats, more than 350,000 American airmen (members of the 8th Air Force) were stationed in a relatively small area northeast of London, called East Anglia-- a region of thatched cottages, stone churches and wheat fields. Sixty air bases were hastily scraped out of these wheat fields in an area about the size of the state of Rhode Island.

From these bases (some no more than 10 miles apart) the 8th Air Force flew hundreds of bombing raids over Hitler's "Fortress Europa". And the little corner of England became known as "Little Amierica".

This was a time when British farmers found themselves living plow-to-propeller of American bombers and fighter planes; when village girls found themselves dancing cheek to cheek with American airmen.

Each air base was located near a small village--and each small village had its own pub, with a "double" name. Ours was the "King's Crown". When Americans first arrived here, the pub's always ran out of beer, because of the Yanks' capacity. But the pub owners soon corrected the problem.

Since t he war many former airmen, who were stationed here, have come back for a visit. One of their first stops is always at the "King's Crown" to see if their names are still visible on the ceiling where they had scribbled them with burned cork.

There are many memorials all over "Little Amrica". They have been placed there by a grateful host-nation to honor all those American airmen who served here and monuments have been erected to pay tribute to those who are buried here. As one Englishman put it, "Without you Yanks, we might very well now be speaking a different language".

When we boarded the ship in New York each of us received a carton of cigarettes, provided by some well-meaning service organization. With time on our hands on a boring trip, it was an opportunity to try something new. Many on board took up the habit and became addicted for life. For some reason I never took up smoking.

**Our First Taste of War**

We finally docked at Liverpool on May 5th. The buildings around the dock were in shambles. The train station was demolished, but the port was still functioning. We began to appreciate the iron will of the British people who had absorbed this terrible punishment for 4/1-2.years from a brutal enemy. They had lost all the early battles and were left standing all alone against the Nazis.

**The "Buzz Bomb".**

But by this time the Germans had given up on their bombing of Britain (especially London). This awesome "silence" was both a relief and a major concern for the British. There had been many rumors that Hitler was about to launch his "secret weapon", more sinister than anything before. It was nicknamed the "Buzz Bomb". It was a small, pilot-less jet plane, carrying a large, destructive explosive charge. The engines were timed to quit when they got over London and they fell often with a huge blast. I personally experienced their effect while on a pass to London with Pete Mangus. The buzz bomb had struck near our hotel, had left a mass of destruction and a large gaping hole.

The pads from which these buzz bombs were launched became targets for our bombing missions. We took part in such a raid on our 17th mission on July 18th to Peenemunde. Out Intelligence became aware of these sites and sent out "scouts" in the form of our planes flying over these sites, under the pretense of going to anothe target. However, the Germans became suspicious and moved equipment and personnel to another location before we destroyed the original site. But we eventually wiped them out.

Hitler had threatened the Allies with this "secret weapon" for some time and had pinned his hopes of winning a negotiated peace with it. In truth, the people of London and surrounding areas were more frightened with this new threat than with the previous Luft-waffe bombing. In fact, many Londoners had move their families into subways and lived there for weeks and months to escape this threat.

Because so much of Germany's hopes in the war were centered around this weapon, Hitler took personal charge of the project. In the process, there was a constant parade of new scientists and technicians, who cane and went in the program. Even some of the original designers were fired by Hitler in one of his many fits of anger and frenzy. Even worse, some were put into prison. Among them was Werner Von Braun, who came to the United States after Germany's defeat and played a major role in America's aerospace program.

We got along well with the RAF pilots and bomber crews. We "melted in" with our British neighbors near the base and with those we met on the streets and at the pubs. We were getting accustomed to their habits and way of life, and they tolerated us and became quite friendly. They welcomed us to help save their "island" and we were grateful for their cooperation and expertise, which they shared with us.

**Flying as a "Spare"**

.For some reason I had completely forgotten about the first time we were called to fly a combat mission, since it was rather unusual. It was only after I had read the book written by our navigator, Bob Hilliard that I was reminded of this experience. It was somewhat different and we never heard much about it before, but it was a common occurrence, especially among the newer crews.

What actually happened was that we were designated to fly as a "spare". When a Group of our bombers took off on a combat mission, a *spare* plane--with a full crew, loaded with bombs and equipped with machine guns, fuel and everything else--accompanied the Group as far as the English Channel or North Sea, If one of the Group's planes had to abort (turn back) for any special reason like mechanical trouble, the spare would take its place in the formation and fly the mission with the Group.

What took place on June 5th was that none of the Group's planes had to abort, so we were not needed. It was a big let-down for us since we had really looked forward to making our first combat mission. Also, we had gone through all of the preparation and procedures necessary for the "real thing". But it was a good experience to realize what was necessary to get ready to fly in combat.

**The "Routine"**

This was the routine in getting ready for a mission: At around 2 or 3 a.m. (depending on the length of the mission) "Graveyard Dan", the sergeant who had the pleasant duty of waking us, would enter our barracks and come to your bunk, flashlight and clip-board in hand. He would shine the flashlight directly into your face and yell, "Buddy, wake up. You've got a mission to fly today". The clipboard had the names of the men in the barracks who were scheduled to fly and he made his way down between the bunks, using the same technique on all the other unfortunate fliers. If he didn't get the proper response from his "subject", he'd give your bunk a good kick to make sure you were awake.

We had about an hour to clear our heads. to find our clothes, get cleaned up and make up our bunks. Then it was off to the mess hall. The chow line moved quickly and quietly. It was a "royal" buffet--somewhat like you would offer a prisoner before he went to the gallows. We had *real* eggs, bacon, sausage, fresh bread, fruit, milk and coffee. At the end of the line there were candy bars that we could take along on the mission. When we didn't fly, we had *powdered eggs* and SOS, which in civilian terms was chipped beef on toast. I can't remember that we ever had Spam, the army's basic "meal". It was usually very quiet during breakfast. Most of us were barely awake and the thought of risking your life one more time was not a topic for early morning discussion.

## The Briefing

We entered the briefing room an hour later. One by one the crews drifted into the hall,. making their guesses as to what the target would be today. There was a large map on the stage with all the facts concerning the mission. But this would remain hidden behind a large black curtain until the CO (commanding officer) arrived to give the briefing. At precisely 4 a.m. someone in the back of the hall would yell "attention", indicating that the "old man" had arrived.

He walked to the platform, put everyone "at ease" and began to speak. The curtain was removed from the front of the map to reveal the route of the mission, the area of flak we would encounter and the amount of fighter support we could expect. The red ribbon marked the mission route and extended to the destination. The CO would continue by announcing the Group's and our position--whether in the low, middle or high Group.

After the main briefing there were separate briefings for the various members of the crew, including radio operators, who were assigned special codes and frequencies for this particular mission. Next, everyone went to the Equipment Building where we were issued our parachutes, life jackets and other special equipment, including the escape kits. These were small plastic boxes, about 5 x 8 inches and about 1-1/2 inches thick. Included were maps of the area near the target, a chocolate bar, some money :(either francs or marks) and a vial of morphine. The latter was to be used in the event of serious injury during the mission. The unused morphine had to be returned at the time of debriefing after the mission.

## We Wore Flak Vests

Also available were flak vests which we would wear over our other paraphernalia when we were in an area of heavy flak. These vests were about 24 inches wide and 36 inches long. They were made of tiny strips of metal, designed to deflect small pieces of shrapnel. They hung over your shoulders like a sandwich board and weighed around 40 pounds. Some of us preferred to sit on them, rather than have the heavy weight over your shoulders. Our bombardier always tried to get an extra one for "double protection". In addition to this equipment, we also wore headsets, throat mikes and oxygen masks.

The target for June 5th was Hamburg, Ger. Even though we did not get to fly this mission, we were given the chamce to fly there on our eighth mission, on June 20th. Also, I had the opportunity (during our forced march) to witnes the results of the "fire-storm" raid by the RAF, that all but destryed the city of Hamburg.

In preparattion for this mission (as a spare), we got ready in the same way as the crews, who were flying the mission. When we got into the air, there was an oxygen check--every oxygen station that was to be used on the flight reported in over the plane's intercom. All the machine guns were test-fired while we were over the Channel. This was stanard operating procedire. Then, if there were no aborted planes, we (as spares) returned to our base at Polebrook

Ever since we came to England, there were rumors that there would be an invasion of the Continent by the Allies in the near future. Of course, we did not know when this would take place, or where, any more than the Germans. This was amazing in itself, since the Krauts had a terrific Intelligence Network. But, as time went on the rumors became more persistent as the media commented about the extra military activity that was going on in England. We really hoped that the 8th Air Force, including us, would play a major part in this monumental event.

**Our Combat Experience Begins**

So, it was doubly exciting when our crew was called on to fly our first "real" combat mission on June 6th--the day that will always be remembered as D-Day. This was the day when Gen. Eisenhower unleashed Operation Warlord, the code name for the invasion of Fortress Europa.

Some so-called experts had disputed Eisenhower's plan of attack and advised that the invasion should come from Africa and Southern France. Among these opponents was none other than Winston Churchill. But the American Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall and President Roosevelt insisted on the "direct" approach.

On June 6, 1944 the sky was filled with clumps of planes as far as the eye could see. Shortly after dawn we became part of a long line of bombers headed for France. There would be so many planes in the air that day that we were ordered to fly a huge, one-way circle to France and the battle area before returning to our base . We were not allowed to make a second "pass" over the target (as we did other times when the target might be covered with clouds), but to bring our bombs back home, if necessary.

On June 6th our plane was one of 11,000 aircraft that took part in this, the largest assembly of armed forces ever to strike at one time. And we had a ring-side seat to watch it happen. We could see ships unloading the landing craft. We could see the soldiers wading ashore and the confusion of thousands of men and machines trying to make a beach-head in the face of withering enemy fire.

We were disappointed when we learned that we were not a part of the force that would directly support the ground forces in the invasion. Instead, we were sent to Caen, France to bomb a railroad bridge which the Germans might use to support their troops at the invasion sites. It was a short mission. We never did get to drop our bombs and we ran into very little enemy opposition. We were back at our base in a few hours and put on stand-by for a possible second mission that day. But we were never called again. However,, it counted as a "completed" mission and we had our first experience of flying into enemy territory.

In our vernacular, this mission would have been described as a "milk run". But there weren't too many like this. Instead, we discovered that many of the missions would take us into the German heart-land. This is what it was like on a typical combat mission:

American bombers, like this B-17, as well as B-24's, dropped millions of tons of high explosives on Germany and Occupied Europe during WWII. But the effort carried a very high price tag. Nearly 2240 bombers were lost and 20,000 crew members were killed and thousands more became POWs.

This photo was provided by our navigator, Bob Hilliard, from an illustrated calendar issued in honor of the men and women from Pacific County, Wash. (including Bob) who served in World War II.

This picture shows a group of B-24's ("Liberators") flying through enemy flak, or anti-aircraft shells that are exploding in puffs of black smoke. B-24's were hit hardest because they flew lower and in looser formations than B-17's. From 1941 onward, more than 18,000 of these B-24's rolled off U.S. assembly lines in more than a dozen different models.

**A Study in Contrasts**

As our formation approached the enemy coast (France), it was a wonderful sight to see other Groups on either side, heading for Germany. It was likewise beautiful to see the bright sunshine after the hectic moments when we broke through the clouds above our fog-covered airfield.

The clouds looked fluffy and light--quite a contrast to what it would be like in a few hours when we encountered the black, smoke-filled sky with exploding shells all around us.

All the Groups headed in the same direction even though some were going to different targets. This allowed for better protection from our fighters (whom we called "little friends") to have us all in a rather compact group. Sometimes we had as many as a thousand bombers launched from our basis in England for one special mission.

**"The Bomb Run"**

After we got well into Germany, and our target came nearer, it was time to get ready for the most important and dangerous part of the mission--the *bomb run.* As we made our turn. we headed for the target where we were to drop our bombs. If the planes behind us in our original formation had other targets, they would continue on or turn off in another direction. Sometimes we even flew as decoys to confuse the Germans. It was now time to do some serious praying for God to help us get through this ordeal and bring us safely home.

Everyone was tense and scared. The bombardier watched for the signal from the plane ahead of us, or used his Norden bomb sight to make the bomb drop as accurate as possible. Usually the bomb run lasted only several minutes, but sometimes it was longer--it always seemed like an eternity!

The German anti-aircraft gunners opened up with everything they had. They knew we could not deviate from our course . The sky was black with globs of red and orange where the shells exploded. We could hear the rattle of shrapnel against our plane and see holes in the wings. The plane was bouncing around like in a heavy thunderstorm. We could see other B-17's on fire, some exploding and pieces flying all around. We watched for parachutes or bodies falling out of damaged planes.

When we heard the whine of the bomb bay door motors we knew that we were ready for the bomb drop When the bombardier yelled, "bombs away", we turned away from the target area, but stayed in formation. "Stragglers" (those who had sustained damage and couldn't keep up), were on their own, at the mercy of the German fighters.

If your plane was damaged, but could still fly, it might be necessary to jettison your machine guns, ammunition--even the ball turret. This was a real gamble, since you had nothing to defend yourself if attacked. We were fortunate in that we never had to go through this torturous process or make this horrible decision.

However, one time we did run low on fuel when returning from a mission and had to make an emergency landing at an RAF base in England. There were some harrowing moments as the pilot tried to find a hole in the clouds to locate an open area in which to land. Here again the Good Lord was with us, since we did make a safe landing and avoided a crash in some remote field with potential injuries or even death

When the pilot was getting ready to make this emergency landing, he had given us the option to "bail out" if we wanted to avoid a possible crash In the panic of the emergency I grabbed what I thought was my parachute chest pack, which I kept close by in the radio room. After the emergency had passed, and we didn't have to jump, I discovered to my consternation and chagrin, that I was holding one of the radio receivers instead of the chest pack. .The safe landing was just another one of many miracles that saved my life.

During June, July and early August we flew 25 combat missions. Earlier in the war this would have constituted a complete tour, but as time went on they kept increasing the number of missions. The average length of a mission was eight hours. The longest that we flew was nearly 11 hours. Some of the most dangerous of all the targets that we bombed were in the cities of Munich, Hamburg, Berlin and the Ruhr Valley. Quite often we had to go back to the same target two days in a row since we didn't wipe out the target that we were assigned, whether it was overcast, not as obvious as Intelligence had estimated it, or whatever.

Obviously, we were most fortunate to complete that many missions without injury or fatalities or serious damage to the number of planes that we flew. This good fortune was due in great part to the competence or our pilot. There weren't too many crews that made it this far with as good a record as we had. Your chances were almost 50-50 that you wouldn't survive your entire tour. The number of POWs and casualties were stark reminders of this fact. I should also mention that our success was due to the fact that our pilot was not a "glory hunter". He never volunteered for heroic missions or for extra hazardous positions in a formation. He seemed to know how to dodge flak and we never had to battle German fighters because we were able to stay within the area protected by our fighter escort. Also, credit should go to our navigator for getting us home safely sometimes when we were on "our own" when returning from a mission..

Also, a lot of credit should go to the ground crew, back at the base that took care of all the plane's maintenance, saw to it that the guns were in good shape--and to the men that took care of the ammunition and loaded the bombs. These guys were the real "unsung heroes" of the war. Unfortunately, we never got to know them well and to give them the recognition and thanks that they deserved.

Most of the guys who flew combat had some superstition or good luck charm that they felt would get them through the most dangerouos part of a mission.

These gimmicks involved carrying such things as a rabbits foot or hanging a pair of baby shoes on your jacket. My hang-up was this: when we got into the area where the flak was really heavy, I would be sitting at my desk in the radio room and would lift my feet a few inches off the floor (thinking that this would keep me from being hit)--and it worked, if only to a degree.

I should also mention that as radio operator I also had other duties beside sending and receiving messages. There was a chute built into the left side of the radio room through which I would throw "chaff", which resembled the metallic tinsel that you use to decorate Christmas trees. This was supposed to deflect the German radar used to control the flak guns. After I was shot down I can remember seeing a lot of this stuff on the ground. Whether or not it did any good, I don't know.

Also, the camera well was located in the floor of the radio room. Whenever they installed a camera in our plane to take pictures of our bomb "strike", it was my job to see that the camera functioned well. These pictures were used by Intelligence to see how effective our bombs were.

The "bomb run" was the prime purpose of each mission and usually was the most hazardous part of the flight. When we had reached the IP (Indicated Point), the formation would make its turn toward the target. Also at about this time the German fighters would leave the area and turn their destructive work over to the flak gunners. The actual "run" was really only a few minutes, but seemed like an eternity. The lead plane was the first to drop its bombs and others followed, in turn. It was a strange feeling to hear the whine of the bomb bay door motors as they opened up the doors, ready to release the bomb load. You were always hopeful that none of the bombs would "hang up" and someone would have to crawl out onto the 8-inch catwalk, 25,000 feet above the earth. to pry them loose

Once we were on the bomb run there was no deviation in altitude or direction--no evasive action could be taken. The Germans knew this and concentrated their anti-aircraft fire at this point. "You have been through this before. Maybe we can make it one more time". There is nothing you can do to protect yourself. You feel helpless. The seconds drag on. Time seems to stand still. From your radio room window you see bombs falling from the planes in the high group above us, hoping they won't hit us. You can see the flak explode all around us. Our plane was jerking and jumping from the exploding shells nearby. Holes were developing on the top side of the wings where shrapnel had penetrated from below. And you could see other planes being hit, with parts flying in all directions. Some were on fire We were instructed to watch for parachutes. We knew that those who managed to get out would probably be POWs within a short time.

At the time it never occurred to me that I would actually be one of those guys who bailed out from a burning plane and became one of those Prisoners-of-War. But at the time it was always "the other guy". After the mission we were asked to give our report on what we saw and if we could identify the plane from which the parachutes came. But for some reason or other no one ever reported what happened to our plane on August 6th

At the conclusion of the bomb run the pilot would get on the intercom with "let' get the hell out of here".. The planes in the formation would peel off, but would take evasive action, if necessary. But generally they would try to keep some type of formation, since it was better to be close together in the event of a fighter attack. But if you had mechanical problems or severe damage, you were on your own. This was a last resort since the German fighters would jump on 'stragglers".

If your mission took you close to Switzerland or Sweden (neutral countries} some of the disabled planes would try to make it across the border, and turn themselves in. Some crews were accused of taking advantage of this to avoid future combat. All those who were interned spent the rest of the war in those countries.

When we returned to our base at Polebrook, all crews would go through a de-briefing where Intelligence would ask a lot of questions about the mission to determine how successful the mission was. All of us were offered coffee and a shot of whiskey. I usually gave my drinks to other members of the crew since I didn't like the taste of whiskey.

Sometimes after a series of back-to-back missions we would get a pass to leave the base for a day. At these times we would go to Peterborough or other nearby towns. If we had a 3-day pass we would go to London. Pete Mangus and I traveled together but sometimes the entire crew, including the officers, would go as a group. London provided a lot of attractions, including The Tower of London, St. Paul's Cathedral,Westminister Abbey, London Bridge and, of course Picadilly Circus, which was not a tent city with elephants and clowns, but a section of the city where Americans met British girls.

We also had a pub in the little town next to our base called the King's Crown. The airmen would stand on each other's shoulders to reach up and write their names on the ceiling. My correspondent from Peterborough says the pub is still there, as well as the names on the ceiling. Veterans of the 351st, visiting Polebrook still stop there to visit..

Our crew had planned a trip to Scotland after our 25th mission when we were to get a five day pass on August 6th, Everyone was excited about going and had put aside extra money for the trip. I had $100 stashed away. The rest of the crew did go (without me) but were disappointed since the golf courses were poorly tended because of the war and each player was rationed two golf balls. Food was scarce, so the guys left after about three days to get back to the base and some good food..

**The Fatal Mission**

The story of my fatal mission is a combination of what I remember and information from others who were involved, plus the "official report". It's a story that was repeated many times in the air war of World War II, but each experience is a little different. Being shot down, becoming a POW and then being held in a camp with 10,000 other prisoners gave me the opportunity to hear a lot of similar accounts, one more exciting than the next. How most of us survived this ordeal is still beyond belief.

To begin with, I had conversations with Carl Rogge and Pete Mangus regarding a verbal "pact" that the crew members had made among ourselves, that we would never fly with another crew on our combat tour. Unfortunately, I did not remember this on the morning of August 6, 1944 and as a result I didn't protest when they called me to fly with Lt. Pattison's crew. Nothing was mentioned about the need for approval of my own pilot. Blame it on the fact that I didn't remember the "pact", that I wasn't thinking clearly that early in the morning, or that I wasn't superstitious--whatever the reason--it was the biggest mistake of my life, *(Note: Bob Hilliard did fly with another crew and made it back safely).*

Let's begin with my recollections of the events that happened on August 6, 1944:

While I was still dreaming about the rolling hills and beautiful scenery of Scotland, as well as the Scottish lassies, this guy came to my bunk and shone the flashlight in my face and told me I was scheduled to fly with Lt. Pattison's crew. I'm sure I thought this was rather unusual. I didn't even know a Lt. Pattison. But somewhere along the way they told me that his crew was short a radio operator and I was to fill in. When they told me who the other crew members were. I didn't recognize any of their names.

In a way this wasn't unusual, since we didn't get very friendly with other crews because we flew at different times and you were afraid to get too close to someone since he might not be around the next day.

Before I was totally aware of what was going on, we had been through the briefing, where we learned that today's target was BERLIN, the capital of Germany. I had been there once before and I remembered that it was very rough--lots of flak and what was left of the Luftwaffe was flying that day. We all took our positions on the plane but I can't remember that we were ever introduced to each other. There wasn't much time for chit-chat once the plane took off.

It was going to be a long day. Berlin was more that eight hours, round trip, most of it at high altitude and on oxygen. We went through the routine of test firing our guns, checking my radio equipment, and checking out the intercom before we got into enemy territory. Since two months had passed since D-Day, some of occupied France had been liberated by the Allies and was no longer hazardous as far as anti-aircraft was concerned. It was a bright, sunny afternoon in early August and the ground temperature was very comfortable. However, at 26,500 feet, the temperature was many degrees below zero.

Later, I learned that the members on this crew were a grand mixture--some of the guys had flown with other crews before. The original co-pilot of the crew wrote me a letter in which he told me that he left the crew because he and Lt. Pattison "did not work well together". It was an all together different set-up than we had on our crew..

**The following information was received from Clyde Bullock, the engineer-top turret gunner on the crew that I flew with on the day I was shot down. This was received in April 1997 in response to a letter I had sent him, after I had received a picture of his crew from Mrs. Pattison, the pilot's wife.**

**"I was glad that you heard from Mrs. Pattison. I never got to know her, but I really liked Paul. He and I got along real well. Of course, we never associated much other than when we were flying.**

About the photos though. As far as I can remember the only ones in the picture that were flying with us that day were Robert and of course Pattison. Jones wasn't flying with us that day as Parker was our co-pilot. and he was lost. Seelbach was not with us as he had been assigned to another job, flying as a listener to Geramn radio transmissions. He understood German and spoke it very well. By the way he was born in Germany but his parents brought him to this country when he was small, but they went back to Germany before the war broke out. Then sometime along the way he was given the option of coming back to this country or staying in Germany. He decided to come back to the U.S. and became a citizen. I think he entered the service from Chicago or some where there abouts. So the bottom row: DeHart, next to me in the picture was shot down before I was. Next in that row was Lopez. He was killed in a forming up accident over England shortly after we started flying. Kemahah was also shot down on another mission before I was. Both Kemahah and DeHart were in Kiefheide at the same time that I was, but not in the same compound.

**"Since I started this letter I have come to the conclusion that Lt. Mc Farlane was not on the crew that day either. I just recently came across a flimsy that I've had in my files all these years and it seems Lt. Chamberlain was our bombardier.**

**"Since coming across this list and looking at the picture you sent, I believe that the person in the top row, second from the left is Lt. Pattison. To me it looks more like Pattison than Mc Farlane. and I know Mc Farlane wasn't on the list. But it's been a long time and I'll admit my memory is not as good as it used to be."**

The information in this letter was not only interesting, but it tells more about the crew in general. From what Clyde says, there were a lot of changes in his crew. Some of his original crew were killed in earlier missions. I had a letter from one of Clyde's former co-pilots, whose name was Jones. He told me that he had requested a transfer to another crew because he and Lt. Pattison "were not compatible".

This was in sharp contrast to our crew, that I flew with for 25 missions. During that time we always flew with the same crew members. We felt a strong comraderie among ourselves, including our officers. However, I learned from Pete Mangus that John Rickett, one of our waist gunners, did leave the crew, after I was shot down, for medical reasons. And, of course they had to replace their radio operator. All in all, our crew was much closer-knit than many others,. ..

Many years after the war was over I decided to try to trace several sources to see if anyone had a record of that mission and possibly the names of the crew members. I came across an organization called the 351st Bomb Group Association. Since we were a part of the 351st I thought maybe someone could help me. Fortunately, the editor of their publication, *The Polebrook Post,* Howard Stickford, was most helpful. He had a history of our Bomb Group and located the mission of August 6, 1944.

The records listed the following crew members of our plane, which was No. 42-102971-YB-J.: 1st :Lt. Paul F. Pattison (pilot), 2nd Lt. Francis H. Parker (co-pilot), 1st Lt. :Leonard :B. Roberts (navigator}, Roland H. Chamberlain (bombardier), T/ Sgt. Clyde Bullock, S/Sgt. Winfred Riemer, Sgt. John R. Smith, Sgt. Frank L. Espinoza, and Sgt. Clarence A. Bessenson. They did not give the positions of the enlisted men, but I learned later that Clyde Bullock was engineer/top turret gunner.

Clyde Bullock was the only one that I ever got to talk to about that mission. I had written to the pilot, Paul Pattison, but never received a reply. Quite some time later, I received a letter from his wife telling me that Paul had died. She said he was ill for a long time and that he never talked much about his war experiences. Paul made a lifetime career of the service and retired as a colonel. His wife lives in Augusta, GA and we still exchange Christmas cards. Clyde Bullock stopped to see me in 1996 on his way to Washington Island. We had lunch at Michiels and a wonderful visit. He was over 80 at the time but drove all the way from his home in California. We still talk on the phone occasionally.

On this mission to Berlin, we turned right over the North Sea and then crossed The Netherlands. There was no sign of enemy fighters or flak thus far. Besides, we had protection from our P-51's, who would follow us almost to the target. On this mission the IP (Indicated Point), where we turned on the bomb run, was exceptionally long, It was at this point that we encountered the biggest concentration of flak and the few German fighters that were still around. We started noticing that some of the planes in the formation were being hit. There were planes exploding; others were on fire and we saw some parachutes in the sky, We didn't expect that our turn was next.

**The Battle Begins...**

We suffered a direct hit in our No. 3 engine, which is on the right side, inboard. The pilot feather the prop to keep it from windmilling , but oil and fuel was coming out of the engine and running along the right side of the fuselage. Pretty soon it started on fire. In the meantime the FW-190's and ME-109's started their attack. We figured that there must have been about 15 of them. They darted in between our planes and usually hit the tail end" plane. They had heavy armor on their underside and when they pulled away the belly of their plane was exposed to us, but due to the heavy armor plate, our bullets just glanced off. The next thing that happened was that we had another hit, this time in our No. 2 . engine. (on the left side). Even though we had not reached the target, our pilot decided to drop our bombs so that we might possibly retain our altitude. But the damage was too severe and we started to go down. By this time the cabin was starting to fill with smoke.

According to "operating procedure", the pilot gives the command to "bail out" if he feels it becomes necessary. However, on this mission we never heard the order. It is very possible that the wires for the intercom were shot out by flak or fighters or burned off by the fire. We knew that there was no time to wait any longer. The guys from the back of the plane were already trying to open the escape hatch. As we left our stations we also pulled out our oxygen connections. And we were still at the altitude where the air was very thin. But in our panic to escape the burning plane. we must have had the extra adrenaline to survive with less oxygen.

We all took a turn at trying to open the hatch, but it would not open. Normally, you could pull two pins from the hinges and the door would loosen and you could kick it out. But time was running out and we had to go to our next alternative. This was a smaller door, still further back, near the rear of the plane where the tail tapers and there isn't much room since this is also where the tail wheel mechanism is located. It was designed as the hatch for the tail gunner. This opening was considerably smaller than the regular escape hatch.

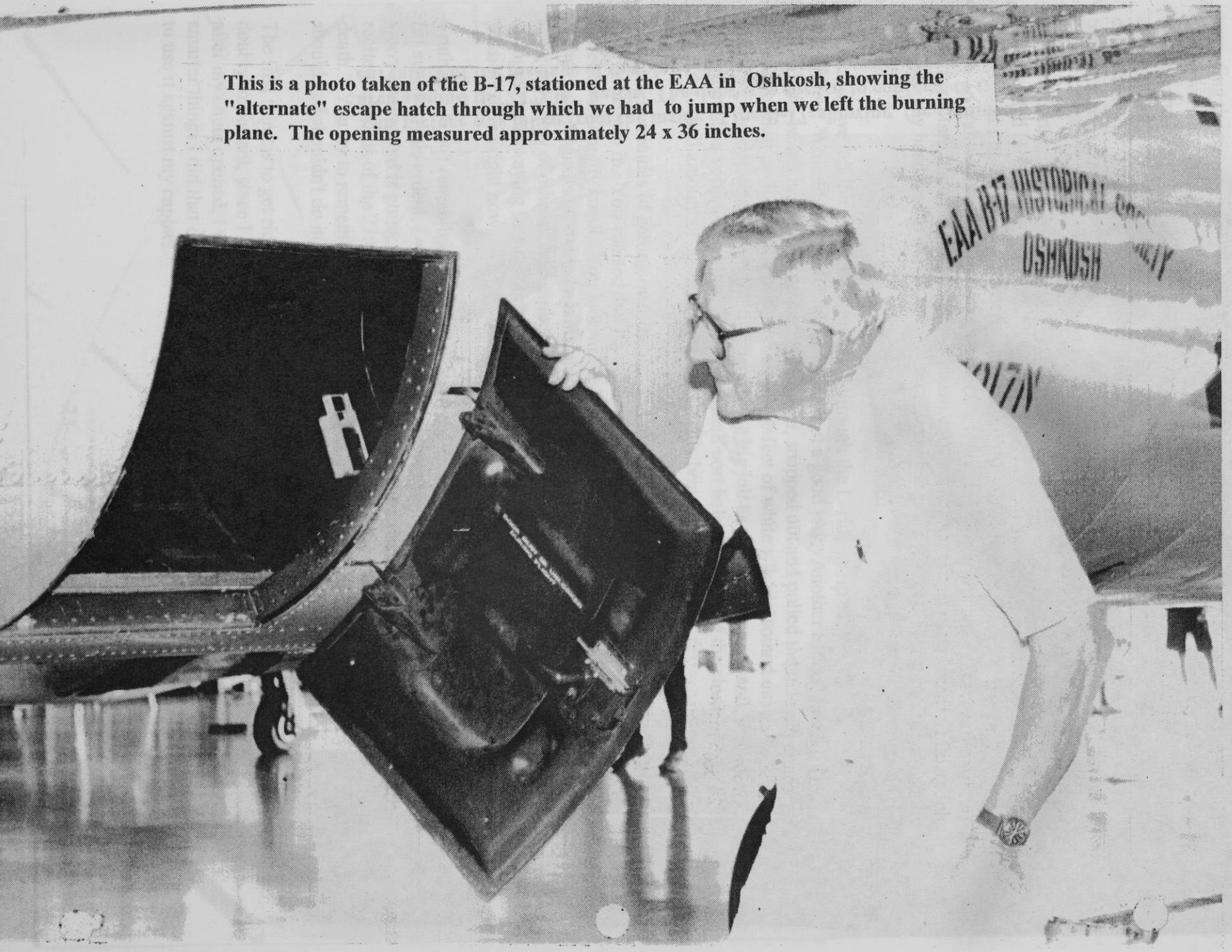
After the war I sometimes thought about the small escape hatch--how we managed to get through it since it appeared so small. I wondered *how small* it really was. My answer came when I was invited to tour the B-17, "Silver Overcast", which is based at the EAA Grounds in Oshkosh. When I took out my tape and measured the opening, I found it to be 24 x 36 inches .It was indeed a miracle that all five of us got through it, especially since all of us were wearing a lot of clothes and equipment, including our parachutes.

But all five of us managed to get out. I think there was a little pushing and shoving that may have helped the process. The other members of the crew could use either the bomb bay, if the doors were open or the hatch near the cockpit. I forgot to ask Clyde Bullock how he got out since he was in that area. This meant that the engineer, pilot and co-pilot exited that route. Tragically, the bombardier and navigator were killed on this mission. Nobody seems to know if a shell or gunfire hit the nose area and killed them , or if they went down with plane when it crashed.

