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AN AMERICAN SLAVE IN NAZI GERMANY
My story of combat, capture, and slave labor
John W. Reinfenrath, B Company 423 Infantry 106th Infantry Division

John was captured during the Battle of the Bulge, walked and rode in a boxcar to Stalag 9B. Then sent to the Buchanwald complex at Berga am Elster. Here he and 348 other American Soldiers captured by the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge were forced to dig tunnels with other slave labors.

This is John's story exactly as written by him on March 26, 1997. Only changes made were spelling. We have taken the liberty to add footnotes to further explain or clarify his story. On 8 February 1945 these American soldiers became slave laborers and were sent to dig tunnels on the Elster River. Dr. Michael G. Bard first brought Berga to the world's attention in his book "Forgotten Victims". We provide this material in order for more Americans to understand some of the terror experienced by our soldiers under the control of the Germans during World War II.

Pete House, Editor
Stalag 9A, 9B, 13B, and Berga am Elster Association Press

PREFACE

The following narrative of being captured and held as a prisoner of war in Germany is based on my memory which has been refreshed by reading letters written from a hospital bed in England. My family saved all of the letters that I wrote. I had a lot of time to think and write while I was recuperating in an isolation ward in a room by myself for several weeks.

I realize that my incarceration was short compared to others but it was my experience and very personal. I have refrained from reading the writings of my fellow POWs because I did not want to taint my recollections with those of others.

The things that I recall may well differ from what others recall. Not everyone had exactly the same experiences or saw the same events in the same manner. Also our memories can be flawed.

I was a private in B Company, 423rd Regiment, 106th Infantry Division.

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March 26, 1997
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PULL OFF LINE, CAPTURE, AND BAD ORB

December 18, 1944 dawned foggy and dreary.[1] Our communications phone lines were not secure and messages were sent by runners to the various areas.[2] We got word in the light machine gun[3] section about 8:00 am that we were to pull off the ridge that we were on and that our company was to fight a rear guard action.[4]

We had three machine gun emplacements and the sergeant put me out at the far machine gun on guard in the fog. He said he wanted some one out there he could count on. I think he must have appealed to my ego because he didn't know how scared I was. That was the longest and loneliest time that I had experienced so far in my Army life. The fog was so thick that at times I could see no more that three feet, beyond which everything was a gray white. The muffled silence played tricks on my nerves. I don't know how long I was there. It seemed hours before someone came and said "We are moving out".

We were told to take only combat packs[5] because we would be moving fast and to leave everything else behind. It was not until about four o'clock in the afternoon that we finally left the ridge. A patrol was left behind to blow up the bunkers and set fire to the things that would burn. We never did fight a rear guard action because as we learned later, we had been cut off way behind our lines.[6]

We joined up with others of our regiment who had pulled out earlier and were waiting at a crossroad on the ridge. One company[7] of soldiers resting there looked utterly exhausted. We were told they had been fighting to hold another crossroad.[8]

Four of us and a non-com[9] were sent down the road about 200 yards to dig foxholes next to one of cannon company's guns.[10] We dug down about a foot and a half and hit bedrock.[11] We stood around in the foggy dreary weather wondering what next. From our left came some of our men marching a dozen or so German prisoners. Most of them looked to be only about 13 or 14 years old.

1 The 106th Infantry Division relieved the 2nd Infantry Division in the Ardennes on 11 December 1944. The Germans began the Battle of the Bulge 0530 hours 16 December 1944.

2 At this time radios were not too reliable so Army field phones were the choice of communication. Telephone wires were everywhere. We were certain that many of our lines were being listened to by the Germans or civilians still in the area.

3 30 cal. Browning machine gun

4 This means that you stay and fight while the rest of your unit moves back. A very dangerous position.

5 The blankets and shelter half (tent) were left behind. Normally this material was to be transported at a later time. In this case John probably never saw his again.

6 On the 18th both 422 and 423 Infantry Regiments were ordered to fight back through Schoenberg where we were to meet the 7th Armored Division. The 7th Armored Division never arrived and we ran out of ammo. We were not able to fight our way back

to Schoenberg

7 A rifle company had around 250 men.

8 It is to be remembered that the German offense began two days earlier. Meals were irregular if any, and normal sleep non-existent

9 Non commissioner officer such as a corporal or sergeant.

10 A smaller version of the 105 mm howitzer used by the field artillery.

11 The procedure was whenever you stopped you set up your weapon and began digging a hole to protect you from enemy fire. This hole was named after the holes foxes dug for protection. It was supposed to be deep enough so you could stand up.

Suddenly the men from cannon company hitched up their gun to their weapons carrier and took off leaving their trailer behind. [12] They did take the three rounds of ammunition that they had left. We waited a while longer and then checked the trailer to see if we could find something to eat. There were some large cans of rations and the one that we opened had peaches in it which we proceeded to eat. We had not eaten all day.

A jeep came from the crossroad area to our right and went on down the road. Shortly it came speeding back and passed us without stopping. Again we stood around for a while waiting for someone to tell us what to do. The non-com with us decided to find out what was going on. He came running back to say "They are moving out". We hurried back to our company.

Our B Company commander[13] started us down the road but we did not get very far when we were halted and told that we were still to fight a rear guard action. When we finally did get to march on we passed our vehicles parked at the side of the road. We learned that our lead jeep had gotten stuck in the stream crossing in the steep canyon below us. It was getting dark and the plan was to get it out the next morning. We went on down the road to the crossing and were then dispersed up the steep hill to our right. By this time it was dark. We were sent to dig foxholes in the forest. Another GI and myself began a two man hole. Then we were told that our company was supposed to be on the other side of the road. So we went down, crossed the stream and up that hill. Foxholes were being dug there and someone said "What in the hell are you doing over here. You belong on the other side." So back we went to begin digging in our foxhole again.

Every time that it was my turn to dig, it didn't seem that the hole was any deeper. When dawn began to break and it got light enough to see we discovered that we hand an "L" shaped hole. We were starting at the same corner but going 90 degrees from each other. It was pitch dark when we started to dig. My leg of the foxhole was about three times as deep as the other and fortunately facing the right direction. My partner was not very anxious to dig. I remembered that in basic training we were told that no matter how tired you were, it was so very important to dig one and fast.

With daylight came the shelling of our positions by the Germans. I was digging at the time and flopped down in the hole which was about three feet deep. I no sooner stretched out then my partner lit on top of me. I didn't object. When the shelling was over I looked back and about 100 feet behind us our first sergeant was covering up a GI

with his sleeping bag and said "He won't be needing this anymore." He had been too tired to dig.

All of a sudden our own men came running up the hill from below us and passing us. We joined them but then our officers got us turned and back to where we were. This was after the second shelling during which my partner was digging. He flopped down and I figured it was my turn to land on top of him. No sooner that I did that someone else landed on top of me. There we were stacked three deep.

12 The weapons carrier was a Army pick-up four wheel drive truck made by Dodge.

13 Normally a Captain.

When the third shelling began, our officers pulled us pack as the Germans shelled the hill starting at the bottom and methodically moving the barrage up the hill. We were told to charge across a road in the trees. I was carrying a canister of machine gun ammunition even though I didn't know where the light machine guns were.

I followed a first lieutenant and a sergeant who had seen duty in the Aleutian Islands, thinking that they were capable men. We went around a bush, across the road into some brush and trees. We ran into clearings several times where we drew fire, hit the dirt and changed directions. We were separated from the rest of our company. We came across a medic who had a wounded man with him. He had a wound in his right buttock, was in shock but could walk.

We came to a road and had to stop. There were tracer bullets[14] flying up the road and we found ourselves in a triangle of fire. There was mortar fire on one leg of the triangle, we could hear burp guns[15] on one leg and the road was the third leg. The firing stopped and the medic with the red cross on his helmet was elected to cross the road to the edge of the clearing and wave a white handkerchief.[16]

If we had not stopped because of the firing, I could not have gone on. All of the running had brought on an attack of asthma. I had trouble with exertional asthma in basic training. Our company commander tried to have me discharged but was not able to do so because I never had a hospital record of it. I did not ship out with the rest of my buddies as replacements but was sent to Camp Blanding, Florida and was told would never leave the continental United States. While we waited in the triangle I was able to settle down and breathe normally. It was too late but I realized that I had no business trying to be a foot soldier. With an asthmatic attack my feet acted like they belonged to someone else, my fingers would draw and I couldn't talk right. I was a liability at that point.

We ditched our rifles and followed the medic to the edge of the forest. We looked out over a large valley and could see artillery fire back and forth from the hills on each side.[17] Like seeing a movie we could see men in the distance jump a fence and run across the valley to be followed by another group. They were too far away for us to tell if they were Americans or Germans.

