

# KRIEGIE

( MY STORY )

TO SUSAN,

YOUR FATHER SHARED ALL  
OF THESE EXPERIENCES  
WITH ME.  
A GREAT GUY!

**LEONARD LINCOLN**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Leonard Lincoln".

Each one of the millions of people in the service during World War Two has their own story of personal experiences to relate. For whomever may be interested, here is mine:

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Along with 18,000 other soldiers of various branches of the service, I boarded the troopship Queen Elizabeth in New York City. We sailed alone without any convoy protection across the Atlantic, landing on June 6, 1944 at Glasgow, Scotland. While waiting to debark, we were notified that the Allied Expeditionary Force had just landed on the shores of Normandy, France.

I was part of a ten man flying crew on an 8-24 heavy bomber, There were four officers (pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier) and six enlisted men (engineer gunner, radioman, nose turret gunner, two waist gunners, tail turret gunner). I was the latter. We were to be sent as a replacement crew in the Eighth Air Force stationed in southern England. Before that, we gunners were sent to Ireland for a week's refresher in sharpening our skills. The officers were also sent elsewhere for a last chance at improving their particular specialties. We then were flown from Ireland in a 8-17 Flying Fortress to our permanent base where we were reunited with the rest of our crew.

Our base was located near a small village called Old Buckenham. We officially became part of the 453 Bomb Group of the Eighth Air Force. Each Bomb Group consisted of three or more squadrons of bombers. This field was typical of many located over the southern part of England. There were various supporting structures necessary for a combat bomber base, including a headquarters and control tower, repair facilities, crews quarters, mess hall, combat briefing room and others. The field consisted of many "hardstands" where each bomber was parked, which in turn were connected by taxiways leading to the main runways.

After several practice bombing missions, we were declared ready to begin our "tour". A "tour" consisted of completing 35 combat missions. After successfully completing these, the crews were eligible to be rotated back to the states. The initial excitement of beginning our missions, and the anticipated adventure, was soon tempered by the knowledge that the odds were against a bomber crew completing their required tour. Of course we all felt that we would become one of the successful crews. In a short time we would learn that this initial optimism was somewhat clouded with the realities of combat flying.

There were easier missions which were called "milk runs." One of these which we were a part of, flew across the channel into France to bomb a "flying buzz bomb" **sfie**, where only light antiaircraft fire was encountered. This was about a month after the Normandy invasion and we got a very good view of the many ships and equipment still on the beachhead. Then there were the rough missions deep into Germany which everybody dreaded. It is one of these that I will try to explain in some detail.

On the morning of July 7, 1944, all the crews scheduled to participate on this mission were roused out of bed around 2:30 to 3:00 in the morning. We got up, griping about the early hour, dressed into our flight suits, which we put on over heavy winter underwear, and headed out. Even though it was in the middle of summer, the temperatures we would be encountering at 19,000 feet altitude, or higher, would be well below freezing. We went to the combat crew mess hall for breakfast and then over to the briefing hut to see where we would be going and for last minute instructions. After everybody was present, the briefing officer came on the stage in front to inform the flight crews what today's mission was to be. There was a very large map hung up on the front wall which was covered by a canopy. When the officer removed the canopy, it revealed our target for the day. There was a bright red string running from our base in England, crossing the channel and zig zagging around known heavy antiaircraft batteries and ending at the assigned target. Then the string wound its way across the map to end up back at our base. He told us of various conditions to expect, ending with the statement that there would be heavy flak (antiaircraft fire) over the target. After he wished us good luck, we went to the crew equipment room to be issued heavy flying boots, parachutes and flak jackets. Each crew then jumped in a truck and were driven out to their plane located on one of the hardstands. By this time the sun was just becoming to come up in the East. We finished putting on all our flying gear next to our aircraft. Each crewman in a bomber had to be dressed in many layers of protective clothing and equipment. Since there was no heat in the aircraft and the side waist gun windows were wide open, the freezing wind blew through the whole rear of the plane. My rear tail turret had no doors on it so the wind blew freely throughout my turret. Besides the winter underwear and flying suit mentioned earlier, we put on a two piece electrically heated suit consisting of a jacket and trousers embedded with heating elements designed to keep us reasonably warm. They were tailored to look like a suit in case we were shot down and were trying to escape capture. Over two sets of socks we put on electrically heated heavy stockings, Then another set of warm socks and into the heavy flying boots. Over our heated suit we put on a "Mae West" deflated life preserver. A heavy parachute harness completed the ensemble. Of course we had to have heated gloves to keep our hands from freezing. Our headgear consisted of helmet and goggles and of course the required oxygen mask. Upon entering the aircraft, we put on a two piece flak jacket to cover our front and back. This was to give some protection from the shrapnel coming from exploding flak. When over the flak areas, we would put on a regular army steel helmet with the wearing of all this gear, we increased our weight by quite a few pounds while also restricting our maneuverability.

After the pilots got word to start the engines, we all climbed aboard. Our aircraft left the hardstand and followed others down the taxiways to line up for takeoff. It was quite a sight, rows of heavy bombers all lined up nose to tail, with all four engines roaring on each plane, waiting for the tower to fire the takeoff flares. Finally the lead plane was given clearance and began its takeoff roll. Each 30 seconds the next aircraft followed suit. Every takeoff was something to sweat out, as the overly loaded bomber with around 2,800 gallons of

gasoline and four tons or more of high explosives, lumbered down the runway gathering speed and at the very last moment being eased off the ground. Casualties were sometimes caused by aircraft that did not become sufficiently airborne and crashed. In these instances there would rarely be survivors. Once in the air, each squadron would fly to a rendezvous area, either over land or over the channel. Each group had a certain colorfully painted Assembly Plane which would be at the designated spot for its squadrons to form on, and would keep sending up different colored flares that assisted the planes in finding their proper location within the formations before heading across the Channel.

Watching great numbers of bombers circling around, working their way into the proper group location and then getting into their assigned spot in the squadron "box formation" was incredible. Bombers would slide by at very close quarters to each other in this ritual. Collision among planes was unfortunately not too uncommon. One B-24 slid by right below us so close that as I looked out of my turret I could see the nose gunner reading a book. I could only admire anyone being so calm with all of this going on until someone over the intercom suggested that he was probably reading a Bible.

Right after takeoff, the bombardier went into the bomb bay to activate the bombs while the rest of us took our proper places. In the rear of the bomber were two waist gunners and my self as the tail gunner. It was not an easy task fitting myself into a cramped turret with all of the flying gear on. After connecting all of the electrical heating fittings, intercom, checking the guns, turning on the hydraulic systems and installing my oxygen mask to the oxygen outlet, I felt ready although not very eager to go.

Over the English Channel on our way to Germany, I marveled at the sight of hundreds of aircraft, all in tight formations in their proper groups and assigned altitudes, heading towards the target. Never before and never again will such an armada of bombers and fighters be put into the sky at one time as when the "Mighty Eighth" assembled on one of those thousand plane raids, I shall never forget this fantastic sight. The pilot soon advised all gunners to test fire their guns. As eight 50 caliber machine guns were firing, it shook the plane somewhat but reassured us that we had the ability to fight back if attacked. Soon the coast of Holland came into view and then on into Germany. We followed a changing course in order to avoid as much flak batteries as possible. We were in a fairly tight formation with planes of our squadron at about the same altitude, slightly above and slightly below us. Sitting in my turret in the tail end of the airplane was a very lonely position to be in. I could not see another person on our crew and except for occasional chatter over the intercom, it surely seemed that I was all alone, I was intrigued by watching the bomber directly behind us. Painted on its side was a large eagle with the name "Jabberwok" or something similar. He was so close that I could watch the activities of the pilot, copilot and bombardier in the nose of the plane.

After being airborne for several hours, you are aware of the extreme cold, even with your heated gear turned fully on. The oxygen mask feels like a cold and clammy hand over your face. My cramped tail turret became more and more uncomfortable as the time went by, while at the same time I was trying to maintain a vigilance for enemy fighters. Thoughts are suddenly interrupted by the navigator announcing over the intercom that we are nearing the target area. The target we were assigned to bomb was an aircraft factory near the town of Halle, Germany. We knew it would be heavily defended with antiaircraft fire but the reality of this was soon to become very apparent.

As we neared the target, all of the planes pulled into a tight formation since everyone dropped their bombs on the lead bombardier's release. This would give as tight a drop pattern as possible. The waist gunners started throwing out aluminum strips called "Window" which was intended to confuse the enemy radar. Up until the final bomb run, the formations could perform evasive action to elude the flak, but after starting on this, we had to fly more or less a straight line so the bombardier could aim his bombs accurately. At that point you had to fly directly into the flak area without any evasive action, I knew we were getting quite near the target when over the intercom someone up front exclaimed "my God, look what we have to fly through!" Since I couldn't see what's coming ahead, I took this as a signal to reach back and put my steel helmet on my head for whatever added protection it provided. Very soon a few black puffs of flak started to appear. As we got nearer the target area, they became more and more numerous. All the planes pulled in very tight now with Jabberwok moving in very close behind and slightly to the left, just abeam my turret we were bouncing all over as each shell exploded and the concussion rocked the plane. Black puffs were everywhere, quite thick and becoming increasingly closer. Each burst showered the sky around with many pieces of deadly shrapnel. I noted that most explosions appeared as black clouds unless it was very close. At that point you could see the red center of the explosion, it is a very helpless feeling not being able to hide behind something for protection as you are being shot at. I pulled my helmet down as far as it would go, which at least gave me a feeling of doing something to shield myself from the flak bursts. Once I felt something running down my back. I thought that with everything going on, I might have unknowingly been hit. I reached my gloved hand behind my neck and found to my astonishment that even with the freezing wind blowing through my tail turret, that I was sweating! The bombardier finally announced "bomb bay doors open". At this point I'm sure that there were very few of us who were not asking God to please help us safely through this. With all the bomb bay doors open and while nearing the drop point, with the flak at its thickest, I saw something very bright out of the corner of my eye. I turned my head just in time to see Jabberwok get a direct hit. Four tons of bombs exploded instantly into a huge fiery cloud. Parts flew by us in all directions. I do not see how we came through unscathed, since the plane was right next to us, I could see every horrible detail of the explosion. The whole front of the plane from the bomb bay forward, started going down with fire streaming out from just behind the pilots area. The tail end from the waist windows back was in one piece and was not on

fire. It went up in the air slowly twisting and turning with its tail gunner still in his turret, as it fell earthward in apparent slow motion. The middle of the plane just disintegrated, Ten men had been killed instantly in this fiery holocaust.

It seemed forever until the call "bombs away" and the jar felt as the bomb load left the plane, I watched the bombs leave the planes adjacent to us and fall earthward toward the aircraft factories far below. The fires caused by the explosions from previous groups bombing the same target, caused a column of smoke to rise thousands of feet in the air. After unloading all the bombs, our squadrons made an immediate turn to the left to avoid further flak. Unfortunately, another group having bombed the same target from a different direction, made a turn to the right, exactly into our path at the same altitude. From my position, I could not see what was approaching, but was listening to the pilot and copilot yelling to each other to go up or down or whatever to miss the oncoming aircraft. As we jockeyed to avoid collisions, bombers started to slip by just beneath us while others barely missed going over the top. As I sat there watching these planes go past and not being able to see what was coming, I knew that any second we could be crashing headlong into another plane coming from the opposite direction. About that time I saw a large section of a plane's wing slowly spinning in the air and falling to earth. I then noticed a B-24 minus its left wing going down and entering into a flat spin. Obviously an aircraft from our squadron had crashed into one from the other group. I watched unsuccessfully for a while to see if any parachutes could be seen leaving the ships. Twenty more bomber crewmen had just become casualties.

Our group reformed the remaining aircraft into formation and headed for home. After hours, we finally reached the English Charnel, and while losing altitude to land at our base, we crossed over the white cliffs of Dover. We reached an altitude where I could remove my oxygen mask and leave the cramped turret which I had sat in for many hours, On the way back to our base, we passed over other airfields whose bombers were also landing after completing their missions. Our squadrons entered the field pattern at our base and in turn landed one after the other in short order. Bombers with battle damage or wounded aboard were given priority in landing. We all stepped out of our plane, thankful to be back on solid ground once again. After landing, all crews had to be debriefed and interrogated for any information we may be able to provide. The total relief we felt on safely completing this mission was tempered by the fact that in the next day or days we would have to go and do this all over again.

#### THE LAST MISSION

July 12, 1944 Is a date that none of us on our crew shall ever forget We got up very early, briefed on our mission and headed out to our aircraft Today's target was to be Munich, Germany, which was at about the maximum range the Eighth Air Force could fly to a forget out of England and be able to return home. It would be very heavily defended again. As we were at our plane preparing to embark, I must have appeared somewhat apprehensive, because one of the ground crew patted

me on the shoulder and said something reassuring, then wished us good luck. Leaving the safety of the solid ground and climbing back into our bomber was not the easiest thing to do.

The bomb load on this day consisted of several large containers of incendiary bombs along with the 500 pounders. We finally took off, formed into groups over the Channel and headed off deep into the Nazi heartland. Since most of Germany had a solid cloud cover on this day, our group was following a "Pathfinder" bomber which could drop its bombs on the target by radar. All the bombers in our squadrons would release their loads on the signal from this plane. Flying above the clouds at about 19,000 feet altitude, we could see the ground below through an occasional break in the clouds. After hours of tense and very exhaustive flying, all the while continuously scanning the skies for enemy aircraft, we were closing in on our target. As we approached Munich, the flak batteries opened up in full fury. Everybody closed in tight after passing the "initial point" of the bomb run. The bomb bay doors were opened in preparation to drop our lethal load. The concussions from exploding antiaircraft shells was giving us a rough ride when "bombs away" was finally announced. About that time our plane was struck with several flak bursts. The pilot communicated to all the crew that two of our engines were knocked out and had to be shut down. Whatever other damage had occurred, I am not certain. It was determined by the pilot and copilot that we could not maintain altitude and since we were so very far from our home base in England, there was no possibility of making it back successfully. Our only chance for survival was to try to make it to Switzerland, which was a neutral country, while trying our best to avoid coming down in Nazi Germany. I guess the pilot called to the flight leader our intentions as we banked away from our group and headed towards Switzerland. From my tail turret position, I watched us separate from the other aircraft as they headed home. It was a very lonely and sinking feeling watching our friendly force head back to England as we limped over Germany. Flying all alone and crippled over enemy territory was an extremely bad position to be in, because if spotted by Nazi fighters, we would have no chance at all.