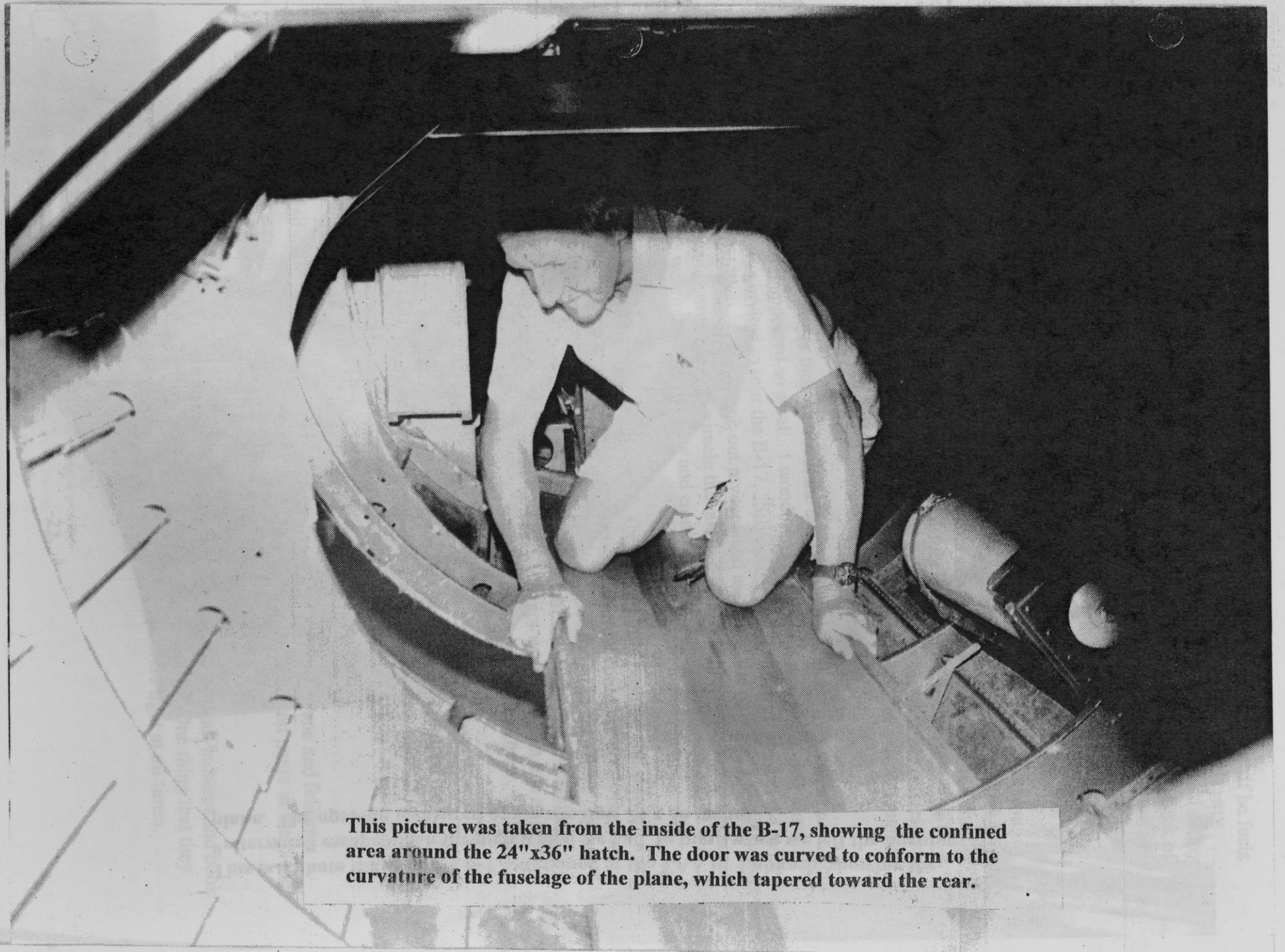
The fire was still burning along the outside of the fuselage when we jumped, so we had to go through the flames. Again, I don't know if any of the other crew members suffered any burns, but I did have facial burns, on the left side of my face. I didn't realize this until later.

So, we had managed to cheat the "grim reaper", as we cleared the plane and fell into space. It was suddenly very quiet and peaceful after the confusion and panic in the plane. But there were still more life-threatening moments to come.

We had never had a practice jump while we were in training. It was all lectures and book learning. The instructors gave us a general idea of what to expect. One thing that they really stressed was to be sure your parachute harness straps were tight at all times.




**This is a photo taken of the B-17, stationed at the EAA in Oshkosh, showing the "alternate" escape hatch through which we had to jump when we left the burning plane. The opening measured approximately 24 x 36 inches.**



**This picture was taken from the inside of the B-17, showing the confined area around the 24"x36" hatch. The door was curved to conform to the curvature of the fuselage of the plane, which tapered toward the rear.**

We were warned to expect a severe jolt when the chute opened. Their favorite comment regarding the tight harness straps was "or all you baritones will be singing tenor". The chutes we wore were actually in two pieces--the harness was worn at all times on the mission and had two hooks in the front. The chest pack was about the size of two loaves of bread and had two loops that attached to the two hooks on the harness. Previous chutes had the actual chute in the form of a back pack, or seat pack and was worn all the time as a one-piece outfit.

Also, in training we were told to delay opening our chute as long as possible to avoid being strafed by enemy fighters and being more easily detected by anybody on the ground. But I doubt if any of the instructors had ever been in combat to experience what it's like to wait when you're falling like a rock. At any rate, I had the feeling like I might be slipping into unconsciousness (having been without extra oxygen for quite some time). I felt like my head was in the center and my feet were flying around like a horizontal wind mill

As soon as we left the plane, I put my hand through the D-ring or rip cord on the chute, just in case. Without too much hesitation I gave it a good jerk. Another miracle! The pilot chute, which is about 18 inches in diameter, snapped out and pulled the main chute out of the chest pack. What a beautiful sight--30 feet of white silk blossomed out above me. Yes, the instructors were right! There was a big jolt as the chute opened and brought me to a vertical position. There is a small port hole in the top of the chute that lets out a small amount of air at a time, to gradually bring you down.

After a few minutes of getting over the jolt and realizing that you are still alive, reality once more sets in. You can see that it's a long way to the ground because objects down there are still pretty small. You look up and see the planes in your formation, glistening in the early August sun, framed against the blue sky--on their way back home. You also see quite a few of other crew members who are in the same boat as you are--they are also swinging and swaying in their parachutes. You don't know if they are injured or even possibly dying right now.

Truthfully I can't remember all my thoughts at the time, but I do recall telling myself that if I survived this ordeal, I would tell everyone I knew about it. Naturally, you begin to worry about what is going to happen next. This is the time you ask the Lord for help; you recite the words of the 23rd Psalm, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." You try to remember the things they talked about in training, regarding what you should and shouldn't do in the event you were captured.

The first thing is to get rid of the .45 pistol that most of us carried. In my case it was doubly important, since I was never a good shot with it at gunnery school. So, shortly after my chute opened, I took it out of my holster and threw it away. It was one of the smarter things I did that day since it would have caused me a lot of trouble if I intended to use it against my captors.

## Name, Rank and Serial Number--That's All

Another primary bit of advice we received was that if you are captured, don't tell them anything except *name, rank and serial number*. This was actually a part of the Geneva Convention rules that had been signed by most of the warring countries, including Germany. But we were also warned that there would be some severe interrogation by the Germans in which they would use all kinds of tactics to get more information from you.

As I was floating to earth, I could tell that things were starting to look a little larger. Which meant that I was getting closer to the ground. I could now see more clearly that I might land in the little town, possibly in a power plant or even in a lake nearby. Once again I remembered something the instructors had told us about our parachutes. If you want to change the direction in which you might land, you could "slip you chute", which meant that you could pull the "lines" on one side of the chute and let out some of the air. But, along with that, there was the hazard that you could "spill" the chute, which meant that all the air would go out and you would land like not having any chute at all.

So, I decided this was no time to gamble. I'd take my chances. I also notice, while I was floating down that there were a lot of people standing around one end of the lake and that there were some small boats on the shore. While I was debating my landing site, I hit the water. I went down to the bottom. When I came up to the surface, I noticed that the pencil that I had stuck behind my ear in the radio room, was floating beside me. Also, my parachute had collapsed beside me. This too, was good fortune, since some reports told of airmen landing in water and suffocating when the parachute landed over them.

I also saw that a small boat was coming in my direction. It had several men in it, but they weren't wearing uniforms. But instinctively I started swimming for the opposite shore. I was still wearing my X-tra large flying boots, which served more as anchors than flippers I was not a good swimmer--my only training was at Art's pond and at the Lime Kilns. I had visions of pulling a "Moses" and hiding in the reeds near the opposite shore. But I made little headway and soon the boat with six Krauts was next to me.

All the guys in the boat had guns and one had a pitch fork and he kept trying to spear me (like an olive in a martini). They were talking to me and I could understand some of what they were saying since my parents spoke German at home and I didn't speak good English until I was in first grade. These men were all in their 60's, but in good physical shape. They were not in the military, but served as members of the Volksturm, which was the equivalent of our Civil Defense. I had heard stories that there was a bounty on American airmen and possibly this was a profitable afternoon for them..

I don't remember that there was much conversation in the boat on the way to shore--at least I didn't contribute much . I could see that there were a lot of people--men, women and children gathered on the shore. And I knew that they were not a "Welcoming Committee". I surely didn't know what to expect, however, I knew that this was not going to be one of the most pleasant moments of my life.

## Wasch Doch Dein Gesicht

When we got to the shore. I got out of the boat and the bystanders started to crowd around me. As I remember, they weren't real hostile, considering that they must have heard the bombing that was going on, and that I had been a part of it. The Volksturm guys appeared to be in charge, and when they talked, the crowd moved back. They made me put my hands up and made a thorough search. They appeared puzzled and suspicious that I was not carrying a gun. Also, the fact that I could speak German was a concern and they probably thought I was a spy.

One of the women in the group, called out to me, "Wasch doch dein Gesicht", which meant "Wash your face". When I rubbed my hands across my face I realized that the skin on the left side of my face had been burned, and a handful of skin came off and now it started to hurt. However, they didn't offer any treatment for it. In fact, I can't recall that at any time during the next few days, that there was any medical treatment.

After the search, they made me lie down on the beach, "spread eagled" with one of the Volksturm standing guard over me with his rifle. This gave me a chance to dry out, at least a little. It was about 1:30 p.m. on a warm August Sunday afternoon In the meantime, they must have called some military installation to get instructions on what to do next. There was a small building nearby, which turned out to be an old smoke house. It had one small window in it and they shoved me inside and locked the door.

When I think back to that time, it surprised me that there were no other airmen that came down in the immediate area, since we all jumped out within a few seconds of each other. But, the plane was still traveling at over 100 miles per hour, so there was considerable space between us. They evidently didn't capture any more of us in this vicinity, because I never saw another American till later. I spent an hour or two in my new "home". There never was any offer for food or drink or to go to the toilet.

While I was in the smoke house, I had some more time to think. I'm sure I had mixed feelings of relief (that I was still alive), but what would follow? I had now become a Prisoner-of- War. I had just lost my freedom. I was at the mercy of my captors. And a feeling of utter loneliness swept over me. Could this really be happening to me? I had been through 25 missions and had always escaped. Was it because I flew with this different crew? What had they told us in training--what could I expect as a POW?

While I was still meditating on the possibilities of the future, there was a rattling at the door. As it swung open there was a German soldier, about 55 or 60 years old who ordered me to come out with my hands up. I learned later that the uniform he was wearing was that of the German Wehrmacht or Army. The reason that these guards were quite old, was that the younger men were at the Front, fighting the Allies or the Russians. He ordered me to push his bicycle while he walked behind me with his rifle in my back.

## Our First Night "Out"

We finally arrived at another small town; where there was a small prison, which probably was a civilian jail, but had been taken over by the military. Before the day was over there must have been about 30 of us who were captured that day. Some of the guys had injured their backs, some had sprained ankle and even broken arms, but only two others had burns and I presume these were some of my fellow crew-mates. There weren't enough bunks to go around, so some of us had to sleep on the concrete floor. We didn't get any food from the Germans and again there was little conversation because we were afraid there might be some German spies among us.

It was some consolation to have other airmen around and that you were not all alone in this situation. All of us were still scared and nobody got much sleep. But we had made it through a very life-threatening day.

The next morning we received a slice of black bread and some German coffee. We didn't realize it at the time, but this was to become a "normal" ration for breakfast. The bread was dark and dense. It was a far cry from what we consider bread. There was always some sawdust around the edges so we suspected there was more inside. The "coffee" was also something else. They called it *ersatz coffee*, which meant substitute. Over time we learned that it was made from roasted barley, nut shells and acorns. One of the guys aptly described it as *smelling like a wet dog, and tasting worse.* But we got used to it because there was no choice.

Before long, the Germans put us on trucks and hauled us to the Berlin railroad station. I learned later that our target was not actually Berlin, but a jet aircraft factory in a place called Genshagen. When we got to the Berlin railroad station we saw just how much damage we had done with our bombs. There was a lot of twisted steel, no glass in what used to be windows. There had been about 25 lines into the station, but when we got there, only two were in service. Upon arrival we were greeted by a bunch of Hitler Jugend (Hitler Youth) who threw sticks, bottles and stones at us. The German guards chased them away and herded us into the passenger train.

This caused another problem since they evicted the civilian passengers from their seats. After we got on board, they made us pull down the shades, so that those on the platform couldn't see that we were American POWs. In the train station we saw two dead British (RAF) flyers hanging from a pole. Our destination was Frankfurt railroad station, near the place where the Germans processed the newly captured Americans.

We were sent to Oberussel which was the German Interrogation Center for all POWs. This was to be another experience that we were warned about in training. As I said earlier, we were not to give any other information except *name, rank and serial number.* Each of us was put into a solitary confinement cell. Mine was a rather bare room with only a steel cot and a pail in the corner. The room had a frosted window with bars on it and there was a small light bulb in the ceiling, which burned night and day.

## The Question and Answer Game

The room was about 8x10 feet. The door had a slot at the bottom though which we passed our "toilet" pail and the Germans sent whatever rations we got. I could hear troops marching outside in what must have been a drill or parade area. We spent about three or four days here. The Germans would call us out at any time of the day or night and take us to the Interrogation Room, which was well furnished and decorated. The officer was well dressed and spoke good English. At first they would try the "I want to be your friend" approach to solicit information about your air base, your plane, your target, etc.

If this didn't work, the next time you would get a more stern treatment. And if this was not successful they resorted to the "if you don't tell us what we want to know, we could make it pretty tough for you" approach. They told us that if we didn't give them the information they wanted that they probably wouldn't acknowledge (to the U.S. government) that we were POWs. I was never bribed with an offer of a drink or the "services" of a German fraulein, as they had told us in training. They did, however, offer me a cigarette early in the game.

One of the most surprising things that happened when you didn't cooperate, was that they would produce your file, in which they had all the material that their Intelligence System had generated--information regarding your personal history, the bases that you had trained at in the States, etc. They also could tell you what air base you flew from in England and the target for the day Some guys said they probably had spies at our briefing. The place had the nickname "Flea Center" and was our first experience with body lice.

Our next stop was much more pleasant. We were sent to the DuLag (Durchgangs Lager) or processing center at Wetzlar. This place was under the command of an American, Colonel Stark, who had been shot down as a fighter pilot. The place was still under the jurisdiction of the Germans, but we got very good treatment here. It was the first time we had a shower in several days. We received warm food and a *capture kit*, which included a lot of personal items like toothbrush, comb, shaving kit, vitamin pills, etc. In addition we got different clothes--some of it was used, some were parts of uniforms from other countries--I received a French overcoat, as well as a pair of brand new GI boots, which were a life-saver during the march several months later.

## Stalag Luft VI--St. Wendel

But this Taste of Heaven was short-lived. We had learned that the DuLag was a jumping off place to your first real prison camp. So it was no surprise that on about August 15 we once more were taken to Frankfurt and put on the train--destination: Stalag Luft VI at St. Wendel, Germany, near Saarbrucken. The term *Stalag Luft* meant a camp for enlisted men in the Air Force. The number VI had actually been transferred from another camp (Hydekrug) in northeastern Germany, that had been evacuated. The camp in St. Wendel was new and we were among the first POWs that were sent there..

It was obvious that this camp had been set up in a hurry because they were just finishing putting up the fence around the outside. The building was a converted garage where the Germans had been repairing trucks, cars, motorcycles and other vehicles. It was located on a hill overlooking the town. The garage was rectangular in shape and had a ground floor. There were no bunks available for the first few days--until the truck arrived and we helped set them up. There were several other building s nearby. Some were similar to the one in which we stayed. In fact, we enjoyed watching the Germans drive the cars and motorcycles out on to the road. A lot of the cars looked American-made and they must have had some gasoline left in them because they moved much faster than the ones that were using the charcoal burner types..

About two years ago (1998) I received a questionnaire from a historian at St. Wendel. Among the questions he asked were: Can you remember the monastary and the large church in the town? How long were you in the camp? What kind of building were you in? Were there other nationalities beside Americans there? How many POWs were there? Have you ever been back to St. Wendel?

The historian, whose name was Roland Geiger, sent out 37 letters and received 17 replies. He made copies of the replies and sent them to the people who responded (including me), One of the replies was from John Anderson of Mexico Beach, FL. Anderson wrote me a letter after reading my response to Geiger. Strangely enough, it turned out that I was among the batch of prisoners that he was with on the truck that took us to the jail near Berlin, shortly after we were captured. The guys in the truck though that maybe I was a German spy since I could talk German, had blue eyes and blonde hair..

In the responses to Geiger's questionnaire, there were a lot of different answers to the same question. For example: the estimate of the number of POWs in the camp ranged all the way from 200 to a 1000. Some said we had good food while others said it was bad and scarce. It was surprising to learn how many ex-POWs had gone back to St. Wendel to try to locate where the camp had been. Melva and I went back there in 1972 and like everybody else could not find any trace of the camp. When we asked any of the civilians about it, they maintained they were unaware that there was ever a prison camp in their town

According to Historian Geiger, the reason that the civilians did not know about the prison camp is that it was located near a flak site where the anti-aircraft guns were located and that was secret, off-limits to civilians. But many of us can remember marching through the town from the railroad station to the camp and it would have been quite difficult not to realize that we were POWs Very few of us remembered the monastary or the large church. One thing that all of us recalled was that we underwent a lot of air raids while we were there. But no one was ever injured by the bombs, but we got plenty scared. According to my memory, there were about 200 or 250 POWs in the camp, all Americans. My impression was that food was scarce. The guard fence was close to the building so we didn't have much room to walk.

Among other things that John Anderson mentioned in his letter to me regarding our similar experiences was that he was also a radio operator on a B-17. He was shot down on his 24th mission; mine was my 25th. We were both on the same mission, to Berlin. Both of us arrived at St. Wendel on August 10th and left there on Sept. 5th. He mentioned that when I was put on the truck with him (on August 6th) that he remembered a blonde kid who could speak German and that he and the other guys were suspicious that I might be a German spy, since the Germans would do this to eaves drop on the prisoners to get information on the crew, the target, the plane, etc. He also was on the train ride from St. Wendel to Stalag Luft IV and kept a diary of that trip.

These were some of the things that he noted in his diary while we were at St. Wendel: He was under the impression that a regular prison camp was being built right next to the converted garage in which we were kept. However, we never got to see it since we were evacuated before it was finished. He said he got to use a mechanical toilet they had in it. Our food ration was "bread for breakfast, soup for lunch and bread for supper". The temperature ranged from "rather hot" to "cloudy and cold".

He said that a short distance from the camp there was a huge hole, probably dug for an air raid shelter and then abandoned. The Germans wanted us to help fill up the hole, but we protested, since the Geneva Convention does not require anyone with the rank of sergeant or above to do such work. The Germans answer to this was, "no work, no eat". So we decided it would be wiser to work. A work detail was out filling up the hole most of the daylight hours, but we didn't work hard. It could have taken months to fill up that hole.

The guys played cards (where they got them I don't know). We gave each other haircuts. There were facilities for cold water baths, also for washing clothes. Only one roll call per day, at 9 a.m.

On Sunday, Sept. 4 we got to use the facilities in the new camp. The toilets were different from those back home but a lot better than the outdoor "trenches" we had been using. It was the last time we got to use a mechanical toilet for the next 8 months.

Here is another of his "observations": In the distance we could see a highway and a number of tanks and trucks were moving toward the interior. We heard that the Allies had rushed across France. Information was scarce, but we did hear a lot of rumors. Actually, DeGaulle entered Paris on Aug. 26th. British armored columns entered Brussels on Sept. 23rd. Antwerp on the 4th and then penetrated into Holland.

Most of us felt that the war was nearly over. It looked like the Germans were retreating back home and would surrender before the fighting came to their country. According to Anderson, the guys in the camp picked a date when they thought the war would end. Many picked dates in late September or October. The most pessimistic picked November 11th. We talked about a mass escape, but it never materialized.

The rumor mills were working overtime with the reports that Gen. Patton's army was moving in our direction with the possibility of an early liberation. Part of the rumor was true. The Allies were indeed advancing toward us. However, the Germans had no intention of allowing us to be liberated. Instead, they were making arrangements to evacuate us from St. Wendel in the very near future.

So, on September 5th (1944) they hustled us out of the camp and marched us down to the St. Wendel railroad station to begin what was to be one of the most horrible parts of my Prisoner of War experience..

When we arrived at the station we discovered that the travel accomodations for this leg of our trip had been drastically down-graded from the previous ride in railroad passenger cars.in which we had arrived in St. Wendel.. Now, a string of six or eight funny-looking box cars on a siding were waiting for us. These cars were much smaller than their American counterparts. These little freight cars evidently were quite common in Europe. They had gained popularity during the First World War, especially in France, where they were known for their rated capacity of either 40 Hommes (humans) or eight Cheveaux (horses). This antiquated rolling stock couild easily have been left over from another era.

Fortunately. the railroad station at St. Wendel was not as congested or bombed out as Berlin or some other major cities and we were not usurping any of their train seats.. However, this was little consolation when we realized what lay in store for us.

Little did we know that this was the beginning of a five-day train ride across Germany from southwest to northeast. As someone described it--we were an impotent advance force 800 miles into enemy territory. The trip included some of the most brutal, inhumane and despicable treatment that could be imposed upon Prisoners-of-War by an enemy power.

Our contingent of several hundred Kriegies was split up into groups of 50. Each group was assigned to one box car. The car itself was divided into three sections.. The center area, where the sliding doors were located; was the guards "quarters". This was fenced off from the two end sections. Twenty-five POWs were jammed into each of the end sections giving each person about four or five square feet of room. Our only view to the outside was through this fence or through a small window near the roof of the car.

While I was writing this, I received the May issue of the EX- POW BULLETIN which carried an article on "The 40 and 8".--the type of box car just mentioned. A group of Americans had organized a project to bring one of these cars (which had been completly restored by the French) to the Wright-Patterson Air Force Museum. The railroad car, along with the C-17, which will be used to t ransport it to the U.S. will be on display at the Paris Air Show at Le Bourget on June 17-24 (2001).

This article also includes two drawings of the 40 and 8's. The side view shows the car to be 25.68 feet long with the sliding doors to be about six feet wide. The small window was approximately 15 x 18 inches. The end view shows the car to be 10 feet wide and 7.3 feet high. This would confirm the earlier dimensions that allowed about four square feet per prisoner.

The French said "the cars were decommissioned and retired from service, but a few wagons of this type can be found in railroad stations throughout France. They are most often used for the purpose of fixed storage and are generally not usable for travel".

The German approach in providing toilet facilities for us can only be described as ***primitive***. The five gallon pail in the corner was usually overflowing and was slopping over as the train jerked and bumped along. And the German black bread, which was our main food ration, aggravated the situation and nearly everyone had dysentery or diarrhea to some degree. The smell became almost unbearable. Men threw their soiled underwear out the small window. And the foul odor never left. If it was any consolation, the guards shared in this horrible odor of human waste.

In addition to this stench and the stomach and intestinal disorders, we were beginning to feel the effects of being crammed into such a small space. There was room to stand, providing you could support yourself next to the wall of the box car. If you wanted to sit you had to pull your knees up under your chin. The only way in which you could lie down was to sprawl over someone else. This went on hour after hour, day in and day out for five days--which seemed like an eternity. And we were getting stiff from lack of movement.

Some POWs. writing about these experiences said that their shoes were confiscated before they got on the train to prevent the POWs from escaping. It is possible that this may have happened on some other trains. but in our case we kept our shoes during the entire trip and we never left the boxcar, so there was no way we could escape

Since we were a trainload of enemy prisoners, we had absolutely the lowest priority on the German railroad system. We stopped over and over again to allow any and all other trains to go by before we moved again. Thus we spent five days inching across Germany, when the trip might normally have been made in much less time. Also, there were no markings on the boxcars that might have alerted our pilots that there were American airmen inside. Our B-17's and 24's were making a raid on one of these days while we were sitting in a railroad yard, waiting for rail repairs up ahead. We could hear the familiar growling drone of the four-engined bombers as they approached.

The Germans quickly had our cars pushed smack in the middle of the yard so that our planes couldn't help but see us. They pulled the engine away and made sure that the

doors of the box car were securely locked before the guards ran off to the protection of their air raid shelters. Like rats trapped on a sinking ship we waited and prayed as the formation came directly overhead. But nothing happened. The bombers had another target in mind for this day, thank God!

Two days later our train approached a bridge over the Elbe River and again our planes were on their way, headed in our direction.

The Germans pushed our cars out onto the center of the bridge and left us there, no doubt hoping that we would become the target. The Good Shepherd was with us again since our planes ignored us and we were spared one more time. There was a lot of crying and loud praying in that box car since we thought surely this was the end. When our planes had gone a safe distance, the Germans hooked us up again and we started to move. This was a typical example of the cat-and-mouse game they were playing with our lives. They purposely put us in harm's way, expecting that our own planes would be responsible for our deaths Incidents such as this were reported to the War Crimes Trial at Nuremberg, after the war, charging the enemy with cruel and inhumane treatment of Prisoners of War,

Along the way we again passed through Berlin. This was about the fourth time I had been to Germany's capital city in three months--two times by air and two times by rail. It would take another 27 years, after the war to make a return trip--when Melva and I went to Europe for our 25th wedding anniversary in 1972.

Our captors had not planned a lengthy stay at the Berlin railroad station since there were a lot of angry, hostile civilians. This-once magnificent terminal was reduced to a mass of broken glass and twisted steel. The colorful glass dome now had very few panes of glass intact. And the Germans were forced to constantly repair and replace rails and supporting structures in order to keep a few trains running. It was said that before the war there were more than 25 rail lines into Berlin. Now they had trouble keeping two or three in operation before our bombers or fighters knocked them out again. I remember very well that many of the missions that I flew on included railroad terminals.

While the constant threat of air raids kept us in a perpetual state of fright, our physical problems also started to mount. Even though we tried to stretch our meager food rations,. by the fourth day we were getting very hungry and thirsty. Our captors were very inhumane when in came to supplying us with drinking water. They continued to keep making feeble excuses and idle promises. When they did give us a water ration, it was only a "token" amount, barely a cup per person per day..

Some other POWs who made the trip to Luft IV had to spend only three days on the train. They told us that they made frequent stops and were allowed to get off the train to relieve themselves and stretch. Some even received cups of warm soup from German Red Cross ladies at some of their stops. We were not that lucky! Comparisons such as this tells you how different the experiences of one POW varied from another.

While my experiences on this train ride seemed that it was about as bad as it could get, there are, no doubt, other POWs who may have had even more harrowing stories to tell. But to me it was the worst part of my entire experience as a POW.

What I remember most is being crammed into a dirty, stinking box car, very uncomfortable, sometimes in pain, always hungry and thirsty and stiff--and constantly being subject to feelings of panic and fear from the threat of being bombed and strafed by own planes. One of the passengers on this 5-day train trip aptly described it as "Hell on Wheels".

**Arrival at Stalag Luft IV**

Finally, at the end of the fifth day, we came to the last of innumerable stops. We found a new detachment of uniformed guards waiting for us alongside the tracks when we stopped This was a little train station, altogether different from the others at which we had been before. It was located in a little hamlet (Gross Tschow) set in a pine forest in the German state of Pomerania, east of the Oder River, part way between Stettin and Danzig (about 30 miles south of the Baltic Sea). This section of Germany would be ceded to Poland after the war and the names of the cities and towns converted to Polish. Stettin would become Sczcecin, Danzig would become Godansk and Gross Tschow became Tychowo,

When the Krauts took down the fence that had separated us from the guards (in the box car) and ordered us to get out (Raus!} we realized just how stiff our joints had become. While we relished the opportunity to stretch all the parts of our bodies, we actually experienced pain, but it was a welcome relief.

The two sets of guards then lined us up to be counted--numerous times. This we found out later was a continuous ritual that we would find to be a routine all through our confinement at Stalag Luft IV.

When they were finally satisfied with the count, and numerous documents had been exchanged, our new guards got us into something of a military formation and marched us off along a small country lane, through the pines. The guards who had accompanied us along the trip stayed with the train .

After two or three dusty miles we broke out of the pine forest into an extensive clearing.in the midst of which stood our new "home"--a small collection of one-story wooden barracks, enclosed in the inevitable barbed wire fence (which became the trademark of POWs). There were a few similar buildings outside of the fence. housing the prison guards and the administrative personnel.

We were marched into the waiting area of the camp, inside the fence, but in a separate building, away from the barracks. After waiting several hours for the Germans to get organized, they started to process us. We were again stripped naked, body searched. finger printed and photographed by Luftwaffe (German Air Force soldiers). They typed up our personal records. There was no attempt to hurry. Neither was there any indication that we would receive any food or different clothes.

After we got dressed, the guards took us out in smaller groups and we walked down a lane leading to a pasture. On both sides of this lane there were tall fences, plus barbed wire, behind which there were hundreds of other prisoners, who were watching us and milling around. They called to us, asking for names and asking questions about the war. But the guards pushed us along and discouraged any response from us.

We passed through two more gates and continued to an area adjacent to where two other barracks were under construction. This was during a period in the war when we were losing a lot of planes and airmen--and consequently the Jerries were pressed into building more barracks to house the additional POWs, who were arriving daily. At this tune there were about 5,000 prisoners in Stalag Luft IV, housed in two lagers or compounds. By the time the camp was evacuated in February 1945 there were four lagers with a total camp population of about 10,000.

Because of the housing shortage, we were to be temporarily housed in what we called "dog houses". These small buildings were about eight feet wide and 16 feet long and less than six feet high. This made for extremely tight quarters for the 10 "residents" who were assigned to each hut. We were issued two threadbare blankets per person--one to spread on the wooden floor and the other to serve as a cover. There were no bunks, tables or stools.

I can't remember exactly how long we lived in these huts--probably two or three weeks. Neither can I recall how we were fed or what toilet facilities we had. But I do know that it was getting to the end of September and that the nights were getting colder,

Eventually, Lager "C" was completed and we moved out of our "dog house".

As I mentioned earlier, the camp was set in a pine forest clearing, approximately one and a half miles square.This particular location for a prison camp was chosesn by the Germans, utilizing the dense forest foliage and the heavy underbrush as a deterrent for anyone trying to escape. There were two fences, each 10 feet high, compleltely surrounding the camp. Rumor had it that the outside fence was electrified, but we had no desire to verify that.

Between the two tall fences there was a barrier of four-foot coils of barbed wire. An area 200 feet wide. from the fence to the edge of the forest was left clear, making it necessary for anyone trying to escape to travel through this open area in full view of the guards..

Fifty feet inside the tall fence was a "warning rail". This was a small wooden rail mounted on posts about three feet off the ground. This rail also completely encircled the entire camp area where we did our walking and exercises. This was a "free fire" zone and prisoners would be shot, without warning, for touching it or going beyond it. On one occasion a prisoner involved in a game of playing catch forgot himself and reached under the rail to retrieve the ball. He was immediately shot by one of the tower guards. Fortunately, he recovered from his wound. This was a stern reminder that we were in the hands of the enemy, who had no reservations about carrying out their threats.

There have been numerous accounts about the location of the various lagers or compounds of the camp. The most authoritative was from someone who had obtained an actual photograph from the Germans showing the camp layout--the barracks, the washrooms, the kitchen and the administration buildings. This "official" photo showed the following:

Lager "A", which was the first to be completed in 1944, was in the SW corner, Lager "B" was in the NW corner, "C" (the one in which I lived) was in the NE corner and Lager "D" was in t he SE corner. Lagers "E" and "F", which were never finished, were on the north end of the camp. The road running through the center of the camp, started at the entrance gate and was dubbed "Main Street". Entrance to the various lagers was gained from this road.

All the barracks were identically constructed of some type of pre-fab wood and set on three-foot "stilts". This was the result when, in earlier camps the prisoners tunneled out through the floor of the barracks and made a tunnel to the outside of the camp fence. This technique was well documented in the movie, "The Great Escape".
Each barracks had a number painted in white Roman numerals over the entrance. There were 10 rooms in each barracks, five on either side of a central hall. There was a two-holer toilet at the end of the hall for night-time use only. .

When we moved from the "dog huts" to Lager "C". I was assigned to Barracks IX, Room 9. We had a grand mixture of nationalities, guys from diverse parts of the U.S. Names like Buchsbaum, Getchell, Schaetzke and Schultz were on the roster.

Leonard Rose, one of the Kriegies at the camp, now president of the Luft Organization, was kind enough to send me the complete roster of everyone in Room.9, all 21 of us complete with our POW number and home address.

He has devoted much of his post-war life to gather a large amount of information on our camp and the people who were involved in it. He has hosted several trips back to Poland and to the original site of the camp. Over the years the buildings and fences have been demolished and a forest has overgrown the area. The Polish people and their government have erected a monument at the site, dedicated to the POWs who were held there. Leonard also puts out a newsletter about every three months with pictures and cartoons, as well as up-to-date details on what future trips are being planned..

While the construction of the barracks had been completed, there were still no bunks in the room. These came later. In the meantime we were issued large paper sacks which we filled with wood chips or excelsior. These were our mattresses for sleeping on the floor. The bags worked out reasonably well for the first few nights, but as the wood chips compressed, they turned into what we called a "bagful of door knobs". When the double-decker bunks finally arrived, we used the same bags but shook them up to reposition the lumps.

