

Below is a rough draft of a book Sam Archino wrote in the mid to late 1950s. The book covers Sam's time with F Co, 422<sup>nd</sup> just before the Battle of the Bulge began, through his time as a POW in Stalag IVB and at the Zeitz Kommando. Sam passed away in 1969. One of his daughters (Kathy Wallace) retyped the below into a Word Document, so that it could be shared with surviving 106<sup>th</sup> veterans and their families. At the end of the book, is a pieced together timeline of Sam's experiences during the battle and as a POW. If you have any questions or comments, you can contact me at [walterwallace0303@gmail.com](mailto:walterwallace0303@gmail.com)

The surviving members of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division will long remember the Schnee Eifel sector of the Ardennes on the Belgium-German border. We sustained more than 8,600 casualties, during the first few days of the now famous "Battle of the Bulge", when the overwhelming might of Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's armored divisions spearheaded the attack and steam-rolled through the sparsely separated troops.

It was on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1944, that Company F, 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment neared the front. Artillery bursts could be heard in the distance, causing a tremor of excitement among the men. It was a pleasant relief to be able to disembark from the open trucks, after two uncomfortable days and nights journeying from the temporary encampment in France. The truck in which I rode was without a canvas top and the howling wind, freezing drizzle, sleet, and snow was our constant companions. Throughout the long drive, snow steadily fell and the occupants and equipment were completely covered. The drivers had finally stopped their trucks within a mile of where the camp was to be established for

the night. Struggling through the foot deep snow drifts, the company arrived at the designated area and began the arduous task of pitching tents. Clearing a small parcel of ground, my tent-mate, Bill, and I proceeded to erect our tent. Upon completion of the task, we were allowed to go to the mess tent for hot coffee. Bill decided to come down later, so I trudged through the snow alone. When I returned, he had disappeared from the tent. Frantically searching the area, I finally located him curled up beside a tree, sound asleep and partially covered with snow. In another few minutes, he would have been completely hidden in a pile of snow. Bill was later killed by strafing American P-47 fighters on Christmas Eve 1944, while traveling by train as prisoners toward Stalag IVB.

Early on 11 December, the division began taking up positions on the Siegfried line, relieving the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. The process of taking over the 27-mile front necessitated the stretching of platoons, about 25 men, over several hundred yards of front line.

Arriving at our platoon area, we found that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division men had constructed dug in log outpost huts, at intervals of approximately one hundred feet along the line. We were elated over these modest huts, since they were much more comfortable than a pup tent and the thick logs afforded protection against mortar shells. All of the huts were situated on the edge of a fire break, thus affording about twenty-five feet of cleared space in front of each outpost. On the other side of the fire break, the visibility was obscured by a dense, snow-covered forest of pine trees and brush, which made it possible for the enemy to approach undetected. To counteract such a possibility, mines and barbed wire were set in near where the tree line met the clearing. Every few feet of wire had tin cans attached with pebbles inside to alert us of anyone nearing our position.

Each hut was turned over formally by the departing 2<sup>nd</sup> Division soldiers, and I was assigned to a smaller one with three other men. Before departing, our 2<sup>nd</sup> Division counterparts told us about how a group of German soldiers had recently infiltrated through the line and fired a “Burp-gun” inside the doorway of the hut we would occupy, killing every man inside. The evidence of the attack was still present in the form of splintered logs and blood stains, which could not be wiped away. “Burp-gun” was an American expression for the German MP-40 machine gun. The fire power was so great it was capable of cutting a man nearly in two. True to its name, it sounded like one continuous burp when fired, instead of a momentary pause between each round.

When entering the hut, it was necessary to crawl through a tiny doorway on hands and knees. Once all four of us and our equipment were inside, there was hardly room to move, and nearly impossible to lie down. Further adding to our discomfort, the roof of the hut was less than five feet high making it impossible to stand fully upright. The floor of the hut was covered with soaking wet pine needles and straw, due to melting snow seeping through the dry-rotted canvas thrown over the roof. Situated by the door was a make shift stove converted from a G.I. water can with some tin cans clamped together to form a stove-pipe. The pipe ran up to the roof and protruded out the top of the hut. On the side of the can was a square hole with heavy wires crisscrossing from one side to the other, forming a sort of grate upon which the fire was built. Despite our many hardships, the stove was glowing merrily and it was a pleasant feeling of warmth that we were very grateful for.

The area assigned to Company F was nicknamed “Buzz Bomb Alley”, because German V-1 buzz bombs would frequently streak over the position,

presumably destined for England. Each bomb could be heard as a faint roaring sound in the distance, gradually becoming louder. As it streaked overhead, red streams of flame could be seen for a few seconds before disappeared into the distance. Many times, anti-aircraft tracer bullets chased them to no avail as they passed.

The 106<sup>th</sup> Division occupied the portion of the Siegfried line which was reported to be a “quiet sector”. We were a green combat outfit and the majority of the men composing the division were former Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) students, ex-air corps trainees, and disbanded station complements, all of whom had very little infantry training. Many of the non-commissioned officers were inexperienced in infantry tactics, having attained their present grades prior to transferring to the division. Due to the previous inactivity of our assigned portion of the front, the division was inadequately supplied with ammunition and other items normally issued to combat troops. We were surely ill equipped to confront a large attack on our position. Between the three other men and I, we had a combined total of forty-eight rounds of M-1 rifle cartridges and one hand grenade.

During the hours of darkness, the men took turns sleeping and standing watch, alternating every hour or so. Sharing the watch duty with me was a young fellow named Jack, who before entering the Army had never ventured more than a few hundred miles from his farm home. At present he was thoroughly frightened, and being naturally awkward, he stumbled around the darkened outpost bumping his equipment against the wooden logs, causing a clamor each time he moved. Just the normal moving around or changing of positions could be heard many yards away. Noises such as a cough, a sneeze, or clearing of the

throat were a dead give-away as to the location of the outposts. Later we learned to make the necessary movements when the roar of the buzz bombs were heard. When it was our turn to rest, Jack seemed determined to keep me awake, and frequently nudged me, claiming the Germans could be seen creeping toward us. Leaping up I would peer into the bright moon lit night and invariably it turned out to be merely the movements of bushes, fanned by the slight breeze. The moon light cast shadows upon the snow which appeared to have a slight resemblance to human forms, with a little imagination. In between being awakened by Jack, the burst of German rifle fire in the distance would break the silence causing me to jump up in alarm.

The Jerries had begun to fire their rifles in our general direction, hoping to draw fire in return, but our orders were to refrain from firing unless the enemy was actually visible. Their bullets sometimes came dangerously close. Several struck the edge of the outpost and ricocheted into the brush. A few “trigger happy” G.I.s recklessly fired at the invisible Germans and jeopardized their own, and their buddies’ lives as the Jerries returned the fire with mortars. During the night, the sub-zero temperatures played havoc on our already frozen feet and frost-bitten hands. The first rays of the rising sun were always a welcome sight.

Each morning we would make our way to the improvised mess area. After coffee, powdered eggs, two pieces of bread and a small portion of jam, we tramped back to our respective huts. On the way we gazed enviously at the comfortable block houses in which the Command Post, or Company Headquarters was located. The block houses were part of the original German Siegfried Line and were massive structures with reinforced concrete walls over six feet thick. Built in a pentagonal shape, all sides had foot wide slits for riflemen to view the terrain.

Inside the building were double decker bunks with straw mattresses. Field kitchen burners were used for heating and were adequate to heat the interior rooms.

Arriving back at our hut, the first requisite task was to build a fire in the stove. This was a difficult task, since everything burnable was so damp, but by utilizing shoe polish, combs, and other useless articles, the dampened wood and coal finally started burning. During the day, the only activities were trying to stay warm, cleaning rifles, and of course more watch duty.

Every so often, the quiet was disturbed by the sound of gunfire. On one occasion, a G.I. located in a hut near mine fired a burst of rifle fire into the woods. To our surprise, his fire was answered with a burst from a burp-gun, but no damage was done to either side. The German simply disappeared into the dense thicket. The buzz bombs seemed to be more frequent as the days went on and German mortar fire was becoming more accurate, much to our distress. One mortar shell burst in the mess area and we sustained our first battle causality, a first Lieutenant was wounded in the hand. Fortunately, it happened in between chow call, which accounted for the lone causality. The news of the first blood shed had a sobering effect on the rest of the Company. The war was taking on a different aspect and anyone of us could be hurt or killed.

In the foggy dawn of December 16, 1944, the disaster of the 106<sup>th</sup> Division commenced. The German-Ardennes counter offensive started around 5:30 am with the enemy pushing forward and occupying positions in and around the Schnee Eifel. Fortunately for us, the main brunt of the attack occurred between the Second and Third Battalions. Rifle fire could be heard to our right intermingled with the roar of artillery and the zooming of mortars as they lobbed high in the air, striking in the midst of the approaching enemy.

Peering through cracks in the logs, I nervously awaited the worst, as the sound of German burp-guns became louder and louder. A group of Germans had infiltrated within several yards of an outpost near mine and had killed two Americans, but alerted GIs in the next post opened fire on the enemy killing three and wounding a fourth. When the firing ceased, screams of the wounded German in mortal agony could be heard. He was begging for a medic to come for him. After a short while, one of our medics ran out to him and started working on him. My attention was averted from this activity by a suspicious movement in the bushes several hundred feet in front of me. Straining my eyes, I finally caught a glimpse of a white-clad figure leaping from a bush and dashed behind a tree. Training my sights on the tree I waited for what came next. In their white camouflage suits, it was hard to distinguish the hiding Germans from the snow-covered woods, and only when they were in motion could they be seen. In a moment another soldier emerged from the brush and proceeded to seek cover behind another tree nearby. Without a second thought I aimed and fired at him. He dropped in his tracks. Now, the tension was at a height – had I hit him or was he just playing possum? Gluing my eyes on the spot where he had fallen, I patiently waited. After several minutes of breathless waiting, the man behind the

tree, and several others I had not detected arose and made a dash for the dense underbrush. Firing several quick shots in their general direction, I found they were soon out of sight. My first encounter with the enemy was thus ended.