Occasional holes in the cloud cover gave us glimpses of the earth below. We were constantly losing altitude while nearing the top of these clouds. About this time there was some confusion in the cockpit as the copilot was arguing with the Navigator regarding our position. Apparently they couldn't agree on where we were. The pilots guided our plane through a hole in the clouds as we were losing more and more altitude. At this time we were ready to bail out if the pilot decided this was the best plan. After a while this option was ruled out as we were much too close to the ground. We were now so low that we attracted the attention of a German light antiaircraft battery which we had inadvertently flown directly over. From my tail position I watched as the tracers from the cannon shells left the ground and headed towards us in an arcing trajectory, somehow barely missing us on all sides. Watching these tracer paths coming at us was like watching it in slow motion. Fascinating but very frightening, I really don't know how they missed us as we were so close. As we flew on, losing more

and more altitude. The pilots knew they had to land our plane somewhere. I got out of my turret and joined some of the crew in the rear section to prepare for the crash landing. The pilots had chosen a wheat field as our landing site. We sat down, holding our heads down with our arms, and nervously watched the ground approach through small windows near the floor. The pilots brought the plane in as slow as possible with full flaps while holding the nose wheel up. We eventually met the ground in a very rough ride, with ammunition boxes and other equipment flying all about. We knew that when the nose wheel had to be lowered due to lack of flying speed, it could dig into the soft earth and flip the plane completely over. When the nose wheel finally touched the ground, it acted like a plow but did not stick in and throw us over. We came to a halt with our nose dug into the ground while the tail end was high in the air. As we all left the aircraft and stood on the ground without any injuries or casualties except for frayed nerves, we considered ourselves extremely fortunate.

Being safely on the ground, we now had to decide our next move, since we had no idea of our exact location. Were we in Switzerland? About this time someone saw a man coming across the field towards us. A couple of our officers walked over to the man to find out where we were. They came running back with the announcement that we were still in Germany! Actually we had landed just across the German border into Nazi occupied France. At that, it was quickly decided to split up and all try to get to Switzerland in any way possible. We all started running in different directions, some through the wheat fields and others towards the woods. Gordon, our radio man, and I, headed in the direction of the forest about 150 yards away. Being in the middle of July and very warm, we struggled through the wheat field, still wearing our heavy flying gear. As we entered the edge of the woods, we stopped to remove some of this equipment so we could move faster. While attempting this, rifle shots clipped the branches around us. Dropping to the ground and peering in the direction of the shots, we saw a rather fat German policeman with his rifle aimed at us. We were so intent in running to the woods we had not seen him pursuing us. At this point, without any other choice, we had to raise our hands in surrender. I think the policeman was as nervous as we were. He shouted something in German while waving his gun at us. Hoping not to be shot on the spot, we followed his motions for us to go back to the plane with him right behind us.

Being captured by your enemy is an incomparable experience to any other. Your first reactions are the fear for your life and the immediate intentions of the person to whom you are surrendering. We carried no weapons to defend ourselves, even given the chance, ~ had happened so suddenly and caught us totally unprepared for this turn of events. Even though this possibility had been mentioned in our training, I never considered it as a serious option. We would either successfully complete our missions or go down trying. Anyway, the man holding the rifle pointed at us gave us no alternative but to surrender. While being led away, I was filled with apprehension while at the same time trying to grasp the full realization of what was happening and what would be happening to us.



The policeman marched us back to the plane with hands held high, where we saw Charlie, our engineer gunner already being held a captive by a higher ranking policeman. Everyone else was still on the run trying to escape. The three of us were forced into the rear seat of a little car powered by some sort of charcoal burner or something, built on the back of the car. With one of the policeman driving and the fat policeman holding a cocked pistol aimed at our heads, we started our short trip to the local town. Since I was sitting in the middle, the policeman apparently figured that by pointing his gun at me, he was covering us all. Bouncing over this rough road while looking directly down the barrel of a cocked pistol was very unnerving. We drove into a small city named Ensisheim which is near the larger city of Mulhausen. We drove down a street and stopped at a white house, Here we were directed down stairs into a dark basement which held bicycles and other equipment. The heavy door which was closed and locked behind us had a small steel barred window in it. We stayed here for a short time while wondering what was going to happen next. Pretty soon a lot of people came down the stairs and looked at us with flashlights through the barred window, There was much talking and shouting before they decided that they should break the door down and drag us out. As they were battering on the door, an older woman took the flashlight and shined it at our very frightened faces. According to Charlie, who could understand some German, she said to the others as she shined the light in my face, "He's only a child!" She apparently took some pity on us and convinced the rest of the people to quit trying to get at us and leave, I guess that being quite young and looking it must have saved our hides!

Being captured by civilians and not by the military was the worst of situations. We had been told that German civilians were killing many downed airmen due to their anger over their cities being destroyed and people being killed in these raids. Many flyers were shot, beaten to death, hung, bayoneted and killed by various means. Many were killed by angry farmers with pitchforks immediately upon coming to earth. On the other hand, the military had orders to capture us so we could be sent to Prisoner of War camps, Obviously we had hoped to see some sign of German military personnel as soon as possible.

After a while, some policemen came to get us and take us over to what appeared to be the local jail. It was an large ominous looking building with high stone walls, We went through a door into a covered area outside of what was the main office. Here we were taken over by the local Nazis, These were arrogant civilian men who had their official Nazi buttons worn proudly on their coat lapels. They made the three of us line up, while in very broken English accused us of being "Luftgangsters," murderers and many other such things. During this loud haranguing, one of them smashed his hand across the face of either Charlie or Gordon, I don't remember which. Each one of us were taken in turn into the office where we were asked how many of our crew were still running free. I tried to act like I couldn't understand in their broken English just what they wanted. One of the men pulled out a large pistol and aimed it at me and asked again. I still said I didn't understand until he cocked the gun and pushed it hard into

my belly. At that point I figured I had best say something even though there were still seven of our crew, as of this time, not captured. I said there were three, I suppose this was my small attempt to keep from telling them the whole truth. After being taken back to the other two, we were further accused of various atrocities. One of the men loudly told us that since we were murderers, that we would have to die also. He then waved for a guard to take us away. We were led through a door into a large inner court surrounded by high stone walls, I guess the three of us were thinking the same thing upon seeing these stone walls. We had all seen movies of condemned men lined up in front of similar walls. However to our great immediate relief, we were taken across the courtyard and down a long flight of steps to a series of prison cells below ground. This area was cold and dreary and reminded us of dungeons we had seen in movies.

Upon arrival there, we were told to disrobe and given a very thorough strip search. After that we were given back only our underwear, then directed into a dismal cell with only straw on the floor. Later we were given some lousy ersatz tea and a slice of black bread which we found hard to eat. The guards then left and we were alone with our thoughts, As the day progressed, some more of our crew joined us as bit by bit they were all captured at different locations, Eight of us were prisoners while the pilot and copilot managed to escape and make it to Switzerland.

Late that day we heard much hammering and sawing which sounded as if it were coming from the courtyard, This went on until dark. Slowly our minds began to explore the possibilities of what our fate was to be. I think we all came to the same conclusion, After all, we had been told earlier what was to become of us.' We imagined that we might be slated to become a demonstration for the local citizens of what happens to airmen who bomb cities. Ultimately there was not a doubt in the world as to what lay ahead for us, I cannot possibly portray in words one's feelings when you believe that you will not survive another day on earth. This was without doubt the worst night of our lives. Apprehension, fright and panic all take their place in your mind. You wonder how you will be able to stand up to what was to come. All this sounds overly dramatic now, but at the time it was all very real. That night we got very little sleep. The sleep we did get was mostly because we were exhausted from the mental and physical turmoil we had been through that day.

Morning arrived and we were told to get dressed, after which the guards would come to get us. It was extremely hard to follow the guards up the stairs towards the courtyard with the overwhelming apprehension we were all feeling. We came to the courtyard, looked around and did not see what we expected to see. We followed the guards out in the direction of the prison entrance, We could hear a crowd of people outside in the direction we were headed. We were led out and through these people to an open flat bed truck loaded with some of the weapons and gear from our bomber. But best of all there were German soldiers in the truck waiting for us. The immediate relief we all felt was beyond description, We finally were in the control of the military and had a chance for a future,

however tenuous it may be. Many people crowded around the truck when we climbed aboard with the soldiers. One man kept acting like he was trying to get on the truck to drag us out to the delight of the crowd, By this time we all felt so relieved that this didn't bother us at all.

We were certainly glad to leave this town and the jail behind as we drove away in the truck. We drove past many concrete pill boxes with cannons protruding from them. This must have been the French Maginot Line. We came to the Rhine River and crossed over it into Germany. We passed a wrecked plane alongside the road as soldiers were trying to extricate the pilot. They yelled and shook their fists at us as we drove by. During the whole trip the guards never said a word. We finally arrived in Freiburg, a large German city. Letting us out near an airfield, we were marched past German fighter planes all lined up, on the way to what turned out to be a very large prison building. We were led up to the fourth or fifth floor and put in an ancient cell with a barred window which looked out on a military drill field. We could look out the window and watch new German soldiers going through their basic training. It was somewhat disconcerting to watch them take bayonet practice on dummies dressed up like American and British soldiers. While we were in this cell, another gunner was brought in to join us. He was the only survivor of his B-17 bomber when it blew up over the target. Nine of his crew members died in the explosion.

The next day all of us were put on a passenger train with some guards. We received both hostile and curious looks from the civilians in our car. The guards kept them away from us. We left Freiburg and traveled north to Frankfurt. At a stop at a train station on the way, I looked out the window and saw some Red Cross ladies giving out some snacks to soldiers nearby. For an instant I thought that this was great because we were getting quite hungry, Then reality set in as I remembered that we were the enemy and were not about to receive anything from people who hated us. Arriving in Frankfurt, we were taken off the train in the main station. The large steel and glass vaulted structure was very heavily damaged with all the glass panels broken out. We got many very angry looks while in the station. I have heard later that there were quite a few instances of atrocities against Allied airmen which occurred in Frankfurt. In our case, the guards were guarding us from the civilians. We were taken out of the station and traveled through the city, or what was left of it. The buildings were extensively damaged and in ruins from many previous air raids. Three and four story buildings with roofs and walls blown away still had people attempting to live in this rubble. Through all of this devastation, we were taken out of the city a short distance to a town named Oberursel. The uninviting and somber group of buildings we were being led to, did nothing to ease our apprehensions.

#### INTERROGATION CENTER

Our destination was a group of large wooden barracks and other buildings surrounded by a barbed wire fence. Since our captors did not tell us anything, we wondered what went on behind these walls. Upon arrival, we were stripped,

searched and led individually down a long hall and into a very small cubicle. There were many of these solitary confinement cells, each about 5' wide, 12' long and 8' high. It had one small window which was frosted over so you could not see out at all. A wooden platform with some straw stuffed into a paper sack served as a bed, with a short wooden stool being the sole contents of the room. All cells opened onto a long hall which had a toilet at the far end. To use the toilet, you rang a bell which brought an armed guard who would accompany you to and from. The walls and ceiling were painted white. A previous occupant had scratched a "V" (for Victory) on the head of every nail on the walls and ceiling. Being separated for the first time from my other crew members and put in this cell, brought out an overwhelming feeling of loneliness. Sometimes I could very faintly hear the airman in the adjacent cell talking to an interrogator or singing to himself to break the tedium. Once I heard my neighbor singing a song popular during the war called "In Der Fuhrers Face", so I joined in the song. Rations were 2 slices of black bread (usually with mold on it) with jam and ersatz coffee in the morning, watery soup at midday, 2 slices of bread at night. We would obtain drinking water from the guards. Being confined in such cramped quarters with nothing to do or see for days, with only your thoughts and apprehensions for company, became very difficult. I never knew from day to day what would happen next. At one time I passed the time making pictures of our house at home and other objects from pieces of straw taken from the bed, I was soon to learn that we were in an interrogation center run by the Nazi Luftwaffe for the purpose of questioning all captured allied airmen for any useful military information they could get from us. Of course we were instructed beforehand, if captured, not to divulge anything but name, rank and serial number. Naturally this did not satisfy them so other methods were attempted. They used calculated amounts of mental depression, privation, and threats to achieve what information they thought we might give them. They knew that our situation was very intimidating in itself, so they pushed on this all they could. Put in solitary confinement, we were to be eventually interrogated by German military people who could speak fluent English.

One day a very tough looking Sergeant came in my cell and began asking questions. After giving him my name, rank and serial number, he persisted for more. In an attempt to frighten me, he said that they did not know whether or not I was a spy and made me aware what happens to spies. Even though I felt that they knew I wasn't a spy, this uncertainty gives one something to think about. After a standoff, he finally left saying that he would be back. I never saw him again. The next day or so, I was taken to an office where a Luftwaffe Major was waiting to interrogate me. He acted quite civil and could speak perfect English. During the time I was in his office, he held up an empty champagne bottle while saying he was sorry he didn't have any to offer me such as we saw in our training film. He referred to the film which we had been shown in training, that showed the Nazis offering champagne and other things to prisoners to get them to divulge military secrets. Obviously he knew that I didn't know anything of value and was just enjoying himself. In fact, he pulled out a binder and read me the Bomb Group I belonged to, which Squadron and even where we trained in

California. He had binders full of information on every Bomb Group in England. The Major said that I probably wondered how they knew all of this. He laughed and said "we pick it up for a few Pounds in London." I was then sent back to my cell and the next day was taken to an area where prisoners were being gathered together to be transported to another camp. After five days in solitary confinement, I met our Navigator who was also being released. The rest of our crew were released after only three days. We were all put in a room while they were getting us ready to ship out. On the walls of this room were scribbled various stories by prisoners who had come through before us. Some of these were quite vivid and tragic. Finally we were herded into trucks to take us to the train for the trip to the next camp.

