



World War Two Diary and Memoir

Clarence O. Swope

U.S. Army

103d Infantry Division

409th Regiment, Company B

© 2014 Tom Swope

First page of original diary

U. S. ARMY.

March 25, 1943 -

cp. Perry, Ohio
75th INF. DIV.

A.S.T.P. U. OF. Nebraska

A.S.T.P. U. OF. Wyoming

D.E.M.L. FT. Leonard Wood. Mo.

U.S.A.A.F. Keesler Field, Miss

cadet Aloe Field, Tex.

86th Inf. Div. cp. Livingston La.

4173 Q.M. cp. Howze, Texas

103rd Inf. cp. Howze Texas

103rd Inf. cp. Shanks. N.J.

OVERSEAS - Oct 6, 1944

RETURNED - June 12, 1945

cp. Kilmore N.Y.

cp. ATTORbury Ind.

FT. Oglethorpe. Ga.

FT. KNOX, Ky (discharge)

To any of our men from Company B:

This diary of my experiences with Company B was written over a period of time (beginning in 1943). I did no writing during combat, except during breaks in our travels. I expect some errors on names and plenty on spelling.

I'm mostly concerned about names. If you find any mistakes, please write and let me know. I will correct that page or pages.

Thanks,

PFC Clarence 'Mike' Swope
7631 Fairview Ave.
Mentor, Ohio 44060

- March 18, 1943 – Inducted into Army in Cleveland, O.
- March 25, 1943 – Left for Camp Perry O. reception center
- March 29, 1943 – Left for Ft. Leonard Wood Mo. to become member of Co. C 284th Inf. Reg. of the 75th Inf. Div.

Was a machine gunner on a Browning light 30 cal. M.G.

Took a very rugged basic training. Went to firing ranges, for one 3 week period
Rain every day. Walk 5-7 miles every day, one way. Had 5 or 6 hours sleep every
night for 3 weeks, no dry clothes. Wade 2 rivers each way. Food very poor.

Ate out of mess kits for first 4 months.

Made expert on machine gun, rifle, carbine, grenade & bayonet.

Came in second on machine gun in company.

Decided to find a better life in the Army. Looked into Air Cadets. Was asked to try
for Army Specialized Training Program. I did and I passed qualification exams. Had
a furlough from July 22 till Aug. 2nd “43.” When I returned I went to A.S.T.P.

“A.S.T.P.”

- Aug. 15 – arrived at University of Nebraska in Lincoln, Neb. for classification tests.
Food was swell, ate in cafeteria. Lincoln was a good town.
- Sept. 5. – Left, for University of Wyoming in Laramie Wyo. to start college. Had a
swell time there. Lots of females and nice town. College located about 7,200 ft.
above sea level in mountains.
Had a swell Thanksgiving & Christmas there.
- Dec. 27 – Left for 75th Div. at Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo. Asked for old company.
Got in headquarters platoon.
Got there in time to get drunk New Years Eve.

Went out on 5 day problem & got my feet frostbit & blistered so I stayed in company area most of the time. Turned in my papers for Air Cadets.

Passed the preliminary exams and was transferred to D.E.M.L. unit just 2 days before outfit moved out to Louisiana maneuvers.

“Air Cadet”

- I got a 16-day furlough from Air Corps at the end of Jan. to Feb. 10th.
- Feb. 12th - Shipped out to Keesler Field, Miss.
- Feb. 14th - Arrived at Keesler Field, Biloxi, Miss. to take qualification & classification exams for Air Cadets. Came out 3rd from top in class of 200. Qualified for pilot, navigator, and bombardier. Waited about 3 weeks at Keesler for shipping orders.
- March 10th – Shipped out to Aloe Field, Victoria, Texas. Was assigned to 482nd Single Engine Fighter Training Squadron to work on line until opening in college.
- April 25th – Order came from General Arnold to send all cadets that were previously in ground forces back to ground forces. So my cadet days were over. I had swell time at Aloe Field. I hated to leave the Air Corps. I was a mechanics helper. I had 2 planes assigned to me, an AT-6 and a P-40. My job was to pre-flight them every morning and inspect them to make sure they were fit for the days flying. Just after I arrived there I saw a cadet from Ohio and an officer killed when their engine failed on the take-off over my end of the ramp. About a week later an AT-6 burst into flames over my head and crashed nearby. The pilot bailed out and came down O.K. Plenty of ground loops and minor incidents.

“Transferred”

- May – Following through the order from Gen. Arnold, I was transferred to the 86th Black Hawk Inf. Div. I was in F Company of the 393rd reg. They had just come off maneuvers and were on the rifle range. I fired all the infantry weapons and came out high man on the M-1 rifle in the regiment. I was supposed to receive a war bond for it but I shipped out around the middle of May. The Black Hawks were in Camp Livingston, La.

I was supposed to ship to a Quartermaster Rail Head Co. at Camp Claiborne, La. But when we got there, there was no such outfit in existence.

“Camp Howze, Texas”

1944

- May 20 – My orders were revised and I went to the 4173rd Quartermaster Depot Co. at Camp Howze, Texas. They were taking a basic training and I made Pfc. after 2 weeks. Met my buddies, Rippey and Lou Rene` there. I had some swell times in Dallas, Ft. Worth and Denton, Texas.
- June 15 – A post order came out to transfer all men in Camp Howze that were in 1-A physical condition to the 103rd Cactus Div., also in Camp Howze. So Rippey, Rene and myself were stuck in the infantry again. We were assigned to B Company of the 409th regiment. I was a combination rifleman and scout. We had some swell and rough times there. They were running some 5 & 6-day problems getting ready for overseas. Rippey and myself would get purposely lost on the first or second day of each problem and spend a couple days by a creek fishing or taking life easy.

Occasionally we would disguise as enemy and eat with them. Later we would bring information about enemy back to our own lines, to make up for being lost. Dangerous Dennis our captain would be very much pleased and forgive us for getting lost. Lt. Crown was our Platoon Leader and he didn't care much what we did.

We nicknamed him 'Water Boy' as he was always begging for water, in combat we called him Bobby.

- July – I had my last furlough before going overseas. The outfit had been alerted when we left.
- Aug- The final phase of our training and we were issued our combat equipment. No doubt now as to where we were going. Rumors of Army of Occupation were strong.

“Shipping Out”

- Aug. 25 – We shipped east to Camp Shanks, our point of embarkation. Spent about 2 or 3 weeks there.
- Sept. 18 - Around that date my troubles really began when I walked up the gangplank with full equipment. I was on my way. For about eleven days, all I saw was water. I was beginning to get sick of it, although I was yet to be seasick. We hit a terrible storm about halfway out, and our ship was tossed around like a toothpick in boiling water. A lot of the boys were really seasick. The morning after the storm we saw two tankers on fire on the horizon. I was plenty glad that was over.

I was aboard the U.S.S. Monticello, an ex-Italian luxury liner – I really mean “ex”. I was in “F” hold, about 20 feet below sea level. We had two meals a day (beans and lemonade).

“F” hold was extremely hot; the only air we got was from a single tube above. We were allowed on deck two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon, but I managed to find a hiding place under a gun turret or someplace on deck, so that when the two hours were up, they couldn’t find me to run me off the deck. When the next group came up, I would come out of hiding. It worked every time.

