



**DIARY OF A
PRISONER-OF-WAR
IN GERMANY
DURING
WORLD WAR II**

**LIFE IN THREE
DIFFERENT STAMMLAGERS
AND TRIPS BETWEEN CAMPS
CAPTURE - INTERNMENT - LIBERATION
AND HOME.**

by: Charles G. Rahn

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Now after forty years the pages of my diary are yellow with age and the penciled words are fading away, but the memories of those events have never, no never, been forgotten.

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Best Wishes To All

Charles G. Rahn

**Charles G. Rahn
Author and Publisher**

PREFACE

WWII Diary of Charles G. Rahn while a Prisoner-of-War in Germany.

December 1, 1944 June 2, 1945

Content of Diary covers the time from the day of capture to the day returning home.

Dates and events are in chronological order.

Captive was in three different camps in Germany.

- ✘ Stammlager XII-A in Limburg, Germany**
 - ◆ N. of Frankfurt an Main**
- ✘ Stammlager III-B in Furstenberg, Germany**
 - ◆ S. of Frankfurt am Der Oder**
- ✘ Stammlager III-A in Luckenwalde, Germany**
 - ◆ S. of Berlin**

Corporals Shafer, Draughon and myself were squad leaders in a Heavy Weapons Platoon of Company D, 409th Regiment, 103d Infantry Division. The several other N.C.O.s named during my stay in various prison camps were from Company B, a Rifle Company, of the same Regiment.

CHAPTER 1

THE VERY LAST MAIL CALL

DECEMBER 1, 1944

The room was filled with the pungent odor of cleaning fluid and oil. Most of the men were cleaning their weapons, which they would be using within hours. Others who had finished preparing their weapons for battle were hurriedly writing home to a loved one. Still others, like myself, just sat there in silence, each with their thoughts. As I looked about the room, my eyes fell momentarily on the face of each man in my squad. Which one of them would be wounded, or even killed? We had all been together as a squad for a long time and the thought of losing anyone of them made my heart sick.

My thoughts were interrupted by the loud shout of the company clerk, "MAIL CALL." Everyone jumped to their feet and crowded around the clerk, each listening for his name to be called.

"Jennings, McGregor, Klie, Peterson, Jenkins, Mack, Brinks, Kokensparger, Wiedman, Rahn." I reached out anxiously for my letter, hoping desperately that it was from my wife, Virginia. My eyes immediately recognized her handwriting. With trembling fingers, I tore at the flap. As I unfolded the letter, my eyes rapidly scanned down the page looking for the word, "son" or "daughter". Then, I thought in my anxiety, I might have missed them so I started at the top again and read very slowly.

"November 14, 1944 – Dear Charlie, I pray that you are all right and that this war ends soon and you can come home. I know you're waiting for good news as to the birth of our second child. Last week the Doctor said that it could be any day now." I went on reading the rest of my letter but my thoughts were elsewhere. God, would I be around to get that next letter?

What would have been my reaction that night if I could have foreseen that six months of captivity would prevent me from receiving a letter from home?

I had just finished reading my letter when the Section Leader, Staff Sergeant Michalski, entered the room and called out, "Second Section, get your stuff together and fall-in outside on the far side of the road. We will be in support of B-Company." The third and fourth squad of the platoon was called the Second Section. I was the corporal of the third squad. This particular night, the third and fourth squads were combined into one large squad which I was appointed to lead.

It was a very dark night as we took up our position behind B-Company and moved out. We knew that our destination was Selestat, France, in Alsace-Lorraine, within 30 or so miles of the Rhine and Germany.

Three of four miles into the march, we started hearing gunfire from the forward rifle company. It was so far ahead of us that we were unable to tell exactly what was taking place. However, we could see the bazooka flashes. We heard grenade explosions along with rifle and light machine-gun fire. When the noise died down, we were ordered to move up.

The rest of the route march was uneventful. We entered the town of Selestat by way of a bridge over a fast running stream. Our squad and a few other men from B-Company took up a position in the first house, a two story structure not more than twenty feet from the stream. Looking out the front window, we could see down a road running parallel to the water. We placed our heavy machine-gun on a table and aimed it down this road. From a side window opposite the stream we viewed a large field. The road fronting the house turned and angled across this field for several hundred feet before rising above railroad tracks. Across the street from our position was a line of ten or more homes, a few occupied by the First Section and the remainder with riflemen. We had no sooner set up a watch at the windows when the German infantry attacked. Instantly we returned fire.

During this brief small arms fight, we could also hear the sound of heavy shelling and the rumble of a tank. The heavier action seemed to be just beyond the overpass, out of sight. When there was a brief lull in the shelling, the noise of one or more tanks became very evident. Then within seconds, two Tiger Tanks broke over the hill in the road. Momentarily they were silhouetted against the skyline. At that moment we knew that we were in serious trouble. Our tanks were a long way back at our Battalion Command Post.

The smartest move we could have made at that instant would have been to jump out the side window and make a dash for the bridge. At least we would have been leaving from the side furthest from their view. In the confusion, as one tank made a rapid approach towards us, several men did escape out the window. The tank sped past our house and crossed the bridge. Swiftly it swung around, came back and stopped on the bridge, training its cannon toward us. It was less than 50 feet away and I called to the bazooka team to fire. One round could have knocked out that tank, but to my horror, the shout came back, "We have no more ammo." Without anti-tank rockets, we were doomed. Unopposed, the tank opened up with several rounds into our roof. There was a cry from outside, "Hande Hoch," meaning, "Hands High." We answered with rifle and machine-gun fire, then one more round from the tank. For some unexplained reason, that final round seemed to stun us. Several of us were knocked off our feet. I had been standing between the inner doorway of the kitchen and bedroom. At the noise of the shell, I hit the floor, then I groped for the helmet that had been knocked from my head and stood up, shocked to see a nice round hole in the door jam just over my shoulder where I had previously been standing. Possibly

the shell the tank fired was some sort of concussion round. I don't recall an actual explosion or anyone being hit.

Now the cry from outside came loud and clear and with a lot more firmness. "Kommen Sie raus, Hande Hoch!" (meaning, you come out, hands high). Any further resistance would have meant total annihilation. It occurred to me that the Jerries were attempting to take us prisoner since they could easily have destroyed us with no trouble. Their infantry fire could have kept us pinned down while the tank leveled the houses with shells. Clearly, taking prisoners must have been their main objective. This idea was (borne out) later when in prison camp they took our American uniforms, including shoes and helmets. These items may well have been the very clothing the Germans wore when, prior to the Battle of the Bulge, they tried to infiltrate our lines and disrupt our troop movement. Regrettably, on many occasions they were highly successful.

While some of our men were jumping from windows and surrendering, I remembered a rule of thumb for this situation that faced us. Destroy or make inoperable your weaponry so it would not be used against any of our troops. I removed several vital parts from our machine-gun and threw them in different directions, even a few out of the window.

One of the last to leave the house, I was half way out the window when I looked back and saw two or three men lying on the floor among the overturned table, chairs and ammunition carrying-cases. I called out to them but received no answer. I was about to climb back into the room to see who they were and if they were wounded or dead. A German Officer watching me screamed, "Mach Schnell, kommen Sie raus, Hande Hoch!" Even had I not understood the language I would have known what he said by his gestures and pistol waving. As my feet hit the ground, one of the German soldiers pushed me towards the road. There all the Americans were standing, surrounded. We were formed into columns of four and hurriedly moved down the road into the main part of Selestat. No doubt they wished to get out of there "schnell" before our troops could come up and overtake them.

We were not allowed to talk or move about in the line of march. It was therefore impossible for me to find out which of my men were safe, who was wounded or killed or who may have escaped. We walked in silence through town, each man with his own thoughts and German infantry flanking us on both sides. Where were they taking us in such a hurry? Should I try to make a run for it to the nearby dark woods? Suddenly, excitingly, my mind began working in double-time. Maybe I'll try it while there are not so many guards near me. In this darkness, they wouldn't be able to pick me up in their gun sights very easily.

The heavy woods alongside the road was about 50 feet away. I still had a hand grenade in my pocket and a 45 tucked in my belt under my jacket. I could toss the grenade out towards the woods to cause confusion and shoot the guard nearest me and make my escape. But then rationality took over. What happens to all those other men if I shoot and kill a guard? Would Jerry take it out on them and start blasting away into their ranks? While mulling all this over I was tapped on the shoulder by one of our captives. "Haben sie ein Americanish cigaretten," he said. My reply was, "Ya." Why I answered him in German instead of English must have been because he surprised me by talking to me. Then again it could have been that my being able to understand and talk German made my reply to him seem more natural. He asked, "Where did you learn German?" "In school," I said.

Sometimes it was very advantageous to speak and understand German in the months that followed and then there were times it could have cost me my life.

After handing this guard the cigarette, he dropped back to light it. He surprised me again by running to come up alongside me to say, "I can also speak and understand English." He must have thought that very funny judging by the way he laughed. He went on to tell me that earlier he had been captured by the Americans and when his troops attacked the next day, he was freed. He spoke very highly of the treatment he received by his American captors and seemed to be in a happy state of mind being safely back with his outfit. I entertained the thought of explaining my plight in being captured just before I was to find out if I had a son or daughter. I wondered if I could appeal to his compassionate side and see if he could turn his back but for a moment while I make my escape. I didn't ask the question, knowing all too well that if I had been the guard and he the prisoner, I would not allow him to escape no matter how sorry I felt for him.

Daylight was just beginning to show in the eastern sky as we neared a group of buildings that appeared to be warehouses. Here we were made to strip and search of our clothing was made. We were returned all items except guns, knives, ammunition or anything of governmental issue.

After a complete search, we were separated by rank. The Officers were taken to another building and we never saw them again till several months later. The Privates and Private First Class men were left behind as the N.C.O.s were ordered to load up on German trucks for transportation towards Germany.

We were not so sure of our exact location in France, however we did know that we were southeast of Selestat according to the sun in the sky. Every chance I got I would attempt to engage a guard in conversation. Some were very talkative and then others wouldn't give you the time of day.

CHAPTER 2

BEING STRAFFED

DECEMBER 2, 1944 – Late Afternoon

The three German trucks we loaded up on were comparable in size to the American 2 ½ ton truck. There were hooped rods over the top allowing for a canvas top. They had rolled back the canvas permitting us to stand up and support ourselves by these hoops. The first two vehicles were not too crowded, but someone misjudged how many men would end up in the last truck and we ended up somewhat crowded together. Each truck's cab was occupied by the driver and two guards. A third guard rode on the outside of the tailgate by standing on a narrow rail. Following our caravan were six Jerries in a smaller vehicle which had a 50 caliber machine-gun mounted on a tripod.

We started out and had not gone very far when I began to feel like a sardine among the other G.I.s. I asked the guard if I could join him hanging on to the tailgate. He didn't answer me so I climbed over the tailgate and stood beside him. He had his rifle slung over his shoulder and showed no sign of being worried about me being so close to him. Why not? The turkey had his buddies back there with a machine-gun.

The guard and I had quite a lengthy conversation while hanging on for dear life as that truck bounced along the bumpy road. I tried needling him about our Army's rapid advance and that we had the German Army on the run. All he did was smile. He did not seem to give a damn one way or the other what I said.

It was a very mild day, cool rather than cold weather associated with the month of December. The sky was blue and had a few small white thin clouds drifting lazily by. Someone in the truck shouted, "Planes." Every head turned to where he pointed and we observed three planes at about two to four thousand feet and flying single file in the opposite direction we were going. We all decide they were American P-51 fighter planes. We were all thinking the same thing at that moment. German trucks, loaded with soldiers, would these American fly boys be able to distinguish us as American prisoners-of-war? I didn't think so and neither did the rest of the men because someone shouted for me to tell the guard what was going to happen.

I shouted to the guard that was watching the planes in order to get his attention. "Those are American fighter planes and they are going to attack," I said with all the meaning I could put into it. "Nein," he said, "they are going in the other direction." I thought to myself, the damn fool, doesn't he realize they can make a turn and come swooping down on us within seconds? I tried to convey this to him, repeating

it and using my hand to simulate a plane banking for a turn. I hardly got the words out of my mouth when the lead plane dropped his left wing and started to bank into a wide turn and at the same time descending. Now that German guard was not a complete idiot when he saw them start that maneuver.

Our convoy was just entering a small village and evidently the other guards anticipated what was going to take place and stopped the lead truck. When ours slowed and was about to come to a stop, every G.I. in that truck tried to exit all at once for the safety between the houses. The German guard and myself had to be very quick ourselves or be knocked off the tailgate as they came off that truck in one big mass of arms, legs and bodies. The guards then took control of things by guiding us into the basement of the nearest house. It's a good thing our truck managed to stop inside the village or we would have been caught out in the open. By now the P-51s were making their pass at the trucks. We could hear the strafing fire from those planes and the return fire from the Germans in that smaller truck that was following our convoy.

We later assumed that those planes had other things to do or were low on gas because they only made one pass at the trucks. Then again maybe those fly boys did see Americans down there and cut off the attack.

As they flew off in the distance, the guards started to yell for us to come out of the basements and get back on the trucks. In the basement I was in there was a large potato bin. A couple of G.I.s hid themselves under these potatoes. It seemed like a good idea at the time but turned out to be unsuccessful. The German guards evidently had been keeping count of how many went into the basement and when we came out they were two short.

Now this was no time for playing games like Hide and Seek. The guards could easily see that the only place anyone could hide would be under the potatoes. They ordered the men out or they would start shooting. They of course had no choice but to come out. I had to give those guards credit for having a sense of humor because they thought it was pretty funny. I think we all had a laugh over that episode. No one hurt and from the looks of things our trucks were not damaged to seriously.

They hurried everyone along getting us back into the trucks. I tried to fake an injury to my left leg and dragged it along. I guess my reason for doing this was because I thought they may be in such a hurry they may leave me behind with the one guard. If they did, I had a chance to over-power the guard and seek safety among the town's people. But alas, that old guard came back and supported me under the arm and the darn truck waited for both of us.

Every mile we were carried closer to Germany and farther from our lines meant less chance of a successful escape. I had not exactly given up hope for an escape but when I climbed back on to that truck, I knew that from hereon there would be little chance to get away.

CHAPTER 3

CROSSING THE RHINE

DECEMBER 2, 1944 – Evening

Darkness was settling in as the trucks came to a stop. The guard I had been talking to throughout the trip said, “The Rhine River and Deutschland.” We were ushered into several houses alongside the road. The group from my truck occupied the house closest to the river, maybe about a hundred feet away.

The road we had been traveling on went right down to the water’s edge where there was a great deal of activity going on. The area was well lit from floodlights placed on poles near the river and even some lights on the far side in Germany. Most of the men laid down and tried to get some sleep. Others sat and talked about what might happen to us. I being one who has to be in the thick of things took up a position at one of the windows to observe what was going on down by the river. There was no glass in the windows, so I sat on the window sill and lit up a smoke. A German soldier, not any I had seen before, stepped up and motioned for a light from my cigarette. I offered the light and asked, “What’s going on down there?” He said that the American and British planes had bombed out the bridge several weeks ago and that a temporary pontoon bridge was built. This was also destroyed. Each time they erected a pontoon bridge the planes would come the next day and knock it out. Now they had built a portable raft that they could remove during the day. The raft was attached to cables strung across the river. By means of a rudder and the swift current they could maneuver the raft back and forth. I think this soldier was showing off how much he knew about the operation or he knew it was not going to do me any good as I was going to a prison camp.

This German soldier I was shooting the breeze with was about my age, 22. He said he knew very little English so we continued our conversation in German. I could understand the language a lot better than I could speak it, mainly because my grammar was so bad. However, I managed to get my sentences across so he understood what I was talking about. This of course was time-consuming when I was racking my brain for the right word. He asked me where I had learned my German.

Earlier I had mentioned that there was a time to not let on you understood or spoke German, - well, this is a good example of what could have happened.

I told him that my Grandparents were born in Germany and that I had learned a lot from my Grandmother and also that I was taught German in the Lutheran school I attended. With that, he walked away and said he would be right back. Within minutes he returned and with him was a Lieutenant. I remembered my military courtesy and saluted the officer who in turn saluted me. He

began by saying, "I understand that your Grandparents came from the Fatherland." "THAT'S TRUE." I said, wondering what came next. He went on rather slowly, "You then have German blood in you. Where you are going it will not be so nice in a prison camp. Come with us and put on a German uniform and fight for your Fatherland." If I would have had more time to think of what he said I probably would have realized he didn't really expect me to do that. But having a German Officer standing before you, he the Captor and I the captive coerced me into thinking, O.K. Charlie, you opened your big mouth once too often and now you're in trouble. I swallowed hard, straightened my shoulders back and said, "It's true that my Grandparents were born in Germany, but they came to America a long time ago and became American citizens. My Father and Mother were born in America and I was also. Your country started this war and my country needed me so I enlisted in the Army to help my country and if I am to die in this war, it will not be wearing a German uniform, I am an American soldier."

The Lieutenant came to attention, snapped his heels together, saluted me and said, "Spoken like a real soldier." With this said, he disappeared around the corner of the house. Someone in the back of the room gave a deep sign of relief. I knew then there was someone else who could understand German.