#### DULAG LUFT

Under the surveillance of the guards, we again boarded a train and headed north to a town named Wetzlar. We got off the train and were marched through town and up a hill to where a prisoner of war camp was located. During this trek, we were accosted by a group of Hitler Youth who threw rocks at us while shouting names at us in German. These were all fairly young boys who were dressed in their Nazi uniforms. As we neared the camp, we could see barracks and other buildings in a compound surrounded by high barbed wire fences and guard towers. This camp was called Dulag Luft. It was run by the Luftwaffe for allied airmen in transition to their permanent camps. Officers and enlisted men were gathered together here before being separated and sent to either a camp for officers or one for enlisted men. As we entered the camp, the prisoners who were there, shouted greetings to us while looking to see if they recognized anyone from their particular air base. Occasionally someone would see a friend or buddy they knew and would immediately inquire about the fate of other mutual acquaintances. We all felt a big lift in our spirits because we were among other airmen and friends, and were finally in an official Prisoner of War camp.

This camp was quite well run by both the appointed prisoner directors and the German military. We had fairly decent quarters to sleep in and a reasonable amount of food, though still in short rations. Each new arrival was given an American Red Cross "captive case", a sort of suitcase made from fiberboard which contained some personal items such as shaving gear, toilet paper, soap, underwear, a sweater and a few other necessities. We were each issued American Army pants, shirt, shoes, and one blanket. This was a Godsend to us as we were still wearing some of the flying gear we had on when shot down. The Germans had taken away most of our heavy flying clothes and left us with light coveralls, etc. Most of the items and parcels came through the International Red Cross stationed in Switzerland, which was neutral in the war. The American Red Cross had sent all of this to be distributed by the Swiss Red Cross. Food parcels came to us via the same channels. There is no question that the Red Cross saved many prisoner lives and we all owe them a deep debt of gratitude.

We were served family style in a mess hall where you knew only to take a small portion of whatever food was passed around the table. The many eyes watching you made sure of that. This camp was so much better than anything we had all been through, that we were going to miss it when we had to leave and go to our permanent camps. Since this was a transition camp, our stay was to be quite short.

We had officially become "Kriegsgefangenen", which is German for 'War Prisoners'. Later we came to refer to ourselves as "Kriegies". We were given cards to write a note home to be delivered through the Red Cross in Switzerland, I think my parents received my card about two months later. This was after the Army had sent them a "Missing In Action" telegram. It took about the same amount of time before they were notified that I was a Prisoner Of War. During our stay at this camp, we could usually look up in the sky and see large formations of bombers flying overhead to their targets. One day the target turned out to be the town we were adjacent to. We had a ring side seat as we watched from our hill top position at the action below. The ground shook with the explosion of the bombs and we could see the smoke coming up from the target they had just **M**, We could see some parachutes coming down in the distance from the bombers which were hit by enemy fire. Someone observed that if they could only land in our camp, they probably could avoid all that we had been through. Unfortunately, they landed miles away from us, to whatever fate awaited them.

After about a week's stay at this camp, we were notified that another group of enlisted airmen would be gathered together for transportation to a permanent Prisoner of War camp. This was not welcome news, although not unexpected, since we knew that wherever we were headed, it would be much worse than this camp. We gathered our meager belongings and prepared to march down to where the trains would be waiting for us. When we arrived at the train, we saw that it contained several box cars which were intended to carry us to our destination. These were quite a bit smaller than American box cars and were the same type that were called "40 and 8" (40 Hommes - 8 Chevaux) boxcars during World War One. In other words, they were intended to carry either 40 men or 8 mules. More than 40 of us were herded into each car along with a few armed guards who rode in another car. They put in a little straw on the floor for us to lay on and a few rations of black bread and water. The doors were securely locked behind us, which left only a very small high opening near the ceiling for ventilation.

Finally near evening, the train got under way, heading generally in a northeast direction. Again we did not know where we were heading. A lot of rail transportation was done at night because of the threat of allied fighter plane attacks. We traveled all night long over rail tracks which in places must have been quickly repaired time and again due to continuous air raids. This produced a somewhat rough ride in stretches. Once, while we were speeding along in the middle of the night, I was awakened by our car hitting something on the track, which felt like we jumped a foot or so in the air. We heard later that we had traveled through Berlin on our way north. This train trip was very long and

uncomfortable. One morning we arrived and stopped on a siding which turned out to be at the port city of Stettin near the Baltic Sea. The doors were opened by the guards so we could get out long enough to relieve ourselves. This allowed us to stretch and enjoy for a short while the warm sunshine and fresh air. All too soon we had to get back in our box cars and be locked in again. The train took off going in an easterly direction. Another long ride until we stopped once again. This time we were told that we had reached our destination and would soon be leaving the train on a march to our new camp. The railroad station was named Grosstychow, which was about two and a half miles south of Kiefheide in the Pomerania sector of Germany. This is very near the Baltic Sea and today is within the borders of Poland.

The officer in charge of delivering us to the camp was a young Lieutenant in the Luftwaffe, who turned out to be a very compassionate person. Through his efforts, he saved us all from a lot of pain and suffering. Ordinarily, the camp guards would come out to each arriving train full of prisoners and escort them back to the camp. The prisoners would be lined up in columns with guards on either side. Sometimes the prisoners were shackled together. They also brought with them a bunch of extremely vicious German Shepherd attack dogs. After the guards fixed their bayonets, the order was given to start running the prisoners. Each prisoner was carrying his Red Cross case with his belongings in it. While forcing the prisoners to run, the guards would keep jabbing them with their bayonets while at the same time the dogs would bite the legs of whomever they could. The guards would try to cut the cases from the hands of the prisoners so they would drop them. Many airmen arrived at camp with several bayonet wounds in their backs, rear and legs, along with bites from the vicious dogs the guards set on them. The distance of this run between the train station and the camp was about two miles. Our young German officer knew what we were in for, so he got us up early enough to march us in before the camp guards arrived at the station. When we showed up at the camp with our guards, the Captain of the camp guards was livid with rage. He ranted, raved, swore and threatened to have us all shot. It seems that he would stir up the emotions of the German guards each time with stories of our being vicious murderers and perpetrators of other atrocities, to the point that they would have carried out any of his orders. We were saved by the intervention of the camp Kommandant. As we sat outside the buildings waiting to be processed, the worst some of us received was a few belts by a rifle butt. This was nothing compared what we had just escaped. It seems that this Captain had some of his family killed in air raids, so he turned his rage and hate on all of us who were bomber crewmen. During our stay at this camp, his hate became very apparent.

#### STALAG LUFT IV

Stalag Luft IV was a P.O.W. camp set up by the Nazi Luftwaffe to house noncommissioned allied flying personnel. It was also referred to as a Strafe Lager, or "punishment camp" for "terror fliers." New war prisoners were delivered into the "Vorlager," an outer group of buildings which housed the

German administration facilities, warehouses, barracks for the officers and guards for the camp and various other structures, The camp housed predominately Americans together with a few hundred English RAF flyers. It was located in the center of a large clearing in a very dense forest far from any population centers. Next to the Vorlager was the main part of the camp. It consisted of four compounds (A, B, C, D), each about 100 yards square which were referred to as "Lagers." This camp was designed to hold about 2500 prisoners per Lager, or a total capacity of around 10,000. Each Lager contained ten barracks with five barracks on each side facing a large open area between. At one end was the kitchen where our food was prepared and delivered to each barracks. Within this building was a general purpose room and an office. On each side between the five barracks were a latrine and a shed called a wash room, which housed a hand pump over a well. This became our only source of water for the Lager. The Lagers were separated from each other by two 10 to 12 foot high double barbed wire fences with rolls of barbed wire between. These fences also surrounded all four Lagers with guard towers spaced at regular intervals and manned 24 hours a day, These towers supported machine guns and searchlights which were turned on at night. Circling the interior of each Lager, about 20 feet from the main fence, was a wire (about 18 inches high) which was called the "Warning Wire." The guards had orders to shoot without warning, anyone crossing over or touching the warning wire.

Each barracks was constructed with the floor about 2 or 3 feet off the ground to prevent escape by tunneling. They were single story structures, each containing ten rooms and approximately 40' x 130' in size. There was no plumbing or heating in any of the buildings. From a single entrance door, a long corridor went the length of the building with the rooms all entering off of this. At the end of the corridor, there was a pit toilet without running water, for use when we were locked in for the night. Each room, which was about 15' x 25', was designed to house 25 men. As time went on, more and more new arrivals were crowded in. A single window was provided for each room with large solid wooden shutters which were opened during the day but were closed and locked from the outside at night. Prisoners were informed that the guards would shoot anyone seen entering or leaving through the window. Each room also contained a stove and a single light bulb hanging from a cord off the ceiling. The furnishings consisted of a wooden table and several wood stools.

After sitting on the ground for a long time under the watchful eyes of the guards, we were sent in small groups to be processed. We were again searched very thoroughly, interrogated, posed for mug shots, filled out forms regarding next of kin and were even asked to give our mother's maiden name. After being thus processed, we were sent into a room to wait for the others. Here is where we came to be acquainted with the meanest and most hated guard in the camp. He was a huge man, about seven feet tall, whom others before us had given the nickname of "Big Stoop," after a character in the then popular comic strip called "Terry And The Pirates." He hated all airmen and apparently enjoyed subjecting each prisoner that came by him to some sort of bodily harm. He would



beat some, throw others forcibly against a wall, or find various other ways to satisfy this urge. I was standing with my hands in my pockets waiting for the others, when he came up behind me, grabbed my arms out of the pockets and threw them down with all his strength. My arms felt as if they had left their sockets, I was sore for quite a time after. One man came flying through the air, bounced off a wall and landed in a heap next to me.

After all our group had been processed, we were gathered together in formation and started to march towards the main camp, The man who had just been smashed into the wall, was calling Big Stoop some very choice names, when one of the guards overheard him. The guard ran to Big Stoop and told him what was said. He came running out of the building, roaring and yelling loudly and headed for our group. He grabbed the poor guy who had swore at him, dragged him out, screaming and hitting him while threatening to take his pistol and shoot him. Needless to say, he scared the hell out of this prisoner.

Finally he went back in the building and our march continued through the gate into the main compound. We were surrounded by lots of "Kriegies" who wanted to see if anyone they knew from their bomb group was among the new arrivals. We were all asked for news of how the war was going and any other news we could relate. Since we hadn't had anything to eat, we were each given a slice of black bread with some sort of jam on it. This did little to ease our hunger but were thankful for it anyway. Since they were still constructing the Lager and barracks we were to be assigned to, they had put up a large, long tent to temporarily house us. We were all given a large paper sack and directed to fill it with wood shavings they provided. This was to be our pad to sleep on. We were also issued a blanket together with a bowl and large spoon. There were 50 or more men crowded into this tent and since there was no toilet facilities, they gave us two pails to use for this during the night. Of course that was not enough, so by morning they had overflowed and spilled over. We were given a few loaves of black bread to be divided amongst us. This was the same bread that we were given when first captured. At first taste, the bread was so bad that you didn't want to eat it, but hunger soon overruled taste and we learned to relish every slice. The bread had sawdust used as a filler in the dough and was tough and almost indestructible. This particular bread was the main staple for German troops and civilians during the war. In the morning the "honey pots" that had run over, slopped onto the loaves of bread, Since no food was to be wasted, we scraped off some of the crust and ate every crumb, After a week or so of tent living, we were told that our new Lager was completed and we would soon be moving there.

#### LAGER C

All of us who were crowded into the tent, along with some new arrivals and some Kriegies who were overcrowded in the other Lagers, were gathered together and marched through the barbed wire gate to the new Lager C. Here we were counted into groups of 25 to 30 men and assigned to rooms in the barracks. The six of us

from our crew made a successful effort to stay together so we could live in the same room. We were assigned to barracks No. 3. Since there were as yet no wooden bunks built in the room, we all threw our paper bed sacks on the floor around the base of the walls. The only furnishings were a wooden table and some stools. A small round stove provided heat and a place to cook, providing we had something to cook. As stated before, there was only one window which was closed and locked at night. In a short time, all of us in the room became acquainted and became rather close friends. In all of the time we shared this room, I can't recall a single incident of any serious argument, in spite of the crowded conditions and hardships endured. We all had a lot in common, being from various bomber crews who were shot down by either Nazi fighters or flak. Everyone had their own dramatic story of how they met their particular fate. There were some who were sole survivors of their bomber which blew up in the sky. Others had part of their crew killed in all kinds of horrible ways, including in some cases, by civilians. Some men were delivered here after being mistreated while in the custody of the Gestapo. There were men still suffering from all types of wounds. Some men were disfigured from burns encountered when they escaped their burning airplane. Some were walking around with many small pieces of shrapnel still in their bodies. A flyer I became good friends with had his fingers all twisted out of shape from getting them tangled up with the shroud lines in his parachute while plummeting to earth. The most seriously wounded were kept and treated in a makeshift hospital elsewhere in the camp.

The major concern for all of us was the shortage of food. The Germans had a hard time to secure enough food to feed us, let alone feeding their own people. Air raids had disrupted the transportation systems to the point where the delivery of any food could not be counted on any regular schedule. The American Red Cross had put together "Prisoner of War Food Parcels" which ideally were to be distributed on a one man per parcel per week basis. These were sent through the International Red Cross in Switzerland or Sweden which were both neutral during the war. Each parcel contained miscellaneous items such as cans of corned beef, Spam, powdered milk, instant coffee, box of cheese together with cigarettes, a chocolate bar and a few other items. Of course, we never received anything like one food parcel per man. Many times we had none and would have to rely on the German supplied food which was pretty meager. There is no question that the American Red Cross kept us from starving. They also saved our lives by supplying us with warm clothes later on when we were in desperate need.