After about 11 days out, we finally saw land. It was the coast of North Africa; soon we saw Spain and Portugal. We passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, saw the famous “rock”, and the spot where the French fleet was scuttled. It was quite a relief when we finally docked at the city of Marseilles in southern France.

“Landing in France”

It was night when we got off the ship. There were few lights and they were laying smoke screens over the harbor. We came in on the second day of the invasion. There were barrage balloons over the harbor.

We were lining up to get ready for our move to the camping area when a German observation plane flew over. Our anti-aircraft guns opened up on it, but it must have got away. It was quite a sight to see the sky light up with the bursts of flak.

We started moving out on our long march to our camping area, carrying full equipment. All the way through town we would march a little and then rest a little. The French people were all outside the houses begging for cigarettes, soap, chocolate, chewing gum, or some other hard to get article. We would accommodate them and feel proud to keep up the tradition of the big-hearted Yanks. Of course, if they had a little wine or cognac we wouldn’t refuse. They were afraid the American officers would get mad if they got caught giving us wine. Our Lieutenant Crown convinced them that the officers were not so bad. Lou Rene`, my French speaking friend, was our interpreter. He taught me a lot of French on the ship, so I didn’t do so bad.

The Frenchmen would tell us all their experiences with the Germans, and how they killed and tortured their people.

We finally reached the outskirts of town and it started to rain and my equipment was getting heavier. The boys were dropping out like flies. Finally, I said to Rippey, "Let's drop out and spend the night here." We knew there were still German snipers in the area, but we decided to take a chance.

Rippey woke up first, so when I woke up there was no one around. I walked down the road and saw Rippey sitting by a big fire getting dry. Rene` was with him. A Frenchman with one leg was getting wood for the fire and making coffee. Was that a beautiful sight! So, I warmed up a K-ration and had my breakfast. This Frenchman had lost two daughters and one son to the Germans. They also killed his dog. We were getting ready to start off again for camp, when a Frenchwoman came over and said there were two Germans in a guard tower and they wanted to surrender. So we went casually over and told them to come out unarmed. They did and we had our first two prisoners.

We started for camp and caught a ride on a "duck". He took us into camp. The Captain began to chew us out for being lost, so we gave him our prisoners and told him it was a long battle getting these two prisoners.

The camp was a muddy field, but it was our home for a couple of weeks. For a few days we had to go to the docks and help unload ships. It was a good deal because we got plenty of food. We borrowed some candy bars by the dozens; we also got sleeping bags for our squad. Lt. Crown would turn his back when we liberated all this stuff. The officers were allowed to bring a lot more over than the enlisted men, so we didn't feel guilty.

After about a week of doing this and sneaking out to town, we were called together by our Executive Officer, 1st Lt. Thompson (The Head), and he told us that a battalion was pinned down by the Germans up in the Belfort Pass, and we were to get them out. Our company was to go ahead to guide the rest of the outfit to the front. (My first mission.)

“Moving Out”

We were taken ahead in trucks and placed alone at various intersections to make sure the convoy went through uninterrupted. When the convoy would stop at night, we would be moved ahead to new positions.

We didn't get much sleep. The French treated us pretty good; they gave us anything we wanted. One time, the First Sergeant came along to pick me up and I was sitting on a chair by a fire. A Frenchman had just given me a bottle of Kish (liquid fire) and his daughter was fanning the fire and warming K-rations. I had a sign on a tree with an arrow saying “This Way.” I guess I was on the job...

Our truck finally came to pick me up; I had my pockets full of wine and whiskey for the guys on the truck. When the truck slowed down I jumped on the tailgate. I had trouble climbing on. I was weighted down with booze. I decided to lay my rifle on the tailgate so I could use both hands getting on. The safety was not on and my rifle went off and grazed the helmet of Sergeant Moseby, and went through the canvass just above his head. He started hollering at me, so I sent two bottles of booze to him. It didn't take long for him to forget the ringing in his ears.

“Combat”

We finally got to within 10 miles from the front and we stopped for a couple of days before the push off. We could easily hear the artillery, and we decided we weren't there for an Army of Occupation. There were a lot of mines in the area and we had occasional accidents with them. A few men were killed, but no one from my Company.

About the third night there, Clayton Rippey and myself wrote a song called “After It's Over” and it went over big in the Company. The mess Sergeant wanted to buy it, but no sale. We willed it to him in case Rippey and myself were killed. Lt. “Bobby” Crown wanted the song, too. We went through the rest of combat singing “After It's Over”, and we had the song “Paper Doll” down pat, too. We had our own special arrangement of “Paper Doll”. Rippey and I were very good at harmonizing. Rippey was a swell cartoonist, too. He was a swell morale booster to Company B. We were always making our troubles look like jokes.

The necktie rule, for instance. The Colonel had put out orders when we left Marseilles that we should wear neckties, or at least have them with us. So various times in combat, especially in a tight spot, I would pop up and say, “It's a damned good thing we brought these neckties!”

Well, it's finally time for our outfit to move up front. Our platoon was left behind two days to guard the Regiment's duffel bags. Eventually, we were brought up to our outfit on trucks. They were dug in just behind the lines. It had been raining just about all the time. We had to cross a big river on a footbridge that was under fire by snipers, and we had to walk 10 miles in mud almost knee deep before we caught up with them. They were on the side of a hill. It was so dark we had to hold hands to keep from getting lost. It was pretty stormy that night and the wind blew down a large tree that just missed Rippey and me by inches.

When dawn finally came, we found ourselves with good old B Company again. When it was light enough, we moved up front and relieved some Texas outfit.

The following morning, we were to start our attack. Our Colonel had gotten a medal for relieving an outfit without the Jerries knowing about it, so they didn't know that green troops were about to hit them. Just before our push-off, our artillery opened up with a terrific 10-minute barrage.

The first day we were battalion reserve and we followed close behind in the woods. I saw my first dead American soldier lying in a foxhole in the mountains. I was kind of stirred, but in a few minutes I got over it. Later that day, I saw our first wounded being brought back on jeeps, etc. When we finally stopped for the night, our outfit dug in, in the spearhead position.

During the night, two Jerries came running through our area and Berkowitz, a Jewish boy from Brooklyn, cut them down with an automatic rifle. One of them fell about 10 feet from my foxhole and he hollered and screamed all night long. We had orders not to get out of the foxholes at night, so I couldn't help anyway. I didn't get much sleep that night. He was dead in the morning with 3 bullets in his chest.

We were about ready to push off again, so I picked up a light machine gun with a couple boxes of ammo and decided to carry that for a while. We shoved off early that morning and had gone about 200 yards to the top of a hill when a bunch of Jerries in a house in the valley opened up on us with machine guns. I set up my machine gun and used all my ammo on the house. I guess I quieted a few of them.

Meanwhile, we had sent a squad to take the house and our mortar squad dropped quite a few mortar shells. It took us about 20 or 30 minutes to take over the house. What Jerries were left finally surrendered. Just after we took the house, a Jerry came riding down a trail on a bike. One of our boys saw him coming so he stepped behind a tree and waited for him. When he got there, our boy yelled halt and the kid was so scared he fell off his bike. He surrendered. He was only about 13 years old, but he had on a German uniform so we took him as a prisoner.