Each bunk came complete with five wooden slats to support the bags and our bodies. We juggled the position of the slats to gain the maximum support for each of our particular needs. At first the No. 1 choice was the bottom bunk, However, we soon discovered that the bag-mattresses would "sift" a light dust down from the upper bunk, so the preference changed. Before long we discovered that there was yet another enemy "within". Out first encounter with body lice was at the Interrogation Center, which was appropriately named the "flea center".

Evidently the same sanitary conditions existed at our camp as at the Dulag and before long all of us were busy checking the clothes around our wrists and ankles and starting to scratch.

The interior walls of the barracks were made of wainscoting with light vertical grooves, two or three inches apart. The reason that I can remember this so well was that you could use the grooves to help lead you back to your room after using the toilet at night--since there were no lights in the hall. One of my room-mates had to make that trip every night. Several of us decided that we would have a little fun at his expense.

While he was on his way to the toilet we moved some of our room "furniture" around to confuse him when he returned. We could hear him brushing against the wall of the hall, carefully measuring the distance to his room door. As he entered the doorway we could sense his feeling of confusion as he groped for familiar objects, including his bunk, but did not find them. He called out softly to his bunk-mate. Instead he received an irritated response from across the room. After almost convincing him that he was in the wrong room, we confessed to our rather sad attempt at a joke and he finally settled down in his own bunk..

This was a sample of the perverted sense of humor and jokes that we pulled on each other in an effort to offset the monotony, the boredom and the routine of "every day's the same" prison life. When the Germans realized what we would do for a "laugh", they were absolutely amazed, perhaps even somewhat envious.

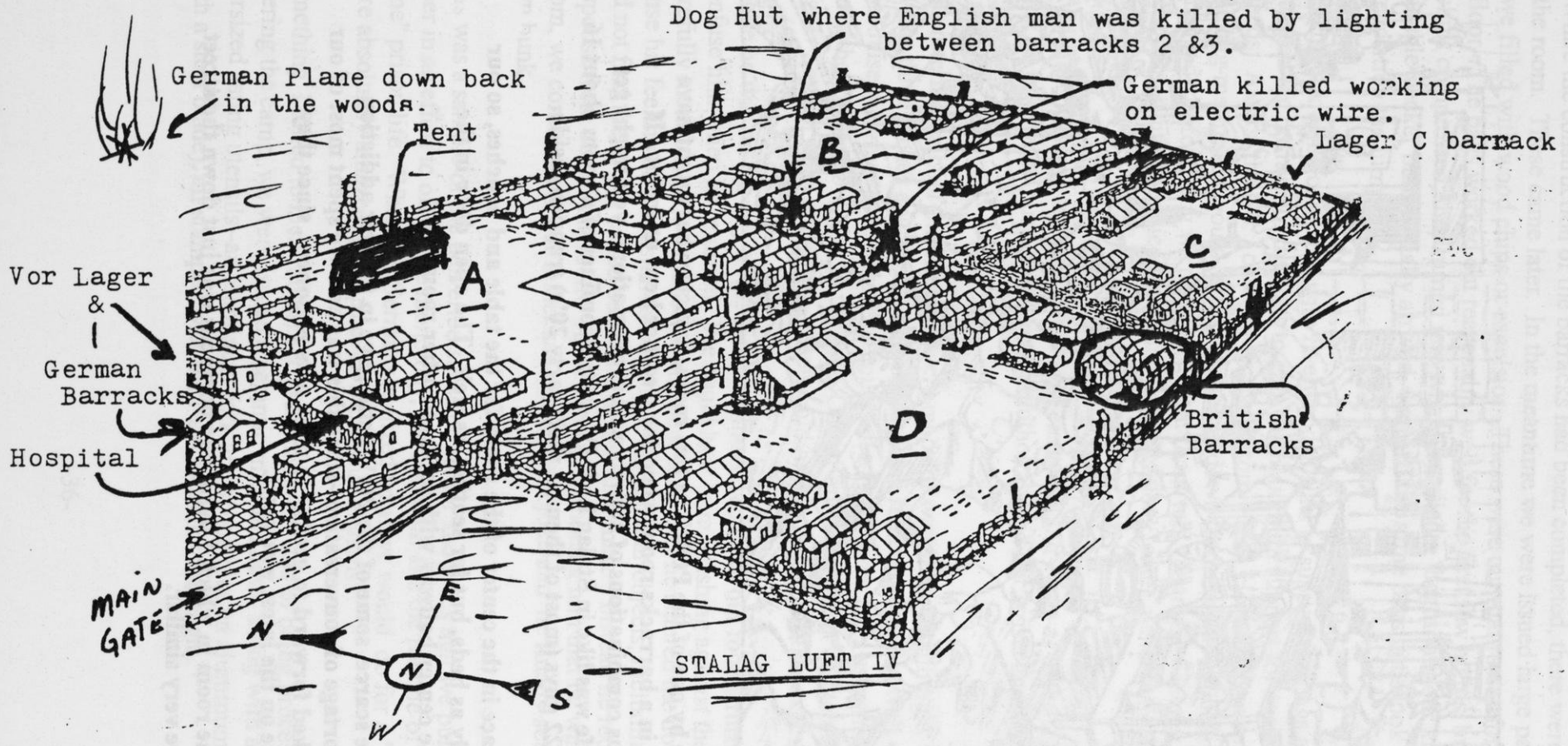
Something I failed to mention earlier, was that at the end of being processed and entering the camp, we were issued a ceramic mug and bowl, along with a set of three oversized eating utensils--an aluminum fork and spoon plus an aluminum- bladed knife (with a steel blade), all stamped with the Nazi swastika and eagle.

**This drawing, made by one of the POWs in this room, depicts what might have been a typical scene in a barracks room when the weather kept us inside. If you study the various combinations of activity and conversations, you might get some idea of what life was like in Stalag Luft IV--in the confines of a room about 16 x 20 feet with 20 or 22 guys (most of them in their early 20's) trapped inside.**

**There was limited space in the center of the room for the table and benches, so our bunks served, not only as beds, but for seating, as well. The open door in the background led to the center hallway with access to other rooms.**

**While cigarettes were scarce, some of the POWs still gave in to their addiction. And there was no shortage of conversation--since this was how we spent most of our time. We always looked forward to getting to meet new prisoners, since they brought us up-to-date on the latest war news.**

**While this was not the room in which I lived, our barracks was just down the street and the facilities were very similar.**




**This drawing, made by one of the POWs at Stalag Luft IV shows layout of the various lagers (or compounds) in the camp . Each was separated from the other by high wire fences and guard towers. All of the barracks were built on "stilts" three feet off the ground to prevent escape tunneling. I was in Lager "C" in the upper right-hand corner. The map was provided by Les Rose of the Luft IV Association.**

## The Geneva Convention

To the average person the word or term "Geneva Convention" might mean little or nothing. However, for members of the Armed Forces reference was made to this name in training in connection with the possibility of capture by the enemy in combat. It was lightly regarded by most of us since we never entertained the idea that this might happen to us. The main stress in training instructions was that "under the Geneva Convention you were to give only **name, rank and serial number** in the event of capture and interrogation. But as a prisoner, it meant a whole lot more--which becomes obvious in recording this history.

The Geneva Convention was signed in July 1929 in the Swuss city of Geneva, hence the name. It was designed to provide more humane treatment of military captives and was the result of major concerns that developed during the treatment of prisoners in WWI.

The Convention was signed by 47 nations, including all of the belligerent nations of WWII, except the USSR. The Convention was called by the Swiss government, working hand in hand with the International Red Cross, a Swiss organization which is the umbrella for the hundred or more National Red Cross groups. The Red Cross emblem is the reverse of the Swuss flag--a white cross on a red background. Among other accomplishments, it established the neutral state of military medical personnel.

The Geneva Convention defined a prisoner-of-war as a uniform-wearing member of a regular military unit. It excluded guerrillas, spies and other irregular warriors. It further directed that POWs "must at all times be humanely treated". A prisoner's food, clothing and shelter was to equal that of the captor's own troops. In practice, application of the rules was unpredictable. How a prisoner fared behind barbed wire depended less upon the humanitarian provisions of the Convention, than upon the varying customs and attitudes of his captors and on wartime conditions.

A typical response from a German guard, in reply to a prisoner who complained about his treatment tapped his rifle and said, "This is my Geneva Convention!". The Germans, along with the Soviets and Japanese ignored the agreement in various degrees.

However, there was an element in the effectiveness of both the Convention and the International Red Cross in Germany that played a life-saving role in the lives of the prisoners held by the Third Reich.

In addition to the food parcels, which I will describe next, the Geneva Convention also included a provision that inspector from the International Rd Cross would be allowed to visit prison camps to determine if the captive country was abiding by the Convention rules or not. Also they were permitted visits and interviews with prisoners outside of earshot of the Germans. .If many or any of these inspections and interviews ever took plalce, I don't know. I never witnessed an inspection or interview while a POW.

## The International Red Cross and Food Parcels

A POW who survived the moment of capture, the ordeal of interrogation, the enemy's attempt to subvert and the hardships of wartime travel finally settled in a POW camp. His accommodations might consist of anything from a bamboo hut in the jungle to a cold wooden barracks in Germany. Many were often moved from one camp to another.

In adjusting to his new home, the prisoner was primarily focused on essentials--above all else , getting enough to eat. The problem varied in intensity. The rations in a typical German POW camp ranged from 600-1500 calories per day. (the American soldier consumed up to 3500 calories per day) The German ration was sometimes supplemented by parcels of food sanctioned by the Geneva Convention and distributed under the auspices of the International Red Cross.

A Red Cross food parcel was 10 inches square and 4 1/2 inches deep.and weighed exactly 11 pounds (to conform to a German postal regulation) and was the prisoner's most treasured possession. The contents of the parcels included:

16 oz. can Powdered Whole Milk (KLIM)
16oz. can Oleomargarine
12 oz, tin Corned Beef
12 oz, box Raisins or Prunes
12 oz, tin Luncheon Meat (Spam)
8 oz. pkg. Processed Cheese (Velveeta)
8 oz, can Tuna or Salmon
8 oz, box Lump Sugar (15 cubes)
7 oz box Crackers (one doz. Graham type)
8 oz bar Chocolate (Army D-bar)
6 oz, can Liver Pate
6 oz. can Jam (assorted flavors)
2 oz., can Instant Coffee
5 packs Cigarettes
1 bar Soap
Pkg. of 16 Vitamin Tablets
1/2 oz, each Salt and Pepper

The original plan was to provide one parcel to each American and British prisoner in Europe, per week. Even though this was the intent, it did not necessarily work out that way. Most often our ration (under ideal conditions) was 1/4 or 1/2 parcel per week. This plan worked out fairly well while we were confined to the camp, but disappeared when we were on the forced march .

Food parcels for all Allied prisoners were prepared by the American and the British Red Cross but were largely financed by their governments. Shipments were made by ship, usually to neutral countries like Lisbon. Portugal and eventually to Geneva to await distribution through the International Red Cross, by rail or truck.

The American Red Cross, which handled relief for all of the Western Allies, except Great Britain, sent nearly 200,000 tons of food, clothing and medicines--so many parcels--it was said that if laid end to end they would reach from Chicago to Berlin.

In addition, prisoners were allowed to receive parcels from their families, only one every other month. However, at Luft IV you had to be a POW for at least a year. The same applied to mail from home. I never received any mail or packages while a prisoner. We were allowed to send two post cards per month, but they were so censored, that you couldn't say much other than that you were OK and hoped to be home soon.

The tobacco parcels, which some of the prisoners received, contained cigarettes, cigars and pipe tobacco. These packages were like "money from heaven" since cigarettes were the "medium of exchange" in the Kriege economy. The well-known brands commanded a good price and were invaluable in trading among ourselves and the German guards since the cigarettes that the Germans had were very inferior. Camels tended to be the first choice, followed by Old Golds and Chesterfields. Strangely, we never received any Lucky Strikes even though their advertising at the time said, "Lucky Strike Green has gone to war". Less widely known brands like Marvels and Twenty Grands were way down on the list

The basic monetary unit was one pack of cigarettes. There might be some adjustments depending on the brand of either the cigarettes being offered or of the item being sought. Individual cigarettes could be used as change from those shown below:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| German Bread | 1/6 loaf | 1 pack |
| 1/4 Choc. D-bar | 2 oz. | 1 pack |
| Powdered Milk | 16 oz. | 4 packs |
| Graham Crackers | 1 doz. | 4 packs |
| Raisins or Prunes | 12 oz. | 2 packs |
| Instant Coffee | 2 oz. | 3 packs |
| Sugar | 15 cubes | 1 pack |
| Process Cheese | 6 oz. | 2 packs |
| Jam (except orange) | 6 oz. | 2 packs |
| Jam (orange flavor) | 6 oz. | 1 pack |
| Oleo (except Elgin) | 16oz. | 2 packs |
| Oleo (Elgin) | 16 oz. | 1 pack |
| Corned Beef | 12 oz. | 3 packs |
| Spam | 12 oz. | 3 packs |
| Salmon or Tuna | 8 oz. | 1 pack. |
| Liver Pate | 6 oz. | 1 pack. |

Soap had no cigarette value in camp but would have been priceless on the Forced March

The food parcels were stored in the Vorlager and distribution was made in a piecemeal fashion . Instead of handing out full cartons, we were issued the individual items over the course of a week A certain number of parcels would be designated as a week's ration for each lager, based on the supply on hand. The cartons would be opened in the warehouse by the Jerries and each day one or more of these groups would be issued to us. So we would never see a full parcel--only its separate contents as they were doled out. Also, I should mention that all cans were punctured before they were issued. The Germans used the excuse for this that it was to prevent prisoners from hoarding them in planning an escape. This meant that we would have to eat the perishable items, like meat and fish shortly after we received them. Over tune, we learned to use some of the parcels' contents, together with the German food rations to create some very unusual dishes, but most of the time we devoured the food "as is" in a short time.

At first, we were required to turn in all the empty cans, but later this practice was discontinued and we found all kinds of uses for the metal American ingenuity produced all sorts of devices--many of them simulated appliances and accessories that might have been found in the kitchens back home. One of these inventions (which worked well on the Forced March) was a miniature blower which could be used to fan small fires to heat water or cook potatoes.

On occasion we received British or Canadian Red Cross food parcels. The contents were somewhat different (such as plum pudding) but we enjoyed it, as well.

While we relished every morsel that was included in the Red Cross parcels, we strongly suspected that the Gernan guards and caretakers of the warehouse often submitted to the temptation to pilfer some of the parcels and to help themselves to the contents. At this point in the war German food rations were also suffering, plus the fact that even in better times they did not have such delicacies as salmon, liver pate or chocolate and American cigarettes. There always seemed to be a shortage of parcels in inventory. The Germans blamed it on the fact that we were bombing and strafing their transportation system, of which we were well aware. However, we also felt that sometimes they were purposely holding back on issuing the parcels just to remind us that they were in charge.

## Dividing and Sharing

As was true with the German food rations, served by way of the kitchen, the division of Red Cross food by the American KPs was a matter of intense scrutiny Now there were different problems in attempting to ration out equal shares. With some items there was no trouble For example, all boxes of sugar contained 15 cubes. The same was true of the Graham crackers and the squares of chocolate. However, in many instances there were differences, real or imagined, and they had to be resolved by lot.

Again, for example: differences arose over brand names. (The reader might find it hard to believe that starving, hungry people could let something so simple (a different brand) become such a critical factor. Allow me to explain:

In the case of oleomargarine or jam there were obvious differences. One brand of oleo (Elgin) was definitely inferior and was relegated to making candles or shoe polish. The orange jam was felt to be less tasty than any of the other flavors.

Cigarettes involved a combination of both quality and preference. On one-half parcel rations we each received 2-1/2 packs or 50 cigarettes. As mentioned earlier, Camels tended to be everyone's first choice. .

After the distribution, another major problem arose for each prisoner. It was up to each individual to determine how best to consume these delicacies. We could "wolf them down" at once or to spread them out over a longer period. The powdered milk, oleo and instant coffee lent themselves fairly well to week-long enjoyment, although a pinch of powdered milk, taken "straight" was not bad tasting. It was more difficult with other items. The chocolate was the most tempting to devour the entire bar at once since it seemed so little and tasted so good.

But no matter what the size of the ration, we were grateful to the Red Cross for getting these life-saving provisions to us, for remembering us at all, and for providing a sense of a link with home, however slender it might be. It would be difficult to assess what effect it had on our health, at the time, or even in our later lives because without this additional variety of food we not only would have suffered from more disease and malnutrition, but our weight loss would have been even more severe..

The arrival of the Red Cross parcels did wonder for our morale, even though a feeling of hunger still persisted, but it was much less intense than before and our minds were diverted to other things.

## The International YMCA

While the Red Cross was the principal relief organization as far as food, clothing and medicines were involved with the POWs, the International YMCA made a major contribution to our day-to-day existence at Luft IV. I don't know how their transportation and distribution system worked, but they also were able to make shipments of supplies to us. They provided us with many recreational items from playing cards to musical instruments--books, small games and athletic equipment including bats, softballs, basketball and footballs, etc.

The sports equipment not only provided an outlet for outdoor activities while the weather was good, but the small games and cards were real "brain savers" when we were confined to the barracks. I can very well remember that our room was the scene of numerous bridge games. Card playing would begin early and would end late And there was some heated discussion among partners after each hand for making some stupid mistakes. The playing cards themselves served another major purpose. which might not be obvious to the average non-POW. Whenever there were rations to be divided--before we had cards--we used twigs of various lengths, like long and short straws. Playing cards made the process a lot simpler and more flexible.

## More about the Camp

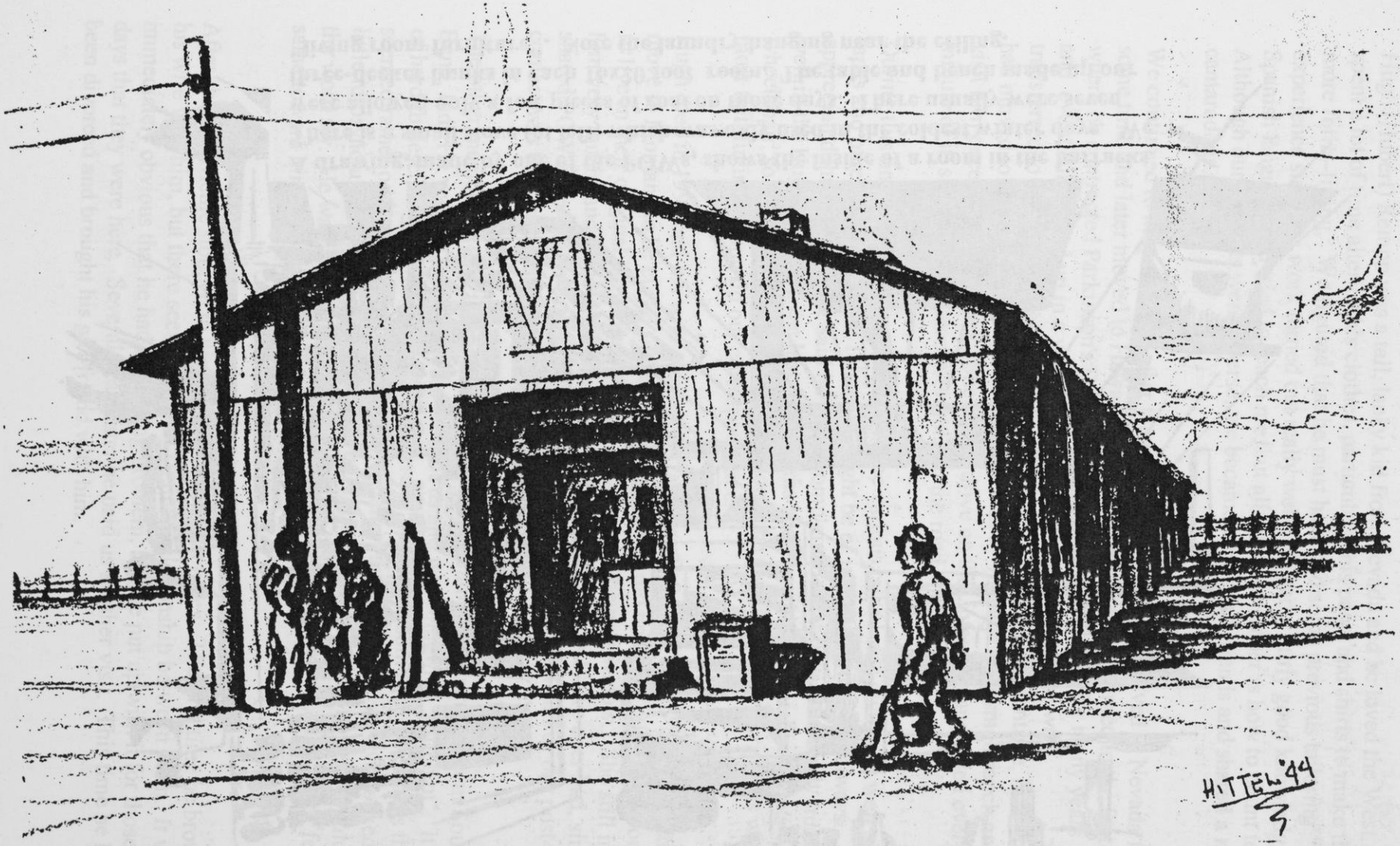
We were not supposed to have any dealings with t he Germans on our own, or they with us. Each lager had an American (POW) representative on the Internal Camp Administration. They formed the official liaison between the prisoners and our captors. They lived apart from us in the Administration Building in the Vorlager. This building also housed a few prisoners who served as cooks for us. The two or three large kettles which made up our kitchen facilities were also housed there. Under the same roof was an office used by the Germans (guards and officials) and a moderately large general all-purpose room, which was basically used as a center for the distribution of various materials, including Red Cross food parcels, when they were available.

Our room in the barracks was about 16 x 20 feet with a nine foot ceiling. Next to the door, which led to the hall was a brick foundation set on top of the wooden floor with a small pot-bellied stove and a stove pipe that led to a nearby brick chimney. A double casement window was located on the wall opposite the door. There was a large rectangular, crudely made table in the center of the room, flanked by eight stools. From the ceiling in the center of the room hung a single bare 20 or 40-watt light bulb. All the lights in the barracks were controlled from outside the lager.

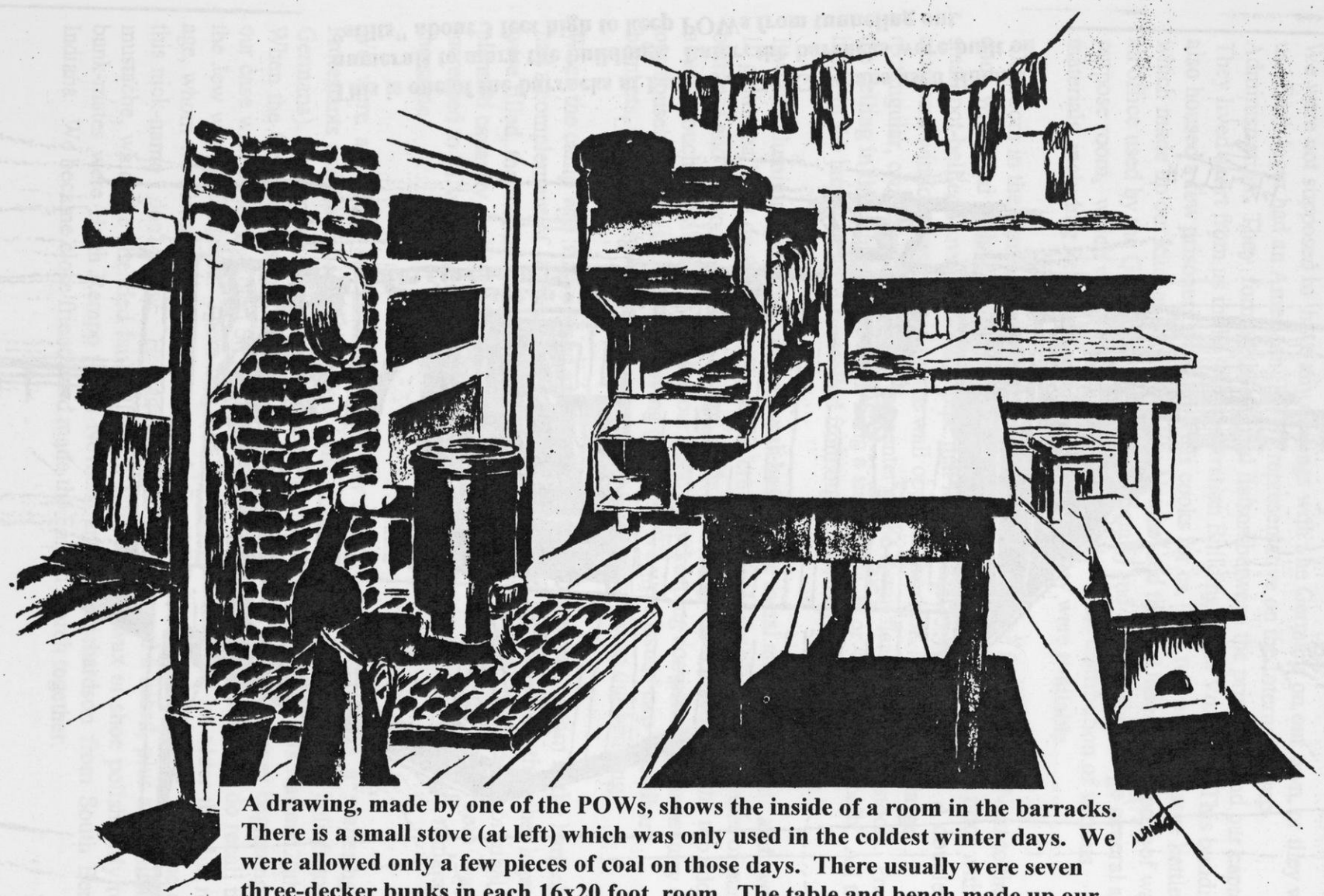
Two tall aluminum pitchers and two wash basins--one metal and one ceramic and two 10 gallon pails sat on the floor. Each was crudely painted, in black, the number of our barracks and our room. A short broom, made of twigs and tied together at the top added a rustic touch. This primitive aid to our good housekeeping completed the inventory of our household furnishings in our living quarters. We were issued two threadbare blankets, which along with the wood-shaving mattress made up our bedding.

When the camp was first opened and Lager A was occupied, each room in the barracks had a complement of 16 prisoners, with eight double-decker bunks. As the other lagers were filled, the number of airmen being shot down had increased beyond this original planned capacity so that by the time we moved in, the number of POWs per room was increased to 21 with seven three-decker bunks. However, the size of the room remained the same.

We were all about the same age--between 20 and 25 There was a scattering of Protestants and Catholics and one Jew (who never mentioned his religious beliefs to the Germans). Each of us had completed between one and 25 missions (this was my 26th). When the Germans assigned us to the room they chose certain last names beginning, in our case with either B, R and S. I don't remember many of the names but I do recall that the Jew was Buchsbaum. There was also one guy who looked a lot older than his real age, whom we called "Focke-Wolf", named after the German fighter plane. How he got this nick-name I don't know. He had longer reddish hair and a beard, plus a handle-bar mustache, which he attended faithfully with some kind of wax or shoe polish. My two bunk-mates were Hugh Rempp (from Nevada) and Jim Richardson from South Bend, Indiana. We became close friends and made the Forced March together.




**This is one of the barracks at Luft IV. The Germans used Roman numerals to mark the buildings. Later, the barracks were built on "stilts" about 3 feet high to keep POWs from tunneling out.**



**A drawing, made by one of the POWs, shows the inside of a room in the barracks. There is a small stove (at left) which was only used in the coldest winter days. We were allowed only a few pieces of coal on those days. There usually were seven three-decker bunks in each 16x20 foot room. The table and bench made up our "living room furniture". Note the laundry hanging near the ceiling.**

Hugh (Hubert) Rempp was a tall, lanky kid from Nevada and he loved the West. He spent a lot of time altering his clothes, particularly his pants and shirts to make them more form--fitting, We figured that he must have had some previous tailoring experience since his work turned out really well. He had a fairly good knowledge of the Spanish language and tried to teach me, but all I can remember is how to count to 10. Although our interests were diverse, we became very close friends and shared a real camaraderie.

We continued to keep in touch after the war. He and his family lived in Nevada for some time and later moved to Hawaii. After a few years they returned to the States where he contracted Parkinson's Disease. He struggled with this for many years and eventually ended up in a wheel chair. About five years ago he was transferred to the Veterans Nursing Home in Reno, NV. In the meantime, his two sons had moved to Montana, leaving his wife, Theresa to manage their small ranch and to visit him once or twice a week. She had to drive on the interstate and hated every minute of it, since she felt uncomfortable on the road.

During this time I sent him audio tapes of the various talks I was giving, as well as video tapes and other mementos that I thought might be of interest to him. He always appreciated this and his wife said he never complained--that they were really treating him well in the Home. .During the last few months he fell and had several accidents with the wheelchair, so he had to give it up. Even though he could no longer write, his wife was most faithful in keeping up our correspondence. .

Hugh died in 1999 and his wife seemed to "fall apart" after his death. She decided to move to Montana to be closer to her two sons, but this did not work out, so she continues to live in their original home and is trying to cope with being a widow.. She still misses him very much--and so do I. He was one of the closest friends I have ever had, since our shared POW experiences cemented that relationship. The saddest part of our post-war contact was that we never got together for a visit.

The other member of our "triumvirate" was "Richie" (James) Richardson from South Bend, Ind. He was the shortest of the three of us and was somewhat "different". It's kind of hard to describe just what made him different, but he had some characteristics that seemed rather odd at times. But since we were all in the same boat, we overlooked the little idiosyncrasies that all of us had. The only adjective that comes to mind would be the word **sly**. He was compatible throughout our POW time together, but I never felt the same toward him as did to Hugh.

After the war Richie stopped to visit us in Brillion two times. The first time he brought his wife with him, but there seemed to be a strained relationship between them. It was immediately obvious that he had a drinking problem, but we put up with it for those few days that they were here. Several years later he paid us another visit. This time he had been divorced and brought his girl friend with him.

Under ideal conditions there would be three issues of rations each day . For each of these the two men from our room would take the pail and pitcher (if necessary) and line up under the overhang, outside of the kitchen, along with the men coming from the other rooms in our barracks. There the food for the meal would be doled out by the cooks through a serving window. Each barracks rotated positions in the line on a daily basis.

At breakfast each room would be issued its bread and oleo allowance. as well as pitchers of ersatz coffee, mint tea or just plain hot water. Lunch consisted of a thin soup which might contain any of a number of additives, but mostly cabbage.

For supper we would get boiled potatoes, turnips or kohlrabis. The potatoes would be cooked with their skins on, but we would have to peel the turnips or kohlrabis to help out the cooks when these vegetables were on the menu.

When the camp first opened with Lager A, there were 16 men per room, and the ration for the room was four loaves of bread, or 1/4 loaf per person per day. By the time we moved into our barracks in Lager C, there were 21 men per room and the bread ration had been reduced to three loaves per room, or 1/7th of a loaf per prisoner. But, regardless of the reduction, each piece was treasured as a prime possession.

Each loaf of bread, whose lineage owed as much to the sawmill as to the grain field, was embossed on the top with its weight in kilograms--a figure that worked out to be in the vicinity of four pounds apiece. That made for a substantial loaf, except for the fact that a great deal of the weight was due to sawdust and moisture It tended to dry out rapidly and assume a hard, rock-like character.

Since each portion of the loaf had to last the entire day. it was necessary that slices had to be cut as thin as possible. We soon learned that the bricks on the foundation for our small stove were ideal for honing the steel blades of our table knives to a keen cutting edge.. This allowed us to cut off slices that were thin to the point of transparency.

Even so, the bread ration never seemed to last out the day. It was always a temptation to enjoy just one more slice. This bread was the mainstay food item for the day until supper time. Along with our bread we usually received enough pale margarine to cover several slices, before eating it "straight", In addition, each room would receive a pitcher of ersatz {coffee substitute}, strong tasting like acorns and chicory. Some Kriegies have described the "coffee" as "smelling like a wet dog, and tasting even worse". Also, the pitcher might contain an odd-tasting herbal tea with a faint taste of mint.--or just plain hot water, which we used for washing and shaving.

Sometimes, maybe three times a month, we would be surprised with a few dabs of synthetic jam or something faintly resembling cottage cheese. At mid-day the Room KPs would return from the kitchen with enough soup in the ten gallon pails to give each of us a cup-ful. This soup would usually contain something like cabbage, judging by the few limp leaves that floated on the top.

Rarely, a couple of bits of stringy meat (mostly of unknown origin) might also appear among the cabbage leaves. We strongly suspected that at times this could be horse meat when we saw a wagon being pulled into the kitchen area, covered by a cloth, with the definite outline of a "hay burner".

By far the worst soup we were ever served was a nauseous abomination supposedly derived from dehydrated alfalfa, It was served several times a month and was a disagreeable, rancid-tasting concoction with a sour, penetrating odor that proclaimed its presence throughout the barracks as soon as the first pail of the foul-smelling liquid came through the front door. Even for us, in our state of semi-starvation, it was almost too much for us to stomach and was the only thing on our limited bill of fare that sometimes went partly uneaten.

On the other end of the scale, to which we all agree, that the best was a fairly thick rye or barley soup which was called "rucken", the German word for rye. It made the most pleasant tasting and substantial meal of all. However, this was reserved for special occasions. Whenever they have this barley soup in a restaurant or at home it reminds me of another day.