We stood at the edge of the forest but no one seemed to see us or want us. Finally some soldiers came out of the woods to our right and finally beckoned us to come down to them. As we got closer we saw that they were Americans. They were from our second

battalion.[18] The major who was with them wasn't too pleased with us especially our lieutenant. We went back and got our rifles. The lieutenant found out that as of then he was B company commander and our battalion was down to company size.

14 Every third or forth bullet had a material that burned in flight so you could see or trace its flight.

15 The German machine guns fired so fast that they sounded like a burp hence the name.

16 I wonder where the white handkerchief came from. We were all supposed to have olive drab colored handkerchiefs.

17 It couldn't been my battery because by this time we only had three rounds.

18 An Infantry Regiment had three Battalions. Each battalion had three rifle companies and one heavy weapons company.

I was reunited with my company first sergeant who put me to work digging a foxhole for the battalion command post. I was down about three feet when a fire fight started.[19] I could hear bullets cracking over my head. I looked out once and saw the first sergeant beginning to dig his own fox hole very slowly and methodically. I guess that he thought it was to late to hurry. Then someone yelled "stop firing, you are shooting your own men". Our men were being forced up the hill from below. The attack stopped and shortly thereafter we got orders to break up our weapons and surrender. think it was about 4:00 p.m. This was December 19, 1944.[20]

We gathered on a hillside clearing in the forest confronted by German soldiers dressed in camouflage suits. As we knelt and sat on our heels, a flood of anxious fears filled my mind. First was will we be shot? While we were waiting I decided I had better eat the chocolate ration bar[21] for fear it would be taken from me.

We were marched away to join other prisoners being held at a church and churchyard with a low fence around it and a grave yard. There was not room for everyone in the church and it was cold and snowy outside. It was a very cold night with no blankets and only the clothes on our backs. I had on shorts, t-shirt, long johns, wool pants and shirt, wool sweater, field jacket and helmet and helmet liner. Because of the fear of exertional asthma I left the extra weight of overcoat and overshoes behind.

On the 20th we were lined out in a column and marched with other prisoners joining us. We were on a road that was in rolling open country. I remember passing an American tank with a dead soldier hanging half way out.[22] We passed a dead American every now and then. Some were without shoes. They probably had been taken by a German soldier because they were better than his. As we through the open country as far as I could see ahead and behind was the column of prisoners.[23] We were marched all day without food or water. At one rest we were at the edge off a field of turnips. I dug up several, put some in my pocket and peeled and ate one.

At the end of the day we were quartered in a large empty warehouse at the town of Gerolstein. We spent another cold night on a hard concrete floor. We were each given two packets of hardtack and five of us had to share a can of cheese.

On the 21st we were marched through Gerolstein to the rail yard where we were put in box cars.[24] The town was in shambles from Allied bombings. Paths were bulldozed through the rubble in the streets. At a stone bridge over a stream a German was filming the long line of prisoners. Civilians were watching us and if looks could kill, we would all have been dead.

19 This is the term used when opposing troops shoot at each other. Not a picnic!

20 All the Americans in this pocket surrendered this day.

21 This ration called a "D" ration was supposed to have 1/3 of the daily calories needed. They were very hard. And not supposed to melt in the desert.

22 I remember passing an M-8 armored car from our recon unit with an American half hanging over the side on the 19th. Could this have been the same man?

23 Remember the 106th Infantry Division lost two complete combat teams of over 7,000 men and the 28th Infantry Division lost her 110°h Combat team.

24 Apparently the town of Gerolstein was a major staging area for German troops being brought up to the front. So they walked American prisoners back and loaded them on the same trains for the trip east.

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60 of us were herded into a box car meant to hold 40 men or eight horses.[25] We were locked in to begin a journey that lasted seven days. Our box car had straw on the floor and as I recall did not appear to have had any horses before us.[26] There was a small rectangular opening high up on each side near the end of the car. Each had a door that swung down and barbed wire over the outside. There was no glass in them.

We soon found out that it was crowed and we could all sit down at the same time only if we pulled our knees up under our chins. This position became uncomfortable and you had to stretch you legs which posed problems. We had all suffered from frostbit of various degrees. In the daytime feet would swell and ache. So shoes would come off. At night not everyone could get their shoes back on. At night in their sleep someone would be going to the wooden box that served as our latrine and step on some ones toe. Toes were sore as boils and some had open sores. I heard more new cuss words that I ever thought existed.

In addition to the wooden box with straw we had a couple of tin cans to serve our calls of nature. The wooden box was emptied once each day when we were out of the cars for a few minutes. The cans had to be emptied more often. The only way this was done was to attempt to pour the contents out the small openings in either end of the box car. This was not easily done and pity the guy sitting under the opening. Thus the guy under the window said "let me do it".

The hardtack and cheese that we got before the train ride began was to last us for three days. Evidently we were to reach our destination in that time but it did not work out that way. Thus we were hungry. We had to guard our food or else someone might steal it. How someone could move around at night in that tangled mass of legs and sore feet

without being detected is a mystery to me. We did get a part of a loaf of bread one day, a little margarine and a kind of molasses.

Christmas Eve we were sitting in the railroad yards at Diez, Germany.[27] It was about dusk when the sirens began to wail mournfully. We had been there for a couple of days and learned in that time to recognize the first warning of aircraft approaching. Then a new sound which had to indicate a raid because at almost the same time we were shaken out of our lethargy by explosions. Before we had time to think about it we heard the whistle of bombs as they fell and held our breath. This yard was a target.[28]

With the blast of an explosion, it felt as though a giant had lifted our car about four feet and then let it drop. There was a momentary silence and then a scramble for our steel helmets. Conversation that moments before included cursing, food and sex turned to prayers. I have a vague memory of starting with an Act of Contrition, an Our Father etc. They were said aloud and all around me I heard praying.

25 Actually this limit was established during World War I by our own Quartermaster Corps. The box cars were called 40 & 8 which means they could only carry a maximum of 40 men or 8 horses. You may see one of these box cars at the Holocaust Museums in Washington DC and St. Petersburg, Florida.

26 The Germans still used horses to pull their cook carts and much of their artillery.

27 Diez is just west of Limburg. Many of us spent several days at the railroad yards at Limburg. The Germans were having a hard time keeping the tracks repaired and saving their engines from our fighter planes. The USAAF took Arial photos of the yards on Christmas Day. Looking at these photos one wonders how any Americans survived the bombing.

28 I think the scariest I have ever been was sitting in the locked box car and bombs dropping all around.

Those by the door pounded and called vainly to be let out. Events showed that we were probably safer in the cars than outside looking for cover. We heard that the doors had been blown off one of the box cars at the end of the train and eight Americans had run out only to be killed by the next bomb. Our car was hit by flying debris but no one was injured. We had a few loose boards in our car. It was a horrible experience to be locked in and bombed by our allies. When I looked out the little window I could see a gaping hole in the slate roof of a nearby building that had not been there before.[29]

Christmas Day found us hungry. I could not help but think of the Christmas dinners that our families would be having. For a short period of time black despair seized me and I wondered if I would ever eat again. A prayer to the Infant Jesus seemed to be answered by the distribution of some British Red Cross boxes on the basis of one box for each five men.[30]

Water was also a scarce item. It was given to us every other day. It had to be carried to each of the cars. Because most of had lost our equipment very little water

could be kept. By the time everyone had a drink there was little to save. Steel helmets in a moving box car are not good containers. Whenever we stopped there was an incessant plea for food and water.

We sat on railroad sidings more that we moved. The Germans had trouble getting engines to pull our cars and because of Allied bombings there was a constant need to repair track. We saw many concentration camp prisoners working to put the tracks back while we waited to move on. We sat in the yard at Diez for a couple of days. The wail of sirens and the sound of planes passing over brought silence in the car. We held our breath listening for the whistle of bombs. We were not bombed again. With a move to some other rail yard we heard different sirens.

At last we reached the town of Bad Orb which was our destination. It was night and we had to spend one more night locked in the box cars. We had arrived on December 27. The next morning we were called out of the box cars and lined up. We were stiff and sore from the lack of exercise and the cold. Every joint called out a protest at being made to move. The hope that we would get some food soon provided a reason to move.

We were marched through cobblestone streets past curious shoppers and out of town. We walked uphill on a winding road leaving the town behind. The town was rather picturesque and had some very nice homes. Most of the buildings were of stone and capped with slate shingles.

There was not a lot of travel on the road. Now and then we met a truck coming down the road. They were loaded with one or two airplane type engines. With this came the question Were we going to be put to work in a factory somewhere?" If so, there would be a danger of being bombed. The weather matched our mod or at least mine. It was one of those cold, damp, clammy overcast days that weigh so heavy on ones spirits.

29 The RAF target flare had been blown off target and the RAF accidentally bombed a building holding American Officers captured during the Bulge killing all of them.