The guards then came and escorted us all down to the river's edge. Here we waited our turn to cross on the raft. The raft was just big enough to handle two large trucks. Each time they made a crossing it took about fifteen minutes. They moved a lot of their equipment across that night. They started to move us across, a few men at a time on both sides of their equipment. Evidently, they were more concerned with getting across as much military equipment as they could to put up a fight in Germany.

The current of the Rhine seemed to be very swift and the raft rocked back and forth as it moved across on the cables. We were martial together on the other side and marched to a town a short distance away called Breisach, Germany.

CHAPTER 4

HUMILIATION

DECEMBER 3, 1944 – Breisach, Germany

Breisach is about 50 miles southwest of Stuttgart and just a short distance from the Rhine River. We entered Breisach in the early morning hours and occupied some old barracks just outside of town.

About 9 a.m., we were gathered together and issued shovels and marched out to a field nearby. Someone said, “What the hell are they going to do, make us dig our own graves?” There was a chuckle here and there but it was no joke when you are the brunt of it.

I was placed in charge of 12 men and instructed to dig fox-holes for the German army to use in the defense of the town. The Lieutenant in charge left one guard to watch over us. Further away I could see other small groups just like our doing the same thing. Of course we put up an argument that under the Geneva Convention rules, we were not to aid the enemy in any Military Project. Well, I guess they took advantage of the fact that we had not as yet been registered under those terms. I don’t know what the consequences would have been had we refused to dig those holes, but I told the men if they want fox-holes, we will give them some beauties. When I explained how we would dig those holes, 12 men were eager to get on with the digging.

I picked out a spot and told the first man to dig and then paced off another 50 feet for the second man and so on, being sure to walk in a straight line. The men and I jumped to the task eagerly knowing all too well that this was a hell of a way to dig fox-holes.

What made it even more hilarious was that the dirt being removed was of a reddish color and the men threw that dirt all around their hole instead of piling it up. The guard watching over us didn’t care one way or another. In fact he didn’t seem to be watching us at all because he seemed to be napping. Being we were in a very large open field, nobody thought of walking away. Other eyes unseen by us may have been watching also.

Within a few hours, the Lieutenant came back and noticed the holes all evenly spaced and in a straight line. He pointed his finger in my face and said, “Don’t tell me you Americans dig holes for yourselves like this.” He could not keep from smiling as he said it. He went on to say, “From the sky, those holes will look like bulls-eyes on a target with all that red dirt spread around.” He went over to our guard and talked to him, all the time pointing back towards the holes.

I don't think it mattered to that Lieutenant how we had dug those fox-holes, not the way he carried on with that guard laughing. Later on in the day, we all thought about how we dug those holes and got away with it. We were indeed fortunate that the Lieutenant had a sense of humor or we could have been dealt with very harshly.

When we arrived back at the barracks, we received our first meal since being taken prisoner and before that our last meal with our own company was around 5 p.m. on December 1st. We were given a good sized metal bowl of vegetable soup, a small hunk of sausage, a dark bread with butter and hot coffee. We then managed to get some rest.

Later in the day, we were assembled outside and ordered to form in columns of four. We were led into the town of Breisach proper. After a short time, it was evident we were not going anyplace in particular as we marched up one street and down another. It was also very evident that the townspeople were notified of our coming as the streets were lined with them. There were just too many people present on the streets that day. They must have been told about the American prisoners coming well in advance.

The streets were lined on both sides with jeering people. Some threw debris at us, some of it being small pebbles. Some stepped forward and spat on us. One youngster even went so far as to strike one of the men in the face with a stick. It was very apparent that our guards were making no effort to stop any of this harassment. At one time we were forced to stand in one place for over 5 minutes or so. The crowd seemed to be incensed with our taking up space on their streets. Whoever was in charge of that march must have realized that things were getting out of hand and orders were relayed back to hurry the march and to protect the prisoners by keeping the people back away from us. We made no further turns and were led by a direct route to our barracks.

I wish I knew who the soldier was that yelled out, "If they want to see what American soldiers look like, let's show them. Throw your shoulders back, step lively and smile damn it, smile." Someone started the cadence count and soon we all joined in with that rhythmical count every soldier is familiar with, Hup, two, three, four. We sang in cadence as we marched the rest of the way with heads held high.

As I marched I kept thinking, look at me, I'm an American, look real good because soon you're going to see a hell of a lot more of us. As we neared the barracks, the count seemed much louder and I thought I detected a little smile on the faces of some of the German soldiers guarding us.

A good soldier is a proud one regardless of what Army he serves. Who ever ordered that march to show us off as prisoners caused us a lot of humiliation and degradation for a time, but in the end, WE WON!

CHAPTER 5
GOTT IN HIMMEL-NEIN
GOD IN HEAVEN-NO

DECEMBER 5, 1944

Late in the afternoon we were given a blanket, one and a quarter loaves of bread and a good sized piece of sausage. We were told that the food was all we would receive during the short trip to a prison camp where we would be registered as prisoners of war agreeable to the rules of the Geneva Convention. We were marched out to a railroad siding where a freight train with twenty or more box cars waited for departure. Forty G.I.s would occupy each car. While the men were divided into groups another contingent of G.I.s was marched past us to cars farther down the line. These soldiers were from some other unit taken prisoner a week before we were. My guess is that we numbered about 400 in all.

Our train had no marking, such as the International Red Cross symbol, to distinguish it as non-military. The German military violated this rule by transporting troops, guns, tanks and supplies under the Red Cross emblem. This violation of the German military was observed at a later time when our train had to set on a siding allowing the military trains to use the main track.

One German guard was assigned to each box car housing 40 G.I.s. Ours was probably in his late fifties or early sixties. We nicknamed him Willie because Wilhelm sounded so German. During the day, we spent our time talking, playing cards and taking short naps. Occasionally we would look out of a large crack in a boarded up vent to see the countryside. One of the men from B-Company could speak German very fluently so he and the guard got along just fine.

The men would crowd around the old man and ply him with all kinds of questions through the young interpreter. I don't think Willie was just being friendly because he was locked up in the box car with us, he was simply a very nice old man and he voluntarily offered information interesting to all of us. Willie told us we were headed for Limburg, 160 miles north of Breisach and about 15 miles from Frankfurt on the Main River.

Each morning our train would stop around 10:00 a.m. and the door would be opened from the outside by other guards and Willie would get off while another guard stood watch over the open door. Willie told us later that he got a hot meal back in the mess car. While the door was open, we took advantage of the situation and emptied the pail we used as a toilet. If talking about a toilet can be humorous, consider 40 men using the same one during a 24 hour period. We had to make a rule that the pail was only to be used for excretion only. If one had to urinate, he did so by standing at a door on the other side of the car and

attempted to urinate through an opening at the side of the door. This could be a laughing matter especially when the train was starting up or jerking to a stop. Even in trying times G.I.s can find something to joke about.

The nights were the worst time for everyone including Willie. He fared a little better than we did during the cold nights because he was dressed warmer and he had a thermos of hot coffee. Willie shared his coffee with the young G.I. interpreter while they passed many hours of the night talking in low tones.

We teamed up into pairs during the night mainly for the purpose of using one man's blanket to lie on and two bodies cuddled together could cover with the other blanket. This way two men's bodies generated some extra warmth. It was cold but not unbearable, just miserable enough to cause a restless sleep.

Having this nice friendly old guard was a blessing in that he would tell us where we were and how far we had to go. This way we could ration our bread and sausage. Some of the men just couldn't ration their food and they suffered for it by going hungry as much as two days with the exception of getting a drink of water when we made our usual stop around 10:00 a.m. each day.

As our train was pulling into Stuttgart, we could hear the air raid sirens blowing. The train came to a sudden stop and the door was opened from the outside by other guards. Willie jumped out and the door was closed and locked. We looked through the cracks and saw all the guards running for an open field next to the tracks and they spread out and lay on the ground. In the mean time, we sat waiting to hear the bombs drop, praying that the city of Stuttgart was the target and not our unmarked prisoner-of-war train. There were no bombs dropped and we assumed that the planes which caused the alert must have headed for some other target.

In Willie's haste to leave the car, he left his machine-gun under a blanket. None of us noticed this at the time. When the all clear sounded, the guards returned to the train. When our door was opened, one shot was fired from Willie's machine-gun. Somehow, the edge of the door caught on to the bolt of the gun and held it back. When the door was opened, it released the bolt causing it to fire one round.

To our horror, the one bullet struck the young G.I. interpreter in the temple and within seconds he was dead. Willie screamed, "GOTT IN HIMMEL-NEIN!" He was visibly shaken. He climbed into the car and held this young man to his bosom and cried like a baby.

The other guards tried to get Willie to pass the body out to them but Willie just set there holding him and crying. Someone started to say the 23rd Psalm and we all joined in. A stretcher was brought to our

car and they took our comrade's body away. Another guard was assigned to our car and as the door closed we could still hear Willie crying openly.

I believe the death of this fine young soldier was an accident. I'm sure we all knew that and though we grieved for the loss of our American comrade-in-arms, we genuinely felt sorry for Willie who through his carelessness caused the death of his friend, surely not his enemy.

The remainder of the trip was uneventful, we tried to exercise and stretch our muscles, we talked to each other but never spoke one word to our new guard. We were encouraged when ever the train was moving as it brought us closer to our destination. The time dragged by when we sat on sidings, sometimes for as long as 6 hours. At every little town we came to, we stopped. Why? I don't know. We saw no other trains on the tracks near us but I suppose they had their reasons for stopping so much. The trip in all took six days to complete and we actually only went 160 miles.

CHAPTER 6

REGISTERED

DECEMBER 11, 1944

We arrived in Limburg, Germany at around 4 p.m. We were marched through town to Stammlager XII-A. We were given time to wash our hands and face and then was served a hot meal of barley soup, bread, cheese and coffee. We were then housed in a building devoid of any furniture. We slept on a straw covered wooden floor. This was to be our home for a week or so before being sent to a permanent camp. That night I slept like a little baby on that hard floor. The next morning I felt as if no joint in my body would ever move again. For breakfast we had the usual, coffee or tea, bread and jam. After breakfast, we were marched to another building which served as some sort of office. Here we were registered as prisoners of war with the Geneva Convention.

We lined up at several tables on one side of the room. At the table I was registered was a German Lieutenant and a British soldier who also was a prisoner-of-war. He acted as a clerk for the Germans.

First we were searched and everything was taken from our pockets, including personal items such as rings, watches, pens and pencils, and our dog tags. The lieutenant went through everything before him. He went through a pouch I carried containing a picture of my wife and son, a few addresses and about \$60.00 in French francs. He asked me what kind of outfit I was in. I answered him by giving only the information he was entitled to under the rules of the Geneva Convention.

I gave him my full name, rank and serial number. I'm sure he didn't expect anything else but then you never know. Some G.I. might slip up and forget. He smiled, pushed everything back across the table to me except the French francs. I honestly believe all that lieutenant was interested in was the money. Some G.I.s had American money and this was a gold mine for him. I was then directed to another table where the British soldier prepared to fill out papers. I was given an identification number, 080809 – XII-A. The 12-A following my number represented the number of the camp. My picture was taken while I held this number under my chin. The British clerk started out by saying, "That name, rank and serial number shit don't mean a thing around here." I asked, "What do you mean by that?" He replied, "The bloody Germans knew when you left the States, when you arrived in bloody France, what bloody division you were with, how many men were in your bloody outfit and how many bloody hairs you have on your ass." Right there and then I knew I didn't like the limey son-of-A-bitch and I told him so. The limey stood up and started to move around the edge of the table evidently to take a poke at me. The lieutenant who could speak English overheard all this and knew I was ready to fight this limey. He called out this limey's name and told him to sit down and get busy filling out those papers. The limey sat down glaring at me.

He said to me, “Hey look, I don’t like this job no how, but someone has to do it because there are not enough Germans that talk English around here. Anyway, I get extra privileges for doing this.” Maybe getting a little extra food or cigarettes, or whatever, made life more bearable for him as a prisoner-of-war. I suppose what ticked me off was his attitude and that adjective “BLOODY” before everything. Bloody this and bloody that, is all he knew. My registration card was completed with name, rank, serial number, age, weight, height, color of hair and eyes, religion and blood type.

We spent the remaining days in our building, leaving only to go to meals which varied very little. Breakfast was always just coffee or tea, bread and jam. Lunch consisted of soup (barley, pea or vegetable), coffee, bread and jam. Supper was good old coffee again, bread, jam, and either a small hunk of sausage or cheese. We received 5 cigarettes each day. The non-smokers traded their smokes off to the heavier smokers for maybe jam, or even for soup which may not be to ones liking.

The following day, we were stripped of our American uniforms. They took our combat boots, heavy combat jacket, pants and shirt, even our helmets. In place of our clothing they issued us parts of French and Italian uniforms and every one of us looked different in ill fitting clothing. I had gray colored pants of a heavy material. This I was thankful for in the cold weather. My shirt was something on the order of our summer shirts and the short jacket was brown. The clothes were filthy and they were full of lice. Luck was with us in regards to our keeping our wool kiwi caps that we could pull down over our ears. Now the shoes we got were something out of a story book.

The shoes were in a huge pile and pairs were not tied together. They were wooden shoes commonly called clogs. They had a thick hard wood sole. The upper portion over the front top of the foot was made of very stiff leather.

There were thin straps on some clogs that snapped over the top of the foot and others went around the heel. These bands just did not hold up at all. The second day I wore mine, the straps broke due to wetness and rotting. This made walking extremely difficult. You had to shuffle your feet along in order to keep them on or you would step out of them into the wet snow. These clogs gave no protection from the cold snow or wet conditions. Every chance you got, you would be rubbing your feet in order to get the circulation of blood flowing to warm them.

Why did they have to take our clothing from us? History would later tell us that the German Army wore our American uniforms in an attempt to infiltrate our lines and disrupt our advance toward Germany. This they accomplished, on many occasions, with some degree of success.

When I think back of how I looked in those ill fitting uniforms, wooden shoes, unshaven face and in desperate need of a haircut, I don't think my mother or my wife would have recognized me if I had stood before them.

CHAPTER 7

MEMORANDUM OF 400 IN PRAYER

DECEMBER 17, 1944

It was very dark outside and there were heavy clouds in the sky threatening to dump fresh snow on the camp. The wind was whistling through the crack around the windows and the large room we occupied was cold and damp. Give a soldier idle time on his hands and he will write a letter home. I wrote my share of letters home. However, our captors never mailed them as my family never received one letter from me while a prisoner-of-war. Some of the men were doing exercises and making a lot of noise while trying to see who could do this or that longer. There always seemed to be a card game going on, yet most men were just talking about home. We sure learned about the likes and dislikes of one another whenever we had these bull sessions.

We were all startled by the sound of the camp air-raid siren going off. Before they reached there highest pitch, the lights went out leaving the room in total darkness. All the outside lights were also turned off and even though there were a lot of windows in our building, you still could not see your buddy sitting next to you.

I, like others, probably thought that Allied planes were passing overhead to bomb some distant target. Well, not on this night! Their target was the large freight yards that was right next to the camp. Those who stood at the window said they couldn't see a thing but the flashes of machine-gun tracer fire from planes and the explosion of bombs. Some of them seemed awfully close. One in particular was of such magnitude, it shook our old building.

Sometimes an explosion would be so close it would brighten the sky and our room for an instant, like a flash of lightening. I believe that a little panic started to creep into all of us at this time.

Over the sound of battle we heard the loud voice of someone saying, "All right men, settle down, bow your heads and listen to my prayer." He went on reciting not from any text he read or prayer he learned, this prayer came from the depths of his heart. His voice was soft and low, it could be heard easily over the sounds outside because inside not one man moved or spoke. The part of his prayer that touched me very deeply was when he came to speaking about those whom we loved back home. His voice then quivered. "Lord God, please give courage to our wives, mothers, fathers, children, sweethearts and loved ones." Here he stopped and openly cried. He was unable to continue. After a long silent moment someone said, "AMEN" and we all joined in with yet another, "AMEN".

During his open outburst, all you could hear above the roar of the planes was a snuffle and a sob here and there. I know that others were carried away also as I was. I know that our LORD was with us in the barracks of 400 where only 100 should be as He always is with us, but this night you could feel HIS presence. I have prayed many times, but never have I felt closer to my Lord than this night of 400 in prayer.

When the lights came on, I looked at the face of each man around me, trying to establish which of them led us in prayer. It didn't really matter who it was, I just wanted my tear filled eyes to say "Thank You"!

CHAPTER 8

40 + 8 = 70

DECEMBER 22, 1944

In the afternoon we were surprised by the appearance of German guards entering our building carrying boxes. We were ordered to form a column of two's. We were told that we would be moving to another camp that would be larger, have better facilities and it would be our permanent camp. A shout of joy went out among the men. The boxes were opened and the guards started to pass out contents as the line moved by. I was teamed up with Staff Sergeant Bruno Bragganini from Kalamazoo, Michigan. Each man received 10 cigarettes, a chocolate candy bar (D-Bar) and a can of food. I received a 12 ounce can of lunchmeat and Bruno got 6 ounces of cheese.

We were then divided into groups of 70 men. Each group had guards flanking them on both sides as they were marching out of camp and down to the very railroad yard that was bombed the night of the 17th. Workmen were still repairing tracks and heavy equipment was removing damaged box cars. The one consolation we had for the scare we experienced on the 17th was seeing all the destruction either our planes or the Royal Air Force planes had caused.