Later that afternoon, I saw another group of Germans. Several of the enemy were crawling about 600 yards in front of the position. Their white camouflage blended perfectly with the snow and aside from their movements, they were hardly visible. Aiming my M-1 rifle, I fired eight rounds. My aim was bad and again they scurried into the brush unscratched, as the bullets went tearing overhead.

After this incident our squad was withdrawn from our positions and ordered on a special assignment of guarding an artillery unit from rear attacks. Moving away from the firing line and walking about a mile, the artillery unit was found. To the amazement of everyone in the squad, their guns were pointed in the opposite direction of the front. It was learned that German Panzer Divisions had penetrated over twenty miles into American held territory, leaving the regiment open to attack from all directions. Our supply lines were soon out, leaving our intermittent radio communication as the last contact with higher headquarters.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of December, we were told the company was pulling out, with an order for the squad to return to the company area post-haste. Trucks were loaded and men rushed about trying to get organized. Since orders were to take only the necessities, most of our valuable personal belongings, clothes, and equipment were left behind. Everyone was silently wondering just what was happening. It seemed incredible that the American Army was retreating, but when battalions march away from the firing lines there was no other conclusion.

As darkness came, the clanging of mess gear and equipment hurriedly being gathered and moved was usually answered with enemy gun fire in our direction. The road was covered with ice and many of the men slipped and fell, causing a loud crash, usually followed by swearing. The men were already on edge and each time someone fell there was a loud protest from men in the vicinity, which was louder than the noise made by the falling.

It was daylight on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December before we halted and again my squad was chosen for an advance scouting party. While the rest of the company dug foxholes, the squad went a mile or two farther down the road. After arriving in a clump of trees, we began to dig in. Hearing the clanging of our shovels, the Germans discovered our positions, and proceeded to fire mortar shells in and around the area. Face down in the snow, I felt the concussions of the shells as they hit. Fortunately, and by the grace of God, no one was injured. American artillery soon located the German mortar position and after a few rounds, the Germans ceased firing. Being on the receiving end of enemy mortar fire had a sobering effect on the men. We were coming to the realization that we were in a war, where there was a possibility of getting killed.

Since the Germans now knew where we were, our squad leader decided we should return to the rest of the company. Between our position and the company, was a quarter of a mile of road bordered by open fields on both sides. While hurriedly walking down the open stretch of road, a German artillery shell, known as an "88" exploded about fifty yards to our right. Diving headlong into a ditch alongside the road, I crawled several yards forward as more shells hit in the vicinity. Remaining perfectly still for what seemed an eternity, the firing finally ceased and I was still in one piece. The edge of the woods was a few hundred feet

away, but we knew we had to make a run for it. The squad got up and we sprinted across the field toward the woods. Just as we reached the tree line, another shell came crashing into a nearby tree. Once we were in the relative safety of the woods, I breathed a long sigh of relief.

When we arrived back at our company position, we were informed that the Division Headquarters directed the 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, in conjunction with the 423<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, to attack and destroy enemy forces at Schoenberg. We then would continue along the Scheonberg-St. Vith road clearing our principal supply route. When the company was ordered to move out, we were told to leave everything but rifles and canteens, because we would return once our mission was complete, which of course never happened. Food was getting scarce and the Company Mess Sergeant issued a "D" bar (a chocolate bar) per man, and two large cans of "C" rations (meat and beans) for each squad. Soon the men were on the move and I ate my share with my hands.

The general plan was for the battalions to separate and assemble later at a designated spot and attack Schoenberg in force. Avoiding the towns, the company trudged through woods and fields, finally arriving within a few miles of the assembly area. Along the way, most all of the trucks we passed were mired in knee-deep mud and at a complete standstill. The congestion of trucks were ideal targets for German artillery, which made good use of the opportunity. Between each artillery barrage targeting the trucks, the infantry continued on its way, finally ending up in a dense forest with several other companies. Many of the companies never arrived at the assembly area because of encounters with the enemy, some having suffered heavy casualties. The loss of large quantities of

material and equipment also added to the confusion, disrupting the planned attack.

Early in the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> of December, 1944, Company F was dispatched to a new position in the vicinity of the 590<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, which was in the process of establishing a new position. Our job was to protect them from enemy attack. The only way to get to the new position was through a gully, covered by a concentration of German machine-gun fire. Several times it barked as men started across. A machine gun was set up on the edge of the woods and sent a continuous covering fire at the Germans as each man dashed across the open space. Farther along the way someone discovered an abandoned kitchen truck and everyone took advantage of it by stuffing themselves with all types of canned food. This was the first time in weeks the men were completely filled, and it was destined to be the only time for several months, for the men that came through alive.

After foxholes were dug, the Americans fired an artillery barrage toward the Germans and continued it for a half an hour. Just as the American barrage stopped, the German artillery began with barrage after barrage in the general direction of the American artillery positions. In between the explosives bursting among the trees, were screams of pain from the men who were hit. A short time later, men were seen streaming from the woods with their hands in the air. Thinking they were Germans surrendering, some of the infantrymen started toward them. As they drew near, it was realized that the men surrendering were the American artillerymen. They had completely run out of ammunition and were suffering heavy casualties.

In the confusion, about half of Company F was separated from the rest of the company. Under the leadership of a First Lieutenant, we started down a paved road to put some distance between us and the advancing Germans. After several minutes of walking, a barrage of "88" shells began to land all around us. Some of the men were hit and their screams were dreadful to hear. The Germans had zeroed in on the road and it seemed most practical to get away from it. Dashing across another open field toward the woods, the shells seemed to follow us. Once in the woods, we came upon the old regimental motor park and discovered various other units and separated individuals in various stages of digging in. The remains of an anti-aircraft outfit were equipped with two 50-caliber machine-guns, which proved to be the heaviest weapons in the area. In the motor park, a few camouflaged trucks remained that were loaded with M-1 rifle ammunition.

Over the next several hours, the Germans attacked multiple times, but were repulsed. Just a short distance away, German tanks rolled down the road, but we were powerless to do anything about it. The firing continued throughout the night and again there was no sleep for anyone.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of December, the remaining officers took inventory of the men, equipment and ammunition. There was very little food, but plenty of M1 rifle ammunition, mostly armor piercing still in the trucks. Improvised companies were reorganized and strategic points covered by machine guns and men. The officers informed us that the Ninth Armored Division would soon come to the rescue, being just seven miles away and advancing steadily. Each time the enemy firing would stop, the hungry men would roam around the area looking for food. Some had success in finding a few cans of food in the trucks, but this was a minority.

There was a stream running through the area which enabled the men to have full canteens. Although the water was dirty, it was considered drinkable when Halazone purification tablets were used.

That night the Germans played old jazz pieces over a loud speaker. After each song, a man's voice, in perfect English began telling us to surrender, because we were surrounded and there was no possibility of getting out. He carried on to say that if we surrendered, we would be well treated, well fed, and have a warm place to sleep. This went on for hours, voice and music alternating. After a while, it became monotonous, but the only visible effect it had on the men was an angry protest at being kept awake. At this point, it was pretty well conceded that the possibilities of getting out were nil, but no one liked the idea of being reminded of it.

In the morning of 21 December, a German Sergeant was noted talking to the highest-ranking officer, and it was apparent that a surrender was being negotiated. Men formed in small groups and stared at the German as he talked through an interpreter. There was some loud talk and waving of hands, typical for the Germans. After the sergeant departed, our officers circled up together and discussed what to do next. That was all there was to it. Thus, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, in the vicinity of Schoenberg, on the Belgium-German border, we surrendered. The expressions on the faces of the men were varied. Some were crying, some cursing, while others had a relieved look. The officers were fairly calm, but maintained a sort of stunned look. It was hard to realize that soon everyone would be prisoners of war. It brought to mind one of the last sessions held in England before embarking for France. The subject had been "What to do if

captured". Ironically, it was one subject which took longer than any of the other last-minute talks.

While waiting for the orders to move out of the woods, the Supply Officer passed out the last of the "D" bars, one per man, and then everyone went searching for blankets, overcoats and food. There was plenty of clothing, since a lot of personal equipment was laying around that had been left behind. Rummaging through one of the trucks, I found an officer's suitcase which had a swell pair of woolen socks. In the same truck were also two blankets, and a carton of cigarettes. All of my bounty was stuffed into a gas mask carrier. One of the mysteries of this fateful morning was the fact that many men did not take even one blanket with them. While the "practical" men were scouring the area for items that would be useful as a prisoner, they were just standing around with hands in pockets. Later on, they had to beg their fellow prisoners to allow them to sleep under blankets.

At approximately 7:00 am the order came to move out. Forming a column of threes, the men walked out of the woods. On the edge of the trees, German guards awaited us. They looked like any G.I., excepting of course, for the uniform, neither smiling nor looking unduly ferocious. A German officer placed his men at intervals of fifty feet apart on both sides of the column. After calling for an interpreter, the march began. It was appalling to see American equipment and dead strewn all over the ground. Several Germans had discovered a kitchen truck and were yelling their delight as cans were opened. After taking a few mouthfuls the remainder was tossed aside and new cans were opened to be sampled.

The first village we passed through was one that the American artillery had pounded for days and was in shambles. Under sagging roofs, German tanks were tucked inside several houses. The crews were lined up along the road as we passed, staring and conversing with each other in a low voice.

Outside of several buildings, soup was being served from a horse-drawn Army field kitchen. The sight of warm food reminded the men of their own hunger. It had been many a day since eating anything warm and now the fatigue, cold, and tension of the past several days were beginning to show on some of the men.

After five miles we were halted to be searched for weapons, flash lights and field glasses, and for regrouping. Officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates were segregated. The search was not very thorough, although some of the men lost watches and other valuables, but this was a minority.

The thought uppermost in the minds of the Germans, was to get the prisoners out of that area as quickly as possible. The farther into Germany the prisoners got, the harder it would be to get back to the American lines.

After a conference with the Germans, the American officers told the men that three more miles down the road, trucks would be furnished for the rest of the trip. This was our first indication of what liars our captors were, because by the time the march was halted for the night, we had walked over thirty miles.

Every three or four miles, a ten-minute rest period was called. During one of the rest periods a German correspondent, with a motion picture camera, took pictures of the column of prisoners. It must have made a pretty sorry photograph, since none of the men had shaved for more than a week and what little sleep was

had was in the mud and snow. Many of the men posed for pictures, linking arms and grinning. Some even assumed poses desired by the photographer.