On a good day, supper would consist of about a pound of boiled potatoes--which consisted of two or three small potatoes. When squashed into a cup, it would fill it to the top. Those who divided the food, were watched carefully as they leveled the top of the cup with the table knife. I don't remember how any left-overs were divided. When we were not so lucky, we received a similar quantity of turnips or kohlrabis. These two root vegetables must have been the culls of the crop, since they probably had been left in the ground too long and were always very tough, with centers that clearly resembled wood in both taste and texture. Whether you liked them or not, that had very little to do with anything, given the circumstances and we ate them and cleaned up our bowls. We had no fussy eaters.

This then, was the extent and variety of our daily meals, as doled out to us by our captors. These also were the maximum amount we received--never more, sometimes less, Our cherished bread ration was particularly vulnerable to frequent down-sized adjustments Throughout our stay at Luft IV, there seemed to be many logistics problems between ourselves and the bakery. When supplies in the Vorlager dwindled, we might go for a week on reduced rations. Near the end of our stay there was no bread at all..

An additional duty for the Kitchen KPs was to divide whatever food they brought from the kitchen into equal portions for every room member--a task worthy of a Solomon. No one was ever absent from the room at meal time and every move made by the KPs in doling out the food was closely scrutinized. When the loaves of bread had been cut into seven sections and laid on the table, we would each get to select our individual choices by lot drawing. Surprisingly, there was never any big argument about the outcome of the drawing. We did, sometimes exchange pieces, if we felt it was to our advantage..

## Who Said Tobacco Was Addictive?

In addition to our acute shortage of food, there was another shortage which brought about cravings of a different nature, namely cigarettes. The majority of POWs were confirmed smokers (whether 19 or 35) and quite addictive to the habit. Those who had been without cigarettes for weeks, had developed an especially strong craving with withdrawal symptoms. There was a steady flow of these Kriegies patrolling outside the barracks in hopes that someone might throw a butt out the window.

Even more indicative of the awful strength of tobacco addiction were the ones who would visit the latrine (toilet) to find a butt in the end of the urinal trough--butts which would be dried out and smoked! Since I did not smoke, tobacco addiction was not one of my problems. In fact, this proved to be a distinct advantage throughout my POW experience. Any time that I received cigarettes in my Red Cross parcel.or from any other sources, this was just like "money from home" since cigarettes were the medium of exchange in prison camp and I used their bargaining power to trade for food etc.

But there was a break in the depth of depression for the smokers. There was actually a German cigarette ration--enough to keep the cigarette smokers hooked on the habit, but not much more. There were two different brands, which came from countries occupied by the Germans. One was French, called *Elegantes* composed of strong, coarse tobacco and street sweepings. The other was either Polish or Russian, strange contraptions consisting of a slender tube of light cardboard, about 2-1/2 inches long--to which was attached an inch-and-a-half of powerful, finely ground tobacco, wrapped in standard cigarette paper.

To light a cigarette was also a major problem. Only rarely would small boxes of wooden matches be doled out, so they had to be used sparingly. It was usually easy to find someone already smoking and get a light that way. At night, after lock-up the problem worsened. After "lights out" it was not uncommon to hear a whisper from the hall, "Has anybody there got a light?". By this means these ardent smokers maintained their own version of the "eternal light". Thus it was possible for one match used early in the morning to keep the smokers going all day.

## "Looking Back"

Looking back on those early months at Luft IV, about all that we were able to do was to lose weight unintentionally and sit or lie on our bunks lethargically, talking primarily about something to eat. Whether or not our stomachs were actually shrinking from lack of use was a topic of interest. We hoped that this was true since then we would be less apt to notice how empty they were.With the arrival of the Red Cross food parcels our spirits and energy improved. We took advantage of the sports equipment sent by the International YMCA to get some exercise outside.
Also there was more enthusiasm for putting on shows and musical performances (again, using the instruments supplied by the YMCA) for those who had the talent and for the rest of us who just enjoyed the entertainment.

**What are the Chances for Escape?**

A subject that has been over-rated and glamorized in books, films and TV is that of escape from a prison camp. Actually, as part of military doctrine, prisoners were encouraged to try to escape. supposedly to occupy some of the enemy's soldiers, who might otherwise have been available for active duty in battle.

The Nazis, with Teutonic efficiency, had created what amounted to an *Escape Prevention Laboratory*, located at Colditz Castle, near Leipzig. They actually encouraged some of their most clever captives to escape from a supposedly "escape-proof" camp set up by the Germans

What happened was that 30 inmates (out of 800) actually made their way to freedom. However, there were no diversions involved in this venture. The results of the investigation into this escape was circulated to other prison camps to alert the authorities there to potential escape techniques and how to deal with them.

Among this list, I have selected what appeared most likely to affect us at Luft IV:

1. Regular roll calls--two times a day, rain or shine
2. Unannounced barracks inspections (day or night)
3. Barbed wire fences and the "warning rail
4. Manned guard towers with machine guns
5. Test firing of these guns
6. "Goons"
7. No jumping out of windows
8. No tunneling
    a. sandy soil
    b. barracks built on stilts
    c. crushing any potential tunnel areas
    d. police dogs and search lights at night
9. Location of camp (geographically)
10. Puncture food cans
11. Death threats
12. Conditions outside of camp (after escape)

Apparently, the first step in this series of rules, regulations and devices was to insure that we stayed within our barbed wire barriers, to constantly verify that we were all still where the Germans thought we were, namely in C Lager. This was accomplished through the ritual of the roll call. twice a day--once, following the morning bread distribution and again later in the afternoon, every day--rain or shine, sleet or snow..

On paper, our "custodians" knew how many of us should be present and the roll call was their physical inventory. The records were meticulously kept. No discrepancies were tolerated.

The frequency of the roll calls made sure that any prisoner who did break out would never get much of a head start. The whole procedure began when a detachment of six elderly guards, carrying an assortment of antiquated rifles, were checked into our lager. They were under the command of an Oberfeldwebel (sergeant) who wore a small pistol in a holster on his shiny belt, The guards would split up and make their way in front of the barracks. They went to the door and barked, "Raus, raus, alles raus--schnell" (Out, out everybody out--hurry).

Inside, we would grumble and complain about interrupting whatever we were doing and would begin drifting out. Then we would fall into formation by barracks, in ranks of five men deep. We would be pretty well lined up before the Gernan commandant (lageroffizier) decided to put in his appearance. With his lieutenant-interpreter beside him, and trailed by a pair of enlisted clerks. he would stride out of the German Administration Building, into our lager. As he and his entourage approached, the oberfeldwebel snapped his men to attention (with heels clicking) and saluted with the familiar stiff-armed Nazi salute, including "Heil Hitler".

The commandant was a hauptman (captain) and cut quite an impressive figure. His erect bearing probably made him look taller than he really was, but even so, he looked over six feet tall. He was always dressed in an immaculate light blue uniform of the Luftwaffe, with his high peaked hat and highly polished black riding boots. The story that we got, was that he was a fighter pilot and was shot down in the North African campaign and repatriated to Germany. By military ethics, he could no longer be involved in any active combat, but could assume the role he now played.

When the weather got colder, towards fall, he wore a light blue military "great coat" and whenever the wind would blow the corners of the coat aside, a beautiful fur lining would be revealed. To give the performance a real Prussion touch, he would put his right hand inside the coat, just like Napoleon. It was rumored that he had spent some time in the States and that he had attended Stanford University in California--that he could speak perfect English, but that he would use that advantage in answering questions put to him through his interpreter--questions asked by the American representative, In any event, I thought that his past association with Americans was to our advantage, since he treated us fairly, at least as far as his office would allow.

After the formal ritual, the guards took their positions around the formation. The two clerks took out pads and pencils to assume the count. When they had written down the count, they compared one another's numbers. If the figures agreed, the whole procedure would be over in about 30 minutes. If there was disagreement, there was considerable excitement and major consultation among the officers and the others. The guards would then be dispatched to go to our barracks to see if any occupants may have missed the roll call by over-sleeping or some other reason.

**And There's More...(that the Germans did to prevent escape)**

A variation of the standard roll call was the "security check", which would come at any hour of the night. The lights would come on in a selected barraacks and the commandant and his guards and clerks would come through the barracks, room by room, verifying each of us against the photogrpahs which had been taken upon our arrival at camp. This identity check occurred infrequently, but every once in a while we would be awakened by a disturbance that either we or our neighoring barraacks was being subjected to this searching examination ,.

In addition, there were other security checks when the Germans suspected that there were some suspicious activities going on in a particular barracks or room. One object that brought a more thorough "going over" was when they suspected that we were harboring a secret radio. We almost encouraged the Krauts in this, since some evenings, after lock-up, when we heard the guards patrolling outside our barracks, we would join in singing a popular Southern spiritual (which I had never heard before) called "Turn the Radio on". This almost certainly brought the expected reaction from the Krauts.

If their suspicion was strong enough, they would charge into the barracks, with all lights on and flashlights in hand. Everybody would be ordered out of the room, into the hall as the guards and inspectors tore up the place. Because we were somewhat prepared, the damage was somewhat minimized, but mattresses were torn apart, clothing and other possessions were strewn about, all this accompanied by German cursing and swearing.

What was really ironic about the whole thing, is that *there was really a secret radio* in the camp. We never saw it, but we did get war news by special courier nearly every day--from the BBC and that secret radio, which was built by some RAF airmen, who were imprisoned in another lager.

The frequency of the roll calls and the additional inspections, constantly kept our captors assured that we were where they expected us to be and under control. In addition, there was a wide range of devices and rules that this status quo was maintained.

The most obvious means by which we were held captive was the sturdy row of double fences that surrounded the entire camp and further subdivided it into individual lagers. These were twin barriers of barbed wire mesh, supported by stout posts about ten feet high, running parallel to each other and some five feet apart. Between these two fences were more coils of barbed wire, piled about four feet high. The "warning wire" or "death rail" was about 15 feet inside this fence. It was "streng verboten" to cross this innocent looking barrier. But we learned from actual experience that the Germans would not hesitate to shoot anyone who crossed the rail. .

## More Rules, Regulations and Devices

A symbol commonly associated with prison camps, along with the barbed wire, was the guard tower. These wooden structures were placed at intervals, around each lager perimeter and also down both sides of the dirt street. Basically, they consisted of a platform standing some twenty feet above the ground, supported by heavy posts on each corner and partially sheltered by a wooden roof and surrounded by a railing. A ladder leading up to a trap door in the floor gave access to the platform. Every tower contained a permanently mounted light machine gun and a floodlight for night use to keep its sector of the lager illuminated. All towers were continuously manned by two guards in each tower, in shifts. Each guard was armed with a rifle to supplement the machine gun.

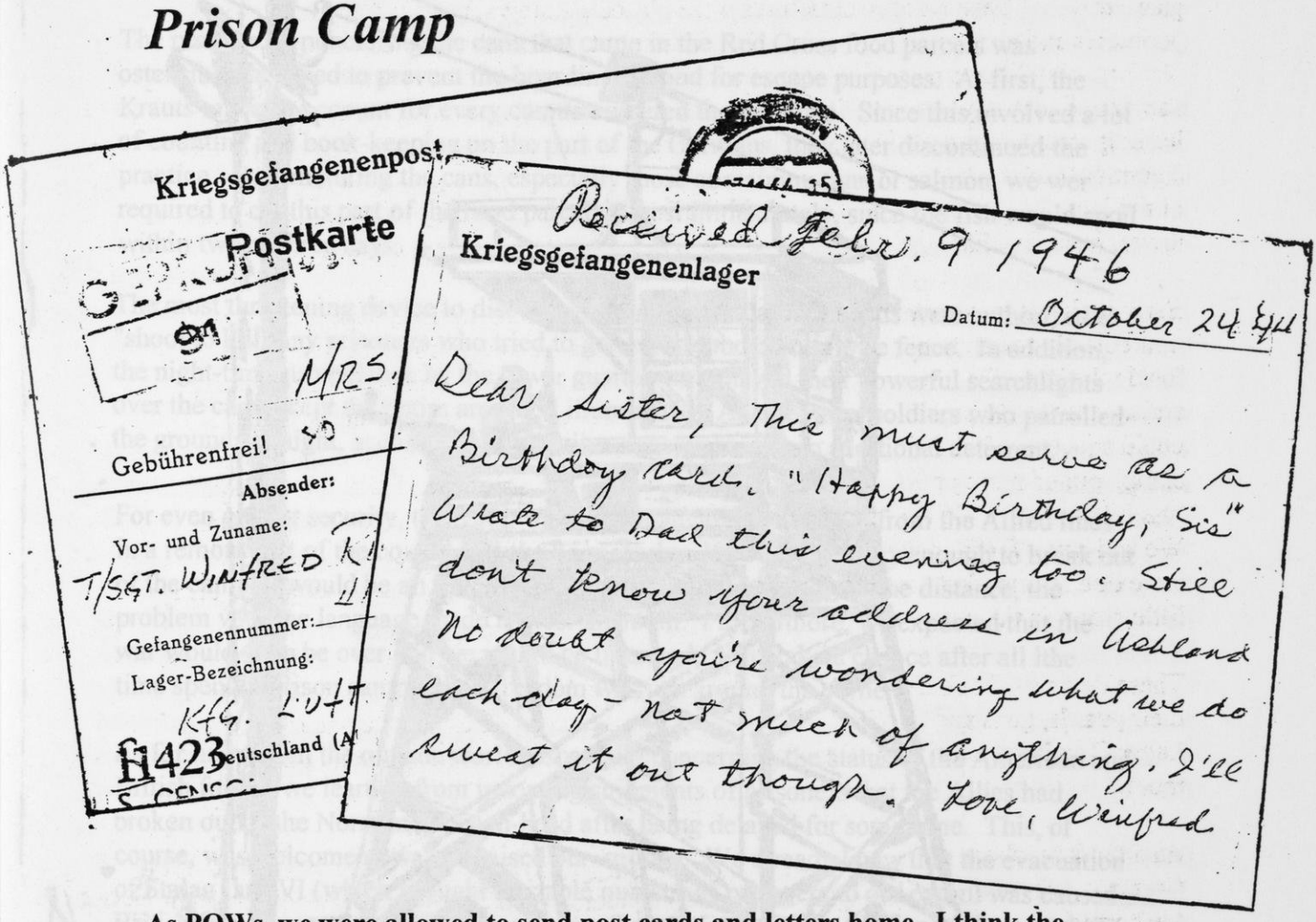
Early in fall, it was announced that on one day after roll call, that we were to immediately return to our barracks so that the guns in the towers could be test-fired. Inside the barracks, we crowded into the central hallway, away from any outside walls and as near to the partial protection of one or another of the brick chimneys as we could squeeze. The firing commenced and continued, gun by gun, around the entire camp, aimed more or less towards the empty center section of each lager. None of us was hit, but we could hear more than a few ricochets, winding off in various directions. We had never doubted that the guns were anything less than fully operative; now we were doubly sure that the Germans had made their impression on us and had blown off a little steam in the process.

These devices--the fences with their barbed wire, the "death rail" and the towers with their guards, guns and floodlights proved more than adequate to keep us securely in Lager C and prevented any of us from getting through or over the fences...and there was more.

As a random check on us and our activities, there was a special squad of "snoopers"--Germans, whose only assignment was to wander around the lager, inside and outside of the barracks to keep us under irregular surveillance. It was not at all unusual to be sitting in our room, to look up to see one of these spies, standing quietly in the doorway, looking into the room. They never uttered a word or sound. They were dressed in dark blue coveralls. We officially dubbed these characters as "goons".

With practically no hope of getting past the fences, at ground level, the next possibility we considered was tunneling--a favorite means of escape in fact and fiction--but mostly fiction. But here again our captors had profited from lessons learned elsewhere. To begin with, Stalag Luft IV was built on very sandy soil. While this would make digging relatively easy, it would also require extensive shoring to prevent cave-ins. .Now it became apparent why we were allowed only five slats: in each of our bunks. We could spare none of them for any tunnel reinforcing.

# *Correspondence from Prison Camp*


Kriegsgefangenenpost

Postkarte

MRS.

Gebührenfrei!

Absender:

Vor- und Zuname:

T/SGT. WINFRED K

Gefangenennummer:

Lager-Bezeichnung:

Kdo. Lvft

H423

Deutschland (A

Received Febr. 9 1946

Kriegsgefangenenlager

Datum: October 24 44

Dear Sister, This must serve as a Birthday card. "Happy Birthday, Sis" Wish to Dad this evening too. Still don't know your address in Ashland No doubt you're wondering what we do each day - not much of anything. I'll sweat it out though. Love, Winfred

**As POWs, we were allowed to send post cards and letters home. I think the allowance was two post cards and one letter per month. However, <u>I never received any mail</u> during all the time that I was a prisoner. You had to be held for at least a year before you received any mail, and even longer to get a package.**

**My sister, Helen, who lived in Moquah, WI had saved these post cards and gave them to me after the war. The card (shown above), dated October 24, 1944 must have gotten lost in the course of the battle in Germany, since it was not delivered to my sister until <u>February 9, 1946</u>. We, no doubt, contributed to the problem since railroad yards and trains were prime targets for Allied around-the- clock bombings and strafings.**

**The information contained in the cards and letters that were sent home were very general since we could not write about our living conditions, where we were, or what was really going on since the correspondence was severely scrutenized by both the German and American censors. About all you could say was, "I'm well" or "Doing O.K., Hope to see you soon", etc.**

**This is a picture of one of the many guard towers at Luft IV. These towers were manned by two guards with rifles and machine guns.**

Tunneling was further discouraged when, periodically, the Germans would pull wagons, loaded with stones around the areas next to the barracks to crush any tunnels that might have been started.

The practice of puncturing the cans that came in the Red Cross food parcels was ostensibly designed to prevent the hoarding of food for escape purposes. At first, the Krauts made us account for every can that entered the barracks. Since this involved a lot of counting and book-keeping on the part of the Germans, they later discontinued the practice. By puncturing the cans, especially those containing tuna or salmon, we wer required to eat this part of the food parcel allmost immediately, since the fish would spoil within two or three days.

The most threatening device to discourage escape was that the guards were authorized to "shoot to kill" any prisoners who tried to get outside the barbed wire fence. In addition, the night-time surveillance by the tower guards, who played their powerful searchlights over the camp, kept the entire area well illuminated. Also the foot soldiers who patrolled the grounds at night, accompanied by police dogs, provided an additional deterrent.

For even greater security, the camp was geographically located far from the Allied lines in a remote part of the country--in the boon docks. If you were lucky enough to break out of the camp, it would be an up-hill battle to get back to our lines. The distance, the problem with the language made it most difficullt. Furthermore, we expected that the war would soon be over and we would be liberated, Why take a chance after all lthe time spent in prison camp, when freedom was just around the corner.

As for news from the outside world, especially concerning the status of the American and British forces, we learned from incoming shipments of prisoners that the Allies had broken out of the Normandy beach-head after being delayed for some time. This, of course, was welcome news and raised our morale. We already knew that the evacuation of Stalag Luft VI (which brought a sizable number of prisoners to our camp) was caused British forces were finally moving our way from the other side of Europe. Now, perhaps the end of the war was really coming into sight.

At this point I would also like to mention that mail from home was unheard of unless you had been a prisoner for over a year. Some of the room-mates in our barracks were receiving letters and packages from home. I was not that lucky. We were allowed to send two post cards a month, but since they were severely censored, you couldn't really say much more than "I'm OK, We are being treated well, Hope to see you soon" But the "real" news and the mail would take almost a month to get from Germany to the U.S. After I got home in June, 1945 some of the cards and letters that were sent to me in prison camp followed me home. But this took several months. One package had cookies and candy in it. The cookies were covered with "fur".

During the month of December (1944) we got the feeling that the Germans were getting somewhat more liberal in their treatment. Quite naturally, we assumed that this was due to the fact that the war was coming to an end and they were accepting the fact that they were not going to be on the winning side, so they wanted us to tell our liberators that the Germans treated us pretty well.

As Christmas drew near, we put a lot of effort into hanging up simple decorations in our barracks and there were rumors about special concessions from the Germans that on Christmas Eve we would be allowed to visit with prisoners from other barracks much later than the usual lock-up time. There was even talk about a special program and church service put together by some of our more talented and religious prison mates.

In our room there were also special preparations. Hugh, Richie and I had made a special brew called Vat 70, which was a combination of prunes and raisins (from the Red Cross food parcel) and some potato peelings. We had made a shelf above the top bunk where we stored this precious potion and covered it with a cloth. Periodically, we inspected it with a finger tip to see how the fermentation process was going. Everyone had been saving up special food items to splurge at Christmas.

And surprisingly enough, our captors joined in the Christmas spirit and for just a few hours on Christmas Eve there was a feeling that the barrier between us and the Germans had just been lowered, at least for the moment. The Germans even joined in singing "Silent Night" with their version called "Stille Nacht".

But on Christmas Day, things were pretty much like they had been before. Nevertheless, it was a great spiritual uplift to have some sort of celebration, even though it was a far cry from being back home with our families.

During the last week of December, the temperature at Luft IV hovered at or below freezing. We had two snow storms which brought about four inches of snow Twice daily roll calls were still compulsory, but they seemed to be going faster than before. No doubt, they didn't enjoy standing out in the cold any more than we did.

With the arrival of the snow we devised some snow games that brought us outside. to break the monotony of being caged in the barracks all day. We also used the snow to make a concoction we called "snow cream"--by mixing ground up sugar cubes in a bowl full of snow and stirring in a few tablespoons of powdered milk (from our Red Cross food parcels) With a lot of imagination we could almost believe it was ice cream.

On New Year's Eve we observed the end of 1944 locked securely in our barracks. There were no concessions from the Krauts, like on Christmas Eve. On New Year's morning all POWs in Stalag Luft IV awoke with clear heads, with not a single hang-over in the whole camp.--not by choice.

Since the beginning of 1945 there were hardly any new prisoners arriving any more, so our source of reliable news on the progress of the war had virtually dried up..

As I mentioned earlier, the two-a-day roll calls were getting shorter, mainly because the Germans didn't like standing in the cold any more than we did. In conjunction with this, we speculated that the shorter time spent on roll calls, might well be a sign of our captors' anxiety--that possibly there might, indeed, be something happening on the outside that threatened them--and us.

What we didn't know was that on January 12th (1945) the Russians had launched a massive military offensive along a 500-mile front, running from near the Baltic Sea on the north, to Czechoslovakia on the south. The ultimate objective was Berlin, which was south and east of our camp. This attack forced Hitler and his High Command to pull their troops from the Western Front and rush them back across Germany, in a desperate attempt to halt the Russian advance.

What really scared our captors at Luft IV was that this Russian drive, which was concentrated just south of us, left only a narrow strip of land between us and the Baltic Sea, It was just a matter of time (maybe a week or 10 days) before the gap would be closed and we would be over-run by Uncle Joe's juggernaut.

By this time also the temperature really started to drop. The minimal coal supply for our little stove was reduced some more. Likewise, our Red Cross food parcel distribution also decreased. We spent a good deal of our time hunkered down to a state or semi-hibernation. We were spending most of our energy just keeping warm. We huddled in our bunks, wearing all the clothes we had and covered with the thin German blankets and our overcoats as the bitter cold penetrated the thin walls of the barracks.

**And now, just when we thought things couldn't possibly get worse, they did!**

Now, for the first time, we began to hear rumors of a possible evacuation. Up until now we thought that either the Germans might surrender to the Allies, or we would be liberated by the Russians. Evacuation had not even entered our minds.

And the rumors started to substantiate our impression that things were starting to unravel and fall apart. However, we were still unaware of the massive size of the Russian "push" that was threatening to cut off our region of Germany from the rest of the Fatherland. But our guardians fully realized the precarious nature of our position.

Now we felt the impact of the situation in our meager food supply. Our bread ration was cut from 1/7th of a loaf to 1/10th of a loaf, with some days with no bread at all. Our soup ration at noon was eliminated. For supper the cooks were forced to mix turnips or kohlrabis with the potatoes to stretch the supply.

The possibility that we might have to pack up and leave made us face the fact that we were not in the best physical condition. In addition to becoming increasingly malnourished, we had not been getting much of any exercise at all since the cold weather had driven us indoors, But, thank God, we had been spared any outbreak of colds or influenza, which would really have taken its toll with our health.

As the days dragged on, there was more and more talk about the possible evacuation of Luft IV and it gradually became to be accepted as an established fact. This led us to consider how best we could carry what few belongings we had, if as it appeared we were going to abandon our "home". Most of us still had the little cardboard suitcase we had been given back at the dulag, but this would be somewhat awkward and clumsy to carry over any great distance.

Considering the time of the year and the current freezing temperatures, it was obvious that we would be wearing every piece of clothing we owned, which didn't leave all that much to lug separately, except for our blankets and whatever food we might still have, The blankets took up too much room to put in the "suitcase" and anything else would just rattle around. So the next best thing we could come up with was to make some make-shift back-pack with materials we could scrounge. It was amazing what variety of designs resulted from this idea.

Generally, the design included two shoulder straps to support the bag which hung over our backs. There had to be some pockets or separations to divide the contents and they had to be somewhat accessible while being carried. Most of us also still had the little sewing kit that we were also issued and we picked the strongest thread to do the stitching. I was fortunate to have my bunk-mate Hugh Remp, who was an accomplished tailor, to help me.

We rolled up the two thin blankets and tied them with a cord and draped them in an inverted U-shape over the back pack over our shoulders. After trying on this combination, there were some adjustments and re-structuring, but generally it seemed to be practical for the conditions that we expected, if and when we had to march out of the camp. I was also lucky to have a good pair of GI boots to complete this "outfit".

January was drawing to a close, The first part had not been too bad as far as the weather was concerned, but it was very cold. The second half was worse--still colder and very stormy.

On January 28th we were surprised by the announcement at roll call that a shipment of typhus vaccine had been received and that and that we were to get our shots that same afternoon. This unexpected concern for our health lent further credence to the evacuation rumors.

The next day, Jan. 31st, the abandonment of Stalag Luft IV continued as B Lager was emptied of all of its remaining prisoners. We lined the guard rail in our compound and watched them march by, out into the Vorlager and down the road towards town. until they were out of sight in the surrounding woods. There were rumors that they also camped out at the railroad station for several days, waiting for transportation. Whether or not it ever arrived we did not know.

A few days later, on a cold afternoon B Lager was re-occupied. This time by what can bests be described as "a foreign legion" of POWs, who had been evacuated from the east.Again we stood along the guard rail and watched them plod past us and on into their new (temporary) "home". They didn't seem to be in very good shape, in fact, they looked pretty rough. They appeared to be a mixture of non-English speaking nationalities; mostly Poles, Yugoslavs, Russians and other Slavic peoples.

They remained for a day and then trudged out again on their weary way. We wondered if the Germans gave them any kind of food or provided any heat in the barracks for these poor souls. A new contingent, equally tired, unshaven and dirty shuffled in during the next afternoon for their brief overnight respite.before taking to the road again the next morning.

By now there was no bread at all coming into the camp. The last of what remained of the delicious barley was now used to make soup at noon, and what potatoes, turnips and kohlrabis were left provided our supper. The daily issue of cans of food from the Red Cross food parcels were growing increasingly erratic. All in all, the outlook was becoming more bleak and more desperate with each passing day. We could see ourselves turning into the same ragged, grubby and beaten-down prisoner-refugees as those pathetic-looking men who were coming into B Lager for their one night stay. We awaited our turn nervously and with a great deal of apprehension.

We learned that the Red Army had broken through to the Oder River at Frankfort on February 4th. This put them to the south and west of us. Now, the only escape route for the Germans in our area was a narrow corridor between Stettin and Sweinemunde on the Baltic, with no assurance that this route would be open very much longer. Little wonder that our captors were starting to panic. Unfortunately, we were in no position to take advantage of the Germans' plight in this situation.

In retrospect, it was obvious that our captors were more excited and nervous than we were at the prospect of evacuation--but for very different reasons. The Germans were totally aware of the reputation of the ruthless Russian soldiers. The Krauts knew that if they were not killed outright, there was very little hope of surviving if taken prisoner. They had every reason to be terrified to fall into Russian hands. Very few of the hundreds of thousands of Germans captured by the Russians ever came back home alive. Instead, they died from neglect, cold, starvation, or over-work. So it was definitely preferable to get over to the West and surrender to the Americans or British..

## The Evacuation Begins

On the very next day those rumors were all but confirmed when each room was requested to select the five members who were in the poorest physical condition. They were to pack their gear and be prepared to ship out the next morning by train. We held a council of war in our room, and after some discussion we made our choice and these men set about their preparations for departure. We sadly said our good-byes and wished them good luck as they joined the others selected from the rest of our lager as they moved out on January 30th.

At the gate they were joined by about 1500 more POWs from the other compounds, Out they went, through the main gate and down the road. toward town and to the train station where I had been several months ago. I learned some time later that they waited a day or so, in the cold, before their train finally arrived to pick them up. They were crammed into the same little box cars with which we were all too familiar. They were shipped west to Stalag Luft I, which originally had been a prison camp for American Air Force officers.

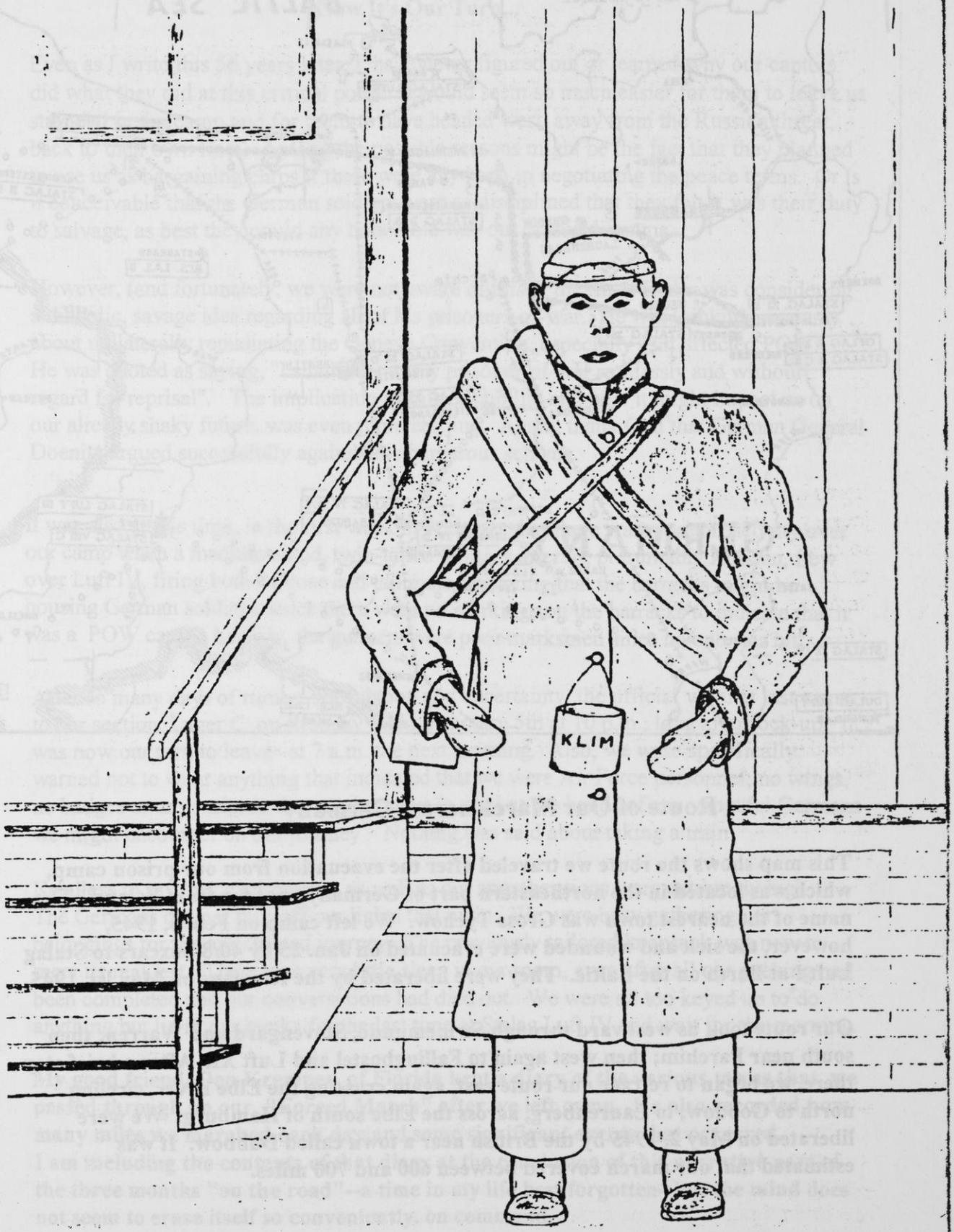
It was located near the town of Barth on the Baltic Sea, north of Rostock. It was only a journey of some 150 miles, but having no travel priorities whatever, and with conditions so chaotic in all of Germany, the trip took **eight**, miserable days, sweating out Allied air attacks and being side-tracked into railroad yards where they sat for days on end. Many became sick from drinking the dirty water alongside the tracks on the rare occasions when the doors of their cars were unlocked and they could stumble outside.