We heard action on the left, so we sent out a patrol to see what was up. It was a bunch of Jerries in a house again. They were firing on G Company up on a hill. Our boys came up behind the house and surprised them. G Company came down from the hill and rushed the building with grenades. Our boys hollered at them, and told them to cease firing. We gave them their prisoners and joined the outfit again.

We moved across a field and hit a road, so we decided to follow it for awhile. I was sent out to the left flank, as a flank guard, in case of any attacks from the side. There were plenty of snipers, and they made it pretty hot for us. One bullet sang off the edge of my steel helmet, and I didn't waste much time getting behind a big tree. I couldn't locate that guy, so we went on. The bad part of fighting in the mountains is that you can't see the snipers.

We went down the road about 100 yards when an 88 shell landed on the road next to me and killed two boys from our outfit. We waited about 10 minutes for more shells to land, but nothing happened so we moved forward again. In a little while, we hit a town. Most of the Jerries had left the town and were dug in on a hill on the opposite side of the town. We took the town with little resistance, and set up on the outskirts below the hill where the Jerries were. We called back for artillery and they opened up with white phosphorus shells and finished with smoke shells to cover our attack on the hill. We took the hill without many casualties from our company.

After driving the Jerries off the hill, we took to the road again and moved out to the right of the town. We had no sooner gotten out of the town when we were caught in the middle of an enemy mortar 88 attack. Barchfield, the B.A.R. man on our squad, got it bad in the shoulder. T/Sgt. Ainsworth went deaf for a while and got hit in the arm. They were about 20 feet from me when they were hit. I found a ditch full of mud at the edge of the road, so that's where I sweated out the barrage. Every time I heard a shell coming I would snuggle down in the muddy water and duck my head under until it hit. I prayed between shells, and I guess all the others did, too. It comes natural.

The barrage seemed to last about half an hour, and left us with about 8 men in our squad. We pulled back to the edge of town to the shelter of buildings and waited for further orders. We had new orders in about a half-hour and I didn't like them no how. We were to cut across country through the hills at night and work ourselves behind the enemy lines. We were to be extremely quiet and not fight unless as a last resort. We were to go 10 miles behind enemy lines and take a town there.

There was a large German column (3,000 men?) moving down a highway towards the town. We were to take that town with about 400 men, set up a roadblock and capture the (3,000?) Germans. I was already so tired I was about to drop, and I was soaked all the way through. All I carried was 3 bandoleers of ammunition, K-rations, my rifle and a few packs of cigarettes. It was so dark I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. But we took off into the woods with B Company leading and our platoon at the head.

Our squad was at the point and I was First Scout. I was supposed to be Second Scout, but Sedeman, our First Scout, was starting to crack so I took over. It's the most nerve-wracking job in the infantry. A First Scout's job is to go ahead of the column and locate enemy resistance. The only way you can do that is by letting them fire on you. So we started out with 400 (?) men. Most of our officers stayed near the rear; we had only 2 or 3 with our company. Captain Walton, "Dangerous Dennis", stuck pretty close to me all the way and not very many officers will do that. We started out by compass, so it was really slow moving. Captain Walton would come up every 15 minutes and check compass directions; and then we would move out.

Nobody dared talk and that made it all the worse. All I had to do was think and be scared. After about 3 miles, I was walking along a small ravine and I hadn't heard a sound all night, when all of a sudden a Jerry opened up with a machine gun about 130-150 feet in front of me. We all hit the dirt (mud) and hardly dared to breathe.

Every time the Jerry heard a sound he would open up in that direction. Most of us dived into the ditch calling our names. Captain Walton heard someone on the edge of the ravine about 5 feet from us. The Captain tapped me and whispered, "Who is it?" We breathed again when he said, "Knudson". He was one of our boys.

The Captain wanted me to crawl up towards the machine gun nest and try to knock it out. I suggested that we should go by compass around the machine gun nest and come out behind them. He agreed and the plan worked. We hardly dared to breathe; it was pitch black out there so we had good cover. We backed up about 50 yards and went around the machine gun and came back to our line of travel well behind them.

Now that the machine gun nest was behind us we were on our way again. We had trouble with snipers from there on. They fired from all four sides of us. Our communications wire ran out, so we had to go ahead with no connections at all with the rear. We kept changing our course to go around the strong points, and finally we got lost. Half the men were lost because of the extreme darkness. They were walking all around the mountains in small groups. We decided the only thing we could do was to stop until it got light enough to move on. We didn't know what would happen in the morning when the Jerries would see us. The Jerry snipers got a lot of our men during the night.

Dawn came and I saw 2 of my buddies dead, about a few feet from me. We rounded up our men and started out again as soon as we could. We were lucky that day. There were very few Jerries in the area of the mountains we traveled and I was First Scout all day. My K-rations were gone so I didn't eat all day.

About 4 o'clock that afternoon, I spotted four Jerries coming out of the woods with their hands up. So I took them prisoners. A little while later, I came across a small village. I didn't know whether there were any Jerries in there or not, so I called up the Captain. He said to go down into the town and ask the people in the first house if there were any Germans around. So I came down off the hill, across the open field, expecting the Jerries to open up on me any minute.

But luck was with me when I reached the first house, an old French couple were waiting for me with a bottle of wine. Boy, did that hit the spot. I got a couple apples, too.

The rest came down and we walked right through the town with no resistance at all and kept going. The next town was our objective. It was over a large hill. We got on top of the hill and saw our objective. It was a large town, full of Jerries. From the top of the hill we could see Jerries riding cars and motorcycles up and down the main street. A lot of the Germans were walking around with French girls.

We set up our machine guns and mortars on top of the hill and got ready for the attack. My platoon was to come down the bare face of the hill, cross a creek, and start taking the buildings at the right end of town, and work our way towards the center.

At a given signal our machine guns opened up and the Jerries scattered like rats in a trap. They set up machine guns, etc. in houses and fired back. They got a few of our machine gunners and I believe Lt. Peters from our 3rd platoon got wounded. A machine gunner from D Company caught 3 bullets; one lodged in a metal-faced bible over his heart, another lodged in a thick wallet over his right side, and the third bullet caught him in the finger. One of those lucky guys whose time wasn't up yet.

About five minutes after we opened up, our platoon started down the hill and a hail of Jerry tracers followed us down. One tracer bullet hit the barrel of my rifle and bounced off my trigger finger, taking the skin off 2 knuckles. When we reached the bottom of the hill, we had to cross a swift flowing creek. It was a tough obstacle, but we made it. Although we were dripping wet with water, (and me with 2 jackets, 2 shirts, 2 sweaters, and 2 pair of pants so soaked full of water I could barely walk) we made it.

We finally reached the first building, tossed a few grenades through a window, and went in. It was empty. About that time, Rippey, who didn't know we were in the building, let go with a bazooka, but luckily it didn't go off.

We started to work our way towards the center of town, searching all of the buildings and taking a lot of prisoners. They would fire on us until we got right up to them and then they surrendered.

After about an hour the town was ours, so we planned our defensive and planned to spend the night there. We had no communications with the rear, no food besides what little the French had, and we only had a few medical aid men to care for all our wounded and very little medical supplies. We were surrounded by Germans on 4 sides. We had a couple of walkie talkies, but we were out of range. Walkie talkies weren't much good anyway. They called all night trying to make connections with the rear. We needed blood plasma for our wounded, and there was no way to get it.