It was amazing to see the various modes of travel used by the German Army. Trucks were never operated alone. Usually two or more trucks were hooked together to save fuel, and horse-drawn wagons were used more than any other form of transportation. On the rear of each wagon was stored the food for the horses. A large number of German troops passed on bicycles, trailed by a few trucks carrying their equipment. Many times along our journey, ambulances were seen loaded with fresh German soldiers moving toward the front.

The ravages of war became more noticeable as progress was made. Dead soldiers, both American and German, remained unburied, and battered equipment, tanks, field guns and all the machinery of war were strewn on both sides of the road. The worse stench came from numerous dead horses, some of which had remained where they had fallen for weeks.

The mud was a foot deep and the Germans were having difficulty getting through it. Up the road a labor battalion, composed of Italians was working on the road, trying to make it passable but not succeeding. Like everyone else in Europe, these Italians tried to “bum” cigarettes from the passing Americans. Some of the Americans did give away cigarettes and were extremely sorry later on when they themselves were begging for them. A number of Italians did give a slice or two of bread in return. From their appearance the Italians did not seem to be faring too badly, being warmly clothed and none of them looked as though they were starving.

As we passed through what was the original Siegfried Line the ferocity of artillery barrages was evident from the wreckage. Pillboxes were cracked open

and the reinforced steel was a jumbled mass. Tank barricades were blown to bits and the trees were nothing more than blasted hulks.

The prisoners were now reaching a point where pride was tossed aside. During the ten-minute rest period every hour or so, they began scavenging along the side of the road for food and water. Some were eating snow, while others filled canteens from the gutter, inserting Halazone Tablets to purify the water. All of the men were issued these tablets, at one time or another, but unfortunately, many of the men still had dysentery. Frozen turnips, dug from the ground and rotten, frozen apples which still clung to the trees were added to the diet of the hungry men, thereby aggravating their present condition of dysentery.

The guards were very liberal with the sick men who needed to frequently relieve themselves. When one dropped out of the column, a call was made to the next guard indicating the man in the woods, thus the word was passed back to each guard until the man was finished his bowel movements.

One of the guards could speak excellent English, and professed to have attended school in Chicago. Hundreds of questions were asked by both the Americans and the guard. We were surprised to hear the guard claim that Germany could not win the war, and after the war was over, he was going to the United States.

The most potent shock of realization that we were prisoners of war came when a German supply truck ran off the road into a ditch and an officer emerged from the cab screaming in German and waving his hand and arms at the truck. The men continued to walk past the officer. Finally in anger, he grabbed one of the prisoners and struck him in the head before pulling out his pistol. At the sight of the gun, twenty-five or so men leapt to the truck and pushed it back on the

road, as the officer continued to heap abuse at them. A wave of helplessness seemed to engulf the men. There was absolutely nothing that could be done when such incidents occurred, but to take it.

There was some talk of trying to escape, but after weighing the possibility of getting shot, and considering the fact that no one had a compass, lack of food, and no conception as to the direction of the American lines, it would have been suicide to attempt an escape.

After hours of walking, the town of Prum was reached, and we were herded like cattle into a bombed-out school building for the night. Of course, once again, food was promised, but never materialized. A few buckets of water were brought, but not near enough to quench the thirst of the exhausted men. The men finally settled down and tried to sleep on the benches and floor, with hunger gnawing at their insides.

On the second day of the march there was a formation in front of the school building and the men who thought they could not make the day's march were told to fall out of the formation. About thirty men stepped out of ranks, but by so lost the opportunity of staying with their buddies. Many a man was either too sick, or too foot sore to make the march, but stayed in line to be with their buddies. The thought of serving the rest of the war with strangers was unthinkable. From this point forward, the attitude of "dog eat dog" often prevailed and it was good to have a friend to share food or any other item one could pick up.

The American officers were still with us, but acted only in an advisory capacity. They continually asked the Germans when food would be given to the men, but had not received favorable answers. The general contention was that

the Germans knew a man was less apt to escape on an empty stomach, especially when it was very cold. For their purpose, the weaker the men were, the better.

Moving along, small towns became more frequent and the people appeared more sympathetic. Standing in windows and doorways some of the elderly civilians were openly crying, while others stood in the streets, staring mutely as the procession of men filed past. Possibly sons and relatives had suffered or were killed by the Americans, but there was no open demonstration of anger, even though almost all of them had felt the war through strafing or bombings by Allied planes. In practically all of the towns we passed through, at least a few of the buildings had been destroyed by allied bombing. Some of the townspeople even managed to slip bread to a few lucky men. One prisoner even traded his rubber galoshes for a loaf of bread, which was appreciated by both parties, since one was very hungry and the other had been wearing wooden shoes.

This bread, which I later learned to yearn for, consisted of a hard, brown substance, usually weighing about two pounds per loaf. Sometimes it came in one and four kilogram loaves. It had a slight resemblance to pumpernickel and the bottom looked as though it were fermenting and usually tasted like it. There was a rumor that sawdust and potato peels were sometimes included in the dough, but was never been verified. The date of baking was always imprinted on the top part of the loaf. During my time as a prisoner of war, this bread was the main item of food.

Although not in a position to admire the scenery, one could not help noticing the beautiful countryside. The German country side consisted of low, rolling hills, similar to Indiana or other parts of the mid-western United States.

Clumps of woods dotted the land, but the great majority of it was fields used farmers.

The destination for 22 December was the town of Gerolstein, approximately twenty-two miles from where we began in Prum. Again, the promise of food made the men anticipate something to eat upon arrival. It was hard to believe that any of us could continue walking without food, but we continued on almost in a trance like state. We arrived in Gerolstein around 5:30 pm and the men were formed into a single line, which usually meant food. After waiting in the snow over two hours, 1/3 of a loaf of bread, a small quantity of hot coffee, and a half pound of cheese was divided between groups of three men. This was the first taste of German rations, and we began wondering if we could exist on it until the war ended.

Before finishing the food, P-47 American fighter planes bombed and strafed the railroad station. When the German anti-aircraft batteries started firing on the planes, they discontinued the attack on the station and commenced diving and firing at the anti-aircraft positions. None of the prisoners were hit and it was a boost in morale to see the American planes back in action.

After the planes departed, a walk of several blocks through town was made to an abandoned factory. Here some considerate German had thrown straw on the concrete floor for the men to sleep on. Bucket after bucket of water was carried in the building and each time the detail appeared at the door, there was a mad scramble to get canteens filled. Fights broke out when some of the men tried to "crash" the lines. A temporary latrine, consisting of two old tin drums was established in the yard, and all during the night there was a long waiting line to use it.

Captivity was beginning to tell on the men. They fought, cursed, and snarled at each other when trying to determine where each man was going to sleep. Space was limited and no one wanted to sleep near the entrances, because of the cold air sweeping through the opening. As it was, there was just enough room for each man to lie down. The men who had not brought blankets went around begging for a place to sleep. These men deserved no sympathy, since they had an equal chance to acquire a blanket before starting the march, but were too lazy to carry anything with them. The aggravating part of the whole situation was the fact that the slackers never volunteered to assist the fellows who allowed them to sleep under their blankets, during the march.

After the lights were extinguished a commotion was heard accompanied by cursing. Someone had stolen a blanket from a sleeping man and he had awakened from the cold. In the darkness, it was impossible to trace the thief, so the unfortunate man was less one blanket. From that moment on all coverings were attached to some portion of clothing and could not be removed without awakening the sleeping man. Everyone began distrusting each other more than ever, and little groups formed cliques, which stuck together in everything that was done.

The next morning, 23 December, at 11:00 am, the men were given an additional  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a loaf of bread to share among three men, but no cheese. After eating the meager ration, we were led to the railroad station.

It was with fearful apprehension that we climbed wearily aboard the diminutive European type box cars, which was approximately half the size of an American box car. Each of the box cars were labeled for "40 men or 8 horses". Our German captors unceremoniously forced sixty men into each car. After being

loaded, the doors were slammed shut and bolted. Even after utilizing the filled manure pits at each end of the car, it was impossible for all of us to be seated at the same time and we were obliged to take turns standing up. The only light penetrating the dismal darkened interior, were pin point streaks from the cracks between the doors and two streams of bright light emanating from the tiny, barred windows situated at each end of the car.

We spent the long night of 23 December in the box cars. Every man his breaking point, and it became apparent that several of the men were reaching theirs. Some of the men, who constantly meditated on their hardships and privations, bemoaning their actual and imaginary ailments, were near the point of derangement. Their constant lament of self-pity was answered with threats of bodily harm by their equally miserable counterparts. All of us were suffering from the pangs of hunger, all of us were freezing cold, and the vast majority of us had the inevitable dysentery. Frozen feet were prevalent among us and the slightest cold would cause untold suffering and agony. In an attempt to take our mind away from that boxcar, my buddy and I discussed our former lives back in the States. We traded stories of former jobs, love life, parents and friends, and of our future plans, if we ever made it back home. In the forefront of my mind was the fact that my future was uncertain.

One of the men began weeping and whimpering piteously and no number of threats, cursing's, or general disapproval could stop him. While gazing at this sniffing, grown man crying, unashamed in the midst of his fellow comrades, I remember thinking, "I must have something on the ball, I have suffered as much as he and I'm not crying."

The string of prisoner-laden box cars remained stationary for many hours, awaiting the arrival of a locomotive. When the train finally did move, it ran for a few miles where it again stopped for several more hours. These periods of inactivity seemed an eternity and had a devastating effect on our morale. Questions pounded our brains: "Why don't we move?" "Why do we just sit here doing nothing?" "Why don't they let us out?" "Why!?" "WHY!?"

At nightfall, prayers for deliverance were said frequently and fervently. Now, they had a definite significance, rather than the previous repetition of a few memorized words spoken on a full stomach and amid comfortable circumstances. Portions of the "Lord's Prayer", "--give us this day our daily bread" and "--deliver us from evil", were generally dwelt on more than any of the other parts. Men who had said very few prayers in their lives now moved their lips in silent prayer and meditation.

The fear of air attack was another matter with which to contend, and it was common knowledge that Allied Air Forces frequently targeted the railroads. We were thankful for the moonless night, knowing that pilots were less apt to locate our train.