Our German rations were one loaf of bread per day to be divided between six or more men. In the morning we were supplied with hot water from the kitchen which we mixed with our instant coffee. This we usually ate with a small slice of bread, if we had any. In the evening we would send one man from each room to the kitchen for our soup or potatoes. The soup was made with various things like cabbage, kohlrabies, rutabagas and if we were very lucky, a little bit of horsemeat was included. Sometimes we got only a few small boiled potatoes. Our basic food was kohlrabies and potatoes. Combined with what the Germans would give us, was whatever small portions we would ration ourselves from the food parcels. You never took more than a very few bites from anything at anyone time,

because it had to last until the next parcels came in, if and when they did. In our barracks room, we put any food that came in, whether from the kitchen or the Red Cross, into a common pool which was divided equally among all the men in the room. When we had loaves of bread or any thing else that needed to be divided, one man was selected to do the cutting into equal shares. We all crowded around, with every eye in the place on the dividing process- When this was completed, all of the pieces were laid out on the table with a playing card placed on top of each, after which we would all draw cards from another deck and match our card with the one on the food. This worked fine since there could be no argument about who got a larger share. Even though this seems very petty now, at the time every crumb of food was precious. Constant hunger was our main hardship and concern.

The daily schedule called for all of us to form in ranks in front of our barracks about 9:00 in the morning to be counted. This was called "Appell". We had to stay there until the exact body count checked out with their records. Once in a while we would duck down or hide in the ranks so it would screw up the count. This would make them very angry and various punishments would be threatened unless we shaped up. This was entertaining at times until the cold weather set in. Then we would be made to stand in the ranks in the freezing temperature a long time until they decided to let us back in the barracks. During most of the day, we were left alone. Many Kriegies would walk around and around the perimeter of the compound, right next to the warning wire, always under the watchful eyes of the guards in the towers behind their machine guns. This was one of the few exercises we had. The YMCA sent us a few bats and balls through the International Red Cross, which allowed us to play baseball. Others just laid around on their bunks most of the day, either playing cards or some other diversion to pass away the boredom. There was another Appell about 4:00 in the afternoon. During these times, the Kommandant would stand in front of our ranks until the guards brought him the proper head count. He would usually use this opportunity to announce any new camp rules and threats for any infractions thereof. He was a middle aged officer in the Luftwaffe who had apparently been wounded in the war, which caused him to walk with a noticeable limp. He had an excellent military bearing and was impeccably dressed in a full length black leather coat over his blue Luftwaffe officer uniform. After Appell, one man from each barracks room would be sent to the kitchen for the room's ration of soup or whatever they had to feed us. Later on, before dark, we would all have to go back into the barracks so they could lock us in for the night. Besides locking the front door, the guards closed and locked the solid wood shutters on all the windows. As soon as we were secured in the barracks and darkness fell, the searchlights were turned on and the guard dogs were turned loose to roam around the Lager. If any prisoner was found to be outside of the barracks after this, they would be shot on sight or torn apart by the dogs.

During the day, there were several unarmed English speaking guards who wandered around the compounds and throughout the barracks. Obviously, their duty was to spy on us and keep the Germans informed on what the prisoners were up to. They

were known as "Ferrets", but we called them "Goons" One of these was a guard who always wore his green Wehrmacht uniform and was referred to as the "Green Hornet". I believe he told us that before the war he had lived somewhere in America and wanted to go back after the war was over. He became a real pain in the neck as he was always coming into the barracks, interrupting and making himself a pest.

Our only contact with the outside world was either through letters we were allowed to write and the few we were able to receive, or through a secret radio someone had built under the noses of the Nazis. If a rare letter made its way through to you, it was the greatest morale booster possible. The letter would be read and reread every day and treasured almost as much as food. Hard as it may be to understand, some men even received "Dear John" letters from their wives who just found it impossible to wait for the war to end and their husbands to return.

Every few days we would gather in our room to hear the latest war news that came over the hidden radio. At each barracks, a man would be posted as lookout at the front door, while two guys would come into each room in turn to read us the current news heard over the SBC. I do not know how the radio was built or how it was kept hidden from the Germans. Whenever one of the Ferrets would come into the vicinity, someone would yell "Goons up!" and everyone would resume their normal activities until the guard left. In this way we had a very limited view of how the war was progressing and how close the front lines were to our camp. We knew that the Americans and British were coming our direction from the west and the Russians were closing in from the east. We could observe groups of bombers from the Eighth Air Force flying overhead toward their targets during the day and could occasionally hear the bombs from the RAF exploding on target at night. I climbed up so I could look out of the front door transom one night, and watched as the RAF dropped their bombs on a target to the east of us. They were apparently bombing Peenimunde where the Nazis had their experimental rocket facilities. The sky would light up as the bombs exploded and I could feel the explosions even though this was some distance away. It was quite a show. During the day we could occasionally see the trails from the missiles as they rose into the sky from this rocket base. Of course, at this time in the war, we had heard very little about the German's progress in rockets except for the **V1** and buzz bombs raining down on London.

The summer progressed very slowly. We spent our time walking around the perimeter, playing baseball and cards, discussing the progress of the war and always talking about food. Since hunger was our constant companion, conversation usually centered on when and if the next shipment of food parcels would arrive. We would spend time telling each other what we were going to do after we got home. This usually involved going into a restaurant, ordering everything on the menu and eating until we became absolutely stuffed.

Periodically, there would be a new group of arrivals coming into camp. We could hear the commotion as they neared us, with the guards yelling and the dogs barking as the poor guys were being forced to make the "run down the road". The Captain of the guards was once again taking his rage out on the flyers. I saw one man being carried in, who we were told had about 64 bayonet wounds in his back. He was covered with blood. Fortunately, this activity was finally discontinued. I suppose those in charge could see that they would be held accountable after the war.

Every once in a while we would be buzzed by usually three Luftwaffe fighter planes. Knowing that our camp was filled with allied flying personnel, they must have had an urge to show us how superior they were as pilots. One day we heard them coming but could not see them because of a low cloud cover. It sounded as if one of the aircraft was in a dive towards the camp. It must have been his intention to pull out just overhead and roar past us at treetop level. As we watched in the direction of his motor sounds, he burst out of the low clouds in a steep dive and while trying to level out, crashed full force into the woods right next to us. He had obviously made a fatal miscalculation in the distance to the ground. There was a large fiery explosion followed by smaller ones as his ammunition erupted. Some of the prisoners started to cheer until someone noticed the guards in the towers had cocked their machine guns and were swinging them around towards us in a very menacing manner. We quickly melted back into our barracks and stayed until we figured it was again safe to come out.

We were always entertained watching the procedure used to clean out the pits under the latrines whenever they became full, which was most of the time. The Germans retained a certain amount of Russian prisoners, who were housed in their own quarters outside of the camp, as the labor force for jobs not assigned to the guards. This was one of their chores. The camp had an old wagon with a large wooden tank mounted horizontally on the chassis. Attached to the top of the large tank was a small metal tank. The wagon was pulled by two slow moving oxen being driven by two Russians sitting high on top. Later on they used an old tractor to pull it. The latrine was a long shed with wooden planks installed full length in a long continuous seat configuration. There was at least a dozen holes cut out along the planks about 24" apart. Backed up to this was another row of seats facing the opposite direction. Whenever the pit under the toilets got full, the wagon would come to empty it. They would drive up to one end of the latrine which had an access door at ground level. The Russians would drop a long flexible hose down the access hole into the pit, then climb up on the wagon and start to pump up the pressure in the smaller tank by hand. I suppose they put some sort of combustible fuel into this tank. One man would then light a match to an outlet on the small tank followed by a thunderous booming noise created by the explosion. The wagon practically jumped off the ground followed by the sound of the contents in the toilet pit being sucked up into the large tank. This whole procedure had to be done several times before their tank was full I don't know how this worked, but I suppose the explosions created some sort of a vacuum in the tank. The Russians then drove the full wagon out of the

Lager to empty it in the fields next to the camp. We were under the impression that they sprayed it on the fields where our potatoes were grown. This whole operation always drew a large crowd of onlookers. There were many jokes made about this being one of the Nazis secret weapons.

Any time of the day or night we could expect to be roused out of our barracks by a squad of armed guards, led by the Ferrets, for a thorough search of the Rooms. Big Stoop was usually right in the middle of this, obviously enjoying whatever misery he could deal out to us. They would go through each room methodically and tear everything apart, throwing our stuff all over the place. The worst times would be the middle of the night. In winter, where we would have to wait outside in the below freezing weather until they completed the search and let us back inside. They would rip the beds apart, rifle through our clothes, food and the few personal items we possessed. I imagine the main thing they were looking for would be the secret radio they knew existed, but they never were able to find it.

Summer was winding down and with apprehension we knew that fall and winter would be arriving soon. During the latter part of August, I celebrated my 20th birthday. Certainly never thought that I would be observing this day in prison. We were aware that we did not have the proper clothes or other gear to survive the freezing winter climate. Since the camp was located very far north near the Baltic Sea, we knew that the weather would be severe. The barracks were not substantially constructed and contained no insulation at all. This far north, the sun would set earlier and earlier during the winter months. Since we were locked in the barracks with the shutters closed when it got dark, this took place around 3 o'clock in the afternoon during the peak of winter. This made our confinement even more difficult. When the cold set in, we tired up the small stove in our room for whatever heat it might produce. Our daily ration of coal was 6 briquettes per room per day. These briquettes were made of coal dust pressed into block shapes about half the size of a conventional brick. Needless to say, the amount of heat generated by burning these, didn't do a whole lot to warm us up.

The days in the rooms were spent playing cards, bull sessions, waiting for our evening meal of potatoes, trading items in our food parcels between each other, and sleeping. Those of us who didn't smoke were able to trade our cigarettes for some sort of food with those who did. Cigarettes became the basis of any monetary dealings up until the day we were liberated. At first we had no playing cards, so we made some by cutting up small cheese boxes into card size and drawing numbers on them. This didn't work too well since you could tell what your opponent held by reading what was printed on the part of the cheese box he held. The guards would occasionally give us a newspaper to pass around. This was the official Nazi propaganda paper which showed pictures of dead allied soldiers and flyers and distorted news of the war.

Each day became a mixture of boredom, apprehension, anxiety and stress. Living daily under these conditions, along with the total confinement we were experiencing, weighed heavily on us. In contrast to being a prisoner in jail, who knew how long his sentence was before given his freedom, we knew that we were confined until the end of the war, however long that may be. We never knew from day to day just what plans the Nazis had in store for us. At times some went through periods of deep depression, which was usually referred to as "barbed wire fever". We had heard that Hitler hated all allied flyers, who were causing the destruction of his cities and war industries, to the point that he ordered all of us to be executed. Fortunately, his Generals balked at carrying out his instructions. Along with the mental stress we were under, our physical condition was deteriorating. We had all lost a lot of weight since our capture, and due to lack of proper quantity and quality of food in our diet, it was impossible to remain in good physical condition. A doctor who was also a prisoner, told us that our blood had turned to crap and it would have a difficult time to fight off even minor infections. Through all of this, the camp morale was quite high and typically as with most G. I. 's, something could usually be found to wisecrack about.

The bitter cold of winter kept us in our barracks most of the time except for the daily roll calls. During this time, large double decked shelves were built in the barrack rooms to sleep on. This was an improvement over sleeping on the cold floors. The snows, ice, rain and winds of a Baltic Sea winter can be very harsh. Of course our daily ration of six coal bricks per day for the small stove in our room, did not begin to keep us warm. Trying to wash and bathe outside from a hand pump in these conditions, did not give one any incentive to linger very long in the process. Soap, along with toilet paper and other essentials were in very short supply, if at all available. The Red Cross food parcels were arriving less frequently, apparently due to the trouble the Germans had in deliveries this far north. Hunger dominated our daily existence. Food, or the lack of it, became our main concern. On very rare occasions, we were served a bowl of barley mush for our main meal. This was relished as much as if, in other times, we had been served a six course banquet.

I finally received a letter or two from home. This was the first news that I had received since we were shot down months before. The greatest thing that any of us could ask for was to hear from our families. These were short letters or cards which were sent to us through the International Red Cross in Switzerland and censored by the Germans. We were able to send letters out on a special kind of a form which we were given about once a month. These went out through the same channels. I knew that my family had received a "Missing in Action" telegram from the Army, and was relieved to learn that they knew I was alive in a Prisoner of War camp. Somewhere around this time we were issued U. S. Army overcoats, which came to us through the efforts of the International Red Cross. We were very thankful and very much in need of these warm coats, since we lacked the proper clothes to ward off the fierce Baltic weather. Little did we know, that these overcoats would save our lives in the months to come.

## CHRISTMAS

I think it was sometime around Christmas when we heard the news of the large Nazi counterattack. Just when we had begun to think that our liberation may be near because of the great strides the Allies were making towards Germany to our West, we were given the news through our secret radio that the American and British were being pushed back and the Germans were having great successes. Our forces were surrounded at the city of Bastogne and nothing but negative news reached us. Our morale dropped considerably. Christmas was near and we already felt low enough being in this prison camp, away from our families and friends during the holiday season, without this bad news. The morning Christmas arrived, we were totally surprised to learn that there was a shipment of Red Cross food parcels which made its way to our camp. The American people had put together, through the Red Cross, a special Christmas parcel for each Prisoner of War. Where we had always to share any food parcels whenever we had any, with several men, this was enough to give each man one at his own. We were like little kids on Christmas morning with new toys. We could hardly believe it when they handed each one of us a box. Each small box contained different kinds of food. Candy, cigarettes and even a small canned plum pudding. Along with this was included a picture of some well known landmark in America. They even put a different small game in each package. This must have been the high point for all of us during the whole time spent behind barbed wire at Stalag Luft IV. Later we went to a program where we sang holiday songs in the room next to the Lager kitchen. Various religious services were given in the different faiths by some of the prisoners. All of this helped to get us through a period of extreme homesickness during this holiday, which was, before this, destined to be a pretty gloomy day.