The name 40 and 8 derived from the old French box cars during World War I, the box car holding 40 men and 8 horses. To our horror, they made 70 men occupy this same size box car. Oh well, we could put up with that for a short ride to another camp, which promised to be real nice. Our first train ride as captives lasted 6 days and we only went 160 miles. If this was to be a short trip, why didn't they march us there? I don't think I'm going to like this train ride.

I don't know the actual measurements of these 40 and 8 box cars, so I'll try to explain it in comparison to 70 men. 25 men slept on the side of the car opposite the door we entered from. The other 45 men slept on the other side of the car. Each man when lying on the floor would have his head towards the outer side walls. From both sides, feet met in the middle causing a jumbled up mess, especially when trying to climb over them. You lay on your side with both knees drawn up. Your knees would be pressed against the back of the knees of the man next to you. I slept on the side with 45 men and near the door.

During the night when one man couldn't stand it any longer (lying on his left side) and he decided to turn over, the whole row would have to turn with him or be extra crowded. This sure made for a restless sleep. When both your sides became cold and sore, you stood up and leaned against the sides. Sometimes you would doze off standing like this and your knees would buckle and you fell on those lying down. This always caused a lot of grumbling and even a curse word at times.

Sometimes when you stood up to stretch your legs, your buddies on either side of you would take advantage of the added space and roll over onto their backs. When you decided to lie down again, you had to push, shove, holler, etc..... When this didn't get results, you just squeezed yourself in and grudgingly they scooted over. This tightened up the line again and someone else would figure they couldn't stand it any longer and stood up.

You're probably wondering why we had 45 men on one side and 25 on the far side. I hate to mention that toilet again, but it just has to be said in order to describe the deplorable conditions we had to put up with on the train. We worked out the arrangement of only 25 men on the one side to again allow space for that toilet. The worst part about this particular toilet is that it was only a third of the size we had on the train to Limburg. And to compound that, we had 30 more men using then before. All this was bad enough but, to compound our problems even further, some of the men had a bad case of diarrhea. Three men could easily fill that can and those that went after them just bent over the can and their waste just spilled over onto the floor. The stench was so bad, many became nauseous and I think this was the worst night I ever had to endure in my life.

Those poor souls who were nearest to the toilet had their clothes stained by urine and waste. When we made the usual stop at 10:00 a.m. and they opened the door, we emptied the toilet. The pails of water they gave us for drinking water was then used to wash down the floor of the box car. Our guards saw how we used the water and didn't even have the decency to get us more water so we could have a drink. The only sign of decency one guard showed was that he managed to get us a large sized can which was sufficient in size to accommodate all 70 men for a 24 hour period. The two men who had the misfortune of lying the closest to the toilet took off their soiled jackets and threw them out the door at this time. They must have suffered terribly the following nights.

We all felt pretty blue on Christmas Eve. There was always someone who came up with how his family spent Christmas Eve. We all listened intently, savoring every word and living our happiest Christmas over in our minds. Our train came to a stop in a village for some reason or other and one of the boys came up with a perfect solution of getting everyone out of the doldrums. "Let's sing some Christmas Carols," he said. We started out singing 'Silent Night'. Let me tell you here and now, every person in that village had to hear us because we sang loud and clear. We were still singing carols when the train started to move again a half hour later. I'll bet we sang 'Silent Night' at least half a dozen times before that night was over.

Christmas morning when we made our usual stop at 10:00 a.m., the door was unlocked and opened. The same guard that brought us the larger toilet can greeted us in English with, "Merry Christmas soldiers." Receiving a greeting like that from him gave our spirits a lift and brought smiles to our faces.

Finally, late in the afternoon of December 27th, we arrived in Furstenburg on the Oder, which was 300 miles from where we left from in Limburg. We disembarked and marched to Stammlager III-B. Furstenburg lies about 75 miles southeast of Berlin.

CHAPTER 9

STAMMLAGER 3-B

DECEMBER 27, 1944

3-B was a very large prison camp; possibly it had been an army camp some time ago. It was divided into many separate fenced areas. The outer perimeter fence had towers high up above the ground, each with searchlight and machine-gun. Each area housed different nationalities. There were Russians, French, British, Serbs, Australians, Canadians and of course Americans. I'm sure there were other Allies there but I only listed those that I knew were definitely there. The American section I was in had 5 heated barracks. Not central air mind you, wood burning stoves, with just enough wood supplied to keep the chill off. We had a walk of about 200 yards to a building that served as a latrine. Honest to goodness stools over open pits, the waste treated with chemicals. There's a catch to everything good. The toilet paper was rationed because the dumb G.I.s would burn it up in their blowers, (a type of apparatus to heat food faster). Between our section and the Russians was a double fence, each one at least 15 feet high and interwoven with barbed wire. The two fences were about 6 feet apart allowing guards and their police dogs to patrol. I understand that there was another section of the camp where other Americans were being held, but I never got to see that part of the camp. Fortunately, there was room for another 400 men to occupy these 5 barracks with Americans who had been captured along time ago in Africa. We called these G.I.s "The old timers," with respect. That first night we were taken to showers. I guess the Germans couldn't stand the stench on our clothes. The water was not hot but it was warm and most of us stepped under fully clothed. We rubbed and rinsed our clothing right on our bodies. The guards thought we were nuts, I guess, because they laughed at us. We then stripped and took a good bath, wrung out our clothes and then ran like hell back to the barracks in the cold night. We hung our clothes to dry around the two wood burning stoves.

The guards brought in a large container of hot vegetable soup, bread and coffee. We ate all we wanted or what our shrunken stomachs would allow us to eat. We had double bunk beds, wooden slats, a straw filled mattress and two blankets. The old timers were telling us about the camp and how nice it was. They went some place in the camp where they had band instruments and they had an orchestra. They even had classes in French, German, Math, etc., taught by well educated prisoners of war. They spoke about American Red Cross boxes and about many other fine things about the camp. But my eyes grew tired and I dropped off to a good nights sleep. Everyone slept warm and with a full belly for the first time since being captured 25 days ago.

CHAPTER 10

AMERICAN RED CROSS BOXES

DECEMBER 28, 1944

The Germans at this camp relied heavily on the shipment of American Red Cross boxes of food to supplement their issue. Their issue of food for the American Section for one week was 1 ¼ loaves of bread, ¼ pound of margarine, 1 cup of jam, 20 lumps of sugar and every couple of days they would issue some cheese or sausage. The coffee was given a little more freely.

My introduction to the American Red Cross boxes was a very pleasant surprise. Our first issue was to be divided up by two men. I teamed up again with my old buddy Bruno. The contents of a box never exceeded 11 pounds gross weight. The boxes varied in contents, but basically they were about equal. Our box contained: a pound of raisins, 4 ounces of soluble coffee, 7 ounces of cocoa, 1 pound of powdered milk, 2 cans of sardines, 4 ounces of cheese, 1 pound of oleo, 1 can of liver pate, jam, crackers, salt and pepper mix, meat and vegetable stew, ½ pound of sugar, 2 bars of soap, 5 packs of cigarettes and ascorbic acid vitamin tablets.

DECEMBER 30, 1944

We considered this camp like a country club comparable to the others. Two days had passed by and already we are getting another box . . . “Wow” is all I could say. The box we received was a special Christmas box. Its contents were: 1 3/8 ounces of tea, 4 ounces of cheese, dates, pure honey spread, Christmas hard candies, 7 ounces of nuts, 4 packs of gum, 12 bullion cubes, 1 pound of plum pudding, a face cloth, 3 packs of cigarettes, smoking tobacco and pipe, deck of cards, chess game, preserved butter, 12 ounces of boned turkey, Royal Ann Cherries, 4 ounces of Vienna sausage and 3 ounces of deviled ham.

We received a number 10 box on January 8th, 24th and 31st, which was likewise divided by two men. When I wrote all these items down in my diary, I thought, my gosh, that’s a lot of food. But then I thought of when Bruno and I tried to make this last for a week in some cases.

We played cards a lot during the day to pass the time of day. We gambled for cigarettes only, no one ever gambled their food away. American cigarettes were worth actually more than cash or gold, if we had it. Everyone wanted American cigarettes and that included the German military, civilians, Italians, French and even the British. Now if you’re going to trade cigarettes for food, you have to have lots of cigarettes. That’s where the card playing came in. I sure was a lucky son-of-a-gun at cards. Bruno and I teamed up with another G.I. by the name of Red. Come to think of it, I never did know his real name.

We made up a pretty good trading team. Bruno spoke Italian, Red spoke French and I German. So between the three of us, we could just about trade with any nationals in the camp.

We would approach the guard at the gate of our section and bribe him to let us out and into the French section nearby. This would cost us a pack or two of cigarettes. The French soldiers worked a lot in town under guard and they came in contact with the German Civilians. The Italians worked for the German military doing just about everything and they also had contact with civilians and more so with the German soldiers. After doing a lot of trading, we would come back to our section. Incidentally, we never got out of the outer perimeter of the camp. The guard at our gate was a smart fellow. He knew and we also knew that we were in deep trouble if we were not in our section by 4 p.m. for roll call. It cost us dearly to get back in, sometimes a carton of smokes.

An example of a trade is as follows:

An American G.I. would decide to swap off his watch for whatever he could get in food. He would approach Bruno, Red or me and ask us to deal for him. When we had a lot of other stuff from other men to trade off, we would approach the guard at our gate and make a deal of one or two packs of cigarettes, just to get to the French section, or Italian section. We would talk to the French soldiers and Italian personnel and give them what we had to trade. When they were on their work details outside of camp, they made their contacts with the German population and military. We traded mostly for bread, flour and potatoes. Sometimes for razor blades, soap and anything else a G.I. requested. The next day we visited them again, going through the same routine with the guard, coming and going.

Our system was complicated, but we worked things out so that everyone was satisfied. Regardless of what we got for that watch, sweater, pen and pencil set, ring, etc . . . we divided up as follows; The G.I. got $\frac{1}{2}$, my team got $\frac{1}{4}$ the Frenchman or Italian got $\frac{1}{8}$ and the guard got the other $\frac{1}{8}$.

Sometimes we traded off food for food. For instance, I never did know a soldier that cared for powdered eggs. We did a brisk business for a while, but soon our buddies ran out of things to swap off. So we had to rely on cigarettes as the main bargaining item.

The Russian prisoners were in a section right next to ours. We were separated by two fences, 6 feet apart and quite high. The Russian prisoners were taken out of camp on work details and they did the hard work and the dirty work. The Germans fed them the same food we received (but no Red Cross boxes) and for those who were able to work extra hard they gave them an additional loaf of bread. I guess it was to keep them strong enough for the hard labor they performed. The G.I.s who decided to do their own trading would motion to a Russian that he wanted some bread, usually by holding his hands together as if he was making a big circle, like the shape of the loaf of bread and then pointing to his

mouth. The Russian would go into his barracks and return with a big round loaf of bread. The American would throw over his watch, ring or whatever. The Russian looked it over with his buddies and the bartering go hot and heavy. When they both agreed the Russian would indicate the loaf was too big and heavy to toss over the high fence. So he would go inside his barracks, cut about a two inch large slice out of the center and then toss the two halves over the fence. When the G.I. put both ends together, he found that he got cheated. So if that G.I. had anything else to trade, he came to us.

I learned a lot from the French prisoners and the Italian personnel. They told some weird stories about the Russians. Russia did not recognize the Geneva Convention and therefore they were treated more shabbily than anyone else. They did all the dirty work around the camp and did some awful hard labor, outside the camp. I saw them come back from work detail, dragging their butts behind them. I think some of them got a beating at times or else they fought among themselves. On two different occasions I saw police dogs sent into the barracks to get the men out when they failed to move fast enough. On one occasion, the dogs were thrown back out, crippled or dead. I saw Russians taken out of their section, probably those responsible for killing the dogs. They never returned. One of the weird stories the French told us was so bizarre we had to see it for ourselves. We had a head count everyday at 8 a.m. and at 4 p.m. The Germans insisted that we line up into groups of 100, 25 in the front row and 4 deep. The G.I.s always lined up the front row an arms length away from the next man and the rows behind lined up on the man in front of him. The Russians lined up their front row standing shoulder to shoulder and the rows behind lined up on the man in front of them. It didn't seem to matter to the Jerries how we stood as long as they could see 25 men in the front row and 4 deep in each row. When the horn would go off that roll call would be within minutes, the G.I.s fell out of the barracks like they had all day long. The guards were always hollering at us, "Snell". Now the Russian soldiers were altogether different. When that horn sounded, it was as if they were standing just inside their door waiting to pounce out. They would be standing at attention all lined up long before we got in order. We were counted first and dismissed. The Russian soldiers never fell out till the guards turned their backs and had walked some distance away. After hearing the weird story of their behavior, we watched from then on until one day, we all spotted it. The reason for the Russians standing shoulder to shoulder was to hold up a comrade erect. The weird part is that they would hold up their dead comrade so he could be counted and they drew rations for 100 men. I can't imagine them doing this more than one day, two at the most. When the deathly effluvial would become noticeable, they would notify the guard that a man had died. The guard or those in authority didn't care one way or another and you can bet there was no post mortem on the body. The only explanation any of us could come up with for doing this was to draw an extra ration of food. The French told us that the dead soldier had a board against his back and held in place with wires around the neck and waist. We were too far away to see this, but we did see his comrades carry him back into the barracks with his legs hanging straight down.

While preparing this story from pages of my diary, I wrote from facts I had written down and how things appeared at this time. While reading over some of my work, a teacher and a minister stated that I was showing a great deal of hate for the Russians and I was making them look awful, inhuman, etc.. I gave this a lot of serious thought and must admit they are right. I also have shown, to this point, that the Germans were equally awful and inhuman. If a German were writing this as his diary, he would no doubt have some awful things to say about the Russians and the Americans for that matter. In the pages that follow, I will continue to write as I recall the events, neither trying to soften or harden the actions of all participants.

CHAPTER 11

THE BLOWER

JANUARY, 1945

Americans are blessed with the extraordinary know-how to invent. This was shown by one of the G.I. prisoners who made a blower out of tin cans, wire, shoelaces and wood. The blower was an apparatus with pulleys, which when cranked, drove a fan that caused a better fire. It took ingenuity to design and a clever head to build. It was composed of a stiff wire crank fastened to a pulley made from the bottoms of cans held together by wire. Another set of pulleys were ahead of the crank and a shoe lace served as a belt. Ahead of these two pulleys was a tin can with both ends cut out containing a fan blade fashioned from a cut up tin can. The blades of the fan were fastened to a stiff shaft attached to yet another pulley. A flue made of tin was fastened to the fan housing. Atop this flue was a metal pot with holes punched in its bottom.

As you turned the crank, it turned a 4 inch pulley. The shoelace acting as a belt drove a smaller pulley. This pulley drove the final pulley that was attached to the fan shaft. The different sized pulleys enabled the operator to turn the crank slowly while the fan was moving at a very rapid speed. The rush of air over the little chips of burning wood made the flames a lot hotter. Therefore water was brought to a boil much faster with less wood used which incidentally was hard to come by. We could have done all this boiling of water on our coal stove but this was more fun and a hell of a challenge to build.

There sure were some crazy concoctions made on these blowers. A favorite among the men had three different names. We called it a 'Hot Water Cake'. The British called it an 'Ice Box Cake' and the American officers called it a 'Steam Cake'. All the contents came from Red Cross boxes. Your preferential taste was the main factor in determining the measurements to be used and what you preferred in it. Most were made with prunes, raisins, crushed pineapple, graham crackers, margarine, sugar cocoa, powdered milk and nuts. I'm serious. This was delicious.

Stew the prunes, raisins and crushed pineapple. Crumple up graham crackers, mix the prunes, raisins and crushed pineapple into the crumpled graham crackers using as little juice as possible from the stewing. In a separate container, mix together melted margarine, sugar, cocoa and powdered milk with remainder of juice from the stewed prunes, raisins and crushed pineapple. Stir together well, causing a thick icing and allow to cool in a snow bank. Crushed nuts can be sprinkled on the top.

To go way ahead of my story is important in case someone who reads this may consider making this 'Hot Water Cake'. My advice is not to try it. Months after returning home, I brought out my diary, read

about this 'Hot Water Cake' and gave it a try. My God, it was terrible tasting. That just goes to show you that a hungry stomach tells your brain it's delicious. Incidentally, that diary was tucked away in a drawer and never opened again till the Fall of 1984, some 40 years later.

CHAPTER 12

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

JANUARY 31, 1945

Early in the morning, we were issued Red Cross boxes. Once again we had to divide a box between two men. If Bruno and I could have foreseen what took place later on in the afternoon, we would not have dove into that box of food so rapidly.

At 3 p.m. we were ordered to gather all our belongings we could hand carry and be prepared to leave the camp at 4 p.m. We were told we would not be returning. This could mean only one thing; the Russian Army must be getting close.

If the Russian Army did indeed advance so rapidly as to over run our camp before we were moved, the first thing that would happen would be for the Russian prisoners to be given weapons and they would be smack dab in the war again. Not so with Americans and our other Allies who recognized the Geneva Convention. (An example):

If an American soldier was captured and he escaped or his troops counter attacked and he was freed before he was registered with Geneva, he could take up arms once again in that same theater.