The dysentery victims were having an uncomfortable time, since there was no provision for a latrine aboard the cox car. In some cases, the men with dysentery were unable to control themselves and the intermingling stench became unbearable, adding to misery.

Among the prisoners in the box car with me were several men from my old company and platoon. Since being captured, we had endeavored to remain together as much as possible. In the morning as the light crept through the windows of the box car, one man was attempting to read a small Bible. The spot

he was in had insufficient light, so he asked another prisoner to trade places. After much urging, the man reluctantly agreed to move. Soon after, the low rumble of airplane engines were heard in the distance. Instinctively most of us hugged the floor and fearfully awaited the worst. Several of the more courageous men peered through the windows to discern the type of aircraft. Ironically, we were all hoping they were German planes, but they were not. As the first plane dived, the machine-gun bullets tore through the box cars, splintering the thin wooden walls and striking several of the men trapped inside. As the screams of wounded men continued, the planes came around for a second attack. With my heart pounding, I curled up into the smallest possible position, as one 50-caliber shell barely missed my head. The men desperately attempted to open the box car doors and were screaming at the German guards to let us out. Once the planes were gone, the guards finally opened the doors. As I was stepping out of the boxcar, I noticed my Bible-reading buddy lying out-stretched on the floor, a bloody mass of humanity. He was moaning and gasping for breath as a friend knelt beside him and tried to console him as he died.

Medics immediately did what they could to care for the wounded and the dead were removed from the cars. An ambulance from a nearby town arrived and took the more seriously wounded men away, never to be seen from again. In our box car alone, there were two killed and seven wounded and the overall result of the strafing attack accounted for seven dead and forty-eight wounded, many of whom died later.

Meanwhile, the unharmed prisoners congregated in a field and gazed up at B-17 bombers and P-47 fighter planes flying overhead. In order to prevent another attack, the American Officers began having us form a huge, human U S P

W on the snow covered ground. We knew our efforts were successful when several fighter planes flew low and the pilots waved, while dipping their wings in salute.

As darkness closed in on Christmas Eve 1944, the German guards had difficulty getting the men to return to the blood-spattered boxcars. After threats of being shot, we reluctantly returned to the bloody box cars and locked in for the night. The engine had been destroyed, so the train remained stationary, as the sound of more Allied planes could be heard throughout the night.

Christmas morning, a day of peace on earth and good will to men, was a clear, cold, sunshiny day. It was early when the guards opened the doors.

American and German Officers were in conference as to the next move. Since the train locomotive was destroyed, it was apparent that the only way to travel would be to walk. Before starting, each man received another 1/3 loaf of bread and a gallon of molasses for each hundred men which was to be divided by an officer. Unfortunately, about half of the men did not receive any molasses before we were marched away.

Thoughts on this bright, sunny Christmas Day were far away from Germany, the war and the present predicament. When anyone spoke, it was always about home, what the folks, sweethearts, wives and children were doing. Food was another frequent thought and wish. Many were remembering what was eaten last Christmas, or the last one at home. Only the business at hand snapped thoughts back from make-believe to the reality of the present situation. American planes had been sighted and were heading directly for our column of prisoners. Repeating the system used previously, the letters "U S P W" were formed. Finally, a P-38 Lightning came in low and dipped its wings several times

indicating that it had recognized us. This effective procedure was followed three more times over the course of the day.

After twelve hours of walking, a halt was called while the Germans debated possible sleeping quarters for over a thousand men. At the moment it looked as though everyone would have to sleep in a clump of woods. The sun slowly disappeared on the horizon, and it became extremely cold. Everyone hoped and prayed they would not have to spend the night in the woods.

After further deliberation between the German and American officers, it was decided to continue on until a more suitable place to sleep was found. Trying to get the men started again was quite a task. After having gotten seated, it was a difficult effort to gain one's feet again, and start walking on blistered and frost-bitten feet. After each step, everyone swore he could not go on, but somehow managed to stay in the column.

After marching for a few more hours, a small town was reached, and we were split apart into several large barns for the remainder of the night. The farmers were simple folk and appeared to hold no grudge against the Americans. Several brought hot coffee and potatoes to the men in exchange for cigarettes.

We were told that the destination of the next day was to be Limburg a permanent prisoner-of-war camp, situated ten miles to the east of Koblenz. There was a definite rise in morale at the prospect of receiving food and having a fairly decent place to sleep.

While passing through a small town, a woman brought out a bushel of apples for the men and was nearly trampled. In several other places, people threw food from windows, piece by piece, enjoying the scene of grown men fighting and tearing at each other for the scraps of food, just like children

scrambling for pennies. A few even teased the men by simply pretending to throw bread.

Entering the outskirts of the Koblenz on 26 December, the devastation of bombings was immediately noticeable. Even in the open fields, huge bomb craters covered the landscape. The bridge crossing the Rhine into the city of Koblenz had been hit by bombs in many places, and the center of the bridge had been cracked. The Germans had built a temporary bridge across the sagging portion to allow pedestrian traffic to cross.

The line of march was through the center of the city. It was amazing to note the great number of people who were still within the ruined city. It soon became apparent that the prisoners of war were being exhibited for the benefit of the German populace. It was excellent propaganda parading thousands of men through the streets. We were a pitiful bunch to see. Many were sick and were helped along by buddies. Blankets were wrapped around men as they walked and several wore towels tied under the chin to keep their ears warm.

There seemed to be plenty of activity within the city, despite the wrecked appearance. Civilians did not look as though they were starving and, in most cases, were well dressed. Most of the populace remained aloof and, in most cases, ignored the procession, while a few laughed or jeered at the men. A couple of young Nazis, with swastika armbands, spat at the feet of the prisoners, who in turn, gave them a wonderful cursing out in English.

At the other end of the city, another bridge, yet undamaged by bombs, was crossed and it was presumed that it was the last leg of our long journey. At the top of a very long, steep hill, a rest period was in order and all along the line, men

started a chant of “break”, “break”. Apparently, the German officer-in-charge realized the need for a ten-minute break and finally called a halt.

As the men began seating themselves along the sidewalk, German-speaking prisoners commenced conversing with several civilians. The first question on everyone’s mind was how far was Limburg? It was more than a shock to learn that Limburg had been bombed the previous night and many Americans, officers, and enlisted men had been killed. This news was a definite blow to the morale. Many cursed and raved as the disheartening news was received, while others stared impassively at one another. Apparently, the German officer also heard the news, and reversing direction, proceeded back toward Koblenz.

Along the route, a group of Allied prisoners was clearing debris from several bombed-out buildings. They waved a greeting but continued working under the watchful eye of several armed guards. Everyone wondered if that was going to be the fate of our group.

After hours of walking, waiting, and cursing the cold, a huge horse arena came into view. It was a large building with many stables and built of brick. Inside, there was a dirt floor, but it was at present completely covered with straw. It was well ventilated and very cold. The men were exhausted and, in a few minutes, practically all had bedded down and were fast asleep. At midnight while many slept, boiled potatoes were brought in for the men. This was the first real test of comradeship, and it was proven that no such thing existed under the present conditions, as the sleeping men were not awakened. While they continued to sleep, a few men who were awake took all of the potatoes and what they could not eat was crammed into helmets. They also drank the warm water in which the potatoes were cooked, leaving nothing for the sleeping men. A few

hours later coffee was carried in and this time several men made the rounds awakening the sleeping men. When it was discovered that potatoes were served, there was a clamor for more potatoes, but to no avail. Some of the men with full helmets were later seen selling the potatoes to their buddies for cigarettes. After the coffee was consumed, many of the men went back to sleep cursing the rats who had eaten more than their share of the food, and with the determination to be on the alert thereafter.

During the night a wave of stealing began. Overshoes, blankets, and other sundry things were stolen. This made everyone distrust everyone else more than ever. It was heart-breaking to wake up to find blankets or other warmth-giving articles missing, especially since what was had to keep warm was already inadequate.

The town of Wirges, approximately twenty miles to the northeast of Koblenz was our next destination. The penetrated clothing, wet shoes and socks felt like a ton of bricks and each step was agony on blistered, frost-bitten feet. It was amazing to note the limit of human endurance under such trying conditions. The only relief from the physical discomfort was to keep the mind occupied with thoughts of food, home, parents, sweethearts, or any other pleasant remembrance. Periodically, men dropped out of the column and we never saw them again. I was determined not to drop out, no matter how bad it got.

Arriving in Wirges on 27 December, we were led into a factory building to sleep for the night. The windows of the factory were all missing and it seemed to be just as cold inside as it was on the outside.

Italian workers manned the factory under supervision of German foremen. Italian speaking prisoners cornered a couple of the workers and learned they

were brought from Italy to work in labor battalions and had been in Germany over three years. For pay, they were receiving one Mark per day and had a ration of one-fourth of a loaf of bread a day. They wore civilian clothes and had the freedom of the town when off duty. They appeared to be well fed and nicely dressed.

The following morning, 28 December, rumors were heard to the effect that Red Cross parcels were to be issued. This rumor caused great excitement at the moment, but was quickly subdued when we were told that one British Red Cross parcel per twenty men would be distributed. One man was appointed leader of a group and had charge of apportioning out the contents of the parcel. While each portion amounted to little more than a mouthful per man, that meager bite tasted wonderful. Later in the day, a half of loaf of bread was issued per man. That night the men slept a little better with something in their stomachs, for a change. The wave of stealing continued and everyone was ready to fight at the drop of a hat. Moving about at night was a very dangerous past time for anyone bold enough to attempt it.

Hardly able to get completely adjusted, we were aroused at 1:00 am and told to move out. We did not travel far before we found ourselves in another rail yard and the sight of boxcars made many a strong man cringe. We were unceremoniously loaded into the cars and locked inside. Any moving of the train that day was periodical, with long periods of standing still and backing up. The long periods of no movement were agonizing. Sleep would ordinarily come with the rocking of the train in motion, along with the feeling of satisfaction at the thought of getting closer to the final destination, but the intense cold and cramped positions did not help matters. If one moved slightly or stood up to

stretch cramped limbs, another person would invariably acquire some of the precious space.