During January of 1945, we could begin to hear the guns of the Russians to the east of us. Through our radio, we could follow their progress on a map which had appeared from somewhere and kept hidden from the guards. Our camp was far to the north, almost adjacent to the Baltic Sea. The Russians were coming towards us directly to our east. Each day they got a little closer and then started pushing the Nazi front lines to the south of us. It finally put us in the position of being surrounded on two sides by the Russian armies and against the Baltic Sea on the other. We knew at that time that our liberation was only a short matter of time. The only out was directly to the west towards Stettin and that had a lot of waterways to get over. Rumors ran through the camp like wildfire. We knew that Hitler had demanded that his Generals not let us be liberated so we could be held as pawns or hostages for future negotiations. Of course, we all knew that the Russians were too close now and that it was too late for the Germans to move us out. Each day the guns became closer and louder. One day our camp leaders came around to each barracks room to tell us that the Germans were up to something, although they did not know what. We were told to prepare for anything. There were all kinds of possibilities discussed, none of which bode well for us. There was always the chance that our captors would be ordered to carry out Hitler's original plan to eliminate us. Everyone kept calling for



"Uncle Joe" (Stalin) to hurry up and free us before the Nazis could carry out their plans. Needless to say, these were very tense and tearful days.

One day we saw a group of prisoners come through camp led by several well armed soldiers. They were a rag tag bunch of men which looked to be prisoners from various countries. Some had their hands tied. Among them were Russians, men wearing turbans who were probably from India, and others from different allied armies or conquered lands. They were a pathetic sight in their ragged clothes and haggard appearance. They appeared to be very hungry and in very poor physical condition. We all felt extremely sorry for them as we wondered why this particular group were marching alone and just where they were headed. The next morning they were gathered together and moved out.

One night in early February, the guards burst through the barracks door and announced to all within that we would be evacuating the camp first thing in the morning. We were told to fall out the next morning with whatever we wanted to carry, and be prepared to march out. Even though we knew that something was up, this still came as quite a shock. They left the light on later than usual so we could get ready. Each room became a beehive of activity as we tried to determine what we would take with us and how we would carry it. Early on, when they took away my flying clothes, I was given a blue, short, RAF jacket. This I made into a back pack by sewing the ends of the sleeves to the base of the jacket. When I turned it upside down and used the sleeves as shoulder straps, It worked quite well as a pack to carry my few belongings. These included the little bit of food I had stashed away, a blanket, a couple of extra socks and underwear, another pair of pants, a few personal items, my spoon and a tin can to eat out of or cook in, if we were to find anything to cook. The can was the size of a half pound coffee can, which originally held powdered milk from the food parcel. The brand name written on the face of the can was KLIM, which of course was milk spelled backwards. We all had our KLIM cans which we carried with us through the entire march. They became one of our most prized possessions.

#### THE FORCED MARCH

First thing the following morning, which was a very cold February 6, 1945, we were called out of the barracks for our final Appell, ready as we could be, to march out. A knit cap and the recently issued overcoat were our only protection against the freezing weather. We were formed into columns of men four or five across and between 400 and 500 in each group. They assigned about 20 guards for each group. As these columns were formed, we were marched out of the Lagers and through the camp up to the storage warehouse. Here we were stopped until the guards gave each man two Red Cross food parcels to carry. We were instructed that this food had to last us a long time, since there would be no more issued along the march. Of course we thought that this was a real bonanza, because we had not seen this much food since coming to camp. The fact that the Germans had these parcels in their possession for some time without giving it out before this, really angered us. I suppose that the Captain of the Guards had something

to do with this. Our euphoria at being given all this food soon turned to the realization that there was no way we could possibly carry it all. It was too heavy and too bulky to put in our packs. At first chance, we broke open the boxes and stuffed what we could in our pockets and backpacks. It really killed us to do it, but we had to leave behind some of the heavier and less critical food items, because it was impossible to carry everything. For the next mile or so, we would pass many parts of parcels the men tried to carry but finally realized it was beyond their capabilities. We tried to eat everything we could before throwing anything away, but were limited by the size of our shrunken stomachs. Many got sick along the way by trying to gorge themselves.

The prisoners in the hospital and those deemed unfit to march were taken by train to some other camp just before the rest of us started out. I have no idea where they ended up, but as it turned out later, they were the lucky ones. Apparently our camp leaders were told by the Germans that we would march for only a few days until we reached another permanent camp. It was a good thing we didn't know what was really ahead for us or we might not have had the will to go on.

Kilometer after kilometer we trudged on. We were allowed a rest break of 5 or 10 minutes every hour. We sloshed through the snow, slush and ice in the freezing weather. To compound our bad luck, it turned out to be the most severe winter weather in this part of Europe for over 25 years, with the temperatures as low as 16 degrees below zero. We were ill prepared for this forced march, being undernourished and improperly dressed for these blizzard conditions. Our marching columns were strung out along the road for what seemed like miles. Other groups had left the camp on different days before and after us. All told, there were thousands of us walking along the back roads heading in a westerly direction. There was a guard marching along side for every 20 prisoners or so. More guards and their dogs followed close behind. We were told that anyone falling out would be shot. The guards who were marching with us, were the same guards who manned the guard towers and other duties back at camp. Most all of them were either old men or those found unfit for frontline duty in the Nazi armies. This was very tough on the older guards who were carrying heavy machine guns and other arms. All of us Kriegies were young and in pretty fair shape, although weakened by our stint behind barbed wire. The first few days we held up pretty well before the physical stress began to take its toll.

We kept to the back roads for the most part, going through small towns and villages. The inhabitants looked at us with curiosity and contempt as we marched through their towns. We noticed that besides this, there seemed to be a look of apprehension on their faces. This was understandable, because the sounds of fighting at the front lines were quite close, and their fate at the hands of the Russian armies would be terrifying to say the least. We marched all day until we came to a small rural community where we were to stop for the night. The guards counted us off into large groups and led each group over to various barns in the area where we would spend the night. There must have been over a hundred men in

our group. We were led into a large barn on some farmer's property, pushed through the door which was locked behind us. Guards were stationed at the door and around the building to keep us inside. There were many more of us than the barn could effectively house. We all struggled to find a spot large enough to lay down on. Some were crowded into the loft, horse stalls, or wherever else afforded a few square feet of space. The floors were covered with some scattered straw mixed together with animal manure. We were so tired that nothing seemed to matter but finding a space to sit or lay down to rest. We were crowded on the floor like a can of sardines, with each man ending up side to side and foot to head with his neighbor. There was neither heat, light or windows in the barn, so as darkness settled in, you could not see anything beyond a few feet away. We were wet and very cold from the day's march. We found that by sharing blankets with a buddy, yours on the bottom and his on top, seemed to work out best. Also, by sleeping close together under the blanket, you could share each other's body heat. During the night, if you needed to relieve yourself, you had to struggle over all of the bodies on the floor while trying to find your way to the door. Upon reaching the door, a word to the guard stationed there, would allow you to go outside a few feet away to do what was necessary. Trying to find your way back to your bed in the dark through all the bodies, was a real test. Guys would holler back and forth to their buddy to find the way back while stepping on many other poor souls. This was followed by much swearing and threats of bodily harm from the person being stomped on. The men in the loft knew it was impossible for them to get out, so when they felt the urge, they just relieved themselves right there. This of course brought great howls of protest from those directly below. Thus was spent the first miserable night of what was to be many, many more. Everyone eventually formed into what was to be called a "combine". A combine consisted of two or three or more Kriegies who grouped together to share everything they had equally among themselves. It was sort of a buddy system where you worked together and sort of leaned on each other for moral support. Instead of being totally on your own, you had a close friend or two to share the misery and nightmare which lay ahead of us. Three of us from our crew, Charlie Schaefer, Bob Thompson and I, formed up into our combine. We stayed together until we were liberated.

The next morning we were roused out of the barn, formed back into columns again, and resumed our westward trek. The weather was lousy. Snow, sleet, rain, mud and wind made walking very difficult. We were tired, cold, wet and hungry from the previous days march. We had rationed ourselves a small amount of food to eat, from what we were carrying, knowing that it had to last for a long time. The guards kept us moving at a steady pace, not allowing very much rest time on our hourly breaks. With the noise of the war following close behind us, they had no desire to be overrun and captured by the Russians. The next few days followed the same pattern. Breaking up into somewhat smaller groups each night, we were dispersed into barns or whatever places the military could force a farmer to provide for the night. One night a few of us were put in some sort of a chicken coop, where the former inhabitants had left many signs of their occupancy behind. At least here we were able to heat a little water in our Klim cans and

have a hot cup of instant coffee for the first time. Early the next morning we started out again. By this time the daily march was beginning to take its toll on the prisoners. Blisters were forming on feet not used to walking, and some signs of various illnesses began to appear. There was no chance to clean up, dry our wet and cold feet, or get any rest except for a few hours each night. Those who couldn't keep up and slowly fell to the rear of the column, were prodded by rifles and dogs back into the ranks. I recall passing one man sitting alongside the road, who had taken off his shoes to expose a pair of bloody feet from blisters which had worn through to the flesh. He couldn't go on and had to fall out of the marching columns. I have no idea what ever became of him.

One day our march took us through a clearing in the woods where a large group of German soldiers were digging trenches and other fortifications. We had to step over and around the defenses they were preparing. Most of the soldiers were very young boys who were led by older officers. I couldn't help feeling extremely sorry for them, since in a very few days they would probably all be killed by the advancing Russians troops. They would be absolutely no match for the well armed foe bearing down on them.

On another day, we were on the road and on our way early in the morning. We marched all day long through freezing weather until nightfall. This was a very long hike, the longest one we had so far been forced to endure. Apparently the Germans had only a few days to get us out of the surrounded area before the Russians closed the trap. They were determined not to let us be overtaken and liberated by anyone. According to the Nazi leaders, we still had some value as negotiating hostages. Totally exhausted, we were led into a clearing in the woods, then told that we would be spending the night there. There was no shelter of any kind to protect us from the freezing, driving, rain and snow. We sat, frozen and soaked to the skin, the whole night long. We tried to light some fires but were unsuccessful because everything was too wet to burn. It was a very long night. I, along with hundreds of fellow Kriegles, figured that we had been beat down to one of the lowest points in our life.

Morning arrived, with the guards shouting and prodding us to get up and fall into ranks. It took all we had in us, under threats of violence, to drag our stiff and frozen bodies off the ground and into some semblance of a marching column. Some just couldn't make it and were left behind. Again, I don't know what happened to them. From what we heard, those dropping out were being Shot. I can't verify this, but we never saw any of them again. After many hours of walking, we arrived at a strip of land separating two bodies of water, the Baltic Sea to the north and some inland bay to the south, This was the only road remaining to the West, since the Russians were closing in on Stettin directly to the South of us. We marched through the city of Swinemunde, which was located on this strip of land, until reaching a large river. At this point we were taken across to the opposite side on ferries under heavy guard. We continued the march from there, in generally a western direction, staying mostly to the back roads.

We were leaving the Russian armies behind as they were being slowed up by stiffer resistance from the Nazis and the Oder River.

Days went by as the march continued. We tramped along on roads of all sizes, both small country trails and some main arteries between towns. The march took us through villages and cities of all sizes. We were looked at with antagonism and hostility by the population whenever we passed through their area. The route our march was taking was very erratic, zigzagging back and forth all over the map. The weather continued to be bitterly cold, as we fought our way through snow, rain and mud. Each night we were housed in various types of barns or any other buildings they could find. We never were able to get warm or completely dry out. Sometimes we shared the barn with horses or cows. The straw we slept on, if there was any, was liberally mixed with manure and lice. The march began to take a heavy toll on us. Dysentery became a very serious problem which got worse as the days progressed. It sapped what little strength any of us had left. Illness of various kinds plagued many. Frostbite and abscessed feet became common. Many came down with pneumonia. Diphtheria struck some. Men began collapsing from weakness due to the lack of enough food to sustain the body and the other hardships encountered. We had used up the food we carried with us from the food parcels after about a week. The German officers forced the farmer who owned the barn we stayed in each night, to cook us some potatoes from his personal supply. This didn't set well with the farmer, since food was pretty scarce by this time throughout Germany. Our nightly ration would be 4 or 5 potatoes slightly larger than a golf ball. At times we could build a small fire to boil water in our Klim cans for a cup of instant coffee, if we had any left. Occasionally we would either be given kohlrabies, which are similar to a rutabaga, or forage some from a pile used to feed the pigs. The water we received was usually from a very questionable source, which further led to dysentery and other diseases. We were treated like a herd of animals. At this point in the march we were nearing the limit of our physical endurance.

## THE DEATH MARCH

What started out to be a few days walk to another P.O.W. camp (so we were told), was becoming a fight for survival. Men were dying from many causes, from violence at the hands of our Nazi captors, to those related to the many severe hardships faced on this forced march. It had turned into an indisputable death march. Later on, many stories and books have been written about this incident during the war. It has also been referred to as "The Black March".

A true hero of the march had to be a Flight Surgeon whose name was Leslie Caplan. This man, without question, saved quite a few lives among those falling ill and those not able to continue. There was a total lack of medicines and the doctor did not have even the basic necessities such as a stethoscope. I have read that in trying to treat someone with pneumonia or other illness, that he would have to open the man's shirt, scrape away the lice, and put his ear to the man's chest in order to diagnose his condition. He gave encouragement to those who thought they could go no further. Apparently he convinced the Germans that

they would have to make allowances for the men who were seriously ill. I believe he finally got them to allow the critically ill to be sent to German military hospitals. They supplied a "sick wagon" which followed the marching columns to pick up those who collapsed along the way. This was an old wagon pulled by a couple of equally old oxen. I'm sure that Dr. Caplan's efforts were responsible for this. For the rest of us, he would give advise to help us keep going, such as eating chunks of charcoal to try to control our worsening dysentery. He also gave lengthy testimony later on at a war crimes hearing regarding the violations to the Geneva Convention during the march.

Days turned into weeks and still we walked, seemingly without any destination. It became apparent to us that the Germans had orders to keep us on the move, just out of the reach of either the Russian, American or British armies. We had been continuously on this trek through February and it was now into March. What started out as columns of thousands, now had been reduced to hundreds as different groups split off and seemed to be wandering all over northern Germany. A lot of them went southwest and ended up in a camp in Mooseburg. But we kept on the move, still in a general westerly direction. The weather remained brutally cold. My feet had become frostbitten or frozen and I lost all feeling in them from the ankles down. It felt like I was walking without feet. When I removed my shoes and socks, the skin on the bottom of my feet had turned white and just peeled off in large sections. I did not regain any feeling in them until months later.