We had captured a German doctor and he helped out a lot. He had some surgical equipment with him, and he did a lot of operating that night. The first part of the night was quiet with very little action. Every time one of us would step outside a building, a sniper would take a shot at us, but they were too far to see good, so they were not very accurate.

I spent the first part of the night drying my clothes. About 2 o'clock in the morning, I was sent out to guard a roadblock on the far end of town. There were about seven of us on the roadblock. We had a German truck parked cross ways across the road. A squad of the second platoon was dug in along the edge of the road leading to the roadblock. I guess they were plenty nervous. Earlier in the night, a Jerry walked down the road right by them. Sgt. Moseby, the last man, halted him and shot him. The Jerry had walked passed the whole squad, so they weren't taking any chances now. They shot my Assistant Squad Leader in the shoulder, and they were taking shots at almost everyone they saw. So we sent a man ahead to warn them that a relief guard was coming.

We finally reached the roadblock and we set up our guard. Two men sat in the truck, 2 men were under it with a machine gun, and a B.A.R. man, another rifleman, and myself were along the side of the road behind a wall that came up flush with the road. A hill came down flush with the opposite side of the road.

We were there a short time when all hell broke loose. A bunch of Jerries were coming down the hill just across the road, and opened up on us at about 30 yards. We opened up on them. They threw a grenade on the hood of the truck and got the two guys in the truck cab. I think one was Sedeman. Then they started rolling grenades across the road, down on us. I threw 3 grenades up at them, and must have got a few. They rolled 3 grenades down that landed about 10 feet from me. One of them landed right next to me and wounded the guy on the other side of me. I never even got scratched.

The two guys from under the truck came down by me, they were wounded. There were two of us left and I was almost out of ammunition. Finally, some of the boys in the battalion aid station, which was set off the road about 75 yards behind me, opened up and helped us. The Jerries shot a bazooka shell at the building and got about 6 guys with it, none too serious. Finally, I told Portio (the guy left with me) that we should try to make it back to the battalion aid station, where we could hold them off better. We would have been dead ducks for their grenades if we had stayed behind the wall, but we had to cross an open field to get to the aid station. One more grenade on us made us decide to take the chance. I covered Portio when he made a break, and he got in the door with a hail of bullets following him. I figured it would be best if I went in another way because they had the door covered, so I made a dash for a small window that was even with the ground. I dove headfirst at the window, after criss-crossing the field to keep out of fire. I hit the window with my helmet, did a somersault and landed in a watering trough for horses in the basement. So, after all the trouble I took drying my clothes earlier in the evening, it turned out to be a waste of time. I was wet again. I groped around the basement shouting my name so they wouldn't fire on me. Finally, I came to the basement room where many of our wounded were, and I worked my way through them and went upstairs.

We fired back for about 10 more minutes, and finally they quit firing back, so we stopped and a few guys and myself crawled out and brought our wounded in. There were 6 or 7 of us still able to fight so we put guards on all sides of the building. I got stuck with the front of the building facing the Jerries. I was seeing shadows for the rest of the night, but I guess they had left. At least it was quiet for the rest of the night.

The wounded men moaning kind of got on my nerves. Lt. Peters had a very bad leg, and it was driving him nuts. One of my best buddies, Frank Sedeman, had a bad hole in his arm, and he never mentioned it until the seriously wounded were taken care of. Then he nonchalantly asked the medic to patch him up. My Assistant Squad Leader, Corporal Lehrman, was shot in the arm by one of our own men during the excitement. He came walking into the aid station and said, "Someone stuck one in my arm. Any chance of getting it patched up?" It is really indescribable the way our boys took it that night.

Well, finally, after years of minutes, dawn started to break and it was a relief to see what was going on. It was a relief to our medics to work by sunlight, instead of flashlight. I guess everybody felt a little better. Some of the boys that were in town were out walking around now, and we reorganized and got ready to meet the retreating Germans that we had cut off.

About 6 o'clock in the morning an Indian boy from the weapons platoon was doing something with the machine gun under the truck on the road. A Sergeant of the weapons platoon, I believe it was Sgt. Cass, was standing in front of him. The machine gun went off accidentally and caught Sergeant Cass in the legs. We rushed to him and started to give him first aid, but he went into shock before we could get him the 75 yards to the aid station and he died a few minutes later.

The same morning one of our boys who was lost in the woods the night before came in and he cracked. He kept screaming and hollering all the time.

We sent out a small patrol to find the Jerries that were retreating toward us. About an hour later, a very large Jerry column headed by high-ranking officers came toward us with their hands in the air. They had given up to our small patrol without a fight. They must have figured a couple of divisions were around the town. Later that day, an American patrol came to our town from a small town not far away and said our troops had broken through and were hunting for us.

We immediately sent a patrol for medical supplies, and they came back with the much needed blood plasma. We tried to radio back and have doctors flown in by Cubs, but we couldn't get anywhere. Later that night, our vehicles broke through with food and ammunition and it wasn't long before the whole outfit caught up to us and we had a rear line again.

The next day we shoved off again with my outfit in the lead, and I was First Scout again. We went over a small mountain, and followed a railroad track leading to the next town. We were bothered by snipers and occasional machine gun nests, but we didn't hit any large forces. Some of the sniper bullets came pretty close. I realize now why I was born such a short guy. We finally came to the main road leading to the town we were to take. We spread out on both sides of the road and started in. As soon as we got close to the town, we took to the hills and after an artillery barrage we took the town with little resistance.

As usual I got stuck on a roadblock again, the rest of the outfit searched the houses, all but the one next to me. It wasn't long before a German car came down the road. We opened up on it and got an officer who was driving it. He tried to run, but we cut him down. There were 5 of us on the roadblock. The car he was driving was full of silk stockings from a nearby factory, and a sack of regimental mail.

Soon after that a German messenger came down the road on a motorcycle and he got upset with a bullet in the head. I claimed the motorcycle and I played around with it for awhile trying to get it to go. Finally, I got disgusted and sold it to Jack Coleman, a boy in my squad, for a candy bar. He got it running early the next morning. So I borrowed it to run back and forth to the C.P. I had a wild time at first.

It would go like hell, but I couldn't stop it. Half the time I was in the part of town that wasn't searched yet and the snipers tried to get me, but the way I was zig-zagging from sidewalk to street, it was impossible. After a little practice, I got used to it.

About 7 or 8 o'clock the following morning, the French lady that lived in the house across from our roadblock came out and said there were Jerries in the basement who wanted to surrender. So we took them and found out they had enough guns and equipment to last all day. They could have easily killed us all at the roadblock.

We took it easy and moved out after a couple hours. We had fairly level ground for a change, and it sure was a relief. We moved across fields and hit quite a bit of scattered resistance. We were heading for another town. One of our other regiments failed to take it the day before. As soon as darkness came we took to the main road with orders to fire on no one unless absolutely necessary. The whole battalion was behind us, and we were scattered all along the road.

A Jerry car was coming up on us from the rear. Everybody froze where they were, and the car passed through the whole battalion. When it reached the front, where I was, someone opened up on it. It swerved and came to a stop right next to me. A Jerry Colonel and another officer were in it. The Colonel started to get out and he started to draw a pistol on me. I didn't see him, but Sgt. Milosek did, and he shot him just in time.