The doors of the boxcars were not opened for more than two days. A steel helmet was used as a latrine, and the stench was horrifying. Some of the men were too weak to move to the makeshift latrine and soiled themselves, adding to the growing stench in the box car. Sticking an arm through the barred window and scraping snow from the top of the car was the only way of acquiring drinking water.

At approximately 6:00 pm on 31 December, the train stopped and the doors were opened. Outside stood a group of English prisoners of war who informed us that we were headed to Stalag IV-B in Muhlberg, Germany. The ones that were able, stumbled out of the cars, while others were carried out. It was over a mile to the camp and many of the men had to be carried the whole distance.

The camp was a huge place, encircled with a ten-foot barbed wire outer fence and a smaller inner fence about ten feet further inside. The area between the two fences was known as the “dead area” because anyone caught in between would be shot. Guard towers were situated at strategic points around the entire camp. The guards were armed with rifles and the towers had mounted machine guns.

Once inside the gate, everyone was ordered to toss away steel helmets, which most of the men had carried with them since their capture. These helmets had served multiple purposes and it was with reluctance the men tossed them away. Then groups of fifty men were shoved into a barn like structure for the delousing process. Once inside the well heated delousing building, orders were to

strip naked and clothes were bundled together with dog tags attached and thrown into a large receptacle very similar to an oversized washing machine. After the delousing, everyone was allowed to shower for five minutes, after which time the water was shut off. It was a luxury to stand under the hot water and be able to bathe filthy, dirty bodies. It was amazing to see men who had formerly weighed a good many pounds now standing with their ribs protruding. When the flow of water stopped everyone was ushered into a room, equipped with benches, and we were told to wait for the clothes to come through the delousing machine. While we waited, several British prisoners informed us what it was like in the camp. Meanwhile, one Englishman collected all of the first-aid equipment for the Prisoners' Hospital. The Englishman also told us that any or all money would also be taken, so after some deliberation, I turned over 4,000 Belgium Francs, worth approximately \$35.00, to one of the Englishmen to keep for me until after the German search. Many of the prisoners also gave them valuables to hold. After completing the delousing process, we were given several boiled potatoes and a small tin full of millet soup, before we returned to the barn for questioning, search, registration, and barracks assignment.

At the interview, the questions were asked by British prisoners of war, and surprisingly, the only questions were our name, rank and army serial number. In the next room, a young Polish boy took pictures of each prisoner, similar to police photos taken in the U. S. The Pole handed each man a metal dog tag with a prisoner-of-war serial number imprinted on it.

The searching procedure was more of a spot-check instead of the anticipated thorough searching everyone had expected. Some of the men were told to pull off one or both shoes while others had to strip to the waist. One or

more items of clothing were ordered off each man. Every bit of currency was to be turned over to a German guard. All of the invasion money printed by the United States was torn up, while any other money was put into a basket and a receipt issued in return. During the search a few valuables were taken from the men, but in the majority of cases, watches, fountain pens, rings, were not confiscated, possible due to the large number of prisoners in that batch.

Next on the program was the registration of clothes. Each article of clothing was recorded on a form sheet and was supposed to be a protection against acquisition by the Germans. Apparently, there was a Geneva Convention provision about taking clothes from prisoners after registration.

The entire procedure of delousing, searching, questioning, registering and the clothing check took less than an hour, but by the time everyone was assigned to barracks, it was after 6:00 am, New Year's Day, 1945.

The better barracks in the camp were occupied by the British, since most of them had been prisoners over three years. They had an established routine, and quite naturally knew all of the ropes. The majority of them had never left camp during the entire period of imprisonment.

Thousands of men were coming into camp, almost daily, and were practically all Americans captured in the Battle of the Bulge. In one barracks alone, where normally one hundred British and South Africans were housed, three hundred men were now crowded. The original occupants accepted the excess very graciously. The one thing that irritated them was the fact that the issuance of Red Cross parcels would be decreased. Previously, they had received one parcel a week, and with the German ration to supplement that. The parcels contained five packs of cigarettes, a pound can of oleomargarine (or butter), a can

of meat, coffee, tea, or cocoa, about 1/2 pound of sugar, jam or any other sweet, crackers, and a can of powdered milk. On occasions there were variations in the parcels, but basically, they were the same. The three most predominant types of parcels were American, Canadian, and British.

The prisoners' barracks, or as the British called them, huts, were one-story brick buildings with cement floors. At one end of the hut there was a wash basin with faucets and long trowels. The brick stoves were situated at each end, which were the only source of heat for the entire building. Consequently, the most comfortable and only warm spot in the huts during the winter months were the bunks nearest the stoves. Three wooden bunks were situated on one side of the building for the entire length of the room, and on the other side there were tables of all sizes and descriptions, built from boxes and odds and ends. Many of the nails and boards for the tables had been taken from the bunks.

A back-house type latrine was located inside the door, and could be used only at night. The large brick latrine building was used during the day from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm. Anyone caught outside the barracks after 7:00 pm was fired upon by the guards. Electric lights, controlled by a central switch operated by the Germans, were to be turned off at 10:00 pm.

A "Hut Commander" was elected in each barracks, who was in complete charge of each hut and accountable for every man in it. Part of the Hut Commander's duties consisted of calling men for roll call, details, presiding at meetings, settling disputes, distributing food, tea or coffee, turning over to the Germans men accused of wrong-doing and presiding as judge during their trials. His word was law in the barracks, but he could be impeached if the circumstances warranted. The prisoners were allowed to manage all of their internal affairs. All orders from

the Germans came through channels. A Red Cross "Confidence Man", who was elected by the entire camp, with the exception of the Russians, acted as a go-between for the prisoners and the Germans. From him orders came to the "Hut Commander" and was passed on to the men.

The routine day started at 7:15 am, at which time a man was detailed to go through the barracks announcing that roll call would be held in fifteen minutes. Roll call or, as it was known, "on parade", started at 7:30 am. A German non-commissioned officer counted the men. At 7:45 am, coffee was brought. Between 10:00 am and 12:00 noon, soup or skilly was served and usually consisted of carrots, turnips, or millet. At 3:00 pm one-sixth of a loaf of bread was given to each man. Occasionally a pat of oleomargarine or a spoonful of jam was included in the ration. Potatoes were also issued on the basis of one pound per man, tea, which had been collected from Red Cross parcels, was served at 3:45 pm and 7:15 pm. At 10:00 pm, the lights were turned out. Once a week, a few tablespoons of sugar were given, which only aggravated the desire for more, as everyone seemed to have an urge for sweets. When the Germans were in the mood, they would give the men a few grams of lard or some similar substance.

All cooking of the food issued by the Germans was done by Russians in a huge kitchen. At an appointed time, every day a detail from each hut came to the kitchen and carried the food to their respective huts. Any other cooking was done on the two stoves in the huts. The portion of the stove that could be used for cooking was an area approximately three feet square, but the fires were usually so low that it was an all-day job to cook anything. It took over an hour to heat a small can of water. A system was devised for using the stove. Each person who desired to cook something, placed it in a waiting line and as one can of food was

finished the next in line was put over the fire. One man was detailed to handle everything about the stove. Fuel was so scarce, however, that the stove usually went out about 3:00 pm and was cold until the next morning when more briquettes of coal were issued.

After a good night's sleep, shaves were in order and with borrowed shaving equipment most of the new arrivals proceeded to lop off three to four weeks growth of whiskers which made them feel like human beings again.

Many of the prisoners took advantage of the fact that they could roam around the camp, and tried to locate some of their lost buddies.

The entire camp was separated into sections. The Russians were in one section, French in another and the Americans and British were together in another section. It was possible to trespass into any of the other sections during the daytime. Since this camp was originally for British non-commissioned officers, they naturally had the better building.

Due to the influx of men into the camp, some Americans were forced to live in temporary wooden structures, which were much smaller than the ordinary barracks and had one U. S. Army type cast-iron stove in the center of the room. It was an unpleasant sight to see fellow Americans living like animals. The men slept on the dirt floor and when not asleep crowded around the inadequate stove for warmth. The floors were littered with trash and empty cans and no one in the buildings had attempted to shave or wash since arriving at the camp. The general attitude of these men was "to hell with everything". Self-pity was the downfall of many a man in prison camps.

Many Russians were seen scavenging in the trash piles in the British section. It became apparent that they were eating potato peelings which had

been thrown away. After a few days in camp, the Russians would line up in front of every hut in the section waiting for the potato peelings, or anything else edible. They were undoubtedly the most mistreated nationality in the entire camp and were forced to do the filthiest labor around the area. Receiving less food than anyone else, they were also excluded from receiving Red Cross parcels, as Russia did not belong to the International Red Cross and did not sign the Geneva Convention Agreement. They wore cast-off clothes which were begged, borrowed or stolen.

One of the worse crimes committed in a prison camp is stealing, especially the stealing of food. The temptations were frequent as everyone was hungry all of the time. One day, a prisoner had a cake baking in the oven and he soon discovered that it had been stolen. He had saved for weeks trying to accumulate enough sugar, flour and shortening to put into it. The Hut Commander immediately started an investigation and everyone was forced to stand in the center of the room while searching committee made the round of the bunks. They found the partially empty pan under an American's bed. The suspected man was called before the entire group to stand trial and he pled guilty after being questioned. Several men escorted him outside and proceeded to give him a merciless beating, after which he was taken to the wash room and doused in ice cold water. He was then thrown out of the hut into the freezing temperatures. Later he was allowed to return to the hut and the following day was turned over to the Germans who imprisoned him in the jail house for one week.

Another incident of stealing occurred during the transporting of potatoes from the kitchen to the barracks. One of the men, an American, stuffed potatoes

in his pockets while carrying them from the kitchen. Upon arriving at the hut, he was searched and slapped around a bit and then given a two day prison sentence.