However, if an American is captured and registered with Geneva and then escapes or is liberated, he can no longer bear arms in that same theater of war. However, if the Army so desired, he could be sent to another theater such as the Pacific.

Taking all this into consideration, I can understand the Germans removing the Russian prisoners and taking them deeper into Germany, thus prolonging their liberation and avoiding their taking up arms once again to strengthen the Russian Army. So why did they take us?

If they had just taken the Russian prisoners and left us Americans and the other allied prisoners to be liberated, they could have used the thousand or more guards as fighting men to defend Germany. But then again, maybe Hitler didn't trust anybody.

At 4 p.m. sharp, they moved us out. We later found out that over 8,000 prisoners were removed from that camp that afternoon. We were in groups of about 500 men separated from other groups like ours by at least a mile. Ten heavily armed guards flanked our group on both sides and two trucks following each group bearing other guards who took turns relieving those walking. We started out walking on the road that was covered with snow that had turned to slush by trucks and other military vehicles going and coming. We hadn't gone more than 100 feet and our socks and the leather of the clogs was soaking wet. Shuffling your feet to keep the clogs on your feet added to kicking up a lot more slush on your ankles and

even up your legs. We marched as usual in a column of fours. We were strung out 600 to 700 feet due to the terrible walking conditions. If someone stepped out of their clogs into the slush, it just meant that the march was disrupted while that man tried to pick up his clog and put it back on. At times, the clog may have been accidentally kicked by the men behind and this caused a greater delay, causing the column to back up even further. Someone was always falling down and when your cold limbs hit that hard pavement you were in severe pain. We marched like this for one solid hour before we got a ten minute break. During the break we were allowed to go off the road but not any further than 50 feet.

Most everyone carried at least two blankets, a few toilet articles and their food, if they managed to have any. What food I had, I carried in my pockets. I had accumulated an old worn suitcase and all I had in it was my two blankets and my razor, soap and towel. Everything else was carried in my pockets. The pouch with my wife's and son's picture and my diary were carried in my shirt, supported against my body by my belt. The suitcase had no hinges or locking device and I had it tied shut with strips of an old discarded blanket. I fashioned strips to carry the case on my back. Some guys even carried those darn blowers with them.

Excluding the ten minute breaks we got each hour, we marched from 4 p.m., January 31st, until 5 p.m. the next day. That first night was a real test of ones agility in managing to stay on your feet. As the night wore on, the temperature dropped and the slush turned to ice making it extremely difficult to walk. Those wooden soled clogs just slid out from under you. The guards managed just fine with their hob-nailed boots.

Some of the fellows tore up blankets and wrapped their feet. This gave them some added traction for a short time only because the sharp ice tore at those wrappings and they soon were of no use.

I didn't know what route we were taking other than it was a westerly direction; however, sometimes we seemed to be going in a zigzag. Whenever we came to a junction in the road and there was a road sign, someone always would mention the distance to the next town. I wish that I had written them down then instead of waiting till we stopped for the night. Even then I couldn't remember all of the towns or the order in which we went through them. But those that I did recall and wrote down were; Lieberose, Dollgen, Mark Bucholtz, Kalbe, Tenpitz, Winsdorf, Sperenberg and Luckenwalde.

On one occasion during a 10 minute break, I attempted to repair the sling on my back that was coming apart. I had to take one of my good blankets and tear off a few strips of a few inches wide to make a new sling. Maybe the cold fingers were not working to well or maybe I was just in to much of a hurry because no matter what I did, everything went wrong. The ten minutes were up and whistles started blowing and there was a lot of yelling for us to get back on the road. This made me hurry twice as fast and you know

the old saying; “The faster I go, the behinder I get.” Well, that was me in a nutshell. My buddies told me later that this one guard was directing all his yelling at me because I was the last one to be off the road. I was so absorbed in trying to hurry those knots together that I just didn’t see this old guard come up behind me. He struck me in the back of the head with the butt of his machine-gun. It was not really a hard blow; just enough to get my attention or to show that he meant business. I guess, without thinking, I turned and swung at the first thing I saw, which was the guard’s face. I knocked him backwards and he stumbled and fell, dropping his gun. It only took a split second for me to realize what I had done and in that split second, I made a dash for the road which luckily was not more than twenty feet away. I quickly mingled in with the other G.I.s and they closed ranks, shielding me. The guard got to his feet and came up to the road, one awfully mad German. He must have been in his fifties or early sixties, which may have been the factor which saved my life. He just couldn’t get up very fast, pick up his gun and move fast enough to spot me in the ranks of my fellow G.I.s. He walked back and forth looking everyone over.

He even cut through our ranks to the other side looking for me. No wonder he couldn’t find me, even though he looked right at me. We all looked alike, we all had a stubble of beard, we all wore kiwi caps and our clothes were more or less the same color. Boy, was that guard mad. I bet that if he had spotted me and was sure I was the one, he would have shot me right there on the spot. A couple of his comrades didn’t help matters by ribbing him about getting knocked down. Sure glad they didn’t pay too much attention as to where I was in those ranks.

I sure took a tongue lashing from those close to me. I could not blame them one bit. Why that old guard could easily have lost his cool and come up shooting. All I could say was, “I’m sorry.” After about five minutes or so of silence, someone started laughing about how that old guard went sprawling and how mad he was. Those close to me started to joke about it and everyone had a good laugh. I thank God they could laugh about it later because it sure was a stupid mistake on my part. It turned out that my only loss was my suitcase and its contents. By late afternoon the whole episode was not spoken of again.

Now it was time for the Germans to give us a much needed rest or we would all be falling down. A large sized farm with several barns would be selected for a stop off place for the night. The yard in front of the farm house was very spacious. The house was set back quite a distance from the road. The barns and other buildings extending from the house on both sides, back towards the road forming a shape like a three sided square. The guards were stationed all around the perimeter. While it was still light, we were allowed to move about the yard but were not allowed to come near the road.

Most of the men would go into the barns as we arrived and pick out a spot to bed down for the night. The hay loft was the ideal place and that’s why there was always a mad dash for the barn. My curiosity kept me in the yard looking over the farm. The family that owned the farm also had curiosity because

they would come out into the yard to see what we looked like or just to see that these American hooligans didn't destroy anything. Being I had appointed myself as Goodwill American Ambassador, I went over to this family with a big smile on my face and a greeting in German, "Good evening." They in turn said, "Good evening." For all I knew, I might be the first American they had ever seen and a prisoner-of-war to boot. I felt that the ice between us was broken when they greeted me and didn't walk away. I quickly went on to say, "I come from Detroit, Michigan, a very large city, but I can see that you have a real nice farm here." The man replied, "Thank you. This farm has been in my family for a long time now." His wife then asked me, "Did your parents come from Germany?" "No," I said. "My Grandparents did." She went on to ask me if I knew where my Grandparents came from in Germany. That was the exact opening I was waiting for. When I first went over to talk to them, I was already planning a little trickery to get on the good side of them. I have to go back a little in my story in order to explain this trickery. Whenever we came to a road junction that had a sign pointing to the next town and giving the distance, we would try to figure out where we were. Those names of towns and distances stuck in my mind.

To answer her question as to where my Grandparents came from in Germany, I would pretend like I was having a hard time thinking of the town they came from and at the same time trying to pronounce it. I'd pick some distant town about twenty or so miles away and say to the woman, that name. They would all get excited, even the children knew that the town I named was nearby. It was funny watching this family trying to all talk at the same time trying to tell me where that town was. The husband finally made his voice heard over the others and said, "That's just 25 kilometers from here, to the west." How it was my turn to act happy and surprised at finding out that my Grandparents came from a town so close to where I was now standing. I kept up this ruse by saying, "I sure hope we go through that town so I can see where my Grandparents came from and my Grandmother would be very happy to know I was there." The next question the wife asked was, "What's your Grandparent's name?" I would lie and give my Grandmother's maiden name as it sounded more German: I thought, "Schmidting", I'll say. They would think momentarily and say, "Yes, we know some Schmidtings there." They were very pleased that they could tell me where my Grandparents came from and I in turn thanked them very graciously.

This big line of baloney on my part was just to slip in my next reply. "We haven't had a whole lot to eat on this march to another prison camp and I hope we get there soon." I was very careful not to make it sound like I was bitter because the German guards weren't feeding us properly. Before I even finished, the wife was off towards the house.

She came back carrying a sandwich made with that wonderful dark bread and filled with a lot of cold beef. In her apron, she had two apples, a cold baked potato and a handful of raw carrots. She even had some hard candies in her apron pocket for me. I think that if the husband had had a bottle of schnapps

on him, he would have given me a drink. I sat down and ate my sandwich and the young boy even got me a drink from the well.

We talked about our families, how old the kids were and so forth. It was starting to get dark and the guards began telling everyone to get into the barns. Reluctantly we parted company and I bid them a goodnight and that God would bless them for their being so nice to me.

I kind of joked some when I said I appointed myself as an American Goodwill Ambassador. However, I do believe I was a good ambassador that day, even if I lied and used trickery to obtain some food. I came away from that family thinking that they were no different from the people back home. They sure were different from the other German civilians I encountered in Breisach. I don't know if I'm quoting right what someone once said, "Don't judge all people by the actions of a few." This family was a credit to their country because they were German Goodwill Ambassadors.

Would you believe that when I got home after the war and told my Grandmother how I used her maiden name and said she came from a certain town I was near, she actually scolded me for lying to those nice people who fed me. You see, my Grandmother's main ambition in life was to keep her Charles's belly full and she loved those people for helping me.

By the 5th of February, I had eaten the last of my share of the Red Cross box we were given the day we left Stammlager III-B. A handful of raisins and a small piece of cheese would have to sustain me for the day. Most of the men had eaten the last of their food the day before. Some were now eating grain they had picked up from the barn floor we slept in last night. If we had only known that the box of food we received that morning would be our last one, I'm sure everyone would have been able to ration themselves far better. I suppose I fared somewhat better than my buddies because of the ruse I pulled each night we stopped at a farm. The evening of the 6th of February, we stopped at a very small farm. There was only one barn and it was barely big enough to hold all of us. There were other smaller buildings, but they were full of equipment. The farm house windows were aglow with light and I wondered if the family would be coming outside or if they had retired for the night. It was totally dark and the men kept up a steady complaint to the guards that we hadn't had any water today. One of the guards managed to get some pails and two other men and I were picked to get water. The guards got to know me because I was always talking to them or to the farmers. It was easier to get things done by using me as an interpreter. The well was in the kitchen by the sink. The family was seated around the kitchen table having their evening meal. While the first G.I. was filling his pails at the hand pump, we stood and just stared at the food on that table. I can still see that meal before me to this day as it was some of my favorite foods; Mashed potatoes, gravy and beef, carrots, beets, bread, butter and a frosted cake on the drain board. Even the hot coffee looked good.

I didn't get to pull off my little ruse this night. I didn't have any cigarettes left to strike a trade for food nor anything else of value. I mentioned this to my buddies and all we could come up with was a bar of soap (Lux). The wrapper was worn and dirty but the soap still had a nice clean fragrance. I asked the woman if she could spare us each a slice of bread with butter. She was a little apprehensive, probably because the German guard was there, but he interceded for us and said the soap was very good and if she wanted to give us some bread for the soap, it was alright with him. Well, we each got our slice of bread and butter and we thanked her. We took the water to the barn and each man got a dipper of water to drink.

One of the guards was nice enough to tell us that tomorrow we would arrive at Stammlager III-A near Luckenwalde. This bit of news gave everyone an uplift of spirits and I would guess we all slept the night through with the best sleep we had since leaving III-B, six days ago.

I might point out here that this march was no real picnic for our guards either. They may have had nice warm boots, warmer clothing and more food which was hot, but they still had to take turns walking and they had to walk a little apart from us. Not on the road as we were, but over rough ground at the side of the road. So I guess they were as happy as we were that the march would end the next day.

The distance we marched from Camp III-B to Camp III-A at Luckenwalde was about 75 miles as the crow flies. God, it seemed like one thousand and seventy-five miles.

CHAPTER 13

STAMMLAGER 3-A

FEBRUARY 7, 1945 – LUCKENWALDE, GERMANY

Early in the morning we marched through the outskirts of Luckenwalde to Stammlager III-A, which would be our final prisoner-of-war camp. Luckenwalde lies south of Berlin about 35 miles. The camp was 3 miles from town. My estimate of the site of this camp was about a half-mile square. The outer perimeter had the usual barbed wire fence with guard towers at the corners. The camp was divided up into sections by barbed wire like the other lagers were. The Russian prisoners were housed in old type brick buildings farthest from our compound. The American, British, French and all other allied officers were also housed in barracks. Their section was next to ours.

Our section seemed to be apart from the camp, which was hurriedly put up to hold thousands of more prisoners, mainly because we were housed in tents. In this newer section they erected 8 large tents, 150 some feet wide and at least 500 feet long. They had the appearance of circus tents like the Big Top.

The ground inside the tents was covered with about 6 inches of straw. Through the middle of the tent, running longwise was a space just wide enough for one man to walk. Each tent housed approximately 1000 prisoners. Each day more and more G.I.s were brought into the camp till all 8 tents were completely full. Where they all came from I don't know, but I suppose they were moved for the same reason we were made to move closer to Berlin as the Allied Armies advanced.

We were crowded together lying side by side but nothing like in the 40 and 8 boxcars. Each tent had a N.C.O. in charge and about all he ever did was to call us out for roll call every morning and to oversee the distribution of food. When you have 1000 G.I.s and all are impatient to be fed, the N.C.O. had a tremendous job on his hands trying to keep some kind of order and for this we appreciated the good job he did.

Our tent was divided into groups of 50 men. The space allotted each group was about 15 feet by 75 feet. This allowed each G.I. about 3 feet wide and 6 feet long space to sleep in. It left us 2 feet of space to walk out to the main aisle. There were 10 groups like this on each side of the middle aisle. I was in group number 9, the second last group from the back of the tent. I refer to this as the back of the tent because we were not allowed to go out that end. We had to use the front entrance only. Being at the back of the tent had its advantages when it came to being served food and disadvantages whenever you wished to leave the tent, especially at night with no lights. Each group selected one man to be their leader and I might add here that this was the worst thing we could have done to a good buddy. A good example of this

would be at meal time. The chow wagon pulled by two horses would approach the front of our tent. The wagon may contain large containers of soup and loaves of bread stacked neatly and under the watchful eyes of the two guards. Whoever made out the ration count for each tent knew exactly how many they were to feed and you never got one extra bowl of soup or any part of a loaf of bread extra. The top tent leader would call out, "Chow Call." On hearing this, group numbers 10 and 20 at the rear of the tent would make their way down the middle aisle carrying their tin cups. The guards ladled out the soup and the leader of each group received 3 loaves of bread. Back in our area of the tent, our group leader would divide the three loaves of bread among the 50 men and woe be to him if he cheated someone of their fair share. When I said woe to him who was dividing the food and he cheated, here is an example.

It grieves me to tell you about an incident that took place one day when we were fortunate to have oleo with our bread. We were startled by a heck of a commotion a few sections down from us. When things settled down, we found out that the leader of that group was dividing up the oleo and when he sliced it into pats, some of the oleo would stick to his knife and he would wipe the knife clean on a side piece of paper. When all was divided, the leader ended up with his share plus a little from each mans share that stuck to the knife. Someone didn't take to kindly to that and started a fight over it and a few others joined in. I watched our leader divide up oleo and I couldn't see how he could do so without some oleo sticking to the knife. What was he supposed to do with the very little that was left over as he cleaned the blade of the knife? Was he to form what was left and try to divide that up into 50 more pieces? Our group talked about this later and we all agreed that we would never cause such a display of anger that would erupt into a fight. Maybe we were different from most other groups because most of us were from the same company or that we had been together from the time we were captured.

Another sad incident involving food really raised my dander up. I was so mad; I was ready to fight for what I thought was right. One day the American top N.C.O. of all 8 tents came into our tent with a few of his close friends. With them, they had a young G.I. who had been badly beaten. Blood was still on his face and clothing. One eye was puffed up so badly I doubt if he could see through it. Hanging across his chest was a sign reading, 'I stole food from my American buddies.' The Sergeant stood this man up before each group and cautioned us saying, "This is what is going to happen to anyone caught stealing food from another prisoner." That poor G.I. was a pitiful sight. He could hardly stand on his own; he had to be supported by others. I guess that's when I lost my cool. I jumped to my feet and shouted to that Sergeant, "Take that damn sign off him and leave him alone." The Sergeant then called me a few unfriendly names and asked, "Do you condone such actions?" I quickly replied, "Hell no, I don't." I went on to say, "Maybe he deserved a wrap in the mouth from the guy he stole from, but not the kind of beating he got." I received some more nasty names from that Sergeant. I then said, "Why hang a sign around his neck for all the German guards to see? They must be laughing inwardly at how we are acting

towards our own men.” Someone else in the background took up my side and yelled for them to take that sign off him and let him go. He suffered enough for what he did. Others began to take up the same chorus. The Sergeant then made a terrible mistake by stepping forward and telling me I was going to get the same thing. Within seconds, all within my group stood up together and the Sergeant realized he’d made a big mistake in threatening me and stepped back. He quickly changed his mood and asked, “Then what should we do with this no good son-of-a-bitch?” Someone else answered for me by saying, “Just let him go. Can’t you see the beating he took was enough? The word will get around. He does not need a sign on him for Jerry to see.” Reluctantly, the Sergeant removed the sign and as he and his little group of buddies left, the Sergeant just had to make one more aggressive act. He shoved the G.I. to the ground as he left. The Sergeant and his buddies were booed all the way to the entrance door. That G.I. just sat on the ground and cried his heart out. After a short while, he got up and left our tent, evidently to where he stayed. I never thought much about him after he left our tent, but today, as I look back and think about it, My God, what a lonely life he must have had for the duration of his imprisonment.