We went on and finally came to the town. The town was on the opposite side of a river, and there were a few houses on this side of the river. The buildings were full of Jerries, and it took quite a time to get them out. We used up all our bazooka ammunition on machine gun nests in the houses. We finally cleared our side of the river and were to cross the bridge, and take the town on the other side. Our company was to cross the river first, and the rest of the battalion would cross later. We made it O.K. and took the first 3 or 4 buildings in town. We then set up a defensive and sent out searching patrols. They were bringing in prisoners all night long. The date was December 1, 1944.

“Captured”

The building I was in was the first one across the river on the right side. We were overlooking the main road and the bridge. We picked off a few Jerries we saw coming down the road. They opened up with 88's and mortars and most of the shells were landing much too close to be comfortable.

About 2 a.m. on December 2nd, we heard tanks coming down the road and the fellows said it was probably our own T.D. outfits. As they got closer, we could hear that they were coming from the opposite direction of our troops, so we kept watching. Pretty soon we could make out 4 or 5 tanks coming toward us; they were enemy tanks. We took to the buildings, most of them empty. We fired on the tanks and tried to scare them off. It turned out to be what seemed like a whole division, so we were caught red-handed without any anti-tank weapons. We could pick off the accompanying infantry, but we couldn't scratch the tanks. We kept fighting, but they came right up on us.

I was in the building nearest the river near the bridge. I went to the other end of the building and told the guys not to shoot; we had no defense against the tanks, let them go through us. They lined up three tanks in front of the buildings and one tank was sitting on the bridge. I was in a room only about 30 yards from the river. I was tempted to swim across the river, but when I looked out the window the tank crew saw me and started to lower the gun and aim at the window. I ran to the back wall and climbed behind a heat stove. Then all hell broke loose. The stones were collapsing all around and I was buried in a pile of rubble. I must have been knocked out. When I came to I was buried in a pile of cement and bricks. The Jerries were in the room throwing grenades around. I caught a few pieces, but I was so numb I couldn't feel it. My shoulder and back ached pretty bad. I must have passed out for a while; when they saw me they dug me out of the rubble and took me outside. I was pretty dazed and didn't know what had happened.

I saw some of our boys standing outside the building across the street with their hands over their heads. Their buildings had been surrounded and knocked down, too. They brought out one of our officers on a door. It looked like his legs were practically shot off. He was covered with a blanket. I happened to remember seeing an arm sticking out of the ruins of our building. It was too late to go back, but I later heard it may have been my Assistant Scout Corbiel. I also heard that T/Sgt. Burnett was killed.

I thought my best buddy, Rippey, was killed, too, but I later found out that he made a miraculous escape. When the Jerries entered the building he was in, they threw grenades and he kept running from room to room. Finally, he opened a door and stepped forward only to find himself in a heap in the basement of the building. He groped around and found a pile of turnips. He buried himself with the turnips and stayed there for three days. I later heard that he got out and made it back to American lines.

My platoon Sergeant, S/Sgt. Perkins, made it back and he was later commissioned 2nd Lt. My ex-platoon Sgt. Moseby made it back, too. Later I found out that a regiment was practically wiped out trying to take the town that my company tried to take. My company got further than the regiment did. It took two divisions, the 45th and another, to hold the ground my company had taken. So we didn't do so bad after all.

I was only on the front lines about a month, but when I was there things came so fast and furious that I have forgotten some of the engagements. I've written a few of them down, but I can only remember parts of others so I didn't mention them. Some were worse, some not so bad, but none of them was a picnic.

“P.O.W.”

After they had rounded up what was left of the company, the Germans started to line us up. A German soldier came over to the line of survivors and was looking for the guy that stole his watch when he was captured. He had a couple of German soldiers with him. He said if he didn't get his watch he would kill all of us.

Just about then, a German tank stopped next to us and the tank commander asked what was going on. The soldier told him someone stole his watch and he would execute us if he didn't get it back. The tank commander said, “Do you mean to tell me that this group of soldiers tried to do battle with my tank division? They deserve a better fate, send them to the rear without harm.”

After they rounded up the 20 or so men that were left, they started to march us out of town. We had only gone about 100 yards when we were caught in the middle of one of our own artillery barrages. We all dove for the nearest holes. The Jerries had emplacements dug all along the road; I headed for one of them. I dove into a hole and a Jerry guard landed on top of me. The shells were landing all around us. It must have lasted 15 minutes. Shrapnel got the Jerry on top of me, so thanks to him I came through another close one.

When the barrage ended, we started marching again. Dawn was starting to break and our P-40's came out that morning. All day long they would bomb and strafe the towns ahead of us. We passed through several towns that day. We would wait outside the town and watch our planes dive bomb it. When the bombing was through, we would start through the town. Flak got a few of our planes. It was really a spectacular sight. We spent the night in a small barn, and I finished up the last of my K-rations. The next day we started marching again and soon came to a small town where the Jerry command was located.

We were taken to a school building with a fence around the yard. We were taken out, one at a time, searched and questioned.

None of us told them anything, but they knew what outfit we were from, and where we had been. After that we started marching again; by now we were pretty hungry. We came to a large town on the Rhine River where the bridge had been blown out, so we crossed on barges attached to cables. They took us to a large barn and said we would stay there until we could get transportation to a prison camp. We stayed there about 3 days. Every morning they would give us a small chunk of bread for the day. During the day, they would take us back across the river and make us dig gun emplacements for them. Before they took us to where we were to dig, they would go out of their way to take us through a couple towns so the people could see the American prisoners. We called them propaganda walks. We didn't mind the people laughing and sneering at us, but we were hungry and our legs were about to give out.

All the Jerries that could speak English would ask us if we remembered when Roosevelt had said that "No American boy would set foot on foreign soil." And they asked us why we were fighting England's war. They said we had no business there.

After about one week there, we were marched to a railroad station and put on boxcars. There were close to 50 men on my car and there was only room for about 30. We had to take turns standing up. We had one pail in our car that was used for a toilet. We were in the car 7 days and the pail was filled up the first day. We had been given a slice of bread about 4 inches square for the first 2 days. They said we would get more food along the way, but we didn't so we made the bread last 2 days and went the other 5 days without. We were given a small chunk of raw hamburger meat during those other five days, but it only caused dysentery.

About the third day on the boxcar, our interpret, Newmeister, was shot through the head by a German guard and dumped along the side of the railroad tracks. The train moved about 15 miles a day. It stopped for air raids and a little bit of everything. We got water 2 times during the 7 days. I was beginning to get a taste of prison life.

We finally reached Stalag XII-A, Limburg, Germany. We were herded to a large tent with a muddy floor, and stood around hungry and weak. Finally, they took us and gave us a cold shower and took most of our clothes and gave us prisoner clothes. They took my rubber boots and gave me a pair of wooden shoes. Then they gave us a blanket about 3 & 1/2 feet square. Finally, they gave us a bowl of cold grass soup and gave us a place to sleep on the floor of the building. The building was so crowded, I could barely roll over.

I stayed at Stalag XII-A at Limburg about a week; later we found we were fed better there than at any other camp. For breakfast we had a cup of tea and a 3 inch slice of bread, and for supper we had a bowl of grass soup with potatoes in it, and each night we would get a part of a Red Cross parcel. Once a week a small candy bar was given out and we were allowed 3 cigarettes a day. Some of the boys traded off their clothes and jewelry for cigarettes or bread. I gave one of my sweaters for a pack of cigarettes. There was a P.X. in this camp and cigarettes were used as money. Everything was priced at so many cigarettes. Money was useless there.