30 Just like everything else food distribution was erratic if at all. No two Americans seem to get the same food.

At last we could see guard towers and barbed wire and knew we had reached our destination.[31] We passed through gates and past guards and in to the barbwire fenced area. The camp was not promising in looks. There seemed to be nothing growing and it looked cold and forbidding. We walked past wooden barracks and through more gates and guards. On the way we saw a variety of people. There were several different types of uniforms. We passed one group of blacks in British type uniforms and assumed they were British colonial troops.[32] Later we learned that there were French, Serbian and Russian prisoners.

We stopped and were lined up behind a large building, tired, hungry and cold. There we stood officers, non-corns and privates. We were then shuffled so that officers were in front, then non-corns in rank order with rest of us behind. The officers were taken first in small groups into the building. Then the non-corns and finally the rest of us. It was

late afternoon before we were finally all called in. As a buck private I was among the last. In the meantime we could do nothing more than to stand cold and shivering. Some of the men started to pass out and were taken inside. Some faked fainting but were not inside for very long.

There was a fence that was fastened to the building in front of us and seemed to put the front half of the building in the yard where we were. There were some Russian prisoners in a little room that was in our half of the yard. They had some sort of a stove and were boiling water and making some kind of tea. We begged for some. They had some scraps of bread which they started to hand to us. Soon there was a crowd at the windows which were broken and laced with barbed wire. Guards saw the commotion and chased everyone away and back into line. As soon as a guard was not looking back we would go. A mouth full of bread at that time seemed worth the risk.

Late in the afternoon I finally got inside the building and taken into a room where a German soldier sat at a table and had me empty my pockets and searched me. I had a billfold with pictures and the French occupation money which we had been paid and had no chance to spend. I also had a rosary, military missal, comb, small pen knife, pocket book, army pay book, wristwatch and a pedometer. I also had the army rifle cleaning tool. He looked everything over carefully and returned everything but the occupation currency. The young soldier very quickly handed back the rosary and missal with a smirk on his face. Even large pocket knives were given back to those who had them. My pedometer puzzled the German who searched me and I could not make him understand what it was. My search was over and there was no interrogation. I guess there was no need since our whole regiment had been captured. It was at this time I was registered with International Red Cross and given Stalag IX B dog tags.[33]

During the day as men were processed they were marched off somewhere else but those of us late in the day were left in the building. Soon some Russians brought us some food. The food was carried in wooden tubs. We had boiled potatoes and a soup which seemed to contain only some kind of greens. [34] It was hot and we ate it. It had the color of spinach but there the resemblance ended. I thought it looked like alfalfa.

31 Stalag 9B was at Wegscheide on top of a mountain several kilometers east of the mountain village of Bad Orb, GR.

32 John was right. They were black soldiers from Johannesburg captured in North Africa. Their duty in the camp was to take care of the food stuffs.

33 He is shown on the Provost Marshal list of men first registered at IXB.

34 This became vile stuff became known as grass soup. To me it looked like the tops of carrots.

There was plenty of it and we were hungry and thirsty. It filled stomachs that had been empty for a couple of days. Most of us came to the sorry conclusion that we should not have eaten so much of it. We found out that night that it acted like a very severe

purge, many times uncontrollable. For some that was a condition that was never remedied.

Those who had been able to hang on to their mess gear were lucky. The rest of us had to use our steel helmets or helmet liners for the soup.

We spent the first two nights in this building. Between trips to the latrine we sat around and tried to coax the green wood we were given to burn in the stove in the center of the room. It seemed to be made of brick and tile. The amount of heat that we got out of it was slight.[35]

The latrine was an outdoor open pit, half-heartedly enclosed on the sides and back with galvanized iron and no roof. There was an arrangement of poles along the front that reminded me of a corral fence leaning at about 45 degrees from the front of the pit toward the back. Very uncomfortable, breezy and precarious since the pit edge tended to slough off leaving your feet hanging. There were no disinfectants or deodorants.

We got more boiled potatoes and some of that awful soup of greens. About 5:00 in the afternoon we got a loaf of dark heavy bread to be shared among five men. As hungry as we were it was hard to eat. The night was spent in the same manner as the previous.

The third day at Bad Orb the routine for us in the building changed. The excelsior was taken out to be burned.36 Starting in the morning small groups of men were taken out periodically and did not return. We heard that they were being moved to other barracks. Late in the afternoon I left in a group that included Charles Carter.3' We were taken through several guarded gates to a bath house.

Our clothes were taken from us and we were told to take a shower. There was no soap or towels and no way of regulating the water. It was either scalding hot or ice cold and varied between the two. We got our clothes back. They had been de-loused.

While we waited for our clothes we talked to a French POW who spoke good English. He was the attendant for the shower room. He told us that he had been sent there after his third escape. Bad Orb up to this time that we had arrived had been used for prisoners that the Germans had trouble with or groups that they didn't like such as the Russians. Each nationality was segregated by barb wire fences. We also were fenced into our own compound.

From the bathhouse we were taken through more locked and guarded gates to our own fenced section of frame barracks. We were assigned to a small barracks.

35 It must have been either barracks 42, 42, or 43. These building had two rooms that held about 250 men each. For each heating stove one man a day could take out of the wood lot as much chopped wood as he could carry on one arm. And the wood was fresh cut evergreen very hard to burn.

36 For a mattress most bunks had a sack made from burlap stuffed with excelsior or dried weeds.

37 Pvt. Charles E. Carter, GN 26097, ASN 36958989, B Company, 423 Infantry, 106 Division

Carter and I got by one of the wooden double deck bunks. Those of Jewish faith were put in a separate barracks.[38]

The bunks had four corner posts to which were nailed boards about six inches wide at the top and about two feet above the floor. The long ones on the sides and shorter one at foot and head. Strips of wood were nailed lengthwise on the side boards. The strips were at the bottom edge of the side boards to support boards across as slats to hold the mattress. They were made to be single bunks and not very wide. The mattresses were of burlap stuffed with excelsior[39] as were the pillows.[40] They looked and were hard. The mattresses did not come quite up to the top of the side boards.

The barracks was divided into sections of bunks and Carter and I were in the West half. There was one common entrance from the south opening into a vestibule from which entry was made into each half of the barracks. The vestibule continued on back to a small room which had the only toilet in the building. There was also another small room which served as a wash room. There was only cold running water and it was not drinkable. The sink always seemed to be stopped up and the floor was cold damp concrete.

The toilet can best be described as a large inverted cast iron bowl-like funnel.[41] It emptied into a cesspool and was often plugged up by excelsior from the mattresses used as toilet paper. It was not a flush toilet. We were given some old shipping invoices to use as toilet paper. It may have had a seat on it at one time. To use it a board was laid across it and soon became dirty. The solution to that was for each man to have his own board. This toilet was used only at night. We were locked in at night. In the daytime we perched teetering on the rail at the slit trench outside. The floor around the toilet became messy from overflow and we put boards down to use as stepping stones.

Our half of the barracks had two stoves for which there was never enough fuel. Each day we would get a ration of wood and some bricks that looked like compressed coal but burned like wet sawdust.[42] The wood was also green. When the detail brought in the wood there would be an argument over its distribution between the two stoves. Before too long the slats from bunks that were not occupied found their way into the stoves, There were unused bunks because we doubled up in order to keep warm.[43]

The first night in our barracks there was no wood for the stoves. It was cold enough to see your breath inside. We still did not have blankets. Carter and I slit the burlap cover of the mattress on the top bunk and crawled in on top of the excelsior. It was crowded and cold and we got very little sleep. We slept with all our cloths on. The bunk was too narrow for us to lay on our backs at the same time. In fact we had to lay

38 Most of the American Jewish Soldiers were not separated until later.

39 Excelsior was a form of shredded wood quite often used in America to pack dishers.

40 I never saw any pillows. Many of the bunks had a metal or wood shelf at the end for the head.

41 In our barracks the inside toilet was simply a hole in the concrete slab. Eventually a carpenter built a sort of rack so you could sit while doing your business. And with 160 men using this single facility it did get dirty every night.

42 I was frequently on the fuel detail because I could hold more wood than most. I do not remember any fuel except the green wood.

43 Actually bunks and barracks did not stay vacant long because the Germans continued to bring in more American POWs.

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on our sides. Before too long we lost enough weight so that we could lay side by side on our backs.

The next day a guard took a detail of men to bring blankets back to the barracks. There was one for each man. Some were not whole blankets and some were thin cotton ones, Some were short but they were better than nothing. Carter got a blanket that was fairly heavy but mine was thin cotton. Carter and I continued to sleep together and covered with both blankets. We usually took off our pants and field jackets and put them on top of the blankets. Later we were given another blanket and used a thin one to cover the burlap mattress leaving us with three to cover up with.

We also got our first ration of fuel for the stoves on the same day as the blankets. It was soon used up and we quickly learned that it had to be conserved and used wisely. There were many arguments over the burning of the fuel and it was usually gone by 10:00 pm. Unused bunks had just enough slates left to support the mattresses.[44]

At first Carter and I had our bunk on the north wall but were able to move to bunks on the south wall. We were on the left side of a pair of windows about five feet high. It was warmer there with the sun from the south. All of the windows had barbed wire over them on the outside.