The rest of the time they were jammed together without enough room to lie down, urinating into empty cans which were passed down to the side of the car where they were emptied out through a small screened opening near the roof with the aid of a small folded cardboard trough

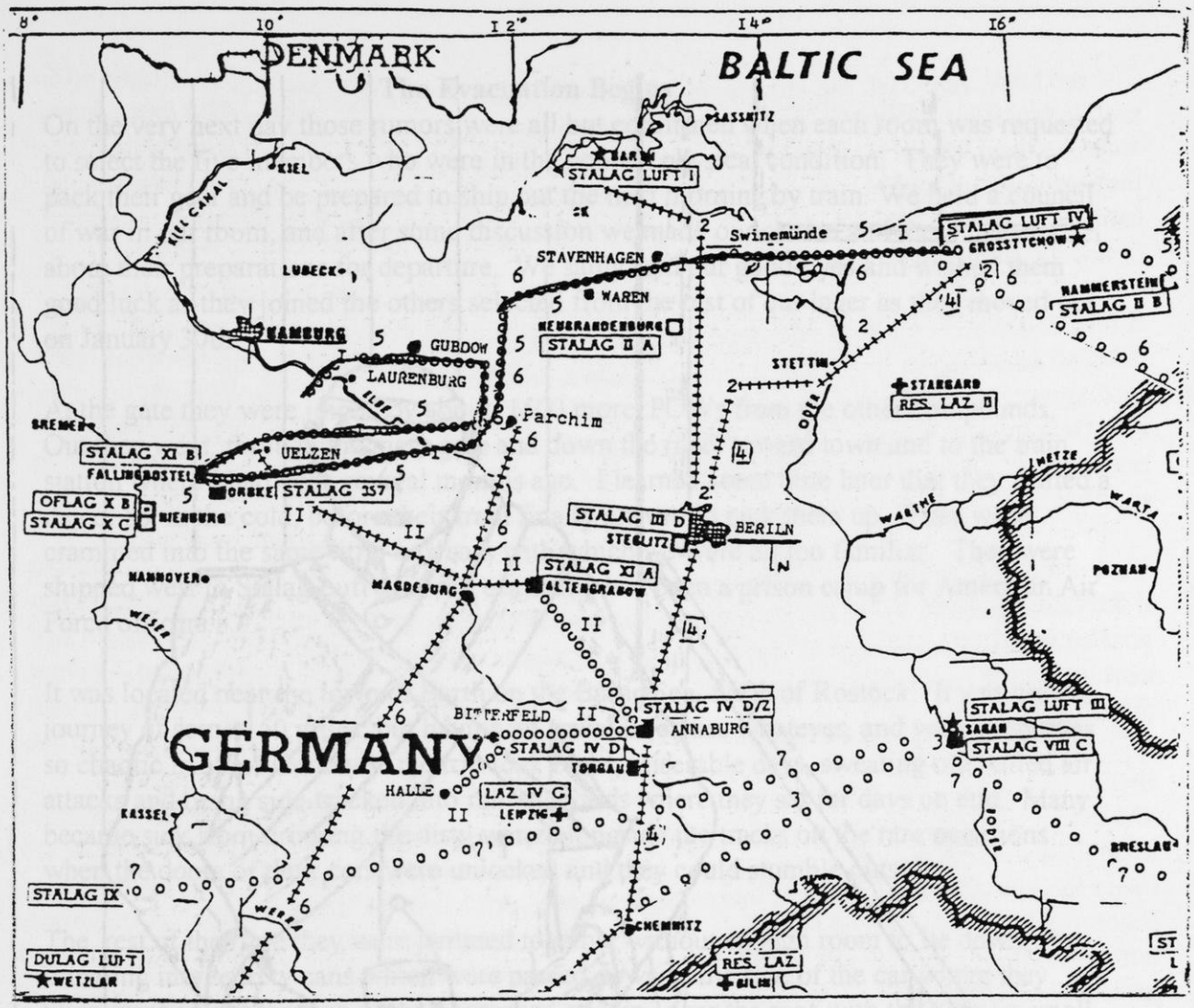
This was some of the cruel, inhumane treatment that we received from our captors. We often commented that, while we did not receive the much-publicized torture that occurred in some other prison camps, this type of cruelty was nearly as bad. And this is how they treated the prisoners who were too weak or sick to walk.

Following three months at Barth, these POWs were liberated by the Russians on May 1st after which they made their way back to the Allied lines in one way or another.

On that same day when the first of the inmates of Stalag Luft IV were evacuated, we noticed that there was much more activity in the skies over our camp. Previously, it was rare to see any planes flying overhead. Now, German JU-52's--slow, lumbering three-motored transports-- were shuttling back and forth on a northeast/southwest bearing. We speculated that they were probably carrying some important German military personnel away from the area just south of us in far greater style and comfort than our friends who had left in the crowded box cars. On the next day we noticed that the first of the more able-bodied prisoners from Lager A were now leaving the camp.




**This is a drawing of what we might have looked like before we started on the "Cold March" that lasted for 3 months and covered 650-700 miles. The Klim can is from a Red Cross parcel, which orignially contained powdered milk. "Klim" is milk spelled backwards.**




## Route of Our March across Germany

**This map shows the route we traveled after the evacuation from our prison camp, which was located in the northeastern part of Germany, not far from Poland. The name of the nearest town was Gross Tychow. We left camp on Feb. 6, 1945, however, the sick and wounded were evacuated on Jan. 25 by 40/8 boxcars to Stalag Luft I at Barth on the Baltic. They were liberated by the Russians on May lst, 1945.**

**Our route took us westward through Swinemunde, Stavengard and Warren; then south near Parchim; then west again to Fallingbostel and Luft XI. After a brief stay there, we began to retrace our route east, again crossing the Elbe River, circling north to Gobdow, to Laurenberg, across the Elbe south of Hamburg. We were liberated on May 2, 1945 by the British near a town called Dubbow. It was estimated that our march covered between 600 and 700 miles.**

## Now It's Our Turn...

Even as I write this 56 years later, I have never figured out or learned why our captors did what they did at this critical point. It would seem so much easier for them to leave us stranded in the camp and for them to have headed west, away from the Russian threat, back to their own lines. Among the possible reasons might be the fact that they planned to use us as bargaining chips if there were any hope in negotiating the peace terms. Or is it conceivable that the German soldiers were so disciplined that they felt it was their duty to salvage, as best they could any honorable way out of this dilemma.

However, (and fortunately, we were not aware of this at the time) Hitler was considering a diabolic, savage idea regarding all of his prisoners-of-war. He was thinking seriously about unilaterally repudiating the Geneva Convention, especially as it affected POWs. He was quoted as saying, "I shall treat every prisoner-of-war ruthlessly and without regard for reprisal". The implication of this possibility and how it might impact us on our already shaky future, was even more chilling. Again, thank God that German General Doenitz argued successfully against this barbarous scheme.

It was also at this time, in the first week in February that there was more air activity over our camp when a medium-sized, twin-tailed military aircraft, presumably Russian, flew over Luft IV, firing both its nose and tail guns, assuming that the barracks might be housing German soldiers, since there were no markings on the barracks to indicate that it was a POW camp. Luckily, the gunners were poor marksmen since no one was hit.

After so many days of rumor, speculation and uncertainty, the official word at last came to our section, Lager C. on Monday night, February 5th at 10 p.m., long after lock-up. It was now our turn to leave--at 7 a.m. the next morning. Also, we were specifically warned not to wear anything that indicated that we were Air Force personnel; no wings, no badges or any insignia that might put us in peril at the hands of any vengeful Germans we might encounter on our journey . Nothing was said about taking a train.

Needless to say, our excitement, as well as our apprehensions were extremely high The Germans did not turn off our lights that night. We were busy gathering our belongings for the anticipated journey. The previously tailored knapsack was now to meet its real test. There was very little sleep in our room, even after all our packing had been completed and our conversations had died out. We were all too keyed up to do anything but lie in our bunks for the last time at Stalag Luft IV and wait for the morning.

**My good friend, Don Kremper, of Florida kept a diary of the various towns that we passed through on our "Forced March" after we left camp. He also recorded how many miles we marched each day and some significant events that occurred. I am including the contents of that diary at the conclusion of this narrative part of the three months "on the road"--a time in my life best forgotten--but the mind does not seem to erase itself so conveniently. on command.**

## February 6th, 1945--A Memorable Day and Night

Scheduled events, in either the American or German military never seem to occur on time.; so it was a good while after 7 a.m. on February 6th when we actually left the camp. First of all, we had to go through the ritual of the roll call one last time.

When we finally left the barracks we were ready to march. Those of us who had made back packs were wearing them, along with the blanket roll over the top. Most of us were wearing every piece of clothing we owned, except for perhaps an extra pair of socks or a second wool cap. There was quite an assortment of head gear, since some of the prisoners had made caps of various materials while in camp. I was lucky when they handed out the overcoats earlier--mine was a French cast-off with a flared bottom section--that served several purposes (which will be revealed later). Throughout the entire march of three months we never removed all of our clothes at one time.

There were, of course many POWs who were carrying the cardboard "suitcase". It was a real "nixed bag" of former airmen that assembled for the final roll call formation. This last roll callwas in sharp contrast to the recent ones through which we had been racing. This one took an extraordinary long time. And it was only after a large number of recounts and discussions that the Geman tellers finally agreed on the count.

Considering the turmoil and disarray in which this part of the Fatherland found itself at this time, with law and order disintegrating with the relentless Russian advance from the east, this precision roll call seemed almost like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

At long last the paperwork was completed, and after another conference among our captors, the gates from Lager C were unlocked and swung open. The guards ordered us to fall out by barracks--first, Barracks 1, then 2 (that was us) and so on--out through the tall portals by which I had entered in mid-September. It was now past mid-morning.

We were in a holiday mood as we crossed the Vorlager towards the final gate and our spirits grew even higher when each of us was handed a full Red Cross food parcel as we passed by the shed in which they were stored. The day was a little warmer and sunny, a welcome change from the bitter windy, cold and cloudy days we had been having.

We had food, for the moment and the road ahead stretched westward, through the woods, in the direction of home. As we passed through the last gate with backpacks, cardboard suitcases and a full food parcel, we were extremely happy in our new semi-freedom. I do not believe that any of us could possibly have conceived of a time in the near future when we would actually yearn to be back in the confines and relative security of a barbed wire prison like the one we were leaving.

We tramped off down the dirt road in a disorderly, strung-out file, chattering and gesturing back and forth, stimulated as much by the novelty of our surroundings as by the excitement of this new adventure on which we were embarking. The U.S. Army Air Corps had never been noted for their precision marching and continued in that tradition, even now. But our overall formation tended to be loosely grouped by barracks and rooms, at least for the moment.

Rifle-carrying guards walked beside us at intervals of several hundred feet Those at the rear had large German Shepherd attack dogs on leashes. Also, in the rear was a horse-drawn wagon, used to pick up any of us who might be forced to drop out of the line of march for medical reasons.

After we had marched along in this fashion for a while, the German order of "Rechts Rais!" was passed up the line, from the rear, from guard to guard. As directed, we dutifully moved to the right side of the road to allow the German commandant to pass by us in the motorcycle side-car driven by his Oberfeldwebel;. He sat ramrod-stiff in full Luftwaffe regalia, looking neither to the right or left. He had remained behind to see that all of us were out of our lager and was now probably scouting ahead, looking for, and requisitioning a place where we would stop for the night.

After leaving Luft IV, we marched for about an hour, when the guards called for a rest-break. After we got settled on the side of the road, we opened our knap-sacks and food parcels and nibbled our lunch--a cube or two of sugar, a crust of German black bread or whatever we could easily grab from our food stocks. Most of us were quite frugal in what we used, since we had no idea of how long it might be before we got any more. A lot of us opened the Red Cross food parcels, since they had become rather clumsy to carry under our arms, and stashed the contents in our knap-sacks and pockets.

We had now been walking just long enough to become conscious of the weight of our luggage, even the little that we had. Consequently, when we started out again, after about a 10-minute rest, we left behind us a great litter of empty Red Cross cartons, the German issued ceramic bowls and cups, and foolishly, such items as cans of powdered milk and tins of margarine. Those who discarded such items would soon come to bitterly regret their folly in the not too distant future.

We passed the rest of the afternoon walking easily down the road, stopping about every hour for a ten-minute rest. And still, after each rest stop we would leave behind diminishing articles as we "fine-tuned" our baggage, rearranging priorities as we now felt was or was not as essential as it was back in the camp.

Dusk was now descending and we had covered a relatively easy eight to ten miles from Luft IV. We had arrived at a cross-road in a wooded area when we were called to a halt. There were a few homes and farms of modest sizes. We had no idea what was to happen next. Soon the guards herded us to some of the empty barns. There was a thin layer of straw on the ground floor. Soon the doors were locked. We were left in the dark.

## A Time for Reflection

But, between the time we quit talking and when I finally fell asleep, there was a time for reflecting on the major changes that had occurred on this sixth day of February, 1945 and how this would effect our lives as Prisoners of War.

Here we were, probably only 10 miles from the camp where I had spent the last 4-1/2 months of my life as a POW. We were in entirely different surroundings. We had traded the security of a barracks and a room with permanent walls and a roof over our heads for a barn whose walls were made of boards that had cracks in them that allowed the wind and the cold to enter easily . We had given up our pseudo-mattresses for a thin layer of straw on the bare ground barn floor.

While we did have a minimum amount of food in our possession, we had no assurance of a daily ration of bread, soup or potatoes as we did at Luft IV. Even though we had marched only a limited distance today, we could feel the after-effects of being unusually tired and achy--and we had only been out for **one** day,

We had to face reality. Our bodies were not in great physical condition. All of us had lost considerable body weight. Many of the prisoners had poor footwear--well worn and poor fitting. While we may have disposed of some of our excess baggage along the way today, we may have to give up even more in the days ahead, leaving us with very little reserve for the days ahead,

Quite naturally, our biggest concern was what is going to happen to us in the days ahead? Are the Germans taking us to another prison camp? Will we again be loaded into those hideous box cars and be subjected to more bombing and strafing attacks.? Will the Russian catch up with us and will we be abandoned by our German captors to fend for ourselves? How long will our food supplies last and what happens when they are exhausted?

Today's march was relatively easy--only eight or ten miles...in a relatively unpopulated area where there had been no Allied bombing...where the citizens were more curious than they were hostile. And the weather had been very favorable for February 6th--no snow or strong winds or real cold temperatures.

But what about tomorrow and the days after that? There was very little we could do about it since we were still prisoners of war, under the complete control of our German captors. About all we could do was to pray and trust the Good Shepherd that He would be with us and watch over us..

But nature finally took over and I went to sleep. I'm sure I had dreams--probably of better times, back home or perhaps even of life at Stalag Luft IV. It was a fitful sleep, with interruptions of prisonrs crawling over us to get to the outside "toilet"..

## Day No. 2

Our second day as vagabonds began a little after dawn when we were rousted out of our slumbers by the guards. We left the shelter of our blankets reluctantly and stood up slowly. We were stiff and grumbling in the freezing air, trying to brush off as much straw as possible from our clothes, the blankets and ourselves. we dug into our food supplies and chomped on a dry piece of bread and maybe a prune or two before we sauntered outside There in the cold early light of a February morning we took care of our toilet needs, but there was no water of any kind, so there was no face washing or anything else.. Then we milled around, speculating on what this new day might bring.

Eventually our keepers managed to get us into a semi-organized fashion into a very un-military formation and attempted to count us. After all kinds of confusion, for which we were partly responsible, the guards seemed to conclude that "close was good enough for government work". We moved out of the farm yard and out onto the road. Thus, began our second day of the march. It was February 7, 1945.

This day was almost a duplicate of yesterday, except longer. We began to fall into the routine that would be maintained during our future days of travel. Our guards and their police dogs herded us along without any apparent intention of keeping up a rapid pace. In addition to the regular rest breaks, there were always a number of unexplained stops, where we just stood around for varying periods of time.

There was a good deal of individual drifting along the line of march as some fell back to join friends farther to the rear. Because of this straggling effect, the group in the rear was always a good distance behind those at the front of the column. Sometimes the front group would already have had their break and continued to march before those in the rear ever got caught up. This made for a herky-jerky motion of the entire body, much like a caterpillar moves. We probably marched about the same distance as we did yesterday and ended up in a crowded barn for the night.

It was the same ordeal in the early morning, as previously and we hit the road just as the sun started to get up into the sky. However, the routine was changed somewhat when we left the main road. We traveled cross-country cutting through fields, trudging down narrow paths in woods, clambering over fences or scrambling up and down small hills We were so strung out that the last half of our line never did get a chance to rest, struggling practically all of their time just catching up.

Once we got back on another road it was in an area that was relatively level. in wooded country. It was thinly populated with only a sprinkling of small farms and houses. Once in a while we would come across civilian refugees, clopping along with little horse-drawn wagons with all their earthly possessions piled high around them. And not infrequently we noted that among their belongings were some of the same precious Red Cross food parcels which we had become to treasure so much. We had no idea of where they might have obtained them..

Each night we continued to be locked up in a series of cold, uncomfortable barns which were invariably too crowded for the number of prisoners that were confined there. And each morning we awoke to the chill of a February morning to line up for the traditional roll calls, which seemed to get less and less regimented as time went on. Then. it was out on the road once more.

Our road still led through relatively level and wooded country, thinly populated. The weather was unseasonably kind to us, considering the time of the year. Our spirits were still reasonably high since we had been marching only about 10 miles a day. This moderate rate of travel was probably dictated by a combination of the large number of POWs in our column, as well as the availability of adequate shelter when we stopped for the night.

In addition, we were traveling west--toward home and our physical condition, though weakening was not real bad and we still had a minimal, though dwindling supply of food. We didn't realize that this was the best part of the march and we didn't appreciate it at the time.

But that state of affairs came to an abrupt end. This was the day before we reached the Elbe River at Schweinemunde. It was St. Valentine's Day, February 14, 1945, It was even earlier than usual when the guards rousted us out of our sleep with more zeal and vigor than usual. Outside of the barn, we were met by an icy drizzle that gradually turned into sleet. In addition, there was just enough raw wind to penetrate through our clothes into our bones It did not help to learn that today was a decisive day and we would be crossing a strategic area, under military control. Here, the Germans were hastily trying to construct a defense zone, backed up by the Elbe River in a last ditch defense stand against the Russian offensive, which was rapidly approaching somewhere behind us.

We were told that it would be "Verboten, Streng Verboten" for us to linger in this region and we would have to be through it before halting for the night, no matter how long it took. This zone was said to cover about 40-45 kilometers. or close to 25 miles, almost doubling the distance we were used to traveling per day--a real challenge for us in our ill-fed and weakening condition.

With this not-so-encouraging news, we were hurried off to the cold, wet road ahead. Each of us was huddled beneath the sleet and increasing rainfall. Our guards were duly impressed by their orders to get us through this defense region as quickly as possible and kept pushing us to move faster. There were no hourly rest breaks today. We lumbered along as best we could down what seemed like an endless road, while the raw, icy wind chilled our minds and our bodies. It was an entirely memorable, miserable morning as the hours dragged by towards noon. In our travels along this road we came across numerous German soldiers who were armed with guns and "potato masher" grenades in their belts. They were a tough-looking bunch,

## Stettin, a Critical Point on Our Route

Finally, we reached a town, crossed a suspension bridge over a ravine, in single file and walked through the business section. People were lined up to look us over and one German woman was pointing to one of the prisoners with long hair, apparently commenting to her companion that he looked just like a "Frau" or woman. When we reached the outskirts of the town, German troops were digging trenches alongside the road. It looked like this might soon be the sight of a battle.

Our column marched up hills and down hills. Trucks passed by ever so often and the guards made us get off the road. As we continued, we could hear shells whistling over our heads and seconds later the explosion when the shells hit. That's how close the Russians were.

We discovered that we were now on an island. The big guns we heard were apparently a coastal gun, now directed across Stettin Bay at the Russians We were walking down a paved road across the island. Off to our right was shallow water that was probably the coastline of the Baltic Sea. This walk brought us to what was the brightest part of our day.

Incredibly, we came across a mobile field kitchen, set up along the right shoulder of the road. We credited our Commandant for making the arrangements for us to get some hot soup and a chunk of the familiar dark German bread. They dumped the thick barley soup into our KLIM cans, which originally contained the powdered milk in the Red Cross food parcels. (Klim is milk spelled backwards). These tin cans replaced the heavy German-issue ceramic bowls we had taken with us from Luft IV.

We were not allowed to linger and it took only about a half hour to be served and for us . to gulp down our unexpected "picnic". I can still picture us standing in the rain, while we ate, looking down the paved roadway. which stretched out into the misty distance ahead of us.

A long line of spindly trees bordered wide, sodden empty fields on each side of the road. The cold wind was still blowing and the rain made our overcoats, unprotected blanket rolls and back packs becoming heavier and heavier as they soaked up the rain. The Russians must really have been moving since we walked all afternoon and evening.

Twilight came early below the heavy clouds and a hazy gloom settled around us, limiting our view to the weary backs of those ahead of us as we trudged silently, mindlessly and mechanically, putting down one aching foot behind the other. Total darkness eventually fell and now the clouds finally began to break up as the wind veered into the north. Bit by bit the air grew even colder and the wind more piercing. Still, we were pushed ever onward

## "A Nice Warm Place to Sleep..."

After all this walking we were still spurred on by the Germans, promising us that we would be sleeping in a nice warm place tonight--a German Army barracks, not too far down the road.

Four hours later--it was now very dark--the column finally turned off the main road and down a lane. About a quarter of a mile farther, we stopped. It was obvious that this was not a military location. In fact, we could dimly make out that this was a large open field that had just been cleared of trees, with only a few pines left around the perimeter.

Now came the surprise announcement! This was where we were going to spend the night. The military barracks was a hoax. The Krauts had never intended for us to get to such a place; it was only a ruse to keep us marching. By this time we should have known better than to believe them. They had lied to us many times before.

Of all nights, there was not even a barn. No shelter of any kind--but there was lots of room! The three of us--Remp, Ritchie and I found one of the pine trees on the edge of the field and thought this might be good place to stake out our claim, that it might offer some protection from the rain, which had only recently stopped. To our dismay, we discovered that there was water dripping from the branches of the tree while it was better to be out in the open. So we picked up our blankets and possessions and moved out into the open field.

We made our "camp" on the bare, frozen ground. Once again we unrolled our rain-soaked blankets, put two of them on the ground and used the others as a cover. The three of us formed a small cocoon, trying to generate as much warmth as our three bodies could provide. Some of the Kriegies had gathered up some of the brush in the area and made fires to get warm and to dry out their blankets and clothes. But a short time later the Germans made them put out the fires since the Allied night bombers were heading in our direction. The formation passed nearby but paid no attention to us.

We had not eaten since noon, but we were too exhausted to rummage through our packs for any kind of "supper". But I still had two squares of chocolate from the food parcel and I decided to eat it right then and there, determined that if I died during the night the Jerries would not get it. I don't remember what time it was when I finally went to sleep, but we were numb from the wet cold and worn-out from the day-long march .
This was definitely the lowest point in my life as a Prisoner-of-War. I didn't think I would see another sunrise.

However, Someone was watching over us and I awoke at daybreak and saw the sun coming up. I thought I must be in Heaven! But it only took a few minutes to realize that this was not Heaven, just another day of prison life. Hopefully, the worst was over. We could only assume that our forced march had achieved its goal of crossing the defense zone. But we learned later that the Germans hope of stalling the Russians was in vain.

When daylight arrived, it was very cold and bright, with blue skies washed clean by the rain. revealing a wintry sun, which seemed to have lost its ability to bring any warmth. We untangled ourselves from the blankets, and each other, stamping our feet on the icy ground and swinging our arms in the frosty air to get some circulation going in our stiff and creaking joints.. We were now able to see that we had spent the night on the hillside overlooking the city of Sweinemunde, which is located at the point where the Oder River empties into the Baltic Sea.

We ravenously munched some breakfast, took care of our toilet needs and lined up for the traditional head count and then trudged slowly down the hill into the town. The old city with its narrow streets and antique buildings would have been quite quaint and picturesque to the average sightseer, but to us it was just another town--a part of a continuing exhausting march. Eventually, we got to the waterfront district, where we could see that this city had a bustling harbor. Several freighters, along with a submarine and a naval vessel, or two, were tied up at the dock.

It took a small ferry several trips to transport all of us across the harbor to the far bank of the Oder to a small barrier island (Osedom) which stretches westward. Later, road signs informed us that we were passing through Peenemunde, the launching site for most of the rockets whose target was England, especially London. I can remember that this was one of our bombing targets when I was flying. There was no rocket activity while we were in the area.

Now we were on a sandy stretch of road bordered by some bare-limbed trees, which led us through a small village of summer-type cottages and homes. The next day (Feb. 16) we left the island by means of an old iron-trussed bridge, which spanned a narrow inlet. We found ourselves in the German state of Mecklinburg. in the northern part of the country.

The character of the countryside changed to rolling farm land with scattered wood lots breaking up expanses of broad fields. The entire region appeared to be divided up into large estates, each dominated by a cluster of stone buildings, set well back from the road on which we were traveling. In one of these fields we came upon a man driving a team of horses, pulling a piece of some type of farm equipment. He identified himself as a Canadian POW, assigned to farm labor. We gave him the news that the Russians were coming. We wanted to talk some more with him, but our guards motioned him away.

For the next several nights our accommodations consisted of a succession of similar farmsteads. Each of them had an almost identical layout. Our approach. after leaving the road, would be made up a long dirt lane, lined with trees, planted at regular intervals on both sides. This led us into a large, square-shaped courtyard with a variety of barns, stables and other out-buildings on the left and right. Facing us would be the manor house, each one an imposing stone structure of two or three stories. The courtyard was of cobblestone and held a huge pile of pungent manure. being held in readiness for the spring planting..

However, in marked contrast to the overall air of permanence, which these stone buildings presented, each courtyard also contained a small make-shift building, not much larger than a good-sized dog house, constructed of scraps of lumber and encased in numerous strands of barbed wire. Situated near the manure pile each of these miniature shanties usually housed two Russian POWs--slave labor to ease the pressure of war-time farming. In this comparison, we fared somewhat better in that we were parceled out to various barns and stables to spend the night. The manor house, of course, was strictly off limits to us, nor did we ever see any of the occupants, who apparently wanted nothing to do with this mangy, dirty bunch of characters that we were.

On one night, several of us ended up in a cow shed. This turned out to be a welcome change from the cold, frigid air of the barns, since we shared or gleaned some heat from the animals in their stalls. The cows gave us no trouble, however, the bull, who was locked in an adjoining box stall, bellowed all night--possibly to voice his objection to sharing his cows' space or resenting the strange smell that we brought with us. The best part of the experience was that the next morning our meager breakfast was enhanced by a taste of fresh milk, courtesy of the cows and some of the group who had rural backgrounds.

On another occasion, as we were traveling through a small village, there was a sizable collection of spectators on the side of the street. Among the throng of onlookers was a German soldier, wearing the uniform of the Wehrmacht (German Army). who hollered to us in perfect English, that we would most likely soon be overtaken by the Russians, and what a shame it was that we Americans had not joined with the Germans to fight side by side against "the barbarians from the East".

During this time of our laborious travels, we had gradually been making our way across the north-central part of Deutchland. Our trek no longer was the exciting adventure that we had regarded it during the first days of our departure from Luft IV, but had turned into a grinding, monotonous toil of drudgery. But I was lucky in certain respects, since my boots were holding up well and unlike many other Kriegies, I did not suffer from blisters or frostbite.

But even without foot problems it seemed as though every village, town or hamlet had its share of cobblestones--stones large enough to make the footing quite treacherous, especially on damp or wet days or when there was a thin film of ice. It was surprising that there weren't more cases of turned or sprained ankles. But then again, there were no Ace bandages or other help for such injuries. But it did make you wonder why people would go to such lengths to install such unsuitable and unstable form of pavement.

While we were plodding along, day after day, many different thoughts would go through your mind. Some of these were concerns about what was happening at home or what kind of an ending this march would bring. I even thought about our German guards. Most of them were "rejects" from active duty in combat--they were in the top age brackets or they had some injuries or handicaps that kept them from the Eastern Front.

We knew that our guards were better fed than we were, but I wondered how they were standing the trip since they had been walking alongside us all day, plus handling the dogs, they would have to stand guard duty at night while we slept. It did seem that their discipline was deteriorating, whether from fatigue, lack of sleep or declining morale because of the way that the war was going. I did not know.

The attention that they were giving to our daily head count was getting more and more. lackadaisical. I don't think it would have been too difficult for any of us to make an individual escape from the barns during the night, under cover of darkness, or even from the line of march during the day. In all likelihood the guards would never have noticed a shortage in our ranks. However, I never heard of anyone doing so. We were all too weak and wouldn't have any idea where to go, or the means to get back to our lines.. Furthermore, we were heading west, in the direction of home.

As a matter of fact, they did not notice the increase in numbers one day when a Slav-speaking man attached himself to us and marched with a small group of POWs, who could speak his language. He might have been one of those slave laborers at the big farm where they kept these workers in the little dog houses He stayed with us for a long time, serving as a sort of mascot, living on the little food the Germans gave us. plus what little we could spare from our own supplies, and smoking some of our cigarettes.
Of all of our problems, getting safe drinking water was among the greatest. There were occasional pumps along the roadsides and at the farms where we stopped, but there were so many of us that it was difficult to get to them. Periodically we would walk past patches of old snow, which we would scoop up, if it looked reasonably clean. Our guards would discourage us from doing this since it could very well lead to diseases of various forms--and rightly so as we soon discovered.

Among other things that we thought about, probably more speculation than anything else, was how this march was organized by our captors--those who were in command beyond the privates and non-coms who marched with us and who provided our only contact with authority.

On rare occasions we would see the Commandant of our former Lager C ride by in the side car of his motorcycle probably checking out the road ahead of us and lining up the barns where we would spend the night and our day of rest. No doubt, he was involved, with other German officers, to direct us through the military defense zone through which we had passed on February 14th. By now all four of the lagers at Luft IV were on the road--all 8,000 or more, scattered on the roads of a small section of northern Gerrmany. There certainly must have been some type of liaison or communication between these German officers to keep us from getting in each other's way and having all of us arrive at the same farms on the same afternoon and commandeering the barns from the farm owners. But, of course, the military had the last word in any of these "negotiations". We had never come across any evidence that any other POWs had ever intersected our route or "residence".

## "Manna from Heaven"

While most of our days were dull, monotonous and wearisome, there were also some days when we had good fortune--not too many, but morale-boosting when they happened.

On one sunny afternoon, when it was not too cold, our column was brought to a halt when a German soldier, on horseback appeared at the front of the line of march. After about 15 minutes he rode away and our march continued.through a small village with the typical cobblestone streets. We ended up a short distance down the road at one of those big farm with rather large barns--larger than usual, and for once we were not crowded for space on the barn floor, which had a generous covering of new straw.

About 45 minutes later we were called to gather outside the barn. One of our sergeant-guards, who could speak good English called us to "attention". What he had to say was the most amazing, wonderful words we had heard in a long time.

"The people of the village that you just passed through knew for several hours that you Americans would be staying here for the night. They have gotten together and cooked up some pork and bean soup for you. Some of them have sons who are prisoners in America. They made the soup to show their appreciation for the treatment their sons are getting.". And from there were shown where the soup was to be dished out.

What a wonderful gesture! But how did this come about? One of our group could speak perfect German. We speculated that he may have had something to do with this. Also, was it possible that these Germans were anticipating surrendering to the American troops and would remind their captors of their generosity to this group of American POWs and possibly.expect some special favor from their captors? It really didn't matter what their motive might be, we were just overwhelmed. There was enough soup for all of us. Some Krieges stood in line again, while eating their first serving. Everyone got seconds. It was the biggest meal we had received since leaving Stalag Luft IV.

It was also at about this time that the distances we traveled each day were getting less. We couldn't believe that this was for humanitarian reasons due to our rapidly deteriorating physical condition, because we had outdistanced the advancing Russians, at least for the time being, or that there was no place for us to go, or any other reason, we did not know.

But it was now apparent that we were doing a good deal more standing around than before, stopping frequently to idle away the time here and there along our line of march. Our captors also were beginning the practice of having us lay over at a farm for two or more days. We didn't mind the extra rest and it gave us a chance to look around the yard and buildings to do some trading, if we still had anything to trade.

But, while we were at these farms, we didn't have too many opportunities to trade with the civilians in the area. But the guards still had outside contacts, which we used.

## The Same Old Story

We had now been on the road for two weeks and it was obvious that the daily routine had been fairly well established--march, stop, march, rest and march some more; sleep wherever the Germans could find a place for us. According to Don Kremper's diary, between February 20th and 25th we passed through the towns of Gutsnow and Gulz.

On one day we marched about 13 miles, but we didn't make much progress, since after reaching our so-called destination, we turned around and marched back to the same place from which we had started.

By this time the weather had started taking its toll among the POWs. Frostbite, foot blisters and dysentery became common. We finally convinced the Germans that we needed some type of wagon on which those who could not walk could be carried. We managed to get a farm wagon and a horse for this purpose. However, we were soon forced to give up the horse and to take turns, among the prisoners, to pull the wagon ourselves.

One day we rested at a farm that had a small stream running through it. The temperature was below freezing but we seized the opportunity (since we did not have too many occasions when we had access to water) we washed some of our clothes in the stream. Some of the guys saw some fish in the stream and tried to "hand gaf" them, but had no luck.

We did find a potato cellar, which was "off limits", but we did manage to get away with a few spuds before the guards chased us away.

Towards the end of February the weather changed somewhat. The wind picked up and it got a little warmer. But marching into the wind made the distanced twice as great. At times the winds were gusty and it was hard to keep your balance.

One night we stopped in the middle of a small town and we were housed in an abandoned commercial warehouse instead of the usual farm barn. Across the way stood an old dilapidated two-story building, in which were housed, to capacity, a bunch of female Polish slave laborers, who leaned out of every window, calling and waving to us. The next morning some of our more virile POWs boasted that they had "encounters" with some of the girls...or perhaps it was only wishful thinking!