When we were interrogated, the confidence man in Limburg told us to say we were cooks, butchers or bakers to make sure we didn't qualify for war work. We were told to try to get into a work camp because, according to the Geneva Convention, workers got extra rations. The confidence man that told us that was later executed for collaborating with the enemy. He was right about the rule but wrong on a lot of other things. However, the rule didn't hold true in my case. Limburg was the best camp as far as food and work.

After about a week in Limburg, a group of us were told we were to be transported to a labor camp where the food was better. We were taken to a railroad siding and loaded on boxcars. No heat, no windows, a few cracks in the boards to see out, and one small can for a toilet. When we were waiting on the siding, some stray bombs from an air raid hit the prison camp; we were told they hit the officer barracks.

We must have been on the siding about a day; we could see troop trains on the main line. Most of those cars were painted as International Red Cross cars, but we could see all the Germans on the trains. After about 5 days in the boxcars, most of the time on sidings, and living on one slice of bread a day, the hunger pangs changed to just a lump in my chest.

The weather was below freezing most of the time; everyone had numb legs, so we knew we couldn't last much longer. The train stopped in what seemed an open field, but in the field was a lone building which we were told was a hospital. As soon as we entered the hospital we were told to form lines. The line on one side was to get cold showers and the other line hot showers. We all had severe frostbite. I believe I was in the line getting hot showers, and it turned out to be the right line, as it saved my legs. A majority of the guys in the other line had their legs amputated.

We were then sent into other rooms where there were German doctors; one of them was injecting gasoline into the blood stream of some of the guys. Other doctors were doing experiments. I went into another room, but I do not remember what they did to me. There was a blank period from that time to Christmas Eve that I could never account for.

I pick up in Stalag 4-C on Christmas Eve. I recall receiving a Red Cross parcel during the day on Christmas Eve. We decided to have some kind of Christmas Eve service; we passed the word around and got permission to use an empty tent. About a dozen of us gathered together in the tent, and we asked for a volunteer to lead us. Finally, a very young soldier stood up and said he would. The prayer was for the safety and comfort for our families and loved ones back home. Not one prayer was said to save us or protect us. It seemed as though we all knew we had nothing to fear; and we had an extreme feeling of security and well-being. It was all ad-libbed, but it seemed he was saying our thoughts. It was the most moving religious experience I ever had. I only wish I could find words to describe it. The worst was yet to come as far as my P.O.W. life, but I don't recall ever being afraid.

After a few more days at 4-C, about 200 of us were sent via boxcar and truck to a small town in Sudetenland near the Elbe River. The main street looked like a Christmas card and especially with all the blue street lights for blackout purposes.

Our building was a two story building sitting all alone in a field a couple hundred yards from the town. We were on the main road leading to Dresden, which was 30-40 miles east of us. The building had a tall fence around it. We were given one slice of bread in the morning, and 8 men shared a loaf of bread. We could take turns slicing the bread (black bread). The cutter had the last choice of pieces, so it would take quite some time to cut up the loaf. The loaf was about 12 inches long.

In the evening, we were given a bowl of rutabaga soup, mostly water. We also had a cup of tea in the morning. This was heavy workers' rations.

Our Lager Fuehrer was called "Scar Face". We asked the other guards what their names were and then we told them how the English would pronounce them. One was F-Face, one was Pri-Head, and there was good old Sh-Head. They would smile when we called them by their English names.

The guards were of the home guard. The home guards were too old for the army, so they were given jobs as prison guards. Near the end, our men were starving and dying. One day I was walking along beside a guard going to work. He said, "I would love to have you over to my house for dinner. We have very little food for ourselves." But the camp commander had to be the meanest man in Germany. If I saw him today, I would kill him.

Getting back to the first full day there; we were marched about 6 miles to an industrial type area which was all built into a mountainside except for a few smaller buildings and a final assembly area for bombers which was under camouflage netting. We had to climb the mountainside to get there. It took all the strength we had to get there. It was January; we climbed the mountain with wooden shoes with cloth straps. As it turned out, those wooden shoes insulated better in the snow than leather or rubber would have.

By the time we got there the first day, we were completely exhausted. We couldn't see how we could possibly work all day and still expect to walk home to camp at night. Most of us made it, but I don't know how.

About the third or fourth day, I recall returning to camp and there was one steep hill on the road just before camp. I was completely exhausted and had absolutely no strength to climb that hill. I raised my head and said, "God, I can't make that hill. If you're going up, please take me with you." I immediately felt a sensation in my muscles and my legs started moving like I was a robot powered by a motor. Needless to say, we held hands the next few months.

Our job was to dynamite tunnels inside the mountain; spurs were made off the main tunnels which would open up into large rooms where the German engineers and scientists would work. We would load the rocks after the blast into small mining trucks on tracks that led outside, to be dumped over a cliff. We had to be very careful not to be cut on anything; our blood was getting thin and would not clot.

One time, I was pushing a cart and I saw when I came to the opening that a German bomber was being brought out of a building and under the netting for some final fitting. The tail section was hanging over the tracks. One of the guys with me gave the cart a big push and we quickly took off inside the tunnel. We went into one of the spur tunnels that was under construction. I don't know whether they knew where we were, but a short time later the mouth of the tunnel was blasted closed. The rocks filled the openings. We crawled up the pile on the inside and managed to squeeze through a small opening at the top. After getting out, we mingled with the rest until quitting time, then made the long walk back to camp.

The weather was getting a little warmer. The winter had been the worst in Germany that year. We had several tries to escape from the camp, but none were successful. We were too far from our lines, and we were too weak to travel. The camp Commander told us all were killed after recapture.

I had two friends in camp that I trusted. Frank Kirk of Chicago, and Tony Stinziano from Wickliffe, Ohio near my home. Tony got up for roll call one morning and stood across from me in the line. I looked at his eyes and they were glazed; he was dead on his feet. I screamed and swore at him to try to bring him back. I told him he promised me a spaghetti dinner when we got home. His expression was absolutely blank. When roll call was made, he did not step forward. He was actually dead on his feet.

Tony was taken to a nearby hospital, never to be seen again. In fact, there was no hospital. I was given his belongings to take home to his family. Tony only had his wallet with pictures of his family. He willed to me some food he had hidden.

Frank Kirk from Chicago was always wheeling and dealing, trading for food. He would share any food he got with me. I gave him my watch that my mother gave me before going overseas. He traded it for food enough for a whole meal, the best meal I ever had.

Every morning going to work Frank and I would sing "Thanks for the Memories". The other guys were so taken by the song that we had to sing the same song on the way to work every day.

Near the end of the war, Frank's eyes were glazed and I'm afraid the same thing happened to him as what happened to Tony.

On Sunday, which was our day off, I decided to read the Bible. I was getting weak and needed help. I just happened to open it to the 23rd Psalm. It seemed to fit my problems; I had been walking in the shadow of death. My nostrils were enlarged and I had an extreme sense of smell. I could smell fresh water for quite a distance. My sense of smell was so strong I could smell things in the fields that I knew were edible. My mind became very sharp, and I seemed to know where to go on my way to American lines.