Each day soon took on the same basic pattern. We were awakened in the morning when a German guard came in about 7:30 and called out "Four men for coffee". It was their job to go down to the kitchen and carry up two wooden tubs with hot ersatz coffee.[45] Sometimes it tasted horrible and the only redeeming thing about was that it was hot. Some men did not even get up to drink any of it.

Then things began to stir in the barracks for the sun would usually come out and warm things up a bit. We had to fall out for head counts. There was nothing to do except for the few who would be on the fuel detail or to clean out the cesspool. When noontime came we would line up and go down to the kitchen for our daily ration of soup. The morning was spent in various ways. Some men would not stir out of their bunks until it was tome to get the soup. Some would build a fire in the stove if any wood was left from the night before. Some would play cards. Some would sit and argue. There was little reading matter.

Carter and I had some very long talks that covered a large variety of things. We talked about our home towns, our families, what we had done before going into the army

and as everyone else did of food. We talked about what we might do when we were free and home again. Carter was married and they had two children so his plans for the future centered around them.

Among my pictures in my billfold was one of my home in Cripple Creek. Carter liked some of the features of it and started drawing plans of the house he intended to build when he got back home. That kept our minds busy for many hours. The paper

44 The Germans got very uptight over burning anything but the wood issued as firewood. If they caught 'ou it was solitary. Or the barracks might not receive any wood for several days.

45 The Germans provided a hot drink in the morning and a different one with the nighttime bread issue. One was ersatz (imitation) coffee the other ersatz tea.

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that we used to write on was some of the old shipping invoices that had been given to us for toilet paper. They were blank on the back.

Bob Young[46] and Bob Walker[47] who was a medic shared the bunk on the other side of the windows and we spent a lot of time in talking with them. When we felt like talking about food there was a great exchange of ideas for meals, deserts, snacks and how to cook. There were other days when no one wanted to talk about food. To me it seemed that the most mentioned breakfast was hot cakes and syrup. My choice was the buckwheat pancakes that my mother made and at times I could almost taste them. still have a sheet of that paper with foods listed on back.

I spent some of my time with Clarence Lahr[48] trying to teach him to read. He had his 18th birthday while we were prisoners. He did not survive the march later when we were moved from the slave labor detail at Berga am Elster. He seemed to be intelligent enough. I still had the German phrase book we had been given and I used it as a text. It seemed that somewhere along the line he had not gotten the basic sounds of the vowels. He would memorize a word but wouldn't sound it out. He would use a word that he had memorized for a new word that looked to him like the memorized word. Se we worked at having him sound out words using the vowel sounds and I felt that we were making some progress.

During the day we were free to go into[49] any of the other barracks. Carter and stayed pretty much in our own barracks. it was cold outside and so we stayed in. Probably most of the visiting between barracks was to barter for food and cigarettes. Some bartering was done through the barbwire fence with Serbian prisoners next to us. They traded bread, potatoes and cigarettes for knives, watches and pens. Some were so addicted to smoking that they would trade food or anything else for a cigarette. believe that one GI in our barracks who kept trading his food for tobacco died of malnutrition. Some men tried smoking anything that had leaves such as the leaves found in our nightly tea. Some valuable items were traded for just a very few cigarettes. Soon there were specific individuals who assumed the role of bartering agents for those who did not want to be caught bartering with the Serbs etc. They would take a percentage of the food or cigarettes as their fee which resulted in many arguments. A typical trade might be a one hundred dollar watch for a few cigarettes.

At first our noon soup came from the Russian kitchen and it was that same soup of greens that we had gotten on the first two days. Sometimes potatoes would be cooked in the soup and sometimes we got them separately. The food was not clean and we would find sand and gravel in the bottom of whatever we ate our soup out of. In my case it was my steel helmet. Some of the potatoes would be half rotten. Some had been frozen by the way they tasted.

After a couple of weeks our own men were put in the kitchen that was in our compound to do the cooking for us.[50] We didn't have anymore of that greens soup. We

46 Can not identify Bob Young.

47 There is a Robert F. Walker of D Company, 422 Infantry, 106 Division

48 Clarence F. Lahr, GN 26586, B Company, 423 Infantry, 106 Division, died 8 April 1945.

49 I believe he meant in the American compound.

50 Our American Chief Man Of Confidence, Hans Kasten, was able to convince the Germans to replace the Russians with Americans. He also was able to get the greens replaced with cereals. The Germans did not understand us wanting cereals as they were cattle food in Germany.

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had potatoes and potatoes soup and sometimes oatmeal. According to the rules of International Red Cross the menu had to be written and posted by the kitchen door each day. If memory serves me correctly the amount of meat to be put in the soup each day was 3.5 grams per man. It was a rare occasion when you found a piece as large as your thumb nail. Even though it was horse meat it tasted good. Sometimes the soup was made of either turnips or some member of that family. They were almost always woody and pithy without much taste. Someone said that they were probably a beet raised for cattle food. It was a lucky day if you found a bone in your soup. It was never my good fortune to get a bone but those who did would clean them slick and gnaw on them for days. If the bone were held against the hot stove scorched, it was easier to gnaw on.

Afternoons did have the daily ration of bread to look forward to.[51] Each loaf of bread was to be divided among five men. We formed ourselves into groups of five with the same people to divide the bread. In order to save arguments we each had one of numbers from 1 to five which we kept. One day number one would cut the bread and number two would be the first to pick his ration. The cutter would draw the last. The next day number 2 would cut and be the last to get his bread. And so we progressed through the numbers.

Quite often we would have a little something extra to eat with the bread, There would be a little honey, a little jam or perhaps some sugar. The portion for each man would be less that a tablespoon full. Now and then there would be some hard cheese, about two bites. Sometimes we got a slice about a half inch in width from some liverwurst or sausage.

The bread was the heavy dark bread and it did not sit well on our stomachs. It was soggy and if we ate it just as it came in it had a tendency to produce diarrhea. We tried toasting it by holding against the sides and top of the stove. That seemed to work better but it produced gas and cramps. Finally I found out that if I did not toast it but chewed it a long time and got a lot of saliva with it that I got along with it okay. I made a sort of a ritual of my meal at night by slicing the bread into thin slices and spreading whatever extra was given to us on the slices, Sometimes Carter and I would make small sandwiches. I guess it made us feel that we had more to eat than we actually did. At times we could save some bread to eat with the morning coffee.

We had no dishes to eat out of unless our own individual mess gear had been saved. I had to use my steel helmet for my soup and also to wash in.[52] Many steel helmets had to be used as chamber pots in emergencies and then cleaned for soup. Some men used their helmet liners.[53] After the bartering began there appeared some tin cans and German mess kits. I had no spoon to eat my soup and carved one from a piece of pine. I had the misfortune to sit on it and break a piece out of the bowel. That meant carving another. This time I chose a piece of what I thought was maple and carved a very serviceable spoon. Then I carved a small wooden table knife. This carving also served to pass the time. Later the Germans gave us some combination

51 About 5 pm the daily bread was issued along with the ersatz tea or coffee. In the early days we received margarine and sausage, cheese, marmalade. Gradually the extras were reduced until they were stopped.

52 The first of us to arrive at Stalag IXB received a pot of some sort. I was lucky in receiving a small cooking pot with a bail and I still had my helmet and helmet liner.

53 Of course they had to cut or rip out the cloth straps.

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spoon and forks. [54] Each had a small handle and they were riveted together in such a manner that when unfolded, on one end was the spoon and the fork on the other end. There were not enough to go around and we had a drawing for them. I was one of the lucky ones.

Sanitation was very bad there and as I mentioned before the one toilet inside would overflow and there was no hot water. We were there for a while before we were given any soap. We each got a small piece of soap that looked like Lava Soap but did not have the same cleaning qualities. It was better than nothing. It was about a half inch thick, an inch and a half wide and two inches long. We also received on razor blade. Our "in charge man" told us to clean up as best we could and to act and look more like soldiers. The Germans with their military background respected you more if you acted like a soldier. 1 managed to shave once and must have borrowed a razor from someone to hold my razor blade. It was not easy to shave with cold water and soap that wouldn't lather.

In the 5th of January 1945 we were allowed to write a letter. I have that first letter which my folks saved for me They did not receive it until some time after I was liberated. I also have post cards written to my folks on January 16 and on February 6th.

In the card of February 6, I mentioned that we had gotten red cross boxes and that I had gotten part of one.[55] The first that my parents knew that I was a prisoner and not just missing in action was the receipt of one of the cards about the time I was liberated. As mentioned before, Clarence Lahr could not write and so I wrote his letters and cards for him.