Living in tent #1 had its advantages. You were always first to be fed. Therefore, the soup or coffee was good and warm, never hot. We were closest to the water that was plentiful to drink. You could wash your face and hands and the upper part of the body but could not remove all your clothes to take a complete sponge bath.

At the rear of each tent were two holes. One served as a latrine and the other for papers and cans. The latrine was nothing but a big hole in the ground with a platform across it and log so situated that one could sit on the log and hang his butt over it. Your feet did not touch the platform. Therefore, you had better be wide awake when using this facility or you could end up in the hole.

The other pit was about the same size, 8 feet by 12 feet and around 8 feet deep. I am assuming the Russian prisoners dug those pits before we arrived because they were here a long time in this camp. I don’t even want to think about the maintenance of cleaning that pit out so I’ll tell you about the other pit.

Every two weeks, a detail of Russian prisoners would be sent to our area to clean out the pits. Two or three men would get down in the pit and hand out papers, cardboard and empty cans from Red Cross Boxes. Two or three men would be taking the debris from them and tossing it into a large type wagon. This wagon had no team of horses. The Russians had to pull that heavy wagon. There were times when we were ordered to fall in and in our haste to do so, many men would stop and urinate in the wrong pit. We weren’t supposed to do this, but when nature calls and you know you’re going to be standing in formation for a long time, you just used the nearest facility.

The Russians would clean out that pit and go on to the next one and so on until the wagon was full. They then pulled and pushed it outside the camp to a field nearby where they dug another pit and emptied the contents of the wagon and then covered it with dirt. Naturally, they were under the watchful eyes of the guards while outside the camp.

It's surprising what hunger can do to people. One example of this was enough to turn my stomach and those who witnessed it. On one of the days they were cleaning out this pit, I observed this Russian run his finger around the inside open edge of the can just to get whatever little particle of food adhered to the jagged edge. Of those G.I.s around me who witnessed this, not one of us had the courage to try and explain how that pit was used at times.

Roll call every morning and late afternoon took up a good deal of time, especially when only one tent at a time could be counted. After a few days of standing around in very cold weather, we learned to move as fast as we could to line up in the usual groups of 100 men. When the guards were satisfied with the count, we hurried back to the shelter of the tent and the next tent would hurry through the same way. After a week or so, we sort of made a game of it. Which tent could get counted in the shortest amount of time? We had the advantage because we had less distance to run to be counted.

CHAPTER 14

TIME ON YOUR HANDS

How one spent the daylight hours depended a great deal on the weather. If it was a bitter cold day, you spent most of the time in your tent, going out only for roll call, food or to the latrine. A lot of us would stroll around our area stretching those aching muscles. If a new snow had fallen during the night, a stroll usually ended up in a big snowball fight. Just a bunch of little boys at heart having some fun was one good way to pass some of the day and eliminate some of the boredom.

There was always a lot of card playing and gambling for smokes. Some wrote letters that Jerry never mailed. If it was a nice sunny day, we would sit outside stripped to our waists and hunt for body lice on our undershirts. We would squeeze the lice between our fingernails and by the time we were done doing this, the whole undershirt would be spotted with the blood that those little creatures lived on. All the time we were in Stammlager 3-A, I believe we went through a delousing twice. We lined up and a nozzle was placed down our shirt front and back and we were dusted with a delousing powder. We even got a shot of it in our hair. I honestly believe those lice thrived on that powder. Hunting them down and squeezing them to death was the best solution. Then if you were clever, you could pretend to wash your hands and rinse that undershirt out and at least get rid of your blood and tiny bits of lice.

CHAPTER 15

RED CROSS BOX #6

MARCH 5, 1945

I think we were all beginning to think that we had seen the last of any issue of Red Cross boxes when we were surprised with our first issue at Stammlager 3-A. When that chow wagon turned down our lane leading to our tent compound, a shout of joy went up and it spread like wildfire. As usual our tent leader called for the group leaders and we were issued one box for four men to divide. Dividing a box between two men is a problem in itself. Dividing up between four men is almost impossible. When you divided it up properly in four parts, you asked yourself, what am I going to do with my part? You can't store it. You can only keep certain things in your pocket, like raisins or prunes. What do you do with 1 ½ sardines? Most of the food you ate right on the spot. Box #6 contained:

12 ounces port luncheon meat	12 ounces meat & vegetable stew	½ pound of sugar
½ pound cheddar cheese	3 ¾ ounce can of sardines	cereal
6 ounce can of liver pate	1 pound can of margarine	1 pound prunes
2 ounces saluable coffee	1 pound of powdered milk	chocolate bar
6 ounces of jam	ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) 7	bar of soap
	5 packs of cigarettes	

CHAPTER 16

SEX AND FOOD

How many times have you heard the phrase, **ALL YOU MEN HAVE ON YOUR MIND IS SEX?** Or maybe something like this, **THAT’S ALL YOU MEN EVER TALK ABOUT, SEX!** Believe me when I tell you that from the time I was captured to the day I boarded a ship for home, not once did I ever hear a G.I. speak of sex. After writing this last paragraph, I sat for at least 5 minutes and racked my brain for just one little word about sex during that time and I still can’t recall ever hearing the word mentioned. Not even a dirty joke was told.

Now if you want a subject everyone talked about, day and night, it’s **FOOD**. My diary has 284 pages. The first 123 are filled with the listings of the contents of Red Cross boxes, names of products, in some cases the names of companies who made them. It lists all kind of foods I could think of and those my buddies mentioned. Recipes of all sorts and a conglomeration list of anything you could eat. A fine example of how food would get your attention reminds me of this story that took place one night after lights were out. The men were settling down for the night and a low hum could be heard as individuals had some last minute thing to tell someone. Corporal Dale Shafer sits up and says to me, “Charlie, know what I could go for right now?” I asked, “What’s that Dale?” He replied, “A Hog **BRAINS AND SCRAMBLED EGG SANDWICH.**” Now if he had said, mashed potatoes and gravy or potato pancakes, I could understand that, but hog brains and eggs? **YUK!!** “What the hell are you talking about?” I asked him. I was a city boy and knew little about hog brains in a sandwich so I awaited his reply anxiously. His story went something like this: “Well you know Charlie, I was raised on my Dad’s big, big farm.” He was interrupted with, “Where was that?” Now he had someone else’s attention. He went on to say, “Kearney, Nebraska.” He was then asked by yet another G.I., “How big was the farm?” Before he could answer another voice came in with, “The hell with the size of the farm, tell us about that hog brain and scrambled egg sandwich.” Another city boy nearby came up with, “Yeah, tell us how in the hell do you fix a sandwich like that?” Dale finally got to tell us by stating that early in the morning he and his brothers went out to milk the cows. This took some time and he would be very hungry. After finishing the milking, we headed for the house to get our breakfast before heading out to the fields. Mom always was in the kitchen at that time making breakfast for my Dad and brothers. She knew what I preferred and she always had a couple of hog brains and scrambled eggs sandwiches for me. He went on to say, “Boy the aroma coming from that kitchen was enough to make you extra hungry.” “My Dad liked fried eggs with pork sausage and my brothers were bacon freaks.” “But when I bit into that sandwich of mine, the eggs and brains would squeeze out of the home made bread onto my plate.” By now there was not a sound, not one single hum of anyone talking within earshot of Dale’s voice. Everyone including myself was tasting that sandwich and enjoying it. After a minute or so, the farm boys nearby started prying Dale

with all kinds of questions about the farm. This went on late into the night because there was always somebody else who had a fantastic food they craved. It was fun going to sleep that night thinking about all the favorite dishes that I heard about. Here is a follow up story about Corporal Dale Shafer's famous hog brains and scrambled egg sandwich.

A few years after the war, I was doing some yard work when my wife called me into the house for lunch. Unbeknown to me, she had earlier been reading my diary and she prepared a hog brains and scrambled egg sandwich for me. Being hungry, I sat right down and started in on that sandwich. I never noticed anything unusual about that sandwich and ate the whole thing. While sipping my coffee, my wife said, "Know what you just ate?" My eyebrows must have shown her I didn't understand what she was talking about or maybe it was the funny look on my face. She went on to say, "That was hog brains and scrambled eggs." "I got the idea from your war diary you know, your buddy's favorite sandwich?" I think my face turned white. I made a dash for the bathroom headed for the stool, but lost everything in the bathtub before reaching the stool. My goodness, was I ever sick. I laughed about it later but at the time I thought I'd die.

Some evenings, especially the ones when all your Red Cross food was gone, we sat around and talked about everything that was edible. Someone would mention a particular candy bar, then someone else would name one and before you knew it, out came my diary and I'd start listing them as fast as I heard them. I missed a lot of them. When fifty to a hundred men around you get caught up in talking about food, it's hard to keep up with them, especially when I didn't take shorthand. Here are some of those called out: Milky Way, Cherry Mash, Mounds, Power House, Clark Bars, Pay Day, Butter Finger, Forever Yours, Oh Henry, Three Musketeers, Babe Ruth, Dr. I.Q., Champ, Nestles, Dreams, Snickers, Mr. Goodbar, Peanut Brittle, Butter Nut, Orange Slices, Chicken Dinner, Chocolate Fudge, Denver Sandwich, White Fudge, Mars, Taffy, Carmels, Kisses, Tango, Licorice, Gum, Bit-O-Honey, Whiz, Wangs, Evergreen Drops, Curtiss, Mary Janes, Holloway, Tootsie Rolls, Butter Scotch, Willards, Nelsons and Chucks. These are what I had written down on one page. I have two more pages of candy bars alone, but will not list them.

My favorite soup is pea soup with chunks of ham and the soup so thick a spoon would have difficulty sinking to the bottom of the bowl. When our captors served us pea soup, it was a joke. We called it green river. If 10 men poured their soup through a sieve, you would find nothing solid. In fact, you could see the bottom of your tin cup right through the soup.

Luckily, we received Red Cross boxes on March 8th, 12th, 18th, 26th and also on April 3rd and 9th. These issues were 1 box per man. These issues along with the German rations helped to strengthen many a G.I. and it gave us hope.

It was sometime during the month of March that the highest-ranking American officer made an appeal to the German Camp Commander to make arrangements to get us all G.I. shoes. How this was accomplished, I don't know, but we did get used G.I. shoes.

CHAPTER 17

GOOD THINGS ARE HAPPENING

APRIL 13, 1945

On this date was heard a loud explosion which seemed to be somewhere nearby. The guards told us it was an Artillery School near what sounded like KUPNERDORF. The French prisoners, privates no doubt were assigned various duties in Luckenwalde under guard and in small groups. They were able to hear radio reports and brought the news back to camp which spread from tent to tent. One sad report they brought back on this day was that President Roosevelt had died the day before. At noon, the entire camp (all prisoners including all allied personnel) came to attention and stood in silence to honor him. My prayers that night were for our new Commander-in-Chief, Harry S. Truman.

APRIL 16, 1945

Received news today that our forces are within 100 kilometers (62.4 miles) of Luckenwalde. If the news is correct, they must be at Magdeburg. On this date we received our 13th Red Cross box. We sense a difference in our guards. Now they strike up a conversation, even the officers allow you to talk to them without going through a N.C.O. They smile more frequently and we just love it. We know what's coming and you can bet that they do also. They even apologized for the slow shipment of Red Cross Boxes. They advised us to divide the box between two men as they were not sure when we might get another one. We decided one box per man, eat now, the hell with tomorrow. The night of the 17th, a light rain was falling and thunder was heard in the distance. The following morning when I stepped out of the tent, I was pleasantly surprised to see a beautiful sunrise. There was not a cloud in the sky and the rays of the sun seemed to radiate warmth immediately. This was going to be a gorgeous day, I could just feel it in my aching muscles. To celebrate, I went over to the water tap, took a cool drink and thought to myself, Hell, lets do it up right. I stripped down to my shorts, rinsed my clothes out, splashed water all over and had a great time. It did not take long for others to join me and within minutes, every water tap was being used. Two guards walked past us and just shook their heads and kept right on going. Something is going to pop one of these days soon, these guards are acting out of sorts. Almost every rule they made was now being broken. I said almost mainly because one of those rules was not to be broken, and that was, STAY AWAY FOM THE OUTER FENCE. If by chance you strolled to close to that outer fence, the guard in the nearest corner tower fired a burst from his automatic rifle into the ground just outside the fence. No one ever tested their marksmanship by hanging around any longer. Now if the guards decide to break the rules, that's perfectly alright. Later that afternoon, they did just that. They rounded up about 250 of us and took us outside the fence where there was a large open field. They threw into our midst at least a dozen soccer balls. We didn't form any teams, we just kicked them whenever one came near us. Within

about fifteen minutes, G.I.s were dropping like flies from exhaustion. I was so pooped out I couldn't even talk. Boy, were we having fun. They ushered us back into camp and allowed another 250 men out for the same exercise. I think the old guards were watching that none of us tried to escape. They were having as much fun as we were, watching us run around and kick that damn ball all over. Maybe we were clumsy. After all, soccer was not very popular as a sport back home.

Later that day, we were further surprised by an issue of packages. Evidently as American and Russian troops were tightening the net on Germany, many prison camps were liberated. The parcels intended for these camps were relayed to us. You can bet the German civilians and even soldiers got their share of these parcels. All sorts of things were in those parcels. Books, cigarettes, cookies, paper and pencils, clothing, etc . . . We ran off a raffle and I won a sleeveless sweater, cigarettes, My-T-Fine chocolate and a handkerchief. It was a funny type raffle because everyone won something.

During my stay in Stammlager 3-A, I observed our American Air force in action. Weather permitting, we would stretch out on the ground lying on our backs and watch the bombers pass overhead. There seemed to be an endless procession of these Flying Fortresses very high up. They would throw out large bundles of tinfoil that would shine brightly in the sunlight. Some knowledgeable G.I. informed us that this was done to foul up the German Anti-Aircraft batteries. It interfered with their Radar somehow.

APRIL 20, 1945

The night was filled with the rumble of artillery. Fires could be seen in the distance. I don't think anyone slept that night. Why should we? The noise was music to our ears. Things were happening and our emotions were mounting, which kept us all awake.

CHAPTER 18

FENCES DOWN

APRIL 21, 1945

Very early in the morning, new American prisoners were admitted to the camp. They had been captured on the 18th. At 8:15 a.m., there was a heavy artillery barrage lasting over 10 minutes. Heavy dark billows of smoke could be seen in the direction of Luckenwalde. We thought that the whole town must be going up in smoke because we were told it was not a very big town.

I believe every prisoner in that camp was standing outside watching the surrounding woods, expecting to see Russian troops approaching any minute. 10:00 a.m. – Word came to us that the German clerks have left the camp offices. Within minutes, we were told that the soldiers who worked in the kitchens have left also, leaving only one and a half days bread in the store rooms. The only Germans we could see were those who were milling about just outside the outer fence. Someone shouted out that the guards were not in the corner towers. Word spread that there was not a guard or a soldier in the camp and that they were all outside the fence.

11:30 a.m. – German trucks appear and our guards are loading up. Some rode and others looked like they were going to walk away as fast as they could because there didn't seem to be any order in their departure. One G.I. was brandishing a German Luger that he got from a guard for a carton of Lucky Strike cigarettes.

12:30 p.m. – The American officers knocked down the fence separating them from us. We mingled together and talked about what was happening.

1:00 p.m. – **THERE THEY GO:** Every head turned to see the Germans on the move away from camp. We started jumping around, yelling our heads off, slapping each other on the back, hugging one another and laughing and crying all at the same time. The last of the Germans were not out of sight and a thousand or more G.I.s all had the same idea at the same time. They rushed the outer fences and within seconds, there was not a fence standing anywhere to be seen. Someone set a corner guard tower on fire and we danced around the area whooping it up. Whistles started blowing and word was passed around to assemble back inside, near the tents. This took quite some time to accomplish due to all the noise everyone was making. I don't know who the ranking officer was in that camp among the prisoners, but whoever it was, he passed the word down that no one was to leave the camp proper. There still was a considerable amount of danger beyond the camp. Air Force P.O.W.s laid out panels on the ground to distinguish our area as a prisoner-of-war camp. White banners were hung on the remainder of the guard

towers and on trees. Groups were selected to make a search of the area for any supply of food other than the meager supply left in the kitchens. I don't think anyone was thinking too much about eating at that time, they were too excited. I don't think there was a German soldier between our camp and Luckenwalde, but we stayed put as ordered. We are almost free but not quite yet . . . Not until we see a Russian or American soldier in battle gear. That night we sang songs and sat around bonfires made from fence poles. It was sometime before I got tired enough to drop off to sleep.

CHAPTER 19

LIBERATION

APRIL 22, 1945

By sunrise everyone was up and about. Some stripped down and took a sponge bath, others washed their clothes and some just stood around in small groups talking. The whistles started blowing and we were told that coffee would be ready shortly. The chow wagon came into our area and two G.I.s were having a ball driving that team of horses. It took a long time to serve every man a cup of coffee. I really enjoyed that cup of coffee while sitting with my closest buddies, Shafer, Draughon, Bruno, Red and Rob. We sat and talked, contemplating what would happen next.