The war was coming to an end. Dresden had been bombed by American planes. It was a daylight raid. I was working outside on the railroad bed in the valley when we heard an air raid signal. We were put into a shed. I looked out the window and saw bombers flying very high almost from horizon to horizon. They filled the sky; I never saw so many planes in one group. Dresden was about 30 miles east of us; we heard the rumble of bombs for a long time. The guards told us the English and Americans had demolished Dresden. Dresden was a cultural city and not involved with heavy manufacturing. I later found it was the worst bombing in history.

About two days later, the people that evacuated Dresden were coming by on the main road, just outside the P.O.W. camp. They had wagons loaded with family and furniture. Their faces were emotionless. They drove their horses practically non-stop. Many horses dropped dead in the front of our camp. The people in town were fighting to get the meat of the horses. We asked the guards if they could get some for our soup. We did get a horse's head and I asked the cook for a piece of meat. He gave me a horse's eye. I decided to bake it inside our coal stove. I set it on a ledge in the oven. It smelled good while it was cooking but when I tried to eat it I could only make a dent in it, so I sold it to another guy for a cigarette.

One morning the camp commander lined us up for roll call and made us an offer. If we would join the German Army, we would get warm clothes and all we could eat. He said those who wanted to join should step forward. Not one man stepped forward. He ranted and raved and told us the war was coming to an end and German headquarters had sent orders to execute all P.O.W.'s. We were taken outside the barracks and lined up in front of a firing squad. While he was talking, we heard a noise of low flying airplanes. It didn't take long for them to open up on us and the town next to us. Some P.O.W.'s ran back inside the barracks. One of the guards opened up the gate to run to his house in town. I followed him out and ran to the town near the camp. The others ran to the barracks for cover. I got to town and went behind the buildings for cover.

“The Road Home”

I saw some planes coming in from the south. The way the Americans would strafe a town was to come out of the sun, drop their bombs and open up with machine guns. These were Russian planes and they were coming in real low from both sides, right at each other. When they got close they would tilt their wings sideways to avoid a collision. They were nuts. Bullets were hitting all around me. They finally moved on to other targets and I made my way to the other side of town, found an empty building and spent the night there.

I came out the next morning and looked around to figure my next move. I started walking away from town and saw a German woman setting up a table in her backyard. She waved me over. Two political prisoners saw her and headed that way. She set the table and went back to the house. It didn't take long for me to finish my meal but the two political prisoners just pecked at their food and only ate a little bit of each thing. I looked in their eyes and they looked wild. They were completely out of it. I'm sure their minds were going real fast.

Just after the meal I heard some tanks coming down the road. They were Russian tanks. So, now I have another decision to make. Our camp commander had told us that Germany had lost the war, but there would now be a war between Russia and America because there could be no two great powers. The Russians would now be our enemies.

I thought. The Russia soldiers I came across would stick up for us. One time I was working on a railroad bed. Our guards were on our backs because we worked very slow. A group of Russian prisoners from an Air Force camp had hollered at the guards to take it easy on us. They told them that in America all is done with machinery, they don't do hard work. Another time we were walking to work when a truck came by full of potatoes and Russians on the back. They threw potatoes off the truck to us even though our guards were shooting at them.

(I had offered a cigarette to one of them. He opened the packet of cigarette papers, threw the papers on the ground, and rolled his cigarettes with the cover for the papers.)

After thinking it over, I decided to try to hitch a ride on one of those Russian tanks. So, I went down to the road and started thumbing a ride. One tank finally stopped and called me over. One Russian popped out of the tank and lifted me on the back of the tank. He gave me a cigarette. Then another Russian popped out of the tank turret and gave me some candy. I knew now that the Russians were my friends.

I told them I was going to the American lines. I rode the tank until we came across a road; they had to make a turn on the road so they left me off about a mile from the intersection and told me which way to go to the American lines. It was getting late in the day; I was still hungry, tired and weak. We had just passed a bombed out German convoy of trucks, with no one around, so I walked back to the trucks, and was looking for food and a place to sleep. I had an extreme sense of smell at the time. I smelled honey on one of the trucks, so I managed to climb on the truck. There were barrels full of honey. I opened one and ate until I got my fill. It was early spring and warm, so I laid on the grass until morning. I had diarrhea in the morning, but the honey made me feel stronger. It was probably the best move I made.

I walked up to the intersection hoping I could get a ride in the direction I was headed. A French couple came along and I asked for a ride. They were driving a horse-driven wagon. They came from Dresden and were trying to get back to France, which was their home. They were an acrobatic troupe in Dresden when the bombs hit. At first they hesitated for fear they would be caught with a prisoner. I told them I would hide under the hay in the wagon. They finally agreed and I was on my way again.

“Prague”

We finally got to the Elbe River and a bridge leading to Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia. We were stopped and they found me under the hay. I told them I was an American looking for the American lines. They allowed me to cross, but not the French couple.

I met with another escapee, an American prisoner from another camp. There were empty trucks all around, so we decided to borrow one and cross the bridge to Prague. It happened to be a maintenance truck. As we crossed the river on the bridge, we looked down and saw Germans being strapped to barges. Oil was poured over them and they were burnt alive.

When we got to the other side of the river, we were in Prague. The people in Prague were revolting that day against the Germans who had occupied the city during the war. The people were celebrating like New Year's Eve. They lined the walks on both sides of the very wide street. We kind of got caught up in the spirit. We decided to see what was in the truck that we could throw out as souvenirs. I found a bin of locks, so I sat on the tailgate throwing out locks to the people along the way. I don't recall if there were keys with them or not, but the people were the happiest bunch of people I have ever seen. When I ran out of locks, I looked in the back of the truck to see what was there and found 3 or 4 bags full of American money which was probably confiscated from Americans. I would bring up one bag at a time and throw the money to the people lining the walks until all the money was gone. (I did have afterthoughts later, but I had no regrets. The people were wonderful.)

I started asking people where the American lines were. They said go to the big building at the end of the street, they would know. It was the capitol building. The other guy stayed in the truck and I walked up the steps to the rotunda. I was asked what I was there for. I told them I was an American and trying to find the American lines. He took me down the long hall to the President's office. I was met by the President and told him I was looking for the American lines.

He told me they were in Pilsen, but I should not try to get there because there was a tank battle going on along the main road. He said I could stay in his office until morning when we could get more information. He told me I should be hospitalized, I was mostly skin and bones. He got me some food, and he told me again he would take me to the hospital. He said he would like to show me what the Germans did to the women in a nearby town. I believe the town was Ladice (?) about 30 miles from the capital. He said the Germans bulldozed all the buildings to the ground. They executed most of the men, and many of the women had their breasts removed and other tortures. The children that looked like Germans were taken and given to German families to be raised as Germans. The injured women were brought to the hospital in Prague and the President wanted me to go to the hospital with him, so he could show me what they had done to the women.

I believe the reason he wanted me to see what happened to the women was because he was sure I saw the Czech people burning the Germans on the barges and he was embarrassed for what his people were doing. He kept apologizing for the way his people acted. He said he couldn't control them.