We all had become like a bunch of robots or zombies, just plodding along, hour after hour, day after day, week after week. We were starving, exhausted, physically worn out and miserable. Your mind even becomes numb at times, walking along automatically, just following the man's feet in front of you. Much of the time my thoughts were thousands of miles away, thinking about home and family. I would try to imagine that if I was permitted to be back home for only one hour, just how much I would be able to do in that time frame. I had it worked out that I could take a hot bath, change clothes and eat a full course dinner and still have enough time for a few minutes rest before having to return. I even worked out what my choices on the menu would be. So much for fantasy. We were as dirty and grubby a group as it was possible to be. We were absolutely filthy. Our clothes were caked with mud, dirt, manure and whatever else we were exposed to. We were never able to wash and clean up, shave, brush our teeth, for weeks at a time. We could not change clothes because we had no extra clothes to change into. The places we were locked into each night were squalid and foul. Once while walking along, I was noticing some of the men and thinking about how miserable everyone was appearing. Later on, someone loaned me a small pocket mirror they had. When I peered into the mirror, what looked back at me was the dirtiest and filthiest face you could imagine.

Food was becoming very scarce. We were fortunate if we got a ration of boiled potatoes at night. We were always scrounging for anything we could find to eat. If there was anything left over in the barns which the farmer used to feed his

animals, it didn't last very long. One time when we were stopped next to a stream for the night, I filled my Klim can with some grass, and threw in a few minnows I caught from the stream. I cooked these, figuring that it would at least help till up the empty void in my stomach. It wasn't that successful. Another time when the Germans had nothing to feed us at all, they killed a horse, cooked it and distributed it amongst the prisoners. Bob Thompson and I shared a single large rib, which we took turns gnawing on. One day when things got very tough, I was able to get one of our guards into a short conversation, using the few words of German I had picked up and with much gesturing of hands. I offered to trade him a gold ring I was wearing for some loafs of black bread. He went away and came back with one loaf, saying that was the best he could do. I was in no position to push for more, since it was forbidden to talk to the guards at all. At least the three of us in our combine had some bread for a few days.

We were plagued with dysentery so severe, that we could not always control ourselves in a timely fashion. Even while marching through the center of a town, it was not unusual to have the need to relieve oneself, even though it was on the main street with many people looking on. After a while all thoughts of shyness or modesty were lost. Besides, these were the same people who were shouting insults and throwing stones at us as we walked through their town. After discarding the only two pairs of undershorts and extra pair of pants I owned, due to uncontrolled accidents, I was left with only my one pair of ragged pants to wear. Further mishaps just had to remain and dry out. Of course there were no facilities available to wash ourselves or our clothes. It seemed that as every day went by, we were being driven further down to the lowest level of humanity.

One night, after being locked in for the night, I became very sick to my stomach. In pain and throwing up often, I got very little rest. The next morning we were roused out as usual to form into position and start walking. I was so weak from this and the dysentery that I could hardly stand, let alone walk. Having no choice, I dragged myself into the marching column and plodded on. I tried my best to keep up but slowly fell back to the end of the column. Several guards were stationed there with the dogs to make sure there were no stragglers. They kept jabbing me with their rifles and demanded that I get back into the ranks. After a while I just went over to the side of the road and collapsed. At this point I felt so bad that I honestly didn't care what they did to me. They tried to make me move, but with all of their threats and prodding, I just remained where I was. Fortunately for me, pretty soon the sick wagon came into sight, carrying a couple of guys they had already picked up. A guard who had stayed behind with me, shoved me into the wagon with the others. The old oxen pulling the wagon started out again and we rattled on following the columns. Somewhere along the way, the guard who was in charge of our wagon, stopped in front of a house in a small town we were going through. He then made the three of us follow him through the front door and into the entry. He apparently knew the owners of the house. He stayed within sight of us while he sat with his

friends and had a cup of coffee and a bite to eat. After a while, one of them brought us some hot water so we could make some instant coffee. They must have had some compassion for the three miserable looking individuals sitting by the front door. The two men with me were close friends and kept more to themselves, leaving me feeling quite lonely and alone. I guessed that I would never again see my combine and the others I usually marched with. After a while we got on our way, ending up with some others in another barn for the night. In the morning, I felt somewhat stronger, so was put back into the marching ranks again. It was a very uneasy feeling, being totally on my own, while everybody else had their buddies to travel with and more or less look out for each other. I started out at the end of the column and kept walking at a faster pace through all the ranks looking for familiar faces. I had to cover a good portion of the entire column before finally finding them. It was very fortunate for me that at last I was able to join up with my own group. I was very happy and relieved.

It was now into the later part of March, and we were still on the road without any particular destination. By now we had walked hundreds of miles. The weather was starting to improve, leaving the snow and ice behind us. We still plodded through rain and mud as we marched throughout each day. On rare occasions, we were allowed to stay at one location for the day. This was probably because the Germans didn't know where the hell to take us next. We welcomed these breaks, giving us a chance for a much needed rest. The marching columns seemed to be getting somewhat smaller as time went by. We were losing some who were not physically able to continue, while other groups were apparently heading off in a different direction. We still numbered in the hundreds of exhausted and starving men. At one point along the way, the Germans found a small cache of Red Cross food parcels stored somewhere. They let us split them up amongst ourselves. We had to divide each one between several men, but it was a real Godsend.

One of the side effects of sleeping in all these barns with the animal residue, was infections of lice. We were soon covered from head to toe with these miserable beasts. They worked their way under our clothes and proliferated next to our warm bodies. It was impossible to rid yourself of them. At night and whenever you were inactive, you would feel them crawling around all over your body. These lice were white, fat and around a quarter of an inch long. Their bites would leave a small red blotch on your skin. Once when I removed my shirt, it appeared that I was sunburned from the belt line up, from the mass of bites. They remained with us during the entire time we were on the march, driving us nearly crazy with their crawling and itching presence.

A few small towns we went through were busy constructing blockades in the roads leading into town. These were mostly elderly men who were cutting down trees and placing them across the road, which was supposed to stop or slow down the approaching mechanized armies. I suppose they thought it was necessary to do something, but it was apparent that it would be pitifully inadequate. You could not help but feel compassion for these older people and children who would soon become victims of this brutal war. Another pathetic sight was the refugees on



the roads and in the towns. They were desperately trying to avoid being overtaken by the Russians who were exacting brutal revenge on many of the German civilians. There were many families loaded down with their belongings either walking or riding on a tattered old wagon being pulled by a worn out horse or oxen. I'm sure they were very short on food and didn't know where they could go to find any measure of safety.

It was now the first part of April and we were still on the road, wandering around the northern part of Germany still in a westerly direction. The daily ritual of marching all day long, being locked in some filthy barn at night and scrounging for what food we could, was wearing heavily on us. Occasionally we were given some cabbage or kohlrabi soup by the farmers wife to go with our ration of potatoes. I managed another trade with one of the guards. My wristwatch bought me two loaves of bread at a time when food became very scarce. Once in a while we would be able to trade some cigarettes, if we had any, for food of any kind from Russian prisoners who were working as slave laborers on the farms in the area. The Russians seemed to think we Americans were great guys and were very friendly. With the weather improving, there were less men becoming ill from pneumonia and other sicknesses. We were hardening up somewhat to the rigors of the continuous hiking. Our blisters had turned to calluses and our legs were becoming more accustomed to the daily grind. However, the lack of proper diet, the lice and the filth were still taking their toll on our bodies and our stamina. Being roused out in the morning after a miserable night of trying to get some sleep and rest in a stinking barn, on an empty stomach, and being exhausted from the previous day's march, was not something you ever got used to. By now, I had slept on the ground, out in the open with snow and rain, in lofts, stalls, feed troughs, in every kind of barn or chicken coop, draped over hard cement sacks, in or on farm equipment parked in the barn, and many other cramped and foul places.

Our morale was improving however, as we could observe almost daily, the sights and sounds of the war getting closer to us. We would watch large formations of bombers flying overhead and hear the explosions of guns and bombs quite often. One day while marching along the road in our usual long column of men, we were unexpectedly strafed by a British fighter plane. We scattered into ditches and behind trees to avoid being hit. I don't recall how many casualties we suffered from this attack. There would have been many more except for the fact the pilot started shooting from a long distance away, which gave us more time to scatter. He saw a large formation of men marching down the road and naturally figured we were German soldiers. Later reports came back to us that other columns had also been strafed and suffered some killed and wounded. We thought that we were aware of most of the dangers facing us, but being shot by people on our own side was not one of them. We were strafed again later on, but remained always on the alert for planes in our area, which gave us time to take cover. The word finally got back to Allied headquarters that P.O.W.s were being force marched throughout certain parts of Germany, so these incidents ceased for the most part. The

fighter planes were becoming more and more active however, shooting up targets all over the area and uncomfortably close at times.

Our route took us through the city of Lauenburg which is on the Elbe River. We crossed the river and continued until we came to another town which I believe was named Ulzen. We were taken to the railroad area and without any explanation, were informed that we had to board some old 40 and 8 boxcars which were parked at a siding. We thought we had seen the last of these on our journey to Stalag Luft IV. These boxcars were old, dilapidated and much smaller than American cars. Our entire column was loaded into several of these boxcars. We were forced in like sardines until there wasn't an inch to spare. The door was closed and locked securely after the last man was squeezed in. There were so many men jammed into each car, that most of us had to stand up. There was only room enough for a few men to sit down at any one time, so we had to take turns standing and sitting. We were wedged in so tight that any movement became almost impossible. The air grew stale and stifling. Our being unwashed and filthy, didn't help the situation either. The only opening in the car was a small slot high on one wall which was about 24" by 8". We all were suffering from dysentery to some degree, which created an additional problem. A tin can appeared from somewhere, which we continuously passed around for those in urgent need to relieve themselves. When full, the can was passed overhead to the person nearest the opening to dump out. Naturally, the contents would occasionally spill as it was given from hand to hand over our heads, which evoked much swearing from the unlucky recipient below. Hour after hour went by without any word from the guards where we would be going, and why, after marching for weeks or months, we were stuffed in these boxcars. The balance of the afternoon and all through the very long night we remained locked in under these miserable conditions. It seemed like an eternity. Being forced to stand up for the major part of the time, in our weakened state, was pure torture. We knew that if we gave out and collapsed, we would be failing on our companions who were going through the same agony. This was one of the hardest things I've ever been subjected to. Morning arrived and still no relief or word of what lay ahead. By then we were nearing the limit of our endurance. Finally, sometime in the afternoon, a locomotive was connected to our boxcars and slowly started moving the train. We had no idea where we were headed, but were at least glad to be on our way.

At the time, we had no information as to why the Germans put us in the cars and kept us on a siding for so long, without moving to some destination. Talking to other Kriegies later on, and reading various accounts after the war, a possible motive became clear. At this time in the war and in areas in close proximity to the fronts, the American and British fighters were shooting up anything that moved, including trains. In many instances, the Nazis would place train cars carrying Allied prisoners on a siding in clear view of any attacking aircraft. Thus, if the fighters strafed the trains and killed or wounded some prisoners, they would let this be known to the Allies so they would cease attacking their trains. They also parked the boxcars with their human cargo in main rail yards

which were being targeted by bombers. Unfortunately there were P.O.W. casualties on some of these trains. What gives further weight to this probability, concerning our particular train, is the fact that our destination was only about 80 kilometers away from where we boarded the boxcars. There seems to be no other reason to put us on the train for such a short ride, since we already had walked hundreds of miles and could have marched that distance in a few days.

#### FALLINGBOSTEL - STALAG XI B

After a few hours ride, the train came to a jarring halt, the doors were unlocked and we were ordered out of the boxcars. The fresh air we were finally able to fill our lungs with, after the many hours breathing the foul and stagnant air in our tight confinement, was wonderful. We were positioned back into ranks, counted and marched out. Our destination turned out to be a permanent P.O.W. camp near the town of Fallingbostel. The time was around the 7th of April when we arrived it was called Stalag XI B, which was controlled for the most part by the Wehrmacht (the Nazi Army forces). This camp had existed here since near the beginning of the war. it housed men from every nation that was at war with Germany. The majority seemed to be British, some who had been held prisoner since Dunkirk. There were also French, Russian, Poles, Serbs, Belgians, Hollanders, soldiers from India and countless others. It had become a dumping ground for every sort of prisoner from every branch of service. We were added to this overcrowded mess. By this time in the war, the camp had lost any semblance of an organized and properly run unit. There appeared to be very little order to anything, with prisoners wandering around aimlessly. The camp had run out of barracks and had reverted to putting new arrivals in very large tents. There was no bunks SO we slept on the ground. Food was supplied by portions of Red Cross food parcels, some black bread, boiled potatoes, watery soup and whatever else they were able to come up with. Many of the long time inmates had built a cooking devise from tin cans, which used a hand cranked blower to heat up a small amount of twigs or other burnable items Into a hot enough fire to heat water or cook whatever they had. These men, most of who had been in captivity a long time, had the connections which allowed them to trade guards cigarettes for food. You could see these cooking machines in operation at any hour of the day all around the camp. New Kriegies weren't very much welcomed by the old hands.

Soon after our arrival, we were taken to a building where showers were installed. Stripped of our clothes, we proceeded to go into a large room with shower heads in the ceiling. These were exactly like the shower rooms used in the death camps to exterminate millions of people. The difference being that the one we went into was real. I'm very glad we didn't know about what occurred in those camps at the time. The hot showers were of short duration, but felt indescribably fantastic. My last hot shower had been nine months ago, and I had not been able to wash or even remove my clothes for over two months. While we were in the showers, the Germans took all of our clothes and put them in some kind of an oven and baked them. They were still warm when we put them on after

the showers. Feeling clean and warm for the first time in months was like heaven. The reason behind all of this was not to give us pleasure, but to kill all the lice and other crawling creatures we were infected with. Apparently the camp, with all of its faults and filth, had as yet not been contaminated with these insects and they desired to keep it that way. After our showers, they sprayed us thoroughly, head to foot and especially in our hair, with a powder disinfectant. Even though we put our dirty clothes back on, we certainly felt much better and free of lice, if only for the moment.