Suddenly we were all startled by the sound of tanks. 10:00 a.m. – We looked towards the woods where the sound of tanks came from and the most beautiful sight in the world, at that time, appeared coming out of the shadows of the woods in the bright sunlight into the open field. Russian tanks, trucks and infantry entered the camp. They were units of the 3rd and 28th Armies, 1st Ukraine Front. They stopped and picked up the Russian prisoners and continued on. The war was over for us but those Russian prisoners, just liberated, were smack dab back in the conflict.

We were surprised at the swiftness that this Russian outfit displayed in coming into camp and leaving. We became worried as to what was taking place. However, we really had no cause for alarm because plenty of Russian soldiers were taking over the kitchens and other duties unbeknown to us. The officers in charge didn't deem it necessary to let us know what was going on now, so we just kept quiet and waited.

In the afternoon, the Russians brought us several truck loads of Red Cross boxes they found in boxcars on a siding in Luckenwalde. These were divided up among all the prisoners. Maybe I should use our new title now, LIBERATED PRISONERS-OF-WAR. One of the fellows in my group managed to run across a Russian Army field kitchen just outside of camp and he talked them into giving him a bag of potatoes. Several of us pooled our share of the Red Cross box issue and we made a feast fit for a king. We had potatoes and gravy, meat and vegetable stew, a rich dessert of cocoa, raisins, butter, sugar, milk, crackers, jam and cheese. We washed it down with coffee. I believe we had more fun preparing the food than eating it.

APRIL 23, 1945

We were told that American transportation would be arriving soon to take us to the American lines. We were ordered to stay in the camp and that the Russians would be setting up a field kitchen. We were

also told that Army doctors were available if anyone had need for one. At around 4:00 p.m., the field kitchen served its first meal. We were issued mess gear and enjoyed a lot of hot pea soup with honest to goodness big chunks of beef in it. Six men shared a loaf of bread and we had lots of butter. We had good hot coffee with sugar and milk, if you cared for it that way. What made it nice was being able to have seconds.

APRIL 24, 1945

A shipment of Canadian Red Cross boxes was brought to camp and each box was divided up by 4 men. The Russians fed us barley soup so thick you almost had to chew it. Boy, was it good! Two men shared a loaf of bread with butter again and good coffee.

APRIL 25, 1945

We were all starting to get impatient waiting for the American transportation that would start us on our way back home. We spent another day just moping about, sleeping, playing cards or doing some exercises. Our meal consisted of hot beef stew with lots of chunks of beef and potatoes, bread, butter and coffee. The news of the War, (Eastern Front) at Torgau, on the Elbe south of Berlin, The 5th Guard's Army (1st Ukraine Front) makes the first contact with the Americans of the 1st Army. The whole of Germany is not cut in two.

APRIL 26, 1945

We were surprised this morning with a breakfast. We had Purina cereal with apple sauce, bread and coffee. Early in the afternoon we received parcels that were broken open in shipment overseas. There was a good distribution of candies, gum, toilet articles, some clothing, cookies and lots of American and Canadian cigarettes. There was a large warehouse in Luckenwalde and it was filled with all kinds of supplies, both German and American. There were parcels intended for our allies and a host of all kinds of equipment. In the late afternoon, a Limey officer picked a dozen men to relieve another group who were guarding this warehouse from the German civilians or otherwise it would have been picked clean by them. We were on guard duty just a little over three hours when another group showed up to relieve us. The Limey officer said they should have sent another group along just to keep an eye on us because we were trying to carry the whole warehouse back with us. That turkey was only kidding because he himself had a burlap bag full of goods. Shafer and I did a good job of carrying back all we could. We had bowls, spoons, an axe, hammer, pliers, 4 blankets, a couple of white sheets and our top prize, 26 large cans of German beef. We took a chance on the later because it was not refrigerated. However, the cans looked O.K. and they were in a cool spot in the warehouse. (Later, we found that the cans were perfectly alright

to eat. At least nobody got sick.) When we got back to camp, we went around trying to swap some of our loot for something others had taken which we would rather have.

We traded off several cans of bully beef for coffee and boxes of cookies. That evening, Shafer and I played host to all who wished to join us having coffee and cookies. We sat around late into the night drinking coffee, long after the cookies were gone, talking about things back home. We took turns talking about our families. When it was my turn, I choked up because I still did not know if my wife gave birth to a son or daughter, or even if she was alive, or what happened. My buddies helped me through those tough times, mostly with joking about her giving birth to twins or triplets. Every one of us said something about whether our families knew we were alive and prisoners. Surely our outfit must have sent them word that we were taken prisoner because they couldn't report us dead without body identification. We assured ourselves that they know and with that on our minds we feel asleep.

CHAPTER 20

LUCKENWALDE

APRIL 27, 1945

Orders to stay in camp were not meant for me and for that matter, a lot of other G.I.s. So early in the morning, Shafer, Brown, Robb and I decided to throw caution to the wind and take a side trip to Luckenwalde, without an officer being along. There were a lot of Russian soldiers in the town and they didn't even pay any attention to us. We must have looked like Americans by the clothing we wore and that special kiwi cap we all wore.

All the German civilians wore a white handkerchief or ribbon on their left arm. Every house had a white cloth hanging from a window and I suppose this was some form of surrender to the Russians. We stopped at the warehouse we had been to before and found it unguarded. On entering we found out why. The place was completely empty. However, we did find a large heavy scale and we decided to find out how much weight we lost. I set the scale for 160 pounds and jumped on. The scale never moved and I said, "The damn thing is broke." Robb got on and set it for 100 pounds. He moved the smaller weight down the bar to 30 pounds and it balanced. I got back on and found out that I now weighed 120 pounds. I was shocked to think that I lost that much. My usual weight throughout my Army life up to the time I went overseas was 160 pounds. If this scale was right, I lost 40 pounds during my captivity. (I confirmed my weight later in the day on another scale and it was 120 pounds.) Brown was the biggest loser, he lost 55 pounds. If we four lost weight, then I assume everyone in camp did also. I suppose we all knew inwardly that we had lost weight, but I don't think any of us expected it to be that much. When everyone is losing weight and it's gradual, you just don't notice it.

We walked around town looking it over. We tired very quickly and then we did something that was not very nice. We took four bicycles from in front of a building and rode off. I hope those German civilians blamed the Russians for stealing their bikes.

We did see several homes burnt to the ground and also a huge barn. Other than that, there was little other damage around. Of course we did not ride all over the town so we may have missed seeing all the damage that was done.

There is a distinct difference between American and Russian Armies when it comes to taking over a town. When the Americans pass through a town, the stores are intact, G.I.s pay for what they want and business goes on as usual. When the Russians go through town, they carry it with them. The only thing

they don't take that first day is something to heavy to cart away, like machinery. Later in my story when I went through many other towns the Russians had control of, I found the same thing.

Later in the day, we came upon a flour mill. There was a Russian soldier loading sacks of flour into a truck. We asked the German civilian running the mill if we could please have a small bag of flour. He offered it without any hesitation and I'd bet that little word, "Please" was something he didn't receive from the Russian. We struck up a conversation with some civilians near the edge of town and I'd say we made a good impression on them because we got a chicken, a jar of honey and apples. I even got a better pair of shoes to wear.

We returned back to camp and found that we missed chow call. Shafer and I decided to go back into town because there sure was more to see and do then in camp. Carmen went with us this time.

We came upon some Russian soldiers unloading supplies from a large truck into several smaller ones. An officer was overseeing their work. We stood and watched them for awhile to pass the time of day and the officer asked us if we were from the prison camp. His English was terrible and we had a hard time trying to figure out what he said. I tried German on him and he did better with that than with English and whenever we ran across a word neither one of us knew in German we reverted back to English. When asked how things were in camp, we naturally said what was always utmost on our minds, FOOD. He told us that as soon as his men had the trucks loaded, he would get us a meal. We even helped unload that truck.

The officer led us down a couple of streets to a three story apartment building. We climbed the stairs to the second floor and to his apartment. He motioned for us to sit at the dining room table which we did. He left the room and shortly he came back with a bottle of schnapps. I always thought Russians liked Vodka. A woman appeared and went into the kitchen. While we talked about the camp, she was preparing food. We had a dinner served us within the hour. We had potatoes, mashed and creamy, with beef gravy, green beans, lots of beef, bread and butter and cold milk. We ate like little pigs. The officer did eat but sparingly. All the while the woman was in the room, she never spoke a word, not even to the officer. We asked him if she was German. He told us she was Polish. He winked at us and said, "She is a good friend." We smiled back knowing all to well what her other duties were other than cooking for him. I guess certain privileges go with ranking officers. After eating, we lit up cigarettes and offered a pack of Lucky Strikes to our host. We drank schnapps and coffee and talked about everything.

Being we were allies, we had something in common to talk about, namely our enemy, the German Army. The officer told us that the Germans treated Russian prisoners of war very poorly. He went on to tell us of how the soldiers acted when they advanced into Russia. He claims they raped their women, stole

from the people and didn't take prisoners unless it was necessary. I wondered how much of this was fact and how much was coming from the bottle. This officer was really putting it away. We sipped from the bottle but acted like we were taking a healthy drink. When he brought out the second bottle, I thought I'd die. We were getting silly and he was getting good and drunk.

I and my buddies may have been getting a little tipsy, but not enough to realize that there is a sobering thought to all that was said, and that is; If all the stories of the war were brought out into the open, you would find that no Army, no soldiers, private, N.C.O. or officer was perfect and abided by the moral code. There were soldiers from every nation involved that committed wrongful acts.

It was beginning to get dark and it was time for us to head back to camp. I'm sure glad that officer did most of the drinking because we three happy G.I.s had a hell of a time riding our bikes back to camp. We were three sick cookies that night.

CHAPTER 21

STAY PUT OR TAKE OFF

APRIL 28, 1945

The Russian officer in charge of the camp and surrounding area contacted our ranking officer in charge and complained that the men are not staying in camp and are interfering with troop movements and causing unnecessary interrogating to determine if indeed they are American, British, French, etc . . . He stated that he was issuing orders to his units to turn back all liberated prisoners. Somehow a rumor got started that the Russians were planning to move us out through Poland and Russia to a port where we would leave by ship for home. Whoever started that little bit of bullshit surely was not helping to keep the men from leaving camp. My buddies and I thought the rumor ridiculous, but we still didn't forget it. In fact it caused our group to have a very serious discussion about it. What to do!!!

STAY PUT OR TAKE OFF:

STAY PUT: Stay in camp and wait like we should for American Forces to send transportation. The Russian's are feeding us pretty good under the circumstances. We're out of the weather, living in tents. We're getting parcels and smokes. We have a radio to listen to and above all, we were safe.

TAKE OFF: Leave camp and sneak around Russian check points and head for our lines. If we did, we would probably get home faster. We would get hot baths and clean uniforms. We would get three square meals a day and sleep in a warm bed. Then of course while sneaking around the check points, we might get shot.

Our decision was to play it safe and STAY PUT.

That night, 50 American trucks rolled into camp and removed the sick and wounded. They brought a lot of food and clothing with them. We were unaware that the American trucks had come into camp till the following morning and when we found out, it just made us feel great that we decided to stay put. We figured we would be moved out within only a day or so.

APRIL 29, 1945

On this particular Sunday morning, we were served biscuits and jam, tea and sugar. The British must have taken over the kitchen duties this morning. The sun was shining brightly and the temperature was slowly rising. About two thousand men attended the Protestant Church services held in the open and another two thousand attended a later Catholic service.

In my youth, I attended a Lutheran School and attended Sunday School 6 years. In my teens I sang in an accapella choir and on more than one occasion I sang with a choir on the Lutheran Hour that was taped at radio station CKLW in Windsor, Canada. Several choirs in our church synod put on two operas, Pirates of Penzance and the H.M.S. Pinafore. Having all this as a background in my youth caused me so much emotion during the services. I sang, I prayed and I cried, not in any particular order, but sometimes together. Being happy can make one cry, especially when you're thanking your LORD for being alive.

Later in the day, a Lieutenant confiscated my bicycle to run errands around camp. The nerve of that officer stealing my stolen bike!

The officers went through the camp's files and took charge of the records the Germans kept on us. They passed out the records and I received an identification card stating:

Corporal Charles George Rahn – Serial number 16175975

It also listed my German identification number and Stammlager – 080809-XII-A. I also received a picture they took of me back when I was registered as a prisoner-of-war, one letter I had written to my wife on January 15, 1945 while in camp 3-B. Being I got this one letter back, I thought that possibly all the others I wrote were sent to my family. My wife and parents never received one letter from me while I was a prisoner-of-war. Why the German military never mailed our letters will always be a mystery to me.

In the evening we listened to the radio and for the life of me all I can remember about that radio was hearing Jack Benny. We even had a little orchestra made up of officers and N.C.O.s who played several songs for each tent. Where they got those instruments is beyond me. They even had a piano. We were told that the piano player once played for Blue Baron and Little Jack Little in the States.

APRIL 30, 1945

We went to a camp about 8 kilometers away from ours. It was an Adolf Hitler Youth Camp. I have no idea when it had been vacated. Some of the officers moved to this camp. They had to straighten the place up some before they moved in. However, it was far cleaner than their barracks back in the prison camp. A few of us managed to find some clean overalls, which we put on immediately. Anything to get out of lice filled pants was a blessing. Those little bloodsuckers were in the straw we slept on and no matter how much we bathed, that next morning you had them in your clothes again.

On the night of the 30th, we heard some good news and some bad news on our radio. The good news was that at 3:30 p.m., Hitler committed suicide in the Chancellery Bunker and Eva Braun died with him.

That's all the space I have allotted for his name in this story of mine. The bad news we heard that same evening was about the death of Ernest Taylor Pyle, better known as Ernie to the Infantry soldier. I remember some of the things he wrote for the Stars and Stripes, a Military Newspaper. This especially endeared him to me because I was an Infantry soldier. "A salute to the infantry- the god damn infantry, as they liked to call themselves. I loved the infantry because they were the underdogs. They were the mud-rain-frost and wind boys. They had no comforts and they even learned to live without the necessities." This quote on his part is what I loved about his writing. On April 18, 1945, Ernie Pyle was slain on the Pacific Island LeShime in the Ryukyus by a Japanese sniper. Many years later while on vacation to the Hawaiian Islands, I had the honor to return a salute to Ernie Pyle at his graveside where he is buried at the 'Court of the Missing', the Punchbowl, Honolulu, Hawaii.

CHAPTER 22

WE'RE NOT STAYING

MAY 1, 1945 MAY-DAY

There was strong talk going around this morning that the Russians were planning to move all of us to the Adolf Hitler Youth Camp. This kind of talk sure didn't sound like we were going home very soon. I made up my mind around noontime that this soldier was going home. My little group of close buddies discussed the pros and cons of taking off for our lines at Wittenberg. My mind was already made up. I was going as soon as it was safe to leave and I thought that in the evening would be the best time. Less chance of being seen and sent back to camp. I thought that if I could get far enough away from the camp during the night and if a Russian should catch me in the morning, they would not send me back but allow me to continue on. "Who is coming with me?" They all refused except Corporal Draughon. The two of us got together and were making plans for how we would leave, what we would take with us and how we would sneak past the checkpoints. All of a sudden there was an explosion in an open area inside the camp. A stray 88 shell from German artillery landed in the camp and luckily no one was hurt. I thought this might change some of our buddies' minds about staying, but it did not alter their decision to stay. Draughon and I had already made up our minds before this shell landed and we both felt better because this kind of confirmed what we had discussed earlier. There always is a possibility of the Germans making a counter attack and we could find ourselves in danger. We had earlier been told that under the Geneva Convention, all P.O.W.s should be removed from their camp after being liberated within 72 hours. After this time the area was then considered a war zone. I never did find out if this was fact or not, but it did sound plausible as far as we were concerned, so Draughon and I took off for our lines at 6 p.m.. Hell! We didn't need any Geneva Convention Rules or stray shells to make up our minds. We were just anxious to get home and that's what we intended to do – GO HOME!

We carried what we could in our makeshift backpacks, toilet articles, personal items and food. Our food consisted of potatoes, flour, bread, cheese and coffee. We traveled very light in case we had to do any running. We found someone with crayons and we colored an American flag we drew out on a white piece of cloth and tied them around our sleeves. We said our good-byes to our close buddies and in parting I told my best pal, Corporal Shafer that I would write to his wife and tell her that he was safe and would soon be coming home. We didn't go around broadcasting that we were leaving, but somehow a lot of the men came around and wished us good luck. Some tried to discourage us by saying we were nuts to try it. Others did and got turned back and we would get sent back also. Draughon and I hoped that we learned a lot from the mistakes others made in trying to leave and we hoped we would capitalize on their mistakes. We stalled around long enough and now it was time to take off for Wittenberg. We left camp heading southwest and within minutes we were in the woods and out of sight of the camp.