A feeling of hopelessness swept the newcomers as they were given two postal cards which could be sent to the folks back home. The people at home seemed so far away and the uncertainty of ever getting back made one feel low. Some of the men refused to send the cards, which was rather foolish. After our liberation, it was learned that the only word received by the parents and friends of the prisoners were those cards. The only other word was a "Missing in Action" notice from the War Department. These cards did not reach the folks back home until March, 1945

Since the camp was originally for non-commissioned officers, the policy was that no one was forced to labor for the Germans. In order to pass the time of day, many projects were established. The most prominent project was a troupe of actors, who rehearsed, made costumes for various plays, wrote music, lyrics and dialogues, even remodeled a barracks into a theater, and staged performances for the prisoners' benefit. One to three cigarettes was the usual admission fee, and all seats were numbered and reserved, with ushers showing the audience to their seats. It was conducted on a very professional basis. The show I saw was called "Keep it Dark", a musical comedy, which was well acted and the majority of the actors looked professional. Jokes were mostly about Americans and their customs. The jokes that were not about Americans were understandable only to the British. The music was very catchy and was later hummed by practically everybody in camp. After a run at the theater, the troupe went on the "road" and performed each night in different barracks. At the conclusion of each performance a collection of cigarettes was made.

Another of the barrack shows was a pantomime of Cinderella. It was extremely funny and was the first time many of the newcomers had laughed in weeks. All the dialogue was sung to music. The female impersonations were the closest thing to a woman many of the prisoners had seen for periods of three to five years.

Many an hour was spent in making plates, pans and drinking cups from empty tin cans. The old timers showed the newcomers how to turn the ends of two pieces of tin and batter them in place to form practically any utensil desired. Cup handles were made by the same process. All the cooking and eating was done in these homemade pans, cups, and plates. The Germans did not issue utensils at all. Forks and spoons could be purchased from the Russians for one to 10 cigarettes, depending how good a bargainer was. The Russians probably had stolen them from the Germans.

Cigarettes were the only medium of exchange and prices were established on the more common items. A store was situated in the center of camp and anyone desiring to sell articles would take them to the store, where the storekeeper, a prisoner, received a Commission when the article was sold. Or the storekeeper could buy the article for a few cigarettes less than the established price and then resell it. Items of all descriptions were put on sale. There were watches, rings, canned goods from Red Cross parcels, clothing and anything else a prisoner wanted to get rid of in order to obtain smokes or food.

All of the canned goods had holes punched in the tops of the cans by the Germans in order to prevent the accumulation of food, which would be an incentive for a prisoner to attempt to escape. Much of the bartering was done in an area in front of the "Mart", as it was called. The Russians were predominant in

the trading area. Since they usually worked outside the camp, everything they had for sale was stolen and smuggled into the camp. Bread typically cost 70 cigarettes while approximately five pounds of potatoes cost 30 cigarettes. Since the penalty for smuggling was the confiscation of the article by the Germans and a long jail sentence, the Russians would only sell to the old-timers or someone vouched for by the old-timers. In fact, many of the old-timers acted as agents for the Russians and solicited trade. This was a highly profitable racket as they usually received commissions.

One of the many incidents which made the Americans appear below the standards of the British occurred one afternoon. Many of the men complained of bad odors emanating in a certain vicinity of the sleeping section of the room. Upon investigation by the hut commander, it was discovered that a young American, suffering from dysentery, had “gone” right in bed and had laid in his own waste for hours, fully clothed, either too lazy or too engrossed in self-pity to go to the latrine. He was stripped naked and forced to take a bath. His clothes were thrown away and the hut commander thoroughly reprimanded the culprit. This incident and the fact that many of the Americans refused to improve their appearances by washing or shaving lowered the opinions of many fellow prisoners toward the Americans. Many of the Americans looked as bad or worse than many of the Russians, who did not have the opportunities of cleansing themselves. Many of the unclean Americans entered the barracks and stared at the British as they were eating. This became so aggravating to the British soldiers that a ruling was established forbidding non-members of the huts to enter, unless accompanied by a member or on official business.

Within a week after our arrival, Red Cross parcels were issued, with one parcel for every two men. Here again the newcomers showed their inexperience, for despite repeated warnings from the old-timers, many became violently ill from overeating. Many had eaten everything in the parcel on the first day, instead of spreading it over a period of time. It was doubtful whether additional parcels would be forthcoming, because of the extremely large number of men in the camp. Present stocks of parcels would only accommodate seven men per parcel and no one knew when they would be issued.

Next day, the sick call was crowded with the gluttons. All were given an ash-tasting substance. A few were admitted to the hospital, which was run by the prisoners themselves. Here the patients were well treated by prisoner doctors and medics. Special convalescent Red Cross parcels were available and cooking was done by the hospital staff, using the food taken from each man's parcel. Although the death rate was relatively low, many died from pneumonia and malnutrition.

Two churches had been built, one Catholic and one Protestant, and were well frequented. The Catholic Church was staffed by a Pole, an Englishman, and a French priest. Altar and statues of Christ and the Virgin Mary were hand carved by devotees. Masses were held each day, usually in the morning and the special services were held in the evenings. Because of the large number of churchgoers on Sundays, the theater was used alternately during the day by the Catholic and Protestant faiths. Many of the stalwart men who in the past never approached the church found solace in attending every available religious service.

Practically every night a program of some sort was held in the barracks, if the conditions permitted. One evening a dance band entertained, while another

time several of the South Africans gave interesting talks on hunting wild animals in Africa, and there was an Englishman who lectured on the “Economic Outlook of the British Empire”. For anyone not interested it, was a simple matter to adjourn to the bunks and sleep.

In many of the Red Cross Christmas parcels, were all several games, including checkers, cards, badminton and many others. These were in the possession of the hut commanders and could be used by signing them out, All in all, prison life in Stalag 4-B was not too bad, compared to what we endured immediately after capture.

During the second week, one parcel for each seven men was issued and with it came the disheartening news that privates and privates first class were to be shipped out of the Stalag on the 17th of January.

The last days prior to leaving the camp were spent preparing for the dreaded day. Accumulating all of the ingredients in the possession of buddies, a cake was baked using ground crackers for flour, powdered milk, raisins, oleomargarine, sugar and water. Not having baking powder, it turned out rather flat, but it tasted delicious. Packing belongings into the smallest possible roll and saying heartfelt goodbyes before leaving were next in order.

The day of departure was a freezing, windy morning and still dark as the men filed out of the barracks. Showers were taken and the men were again subjected to a search. Separate shipment groups of men were formed, and there was a three hour wait in an open court yard awaiting the word to move out. It was torturous, as feet became numb and ached horribly. No amount of moving around would relieve them.

Before leaving camp, a half of loaf of bread was issued to each man. When orders to move out were finally given, we made the short hike back to the Muhlburg train station, where we again loaded the dreaded box cars. When the train stopped late in the afternoon, we were in Belgern astride the Elbe River. We marched through the sleepy little town, outwardly untouched by the war, the prisoners were taken to the local Hunting Club building. It was nothing more than an empty hall with trophies hanging from the walls with a stage at one end and several rooms just off the main hall. Several men were detailed to carry straw from a nearby barn and some semblance of order prevailed as each man was assigned space in which to throw down straw to sleep on. After one hundred and fifty men laid down, there was hardly room to move without stepping on someone's bed of straw. At either end of the hall were cast iron stoves, which did heat the room a little.

The following morning, after one of the best nights rest in ages, organization began. An interpreter was requested by the Germans and a German speaking prisoner volunteered. He preceded to take charge, appointing several of his friends as cooks. All the cooking was to be done several blocks away from the hall, due to the hunting lodges' lack of cooking facilities. Rations for the week were completely inadequate. They consisted of one-sixth of a loaf of bread per day and soup made from dried greens. Trading was nil, since no one except the cook and the interpreter were allowed to leave the building. Crock full of soup were carried from the makeshift kitchen to the hall each day. Approximately one bushel of potatoes was supposed to be put into the soup, but by the time the cooks and the interpreter had their fill, the remaining few potatoes could hardly be tasted at all. Consequently, the men became weaker and sicker each day.

Toward the end of the first week in the Hunting Lodge, the Red Cross Confidence Man, an American Sergeant from Stalag 4-F arrived with one-thousand much needed cigarettes, several games of checkers, and a few decks of cards. He also brought word that additional Red Cross Parcels were forthcoming in the near future.

He was immaculately dressed in neatly pressed pants, OD blouse with ribbons. This was a sharp contrast to the other shabby, starving prisoners, who were hanging on to every word he spoke. As the guards departed from the hall, he gave us all the war news, presumably received over a hidden radio back at the main Stalag. Before leaving he graciously collected wrist watches to be repaired free of charge by a friend, who was an expert watch repairman, and needed practice to stay an expert. These watches were never seen again. This was heartbreaking, when I remembered that I was offered 1500 cigarettes back at Stalag 4-B for my watch and refused it.

On the 26th of January 1945, more Red Cross parcels arrived, one for every three men. There was much rejoicing, as the men stuffed themselves, making trades and concocting various recipes. One of the more frequent mixtures was snow, powdered milk and sugar, stirred together forming a substance with a slight similarity to ice cream. There was always a craving for sweets during the entire interment as a prisoner.

The following day, one-hundred of the one-hundred and fifty men were told to prepare to depart. A list of men scheduled to leave was compiled by the interpreter, and I was one of the men chosen.

To everyone's surprise, the Germans supplied stove inside each box car along with a ration of coal bricks. It was a short, warm trip, passing through the

city of Torgau to Zietz Germany, which would be my home the remainder of my time as a prisoner of war.

Upon arrival, a new guard formed the men into a column of threes and escorted us through the city to the "Schutzenplatz", formerly the town recreation center. Above the entrance-way hung a sign declaring that the building was being used by prisoners of war. Prisoners of War were commonly referred to as "commandos" or working men. Upon entering the former dancehall, a number of other American prisoners of war were found. They did not appear too pleased at seeing the new men. Their resentment prevailed during the entire time spent there and was to cause many hard feelings. As the newcomers filed into the huge room, the majority of the inmates ignored them. The few that did fraternize with the new group let us know that our new home was not too bad. They had been receiving a good portion of thick soup each day and the ration of bread was five men to a loaf.

