



## Charles Herman Story - Stalag Luft IV

This is a brief history of the experiences of Charles L. Herman, our father, during training, time with the 492nd Bomb Group and time as a prisoner of war. - Judy Strong and David Herman

For this website, this story was broken down into shorter parts in effort to make computer reading a little easier on the eyes. This is Part Four of seven.

## Stalag Luft IV

by Judy Strong and David Herman

The prisoners were taken to Amsterdam and put on a train to Frankfurt. On the way to Frankfurt they passed through the city of Cologne. It had been heavily damaged by Allied bombing. The German guards on the train tried to keep the prisoners from seeing what the bombing had done. When they reached Frankfurt they were held in solitary confinement. They were there about a week for interrogation before being shipped out, on a train, to Wetzlar Camp where they were kept while being assigned to stalags. This was the last time Dad saw Robert H Johnson, the navigator and Angelo Bagnosco, the bombardier. Officers were sent to different stalags.

Wetzlar Camp was about two miles or so outside the town of Wetzlar, Germany which had a ball bearing factory. Dad remembers seeing a flight of B-24s with their bomb bay doors open go over on their way to bomb the factory.

They were sent by train from Wetzlar Camp to their assigned stalags. On the way, the train stopped in a Berlin rail yard. They were in cars designed to haul cattle or horses, just boards with gaps between them so they could look out at their surroundings. While there, the rail yard was attacked by allied aircraft but their train wasn't hit. The rail car directly behind theirs was an anti-aircraft gun car. Dad remembers hearing and seeing an old woman yelling at the gunner. They couldn't understand her words but, by her gestures, they could tell she was trying to convince him to turn his gun on the car full of prisoners.

Dad was assigned to Stalag Luft 4, Lager A. There were four lagers with 10 rooms in each lager and 24 men in each room. They weren't allowed to talk to anyone in another Lager. The Germans didn't want them giving what information they could get about the war to each other. They were able to get some updated information at times from new air corp prisoners and kept track of what was going on by drawing a map of Germany on their door. The Germans didn't like the map and took their door.

Some tried to escape at first and the guards would catch them and bring them back. This went on for a while until the guards got tired of dealing with them and put up signs saying, "Trying to escape is not a sport. Escapees will be shot!"

The prisoners entertained each other. They put on Christmas a program where some dressed up like women. Some of the Germans were nice guys and gave them clothes to use as costumes.

In the middle of each Lager there was a big hole (pond) with water for use in case of fire. The guys would make boats and sail on the water.

The straw ticks they slept on were full of fleas. The guys would take their blankets out in the early morning when it was cold and fleas couldn't jump so they could pick them off and kill them. They could get a couple of nights sleep before the fleas came back. Sometimes it was so bad they would sleep on boards instead of on the ticks. They had flea contests in camp. They picked their favorite fleas and would see whose would jump the farthest.

The Germans gave them scissors and they cut each other's hair.

They ate Cabbage and Kohlrabi soup and bread. They were given one loaf per week of sour, heavy bread. They got some food packages from Red Cross that contained bags of prunes, crackers, cans of margarine and a chocolate like nutrition bar that was very hard.

In one of the Red Cross packages was a huge sweater that had one arm twice as long as the other. There was a Frenchman there who said he had watched his mother and knew you used needles to make sweaters. They got slats from the bed to make knitting needles and unraveled the sweater to see how it was put together. Dad made two sweaters without sleeves, one for him and one for his buddy, Hobbs.

Hobbs didn't have any will power when it came to his German rations and food in Red Cross packages. He would give his stuff to Dad who would ration his food for him so that he wouldn't eat everything at once.

Story Continues in: [Death March](#)

Source:

● Charles Herman family

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