Walking through the woods at night is bad enough alone, but doing so without a compass is twice as bad. Maybe lady luck was with us. Whenever we came to a road we were very careful not to cross it if anyone was in view or if lights from a vehicle were seen. Around 10:00 p.m., we came to a small farm town called Busduorf about 3 kilometers from Juterbog. We figured we were far enough away from the camp and boldly stepped on to the road. Up ahead were about 10 Russian soldiers standing around some vehicles. They watched us approach them and one of them had a gun pointed in our direction for safety. When they spotted the American flags on our sleeves all hell broke loose. They shook our hands and patted us on the back and made a lot of noise. Two of the soldiers could speak pretty good English and they did all the talking for their comrades. All 10 men were trying to ask questions at the same time. They took us down the street to a house where their officer was in charge. He was equally glad to meet us and he showed it by actions because he could not speak English. The two who spoke English acted as interpreters. We talked this way for a good half hour and one would think we were long lost brothers meeting for the first time.

We asked the officer where we could sleep for the night? The soldier translated the officer's answer, "Choose any house you want, tell them to get out, and if you find someone to warm your bed, go ahead." Draughon and I were both surprised at this. They smiled and we smiled, shook hands all around again and left. We turned the corner and stopped at the first big house. We knocked at the door instead of barging in like the Russian soldiers suggested. An elderly woman came to the door. You could see fright in her eyes as she looked at us. I quickly pointed at the American flags on our sleeves we were wearing and told her we were from the prisoner-of-war camp at Luckenwalde and that we were headed for Wittenberg where our American forces were. I told her the Russian officer said we could have any house we wanted and to tell the people to leave. I quickly added that we did not want to kick them out of their house, all we wanted was a place to sleep in out of the cool night. We don't want your bed, anyplace on the floor will be fine with us.

My last sentences just wiped the fear from her face and she invited us in and led us to the kitchen. Her name was Anna and she introduced us to her husband Karl and her sister and her husband. There was another man present but I couldn't understand the word she said to describe his relationship. These people were very friendly in that they smiled and offered us a cup of coffee. We in turn offered American cigarettes. We talked about where we were captured and where we had been and when we were liberated.

One of the men left the house and shortly returned. With him were two women in their late twenties. They both spoke perfect English and they introduced themselves. Their names were Emma and Martha. Martha said that she had worked in an ammunition factory till it was destroyed by bombers and she

came home to her parents farm. Emma said she was a school teacher in a nearby town and left when the Russians came. Both their husbands were in the German Army. We had to explain all over about whom we were and what we planned to do. The mother served us a large bowl of potato soup that was very hot and very tasty. They cut off large thick slices from a ham and we had a sandwich with the soup. After our bellies were full all we could think of was sleep. We were denied this for another hour or so because they had so many questions to ask. One question they asked over and over and one that we heard asked day after day was: "When will the Americans come and take over?" Our answer was always, "We're not really sure, but we think pretty soon as they are at Wittenberg." We really didn't know but the answer seemed to ease their tensions. Later, we found out that the Americans never did get to those towns on their way to Berlin. All these towns we went through after being liberated was in what is now called EAST GERMANY.

Emma told us that her sister and her only came into the house late at night after most Russian soldiers were sleeping. They stayed in the barn throughout the day and they never ventured out into the street. At present they felt somewhat secure because the Russians had been through their house and barns and never found them. They said that several girls in town had been raped and when these same soldiers got drunk, they went back to the same girls.

The mother noticed Draughton dozing in his chair and she then realized we must be dead tired. She led us to a bedroom and offered us a full sized bed with a feather tick cover. It was so comfortable to strip down and climb into that bed. We slept till 9:00 a.m. without waking once.

We washed up and shaved and was served a wonderful breakfast. We had pancakes, syrup, ham, bread (white home made), butter and fresh cold milk. When it was time to leave, the mother gave us a big ham sandwich wrapped in paper, some hard candies and cookies. Her husband, Karl, gave us a pint-sized bottle of homemade grape wine. We said our good-byes and wished them happiness. When we parted at the front door, I suddenly got the urge to show my appreciation for their hospitality and stepped up to Anna and gave her a big hug and planted a kiss on her cheek. When I reached the bottom step of the porch, I turned to wave once more and Anna had her apron up to her face and she was crying.

CHAPTER 23

UNNECESSARY KILLINGS

MAY 2, 1945

We headed out of Busduorf and walked along the railroad tracks. We didn't walk to fast as we tired easily. The weather was very comfortable and we enjoyed a nice leisurely stroll down the tracks. Sometimes seeing who could walk the farthest on a rail without stepping off. Draughon always did better than I did. On one of the occasions when I stepped off the rail, I walked over to the edge of the road bed because I noticed quite a drop off. I looked down and there were two German soldiers in uniform. One was lying on the ground and the other one seemed to be tending to his wounds. He had one arm in a sling and it looked like he was having difficulty attending to his comrade's wounds. I motioned for Draughon to come over and see this, but before he could, the one soldier looked up and spotted me. He went for his rifle leaning against a nearby tree. I raised my hands way above my head with my palms facing him as if saying, hold on there, I'm backing up away from you, which I did and Draughon and I took off running like the devil was after us. We looked back and never did see them again.

We walked about another 500 yards and came upon some Russians unloading a boxcar on a siding. Fortunately one spoke English. We told them where we came from and where we were headed. We also told them about the two Germans back down the tracks. We said that one was wounded lying on the ground and that the other one had his arm in a sling and he was trying to dress the other fellow's wounds. We expected these Russian soldiers to go back and capture these German soldiers and get them some medical attention. They were our enemy, that's for sure, but we did have compassion for them being they were wounded. After all, the war was almost over and a little time in a Russian prison camp wouldn't kill them. What did happen was the least we expected. One man gave orders in Russian and three soldiers dropped their work and took off back down the tracks. We had no idea what orders he gave but soon realized what they must have been. We heard two shots from a rifle and in a short time the three came back to where we were. If that Russian soldier who gave the orders could have read our minds, we too may have been shot on the spot. Instead the soldier who spoke English thanked us for telling them about the Germans and told us to keep going as our destination was down the tracks a long way off yet. We walked in silence, each with our thought of what we had done. We only wanted them captured and to get medical attention. If we had kept our mouths shut, those German soldiers may have had a better fate.

Maybe we were judging these Russian soldiers to harshly. We thought they could sneak up and capture them. We could not see what actually took place. Maybe the Germans went for their rifles when the Russians appeared. I guess Draughon and I were just inwardly hurt to know that these two soldiers died because we told on them. Maybe it was not our fault they died, but it all could have been avoided.

CHAPTER 24

THE TOWN OF DENNEWITZ

MAY 2, 1945

By following the railroad tracks, we came to a pretty good-sized town, Dennewitz. What appeared to be the main road was made of red brick. There were a few individual homes near the tracks, but further away it appeared to be apartment type buildings. The largest one was three stories high and the roofs were made of tile. The streets were clean and the buildings in good repair. We decided that a cup of coffee would taste pretty good about now. We had soluble coffee in a small packet and all we needed was some hot water.

I approached a civilian man probably in his forties and asked him if he could get us some hot water so we could have some coffee. He was dressed neatly in a suit and you could tell right away that he was afraid of us. I told him we were Americans that had been in a prisoner-of-war camp that was liberated and that we were on our way to the American lines in Wittenberg. You could tell that he was looking at our American flags on our sleeves and he said, "I can get you some hot water," he hesitated a bit and then said, "We don't have much food to offer."

We walked back towards the railroad tracks to his home. He lived on the second floor of the house right next to the tracks. He sat us at the kitchen table and asked his wife to put some water on the stove to boil. He went on to explain to her who we were and so forth. You could tell by her actions that she didn't trust us. I opened my backpack and brought out 4 packs of soluble coffee and the last of our cheese. The husband kept up a conversation with us as the wife stood by. When the water was hot, she brought two cups to the table. I motioned for her to bring two more. I emptied the packets of coffee into the four cups and asked for a knife. I then cut the remaining cheese into 4 parts and motioned for them to join us. If these people had any mistrust about us at all, our act of sharing our coffee and cheese with them dispelled it. The wife became a regular chatterbox. She seemed to have saved up a thousand questions for the first Americans who came to town. We finished our coffee and she got up and put on a big pot of coffee and even brought out some small cakes that were homemade. I believe they had plenty of food. The husband was just cautious when he first met us. It was apparent that there was someone in another room because we could hear some laughter and movement.

This conversation, as all others, took forever simply because Corporal Draughon couldn't understand or speak one word of German. I translated everything that was said so he could understand what was going on.

The woman asked that same question we came to expect, “When will your American soldiers come, we hate these Russians?” I gave the usual answer, “Soon.” The woman went on to say that the Russians were not soldiers, they were animals. She broke into tears and told us a story we were familiar with from the town of Busduorf.

She went to the other room we heard noise coming from and brought out her two daughters. I never wrote down their ages in my diary but I recall them looking about 13 and 15 years of age. They were pretty girls and were dressed in nice clean clothes. The girls were bashful and probably embarrassed because they knew their mother was going to tell what happened to them a week ago. The girls had been in town at some school function and on leaving they were accosted and raped by Russian soldiers. The mother said that the younger girl had been raped by seven different soldiers and that the older girl was raped so many times she lost consciousness. Draughon and I just sat there shaking our heads.

We sat there thinking about this vicious tale while the mother cried her eyes out. What manner of man could do such a vile act on little girls? Then I thought of the Russian officer back at Luckenwalde who told us of how the German soldiers acted towards the Russian women. Has the war brought out the evil in all mankind? Hell no, I thought. You can’t judge all mankind by the actions of some. This mother phrased this kind of soldier properly, ANIMALS.

I could not think of a thing to say to these parents or to the girls. Draughon started to gather up his backpack and I took his cue and told them we would have to be leaving. The woman then asked me if I would do her a big favor when I got back to the States. She said her husband’s name was August Scheffler. She said she had a brother living in American and asked if I would visit him when I got home. I have always regretted not visiting her brother in Lake Forest, Illinois.

CHAPTER 25

THE TOWN OF ZAHNA

MAY 2, 1945

We left Dennewitz and came to a small town called Klebitz. We passed through the outskirts of this small town and headed for Zahna. As we were approaching Zahna, a Russian patrol stopped us. The American flags on our sleeves didn't impress them and even after we showed them our dog tags they still took us to their officer in charge. He was very nice and polite and he advised us to go to the town of Seyda where our troops were the closest to us. We took his advice and headed for Seyda. We had not gone more than a couple of miles when we spotted an American jeep coming towards us. As it neared we saw that six G.I.s were crowded together in the vehicle and we waved for them to stop. We quickly told them what we were doing and they said we would be better off heading for Wittenberg because there was a Division Headquarters there. They gave us a dinner and supper K-rations and drove off. They were American Army Correspondents. We turned around and headed back for Zahna and intended to take the road to Wittenberg like we first planned. It was getting to be quite late in the afternoon and we were contemplating making a night of it in Zahna. We were tired and dirty from the dusty road and was happy to see a horse drawn wagon coming our way. A girl was driving the team of horses and a Russian soldier was sitting by her side. They stopped and we asked for a lift into Zahna. She answered back in English that she would ask if it's alright. She spoke in Russian to the soldier and he nodded for us to get in the wagon. We climbed into the Wagon and sat among bags of potatoes and other food supplies. Filed on top of these supplies was a crate of chickens. Tethered to the rear of the wagon was a cow. The girl told us she was Polish and that her name was Eta Fucha. She said that she had been a prisoner-of-war for seven months and the Russians liberated her. She also told us that she lived in Zahna with her mother and some other girls. She invited us to have supper at her house and that we could sleep there because it's a big house. The soldier dropped us off at a large 3-story house and drove off. We were introduced to the girl's mother and her friends. Eta told us the other girls were Polish and could not speak or understand English. She introduced us to yet another girl who she said was German and that her name was Marie. Draughon and I went to the bathroom to wash up for supper and we discussed this crazy arrangement of all these girls living together. The whole story Eta told us sounded kind of fishy to us. We sat down to a nice supper of potatoes, cabbage, and ham. While the girls were clearing off the table, Eta told us that some of her Russian friends were coming over for the evening. Within the hour, the soldier that was on the wagon with her appeared with six of his buddies. It was very apparent that these fellows had been drinking quite a bit and they were pretty noisy. They put some records on the old windup phonograph and started jumping around. Eta brought her mother downstairs and sat her in a chair with a lot of pillows. I guess mama was going to chaperone this party. Eta pulled me aside and

asked me to pay a lot of attention to Marie so her Russian friends wouldn't talk to her and find out she was German. I told Draughon what she said and we sat down on the piano bench with Marie in the center. During the evening these Russians put away a lot of vodka and we sipped on ours. When there was a lull in their dancing around, Eta motioned for Marie to play the piano. This she did and she was really good. She played classical music and soon the Russians tired of this and prepared to leave. They shook hands all around and paired off with the girls and left. Eta brought some coffee and cookies into the parlor and we sat and talked. Draughon talked with Eta and she translated to her mother. Marie and I talked in German. We talked about the war and our families. The hour grew late and the mother was taken back upstairs to her room. Eta took us to a third story bedroom and Draughon and I were fast asleep within minutes. The next morning we had some eggs and ham for breakfast. When we were ready to leave, we went to the mother's room and thanked her for all she'd done. On leaving, Marie stepped up and kissed Draughon and I on the cheek and she said, "Thanks for looking after me last night." I stopped her from trying to say anything further because I could tell she was having difficulty.

We were anxious to get started for Wittenberg so we said our good-byes and started out about 7:00 a.m.

CHAPTER 26

EX – P.O.W.

MAY 3, 1945

The sign at the side of the road read, Wittenberg 1 kilometer. My heart quickened and my feet kept pace. We both walked rather briskly as we neared the town. There atop a building was the most beautiful sight in the world to us. Old Glory was waving atop the flagpole. Below in the streets were dozens of G.I.s dressed in combat uniforms. At the sides of the road were jeeps, tanks, trucks and other military vehicles. We walked right down the center of that road leading into town. We waved and said, "Hi." Some half heartily waved back wondering perhaps, who the hell are they. You couldn't blame them one bit. We spoke like Americans. We wore a wool cap like Americans, we had a faded American flag on our arm band, but then again, our clothes was a mixture nothing at all to distinguish who we really were.

We walked up to the first officer we came upon and said, "Good morning, Sir," and saluted. He returned the salute out of habit, I suppose. He looked us up and down and was about to speak. I beat him to it by saying, "Sir, we were prisoners-of-war in Luckenwalde and were liberated by the Russians. We left the camp and came here to Wittenberg." He never hesitated one second. He told us to come with him and he ushered us into a headquarters building. He left us waiting in the hall and entered an office. In a few minutes, a Sergeant and his driver came up to us and said they were taking us to Division Headquarters in Zerbst. We sat in the back of that jeep and felt like royalty. Within the hour, we arrived at Zerbst. We were now among the men of the 83rd Infantry Division. A First Sergeant took charge of us and he filled out papers listing our names, rank, serial number, outfit, where captured and when. Where liberated and when and a few thousand other listings that the Army was famous for. I'm only adding a little humor here. We enjoyed every minute with that First Sergeant and his questions. I might add here that not one person scolded us for leaving that camp.

The Sergeant finished his paper work and summoned a corporal. It was noon time and the corporal took us to a mess kitchen and we were given mess equipment and he put us into the food line. When we sat on the ground to eat our noon meal, the men of this company crowded around us and asked all kinds of questions. We were the center of attraction that day and we loved every minute of it. After chow, the First Sergeant came for us and took us to a building where we stripped and took a hot soapy shower. We were given brand new underclothes, khaki pants and shirt, tie and hat. After shaving and getting a haircut, we looked like real soldiers again. The Sergeant took us around and introduced us to officers, N.C.O.s and privates alike. For supper we got in that same field kitchen mess line and this time we ate our meal in the Sergeant's quarters which was in a real nice house. This Sergeant was the best top kick I

had ever met. In the evening he furnished us with beer and we told our story from capture to the present. Nothing was being written down, this was no interrogation, he was genuinely interested, especially with regards to how we were treated. He got up and went to a cabinet and brought out a German Luger and a sword. He handed the gun to Draughon and the sword to me. He said, "Take them, I want you to have them." He went on to say, "Look guys, I've got a bunch of souvenirs and you won't have a chance to get any now, so please take these home with you as a gift from me." He gave me a gorgeous looking sword and scabbard. The hilt was decorated with jewels that sparkled. We both tried to refuse these beautiful souvenirs but he wouldn't have it any other way. He got up and said he had some paper work to do. He brought us paper and pen and told us to get busy writing home and he would get it off in the mail as soon as possible. He left the room and in parting he said, "You lucky stiffs will be home within 3 weeks." As he walked out the door I thought, boy, that's the best news I've heard in a long time.

Draughon wrote home to his family but I did not. You probably wondering why I did not take this opportunity to write home and say I was safe and would be home shortly. Well it's rather hard to explain my thinking, but I'll try to explain it the best I can.

First of all, I was almost sure that my outfit or the U.S. Adjutant General's Office must have notified my wife that I was a prisoner-of-war. After all I was registered with the Geneva Convention. I had no doubts that the Germans passed this information on to Switzerland. Secondly, a letter took about two weeks to get back home. Thirdly, I wanted to walk into my home and have a joyous reunion, instead of my family reading a lousy letter. Instead I wrote to Mrs. Dale Shafer in Kearney, Nebraska and told her that Dale was safe and sound and would be coming home very shortly.