Within two hours after arriving, several hoarded rations of bread were stolen from the packs of the newcomers, which tended to increase the strained relations of the two groups. Looking around it was noted that the entire place was quite compact and different than any other Stalag we had been in. A public restaurant was still on the premises and was now operated by the former owner of the building. It was situated on the outer portion of the building, but the prisoners were unable to gain access to it. In the basement was a kitchen where all the cooking for both the restaurant and the prisoners was done. The prisoner's part of the kitchen contained two huge cast iron pots, about three feet in diameter. Underneath the pots was a fire compartment. These were sufficient, since the main diet was soup, ersatz coffee, and tea. Two prisoner cooks handled

the food, under the supervision of a German guard, who did all of the rationing of the food. The main items of food were potatoes, turnips, kohlrabi, carrots and bread. On occasion sauerkraut or millet were served. The portions were calculated at approximately one pound of the raw item per man. By the time peelings were taken off, it was considerably less. After it was cooked, each man received a can full of soup (about 500 grams or a little less than a pint). This soup and the daily ration of bread, plus a small oleomargarine and sometimes a piece of blood sausage, the size of an American half dollar and about as thick, was the usual daily ration. Once a week, usually on Saturdays, a tablespoon full of jam and several spoonful of sugar, were given out. Later on, the rations were supplemented by what could be begged, borrowed, stolen, and traded from the Germans. Without these opportunities to obtain additional food, many of the men would never have returned.

Within the hall itself, were our living quarters. On either side of the former dance floor were raised platforms extending the entire length of the floor. At the far end was a stage, with a stove that was our only source of heat. In order to keep the fire going, the men had to bring wood from their various places of work. The guards did not seem to object to this method of obtaining fuel. In the center part of the dance floor were double-decker wooden bunks. On the raised platforms on either side, were tables and chairs, borrowed from the former owner of the beer hall. In a room next to the stage was a wash room, while at the other end was the latrine having modern plumbing fixtures. On one of the platforms was an old foot-pedal organ. Many evenings were spent listening to prisoner piano players, playing remembered tunes. All of the windows were strung with barbed wire, which served as a grim reminder of our imprisonment.

As the rest settled down for the night, the newcomers were forced to sleep on the floor, or tables, due to the shortage of bunks in the room.

There was a rude awakening next morning, at 5:00 am, as a guard proceeded to stomp amongst the bunks, shouting and blowing a whistle. In a few seconds the lights were turned on, and a bedlam of shouts arose cursing the guards. It was a “good natured” condemnation in as much as the guards could not understand the words. The usual procedure upon dressing was a trip to the washroom to wash up, even though the water was extremely cold. A minority never bothered to wash, and later there was an all-out resolution to force these unclean individuals to wash. By 6:00 am the daily ration of bread, one-fifth of a loaf of bread, plus a small portion of blood sausage, or a piece of rancid cheese, was issued. Later the coffee was brought in and soon “breakfast” was finished. This was the only food issued until sometime around 5:30 pm that evening. As the men were called out into the courtyard prior to being assigned jobs, the newcomers were told to remain inside. Following the departure of the “old men” for work, the new arrivals were escorted to a warehouse where huge quantities of clothing, bunks, and other items were stored. While the guard's attention was diverted, many of the men stole various articles of clothing, such as gloves, mufflers, and caps, stuffing them inside overcoats. When the guards finally returned, each two men were ordered to carry a double-decker wooden bunk back to the Schutzenhauser, our home, some five blocks away.

With the assignment of bunks, issuance of blankets and wooden lockers, came the feeling of permanency, after the uncertainty and hardships of the past month. The remainder of the day was used to situate our things.

The whole day resulted in a complete success. The soup that night was delicious, being the best received thus far. After eating, the new men were called together by the prisoner-in-charge, or as he was called, the president. Here, like Stalag IVB, a prisoner was elected to assume full control over the internal affairs. An interpreter was also appointed and a former medic was assigned, from the non-working non-commissioned officers' camp, to handle the sick call for the Commando. These three men were not required to work. The president explained the procedures to be followed at the Schutzenhaus. All of the men were divided into groups of twenty-five or so, with an elected group leader. All distributions were made by the president to the various group leaders who in turn, apportioned it amongst the men in his respective group. In the case of soup, a large can had been assigned to each group and when the food was ready, that particular can was carried to the kitchen, where the president poured so many ladles full, in full view of the carriers. Upon completion they were transported to the respective group leaders, at which time in line was formed according to assigned members, and the food was dispensed with an ordinary can. If after the line had traversed once, and if there were some soup left in the can, a smaller can was used to distribute the "seconds" until it was completely gone. In most cases the "seconds" never completed the cycle of men, and in order to maintain an equitable distribution, the numbered men following the last person receiving "seconds" would start the line the following night, and so on. As for the bread, one loaf was given to each five men, to be divided amongst themselves. A system of fair allocation was devised in our group of five. The loaf was cut in five sections, and one man pointed to a piece, while another, with his back turned, called the name of one of the five individually, until all the pieces were accounted for. In

this way if one piece happened to be slightly larger or smaller, there's no argument, because any of the five could have drawn theirs.

The next day there was no work for the newer men again. Today was supposed to be devoted to showers and delousing. This entailed a trip to the hospital. As was the custom in Germany, prisoners were forced to walk out in the streets, dodging manure, while the guards and civilians used the sidewalks. On the way over, we began taking notice of the town. It was not very different from the normal American city of around 10,000 people. The streets were narrow and made of cobblestone, with hardly any traffic, excepting horse drawn vehicles and bicycles. Everyone seemed to carry a pack on his back, even very old women and men. Children carried their schoolbooks strapped to their backs. **Zietz** had been bombed by the allies on the 8th of November, 1944. The results of these bombings were evident, although it was not as destructive as in Koblenz. An average of one house per block, was the approximate ratio of the destruction.

Finally arriving at the hospital some five blocks from the Schutzenhaus, there was a long wait as the guards inquired as to the whereabouts of the delousing. It was learned that it was situated in one part of the morgue building, and could accommodate twenty-five men at a time, the remainder waited in the boiler room, nearby. Upon entering the morgue, clothes were removed and stowed into the delouser, in this case a huge oversized washing machine that used steam, instead of chemicals such as were used at Stalag IVB. In a few minutes the water was warm enough for the showers, after which the men were told to move into a small, drafty room to await the completion of the delousing process. During the three hour wait, several of the exploring men discovered that by peeking through the keyhole of the locked door, a good view of the morgue

could be had. There was a flurry of excitement when it was discovered that in the next room was a young, nude blonde girl lying uncovered on the slab. The more morbid members of the group spent most of the time peering through the keyhole and having lengthy discussions about her erstwhile charms.

When the clothes finally emerged from the delousing process, any piece of clothing with leather parts were completely ruined, having been shrunk beyond recognition. A few unfortunates had sent their shoes through and were unable to put them back on. Gloves with leather palms, belts and billfolds were rendered useless by this lack of information prior to putting these items in the machine. The civilian in charge had deliberately neglected to forewarn the men. Returning to the Schutzenhaus, or Lager as it was sometimes called, late in the afternoon, my buddy was able to trade twenty of our precious cigarettes for a whole loaf of bread. It was heaven-sent and made the entire evening a period of rejoicing for us. It was hard to realize the difficulty of obtaining extra food under these trying circumstances and it was with a fervent prayer of thanksgiving that I went to bed that night. The sharing of everything with my partner (Giovanniasi was bringing results and was advantageous for both of us.

The first day of work was an ordeal. Aside from the extremely cold weather, weakness handicapped many. Everyone was outside, in the courtyard by 6:30 am, at which time the various jobs were organized, by a German sergeant. Different places of work required any number of men from two to thirty. It was simply a matter of appointing certain men to the individual jobs and then waiting for the bosses, or masters, to come and march them to the job. The work consisted of shoveling debris, cleaning bricks, pushing a wheelbarrow or digging ditches. I was assigned to work on an indoor swimming pool building and a huge, tile inlaid

outdoor swimming pool, with a modernistic diving board and numerous bath houses, which had been partially demolished during the November air raids. This project was not considered a "good job" since it was impossible to make trades, inasmuch as the entire area was surrounded by a tall wooden fence and civilians were forbidden to trespass. Consequently, the men would usually try to dodge this detail. On one of the many trips to the outdoor latrine, several hundred yards away, a German soldier was encountered guarding stranded army trucks. He seemed friendly and after grinning at each other for several seconds, he asked in broken English if I was an American. I nodded Yes, and he proceeded to explain that relatives of his lived in Chicago and he was going to America when the war was over. He also explained that Hitler had made a speech the previous night and had demanded that the Germans fight to the last man, if necessary. The guard did not seem very enthusiastic about the "last man" clause, or about Hitler whom he hated. His home had been blown to bits, forcing his family to live with friends and he had been in the Army over seven years, having only attained the rank of an equivalent of our Private First Class. The ultimate factor was that he had nothing to look forward to, regardless of the outcome of the war.

It was after 4:40 PM when work ceased and the thirty men started for the Schutzenhaus. After washing, the call for the soup detail was awaited. The ruling was that the food (soup) would not be distributed until every man had returned from work. Quitting times were established by the various bosses and could be from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm, depending on their humor or moods. After eating, the men usually read, slept, conversed and waited for tea at 7:30 pm or the inevitable roll call which took place anytime between 7:00 and 10:00 pm. Five minutes prior to roll call, the guards would notify the president, who had the inmates form

columns of three and wait for the sergeant to arrive. As he entered the room, the president would yell "Attention", but no one took notice of the command. The procedure was just a count of the men and if the total corresponded with the number of men in the Lager, that was all. Usually, since the Germans are notorious counters, it required two or three different counts to obtain the desired figure. Upon completion of the roll call, the president again called "Attention" and saluted the retreating sergeant, who generally returned it with the outstretched Nazi salute, which caused numerous "razz-berries" or a murmur of "go to hell", or "you Nazi bastard". Either from not understanding or indifference, the Sergeant ignored these outbursts.

After that ordeal was finished, the men usually went to bed, hoping there would be no air raids alarm. When an alarm sounded, an alert was given first consisting of three short blasts, at that signal, none of the prisoners bothered to move. If after the alert had sounded, the overhead alarm was heard, there was a mad scramble of dressing, rushing to the doors, and then to the shelter, situated just outside the front door of the building. Half of the entire shelter was reserved for prisoners and the rest could be used by civilians. The two sections were connected by a door at which a guard was usually stationed to prevent the civilians and prisoners of war from associating with each other. Generally, the alarms lasted for twenty to thirty minutes after the men were counted as they entered the door of the Schutzenhaus. The all-clear signal was a long, steady, continuous blast and a generally caused many sighs of relief.