There were two chaplains at Bad Orb with us. Father Hurley was the Catholic chaplain and I believe the Protestant chaplain was Reverend Black.[56]

In late January or February the Germans gave them use of part of a building for an office. I was detailed to get wood and build a fire in the office. That detail was short lived. I was sent as part of the 350 to Berga.[57] Father Hurley was allowed to say Mass in one of the buildings. It seemed to me that it was in a basement. I served Mass.[58] After dark some of us would gather in the end of our barracks and I would lead the praying of the rosary. From what I heard the chaplains were kept busy with men asking for religious instructions and information. Father Hurley didn't have time to hear confessions and give general absolution before each Mass. There was a German corporal who spoke English who came to Mass and from his actions I think he was Catholic. He was probably there also to keep an eye on us. He would also come into our barracks and told us how the war was going on.

54 It is my understanding that this issue was because of pressure from the International Red Cross. In my barracks we had a drawing for the few spoons and I received on.

55 At this time the Serb prisoners donated theirs to us. It resulted in one box for each four Americans. After liberation Red Cross boxes were found in parts of the camp and in the Town of Bad Orb. As far as 1 know each American was given two post card forms each week and two letter forms each month. 57 1~. Lt. Francis Hurley and 1st. Lt. Samuel Neel, Methodist.

57 This leads credence that not just trouble makers were sent to Berga.

58 The three large barracks, 41. 42. 43, did have basements. The Germans allowed us to remove the bunks from 41A so it could be used for a recreation room. We were to use it for plays and our band/ orchestra but this fell through. On Sundays I attended Church Services conducted by Rev. Neel here.

One day, I think it was Sunday,[59] the guard was late to unlock and get two men to bring the morning coffee to us. It was cold, and the windows were frosted up. Our ration of fuel had been used up the night before. That hot coffee would taste good. There was a deathly silence outside broken only by rare footsteps. A peephole scraped in the frost on the window let us see that there was no smoke from the kitchen chimney. What was happening? We had heard some bombing in the distance the night before. Was the war

over? One GI went out the poorly locked door to see if he could find out anything. He didn't come back. Why was it so deathly quiet?

A messenger from our leader came to leave us only with instructions that on one was to leave the building or he would be shot. A wild barrage of unanswered questions chased him out the door and left us confused and disturbed. Then silence as everybody crawled back under their blankets and covered their heads to conserve the heat of their breath. I looked at the stove across the room and it seemed to shrink with the cold.

We heard the sound of marching feet and the still crisp air was pierced by sharp commands. With the click of metal on metal and the crash of the barrack door, German guards with fixed bayonets rushed in calling "raus, raus", We were lined up out in the snow in front of the barracks to look down the barrels of machine guns and into the eyes of angry tight-lipped soldiers in full battle gear complete with potato masher hand grenades hanging from their belts.[60]

We stood shivering in the deep snow vainly trying to keep our feet warm by stomping them. Some were lucky enough to grab a blanket before they were pushed out the door. No one would answer any questions. After what seemed hours, during which men who were sick and fainted were made to stay there, we were taken to a large open area behind the barracks. There we lined up with men from the other barracks facing the air raid trenches. We were standing in about a foot of snow. A look around was not reassuring. The guard towers were manned with soldiers with machine guns. The air raid trenches that we faced had machine guns mounted at the front edge and manned by soldiers. Hand grenades were lying close at their hands.

At last an explanation. Our leader told us that we were in a bad spot and to listen very carefully. During the night the German mess sergeant was checking the kitchen and saw some ones feet sticking out from under a table. He drew his gun with an order to come out. He was attacked from behind with a meat cleaver and severely gashed about the head. His condition was serious and the Germans were looking for the two men who had done it. The meat cleaver was found in the kitchen which was a bloody mess. Our leader also begged anyone who knew about it to tell what they knew. The Germans said we would have to stand there until the guilty ones were found.

It seemed that we stood there for hours and the feeling had long gone from my feet. The cold was not good for feet already frostbitten.[61] Finally we were told to return to our barracks and not to leave them for any reason or run the risk of being shot. We would have no food or fuel until the matter was cleared up. When we went back in our

59 Sunday, January 28, 1945.

60 Most German hand grenades had a wooden handle with the grenade itself at the end. They looked somewhat like potato mashers used by cooks hence the name "potato mashers".

61 believe that my feet really went bad after this.

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barracks it was to find that everything had been pulled off the bunks and not too tidy search had been made. Our barracks was suspect because of the broken lock on our door. We were very silent group wondering what would happen if the mess sergeant died. Would they arbitrarily shoot some of us?

We were aroused a couple of times from under our blankets by messengers who pleaded with us to tell anything that we might know or saw the least bit suspicious. The Protestant chaplain also came and talked to us.[62] There were questions about the GI who was sick. He had not eaten his bread rations and when his food was found he was suspected. He had been taken away.

The day wore on and some of us could not help but think about the oatmeal[63] that we were supposed to get that day. It was about four p.m. when we noticed that smoke was coming from the kitchen. Then came a call for a detail to get wood and coal for the barracks. We were told that as soon as the kitchen was cleaned up our meal would be prepared. It would be ready about six p.m. and our daily bread ration would be handed out before that.

We had another scare one day when two American fighter planes were chasing and firing at a German fighter plane. [64] We heard the firing and noise and the four of us sitting on our bunks on both sides of the windows grabbed our steel helmets and hit the floor. After it was over I looked outside and saw where a bullet had hit about three inches below where our heads were against the wall under the window. Someone had been hit in the other half of our barracks. We also heard that several had been killed in the camp.[65]

I know that I did a lot of dreaming while a prisoner but most of them have been forgotten. There were several that I remember. They involved food. In one dream I was standing in the kitchen at home watching my mother putting whipped cream into mound of golden cream puffs As I reached for one I woke up. Only a dream. Another dream started as I walked into the kitchen in the morning. The table was set for breakfast. The griddle was on the coal range, there was a pleasant warm order of cooking and the sudden sizzle as grease was put on the hot griddle to be followed by pancake batter. Mom set the little dipper down that she used as a ladle, turned the griddle a half turn and crossed hands, holding the pancake turner. She turned as walked across the room and the pancake turner she held was pointed at me. I leaned against the kitchen sink beside the stove and watched as each disc of buckwheat batter was turned over to appear a dark golden brown. My eyes followed each one to the yellow flowered plate in the warming oven. I know that they were delicious ready for butter and syrup but I never got to taste them. I woke up!!

I looked at the ceiling and it did not look like the ceiling in my room. I looked for the clock on the bookshelf but saw only rows of bunks and frost patches on the walls. A heavy depression bore down on me as I finally realized that I was in a prison camp. The bitter depression lasted all day. In a later dream I was sitting down at the kitchen table with my mother, father and sister. We were eating chocolate cake. I heard a bell

62 1st Lt. Samuel Neel.

63 It was soup with oatmeal used as a filler.

64 February 8, 1945.

65 Two Americans were killed and three seriously wounded.

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outside and went out to get some ice cream from a vender. But somehow I was sitting in our car about to drink a milk shake and still dreaming, I began to rationalize that I was dreaming and that I was still a POW. This time there was no shock and confusion when I awakened and no bitter depression. Did my subconscious work to protect against that depression? Did my subconscious work to protect against that depression?

You may say there is nothing unusual about dreaming of food and family. Unless you have dreamed of food while your body was wasting from starvation and of people you love while your heart yearned for just a glimpse of them, it is impossible to describe to some one just how vivid and real a dream can be.

My life at Bad Orb ended on February 8, 1945 when I was sent with 350 other men to Berga Am Eister.[66]

66 I understand one of the men was sick so 349 men actually went to Berga.

BERGA

On February 8, 1945 350 American prisoners were sent from Bad Orb to a slave labor camp at Berga Am Elster. [67] They included the American Jewish soldiers as well as those of us from my barracks and others that the Germans thought they might have trouble with. [68] We were marched down to the rail yards in the town of Bad Orb where we were loaded into the "40 & 8" box cars. This time we were more comfortable that our first box car ride. Our trip was four days long but a good part of the time was spent in waiting for the railroads tracks to be repaired from the damage caused by Allied bombs. For the trip we received one red cross food package to be shared by two men. Charles Carter and I shared one box.[69]

Upon arrival at Berga we were marched to newly constructed barracks on a hill about a mile from the town. There were four barracks. The barracks were surrounded by barb wire fences and guard towers. The barracks were one story wooden buildings with two large rooms and a common entry way. Most of each room was taken up by wooden bunks. They were double bunks with corn shuck mattresses and stacked three high.

At night we were locked in and had to use the wooden boxes provided for latrines which leaked some or overflowed. They had to be empted each morning into the outdoor slit trench latrine. Those who got this job were ones who tried to escape, were caught stealing or were unlucky enough to be picked by the guards. There was electricity in the barracks and I think just one light bulb in each half which was on all night. The compound outside the barracks was well lighted.