Between March 2nd and March 6th we marched a total of 72 miles--through Alton-Treptow, Karow, Plav and Lubz. March 7th was rest day We were issued one-half of a Red Cross food parcel. This raised our morale considerably. Thank God that the Red Cross was able to get through to us on the march--another miracle!

We marched another 35 miles between March 8th and 12th through Parchin, Neustadt, Grabow and Domitz. We crossed the Elbe River to a farm near Metzingen.

March 13 was a Rest Day. The Germans were unusually generous with our food ration. We had some cooked rice, two boiled potatoes, 1/10th of a loaf of bread (two thin slices) and one quarter of a Red Cross food parcel. Our good fortune did not last too long, however, since we were back to the 3-potatoes-a-day ration after that. We marched on the three-days-on and one-day-off schedule for several more days. The Rest Days were spent on farms in the Delzen area.

Many displaced Poles were forced to work on these farms. Some of the workers tried to give us food, but our German guards chased them away.

As I mentioned earlier, the weather in early March seemed to be a little warmer, but there were days when it got quite chilly. The sky changed from gloomy and overcast to periods of snow showers and flurries But then there were sunny days with warm breezes. But despite this turn to more favorable weather, we were still down-hearted and constantly hungry. Marching was a matter of plodding, heads down, watching the back and the feet of the guy ahead of you--trying to keep moving. Everybody was tired--always tired.

To any observer we must have been sad representatives of the U.S. Air Force. We were a grimy, unshaven, unkempt lot, and even from a distance, a stinking bunch. Among ourselves we were not aware of ourselves being peculiar, since we were all in the "same boat". I don't remember if anybody shaved--or even if we talked about the fact that we had not had a shower or change of clothes in nearly two months.

Because of our appearance and odor, the Germans, along the way, even though they were hostile, did not come anywhere near us since, no doubt they were afraid that they might be contaminated or catch some terrible disease. So our deplorable condition turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

**The Day the Pigs Won**

A few days later on our travels, we were holed up in an unusually spacious barn, which, for a change provide enough room for all of us to stretch out at night. This farm was to become the scene of one of the most humbling experiences with the title, "The Day the Pigs Won".

Arrangements had been made at the stop-over to supply us with a daily ration of potatoes steamed in a device in the neighborhood. On the first two days of our stay the potatoes were delivered about mid-day in a small horse-drawn cart and unceremoniously dumped in a pile on the cold ground, just outside the barn. We lined up and each of us received two or three of the steamed spuds and we relished every last bite..

However, on the third day, noon-time came and went without a delivery. Several hours later we were told that on this day the steamer had been relegated to cook up the batch that normally was assinged to us--for the pigs in the locality. So much for our status in the community!.

During the course of our march, some of the Krieges who had major health problems--beyond foot blisters, mild diareaha or bad colds--or reasons why they could no longer walk, were taken away from our group to hospitals along the way...at least that's what the Germans told us. We never really found out what happened to them, but after the war some of their stories became public.

I heard of one instance which was really heart-warming, despite all the other stories of inhumanity. This particular story was about a POW, in one of the German hospitals, who needed a blood transfusion. No doubt, this was a desperate situation, in view of the German war effort. But what happened was that two of the German nurses in the hospital gave their own blood to save this American POW. As the story goes, after the war the POW involved traced down the two nurses that had saved his life and brought them to the States for a Thanksgiving reunion.

**"Under Attack" or "Friendly Fire"**

As we got closer to the more populated areas, near the larger cities, we noticed that the bombing and strafing by Allied planes increased. It was toward the end of the day and we had been moved off the road into a farm yard that had several buildings. We were assigned to one of them for the night and were getting ready to make our supper.

Then someone hollered, "Hit the deck" as a squadron of American P-47s swooped down and began to open fire. Bullet holes appeared in the wall ahead of us and we remained flat on the floor for several minutes afterward . Thank God for those who spotted the planes coming at us, and warning us in time. However, two Americans and one of our German guards were injured, but not killed.

On the other hand, there were times when our fighters flew over us and came down low enough that we could see the pilot's face. Sometimes they would make a second pass and wiggle their wings as we waved and cheered. It was a strange feeling to realize that these pilots were free men, while we were still prisoners. No doubt, they reported our presence to Intelligence at their de-briefing after they returned to their base.

While most of our nights were spent in barns or out in the open, there were occasions when we were housed in other buildings, like when we "encountered" the Polish women. On another night we ended up in what was a sugar beet factory that had been vacated for the winter. While investigating its several small concrete buildings, we came across scattered bits and pieces of old sugar beet refuse that had been left over from the sugar beet processing. These "left-overs" still retained a pleasant sweet taste when chewed.

This was quite a discovery for us, since we did not have anything this sweet since the chocolate that came in the Red Cross food parcels. In retrospectk, this sugar beet "bonanza" was like a small miracle. And, speaking of miracles, if you had seen the condition of the shoes, boots, or whatever we were wearing, you could not help but believe that it must have been a miracle that there weren't more cases of frozen toes and feet, as well as frost-bite to other exposed parts of our bodies--our noses, ears, cheeks, and fingers.

While the majority of us struggled with the side effects of marching--for what seemed endless days--tired, despondent, hungry and cold. there were many cases of real serious health problems. I remember one case that involved one of the guys in our group. His name was Alex.

To begin with, he started the march wearing a pair of GI boots that had not been broken in. Alex complained about the blisters that had started to form on his feet. We could sense that he had trouble walking and had a hard time keeping up with the rest of us. But he "suffered in silence" until one morning when he could not get his boots on after removing them for the night.

As tune went on, his problem grew worse and the medics finally agreed to put him on the wagon for the "invalids". After a few days he seemed to recover somewhat and he joined us on the march and we helped him as he hobbled along. Then one night, after we had bedded down in the barn assigned to us, we helped him remove his boots. This was almost as painful for us as it was for him, for we could see him holding back the tears.

When the boots came off, we saw a horrible sight. The blisters on both of his feet had broken open and the brown-colored matter had soaked through both pair of socks that he was wearing. He didn't complain of any severe pain, but we immediately contacted one of the medics to examine Alex.

The medic took out a small tweezers from his first-aid kit, sterilized it over a burning match and began to probe into the purplish-black areas. Soon he extracted several inch-long pieces of greenish, worm-like tissue, which he said represented the onset of gangrene. He cleaned out as much of the puss as he could with some water he was carrying in a bottle. Since there were no bandages, Alex put his old socks back on, the least dirty pair next to his skin.

However, he did not join us on the march the next morning. He continued to ride on the wagon for those who couldn't walk for several days. Then on one of our "rest days" we saw him again. He was wearing a pair of home-made sandals--made up of pieces of cardboard, fastened to his feet with strips of cloth.

But the mud and manure of the farmyards took their toll on his improvised footwear. We heard that he was taken to a medical "barn" and later to a German hospital. We never got to see Alex again for the rest of the march.

After the war Alex and I talked about our experiences and he told me that he did spend some time in a German hospital, but ended up in Camp 357 at Fallingbostel, which was near Stalag 11-B, where we spent several days. The wounds eventually healed--which is nothing short of a miracle, considering the primitive medical attention he first received. He referred to the scars and callusas as "permanent souvenirs" of his experience.

## Another Train Ride?

There had been rumors circulating that we were to go to another organized POW camp. However, to get there we would have to take a train. The memory of that 5-day train ride from St. Wendel to Luft IV had not been forgotten and we dreaded the thought of another trip like that.

The Germans must have overheard our concern and we were told that on this train there would only be 38 POWs per boxcar, instead of the 50 or more on the previous ride. They also promised that there would be plenty of water and good toilet facilities. From previous experience we were hopeful, but doubtful..about any German promises.

We got up especially early that morning (March 28th) and walked to the train station where the boxcars were waiting on a siding. We had been assigned to specific cars the night before, so we immediately went to our designated car. We went through the usual routine of a roll call and discovered to our dismay, that there were again 50 POWs for each car, instead of 38 as the Germans had promised. So much for believing anything the Krauts said.

The boxcar facilities consisted of straw on the floor, but we never saw the water or toilet facilities that the Germans had talked about. Once again, we were locked inside in the same old crowded conditions as on our earlier trip.

An engine finally came chugging up and hooked on to our train and the ride began .First, we moved about five kilometers in one direction, then stop and wait. Then back up again.

Some of the Krieges still had diarrhea and we used some empty Red Cross boxes, filled with straw. These, along with some of the empty tin cans, served as our toilet facilities. All modesty was put aside as the other prisoners moved aside to stay clear of the squatting POWs. The smell in the car was awful. Because we had only the small window near the ceiling for ventilation, the odor never completely vanished.

On the second day the train stopped in a marshaling yard. The guards unlocked the doors and we jumped out. Everyone scrambled to find water and firewood. Soon, Krieges were building fires all along the railroad right of way. In exploring the area around the boxcars, we found one car loaded with fish; another with turnips. We settled for the turnips, since the fish smelled really bad.

An air raid alert sounded and the guards herded us back to our respective cars and locked the doors as they rushed to a nearby air raid shelter. We sat quietly, waiting. Once again we could hear the sound of the B-17 bombers overhead...and we waited. Everybody was tense. The bombers continued on their way. Evidently our marshaling yard was not the target for this day.

The train started moving again, followed by a series of starts and stops and finally kept moving. We traveled a considerable distance before we came to another stop, but we were not allowed out of our boxcar.

Once again we got underway and traveled for several hours. We could see that the shadows were getting longer when we looked out of the small window, as we entered what appeared to be a large city. Someone said it was the German port city of Hamburg, When that name came up, I remembered that I had been here on one of my bombing missions and that it was a rough target.

We slowly made our way into the train station and came to a stop. Before too long our captors unlocked the doors and rolled them back. What we saw when we looked out was a shocking sight. On every side, beyond the ruins of the railroad station itself, were the blackened remains of what at one time was the downtown area of Hamburg. with its tall buildings. This was now completed gutted by the fire bombing that had struck the city near the end of the war and completely incinerated it. All that remained was rubble and ashes.

We had seen the bombed out areas of the Berlin and Frankfurt railroad yards (on our way to the Dulag after we were captured), which were smashed to the ground by high explosives of our bombs, but here in Hamburg the lighter incendiaries, dropped by the Royal Air Force on its night raid had left only a ghostly wreckage.

**We See the Damage of a "Fire-Storm"**

The story of the Hamburg bombing was comparable to the much-more publicized fire bombing of Dresden. The night raid of the RAF started innumerable fires in the long row-type buildings. resulting in fires that were labeled as "fire storms". These fires created winds of up to 60 miles per hour, uprooted trees and consumed so much oxygen that people in the air raid shelters actually suffocated. It was estimated that more than 25,000 casualties resulted from the raid.

Before long we were back on the train, still shaken by what we had seen and wondering if the British airmen really knew what utter devastation they had caused. What was even more amazing was that the Germans had recovered enough to operate the train station.

At our next stop we were allowed to get out and stretch for a limited time before we were once again herded back into the car, but the doors were left open with the guards standing nearby.. Then we waited and waited--always at the mercy of our captors.

Soon to our surprise, a German Red Cross truck pulled up along-side the train and two young German Freulein (girls) got out, went to the back of the truck and brought out several large cardboard boxes. They came to our car and handed each of us a chunk of German black bread.and a small piece of sausage. This was certainly an unexpected, but welcome surprise. Especially, after we had just seen what our fellow-airmen had done to their city of Hamburg.

Hamburg was behind us and we traveled all night, stopping at various switching points. In the morning we arrived at our destination, a small village named Fallingbostel. The date was March 31, 1945. There were several camps in the area. The one to which we were assigned was the "international" camp, officially designated as Stalag XI-B. The camp to which the sick and those unable to walk were sent was Camp 357. Then there was a third camp, but I don't remember what it was called. The nearest large German city was Bremen.

**Welcome to "Gook's Gulch"**

Stalag XI-B was the weirdest combination of imprisoned foreign nationals, of all time. It was reported that there were approximately 8,000 prisoners in this camp. Most of them appeared to be housed in tents.. However, some of them lived in what at one time may have been some German military barracks, but now dilapidated and falling apart. Still others were housed in an old theater, also in bad shape.

The population was made up of Russians, Poles, Belgians, Italians, Dutch and Serbs. There were bearded Hindus, Gerkas. Sengalese.and Turks and perhaps other nationalities. The place looked like and smelled like a circus. Someone had given this place the name of "Gook's Gulch"..

The water supply for this camp was minimal. There were only a limited number of water taps, so there were always long lines of prisoners, each waiting for his turn at the faucet. Toilet facilities consisted of slit trenches.

We thought we were in bad shape, but these poor people were desperate. Those who were more fortunate worked as slave laborers and managed to get out of the camp for the day and possibly find some food or water there.

Our group of American POWs was segregated from the rest of the camp. We lived in tents, and while we were poorly fed, we still were better off than the more "permanent" residents. Evidently, other groups from Luft IV had also stopped here on their route.

**No. 357-- The Best Organized Camp**

While Stalag XI-B was the largest of the three camps, No. 357 was, no doubt, the best organized. My friend, Alex, who had the foot problem was sent to this camp and he told me what it was like when we talked about our experiences, after the war.

Camp 357 had originally been created early in the war to house British officers. who were captured in North Africa or Italy . Some of them had been prisoners since the early 40's/ As more and more British soldiers were captured, the camp also took in British non-coms (enlisted personnel). The camp was well organized and the prisoners were well disciplined.

So it was quite a contrast when American POWs. like Alex, came into the camp. The British tolerated their new camp-mates, but kept doing 'business as usual".

The British prisoners had been allowed to bring all their possessions with them to the camp. They had set up regular "stores" where merchandise was sold and traded. Cigarettes became the medium of exchange. The British had established "regular" trading procedures with the German guards and their outside contacts.

It took some time for the two Allies to agree on a number of things, but the Americans realized that they were "the new kids on the block" and had to make major concessions and learn to live with their "senior" brothers.

As mentioned earlier, there also was a third prison camp in the vicinity from which the captives were liberated on April 26th. I never talked to anyone who had been there so I don't know what kind of a camp it was.

**Good Riddance**

What had happened, shortly after we got to this camp, was the German camp authorities moved all the British prisoners (who had been in the camp before we got there) into the same tent area to which we had been assigned, so we shared what little food we had with them, since they were in worse shape than we were.

After about a week or so, rumors started circulating. The British speculated that we would remain in the camp until we were liberated by their comrades. We did have some information telling us that the Allies were getting very close. However, the Germans were determined to hang on to us as long as possible.

On April 8th we received orders to get ready to leave the camp. Our group moved from the interior of the camp to just inside the Main Gate. It was another one of those "hurry up and wait" deals. At any rate, it was good riddance to leave this place. After an hour we finally moved out. Our group now included the British, who had joined us in the camp. We were now under the jurisdiction of the Krauts of Stalag XI-B, rather than Luft IV.

The notes from Don Kremper's diary indicated that we left quite early in the morning, in a driving spring rain-storm, and that it rained all day.

Our column started marching through a wooded area. All around us were camouflaged gun positions and trucks dispersed under the trees. We got out into the open again and saw a large formation of B-17's flying overhead. We walked and walked, with five minute rest-breaks about every hour.

At this stage of our march it was not uncommon to see all types of Allied planes flying overhead, including B-17's at high altitude and P-47's, P-51's and British Spitfires, all diving and strafing, sometimes too close for comfort. Earlier, there were a few German aircraft patrolling the area--these were called "Storks". the Luftwaffe's recon arm. On one occasion, in early April, a German FW-190 flew over us at tree-top level. He was probably trying to escape from a nearby airfield, under attack by the Allies.

He hadn't flown very far, when there was a loud explosion and soon we saw a large column of black smoke in the distance...one less German fighter. By mid-April the skies were completely dominated by the Allied air power that strafed and demolished everything that moved.

We saw German ground troops digging trenches, wiring bridges with demolition charges, Tanks were lined up in the woods with gun barrels facing skyward, camouflaged by the trees. German fighter planes, that were also hidden, had their cockpits destroyed so that they could not be flown when the Allies took them over.

There were many refugee, mostly German civilians, who were trying to escape the fighting, perhaps hoping to be "rescued" by the Allies, rather than being taken over by the Russians. These were women and children, along with men too old for the German military. They were pulling wagons or carts, loaded down with their life's possessions --as well as with young children and adults who could not walk. We were not allowed to mingle with these refugees, but those of us who could speak German did exchange a few words. They were a pathetic sight, almost worse off than we were.

Our routine was the same as it had been before we got to Stalag XI-B--march a couple of days, then rest for a day. Only now we were back-tracking, staying on some of the s ame farms we had stayed at before and passing through the same towns, like Munster and Ebsdorf (where we had boarded the train for Fallingbostel).

On April 12th we had a Rest Day. This was also one of the saddest days of the march. We heard the Germans cheering and we thought the war had ended. But they were excited with the news that President Roosevelt had died. However, there were some of our guards, who did not join in the celebration. They said, they too felt sad and regarded FDR as a great leader.

I can still remember very vividly the scene when the news broke. We were sitting against a wall in the barn. The light was streaming into the barn through the open door. It was a relatively warm day. Our morale had been somewhat raised, since we knew that the war would soon be coming to an end. But this sad news put everyone in a bad frame of mind, It was indeed a tragedy since had FDR lived another three weeks he would have witnessed VE Day.

**"Horse Trading"**

The strafing by Allied planes continued and in the process a lot of farm animals were killed. The next incident, that I will relate happened as a result of this aerial activity.

One day, after one of these air raids, the German guards brought back a horse that had evidently been the victim of one of the air attacks. The Germans were willing to trade the dead horse to us for 100 cigarettes. We had been getting a fraction of a Red Cross food parcel now and then, and had saved up some of the cigarettes that came in the parcel.

We passed the hat around among ourselves, but could come up with only 50 cigarettes. So we negotiated with the German for one-half of the horse. The guard let us use his bayonet to cut up the meat. They then took their half to make a trade with some other POWs who had more cigarettes.

From April 16th through the 20th we marched near the towns of Hackendorf and Reinsdorf. Allied air activity was still high and we could hear a lot of explosions, as well as what sounded like the firing of big guns.

We were still back-tracking over many of the same areas that we had covered before. Evidently, our captors were now trying to keep us away from the British and the Americans, rather than the Russians. During this time we actually marched near the train station where we had caught the train to Fallingbostel.

The food situation now became so desperate that we tried to make soup out of the grass and the weeds that were now starting to come up. Kremper's diary said, "All indications are that the Germans must be about ready to surrender, but they are stubborn,"

The April 23rd entry in the diary reads: "There is much confusion among our captors as to what they should do with us. One minute they tell us to assemble and get ready to "hit the road", the next minute they tell us we are staying another day."

One time we were about ready to start another day's march when a Kraut soldier came riding in on a bicycle. He talked to the officer who was in charge of our group. Then there was a major "conference" among the guards and the Germans decided that we should stay on the farm another day. Truthfully, we really don't need any more exercise. We are definitely getting weaker due to lack of food. The rations that we are receiving are down to one potato per day.

However, on April 25 we marched again. We could hear gunfire, both in front of us and behind us. We figured that we must be right between the two front lines. By April 30th we were again at the Elbe River. This time they loaded us on a barge to get across. We were buzzed several times by Allied fighters, but we stayed out in the middle of the road. By this time they knew we were American POWs.

On May 1st we marched to a large farm near Hagenow. While here, we were informed that Hitler had issued an order that all prisoners-of-war should be shot, but fortunately for us his generals refused the order.

Looking back to this time in 1945, it is difficult for me to imagine what poor condition our bodies were in, considering the startvation diet that we were on; that our feet, legs and backs were still strong enough to allow us to march, if only a few miles a day. Combine this with the fact that we had not had a change of clothes in nearly 90 days; that our boots or shoes had held up for these hundreds of miles--**this was a miracle!**.

**May 2, 1945--The Day of Liberation--a Real Red Letter Day!**

There seemed to be mass confusion among our captors regarding our next move. We now could hear small arms fire very close by. Many of us were gathered around a huge manure pile near the center of the farmyard. when a personnel carrier or scout vehicle and a Jeep wheeled into the yard. This was an advance unit of the British 2nd Army. Our German guards surrendered without firing a shot, or offering any resistance. We took their rifles and smashed them against trees and corners of buildings. Then we hugged each other (even our guards)

The British soldiers did not hang around but they gave us all the food that they carried and directed us to a small town on the Elbe Canal, called Gudow where they had established a small communications outpost. We broke up into small groups of 10 or so and walked in that direction, at our own pace. We walked toward Gudow and recognized some of the area that we had passed earlier on our march.

Since then there had evidently been a battle in the area, which now looked shot up and shelled by the Allies. Homes were damaged. There were dead German soldiers along the road-side There was German military equipment burning and smoldering--also dead cattle. This was the result of the gun-fire we had heard last night and the day before.

Among the first "targets" that we had sought out was a German Army supply wagon, loaded with bread. Then we "liberated" a German cheese factory of a good share of its contents. And with these provisions, we sought out an abandoned farm house and proceeded to devour our booty. We ate and ate until we got sick.

On the next day (May 3) we walked to an intersection where German soldiers, including officers were surrendering to the British. We (there were eight of us) commandeered a German officers' car (a Mercedes). Six of us rode inside the car, one was on the roof, another on the trunk. We rode around the countryside until the fuel ran out.

On the next day (May 4) we again located a British check-point. They gave us directions to another town, back across the Elbe Canal, called Buchen, north of Lauenberg. We crossed the canal on a pontoon bridge that had been put up by the engineers. Then the British loaded us on trucks and took us to Luneberg.

In the meantime, the Germans were surrendering enmasse. They were searched, identified and locked into a fenced-in enclosure (shades of what had happened to us).. The British had taken over a German military installation and it was here that we were processed back under Allied control.

The processing involved de-lousing, a hot bath and clean clothes, which were British Army issue. We received good hot food, served on a plate! And white bread--the first we had seen in nearly nine months. Our morale was never higher.

On the next day, May 5th we were transported to another British camp and assigned to tents for a short rest. We were treated and fed very well. However, the British had no idea that there were so many American airmen who were now EX-Pows.

On May 6th we were transported to an airfield at Carlston and loaded into British C-46 transports and flown to Brussels, Belgium, to a large military installation. Here we were issued a small amount of money and a small American flag was pinned on our uniforms.

On May 7th we ate in the British Sergeants Mess Hall. The food was good and served to us *at tables--what luxury!* Now we really knew that the war was over--for us.

Today , May 8, 1945 the Germans officially surrendered. Amen! It all seemed like a bad dream with a good ending. This ended our 86-day march that covered between 6-700 miles, through all types of weather, misery, never warm, always scared.

At the beginning of our march we were a very large column with Capt. Leslie Caplain as the lone medical doctor for Lager C, with responsibility for about 2000 men on the march. This man performed miracles to keep the POWs going day after day with only a bottle of aspirin and whatever else he could scrounge. Those who had major illnesses were left behind in the towns that we passed through. Some of our fellow prisoners died along the way and were buried by the Germans. Dr. Caplain died in 1969. There was a special tribute to him in the Ex-POW Bulletin of April '92.

On May 9 we were put on a train to Namur, Belgium where we were returned to American Army control. We were again given a hot shower and issued American uniforms. Our digestive system had suffered and our stomachs had shrunk over time and we could not handle large quantities of food at a time. So we were fed a little at a time, but we ate all day long. When I finished basic training, I weighed over 170 pounds. By the time I was liberated, I had lost more than 60 pounds.

We spent a restful day at Namur on May 10th in preparation for the next day's trip. We rode on a hospital train to St. Valary, France on May 11th. From here we went by truck to Camp Lucky Strike at La Harve, France. This camp was a very large tent city, located beyond the port itself. Bomb damage to the harbor and to the city was extensive. Many ships lay at anchor in the bay. waiting to be unloaded.

We were assigned to six-man tents. German POWs were now doing all the detail camp clean-up, the KP, etc. They, and some Italian prisoners were serving the food in the chow line. They were instructed to give us only a certain (small) amount of food, considering our condition. This aggravated us because we felt that we were entitled to as much as we wanted. This resulted in some arguments and outbursts of temper The Red Cross had donut wagons and again we were limited to how many we could have, to avoid digestive problems. Some time earlier, some ex-prisoners had become very ill from over-eating. We were encouraged to drink lots of egg nog, eat lightly and relax.

**This prisoner-of-war is shown after he was liberated by the U.S. Army forces. He was a German prisoner from about Dec. 15th to May 5th--only 4-1/2 months. Most of us lost anywhere from 60 to 90 pounds due to lack of food and the forced march of 86 days over northern Germany from Feb. 6th to May 2nd.**

# Liberated G. I.s Are Sped Home By Eisenhower

## He Tells Them of Order to Load Ships to the Full, Bunking Men in Shifts

By Charles F. Kiley

*"Stars and Stripes" staff writer*

ST. VALERY EN CAUS, France, May 22.—General Dwight D. Eisenhower told more than 40,000 liberated American prisoners of war today that he is personally doing everything to get them home as soon as possible.

The supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, addressing his audience over a hastily constructed public-address system from a position atop a truck, said he had issued orders for ships carrying former prisoners to the United States to be loaded to capacity, even to the extent of having men share individual beds and sleep in shifts, in order to fulfill their wishes of getting home soon, "even if we have to swim."

The repatriates—about 40,000 enlisted men and 3,500 officers—were captured from two months to two years ago in Sicily, Italy, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. Some have been awaiting shipment home for three weeks, others for only a few days. They represent the 8th, 9th and 15th Air Forces and practically every combat ground force that was in action.

In his address Eisenhower said he felt sure there wasn't one among them "who has forgotten we are still at war with Japan."

"We are doing everything in our power to get you out of here and back home to see your families," he added. "But there is a great deal of activity now in progress to take care of the war with Japan, and if we can't supply the shipping for you immediately, it is only because we must also think of your fellow-soldiers fighting in the Pacific."

Before he spoke he was given a thunderous ovation by the soldiers and when a second roar went up after the general motioned for quiet, he said: "Say, I'm just a G. I., not a movie star."



# Army Speeding Return of Men Nazis Captured

## 22,000 Freed Soldiers To Be in U.S. by May 31; Air and Ship Transport Used

WASHINGTON, May 22 (AP).—Some 22,000 American soldiers liberated from Germany in the closing stages of the war will be back in the United States by the end of this month.

Others of the 100,000 held by Germany as the collapse came will be sent home as swiftly as possible, the War Deartment says. The men are coming back both by air transport and ships.

Colonel Albert L. Warner, War Intelligence Division chief, explains that many of the men were released in camps deep in Germany and others in areas into which the Russians advanced.

They are being moved as rapidly as possible to American camps where medical attention, good food and part of their back pay await them.

"The limitations on transport and communication facilities inside Germany make for delay in hearing about some of the liberated men," Warner says. "Every facility at the War Department's command is being used to expedite reports."

The departmnet said it had established a special repatriation section of the casualty branch to keep families informed of the movements of liberated prisoners, their return to their outfits or news of their expected arrival. In ports here, telegraph and telephone facilities are provided to expedite news of homecomings.

## *An Answered Prayer . . .*

**The days following our liberation were long-awaited, exciting and wonderful. After being a captive for nine months, *freedom* was something you almost forgot about. But it doesn't take a long time to get used to it again.**

**After turning ourselves in to British control, we traveled by truck, train and air, from Buchen, Germany to Brussels and Namur, Belgium, to Valary France and then to the ex-POW camp called "Lucky Strike" at Le Harve.**

**Here, along with thousands of other former POWs we were processed, rehabilitated and loaded on ships for the five-day trip back across the Atlantic to homes and families we had not seen in a *long, long* time--and sometimes wondered if we would ever see again.**

## Eat, Relax and Wait

Now all we had to do was wait for our ship to be ready to load for the U.S. During this time Gen. Eisenhower made a visit to Camp Lucky Strike and promised that he would do everything he could to get us on our way home as soon as possible.

On May 21st we were reassigned to different tents based on our closest home state-side port. This arrangement was designed to speed up the loading of the ships. By this time the egg nog was starting to work We were regaining some of the weight we had lost. We had been drinking six to eight glasses of egg nog a day.

On June 1st we left Le Harve on an American ship named Le Juene for our 5-dy crossing of the Atlantic . What a contrast this was to our trip over more than a year earlier.. We had American style food, we were treated royally--all we had to do was eat, read, watch movies, play cards or sun-bathe on the deck--and enjoy the trip. There were no storms or zig-zagging to avoid enemy submarines.

We arrived in New York harbor on June 6th-exactly one year after D-Day. It was difficult to believe what actually happened during that time. As we passed by the Statue of Liberty it was a very emotional time. What a sight What a welcome home! There were fire boats shooting water up into the air, barges with bands playing, people on shore cheering, cars were blowing their horns--not a dry eye on the ship.

After docking on June 7th, we boarded a train for the short trip to Camp Shanks for processing. We were issued summer uniforms, given some booster shots and some ration coupons. We were amazed at the need for ration coupons since we had no idea that civilian in the U.S. were on rationing. Before boarding a train for Ft. Sheridan, we were issued some money, travel orders and 60-day furlough papers.

I rode to Appleton on the train with another POW named Jones. from Marsshfield. I had never met him before. It turns out that he became the State Commander of the Ex-POW organization a few years ago.

I can't remember who picked me up at the train station, but I do recall that Everett Janke was also home on furlough at the time (he was awaiting reassignment to the Pacific). This, of course, was one of the most memorable times of my life. It was just over-whelming.to be back home, in familiar surroundings with those whom you missed for such a long time and wondered if you would ever see them again.

It took a while to adjust to the civilian life style. but it was fun. There were some embarrassing moments when I would slip back into Kriegie language at a dinner table but everyone was very tolerant.

I thank God every day for sparing my life as many times as he did and for giving me the faith and the hope that I survived this ordeal...that I was able to make a complete recovery in spite of what happened. **Amen.**

## *EPILOGUE*

While the memories of many of the bad parts of my POW experience have faded with time, there are some carry-overs that will never be forgotten and have become an integral part of my life, even after almost 60 years.

Here is one simple, maybe a little exaggerated example: No matter whether I eat at home or in a restaurant, I catch myself scratching the plate, determined to get that *last* crumb or seed--or that *last* drop of milk from the bottom of the cereal bowl. I catch myself eating too much because I don't want to leave anything on my plate to be returned to the garbage can--because there may be none tomorrow.

It annoys me to see someone in a restaurant leave a sizeable amount of food on their plate without asking for a "doggie" bag. The average serving of food, in a restaurant, for one meal, is a lot more than we would receive for *several* days.

When I think of how fragile life really is, how many times I escaped death by a few feet, or maybe even inches--when others, who were only a few feet from me, were killed--I thank God every day for sparing my life as many times as He did.

As I write this I am 79 years old and in better health than others who did not go through the same ordeal that I did. I have lived a very full life, including a college education (thanks to the GI bill). I married a wonderful wife, who has supported and encouraged me through my battles with post-war ailments, both physical and psychological and gave us two daughters, whose families are very close to us. Thanks, God for the recent heart transplant for our son-in-law, Bill Thomas.

Because of Melva's dad's generosity (and being in the lumber business) we were able to build three houses during the course of 13 years, so that we always lived in a new home after moving back to Brillion in 1951. Both Melva and I enjoyed our working years at Brillion Iron Works and spent many years working in the same department.

Both of us took early retirement at the same time in 1983 and have enjoyed traveling to many parts of our country and other areas. We live comfortably in our home and are still independently able to take care of ourselves and our property.

We are most fortunate to live in a small, but peaceful community, within easy driving distance of larger cities. Our youngest daughter, Nancy and her family live within a mile of our house and are always accessible and willing to help if we need them. We live in a quiet, friendly neighborhood where everyone sort of looks out for one another. Our oldest daughter, Toni and her family live in a suburb of Atlanta. While we are separated by a 1000 miles geographically, we still keep close by weekly phone conversations. For all of this we thank the Good Shepherd, who brought me through the *Valley of the Shadow of Death* and made good on His promise that "goodness and mercy would follow us all the days of our lives".