We were all much relieved to be free of the daily agony of the march, and figured that we would stay here and sweat it out until the war's end. There was the usual concern for where the next meal was coming from, but at least we were faring somewhat better than on the road. For the first time we could rest and try to heal our worn out bodies. Besides resting, the days were spent wandering around camp, observing all the diverse population and what was going on. One day I happened to read a notice posted on a building and was astounded to see my name listed along with some others. It was a list of men who had parcels which were delivered through the International Red Cross to this particular Stalag. I have no idea how it ever found it's way to this miserable place. I rushed over to claim my prize. It turned out to be 4 cartons of cigarettes that my parents had sent to Stalag Luft IV months ago. Somehow since we had moved out of that camp, it had been rerouted here. My folks knew that I didn't smoke, but had been sending everything they were allowed to mail by Red Cross rules. None of their other packages ever came through until this. It would have been impossible to receive anything more valuable than cartons of cigarettes, as this was the main vehicle of exchange in any P.O.W. camp. You could buy almost anything with cigarettes, they were in such short supply. I was practically a millionaire! I gave several packs to Charlie who was the only smoker among the three of us in our combine. We walked over to a tent where the British had set up a type of store where cigarettes were used as money. They had different cans and boxes of food spread out on a table which were from various American, British and Canadian Red Cross load parcels. We purchased quite a few food items with most of the cigarettes and kept the rest for later transactions. We had learned to ration any food we had with utmost care, but enjoyed a little of it at the time. We didn't know it then, but this food was to help see us through the upcoming weeks. I took the remaining cartons back to our tent and hid it under my blanket. Later on during the day or night, someone crept up to the outside of the tent adjacent to where my bed was, slit an opening in the tent and stole my remaining cigarettes. This was a major catastrophe as we had planned to buy more food with all that was left. Every ounce of food was very critical during these uncertain times I'm sure that it was one of the long time prisoners who had seen me with all those cigarettes. I don't believe it could have been one of the Kregies we had shared the rigors of the long march with. We had developed too much of a close rapport to steal from one another. With this disappointment behind me, life went on with the daily hardships in camp.

The sounds of war to the west were becoming more intense daily as the American and British land armies were battling the Nazis within close proximity to our camp. We were concerned, but encouraged that our liberation was only days away. Rumors were flying wildly about If the fighting came near or overran the camp, we would be in deep trouble without any defense or protection whatsoever. All we could do was worry and wait.

The word finally came that we would again be back on the road, marching away from the impending action. This was met with mixed reaction. The dangers of staying at the camp, opposed to the thoughts of once more facing the hardships on a forced march. We had been at Stalag XI B only a week. Our clothes and shoes were worn out from the previous long march, as were all of us. It seemed that everyone was not being evacuated. Most of our groups who had arrived the previous week, who were Luftwaffe prisoners, would be marched out I guess they still thought that we would be valuable pawns for negotiating at the war's end. Nevertheless, we started out again in a general northeast direction. After a few days on the road, we arrived at a point where we started to retrace our old route going in the opposite direction. Two months ago, we had begun marching west away from the advancing Russians. We had walked hundreds of miles across Germany until almost coming in contact with the Americans and British, then turning around and retreating back in an easterly direction away from our forces. The outcome of the war was no longer in doubt, and only days or weeks at the most until it was over, so what the hell were we doing being forced to march all over their damned country? It was all so senseless. Our guards, who were older men, were totally worn out and unfit for the physical hardships endured on the march. They told us that they thought the whole thing was stupid, and Germany should have surrendered long before this.

We entered Lauenburg again which was located on the Elbe River. The first time we had passed through the city, there was very few signs of damage from the conflict. Within that short period of time, there was extensive destruction on all sides. They had been the target of much aerial activity. As we marched through the streets, we were halted occasionally due to military movements on the roads. There were many antiaircraft batteries throughout the area. Once we stopped right next to a group of German soldiers manning one of these. They were at their stations waiting for the next attack. It seemed strange to be so close to the enemy whose duty was to shoot down aircraft who were our allies. Being less than 8 feet from the soldiers, we were able to observe each other quite closely. **I can remember that I felt no animosity towards them and in turn didn't notice any antagonism against us from them. Oddly enough, I think there was some sort of a mutual bond between human beings being subjected to the awful tragedies of war.** We finally moved on through the city and crossed over the Elbe on our way. We were very fortunate that there were no air raids during the time spent in the area.

None of us thought that we would find ourselves back on this deplorable march again, after arriving at Stalag XI B. We figured that we could sweat out the end

of the war in a camp where the facilities, however miserable, were far superior to the appalling conditions on the road. The food was as scarce as ever, usually a few small boiled potatoes at the end of a long days trek. The food items I bought with the cigarettes, helped the three of us through some bad periods, but were soon consumed. Our usual sleeping quarters in the filth and manure of barns, brought the lice back in full force. In fact, with the weather warming up in the second half of April, they seemed to proliferate tenfold on our bodies. There again was no facilities for cleaning up, and no clothes to change into even given the chance. Dysentery remained a major problem, draining what strength we had left.

Day after day we plodded along in an erratic route in the same general northeast direction. Occasionally we would stay over an extra day at some farm. This was always welcomed as a chance to rest up for the next day's exhausting march. By this time, I think the guards were acting on their own without specific instructions as to where we were going. Everything seemed in total confusion. Several times a British fighter plane would swoop down on our column to check out if we were German soldiers. We had learned to hold our ranks and keep marching because we knew that the pilots had been briefed on our forced marches. It was still unnerving to hold your position with an aircraft diving down ready to let loose a barrage of machine gun fire. They would come down, check us out, then fly parallel to our columns about fifty feet off the ground and wag their wings in recognition as they flew by.

One day as we were marching down a forest road, we heard a high pitched screeching noise coming from a clearing ahead. When we got to where the noise was coming from, we were amazed to see an airfield with planes more or less hidden in the woods. What surprised us even more was the sight of some jet fighters taking off with the screaming noise we had heard earlier. None of us had ever seen a jet before, and were not even aware the German Luftwaffe had such a plane in their Air Force. Fortunately for the Allied Air Forces, these jet fighters were developed and produced near the war's end or they would have caused havoc with the bomber formations.

Spring had arrived with improved weather which helped immensely. During one warm day on a layover, I was able remove my wool army shirt and sit in the sun I noticed that the inside of the collar was white. Looking closer, I discovered with disgust but not surprise, that the white stuff was lice eggs. These eggs were packed solidly around the entire collar. I was aware that I was infected with these creatures, as was everybody else, but this was carrying things too far! The lice had found a perfect breeding ground. I scraped them off the best I could before putting my shirt back on. There was no way you could rid yourself of all of them. While involved with this chore, my attention was directed down at the road about 200 yards away. A British fighter had appeared out of nowhere and began firing rockets at some German military vehicles along the road. The farm we were staying at was on a hill slightly higher than the road, which provided a perfect location to watch the drama unfolding below me. It was very

similar to watching the action in a movie theater. I watched with interest but did not get overly excited about what was going on. We had become fairly accustomed to the air activity all around us. It's amazing to me, that after a while you become somewhat callous to things that would ordinarily be electrifying.

While out in the barnyard one day, attempting to cook something, a guard came over to us and announced that president Franklin Roosevelt had died. This was as much of shock to us as it was to the people back home. The guard did not appear to delight in breaking the news to us and actually seemed to be rather sympathetic. These elderly guards were as anxious as we for this lousy war to be over with. A little later as I was looking around to find something to eat, I looked under a bush and was delighted to find a freshly laid egg. I took it back and fried it in my klim can. It was shared between the three of us which allowed at least a taste of something we hadn't enjoyed for many months That little bit was wonderful!

Another time we were placed in a smaller barn which also housed a large harvesting machine of some sort. Someone discovered a cache of rye grain concealed up near the top of this devise. Apparently the farmer had hidden the grain up there so the German authorities would not confiscate this extra harvest he had stashed away beyond that which he was required to turn in. Soon we all had our Klim cans filled with rye grain and boiling away over small fires we built. For once we would be able to have enough to eat. Out of the farmhouse came an infuriated guard, running and swearing at us. He proceeded to kick over all of our cans we were cooking in, along with the grain, and was screaming dire threats at us. I think the farmer must have seen what we were doing, told the guard, who was enjoying the farmer's hospitality, and took action to appease the farmer. We were totally crushed! Dreams of a decent meal were shattered completely.

Our cross country march was slowly deteriorating into a seemingly aimless wandering from town to farm without our guards even aware of the next days destination. By this time, our bands of prisoners had been reduced to much smaller groups. We had left some behind at the last camp, while other groups had departed in different directions. Food was very scarce. A few small potatoes in the evening if we were lucky. We were tired, hungry, dirty and becoming somewhat discouraged. To a man, we were wondering if this endless marching would ever come to an end. We knew that the war had to be over soon, but its conclusion always seemed to be further in the distance. The guards were themselves exhausted and became quite lax and somewhat disinterested in keeping a tight rein on us. We were able to wander around the farms where we were spending the night almost at will. It would have been possible to escape and walk away quite easily, but with the fighting and other military activity close by, it was safer to keep together in a group until the Allies caught up with us.

The last couple of days were spent at a farm and barn in the town or village of Zarrentin. By now the front lines were not very far away, as we could hear artillery fire a good part of the time. The German military was on the move all around us. A few others and myself were outside the barn trying to cook something, when a British fighter plane suddenly appeared and made a dive right in our direction. As I looked up to see this aircraft aimed directly at us, he opened up with all his guns. The only cover nearby was a fence post which I proceeded to dive behind. This really offered no protection at all as I lay there listening to the sound of his gunfire coming ever closer. My thoughts were something like, "God, don't let me be killed now that the war is almost over!". I was very frightened that at any second I would be hit. The lighter plane then roared overhead at treetop height and on up and away. As it turned out, he was shooting at some wagons out in the road near us and not at us. He certainly scared the hell out of all of us who were in the barnyard. We all decided after that episode, that it would be wiser to retreat back into the security of the barn.

#### LIBERATION AND FREEDOM!

The next day was May 2 and it was obvious that we weren't going to be moving out. We knew something was up. The guards appeared to be rather quiet and apprehensive. I was sitting up in the hay loft looking out a large opening, when I observed a German soldier come out the front door of a house a short distance away, and start walking out to the street. He stopped short, looked up the street and bolted back into the house. I glanced in the direction he was looking and was astonished to see two light tanks or half tracks coming down the road towards us. They turned out to be the British lead elements of the front which had finally overtaken us. The tanks pulled up and stopped adjacent to our barn. We all started yelling and ran down to greet the British soldiers who had broad smiles on their faces. We cheered wildly, jumped around like a bunch of kids, climbed on their tanks and shook their hands in delirious joy. I cannot adequately describe our feelings of euphoria at this moment. After months and months of being under the absolute control of an antagonist who dictated your every move, and at times treated us as less than human beings, we were at last free from all of that oppression. We laughed, slapped each other on the back, shouted and were practically giddy with joy. The soldiers gave us some of their food rations and said that they had to keep moving as the war was still going on. They told us that we would have to find our own way back to the rear because the lines were moving so rapidly there was no provisions nearby to take us in. Testing our new freedom, several of us wandered over to a building where our guards were staying. We found them smiling and happy that for them the war was at an end. These were old men for the most part who were very weary and realized the war was lost for the Germans many weeks ago. We gathered their rifles from them, and then didn't know what to do with the guns so we just put them in a corner and left. We or they couldn't really care less about guns at this point.



We all went back to the barn to collect our few things, then individually headed down the road from where the tanks had come. Charlie, Bob and I were still together as a combine. We had become very close and relied on each other for both moral and physical support, so we decided to stay together until the end of whatever lay ahead for us. Several miles down the road we came upon a strange scene. There was a very large mansion which stood by itself next to a small lake. Just as we arrived, a few ex-Kriegies were bodily booting the occupants, who were protesting loudly, out of the house. There were some men and women who had been serving as slave laborers to the owners and were now getting their revenge by helping our guys to kick them out. One older woman had a wagon and was already helping herself to some food and other items. She would occasionally go over to one of the owners and kick him hard in the butt. By now, more Kriegies had shown up and we decided to spend our first night of freedom in this large residence. We had little compassion for the owners since they were probably Nazis, because of their luxurious lifestyle. The people working for them were slave laborers from some country the Germans had defeated and indicated to us that they had been mistreated for a long time.

The house was a very large and ornate mansion with many rooms. We took over one of the bedrooms for the night. As there was not enough beds to go around, we tossed the mattress on the floor so some could also sleep on the box springs. This would be the first time in almost a year that we could sleep in an actual bed. All the bathroom plumbing was soon plugged up and overrunning due to all of us dysentery plagued Kriegies. Exploring the house, we found ourselves in the large basement where others had already discovered a large cold storage room which contained much food and drink. The owners had hoarded all this food while their countrymen were struggling to find enough to eat. We had less sympathy than ever for them. Stoves were soon warmed up and food of all sort was being prepared. We went into the very large and elegant Dining Room which was furnished with a huge long table. We found a beautiful tablecloth which we unrolled on the full length of the table on which was placed gorgeous china plates and exquisite silverware. Once the food was consumed, we explored the rest of the house. Upstairs were long rows of storage closets which contained many very old costumes and uniforms. Soon some guys were strutting around in such things as bright red formal uniforms with large plumed hats and long swords. Even though we took over the house, we did not indiscriminately destroy any property. I'm sure the owners moved right back in after our departure. Later that night, many became sick from eating much more than their stomachs could handle. Otherwise, I slept the best night's sleep I had experienced in months on this wondrously soft, warm bed.