MAY 4, 1945

In the morning we were taken to another Division Headquarters in Calbe. While having our noon meal, I spotted one of the G.I.s we met on the road to Zahna. Being he was the first G.I. I met since being liberated, I went over to him and got his name for my diary: T-5 James T. Kilian, ASN 36623813. I might add here that the first American girl was, Mary Eiler, U.S.O. Shows, Washington, D.C. and the first British girl was, Jessica Lee, U.S.O. Camp Shows, Middle t, pike 1 London, England.

At 4 p.m., we left Calbe and were driven in a command car to Forderstadt. We were given a meal and we slept in a building the Army used as an assembly depot. Here we met other former P.O.W. from various other camps and were told by them that we would all be leaving tomorrow for Hildershein, Germany about 70 miles away.

CHAPTER 27

GOODBYE GERMANY

MAY 5, 1945

After breakfast, our group of about 50 was taken to Hildersheim. The trip took us a little over two hours. We stopped once along the way to stretch our legs and rub our butts to get the blood circulation back. Those Army trucks have awfully hard seats. I did enjoy looking over the countryside. I did not take down the names of towns we passed through simply because I did not have to pull off that little white lie of my Grandmother coming from there. We were taken to a building for registration and assignment of quarters and a departure number. We were divided into groups of 26 men. My groups number was A-150.

This area must have been a former military base. It was very large in size and had dozens of 3 story high dormitories. My group ended up on the third floor at the very end of one building. There were 6 Army cots to each room and no other furniture. I would estimate that there were at least ten thousand military men in this camp. They came from every branch of the service and included our allies. There were several large mess halls and they seemed to be in use at all times. We ate three meals a day and every one of them was a hardy meal.

That first evening, I made a terrible mistake. That beautiful sword given as a souvenir was stolen. When I went to chow, I made the mistake of placing it under my mattress out of sight. I looked high and low but never did find it. Maybe it's best that I didn't find someone with it, I'd hate to think of what I would have done.

In the evening we lined up to get into the theater and see a performance put on by the 15th Special Service Unit and we also saw a movie with Dorothy Lamour in it called, Rainbow Island.

MAY 6, 1945 – MOTHER'S DAY

The weather was lousy, it rained most of the day. When I was not standing around the mess halls watching for someone carrying my sword, I was at a large recreation room. That evening we saw a movie called, Hitler's Gang.

MAY 7, 1945

Note in history: At 1:41 a.m. in Eisenhower's Headquarters, German representatives sign the unconditional surrender of all German armed forces to the Allies. The surrender will be effective from one minute past midnight on May 8th, but on the Western Front all military action stops immediately.

I found out that most of the men I was with in Luckenwalde are here now. Have not located any of them as yet, but the G.I. who came from there said everyone was here now. His number was A-320. That meant that in just two days, this G.I. would have to wait for at least 170 flights to leave after I did. If he was one of the early ones from Luckenwalde to get that number, he was lucky. Some of those men could have numbers well into the five hundreds and if my arithmetic is right it could be up into the seven hundreds. Number 700 flight times 26 men a flight is 18,200 men. We had 8,000 in the tents alone in Luckenwalde. The last plane to leave Hildersheim was A-102 and that was two days ago. We sure prayed for a let up in the weather so the planes would start coming in.

MAY 8, 1945

I awoke at sunrise and the first thing I did was to look out the window. What a beautiful morning for flying. From the situation of our dormitory, we could look out the window and see the airstrip. We watched for planes till breakfast time and then watched the skies some more until lunchtime.

About 1 p.m. we spotted a plane coming in for a landing. A shout of joy went up when we saw that it was a C-47. Not far back was another one coming in. We counted 103, 104, 105 and kept counting. We got all excited as they kept coming. Each dormitory had loud speakers and a voice came over ours saying, Groups A-120 to A-175 report to the airstrip for departure. Assemble your group where you see a sign with your number. There was the sound of thunder as hundreds of men in our dormitory dashed down the hall and down three flights of stairs. I have never in my life ever seen a building empty as fast as ours did. We assembled as told and awaited our plane.

Our plane left Hildersheim, Germany at 3:17 p.m. The plane was a C-47 transport named "Lady Margaret." The ride was very bumpy and the cabin noise was so bad you had to shout if you talked to anyone. Draughon and I are still together.

CHAPTER 28

HELLO FRANCE

MAY 8, 1945

We landed at 6:15 p.m. at some airport near a town called, Roy, maybe Rouen, France, somewhere northeast of Paris. We got off the plane and stood around some 200 feet away while the plane was being refueled. We smoked and chatted with each other till we left at 7:45 p.m. We were not up in the air more than 15 minutes when it started to rain and lightning. We sure were glad we took off before this storm came in or we might not have taken off at all. However, we were all somewhat apprehensive as to our fate in this storm and I and no doubt others were quietly saying a little prayer.

We landed in La Havre at 8:40 p.m. The Red Cross was there to meet incoming soldiers with coffee and donuts. We left La Havre by truck to Lucky Strike Camp, 40 miles away. La Havre was very heavily damaged. The streets were clean but many of the blocks were piled high with rubble. To describe it, I'd say it looked like a muffin tin turned upside down.

At Lucky Strike Camp, we took showers and received underwear, fatigues, socks, sheets and blankets. Also received Army mess gear and had a late snack of bean soup, bread and coffee. We hit the sack at about 2:30 a.m. We slept in a ten man tent.

MAY 9, 1945

Breakfast at 7:10 a.m. At 10:30 a.m. we received the following articles. Eisenhower jackets, O.D. pants and shirt, cap, 4 pairs of stockings, 4 handkerchiefs, belt, 3 sets of underwear, U.S. tie and cross rifle insignias and stripes if an N.C.O. We looked like real soldiers again as we went to a U.S.O. show that evening.

MAY 10, 1945

Soldiers are arriving by the hundreds each day. This camp is beginning to bulge at the seams. Received a Typhus shot 1 c.c., was interrogated and had a temporary service record made out.

MAY 11, 1945

Received 1000 francs as partial pay. That was a laugh, no place to spend it. We loafed around and caught up on our sleep. The weather was terrible, lots of rain and a hell of a lot of mud around the tents and no place to go. All we did in the next several days was play cards, eat and sleep. I'm not one to

complain, but at least in the prison camp we could pass the time of day killing lice in our clothing. It's funny when you think about things like this. Here we were safe and sound, plenty to eat, clean body and clothes, a clean warm bed to sleep in and we were bored to death.

MAY 16, 1945

Woke at 4:00 a.m., breakfast at 4:30 a.m., loaded on trucks at 5:30 a.m. and arrived at La Havre at 9:00 a.m. Now I could see La Havre in the daylight. It was an awful sight to see. You could not tell by the rubble if the area had been warehouses, factories, a downtown section or what. We boarded ship and went to our assigned deck quarters. We were told it would be a leisurely trip to the States and no work details Balogne Corporal Draughon was assigned work in the bakery of the galley and I had guard duty from 4:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m.

CHAPTER 29

GOODBYE FRANCE, HELLO ENGLAND

MAY 17, 1945

We left La Havre at 3:00 p.m. and laid anchor in the bay. Can't cross the channel in daylight. I don't know where we got that information, sounded kind of screwy to me. I'm not even going to make a guess on this one. Weighed anchor at 11:00 p.m. and arrived in Southampton, England at 10:00 a.m. the following morning.

May 18, 1945

Ambulances by the hundreds were at the pier. Over 1800 American stretcher cases were carried up the gang plank and taken to a hospital ward. Some 300 American wounded, but able to walk also boarded. There were 80 women, wives of American G.I.s, some with children and some who were going to be mothers soon. When they asked for volunteers to carry the women's luggage on board, I jumped at the chance. I wanted the opportunity to leave the ship and to step onto English soil. We left England on the 19th and anchored in the bay once again. About 7:00 p.m. that evening we weighed anchor and headed for the good old United States.

MAY 20, 1945

We hit very rough seas and many were terribly seasick. Those of us who were not sick were constantly cleaning up after those who thought they were dying. The worst part was that we could not do much for them. They received medication but whenever they drank water, they lost it. It must have been pretty rough on the stretcher cases in the hospital ward. Even the wounded were handicapped to some extent. I would suppose that the pregnant women on board were equally uncomfortable. When the bow of the ship dipped down in the trough of a wave, the water would break over the ship.

MAY 21, 1945

We still have very rough seas but not nearly half as bad as yesterday. My job, as a guard, was made easier by my buddy Draughon. His job was in the galley making donuts and every morning at 3:30 a.m., he would wake me by holding a tray under my nose with fresh hot donuts and steaming hot coffee. He would also have a thermos of hot coffee for me when I stood my watch at the head of a stairwell to the top deck. This deck housed the women, children and officers. My duties were to see that nobody came up to this deck. Who in the hell would want to come up to the top deck in the morning anyway? It was always

windy and cold. They assigned guards simply because they thought the men below would attempt to bother the English War Brides as we called them. There was no need to guard the stairwells from those below, the culprits were already up on that deck with the women.

CHAPTER 30

THE SHIP

MAY 22, 1945

The ship is making its 31st round trip between the United States and Europe. The ship was an ex-luxury liner. Before being commissioned as an Army transport, it was called the “Oriente”, sister ship of the ill-fated “Morro Castle.” The “Oriente” served previously as a Cuban Mail Line between Havana and New York. Now she carries the name of the “Thomas H. Barry.” The Barry carries a permanent crew of 350 men, most of whom are merchant seamen, however, communications and gunnery are operated by U.S. military personnel. Excluding the crew, stretcher cases, wounded, women and children, we had some 500 to 600 American officers, N.C.O.s and privates aboard that were ex-prisoners-of-war.

The Barry is completing the last leg of her 31st round trip as a troop transport. The Barry displaces 17,000 tons and measures 508 feet in length and is 15 years old. Captain Erikson is in command.

The trip from Southampton, England, leaving at 7:00 p.m., May 19th, to Staten Island, New York, arriving at 5:00 p.m., May 29th. It took exactly 2 hours short of 10 days.

CHAPTER 31

HELLO AMERICA

MAY 29, 1945 5:00 p.m.

I started this chapter so I could write the heading, HELLO AMERICA. GOD, did the tears flow as we passed the Statue of Liberty. The shout went up, "There she is!" Those on the other side of the ship came running across to see the wonderful Lady. I wonder how many men beside myself had thoughts of seeing her again as their ship left the States for Europe? This is no time for reflections of what could have happened, this is a time for jubilation.

Greeting us were two fire boats with all nozzles spraying water high into the air. Other ships were tooting their horns. A ferry boat came near us and on the top deck there was a line of chorus girls kicking up their legs. Smaller craft were circling our ship blowing their horns and people were waving. This was one fabulous welcome and we were the happiest men in the world at that time.

It seemed to take forever for our ship to dock. We disembarked and the Red Cross was there to offer coffee and donuts. We took a Ferry across the river to the same railroad dock I left from. There were some wives and parents waiting on the dock. We boarded trains that took us for a 20 minute ride to Camp Shanks, N.Y. On our arrival, we had a short physical examination. When this was completed we were marched to a very large mess hall. The first thing that caught your eye as you entered was a huge banner across the whole room reading, "TAKE ALL YOU WANT, BUT EAT WHAT YOU TAKE, DON'T WASTE IT."

I believe this Army mess hall was only for returning servicemen and a one time meal. I just can't believe the Army would have this much food and variations in the amounts on display for every meal to regular personnel.

I intended to list here all the different meats, vegetables, desserts, breads and drinks available to us, but on second thought, I could best sum it up by saying, "You name a food or drink and it was probably here."

After chow, we received more clothing, 'khaki' clothing as warmer weather was approaching. We also received a partial pay of \$80.00. This time we had a place to spend it. The PX was crowded that night with happy beer drinkers.

MAY 30, 1945

I bought some extra cigarettes for the family at home as rationing was still in effect. I left Camp Shanks, N.Y. at 1:02 a.m. by train for Camp Sheridan, Illinois. We arrived there at 5 p.m. just in time for the evening meal. I fought off the urge to call home and tell them I would be there within the next day or so. I wanted desperately to know if all was well at home and if I had a son or daughter, but I wanted more so to be able to step up to my front door and ring the doorbell and greet my wife with what I hoped would be a terrific surprise at seeing me.

MAY 31, 1945

Not much going on today but was informed that the following day our furlough papers would be cut and we would receive a 60 day furlough beginning June 2nd.

JUNE 1, 1945

In the afternoon, I was called into the company headquarters and given my furlough papers along with orders to report August 2, 1945 for reassignment, at Miami Beach, Florida. The hardest part of having a furlough in your hand was to be told that you could not leave the camp till the following day. That evening was the longest I've ever had to spend and to pass the time, several of us went to a U.S.O. Service Center in camp. Instead of dancing with the young ladies, we sat around and drank cokes and talked about our homes and what we planned to do when we got out of the service.

How is it possible for a husband and father to talk about his family and not call them when he is less than 300 miles away? It's not possible! I finally succumbed to the urge and called home. A sign above the phone booth in the recreation room read, "Limit your long distance calls to 10 minutes, the operator will disconnect you if you exceed this time limit."

My hand and fingers were shaking so badly I could hardly dial the operator. She placed the call, it's ringing, one ring, two rings, three rings, "My God, isn't she home," I thought. "Maybe she is at her Mothers across the street." A voice on the other end of the line I'd waited so long to hear once again said, "Hello." I swallowed hard and blurted out, "It's me honey, I'll be coming home tomorrow." She paused momentarily and said, "Where are you? I just got a telegram yesterday that you were in a prison camp 2-A in Germany." I quickly said, "I only have ten minutes to use this phone, I'll explain that all later." "How are you? Do we have a son or a daughter? When was the baby born?" She answered, "We have a second son, born November 16, 1944. I am fine and the baby is good and healthy." We both said a few

endearing words to each other and shortly the operator said, "Sorry, your 10 minutes are up. You have 10 seconds more to say goodbye."

JUNE 2, 1945

I left Camp Sheridan early Sunday morning and arrived in Detroit around noon. I could have taken a cab and been home in less than 15 minutes. However, to savor my return more fully, I left the Michigan Central Railroad Depot and walked the one block to Michigan Avenue. I rode the Michigan Ave. streetcar to downtown Detroit where I transferred to the Grand River Line and from there to the Cross-town Line on Warren Avenue.

Not too many people were riding on Sunday and the few that were seemed to be looking at me curiously. A soldier in itself is not anything very special, but seeing one carrying a duffle bag and a German backpack with a large insignia of a swastika on it caught their attention. I wanted to shout out to them that I was coming home from the war. I wanted to tell them I was a new father. I was getting excited as my streetcar neared my neighborhood. The next stop was mine. I rang the bell and stepped to the door by the conductor. He smiled and said, "Coming home, son?" All I could say was, "Yes, Thank God!" I started down my street. Only one block and 5 houses to go. My feet quickened almost into a trot. My feet no sooner hit the porch steps and the door flew open. My wife came into my arms and my oldest son grabbed me around the leg. My Dear God, what a happy moment! My oldest son, Dennis, was not even a year old when I went off to war. Now he was 3 ½ years old. His Mother must have told him that his Daddy was coming home and he should hug him. I stood on that porch for a very long time, holding my wife in my arms and patting my little son on his head.

We entered the house and I stood before the crib where my young son, just under 6 months old, was fast asleep. I looked heavenward and thanked the LORD for seeing me safely home.

CHAPTER 32

AFTER THOUGHTS

When I sat down to write a book about the events of my life while a prisoner-of-war in Germany some forty years ago, I had to rely on what I had written down in a diary. I kept the highlights of the events in chronological order as near as possible as they are in the diary. I wish now that I had been more specific to detail, names, addresses and above all exact locations. The pages of my diary are turning yellow with age and the words, written in pencil, are fading away. The memories of what was written there will never, no never fade away. After the war, each of those prisoners-of-war buddies I so frequently spoke of, Shafer, Draughon, Bruno, Robb and Red went home to their families and I wish I had kept up a correspondence, or a visit with them.

CHAPTER 33

DATES AND FACTS

I was captured by the German Army on December 2, 1944 in Selestat, Alsace-Lorraine, France.

I was registered as a Prisoner-of-War at Stammlager 12-A on December 11, 1944 in Limburg, Germany.

I moved to Stammlager 3-B, December 27, 1944 at Furstenberg, Germany.

I then moved to Stammlager 3-A, February 7, 1945 at Luckenwalde, Germany.

I don't have the exact date in February, but it was sometime after February 7th that my wife first received a telegram from the War Department that I was Missing-in-Action. Missing-in-Action means that they don't know where the hell you are. You're not with your outfit nor do they have your dead body. Yes, I was very bitter! Why should a loved one have to wait that long for notification? Why couldn't they have sent word to her that there was a strong possibility that I was a prisoner-of-war? All indications pointed to my being so. After all there were men from my outfit who did manage to escape capture.

I was liberated by Russian Troops on April 22, 1945. The last day of April, 1945, my wife received a telegram from the War Department that I was a prisoner-of-war being held by the German Army at Stammlager 2-A. I don't even know where that camp is, let alone ever being there. While I was on the high seas coming home, she received the last telegram from the War Department. It stated that I was now back under United States Army assignment and arrangements were being made to send me home. Now that's what I call, PROFICIENCY!!!