After we had been there for a while our medics were allowed to set up a dispensary in half of the last barracks.[70] Those who were deemed sick were allowed to go there. We turned over whatever we had in the way of medical supplies. In my case it only a first aid pack with bandages and sulfa powder.

A doctor was brought up from town periodically to look at the sick. At sick call many lined up who were not really sick and the doctor after seeing some who were not sick stopped and went back to town. Those who were sick and could not line up quick enough did not get to be seen. After this happened the sergeant [71] decided he would say who could see the doctor. Thus some sick men who Metz decided were not sick died. Dave Young[72] in my barracks was not able to fall out for work one morning and Metz pulled him out of his bunk and threw a bucket of cold water on him. He died a couple of minutes later with what we though was diphtheria.

67 Actually it was Arbeitskmdo 625 POWs, Berga am Elster, GE.

68 Two things I have not been able to determine; 1. Exact number of Jews, and 2. What was the criteria for the others sent to Berga am Elster.

69 The normal Red Cross food box weighed 4 pounds and was designed to provide the essential foods for one man to survive for one week.

70 Anthony C. Acevedo, 70 Division, 275 Inf, B Company medic, the or one of the medics. He provided me with names of men who died at Berga and a list of many who were sick.

71 John must have meant the German Sergeant Edwin Metz who was Commandant of the American Camp He was later convicted as a war criminal. Afterward our own Army pardoned him.

72 David Young Pvt. GN 26133, died March 12, 1945.

We were divided into two work shifts, one for 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. and one from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. I was in the 6 a.m. shift. We were marched down the hill to the tunnel site and were assigned to the various tunnels to work with German civilians.

The first group to work was from the barracks nearest to the gate. This barracks included all of those of Jewish faith. They worked the 2:00 p.m. shift. When they came in at 10:30 p.m. they said it was terrible and that we should refuse to go out for our 6:00 a.m. shift. We felt that we were not is a position that we could refuse and did go our for our first shift. I must admit that my first march to the tunnel site was with a great deal of concern. We had heard that the civilians had been bombed out of Aachen and had lost homes and families. My buddy Charles Carter and I together with several others were assigned to tunnel number 12. At first we had to fallout at 5:30 for our shift. As it became harder to get men out for work as the days went by, we had to fall out earlier and earlier.

At the end of our first shift we had to wait until almost 2:45 for the guards who would take us back up the hill after bringing down the 2:00 p.m. shift. We learned that this group had gone on strike. Some refused to leave the barracks and some hid under the barracks. Guards with fixed bayonets and police dogs got everyone out to come down to work although late.

I guess that those of us in tunnel 12 were more fortunate than those in other tunnels. Perhaps because I had grown up in Cripple Creek,[73] Colorado which was in a hard rock gold mining area, I knew what the work was like although I had never worked underground. I believe that the civilians with whom we worked were more humane that those in some of the tunnels. Until they had a cut in their rations some would give us a part of their sandwich. We had no food or water during our eight hour shift.

The tunnels were being driven into a bluff along the Elster River. As I remember it there were 17 tunnels numbered 1 to 18 with no number 13. They were 8 to 10 feet wide and about the same height. When we started working they were in about 150 feet. The rock was very hard and had to be drilled and blasted. Ties and rails were laid for the tram cars to run on to carry the broken rock out and dump it. The track ran out of the tunnel about one hundred feet toward the river to a turn table. We had to push the cars to the turn table and then turn them 90° to the left to match up with track that ran parallel to the river and on to where they were dumped.

We were fortunate in our tunnel that there was a compressed air operated loader (mucking machine) and we had to load the rock that the machine couldn't reach. There was an air duct that brought outside air into the tunnel. When our tunnel was in about 200 feet it began to turn to the left. They began to make the ceiling higher. Shortly after this we were pulled out of the tunnels to work outside. With half of the tunnels turning to the left and half to the right they would meet and make one large room.

The working conditions were bad for everyone in the tunnels. The drills were not the modern ones with a stream of water going down the center of the drill steel. The drills used made dust so thick that you could not see more that three feet when they were operated. Over time under these conditions lung could accumulate rock dust that could not be coughed up and could cause death.

73 Cripple Creek is west of Colorado Springs just west of Pikes Peak.

Neither we or the civilians had miner's hard hats to protect our heads from falling rock. Those of us who had been able to keep our steel helmets and liners did have protection. We had to work in the clothes we were wearing when captured. We had no gloves or safety shoes. Little scratches or nicks would soon become sore and fester. When the weather got warmer, Carter made himself a pair of mitts from a piece of blanket. He sewed them together with the thin electrical wire that was used in detonating the dynamite.

We had to help with the drilling at times by sitting back to back on a plank that sloped up when the hole had to be drilled at an upward angle. We had to push against the civilian's back who was holding the drill. A few times I was on the drill.

In working with the civilians we learned that if we sort of kept in motion when there was work to be done things seemed to go along fairly well. When some of the "brass" came along the civilians scurried around looking busy and so did we.

One day a tram car on its way to be dumped got away from us and ran off the end of the track and down the dump. There was nothing said to us for letting it get away.

According to an ex-army corporal who was the tunnel boss of the first civilians we worked with, they did not like working int the tunnels either. We learned that they had three choices:

1. Work in the tunnels, or

2. Be put in the army and sent to the Russian front, or

3. Be sent to a concentration camp.

After four weeks the civilians in the tunnels had to change shifts. Those in our tunnel had to work from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. We got the civilians that had worked with our 2:00 p.m. shift. The boss of this group of civilians was an older short man about 5 foot 4 with a short fuse. He would give a boot to the seat or a rap on the helmet. I got one boot and one helmet rap. I could not speak German but could get the gist of what he said and he began to tell me what he wanted done so I could pass it on.

1 think that with the change of civilian workers the loading machine was pulled out of our tunnel. All of the loading of the tram cars had to be done by hand. This meant shoveling and picking up the large rocks by hand. It took two of us to pick up the larger rocks because we were getting weaker.

On the first or second day after the civilians changed shifts and while we were waiting to start work at 6:00 a.m., one of the civilians we had worked with was hanging around. He acted a little nervous and kept looking around. He came up to me and handed me a small apple. Then he took off at almost a run.

Now the the loading of the cars was done by hand, steel plates were sued for the blasted rock to fall on. These "mucking plates" were laid flat on the tunnel floor and pushed up against the rock face when the drilling was finished. After blasting we had to shovel the rock into the cars. The use of the plates made the shoveling much easier. It is easy to push a shovel under rock while the shovel is resting on the plate. It is hard if

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Sometimes we got a bite of cheese or sausage or jam or margarine. These also became less as time went on. I remember a few times having oatmeal and potato soup. When we were on the hill a food detail of our men would take a cart down[76] to the town and pull it back up the hill with our food. I don't know where it was prepared, perhaps at the concentration camp compound.

We had elected one of our men in our barracks to be in charge and represent us. He found out how many men the Germans wanted for our shift each day and worked out

a schedule that would have let each of us have a day off periodically. I was able to rest the first week. This arrangement was short lived and died from lack of cooperation.

We worked seven days a week but everyone had Easter Sunday off including the civilians. For Easter we got an extra ration of soup. That was a mistake because we were not used to that much food. It gave many of us diarrhea and cramps. 1 didn't eat all of mine and saved part. I got diarrhea and stomach cramps anyhow.

We were taken off the tunnel work before Easter and were put to work outside to carry materials around. I guess we were too weak do the tunnel work. I was put to work at night. I don't know if all of us worked only at night or if any of the Buchanwald prisoners worked at night. I think that it was the day after Easter that I got severe stomach cramps. I couldn't straighten up. Sergeant Metz began yelling at me but 1 couldn't understand him. He was angry and according to one of our men who did understand German he said he was going to have me shot.

I was taken into the compound where the prisoners form Buchanwald were. 1 thought that this was the end and almost didn't care, I was in so much pain. There were other GIs there. We all had to take off all our clothes which at that point didn't make me feel any better. However our clothes were put into a large box-like room within the big room we were in. The clothes were being heated to kill the body lice. I don't think it did much good because nothing was done to get the lice that was on our body. The prisoners in the compound did all of the work with our clothes, putting them in the "box" and then dumping them out in one big hot pile where we had to sort through to find our own. There was a prisoner there who was a doctor. He saw that I was in pain and sent one of the other prisoners to get something for me. He brought back a small bottle with and eyedropper cap. The doctor had him squirt a few drops into my mouth. Within a minute the cramps were gone.[77]

While we waited for our clothes, we talked to the doctor who spoke very good English. He said that the extra ration of soup was more than our stomachs could handle and was dumped into our intestines causing the problem. He said that the best thing to do was to eat only dry toast and stay in bed for a couple of days. I thought the chances of that were dim to nothing. He also said the Americans were getting close and that we were going to be moved. I asked him what was to happen to prisoners in the compound. He replied in a matter of fact voice as though he was talking about the weather, "Oh they will probably shoot us".[78]

76 The huge pots that were used for cooking were cemented in place. They were never really clean. When the soup cooled it usually immediately turned sour due to the bacteria constantly present. This could have been part of the reason for so much diarrhea in the stalags.