The following morning, we were aware that we had to find our own way to the rear as directed by the British soldiers. Having walked for months, we were determined that we would find other means of transportation this time. Everyone scoured the area for anything that ran. Soon, there was every type of vehicle heading out of town. It looked like a Keystone Cops comedy. Cars, trucks, buggies with horses, were all commandeered somewhere in town and driven away

loaded down with Kriegies. Someone located an open bed truck, stopped by and picked up a bunch of us and away we drove.

During these final days of the war, everything seemed to be in confusion. As the front passed through, scattered pockets of German soldiers were sent to the rear as we were. They posed no danger and only wanted out of the war which for them was over. We drove through villages and towns where the signs of a recent battle were all around. Burnt out tanks and other equipment lined the road. Buildings were shattered and riddled with bullet, cannon and shrapnel holes. The road terminated at a river, which I believe was the Elbe, where the British had constructed a pontoon bridge to replace one that was blown up. This created a bottleneck for all of us trying to head west. Besides our groups of ex-P.O.W.'s, there were the Nazi soldiers who were going to the rear to turn themselves in as new P.O.W.'s. Some Nazi officers drove up to the bridge in their staff car and driver and attempted to drive across. The British soldiers guarding the bridge yelled at them to get out of the vehicle and to hike over along with the other German soldiers. As they went by, each one of the officers got a hard kick in the ass from the Limeys. We were allowed to drive across in our truck as we exchanged dirty looks with the Nazi officers who were on foot. A few disparaging remarks were also sent their way.

A few days were spent working our way to where we were told facilities were being prepared to accept us back into the service again. We spent some time at a British frontline army camp consisting of tents, tanks and most important to us, a mess hall. We had a chance to clean up and get deloused. The next day we were riding in another large open bed truck with a group of French soldiers recently released from some P.O.W. camp. They were a happy bunch who were singing in French and passing around several bottles of wine they had picked up somewhere. It was very refreshing. By now, the ranks of German troops marching to prisoner camps somewhere to the rear, multiplied into whole army divisions. We passed thousands of them in very long columns. Many had surly expressions, but the majority looked like they were glad that this miserable war was finally at an end. I imagine that even though they had been defeated, they felt fortunate to have survived this far. We could not help but see the ironic similarity to us only a few weeks ago. At several places, some Kriegies had set up their own check point along the road where the German columns passed through. Whenever a Nazi officer came by, they would pull him off to the side of the road and search him for anything of value he was carrying. Some officers had suitcases with them, which were soon emptied at pistols, decorations, leather jackets and whatever was judged to be a worthwhile souvenir. At this point, we were as yet under no Army control and more or less free to go or do whatever we desired. Most of us just wanted to return to some military base where we could clean up, get into some clean clothes and find a decent place to eat and sleep. A few others actually made their own way to Paris before turning themselves over to Allied control.

V-E DAY

On the night of May 8th, we were sleeping in a small tent at another British Army camp when all hell broke loose. Every rifle, machine gun, artillery piece, rocket and whatever other arms they had, began firing into the air. Apparently the Nazis had capitulated into an unconditional surrender and the soldiers in the camp began celebrating the victory. Everyone was going nuts, yelling and firing their weapons wildly in the sky. As the tracer bullets and rocket flares lit up the sky, it looked like a 4th of July fireworks display. With all this firepower going off, we were concerned about becoming a casualty from some stray bullet, so we kept a very low profile until things calmed down. We had no wish to end up as a casualty after surviving this far in the war.

The following day we finally made it to a place where we were to be processed back into the military. It was a former school or college somewhere in Germany, I forget just where, which consisted of several large buildings and grounds. The British Army had taken it over to serve its various functions, which included the screening of all Allied Ex-Prisoners of War repatriated in their zone of operations. Here we were given hot showers along with an intense spraying of insecticide powder all over our body, clean British Army uniforms and an initial debriefing. Slowly we were beginning to look and feel human again. We took all of our old filthy and ragged clothes together with our worn out shoes outside and threw them in a large pile which was to be incinerated by a huge bonfire. I was not sorry to part with them. The mess halls were open to us anytime we wanted, but it was still impossible to eat very much without getting sick. I don't recall where we went from this last base, but eventually we were taken to an airstrip and were loaded into a waiting squadron of Royal Air Force Lancaster heavy bombers. These huge planes were the primary aircraft used by the British to bomb German targets every night throughout the war. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of flying in this famous and rugged aircraft. After a few hours in the air, we landed at an airfield in Brussels, Belgium.

#### BACK IN THE ARMY

We were trucked over to a group of buildings in town which had become an American Army Headquarters. What a tremendous thrill to see the American flag flying high overhead after months of living under the hated Nazi flag at Stalag Luft IV. Entering these buildings, we were interrogated at length about our previous branch and units we belonged to before becoming P.O.W.'s, and experiences while under German control. After that we showered and again sprayed thoroughly with bug spray. I don't think any lice could have lived through all the clouds of white powder we had by now been subjected to. What a fabulous feeling to have a hot shower, shave, brush your teeth and generally clean up after all those months without. We were issued clean new underclothes, uniforms and shoes. I was officially back in the United States Army and it felt very good! Bunks were assigned to us and we all were able to rest and catch up on a lot of sack time we had missed. Sleeping in my own soft clean bed again, was pure ecstasy.

These Army buildings were located near the center of Brussels, which enabled us to walk downtown with ease. All of us ex-Kriegies were issued some occupation money, which could be spent in town. One day soon after we arrived, the city was having a huge victory celebration of the war's end. The civilians were all dressed up in their best suits and dresses. People cheering, bands playing and everyone in a wonderful festive mood. These men and women had lived for years subjected to the dreadful conditions the Nazis imposed on them. Their relief and joy was certainly understandable. They were very appreciative of what the Americans had done to give them back their freedom.

One day while sitting outside, a soldier came running past me. I don't know why, but I marveled at someone being able to run and was rather envious. It finally registered on me just how weak and in poor physical condition that I had become. I could not possibly have run 100 feet. My feet had begun to hurt and I had trouble putting on my shoes. I dismissed this as the after effects of months of marching and my frozen feet. Later on, I could not put my shoes on at all and noticed that my feet and legs had begun to swell up, making it difficult to walk. After a visit to the doctor, it was determined that I should be sent to a hospital. It was very hard to be separated from my two buddies, Charlie and Bob. We had been through all the hardships of the last three months together and I feared that they would be moving on without me. This turned out to be the case, and I have never seen them since.

I was transported to a hospital in Namur, Belgium. This had been a Nazi army hospital which was taken over by the American army after the liberation of Belgium. I was given a complete physical examination and found to be suffering from malnutrition. By now my legs and feet had swollen up like balloons. The doctor told me that my legs had filled up with fluid because of the malnutrition, causing them to swell. I had to soak my feet a lot and had my limbs painted in some purple medication. This was the first time that I had been weighed since being liberated and I topped the scales at 119 pounds. I can remember that my ribs looked like the cross ties on a railroad track. Since I had been eating better the past few weeks after liberation, I don't know what weight I had dropped to at the end of our long march. The doctor instructed me to eat a lot at the mess hall to regain my weight and health. Following his advise, I loaded up on all the delicious food served in the dining room. A big treat was the white bread which tasted so good after eating the German black sawdust bread for many months. Shortly after indulging in all this food, I paid the price. I had a tremendous stomach ache which was caused by a still shrunken stomach being forced to hold more than it should. I learned to pace myself about eating, although difficult. After that I was confined in the hospital for a week until my legs became normal once again. This was a great time to rest and catch up on all the news which had happened during our incarceration. We had heard nothing about how the war in the Pacific had been progressing. It now appeared that the conflict in that area would hopefully soon be over.

## CAMP LUCKY STRIKE

Together with other ex-Kriegies who were released from the hospital, we boarded a train for a pleasant ride through Belgium and France until arriving at the port city of Le Havre. The Army had set up a large tent city which they named Camp Lucky Strike. The purpose was to gather together ex-P.O.W.'s prior to shipping them back to America. There were other such camps in other areas, all named after popular cigarette brands. We were again interviewed and put on a roster to await transportation home. All of us were given cards to identify us as RAMPS, which meant "Repatriated American Military Personnel". There was nothing to do but wait our turn for the next troop transport ship available. We ate well, read newspapers, played cards and as always somebody had organized a crap game on an army blanket for those wishing to try their luck. Some men took a short leave and went to Paris, but most of us didn't want to chance missing the next boat out. If you were not present, then you would have to wait for the next available transport. I was more anxious in getting home than to see the sights of Paris.

At last one day, my name appeared on the list of those to be shipped out when the boat arrived in port. When that day arrived, we were taken to the port area to embark on the troop transport ship which had just docked. The whole port area was in a complete shambles from the vicious battles waged here. Destroyed buildings and military equipment littered the waterfront. Our ship was tied up and awaiting our arrival. What a great sight! The ship was a brand new Coast Guard troop transport named the Admiral H. T. Mayo. We boarded, checked off on the passenger list, assigned bunks and were anxious to be on our way.

The voyage home was very pleasant, taking less than a week with fine weather. A lot of us slept up on the deck under the stars enjoying the clean fresh air. We docked in Boston some time around the middle of June 1945. We were taken to Camp Miles Standish in New Jersey where we phoned home to our families to let them know that we were alive and well. A few days later, I was finally on my way home.

The longest year of my life was now behind me. I was among the fortunate ones to survive. Some did not. Looking back, I don't know how any of us made it. According to accounts written by several Kriegies who kept daily logs of where we went and the distance covered, the "Death March" lasted 86 days and we walked for almost 600 miles. The group I was with marched further than any. That year was hell, but I still cherish the memories of the men and the experiences we shared together. A sad footnote to my story, was a letter I received, stating that Charlie Schaefer, who had survived the march with the other two of us in our combine, died of Beri-beri within a year of arriving home.

## Lest We Forget

During the winter of 1944-45, six thousand Air Force noncoms took part in an event of mass heroism that has been neglected by history.

~ GEORGE GUDERLEY, SURVIVOR OF THE MARCH. 1482 W. BANBURY RD. INVERNESS, IL 60067

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Most Americans know in at least a general way about the Bataan Death March that took place in the Philippines during April 1942. Few have even heard of an equally grim march of Allied POWs in northern Germany during the winter of 1945, the most severe winter Europe had suffered in many years. The march started at Stalag Luft IV in German Pomerania (now part of Poland), a POW camp for U.S. and British aircrew men, most of them captured aerial gunners. A prelude to that tragedy took place earlier and set the tone for what was to follow. In mid-July 1944, about 2,500 POWs from a camp near Memel, Lithuania, were jammed into the holds of two dilapidated coastal coal tramp steamers and spent five days en route to the German port of Swinemunde, thence by cable car to a rail station near Stalag Luft IV. The POWs' shoes were taken from them, they were chained in pairs - many of them ill and wounded - then double-timed three kilometers through a cordon of guards who used bayonets, rifle butts, and dogs to keep them moving. Some were seriously injured. (German doctors later testified that the injured suffered only from sunburn.) They had had neither food nor water for five days. The next day they were given water and driven through a gauntlet of armed guards and guard dogs, then strip-searched and had most of their clothing and possessions taken from them. Early in 1945, as the Soviet forces continued to advance after their breakout at Leningrad, the Germans decided to evacuate Stalag Luft IV. Some 3,000 of the POWs who were not physically able to walk were sent by train to Stalag Luft L, a camp farther west. On Feb. 6, with little notice, more than 6,000 U.S. and British airmen began a forced march to the west in subzero weather for which they were not adequately clothed or shod. Conditions on the march were shocking. There was a total lack of sanitary facilities. Coupled with that was a completely inadequate diet of about 700 calories per day, contrasted to the 3,500 provided by the U.S. military services. Red Cross food parcels added additional calories when and if the Germans decided to distribute them. As a result of the unsanitary conditions and near starvation diet, disease became rampant - typhus fever spread by body lice, dysentery that was suffered in some degree by everyone, pneumonia, diphtheria, pellagra, and other diseases. A major problem was frostbite that in many cases resulted in the amputation of extremities. At night the men slept on frozen ground or, where available, in barns or any other shelter that could be found. The five Allied doctors on the march were provided almost no medicines or help by the Germans. Those doctors, and a British chaplain, stood high in the ranks

of the many heroes of the march. After walking all day with frequent pauses to care for stragglers, they spent the night caring for the ill, then marched again the next day.

Then no medication was available, their encouragement and good humor helped many a man who was on the verge of giving up. Acts of heroism were virtually universal. The stronger helped the weaker. Those fortunate enough to have a coat shared it with others. Sometimes the Germans provided farm wagons for those unable to walk. There seldom were horses available, so teams of POWs pulled the wagons through the snow. Captain (Dr.) Caplan, in his testimony to the War Crimes Commission, described it as "a domain of heroes." The range of talents and experience among the men was almost unlimited. Those with medical experience helped the doctors. Others proved to be talented traders, swapping the contents of Red Cross parcels with local civilians for eggs and other food. The price for being caught at this was instant death on both sides of the deal. A few less Nazified guards could be bribed with cigarettes to round up small amounts of local food. In a few instances, when Allied air attacks killed a cow or horse in the fields, the animal was butchered expertly to supplement the meager rations. In every way possible, the men took care of each other in an almost universal display of compassion. Accounts of personal heroism are legion. Because of war damage, the inadequacy of the roads, and the flow of battle. Not all the POWs followed the same route west. It became a meandering passage over the northern part of Germany. As winter drew to a close, suffering from the cold abated.

When the sound of Allied artillery grew closer, the German guards were less harsh in their treatment of POWs. The march finally came to an end when the main element of the column encountered Allied forces east of Hamburg on May 2, 1945. They had covered more than 600 miles in 87 never-to-be-forgotten days. Of those who started on the march, about 1,500 perished from disease, starvation, or at the hands of German guards while attempting to escape. In terms of percentage of mortality, it came very close to the Bataan Death March. The heroism of these men stands as a legacy to Air Force crewmen and deserves to be recognized. In 1992, the American survivors of the march funded and dedicated a memorial at the former site of Stalag Luft IV in Poland, the starting place of a march that is an important part of American ex-prisoner of war history. It should be widely recognized and its many heroes honored for their valor.

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