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# Addendum

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**Among those who kept encouraging me to write this history was an old friend of mine, Everett "Bud" Janke, from way back when, who now lives in Glenview, Il. We were neighbors while in high school and lived on Main Street and spent a furlough together in June-July of 1945. About three years ago, I told him that I was in the process of writing my military history. He encouraged me to keep going. In April of 2002, while we were in Florida, I sent him a copy of the first 50 pages for his perusal.**

**He, in turn sent it to his son, Dean, who has had experience in editing. His corrections in grammar and punctuation were truly appreciated. His observations and comments are acknowledged and accepted as he viewed the "history" from a detached viewpoint.**

**When I started writing this history, it was from a very personal standpoint. not necessarily designed for any "outside consumption". My intention was to leave some king of a personal record for posterity--namely, to our grandchildren .**

**However, since the "word got out" that I was doing this, I had any number of people ask if they could see a copy of this narrative. Also, since beginning this "history", I received a copy of a book written by our navigator, Bob Hilliard. He had a much more detailed recollection of what happened while we were flying our combat missions. He provided the actual list of those missions and some notes that he had made regarding each one.**

**As a result, there have been some changes in the original script, which have made it more complete and authentic. At the same time I have tried to stick with a lot of my personal memories as I saw the events actully happen.**

**Again, I thank Dean Janke for his editorial contribution. The questions he raised were of a nature that they can best be answered by some additional remarks that follow this page. Also I want to thank my fellow POWs who put their own experiences in written form or on tape.**

**For those of you, fellow POWs, who read this, and who may have shared similar experiences, I know that each of us had different reactions to different situations. However, we shared the same feelings of loneliness, frustration, hunger, thirst, pain and despair. We will always carry that feeling of camaraderie throughout our lives.**

*Questions and Answers*

**In his editing of this History, Dean Janke posed several questions, the answers to which I had overlooked. I am using this space to respond to Dean's inquiries and also to provide some additional information to any reader of this narrative.**

***Q. What was it like being of German ancestry. living in an almost exclusively German town (Brillion) and going off to fight Germany?***

**A. When I learned that we were going to Europe to join the 8th Air Force, it never dawned on me that this was the land of my ancestors. The enemy (the Nazis) represented an entirely different culture that what we knew as "Gernans" in our small community. Also, by this time (1943) Brillion had changed considerably. There were other nationalities and we were another generation--we had become "Americanized".**

**I did, however take advantage of my knowledge of the German language, which I learned from my parents. In fact, this ability to speak German probably saved my life.**

**When I landed in the lake, after parachuting from our burning plane, and the Germans came to pick me up, I gave my best "sales pitch" to them in *German.* I'm sure that they didn't expect this from an American "Luft Gangster". (This was an uncomplimentary name, among others, that was given American airmen). My captors did pull me out of the water, into their boat, despite the objections of one of their group, who tried to spear me with a pitch fork.**

**However, later, when I served as an interpreter, I often got into trouble when I had to defend some of the mischievous actions of my fellow POWs. But, it did continue to serve as an advantage, since I could understand (to a point) what the Germans were saying when they were within earshot. Also, I had a limited knowledge of printed German, and could decipher someof the German newspapers, if not the military jargon.**

***Q. Why were you excited about transferring to the Air Force, from the Signal Corps in the Army? Was the Air Force more glamorous, or did you always want to fly?***

**A. Surprisingly, when I was inducted into service, I wanted to get into the Marines. But, because I was a draftee, I didn't have much choice, so they put me in the Army. In my mind, the Army was rated as the "the last resort". As a member of the Signal Corps, attached to the Army, I couldn't visualize myself climbing telephone poles while under fire from the enemy.**

**I had no particular interest in flying, but given the option, the Air Force was better than the Army.**

*Q. Was there fear/anxiety when you flew or were you still "invincible"?*

**That's a hard question to answer. I knew that there were many warnings--that each mission was a life and death struggle. This was evident from the empty beds in our barracks after a mission, to observing the serious damage of many of the planes that came back from a raid, to watching other planes go down, on fire or exploding alongside of us, while we were on a bomb run. We were well aware of the hazards, but it was always *"the other guy"*. I don't think there was anyone who wasn't scared and there were few who didn't pray that God would help us to get through this *one more time.***

**It is rather difficult to describe this feeling to anyone who has never been in a comparable situation. I guess we felt that our cause was just and that eventually we would win . But as individuals, we were far from invincible.**

*Q. How often did you fly?*

**A. There were many factors that determined how often we would fly. I don't know if there was ever a formula or pre-determined schedule. So much depended upon the weather or the hazards of a mission.**

**During the tour of my original crew, we flew our first mission on June 6th and they ended up with their last mission on September 7th--a period of approximately 93 days. This would mean we flew about once every three days. However, there was one period in June when we flew five missions on five consecutive days. One time we had the same target (Munich) three days in a row. In mid-August (after I was shot down with the other crew) there was a gap of 16 days between missions. So it was rather erratic.**

*Q. (in reference to the two airmen who were hanged from a tree near the Berlin Railroad Station) Were these men executed?)*

**A. We had no way of knowing what actually happened. No doubt, this shocking scene was repeated many times during the war. This typified the outpouring of the extreme hatred and wrath that was harbored by the younger German population. concentrated against the flyers who bombed their factories, airfields and homes.**

**While the German military may not have been immediately involved in this type of atrocity, they certainly did nothing to discourage it. In my personal experiences, there were many times when our German guards actually protected us from the irate citizenry, especially from the Hitler Youth. Most of the time these guards were elderly, or no longer fit for combat and they were not imbued with the Nazi philosophy. And since Berlin was the capital of Germany, it probably housed a lot more of Hitler's followers, who were outraged at what was happening to their country since the Fuehrer had said "no bombs will ever fall on the Homeland".**

**Don Kremper's Diary of the Forced March**
**Feb. 6 through May 2. 1945**

**Feb. 6, 1945**--The Germans called us out extra early, completed a head count and told us to be ready to march in one hour. The guards marched us out of our compound to a warehouse in the Vorlager where each of us received a full Red Cross food parcel. This issue was the most food we had seen since we came to Luft IV. The guards formed us up and we started down the road. On this, our first day on the road, we marched 8.6 miles to Zarne Franz, to a farm, and slept in a barn.
**Feb. 7**--Marched 16 miles to Stolzenberg--quite cold
**Feb, 8**--Marched 12.4 miles to Kolberg on the Baltic Sea
**Feb, 9**--Day if rest. Confined to farm most of day. Snow.
**Feb. 10**--Marched 20 miles to Greifenberg. Slept in barn
**Feb. 11**--Marched 13 miles to Carmen
**Feb. 12**--Rest day. Group is split up and placed on farms in the area
**Feb. 13**--Marched 13 miles to Dobberpuhl
**Feb. 14**--Marched 24 miles, part of it in a sleet storm, to Pritter, near Wollen. Slept in open field, no barn available. No fires allowed due to Allied bombing. Tried sleeping under pine tree, but water kept dripping, so moved to open area. Ate last of D-bar, felt very low.
**Feb, 15**--Sunny when I woke up. Thought I was in heaven. Marched 14 miles to Wolllen on Stettin Bay. Boarded ferry to cross over to Zirchow.
**Feb, 16**--Marched 13 miles to farm at Usedom
**Feb, 17**--Marched 17 miles to farm near Murchin
**Feb, 18**--Marched 18 miles to farm near Gutskow
**Feb, 19**--Marched 3 miles to farm outside of Gutskow
**Feb, 20**--Rest on farm. Allowed to build fires for cooking. Farner issued ration of potatoes--one or two, quite small. Gernans issued us a spoon and knife, no fork.
**Feb, 21**--Marched 11 miles to Gultz--another farm and barn
**Feb. 22**--Rest day. We were issued 1/3 Red Cross food parcel
**Feb, 23**--Marched 13 miles out and back. Many POWs suffered from the cold and dysentery, as well as blisters on their feet. We got a farm wagon on which those who couldn't walk were loaded. We took turns in pulling the wagon. Those who were very sick were left in the town that we passed through .
**Feb. 24**--Rest day . Washed clothes and ourselves in small creek that passed through farm. Temperature was below freezing. We tried to catch fish with our bare hands, but no luck. Found potato cellar and shared our "find" with others

**(Several days of diary are missing here)**

**Mar. 2**--Marched 16 miles to Alten-Treptow
**Mar. 3**--Marched 20 miles to Luplow, Gr. Gielitz and Waren
**Mar. 4**--Marched 19 miles to Karow
**Mar. 5**--Marched 8 miles to Plav area
**Mar. 6**--Marched 9 miles to Lubz
**Mar. 7**--Rest day. Issued 1/2 food parcel. Our morale improved somewhat. Thank God that the Red Cross was able to get through to us on this march.

**Mar. 8**--Marched 7.5 miles to Parchhim
**Mar. 9**--Marched 12,5 miles to Neustadt
**Mar. 10**--Marched 9.5 miles to Grabow
**Mar. 11**--Marched 1.2 miles to Eldens area
**Mar. 12**--Marched 5 miles to Dmitz, crossed the Elbe River and continued to a farm in the Metzingen area
**Mar. 13-18**--Rest period. During this time the Germans issued us a daily ration of cooked rice, two boiled potatoes and 1/10th of a loaf of bread. Before we left we also received 1/4 of a Red Cross parcel, per person.
**Mar. 19**--Marched 9 miles to Himbergen
**Mar. 20**--Marched 11 miles to Bad Bevenson
**Mar. 21**--Marched 16 miles
**Mar. 22**--Marched 14 miles
**Mar. 23**--Rest
**Mar. 24**--Marched 11 miles
**Mar. 25**--Marched 10 miles
**Mar. 26 and 27**--Rest period. Time was spent in various farms in the Delzen area.. Many displaced Polish people were forced to work on these farms. Some tried to get food to us but the German guards chased them away.
**Mar. 28**--Marched 8 miles to Ebstorf, to a railroad siding. The Germans packed 60 POWs in each box car and locked the doors. No room to sit down-- had to stand. No food or water was issued.
**Mar. 29**--On the train. Stop-and-go all day and night.
**Mar. 30**--On the train
**Mar. 31**--Soltau and Fallingbostel.. Got off the train. Some were sent to Stalag XI-B; others to Stalag 357, which was a very large prison camp. Some were assigned to an old theatre building. Camp consisted of many barracks and tents which housed Russians, Polish, Belgian, British, a few Italians, Dutch and Serbs--many worked on nearby farms as forced labor. Many POWs contracted serious cases of dysentery. The only "medication" for this problem was charcoal from burned-out fires.
**Apr. 1-7**--At Falllingbostel. On April 4 we were issued 1/6th of a Red Cross food parcel; on April 5 we were issued a half parcel. This was the only food we received at this camp. Some of our group were marched south to another camp from which they were liberated on April 26.
**Apr. 8**--Marched out before dawn in rain; rained all day. Ended up on a farm near Munster. (mileage was no longer recorded after this)
**Apr. 9**--Rest on farm
**Apr. 10**--Marched to Ebstorf--same area where we had boarded train.
**Apr. 11**--Marched to Bad Bevenson area--the same farm we stayed at on March 20.
**Apr. 12**--Stayed on farm Germans were jubilant when they heard that Pres. Roosevelt had died. We liberated chickens from hen-house attached to the barn.
**Apr. 13 & 14**--Marched to Luneberg area
**Apr. 15**--Rest on farm. Allied fighter planes were out strafing everything that moves, including us.
**Apr. 16**--Marched all day to farm near Hohndorf

**Apr. 17**--Marched all day to farm near Reinsdorf
**Apr. 18**--Stayed at the farm all day. Food was in very short supply. Germans gave us one or two potatoes each day
**Apr. 19**--We are back-tracking, heading northeast. We marched down back roads, through fields and woods. Allied air activity is increasing every day . Are we getting close to the front lines?
**Apr. 20**--Marched through more woods to farm in Reinsdorf-Neetze area/
**Apr. 21**--Marched to another farm in the area. Food situation is desperate. Farmers here are in bad shape; any extra food goes to the military. We received one potato and a turnip as a ration for the last three days. We have tried to make soup out of grass.
**Apr. 22**--Rested at farm. Today the Krauts gave us two boiled potatoes per person. How we wish we had some of the salt that was in the Red Cross packages.
**Apr. 23**--Stayed at farm another day. No food ration. It seems like the Germans don't know what to do with us. We are really getting weak from lack of food. We really don't need any more exercise.
**Apr. 24**--Stayed at farm another day. We scouted through some of the out-building and found some oats that was saved for feeding the cattle. We cooked this into oatmeal--not bad, but would have been better with cream and sugar.
**Apr. 25**--Marched again today. We can hear gun-fire both ahead of us and behind us, so we must be moving between the front lines.
**Apr. 26**--Another day of marching, but it seems like we are going in circles.
**Apr. 27-29**--Stayed at farm near Elbe River
**Apr. 30**--Marched to Bleckhede and crossed the Elbe River on a barge. We were buzzed by Allied fighter planes but stayed in the middle of the road and waved at the pilot. He made another pass at us and wiggled his wings, indicating that he recognized us as Americans. Our guards ran to the ditches and hid on side of the road. Gunfire is coming closer.
**May 1**--Marched to a very large farm near Hagenow. While here we were informed that Hitler had issued an order that all POWs should be shot. Fortunately for us, his generals refused to carry out the order. It really feels like the war is about to end.
**May 2**--There is an exceptional amount of confusion, almost excitement among our German captors this morning. There have been no indications whether we will stay here another day or move on. But with all the gunfire we heard last night--both small arms and heavier stuff, it seems like we must be getting close to the end. Many of us have always started the day with the expression, "What a wonderful day for the war to end ". Maybe this is it!

***This is where the diary ends. This was the day of liberation. After nearly nine months of confinement, I was once again free. The details of this day and what followed are included in the history narration that precedes this section. Also, there are more details on various stops that we made on the march, as well as incidents that are worth recounting.***

## *Combat Missions*

(from Bob Hilliard's book)

| *Mission Number* | *Date* | *Target* | *Comments* |
|---|---|---|---|
| --- | 6-05-44 | Hamburg, Ger. | Flew as spare--not needed |
| No. 1 | 6-06-44 | Caen, Fr. RR bridge | D-Day, cloudy, bombs not dropped, 4:50 hrs. flying time |
| No. 2 | 6-08-44 | Etampes, Fr. near Paris | RR yard, undercast, bombs not dropped, light flak, navigator's compass shot out, many holes in our plane, three planes from our Group shot down, 6:10 hrs. |
| No, 3 | 6--10-44 | Gael, FR LWF air field | 38-100 lb. bombs at 100 ft. intervals, good results, light flak. 5:30 hrs. |
| No. 4 | 6-14-44 | Le Bourget, FR outskirts of Paris | 18-250 lb. bombs, at 25,000 ft., good results, moderate flak, many holes in plane, 5 :30 hrs/ |
| No. 5 | 6-17-44 | Monchy Briton, Fr. | 12-500 lb. bombs dropped by radar, results not observed, no losses, 5:30 hrs. |
| --- | 6-18-44 | Flew as a spare | This is the second time we flew as a spare. The target (again) was Hamburg |
| No. 6 | 6-19-44 | Landes-de-Bussac near Bordeaux | Airfield. Thick clouds to 30,500 ft., bombs not dropped, no flak but pilot said weather was worse than flak. 5:35 hrs. |
| No. 7 | 6-20-44 | Hamburg, Ger. oil refinery, storage tanks | 10-500 lb. bombs, good results, smoke rising to 15,000 ft., very heavy flak, many planes lost, No. 3 engine and prop lost, 7:45 hrs. |
| No.. 8 | 6-21-44 | Berlin, Ger. govt.. buildings Frederick-strasse RR yards | Six 500 lb. GP and four 500 lb. incendiaries. good visibility. thick smoke from heavy flak, our Sqdn. led 8th Air Force, we flew #2 from Gen. Lacey, over 1000 planes, fighters attacked Group behind us, many holes in our ship, fires still burning at Hamburg, 8:45 hrs/ |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| No. 9 | 6-23-44 | Abbeyville, Fr. buzz bomb site | Six 1,000 lb. bombs at 20,000 ft., results fair, moderate flak, holes in wings, 5:10 hrs. |
| No. 10 | 6-24-44 | Crepy, Fr. buzz bomb launch site | We were Deputy Lead Group leader, cloudy, couldn't see target so went to secondary target--St. Pol RR yard, poor results |
| No. 11 | 6-25-44 | Tolouse, FR airfield | 10-500 lb. bombs, at 25,000 ft., moderate flak, nearly ran out of fuel. 10:40 hrs/ |
| No. 12 | 7-04-44 | Samour, Fr. RR bridge over Loire Loisre River | Thick undercast, circled target several times with bomb bay doors open, ran low on fuel, left formation, got lost, sighted emergency landing field, but was fogged in, pilot gave order to jump and send ship with bombs out to sea. Found RAF landing strip, were surrounded by British soldiers. 7:10 h |
| No. 13 | 7-06-44 | St. Aubin, Fr. near Dieppe, buzz bomb site | 12-500 lb. bombs, results poor, moderate flak, several holes in ship, 5 hrs. |
| No. 14 | 7-08-44 | St, Pol, Fr. S. of Dunkirk, buzz bomb site | 12-500 lb. bombs, fair results, no flak at target, light flak at Dunkirk, 4:30 hrs. |
| — | 7-11-44 | Munich, Ger. | Aborted during assembly, No. l engine lost oil pressure |
| No. 15 | 7-14-44 | Munich, Ger. | 10-500 lb. bombs, 27000 ft., solid undercast, bombed by radar. jet engine factory, heavy flak, high priority to deny Ger. use of jets. two ships lost from our Group, 9;25 hrs. |
| No. 16 | 7-15-44 | Munich, Ger. | Repeat of yesterday's mission, 10-500 lb. bombs--six of them delayed action fuses, bombed by radar, fighters attacked Groups ahead & behind us. saw three FWs and three Forts go down within 30 seconds, 9:40 hrs/ |
| No. 17 | 7-18-44 | Peenemunde, Ger., Exp. Rocket Dev. | 10-500 lb. bombs, excellent results, came in over North Sea and Kiel, moderate flak, no holes, 8:45 hrs. |

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|---|---|---|---|
| No. 18 | 7-20-44 | Leipzig, Ger. | 12-500 lb. bombs, dropped by radar, heavy flak, many holes in our ship, fighters attacked Group ahead of us, 8:15 hrs. |
| No. 19 | 7-24-44 | Front lines near St. Lo, Fr. in support of our troops | 40 bombs, each with 120 anti-personnel fragmentation bombs, we were only Group to b bomb due to low clouds, 14000 ft., 5:10 hrs. |
| No .20 | 7-25-44 | Near St. Lo, Fr. | 35 bombs each with 120anti-personnel fragmentation bombs, excellent results. our troops advanced and broke out of the beach-head, 5:10 hrs. |
| No. 21 | 7-29-44 | Meresburg, Ger., synthetic oil refinery | We were Deputy Group leader, 12-500 lb. bombs, 26,000 ft., accurate flak, ship right behind us blown up, two othrs lost from our Group, fighters a attacked. tail gunner saw 10 ME-109's. one shot down, 7:45 hrs. |
| No. 22 | 7-31-44 | Munich, Ger., jet engine factory | Deputy Group leader. New crew flying on our left dropped their bombs three minutes early and rest of Group. except leader and us dropped when he did, ours were on target, heavy flak, 9:00 hrs. |
| No. 23 | 8-01-44 | Chateaudun, Fr. airfield | 20-250 lb. bombs, salvo on intersection of two runways, good results, no flak over target but accurate flak over Caen, was hit but not serious 6:30 hrs. |
| No. 24 | 8-08-44 | Conde, Fr. | 38-100 lb. fragmentation bombs, over target at 12,000 ft., too low for bombing run, very accurate flak, Forts going down all around us, many holes in our ship, 5:50 hrs. |
| No. 25 | 8-09-44 | Eisenborn, Ger., 25 mi. SW of Aachen | Target of Opportunity, started out for Munich, but weather stopped us, bombed factory, lost two planes, 6:00 hrs. |
| No. 26 | 8-26-44 | Antwerp, Belgium- | 12-500 lb. bombs, poor visibility. After two runs over target--hydrogen peroxide factoey (fuel for buzz bombs)--brought bombs back to base, moderate flak, 5:10 hrs. |

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|---|---|---|---|
| **No. 27** | **9-05-44** | **Ludwigs-haven, Ger.** | **Target: I. G. Farbin Chemical Plant, 12-500 lb. bombs, 27.000 ft., good results, heavy flak, planes blowing up all around us, 8:15 hrs.** |
| **No. 28** | **9-09-44** | **Ludwigs-haven, Ger.** | **Same target as on previous mission (I. G. Farbin Chem Chemical Plant), couldn't see factory, so bombed center of Manheim. Plane on our left got direct hit and went down in flames, plus two others, 7:35 hrs.** |
| **No. 29** | **9-10-44** | **Gegg-nau, Ger. (20 mi. SW of Karlsruh)** | **Navigator flew with Col. Wood, Deputy Wing Leader, good results, light flak, but compass shot out, 7:30 hrs.** |
| **No. 30** | **9-11-44** | **Meres-burg, Ger.** | **Synthetic oil plant, Deputy Group Leader, 10-500 lb. bombs. moderate flal over Meresburg. Couldn't see target so bombed Eisenach. Accurate flak from barges on Rhine River, 8:15 hrs.** |
| **No. 31** | **9-17-44** | **Cleve, Ger.** | **Target: German tanks on front lines of Arnheim and Nizmegan. Deputy Squadron Leader, 24-260 lb. bombs, excellent results, light flak. Saw thousands of planes pulling gliders for parachute attack, 5:15 hrs/** |
| **No. 32** | **9-19-44** | **Soest, RR yards** | **Came out of clouds five minutes before target, bombed visually, good results, then back into clouds. Weather closed our base and so landed at Hadwick (B-24 base). stayed over night, 6:00 hrs.** |
| **No. 33** | **9-22-44** | **Kassel, Ger.** | **Target: armory and arsenal, Deputy Group Leader, 12-500 lb. bombs, bombed center of town by radar, moderate flak, 8:00 hrs.** |
| **No. 34** | **9-27--44** | **Colo-gne, Ger.** | **Target: tank factory. Deputy Group Leader, 12-500 lb. bombs. Lead ship received direct hit in waist immediately after bomb run, guns and gunner fell out. We took lead and brought the Group home, only to find out that the damaged plane had already returned to our base. CO said this was the worst damaged ship to return to our base. Navigator on that plane was class-mate of our navigator, Bob Hilliard. Length of mission was 6:40 hrs. This was Bob's last mission for a combined total combat time of 231 hrs. 45 min.** |

***"Umbriago's" crew flew one more mission--to Magdebrug, Ger. on Sept. 23rd.***

## Missions That I Remember

After reading the record of our combat missions, as kept by our navigator, Bob Hilliard, some of the details started coming back to me. Because there was such a large interval between the time that I flew my last mission to when I got back home and started thinking more about the missions I flew, more than 10 months had passed. After August 6th. as a POW. I was more concerned about survival than remembering details of the missions I had flown with our crew..

I had forgotten all about the mission on June 5th, which was as a "spare". To me it seemed like our first mission was on D-Day, June 6th. Neither did I remember that we flew as a spare a second time on June 18th, or that we had "aborted" a mission on July 11th due to low oil pressure on one of our plane's engines, during assembly over England. Our target for that day was Munich .

Munich was the target for three days in a row, so we did get to go there on our 15th and 16th missions--and again on our 22nd mission on July 31st. Munich had a lot of military targets, including a jet engine factory. This was always a long "haul"--more than 9 hours. The missions that I remember well were No. 1 on D-Day, No. 7 to Hamburg, No. 8 to Berlin and No. 11 to Toulouse, FR (that took almost 11 hours) and No. 17 to Peenemunde, the German Experimental Rocket Development Station.

The roughest targets, with the heaviest flak and the most fighters were those to the major Germany cities and to targets in the Ruhr Valley. The most memorable mission was No. 12 to Samour, FR, when we ran low on fuel on our return and had to make an emergency landing at an RAF base in England.

Bob Hilliard flew a total of 34 missions, completing his tour on September 27th. On his 29th mission he flew with a different crew. This brings up the question, "Did we really have a verbal pact among ourselves never to fly with another crew?". Bob admits that he flew that mission with a great deal of trepidation after my fatal mission on August 6th, while flying with a different crew..

## When You Least Expect It

Usually. after we left the target area, and got away from the flak, we started to relax, as best we could. On one of our early missions, we were returning to our base, flying over Occupied France. We had peeled off our flak suits and had removed our steel helmets. Some of the crew members had come to the radio room to listen to music over the Armed Forces Network radio.

All of a sudden someone yelled over the intercom, "Flak at 12 o'clock low". And sure enough, here came a barrage of the black stuff, poking some more holes in our wings. What had happened, was that during the time we were dropping our bombs, the Jerries brought in some flak guns, on railroad cars, to an area where there had not been any anti-aircraft earlier. Fortunately, we suffered no serious damage, but we sure were more alert on our way home for the next several missions.

## More Details about Our Combat Missions

For security reasons, we were not supposed to keep any record of our combat missions. However, after the war I discovered that our co-pilot, Carl Rogge had kept such a list and gave me a copy at one of our get-togethers. Also, our navigator, Bob Hilliard included such a list in his book. The actual record is found on the pages following this copy.

## American Vs. British Strategy

The chief objective of the American Bomber Command was to destroy the enemy's ability to wage war with daylight precision raids. Oil refineries, ball bearing plants and aircraft factories were high on the priority list. A second objective was to disrupt enemy activity by destroying the marshaling yards, bridges, airfields and rocket launching sites. A third objective was to provide direct support for our ground forces.

Our British allies differed strongly with us on the philosophy of how to conduct the air war. They insisted that daylight bombing was too dangerous for the attacking bombers and that massive bombing of cities, at night was best,

Some German accounts have acknowledged that American bombing was critical, especially to their oil industry. The British had bombers to suit their purpose. The big Lancasters and Halifaxes could carry twice the bomb load of our B-17's and 24's, however, they could not reach high altitudes, They flew singly, at night rather than in Groups like we did in daylight. In this way the Germans were pounded day and night.

American planes had two distinctive features that enabled us to do what the British couldn't do--(1) super-charged engines that enabled us to fly at high altitudes and (2) the highly accurate Norden bombsight.

It is to the credit of the Allied Genera Command, and especially to Gen. Eisenhower, that national rivalries were not allowed to interfere with the efficient prosecution of the war, not only in the air, but also on the ground.

## Our First Combat "Attempt Was as a "Spare".

Fir sine reason, I do not remember our first mission, on June 5th. We flew as a "spare". This meant that you went through the regular routine of briefings, bomb loading, and assembly with the formation over England. You accompanied the flight over the English Channel or the North Sea. If there were any planes that "aborted" (returned to the base for mechanical, or other reasons, the spare would then take its place. If none of the planes aborted, the spare would return to the base. The mission would be over/

Naturally , we were greatly disappointed, since we were all excited and psychologically prepared to experience what it was like in combat. Really, it was doubly disappointing, since we did not received credit for this mission toward our "tour"..

Among other things, I also forgot that we flew again as a spare on June 18th, or that we had "aborted" a mission on July 11th due to a mechanical problem--low oil pressure on one of our plane's engines while we were assmbling over England. The target for that day was Munich, Germany, We did have two additional opportunities to fly there on two successive days--July 12th and 13th--and again on July 31. Munich had a lot of potential targets, including aircraft factories.

**Rumors about the Invasion**

Ever since we arrived in England, but especially during the month of May (1944), there were rumors that there would be an invasion of Europe sometime in the near future. The Russians had been putting a lot of pressure on the Allies for some relief from the German attack on the Eastern Front. The Germans were aware of this possibility, but did not know of the time or the place where the Allies would strike.,

It was a well-kept secret, especially since there would be such a massive number of personnel and equipment involved and a relatively small area in which to assemble the huge force that was needed for this operation to be successful. The weather played a vital part in the overall plan. Accurate weather forecasting was still in its infancy and British weather was among the most unpredictable. The final decision was made by Eisenhower.

Quite naturally, we were hopeful that we would be a part of this important event, especially after the disappointment of June 5th.

**Finally, It's Our Turn**

So, it was a multiple thrill when we learned that our first combat mission would be a part of D-Day, when more than 11,000 other planes would fill the air in support of the Invasion . Everyone in the briefing room was "charged up", anxious to learn what part we were to play .

But once again, we were somewhat disappointed when we learned that our mission was to be a relatively minor one--to Cain, a small city in France, where our target was a railroad bridge that might be used by the Germans to rush troops and supplies to the Normandy beach-head.

Shortly after dawn our Group joined a long line of bombers, headed for France. Because of the large number of planes that would fill the air this morning, we were ordered to fly a large one-way circle (counter-clockwise), south toward the battle area, then west over the Channel Islands of Guernsey and Jersey. If we couldn't see our target, we were not allowed to make a second pass (as we often did on other missions), but to bring the bombs back home.

What a sight we saw as we neared the French Coast. Hundred of ships, large and small, heading for the Invasions site. Some experts had disputed this plan of attack and had advised that we come from Africa and southern France, instead of at Normandy. Included in this group was none other than the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Despite these alternative suggestions, our Military Chief of Staff, Gen. George Marshall and Pres. Roosevelt insisted on the "direct" approach.

On D-Day the sky was filled with clumps of planes as far as the eye could see. As we neared our target, clouds obscured our view. A few anti-aircraft shells reached up toward us. There was no Luftwaffe. Our fighters had complete control of the sky over the battle zone. Experts say that the invasion may have failed without air sup

Sadly, we passed over the target without dropping our bombs and obediently returned to our base. There was sporadic shelling from the two Channel Islands but nothing more. Our mission had been a *failure,* as far as destroying the bridge, but it was an experience we will never forget--the memory of that sight over the English Channel (to which we had a ring-side seat) has been photographically recorded innumerable times, but to see it first-hand, will be forever deeply engraved in our minds.

**"Special" Missions**

Of the many missions that we flew, I have singled out a few that I would consider "special", for one reason or another. Reference has already been made to Mission No. 1 on D-Day, which is rated just as the number indicates. These are also "special":

**Mission No. 4--6/12/44 (Le Bourget, Fr.)**

On this mission we bombed the airfield, which was on the outskirts of Paris. We watched three of our 24 planes go down. At that time the "tour" was 25 missions, and simple arithmetic showed that if this loss rate continued, we probably would be shot down before our tour was over.

During the first few missions we flew in airplanes "borrowed" from other crews, who were not flying that day. But then we received our own plane--a brand new B-17G. which had an extra set of .50 cal. machine guns, mounted in a "chin" turret in the nose of the plane, to be operated by the bombardier. We were proud to paint our own name "Umbriago" on the side of it. However, we loaned the plane to other crews that did not have their own, and it was shot down on one of those missions. That's how terrible the loss-rate was. They gave us another plane, which we named "Umbriago II".

**Mission No. 7--6/20/44 --(Hamburg. Ger.) . . . .**

On this mission we bombed the oil refineries and the smoke from the fires rose to about 15,000 feet. We lost many planes. Also, we fired at a B-17 that was trying to join our formation. We had learned that sometimes the Germans would use a captured B-17 to open fire after it got close to us. On our way home we lost our No. 3 engine over the North Sea. The prop started windmilling and got loose on the shaft, causing a lot of vibration. We dropped out of the formation, our pilot cut the throttle and lifted the nose. The prop flew off the shaft, arched over our plane and fell, spinning into the sea below. We were thankful that it had not cut us in two.

**Mission No. 8--6/20/44--(Berlin, Ger.)**
This probably was the "biggest" mission of them all. The target was a large cluster of government buildings in the center of the city. Our plane was the Deputy Lead for the entire 8th Air Force--leading more than 1,000 bombers over the German capital. We circled around and made our bomb run from the east. As we approached the city, the enemy put up a thick "area barrage" of flak That is, they did not aim at any particular group of planes; they just saturated the sky in the area that they knew we had to fly through . It seemed impossible that we could safely fly through this solid mass of smoke and bursting shells--*but we did!*

A 500 lb. incendiary bomb got hung up on the shackle of the bomb rack and our bombardier had to hook up his portable oxygen bottle, crawl out on the 8-inch catwalk, about 25,000 feet above the earth and successfully release the bomb; Then it fell down into the suburbs of Berlin.

The next time I visited Berlin was on August 7, 1944 as a "ground observer", as a POW on my way to Frankfurt and the Dulag. I personally witnessed, first-hand, the massive

destruction that we, along with many other bombers had reeked upon the city--which Hitler had said would never be bombed.

**Mission No. 12 (7/4/44)--Samour, FR)**
Perhaps the most frightening mission we flew (outside of the one on which I was shot down) was on this Independence Day, 1944. Our 508th Squadron of 12 planes went out by ourselves to destroy a railroad bridge in central France. It was to be a fairly short trip, so our ground crew did not completely fill our fuel tanks--a big mistake!

Clouds obscured the target, so we circled several times with our bomb bay doors open, consuming a lot of fuel. Our pilot became concerned about this diminishing fuel supply and decided to turn back to our base. Our navigator guessed at our position, not aware of the direction or velocity of the strong winds and not being able to see the ground. He gave the ETA (estimated time of arrival) to the pilot. When the ETA was reached, we could still get an occasional glimpse of the French countryside There were those small cloud openings, but nothing the navigator could identify. **So we were LOST!**

The entire crew was on edge. The engineer was busy pumping fuel from one tank to another trying to keep all four engines running.

Suddenly we saw a recognizable city below us and anti-aircraft fire erupted. This gave our navigator the final clue as to our position. We headed for an emergency landing strip at Beachy Head on the English coast. But, when we arrived there, all of that part of England was "socked in" with fog. The navigator did not have any maps of a landing strip in England (for security reasons)--no English maps were carried for security reasons.

In this panic situation I had grabbed one of the radio transmitter, which was on the floor next to my chest parachute pack. What a revolting development this would have been, had it been necessary to jump from the plane--to discover that I had no parachute!

I gave the navigator a list of English airfield co-ordinates. These were typed on rice paper, which I was supposed to each in the event we were forced down in enemy territory .Now the pilot announced that there was no more time and that we should prepare to bail out as he put the plane on automatic pilot and headed it out to sea. We still had our bomb load and didn't want to crash the plane in England.

Just at this time there was an opening in the clouds and we spotted an airfield. Down we came, landing down-wind and unannounced. We were immediately surrounded at this air base by truckloads of suspicious English soldiers. We had landed at an RAF fighter bases and they did not like a B-17 bomber landing on their air field without permission. What a Fourth of July celebration!.

**Missions No. 15 & 16 (7/14 & 15/44)--Munich, Ger.**
This was always one of the most difficult and longest (over 9 hours) that we flew. It was a high priority target and our Group was assigned to it three days in a row. On July 11tj we aborted the mission to Munich due to a plane malfunction during assembly over England. But we were a part of the two missions that followed.

The target was the jet engine factory, deep in the heart of Germany. Up until this time all airplanes used in the war, both by the Allies and Germany used were driven by gasoline combustion engines. There had been many refinements in these engines since WWII had begun, but the basic engine remained the same. Now the Germans had developed a jet engine, which had many advantages and made all other engines obsolete.