77 Could this have been paregoric or some other opium product?

78 I have been told that orders had been issued to kill all American POWs.

Several Americans tried to escape. All were captured and brought back, except one.[79] All were captured and brought back, except one. He had a better chance of making

good his escape because as I understood it, he had been born in Germany and had come to the U. S. when he was 18. He was fluent in German and knew his way around.[80] One escapee had been shot before he was brought back. He was left to lay by our barracks for a day. I presume that was done as a deterrent for anyone thinking about escaping.

Most of the days spent at Berga are just a blur of the same thing day after day. Some things have come to mind and stand out in my memory. As we were marched up the hill to our barracks one afternoon we saw older men being drilled to fight. They were not in uniform. They formed a skirmish line and charged an imaginary enemy to fall prone and aim their make believe stick guns.

On one other day we were going through Berga on our way to the hill when the air raid sirens sounded. We pressed up against buildings and doorways to watch a large number of fighter planes escorting a squadron of American bombers. Berga was not the bomb destination and they flew on. The fighter planes circling and crisscrossing left a white cobweb against the blue sky. We saw no German planes.

Another time I was sent out to the turntable to help turn the tram cars from the tunnel. While I was waiting there a German Major stopped to talk to me. He spoke very good English and said he had worked for five years before the war in Philadelphia and wanted to return after the war. I told him I was from Cripple Creek Colorado. He knew where it was and said that he had been there.

The blasting powder or dynamite that they used to blast the rock in the tunnels must not have been very reliable. Sometimes the blast would hardly break an rock. One day when all was ready to blast and the tools and tram car were pulled back out of danger the dynamite was detonated. There was a mighty roar and the tram car came rolling out of the tunnel past us at the side of the portal and trailing a large dust cloud. The fresh air duct into the tunnel was also collapsed. There was quite s spirited discussion among the Germans when the surprise was over.

79 Morton Goldstein GN 23758, C Btry 590 FA, 106 Div was shot allegedly by Sgt.. Erwin Metz 15 March 1945 as he was being returned to Berga. The first American Chief Man of Confidence at Bad Orb Hans Kasten GN 23400, 110 Inf, 28 Div. and his two assistants Joseph F. Littell GN 24931, I Co. 422 inf, 106 Div and Ernesto Sinner GN 25724 (unit unknown) were captured and sent to Stalag 9C (Punishment and Control Camp IXC) but before they could be executed the Americans arrived.

80 Joseph F. Littell published a book "A Lifetime in Every Moment" that goes into details of their escape and recapture.

BERGA DEATH MARCH

On April 5, 1945 we left Berga on the evacuation march. We were give red cross boxes which had to be shared by two men. Charles Carter and I shared one box. don't remember all the contents but I do remember canned peaches and powdered milk. We mixed some of the milk with peach juice and had "peaches and cream".

Our guards were mostly older men probably World War One veterans. For some the march was about as hard on them as on us. One guard was said to be 90 years old and he lasted only a couple of days. He had a beautiful voice and would sing as we marched along. He was walking beside me and kept bumping me. I looked down and he handed me a crust of bread.

A cart was with us on the march in which the sick and those too weak to walk rode. It was usually pulled by a horse. If no horse was available our men had to pull and push it When a horse pulled it some could hang on to the cart and sort of be pulled along.

We were usually put in a barn at night and could borrow into the hay. One night was spent on the top floor of a gray stone castle. There had bee a moat around it but it was dry and we crossed it on a permanent bridge. That was a very miserable night. The cold wind blew through the openings and the stone floor was hard. Clarence Lahr died that night and was buried the next day.[81]

For food on the march we had the heavy dark bread and each loaf had to be shared by several men. We also had soup and imitation coffee. The soup was in the form of dry bricks and dissolved and heated in water. Sometimes we got potatoes in the soup. One day when I had some boiled potatoes with me on the march and we stopped for a rest, I pulled some green dandelions to mix with cut up potato. (Sort of a potato salad) There was only one stream that we were allowed to drink from. Other streams were polluted.

One of our men farther up the line from me suddenly dashed out of line and down the embankment at the side of the road. He almost got shot but managed to pickup a beehive honey comb that had been lost.

I had my ration of bread stolen from me on day. The G I who had stolen it was seen and reported to our own leader and the next day his ration was given to me. On another occasion when we spent a day resting at a barn, the powdered milk I had left was stolen. I had hidden it in the hay and didn't think anyone saw where I had hidden it. The culprit was easy to find by the powdered milk in his mustache. He had been sleeping close to where Carter and I were. To try to ration the food from our red cross box may not have been such a good idea. Albert G. Berthiaume[82] may have had the right idea. He ate every thing when he got it.

While I was in the hospital in England I tried to remember where we had been and the names of towns from the road signs giving the direction and distances. I noted that on April 8th we stopped in a barn 2 km from Hof. On April 14 we walked 15 km. On

81 According to Medic Anthony Acevedo, Berthiaume died on April 8, 1945.

82 Albert G. Berthiaume GN 26129, ASN 31416858, A Company, ? Regiment, 106 Div.

April 16th we started from near Seib. April 17th we stopped and stayed in a large barn where four farms had a common corner. We stayed on the 18th and began walking again on the 19th.

We were quartered in the loft of a barn that had been cleaned of hay that had been stored there one time. It was on of the barns of the four farms with the common corner. The Burgomaster of the nearby town came to see us. He saw our condition and found out that we had no salt. One of our men who understood German said the Burgomaster gave a tongue lashing to the German officer in charge the likes of which he had never heard. In about a half an hour we each had a ration of salt and some boiled potatoes that were not half rotten. Those who rode in the sick wagon and perhaps others, about 30, were taken to a hospital in town.

At the end of the day I noticed one of our men put a bucket under the stairs that led up to the barn loft. I believe it was Dowdel1.[83] He cautioned me to be quiet and said to join him in the morning. So on the morning of the 19th we got a bucket and went past a guard who I guess thought we were on some detail. We went to the other farms. The farmers in the first barn indicated that they had not finished milking. At the next farm we were each given a cup of what passed for coffee with milk and sugar.[84] It was good and hot. The third stop gave each of us a wedge of fresh bread cut from a round loaf. Then we went back to our barn. We soon started our march again that day.

During the march my shoes which were in bad shape at the beginning gave out.

I had to wait until someone died who had better shoes than I.[85] When our leader decided that I was next in line to get shoes, it was a macabre fact of our life that let me know one evening that I would have shoes the next morning. I came face to face with a six foot GI who had that "zombie" look in his eyes, void of expression which we had first seen in the concentration prisoners at Berga. He was about six foot tall and had no trouble keeping up with the march. I had to put several layers of cardboard from the red cross box into the combat boots because I am only five foot five and one half inches tall.

I have often wondered why someone who seemed as able as any of us to keep going would have that vacant unseeing look at night and be dead the next morning. wonder if they just gave up. In contrast one man whose name I think was Chick [86] was so weak with diarrhea that he had to craw on his hand and knees to the latrine behind the barracks. He refused to let anyone help him. I think that he felt that having someone help him was to give up. He was on the sick wagon from the time we left Berga until he was included in the 30 who were hospitalized by the Burgomaster. About two months later when I was at Camp Shanks General Hospital, New York, I had a pass to New York City and as I was leaving, a group of GIs were coming in and Chick was among them. I didn't get a chance to talk to him.

We saw many Allied bombers fly high over us during the march. One day as we rested in a barn yard, as the bombers approached we could see the bomb bay doors

83 Andrew J. Dowdell, GN 27048, ASN 42056545, G Company, 379 Infantry, 100 Division.

84 It must be remembered that Germany did not have access to real coffee and tea since the war began.

85 Most members of the 106t~ Division received new combat boots in England shortly before entering combat. The leather in these boots had been constantly exposed to sweat and water that greatly shortened their life. Although I did not go to Berga my own boots were worn out and I didn't think they would survive the coming summer.

86 Have not been able to identify him.

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open and when the planes were over our heads, the bombs began to fall. They fell in a downward trajectory to hit in a city that we could see in the distance. We could see and hear the explosions. One day on the march we were close to the bombers target. Heavy antiaircraft fire knocked one down and only two parachutes were seen.

One day on the march we saw an ambulance coming toward us. It looked like an American ambulance. When it got close enough I could see that it had belonged to the 106th Division. I presume that it had been captured during the Battle of the Bulge.

On the march when a stop was made and there was a need to eliminate bodily waste, you did so without regard as to where you were or who was around. On one break at the edge of a small town there was an open field next to a house. There had been a large stop there before, probably the concentration camp prisoners and one had to watch where you stepped. I found a relatively clear spot and had my trousers half way down when a man came running out of the house waving his arms. Then he gave up, threw up his arms in disgust and went back into the house. I think that it was this town where we paused for a few minutes that people began to hand out some food. was not fortunate to be near a window or door.