Morning finally came; I had slept a few hours in his office. The President checked with his staff to see if the tank battle was over. He said very little battle was going on between Prague and Pilsen. So, I told him I would get in the truck and head for Pilsen. I left his office and went through the rotunda and there were women setting up tables and they were full of Christmas pastries. They had heard the rumor that an American was talking to the President in his office, and it got blown out of proportion. They thought the Americans were going to occupy Prague, which they preferred to Russian rule. I had hoped the Americans would occupy Prague, but it turned out to be the Russians who did. The Czechs were such happy people when they got rid of the Germans, and now they are under Russian rule.

“Back to the American Lines”

I found the truck outside the capitol building, and the other American sleeping in it. I told him we were only 30 or 40 miles from Pilsen where we would find the Americans.

The tank battle was slowing down; there was still a little action but nothing too close to us. We got about one mile from the American troops, when a jeep came out to see who we were. We said we were coming from a German prison camp. He looked at us, and said, “Who did this to you?” I told him a camp near Kaemnitz. The Lieutenant and the Sergeant took off beyond the demilitarized lines. I hope they didn’t get themselves messed up. We were taken about 3 miles behind the front lines, and came to a company of men camping there. The first thing they did was take us to their mess hall. We were given milk and white bread. I thought the milk was egg nog and the white bread was angel food cake.

P.O.W.’s were coming in every once in a while. There was another river parallel to the road. There were P.O.W.’s walking along the road, and for some unknown reason I saw 6 of them walk right into the river and drown themselves.

I was starting to get confused myself. My mind was so clear prior to reaching the American lines, now I was not sure who I was – a P.O.W. or a soldier. We were taken to a building where they gave us food and canned food to take with us. We were taken by truck to the airport, and redistribution center at Regensburg, Germany.

We had our choice of getting fed or going to the delousing chamber. The lice had been driving me crazy. They were everywhere there was hair on my body. One of the best feelings I’ve ever had was getting rid of the lice. I went to the chow line and got a meal. Then I decided to lay down and sleep for awhile on the ground. There was very little meat on my bones and they would get very sore if they bumped other bones in my legs. I tried lying on my back, but there were bones there, too.

“Ike”

I was sent over to the Supply Sergeant to get American clothes. I had to get in a line and wait. While I was standing in line, I saw a plane coming in. It had General Eisenhower's stars on it – I was waiting in line to get an Eisenhower jacket. General Eisenhower got into a jeep and he had a truck following him. It had a movie-camera on the top of the cab. They were driving along a road that was raised above the path I was on leading to the supply house. The jeep and truck stopped right above me. General Eisenhower got out and came down the slope where I was standing. After talking to a couple other guys, he came over to me and asked what outfit I was with. I told him General Patch. He said, “Oh yes, you men had some tough battles.” He asked me did I get fed? I said, “Yes, but how come we always get boiled, unseasoned chicken?” He said the people running the mess hall were told to feed you that because it was the easiest thing to digest in your condition.

General Eisenhower told me I should be hospitalized until I got stronger. I told him I wanted to go home. He said if I let his aide take me to a doctor, and he says I can travel, he would see to it that I'd get the next ship home. I agreed, but I told him I wanted to get my jacket first. He smiled and said, “O.K.”

I also told him he should shut down the Red Cross donut stand. The guys were eating donuts until their stomachs burst. He sent a Lieutenant right away to close it, but it had already closed down.

General Eisenhower raised his hand to salute me, and I stood there in a slump. Finally, I realized I was standing in front of the highest ranking officer in the Army. So I tried to straighten up to salute him. He gave me the big salute and gave that famous Eisenhower smile. His complexion was so smooth, I had pictured him older, until he took off his hat. He was mostly bald.

“Coming Home”

Making me stand at attention, woke me up to the fact that I was still a soldier. It took out a lot of the fog in my mind. I went back to my tent after getting my new clothes, and saw a guy in the tent next to mine. He had hung himself on the ridge pole. So I got in the chow line, ate my lunch, then went over and told them at camp headquarters that a guy had hung himself.

I decided to take a walk to the Airport Terminal when I heard someone call my name. It was Sergeant Moseby; he came over and held me in his arms and cried like a baby. He had thought he lost his whole company. I remembered one night during combat, we were pinned down on a hill overlooking a town with a guard tower on one end. We were completely out of food. Without anyone knowing it, Sgt. Moseby snuck down to the town and managed somehow to bring back enough food for all of us. From that time on, there was nothing we wouldn't do for him.

Well, I finally got to the air terminal and I heard music for the first time in 6 months or more coming from the terminal speakers. It was “Chiribiribin” by Harry James. Tears came to my eyes; it was the first time I could cry in 6 months. They started playing more music and I got very confused again. The orchestra and violins sounded O.K., but the songs I had never heard before. Finally, I realized the songs I remembered were now out of style and a whole new range of songs were now popular. While in the P.O.W. camp, we had no music or radio, no contact at all with the outside world, no letters either.

I got a C-47 to Camp Lucky Strike; it had previously been used for paratroopers. We got on the plane, had boxes to sit on, and bullet holes to see out. We flew in a flight with three C-47's. We finally got up and it seemed O.K. until we got to some mountains. The planes were hitting an updraft and we would look out the bullet holes and watch our wings flap, and see other planes bouncing around. I should have gone with Eisenhower.

We finally landed at Camp Lucky Strike, at the port of Le Havre, France. We had a meal and were given a tent to use until our names were called for shipping home. We were given back-pay, and a lot of guys were playing cards or dice. I have never seen so much money on one table. I got to talking to one of the card players and he wanted me to go to a supply tent and buy some candy bars. They were \$10.00 each. (Some Supply Sergeant was making a killing.) Every time he bought candy bars, he would buy two for me.

My name was called for shipping home – the first ship out! I got my duffel bag and headed for the gangplank. I looked at the steep gangplank and tried to go up. I was still too weak to climb with the bag. I stood there for a while trying to figure out how to get up the gangplank when a Captain came by and asked what was wrong. I told him, “I can’t go home. I can’t climb the gangplank.”

The Captain took my duffel bag and threw it over his shoulder, grabbed my arm and said, “Come on, soldier, you’re going home.”

We docked at New York and I went to Camp Kilmore and got my leave papers and train fare home.

I arrived in Cleveland and took a taxi to my home. When I got home, my mother was standing on the porch screaming, “It’s Clarence. It’s Clarence.”

“Christmas Story”

We were behind enemy lines. It was cold with a lot of snow on the ground. It was in the mountains, and we were surrounded with very tall pine trees.

It was getting dark so we decided to bed down for the night. We dug trenches in the snow and used raincoats and blankets for warmth. It was before Christmas, about November. I woke up in the morning and looked up at the tall pines. They were covered with tinsel like a Christmas tree. I was very cold. The first thing I thought was that I'd died and gone to heaven. It would be impossible for anyone to decorate those tall pine trees with tinsel. Then I thought, if I'm dead how come I'm still cold.

This mystery was never cleared up until 30 years later, when I was watching a movie on T.V. It was explaining how the British Air Corps devised a method to throw off enemy radar by cutting up thin strips of metal, loading it on the lead plane, and dropping it to throw off the radar. Most of it landed in the big trees. A confusing incident solved.

“Tony”

When Tony died, I was given his wallet to take to his family. I waited a month then told his family he died.

An Army Officer came to my home and said I could be court-martialed for not notifying the Army first. I told him the details and I signed his death certificate.

Most of our casualties are considered “M.I.A.”