Allied intelligence was aware of this development and was anxious to destroy the factory or factories before it got to be a more serious problem. Naturally, the Germans defended this potential target with the best of their remaining Luftwaffe and anti-aircraft batteries. It was a long, arduous run and we suffered severe losses. But our efforts paid off since we did delay the manufacture of enemy jet fighters, in any quantity during the remaining months of the war.

We did encounter several of them, without knowing what they were. We saw them at a distance, trailing smoke (which was actually the jet exhaust). They never came close enough to attack us, but we saw them at a distance. As mentioned earlier, the Germans were well along in the development of the jet engines they used in their V-1 and V-2 rockets (or buzz bombs) that were launched against London..

**Mission No. 17 (7/18/44)--Peenemunde, Ger.**
The target for this mission wass the German Rocket Development site on the North Sea. It was described on page 11 of this history.

**Mission No. 19 (7/24/44)--Front Lines**

Among the most unusual missions were the ones flown in tactical support of the Infantry on the front lines near the town of St. Lo, FR. In the weeks after D-Day the Allies had moved forward from their invasion beach-head, pouring more equipment and troops into the force that was making its way across France. While the Germans were not expecting the invasion to occur at Normandy, they were quick to respond, and at one point, had pinned down our forces. Our troops were well behind the schedule that Eisenhower and Montgomery had hoped for.

Eisenhower had noted in his post-war memoirs regarding our July 24th attack, "A tremendous carpet bombing of the area was placed along the St. Lo sector of the American front and its stunning effect on the enemy lasted the entire day". Unfortunately, a costly mistake on part of the bomber force caused a considerable number of casualties among our own troops. Luckily, our Group was not a part of this terrible error.

During the attack, red flares had marked the front of our lines. We had the strictest orders not to drop anything on our side of that line. We flew at an unusually low altitude of 10,000 feet, coming in over our own troops, then saturating the area beyond the flares. After we had finished our job, our troops walked through the German lines, where the enemy was dazed as much as they suffered casualties. After this break-through at St. Lo our armies pushed through France and into Germany. But it was still a hard fought battle all the way.

We repeated this type of mission, in support of British forces, a few weeks later. Another tactical support mission was to destroy a concentration of German tanks at Conde, FR some time later. According to our Intelligence, these tanks were camouflaged and hidden in a woods during the Battle of Anheim.

**When You Least Expect It**

Usually, after we had left the target area and got away from the flak, we started to relax, as best we could. On one of our early missions we were returning to our base, flying over Occupied France . We had peeled off our flak suits and taken off our steel helmets. Some of the crew members had come to the radio room to listen to music over the Armed Forces Network.

All of a sudden, someone yelled (over the intercom) "Flak at 12 o'clock low". Sure enough, here came a barrage of the black stuff, poking some more holes in the wings of our plane. What had happened was during the time we were dropping our bombs, the Germans had moved in a bunch of flak guns, mounted on rail cars, to an area where there had not been any anti-aircraft earlier. Fortunately, we suffered no serious damage, or injuries, but we sure were more alert on our way home aftr that.

## The Ground Crew

Among those "silent heroes" of the air war were the members of the ground crew. These were the Air Force personnel who were assigned to keep our planes in tip-top shape, making necessary repairs, checking to see that everything was operating properly and were the first to greet us on our return from a mission. They worked many long hours, often at night, with poor lighting, in bad weather. under adverse conditions to perform their job. These men had to do their job right or the plane might not come home. They took their work very seriously.

Sad to say, we never really got to know these men who were responsible for our safe flight and return to our base. We would see them only as they finished their work, when we got out to the plane at dawn, and then when we returned from the mission. Our pilot and engineer had more opportunity to talk to them about the plane itself.

These "most important men in the Air Force" were farm kids, who worked on tractors or patched up Model T's to keep them running during the Depression. Or town kids, who kept tearing apart and "souping up" their model A's or flat V-8's The big horsepower engines of the B-17's held no mystery for them. Now, men in their 20's or early 30's, they were not given to a lot of talk, unless you pulled it out of them.

To acknowledge the importance of these men and their role, the crew chief was usually a tech or master sergeant. If the engines needed to be "pulled through", when it was cold, he made that decision. The ground crew pulled the props through, to coat the cylinder wall with oil. Then the pilot and co-pilot could start the engines electrically for a pre-flight engine run-up.

We can not over-estimate the pride they took in their plane; the dedication they felt.. They raised hell with us (good naturedly) when we brought the plane back with damaged parts: with an engine out and prop feathered. But, they also felt good that we brought it *back*--holes and all They were good men and they deserve a hearty salute for a "job well done"...

## About Our Air Base at Polebrook

Our air base at Polebrook, in "Little America", consisted of two concrete runways, a Headquarters Building, an officers' mess hall and lounge, enlisted mens' mess and dayroom, sick bay, chapel and a long row of barracks. We were assigned to one of the Quonset huts. Also, there were several large hangars where maintenance went on day and night.There was also a control tower (many of which are still standing, as memorials)..

Our showers were outside and water flowed only when you pulled and held onto the chain. This awkward arrangement and the skimpy supply of warm water encouraged us to be brief. We should not have complained, as we did, since there would be many days in the future when we would gladly have put up with this inconvenience.

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The Group was briefed ...as the 94th "A" Combat Wing. The first plane took off at 0710 with wing assembly at King's Cliff "buncher". Departed the English Coast at Felixtowe. When they reached the enemy coast there were 34 aircraft in the Group--12 in the lead group and 11 each in the high and in the low groups. Two aircraft had returned to base earlier due to mechanical problems.

The flight from the enemy coast to the IP passed without incident. But the approach to the IP brought the formation over anti-aircraft artillery installations, to the east of the target. Two planes in the lead group (42-97216 in the lead box and 42-97381 in the low box) were hit by flak. Bombing was visual. At this point about 12 FW-190's and six ME-109's attacked. The fighters were very persistent, coming in from the rear, through their own flak.

The low group was hit particularly hard, both by flak and fighters. Three planes, including Lt. Pattison's ship, already damaged by flak, were shot down by fighters. One plane was hit over the target, caught fire and blew up.
(59 crew members from the 351st did not return after the August 6th mission)

***Our plane was the one piloted by Lt. Pattison (in the low group). It was No. 42-102971 YB "J". The planes of the 351st used the symbol "J" in a triangle.***

**In a letter to the Polebrook Post (the 351st's newsletter) the member wrote: "The target on August 6th was *not Berlin, or the ball bearing factory.* Actually, it was the *jet aircraft factory at Genshgen, near Berlin. (The Germans were well along with their development of jet aircraft.)***

**"The 351st led the Wing, the Division and the 8th Air Force, On the bomb run it was necessary to retain constant air speed and altitude. Course correction was held at a minimum and the formation was to remain very tight.**

**"The evaluation of the results of the bombing was described as "smashing" on the bulletin board of the de-briefing room."**

## The Venerable KLIM Can

As was mentioned earlier, on page 38 Red Cross parcels contained, among other foods, a pound can of powdered milk, similar to our coffee cans, with a key on the top that was used to "peel off" the metal strip that opened the can and formed the metal lid.

In prison camp we used both the can and the metal strip in making various tools and devices. I can remember a simple egg-beater (even though we had no eggs). The metal strips were bowed and attached to a wooden stick about 12 inches long., This simplified version used your hands to roll the stick between them, creating a beating action (to mix coffee and powdered milk (or whatever) from the Red Cross parcels or liquids provided by the Germans The "deluxe" model was somewhat more complicated but worked a little better with less effort.

The KLIM can itself, (Klim was milk spelled backwards, came from Argentina, as did some of the luncheon meat in the Red Cross parcel) served as a universal utensil when we didn't have a bowl of pot while on the march. By wiping it out after each use, it served its purpose for a long time.

But the Klim can also provided a sizable piece of metal when cut apart. It found its place in many different uses to develop pans, and other utensils. Probably one of its more sophisticated applications was that used in making a blower to heat water, other liquids and foods very rapidly. It was not uncommon to see one of these "appliances" hanging over the shoulder of a Kriege on the march. The German guards were fascinated by this piece of American ingenuity and we often shared our "burner" with them.

A very interesting incident regarding the use of the Klim "key" was told by one of the POWs who came to Luft IV from Hydekrug.

When this group arrive at the train station, they spent the afternoon and night in box cars on the siding of the train station. Each POW was handcuffed to another for the "run" up the hill to the camp the next day. It was July and the boxcars had heated up and the men were overly warm while wearing their jackets. This is the story of the KLIM CAN KEY:

"We looked furtively at the guards as we maneuvered those keys and managed to loosen our handcuffs and slip off our jackets.. Soon, we were comfortably arrayed in our shirt sleeves and our jackets were hung on the wall of the boxcar. This was done in plain view of the guards, but they took no note. Then one of the guards nudged the other and both became very excited and nervous. They had just come to the realization that there was no way we could remove our jackets without removing the handcuffs first.

"Now, they began to recall the warning words of their captain, He had warmed them to be watchful because the Americans 'are very clever' and had to be watched every second since they were always trying to find a way to escape. Needless to say, the vigil of the guards suddenly intensified."

## The Luft VI (Hydekrug) Evacuation

Some time in mid or late July, 1944 the population of Stalag Luft IV increased sizably when another established prison camp was evacuated. This group of Amrican airmen, captured by the Germns had been held in a camp designated as Stalag Luft VI, located at Hydekrug, Germany, north and east of Luft IV on the Baltic Sea. That camp number (VI) was transferred (after the evacuation) to St. Wendel, Germany, the camp where I was first held prisoner from mid August to early September, 1944.

The evacuation from Hydekrug to Luft IV was another example of German brutality and inhumanity to American airmen. First of all, the prisoners were marched from their camp, down to the dock and literally "dumped" into the hold of an old cargo ship--much worse than you would treat livestock. The POWs were stuck in this "hell hole" without food or water. Big oil drums served as their toilet facilities.

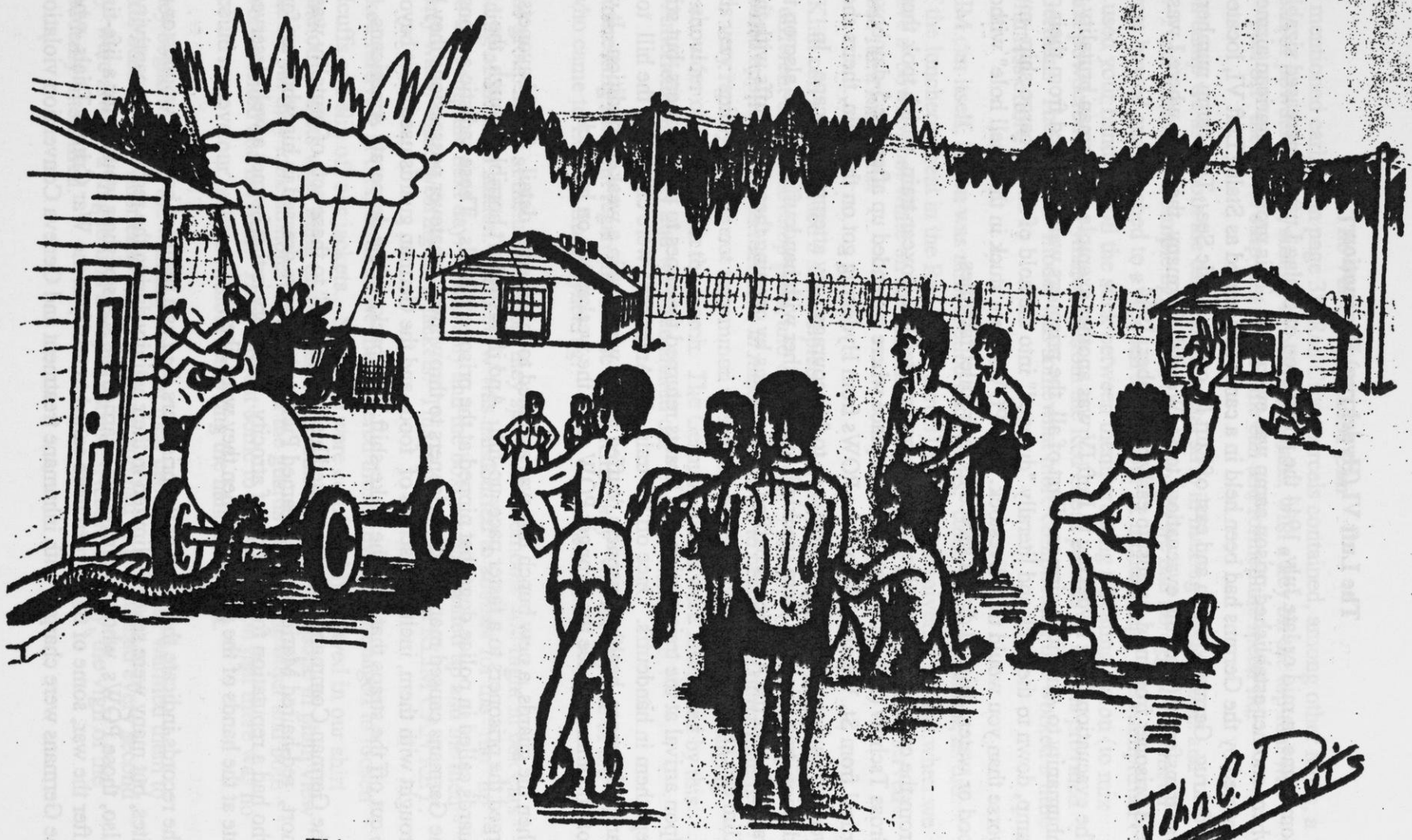
From the cargo ship, the prisoners were transported to a boxcar-train, which took them to Gross Tschow (or Kiefheide), the same place where we ended up after our 5-day boxcar ordeal from St. Wendel. Before the POWs from Hydekrug got on the train, theirs shoes were taken from them by the Germans, to "discourage" any attempts at escape. In addition, two prisoners were shackled to each other with handcuffs. It was also on this train ride that the Americans baffled the Germans by opening these handcuffs with the Klim can keys.

Upon arrival at the train station, the Krauts returned the shoes to the prisoners, but still kept them in handcuffs. Once off the train, the Americans were chased up the hill to the camp, the more healthy prisoners, 'cuffed to one who was in a weaker condition . It was not uncommon to see the stronger POW carry the weaker one on his back.

Then the guards, a new bunch that was assigned to this special detail, fixed bayonets and urged the prisoners to a faster pace, up-hill. And if this wasn't horrible enough, the guards called in police dogs that nipped at the prisoners' heels. These sadistic actions by the Germans caused many of the prisoners to throw away whatever possessions they had brought with them, including scraps of food--and the German guards used their bayonets to cut off the straps that held the make-shift back-packs of the desperate Americans.

The German Commandant, who incited his "underlings" to these acts of brutality was a short, red-haired Marine captain named Pickhardt (always dressed in his white uniform), who had a reputation for this type of atrocity. The story is that he met a well-deserved fate at the hands of the prisoners when they were liberated

The records indicate that none of the prisoners died as a result of bayonet wounds or dog bites, but many were severely limited in their activity during the rest of their captivity. Also, those POWs, who were involved, carried the scars of their wounds for a life-time. After the war, some of these men were called to testify at the War Crimes Trials, where the Germans were charged with inhumane treatment and Geneva Convention violations.




**This was always a "special event" when the "Super Dooper Pooper Scooper" came to clean out the toilet. The Germans put the hose from the tank into the toilet and then there was a loud "bamg".**

## The "Super Duper Pooper Sccoper"

One of the major diversions (actually, there were few) was the arrival of the "super duper pooper sccoper". This was a sizable mechanical device in the form of a huge tank, supported by a frame and carried on four wheels with rubber mounted tires.

To begin with, our outdoor toilet facilities consisted of a large latrine, with a number of wooden seats (with holes cut into them). The entire area underneath, surrounded by concrete walls, was a huge cavern in which the waste was accumulated (comparable to the "slurry tanks", which are now used on beef and dairy farms).

Our indoor toilets consisted of one "two-holer" in each barracks (for 200 POWs) and was to be used sparingly, only at night-time when the barracks door were locked. I can't remember if the Pooper Scooper made a special stop to attend to these toilets or how they were treated.

The "Pooper Scooper" was pulled by various means. In fact, we could almost tell how the German war economy was faring by the methods used to pull this device into the camp.

At first the Germans used a conventional farm tractor (somewhat out-dated} to deliver the "Pooper Scooper". Then, when fuel became scarce, horses were used. Next, it was oxen. Then as their last resort, the Jerries employed Russian prisoners (both men and women) to pull the wagon .

The device was accompanied by a team of German "sanitary engineers", who walked along-side the equipment as it pulled to the site of "evacuation".

The first thing to be done was to connect one end of a large diameter flexible hose to the machine itself, and then to insert the "business end" into an opening in the side of the outer wall of the latrine..

Next, the "captain" of the detail opened a small compartment on the side of the tank, fiddled with some kind of contraption and struck a match to it.

There was a gigantic explosion as the waste from the latrine was sucked into the tank--amongst the loudly cheering and applauding of the thoroughly entertained spectators..

Then, as the onlookers dispersed, the Germans pulled out the dripping hose, loaded it back onto their Sanitation Wagon and moved out of the camp through the front gate.

While the Russians, who had pulled the wagon into the camp, were waiting for the operation to be completed, we tried to give them some of our Red Cross food rations--especially crackers, chocolate, cigarettes or soap. The Germans tried to discourage this, but sometimes we did manage to "treat" our visitors.

## "A Decisive Air Strike"

Earlier in the History I had made mention of the launching site of the "buzz bombs" at Peenemunde on the Baltic Sea. Our raid was made on July 19, 1944. However, in reading the book, "Piercing the Third Reich"--which tells about the OSS (the American Office of Strategic Services), the intelligence branch, working behind the lines, in Germany-- reference is made to an earlier strike by the RAF (Royal Air Force). This is the account from that book:

*Six hundred British bombers dealt their savage blow to the Germans' "Secret Weapons" installation on August 17, 1943. They were guided, in part, by information that Allan Dulles, of the OSS, had pieced together from several intelligence agents operating behind the lines in Germany.*

*Dulles had been informed, as early as May, 1943, that the Germans were developing a missile, propelled with the rocket principle. In addition, the OSS had learned the speed and the destructive power of the "V" rocket. Another informant revealed that parts of the rocket program were being shipped to the remote thumb of land in the Baltic, called Peenemunde.*

*Hitler had boasted that with the V-weapon, "London will be leveled to the ground by the end of April, 1943 and Britain will be forced to capitulate".*

*British versions of the worth of U.S. intelligence tended to slight or ignore the value of the Dulles operation in regard to the Pennemunde strike. American accounts, on the other hand, may have had a tendency to exaggerate it. The salient fact is that the raid succeeded in decisively delaying the implementation of this weapon, which at one point, was projected to kill more than 100,000 Britons per month.*

*The first V-1's struck Englamd on June 13. 1944, too late to blunt the invasion of Normandy or to decimate the British population.*

## The Aftermath

But, despite the destruction resulting from the RAF's August 27th raid, the Germans were persistent in rebuilding the launching pads at Peenemunde. While they had moved most of their scientists, engineers and manufacturing facilities to another location, they found the launching site so ideal, that they spent more time, effort and material to keep it intact. They had re-inforced the pads and associated facilities with heavy concrete walls, several feet thick, to make them almost imprenatable with conventional bombs.

However, Hitler's threats that the V-rocket would defeat the British and help win the war, FAILED. The tide of battle, after June 6, 1944, was pushing Germany into the jaws of a vice with the Allies on the Western Front and the Russians in the East.

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**Events that Stand Out in My Memory**

Today, May 2, 2005, the 60th anniversary of being liberated from being a POW. As I look back over these three-score years, I tried to figure out the most memorable of all those experiences. The following rate "high" on the list:

1. Bailing out of the plane--When we realized that our plane had been hit and was on fire, we knew that there was no alternative but to bail out. The life-and-death struggle to get out of the burning plane through the smaller escape hatch, with a lot of pushing an shoving, jumping through the fire, opening the parachute and floating down through some 20,000 feet of enemy air space is an experience you just never forget.

2. Landing in a lake, trying to escape by swimming to the opposite shore, away from the approaching German captors, being pulled into their boat (while trying to carry on a life-saving conversation in my limited knowledge of German} and being hauled to shore to a waiting crowd of curious and not-too-hospitable "welcoming committee".

3. Spending my first few nights as a POW in German civilian and military prisons and ending up at the Interrogation Center at Oberussel, cooped up in a small solitary confinement cell with frequent trips to match wits with German Intelligence. Here, we also got our first taste of German food rations--black bread and "ersatz coffee".

4. The five-day boxcar ride from St. Wendel (in the southwestern part of Germany) to near Poland. Packed in a confined part of the 40 & 8 cattle car with barely enough room to stand, much less to sit or lie down. Enduring fighter and bombing attacks by our own planes, not permitted to get out for all five days and surviving on little food and water.

5. Christmas Eve 1944 at Stalag Luft 4 when we were allowed to get together with our other POW friends 'til after midnight. When we had a special church service and our guards joined in singing Silent Night and Stille Nacht.

6. February 6, 1945 when we were evacuated from Stalag Luft 4 and started the 3-month march across northern Germany. How excited we were to leave the prison and get out into the world "outside"--only to quickly discover that we had just gone from the "frying pan into the fire".

7. February 14, 1945--when we marched for over 10 hours to get through a strategic military zone where the Germans were constructing a defense against the oncoming Russians. We were promised a warm place to stay with good food at the end of the day. We ended up sleeping outside in the rain, without <u>any</u> food or water

8. Liberation May 2, 1945--This should be No. 1. on the list. This was among the greatest days of my entire life. It's difficult to describe what it's like to be FREE. Only if you have ever been deprived of it, do you know what it really means. I also know the meaning of the phrase "FREEDOM IS NOT FREE".

**What about the German Prisoners-of-War?**

During the war many Germans who were captured by the Allies, were sent to the U.S. as POWs, However, toward the end of the war they were cordoned off and housed in some of the buildings that were "liberated" by the Allies. In fact, at the end of April, 1945 there was such an avalanche of German prisoners that they were interned where ever there was room. Lots of them in open areas surrounded by something like a snow fence.

When the war officially ended a lot of these prisoners were probably hastily processed and sent back home. Naturally, those Germans who were avowed Nazis and the higher ranking officers were confined until it was decided whether they were suspected of war crimes and were eventually brought to trial.

After the war, when Melva and I went to Europe, I had an opportunity to visit with one of the German POWs, who had been sent to the United States as a prisoner and spent more than a year in the Mid-Central states.

On this particular occasion our tour guide had arranged for dinner in one of the mountain resort areas near Innsbruck, where they still had a ski-slide from the previous Olympics, on display.

It so happened that this was on a Sunday and the regular chef had the night-off. Somehow or other I learned that the assistant chef. an Austrian, had been a German POW in our country. I asked the waitress if I could talk to him, telling him that I was a POW in Germany and that I was anxious to meet him for a short visit.

He willingly agreed and we spent nearly an hour visiting and exchanging experiences. When I asked him about his treatment in America, he excitedly told me that he "lived better as a POW in America than as a soldier in the German army". Like so many German POWs in the States, he worked on farms, in canneries and food processing plants. He spent most of his time in Kansas and Missouri.

When I asked him if he would ever move from his native Austria to the US, he said that earlier he might have considered this, but that now he was too old. But he did want to make a point of how much he appreciated his treatment here and that he will always remember the "gracious" Americans.

This also reminded me of the German POWs, who worked in our area, for the Calumet-Dutch Packing Co. in Green Bay, who also operated the cannery here in Brillion. I can remember people talking about taking chocolate milk to the area where the prisoners were housed and passing it through the link fence. What a deal!! I am sure that they never tasted chocolate milk in "the Old Country".

## Remembering May 2, 1945

Last night (May 2, 2004) I was thinking about what a special day May 2, 1945 was. It was the day we were liberated as POWs from the Germans by the British. I have previously told about what happened as I remembered it several years ago. But last night something occurred to me that I had not given much thought before.

In the excitement of being released from captivity and once again becoming "free", I overlooked what happened to the German guards and the officer who surrendered to the British .

I made reference to the fact that the German officer handed over his pistol and that the guards threw their rifles to the ground: that, not a shot was fired, and as EX-POWs, we hugged each other, as well as our German guards. As I lay in bed thinking about this, I wondered if the British ordered the German officer to put his "hands up" and then took the pistol from his holster. They surely didn't trust him to reach for his pistol!

Then, what did they do with him? And, what happened to the guards? As I remember it, there were only a few British personnel in the vehicle in which they came. Did they take the officer in the vehicle with them?

And what about the guards? I can't remember how many of them were guarding us--probably six or eight. What happened to them? I know that they were older--probably in their late 50's or early 60's . . .and not physically able to fight in combat, or they would have been at the front lines.

But, as I also mentioned earlier, they were happy to be captured by the English, rather than the Russians. I am sure that they offered no resistance and very possibly, turned themselves over to any Allied troops that were in the area.

As I remember it, there was absolute chaos in the area at the time. The roads were clogged with Allied advancing troops, surrendering Germans and refugees fleeing from the West, as well as from the East.

Add to this the fact that there had been considerable bombing and strafing by our Allied Air Force, resulting in a lot of damage to the road itself, to buildings along the way and death to many farm animals in the rural areas In addition, there were numerous fires still burning, without any attempt to extinguish them.

I don't know what plans or preparations the Allied Command had made to handle all the surrendering enemy, but the Ger,ams were probably herded into temporary enclosures, like a "snow fence" since there wasn't much of a threat that they would try to escape. There have been numerous accounts about how shocked our troops were to learn that there were so many POWs being held by the Germans . We probably accounted for a greater number than the surrendering Germans.

**German Prisoners of War in the United States (cont'd)**

The copy on the previous page was written on Tuesday, Sept. 7th. Today, Sept. 9th I received a letter from Bob Adams at Kelly Lake including a news clipping from Sunday's, Sept. 5th issue of the Green Bay Press Gazette.

The overall article contained the accounts of three veterans and the stories of their experiences in World War II. Two of the stories were about two of our Ex-POW friends who also belong to our NE Wis. Chapter of the Ex-POWs--Les Ruzek, who was a prisoner of the Japanese and Fred Miller, who was a POW of the Germans.

In addition there was a story of another vet, who was a pilot on a B-17 and was shot down over France. He was rescued by the French Resistance and made his was back to the Allied lines. The fourth story was about a German, who was a part of the Afrika Korps,, who was captured by the Americans and sent to the US as a POW. He had enlisted earlier in the war (at the age of 19) and volunteered for the African campaign, rather that wait to be drafted later and be sent to fight the Russians.

Heinko Ericksen was a part of the German army that had been pinned to the Tunisian coast on May 8, 1943 and was abandoned by his Group "with no place to go" They were told to destroy all weapons and vehicles...and surrender!

It took the convoy, on which he was sent to the US, three and a-half weeks to go to New York, and then were taken, in Pullman cars (instead of box cars) to Hearne, Texas.

Ericksen said that "the camps in America were probably better than being in the German army. We were better fed and better housed, but you were not a *free* man". Prisoners were put to work on farms near the camp, which was surrounded by barbed wire. They were served the same food rations as American GIs

In Wisconsin's Door County there were about 2,000 German prisoners (in seven camps), working in the orchards and on farms. There were about 22,500 Germans held in Wisconsin. In Texas the German POWs were paid ten cents an hour. They had a canteen where they could buy cigarettes for 10 cents a pack and candy bars for five cents, shaving cream and other personal necessities.

Later Ericksen was transferred to Fort Knox, KY. Here he encountered fellow soldiers who had been captured on D-Day, 1944 and learned about the Allied bombings and the destruction of German cities--that it appeared that Germany was losing the war. Regular German troops were held, along with die-hard Nazis and SS units.

Even though the war in Europe ended in May, 1945, Ericksen did not begin his trip back hone until March, 1946. The voyage took a detour to England, where he and other Germans continued to work on farm and help with reconstruction until the fall of 1947, when he was finally allowed to return home.

## "What God Ordains is Always Good"

When you think of a tragedy or disaster, you wonder what good can come of it.

In my case, I couldn't imagine what, if anything good, could come out of being captured by the enemy and become a Prisoner-of-War.

It is true that many times during my incarceration, when my life, along with others was threatened, I was joined in prayer by other POWs--some who had not prayed in a long time, or perhaps this was their first time--and recognized that only God could save us.

But, no doubt, one of the obvious reasons why God put me in this position was a conversion, back to faith for one of our crew members. The navigator on our plane, Lt. Bob Hilliard (now living in the state of Washington) gives this account:

**I was not a Christian when we flew in combat. I attended chapel services a few times but that was about it. I was not aware that anyone around me felt that Christ was important. I was uncertain about who He was and didn't think very much about religion in general. But something from my Mom's faith, or perhaps, from childhood, when I attended Sunday School, must have stayed with me.**

**"So, when I heard that our radio operator, Win Riemer was shot down, I got out my little New Testament (that my Mother had given me when I went into service) and read it, especially the 23rd Psalm. I thank God for His patience with me and for sparing my life until I became a Christian."**

Surely, this is a wonderful testimonial that, "What God Ordains Is Always Good".

# Glossary

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## Glossary (page 1 of 2)

**Abort--To abandon a missions for mechanical or other reasons**
**Atten-hut--Military slang for the command "Attention"**
**Aussie--Abbreviation for our Australian allies.**
**Bomb Bay--Area on a bomber where bombs are stored during a mission**
**Bomb Run--That portion of a combat mission where bombs are dropped' the most hazardous part of the mission**
**Bunk--Military term for bed**
**Buzz Bomb--German rocket, loaded with a bomb, directed toward England, especially London (in '44 and '45)**
**Cat-walk--Narrow (8" wide) walkway through the bomb bay**
**Chest-Pack--Part of parachute that was attached to the harness**
**Chow Line--Line up for food, somewhat like a "buffet" in civilian life**
**'Chute--Short version of "parachute"**

**D-Bar--Highly concentrated chocolate, included in Red Cross food parcels**

**E.T.A.--Estimated time of arrival**

**Ferret--German guard who would search your room**
**Flying Fortress--B-17 bomber**
**Foot Locker--Chest used to store our clothes at the foot of our bunks**
**Forty & Eight--Type of German boxcar. Name originated with the French in WWI with capacity of 40 men / 8 horses**

**G.I.--Term originally meant "Government Issue" but came to include American soldiers and equipment**
**Goon--German prison camp guard**
**Gravel Agitator--Air Force slang for American ground personnel**
**Ground Crew--Air Force personnel who took good care of maintenance and repair of our airplanes (see special reference in Addendum Section)**
**Ground Pounder--Another slang term for US military ground personnel**
**Hatch--Door entrance to or exit from airplane**
**Inter-Com--Abbreviation for (electrical) interconnection between various positions on the plane**
**I.P.--Indicated Point; designated location from which bomb run began**
**Jerry (or Gerry)--Abbreviated form for German military personnel**

**KLIM--Brand of powdered milk included in Red Cross food parcels**
**Kilometer--.6214 miles**

**Latrine--Toilet**
**Leave--Time off (usually several days) with written permission to leave the base**
**Liberator--B-24 bomber**
**Little Friends--US or British fighter planes who accompanied us on a mission**
**Limy--Nick-name given to British military personnel by Americans**

**Mae West--Life preserver**
**Mess Hall--Area where meals were served to military personnel**
**Milk Run--Easy mission, with little or no enemy opposition**
**Mission--Combat flight, usually over enemy territory**
**M.P.--US Military Police**
**Mustang--US P-51 fighter plane**

**Ninety Day Wonder--Officers who were commissioned after 90 days' training**
**Nose--The very front part of a B-17, made of plexi-glass, which provided working area for the navigator and bombardier**

**Prop--Propeller**

**Rack--Slang term for bed or bunk**

**S-2--U.S. Military Intelligence**
**Spare--Extra plane available in case another plane was disabled**
**Spuds--Potatoes**
**Static Chaser--Radio Operator**
**Super Duper Pooper Scooper--Device used by the Germans to evacuate the toilets in the prison camp**

**W/X--Radio man's abbreviation for "weather"**

## Glossary

***German***

**Appel--roll call**
**DuLag--(abbreviation for Durchgangslager)--transit camp for POWs**
**Flak--(Flieger Abwehr Kannon)--anti-aircraft**
**Fuehrer--leader; Adolph Hitler**
**FW--German fighter plane made by Focke-Wolfe**
**Hausfrau--house wife**
**"Hande Hoch"--"Hands Up", in surrender**
**Kartoffeln--potatoes**
**Kriegesgefangenen, also Kriege--POW**
**Lager--section of fenced-in area of prison camp**
**Luft Gangster--German derogatory name for American airmen**
**LuftWaffe--German Air Force**
**"Mach Schnell"--"Hurry Up"**
**ME--German fighter plane made by Messerschmitt**
**Oflag--prison camp for officers**
**Posten--guard**
**"Raus"--"Get Out"**
**Schwartze Brot--black bread**
**Schweinhund--German derogatory name for American airmen**
**Soldat--soldier**
**Stalag--prison camp for ground personnel (enlisted men)**
**Stalag Luft--prison camp for airmen**
**Suppe--soup**
**Vorlager--camp area that contained German administration buildings, camp hospital, warehouse and guards' barracks**


**The POW-MIA emblem, exhibited in the form of a flag or banner is the symbol representing the thousands of service personnel, who were held as *prisoners-of-war* in various US conflicts. *MIA* represents those in uniform, who were listed as *Missing In Action*in in all US wars. There are still many MIA's from WWII, Korea and Vietnam, who are unaccounted for. Both private and government agencies are continuing to search for those missing, *"but not forgotten".***