One day we passed some British troops who were also being evacuated. They were resting beside the road. I believe that they said that they were doing most of their walking at night. They were thin but in much better condition. They looked like soldiers and I fear that we looked like a bunch of ragged scarecrows. They had received red cross food boxes often.

There was a universal pastime during the day when we rested at a barnyard and that was to look for body lice. I don't remember much about body lice when we were at Berga. After a day in the tunnel I was too exhausted to care. On the march they must have gotten much more numerous. About the time I would get settled and warm in the hay, the little beasties would come out of the seams of clothing and start marching around. On those rest days everyone would be sitting around with their pants and underwear undone hunting for lice any where there was body hair. There would be little egg sacks sticking to a hair.

On what turned out to be the last day of our march, although I didn't know it at the time, I got too weak to keep up with the column and there was not room in or to hang onto the sick wagon. I lagged way behind. The column got out of my sight down the road. I prayed a few "Hail Marys" and kept going. As I passed a farm area with an open gate in a solid fence some German soldiers there beckoned me to come in. They gave me about a fourth of a loaf of the black bread and I went on my way. The bread was not all dark brown. It had quite a bit of green mold on it. I remembered that a GI at Bad Orb

who had been a baker said that bread mold produced penicillin and wouldn't hurt you. When I finally got to the barn with my bread where the rest were quartered, could not stand up. Carter and I did eat the bread.

A couple of days before the end of our march, I had cause to remember the concentration compound doctor's words, "They will probably shoot us". We had just started walking in the early morning and came down a slope which curved onto a bridge across a small stream. On the other side was a dead concentration camp prisoner and then another. At first we thought a plane had accidentally strafed them. We had a fighter plane dive on us several days before then pulled up. Someone picked up a

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spent cartridge and said that it was German. For most of the rest of that day at intervals we would come up on prisoners shot in the head and lying beside the road, sometimes on both sides and 50 to 75 feet apart. Sometimes there would be a piece of brain or skull beside the road and a large mass grave in the field. If they couldn't keep up the SS soldiers who guarded them simply shot them in the back of the head. We caught up with the large group and walked by where they were stopped in a field. I saw an SS guard fire up into a tree across the road from the group. He fired two shots, gazed up into the tree and walked away. I assumed that one of the prisoners had crossed the road and tried to hide by climbing the tree.

We were still in the barn that I had managed to reach, resting. Suddenly there was a commotion outside and sergeant Metz and the guards were trying to get us out and on the road. I could not walk and had to crawl. There was a shout that American tanks were coming. Metz and some of the guards took off to try to get away. A few of the guards came back in the barn with us and seemed glad to see the Americans. I don't know what time it was but think it was early afternoon. 1 did get out of the barn and on my feet and saw American tanks. We were liberated on this the 23rd of April, 1945!!!

I am not sure if I imagined it or saw a little later German soldiers and Metz and his superior Murtz[87] herded into a barb wire enclosure and guarded by American soldiers. We milled around the barn area for a while and then were started down the road. A GI pulled me up into his tank and gave me a candy bar. We went down the road toward a town by the name of Cham. As the tank turned a corner to enter the town it drew some fire from a two story house. We stopped and the tank backed up to put me out. Then it went ahead and fired a round into the house. One round was enough. We noticed a white flag hanging from the second story window when we walked around the bend.

There is a sad note to this liberation. Just as the tanks rolled up one of our men died. According to a letter I wrote to my sister from the hospital in England on May 4, 1945 I told her that we had 48 die from April 5 to April 23 on the march. While in the hospital I tried as best I could to account for the 350 men who went to Berga. Right or wrong I have a notation that 21 died at Berga, about 43 sent to a hospital from Berga, 286 started the march from Berga, 48 died on the walk, 30 were hospitalized on the walk, about 166 liberated and 42 unaccounted for.

Some of us came together and walked on into town past the house with the bed sheet hanging out. Rightly or wrongly we looked around in a house that the occupants had left. We picked up a few items, nothing of much value. I got an arm band with a

swastika on it, some other swastikas, a leather cigar case, large pocket knife etc. In back of the house was a small farm yard. A tall black GI came in from there with a large goose egg. Because there was still a fire in the kitchen stove we decided to scramble the egg. That did not turn out well. When I went to put salt on the egg, the top came off the canister and dumped so much salt that we could not eat it.

Soldiers and medics who must have been with the 11th Armored Division that liberated us rounded us up and took us to the hospital in Cham, a Catholic hospital

87 Capt. Ludwig Merz was responsible for all the work details in the region. He was sentenced to death but the Americans later released him.

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staffed by nuns. The German patients were moved to the second floor. It was a two story building. We were put on the ground floor on stretchers.

We were given two blankets and a can of DDT powder and told to dust the hairy parts of our bodies. [88] When I did that I could feel the lice abandoning ship. Our clothes were taken from us and I presume burned. I couldn't see any earthly use for the. I had no more body lice except that I found one crawling out of the book I had kept from Berga and taken to England.

The sisters at the hospital cooked pancakes for us that night. I ate a few but could have eaten more. I remembered the soup experience at Easter and held off not wanting cramps and diarrhea. Either I did eat too much or the candy bar was the wrong thing to eat. The medics came around at bedtime and had us each take a sleeping pill. That was a mistake. I didn't wake up until about 5:00 am and found out that I should have been awake much sooner. I managed to find the utility room, cleaned up as best could and trashed one very dirty blanket.

On the 24th some GI photographers came and took pictures of me and several others. They said they were for evidence of our mistreatment. Also that same day we were moved by ambulance to a field hospital that had been set up. I was the first one in one of the tents and got a cot next to the stove in the front. I took the opportunity to heat some water and gave myself a sponge bath and didn't care who came in or out while I was doing it.

From the field hospital we were moved to an evacuation hospital (the 35th evac) and then to the 7th Field Hospital at an airstrip near Bayreuth. On May 3 I was flown with others in a C-47 [89] On May 3, I was flown with others in a C-47 to a station hospital near Newberg, England. On May 4, I had a train ride as a stretcher patient to the 49th Station Hospital in the vicinity of St. Neats, Bedford and Cambridge.

So many of those days marching are but a blur. 1 know I shall never forget the dead concentration camp prisoners and a few of our men that I saw dead. There are a couple of other things that I remember that were not so gruesome.

Early afternoon we had stopped at a farm and preparations that had started to cook up soup from the dry bricks was stopped. We were told that some one had broken in

to one of the guards packs and we would not have soup. Shortly after that we were hurriedly assembled to continue our march. While we were lined up a column of older Home Guard troops came from our left and halted in front of us. One soldier with a bushy handle-bar mustache was so interested in us that he didn't hear the command to halt and ran into the soldier with a loud clang as his rifle hit the steel helmet slung on the back of the soldier in front of him.[90] He ducked his head and got the kind of look that

58 DDT and talc powder was sprayed on just about everyone at check points to kill the lice and fleas as they carried diseases. After leaving Bad Orb I was dropped off at an American Shower unit where I took a shower. Afterwards they sprayed the DDT all over my body and issued me a clean uniform and sent to an evacuation hospital.

89 The jack of all trades C-47 transport planes were being used to bring up gas and food and return POWs and wounded soldiers to France and England.

90 When not in combat the Germans usually wore the billed soft cloth hat and carried their helmets on their pack.

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you would expect to be on someone who got his hand caught in the cookie jar. In spite of our situation I had to laugh at his silly grin.

One day we walked along a road that led through a forest of evergreen trees. The trees had been planted and no matter if you looked down the rows horizontally or diagonally they were perfectly lined up neat and clean. Such a contrast to the hell and ravages of war.

I have a picture in my mind of this road leading out of the forest to look across a large open rolling field with green grass. To the east was a steep hill topped by a white or near white castle. With the very blue sky and cotton ball clouds it was a picture book scene. Was it real or did I imagine it.

I remember hearing about President Roosevelt's death from the German corporal who had kept us informed of events while at Bad Orb.[91] It was a shock and left a sadness.

Why did I survive this march? it had to be in part remembering my parents, my sister and her husband, the good times we had and the desire to see them again. It had to be that I wanted to see my sister's baby who was to have been born in January. It had to be my Catholic rearing that my parents gave me. When things seemed too hard to bear, I turned to the Blessed Mother and prayed. I promised to pray the rosary every day if I were liberated. It has become a very satisfying habit.

My buddy Charles Carter made it home to his wife and family and I had the privilege of spending a night with them in the summer of 1948 at their home in Cheboygan, Michigan. He died November 22, 1982.

The reason that I was in the isolation ward flat on my back was the result of coming down with diphtheria a few days after arriving at the hospital in England.

91 Actually President Roosevelt died April 12, 1944 while the Berga men were on the death march.

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