The 1st of February was an extremely cold, dark day. Purposely avoiding the swimming pool job, a harder, colder job was allotted to me. This necessitated working in an open field, with no protection from the driving wind which whipped

through our clothing. After much persuasion and a cigarette, Kurt, the boss, allowed a fire to be built and permitted three men to warm themselves at one time. Since there were only nine men on that particular job, each individual remained by the fire for twenty minutes per hour. Kurt's generosity was prompted by the fact that he himself was cold and stood by the fire constantly and the job was situated in such an outlandish vicinity that passing pedestrians could not see that the prisoners were not working every minute. Digging and shoveling were to become everyday occurrences for me, and today was no exception for we were required to dig a huge sewer hole. Trading here was also nil and I was determined to be assigned to a job with trading possibilities the following day. There usually were many arguments pertaining to these assignments and the sergeant made the final decisions as to where the individuals worked.

Next morning the interpreter asked for volunteers for a brand-new job. Rushing to the spot designated, we awaited the appearance of the boss. To the surprise of everyone, a young boy of sixteen years arrived to escort us to the job. But this was one-time appearances were deceiving, because within ten minutes of leaving the Lager we were in the presence of a real boss, a dictatorial, loudmouth, Nazi saluting individual who hated Americans. While walking to the scene of the work, the young boy strutted, "Nazi saluting" and "Heil Hitlering" each person encountered. Many seemed reluctant to return the salute, but did so out of fear of consequences. On his left arm, he wore a Nazi armband with a swastika on it. After a short walk, we arrived at a bombed house and the work commenced. A cement mixer cart was assigned to me. Other prisoners filled it with debris and it was pushed to the street for dumping. The boss supervised each loading, making

certain it was loaded to overflowing. It was very heavy and pushing it was an exertion.

Upon returning to the Schutzenhaus with a leaden heart, my buddy informed me that our hoarded bread had been stolen. At that particular moment, respect for fellow humans hit a new low. This loss was more disastrous than losing a huge sum of money. While eating the now thinning soup, curses, both silent and outspoken, were heaped upon the unknown thief. As was the custom, the thief was reported to the President. During the formation for roll call, he threatened the thief with many punishments if and when the criminal was ever caught. But apparently these threats did not faze the crooks because the thefts continued to take place. Suspicion was cast on the sick call, who stayed in the room all day, but there was no proof. These stealing's were having a devastating effect on the morale, since everyone began suspecting one another. The disappearance of a piece of bread, or cigarettes did not sound very serious, but to hungry, almost starved men, it was their very breath of life.

Rumored war news on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1945 was good. The men thrived on this news, never worrying about its source. A German civilian had told men that the Russians were within fifty kilometers of Berlin. Another prisoner had heard that the Russians had Berlin under artillery attack.

At night, prayers were said with fervor and with feeling. One part of the Lord's Prayer "...give us this day our daily bread" was unconsciously dwelt upon longer than any other portion. Food had become an obsession and was the prime subject in practically all activities, both awake and asleep. Dreaming and talking of food was a favorite pastime: what had been eaten, the enormous amount of food thrown away (in what seemed like years ago), what the first meal upon liberation

would be like, wondering if it would be possible to make a trade tomorrow, or the next day, and silently hoping and praying the Red Cross parcels had arrived by the time work was finished ---these were but a few of the thoughts passing through the minds of the men every day.

Sunday was a day of rest. The Germans had directed that every man was to take shower at the hospital. About seventy-five percent jumped at the opportunity of cleansing themselves, but a few were either too lazy or reluctant to expose themselves, to cold weather after hot showers. Consequently, the number of men taking showers was checked, until all had been accounted for. This system forced the unclean prisoners to wash. In between taking showers, the day was spent reading, playing cards for cigarettes, or cooking potatoes on the one stove. Some of the more progressive men had ripped up a blanket and preceded to sew patches in pants make new gloves, hats or any other articles of clothing needed. My partner was fortunate enough to trade ten cigarettes for a half loaf of bread, which made the day a complete success.

The next day a thief, was caught stealing bread. A meeting of the entire Lager was called and the culprit was forced to stand on a table during the trial. Witnesses of the act were questioned by the president and the accused was told to defend himself. All he could say was the bread would be returned the next day. Then the question of guilt was put before the crowd and it was decided unanimously that the punishment was to be administered. Volunteers were requested to step into the washroom, with the convicted thief who was unceremoniously thrown into the room. There were such a large number of volunteers that the president decided to select six husky men to do the preliminary beating and then anyone desirous of striking a few blows would be

allowed to do so later. One at a time these men pummeled the unresisting thief. Each continued beating him until they were too tired to raise a hand. During the course of the punishment, the recipient feigned unconsciousness but that did not stop the beating because one man held him up by the arms while the punishment continued. When the beating was completed, the thief was forced to stand on a table again for exhibition. His face was a complete mass of blood, and swollen to twice its normal size. It was proposed and seconded that this man was to forfeit his ration of bread, which would be given to his victim and no one would speak to him for a week.

During the next several days, there was much clamoring for Red Cross parcels. The old men had last received parcels three weeks before, and the newcomers had gotten one parcel for three men two weeks before. Soup was steadily becoming thinner and there was less each day.

Rumors that the Russians were within the city limits of Berlin have been circulating. Some of the German civilians admitted that it was true, while others vehemently denied it. Our hopes fluctuated with the more predominant rumored war news each day.

We proceeded to work on a sewer digging job with a very old lazy boss named "Pop" who, upon arriving at the site, immediately built a fire in his shack and then went sound asleep. In order that the job did not come to a complete standstill, an agreement was arranged among the men so that certain men would be working or pretending to work at all times. This precaution was to keep passing people from reporting us for loafing. On occasion inspectors were known to canvas the various jobs. The latrine was a bomb crater some hundred or so yards from the sewer. Slipping away I encountered a young boy nearby who asked

for ten cigarettes in return for one hundred saccharine tablets. Handing him eight he quickly turned over the box of tablets and disappeared. On the return trip it was necessary to walk along the back fences of several houses. Halfway, a sample of indifference was displayed; a German woman was calmly seated on a latrine in a backhouse with the door wide open. She was so callous, a smile appeared on her face at the sight of me. In a moment after arising, I motioned her to me and in memorized German asked if it were possible to trade cigarettes for either bread or potatoes. Motioning yes, she soon returned with a sack full of potatoes, indicating the price would be ten cigarettes. Handing over the requested number, the potatoes were shoved inside my overcoat and all was well for the moment.

On the way home the civilians seemed excited. They stood in small groups talking loudly but, as we passed, ceased and just stared. This apparent excitement heightened the tension with the Lager. The only possible explanation could be that the Russians were in Berlin. Extra prayers were said that night in hopes that this was an actual fact.

The following day was the day when ten selected men, old men, were allowed to travel by train to Hartsmandorf for as many parcels as they could carry. A ripple of excitement and well wishes followed the announcement that they had finally gone and the men were in good spirits on the jobs that day, with the expectation of receiving at least one parcel for three men. It was after 9:00 PM when the detail returned with exactly fifty parcels, which were locked up until distribution could be decided. It was a definite shock amongst the new men when it was announced that since the parcels were Christmas packages, which had been reserved for the old men prior to the arrival of the newcomers, consequently they would be issued one parcel for each fifty old men. A wave of

protest arose at this announcement and heated arguments commenced between the two factions. Never before had such reasoning been the basis for issuing parcels since every other Lager had shared the parcels with the number of present, regardless of when the man arrived, or departed. Fights broke out, but were quickly stopped by members of both groups. However, the final outcome of the situation was the opening of the parcels, as the new members stared enviously and hungrily at the old men as they consumed parts of the contents and muttered between themselves about the unfairness. Other events soon occupied the men and as air raid alarms were becoming commonplace and much of the time at the Lager was spent in the shelter. For the most part, Zietz was being bypassed, but the surrounding towns were being hammered. At night the red glare of fires was evidence of the bombings and explosions which could be heard even in the underground shelter.

On the 7th of February, The German ration of tobacco was issued consisting of one ounce of foul-smelling tobacco and light Polish cigarettes. However, the tobacco was better than the coffee grounds, tea grounds, and dried leaves some of the men had been smoking. The Polish cigarettes were nothing more than a piece of thin card board material approximately four inches long with tobacco stuffed in the end an inch and a half. Since my buddy and I did not smoke at all, these items were used primarily for trading. Even the German civilians were grateful to receive tobacco of any kind. Their rations were cut to practically nothing and they were hurting as well.

I was starting a new job the next day working on a bombed-out house located at number 4 Lindenplatz which was situated across the street from the hospital. The good feature of this particular job was the fact that only four men

were permanently assigned to work there every day and most of the work was done inside of a courtyard, which lead into an apartment house. This gave us a certain amount of privacy in dealing with civilians, who were normally skeptical about having other people see them conversing with prisoners of war. Two elderly men were the bosses and did all the skilled work such as bricklaying, mixing cement and placing scaffolds. Both had participated in the previous World War and Mier had received two wounds in the leg for which he was receiving a pension. Hans was over 65 years of age and very active. Upon arriving on the scene, the first requisite was fire, which was built over violent protests of Hans. It was amusing to note, that later he warmed himself, too. Our first assignment was cleaning bricks which was simply a matter of knocking off the old mortar with a hammer. It was easy work in comparison to shoveling and wheelbarrow pushing on other jobs. As the women left their apartments for the stores, it was necessary for them to pass within several feet of the workbench. Soon they were nodding, "good morning" and later even stopped and conversed. The possibilities for trading were unlimited and the first day in exchange for twenty cigarettes, I received a loaf of bread.

That night the German Sergeant came in to pay off the men for their laboring. The wage was supposed to be one mark for each day of work and was absolutely no good for making purchases since everything bought had to be accompanied by ration stamps. Since it had no value, we used the money in craps or poker games. Usually, one man cornered all the money in the room during the evening of games. Then there was a lull in the games being played for money until the following payday. The mark was supposed to be the equivalent of twenty cents of U. S. currency, but in reality, was worthless.

Another man was caught stealing a ration of bread on the 12th of February. The same procedure was followed for the trial, but in this case the culprit admitted stealing the bread. Unfortunately, his admission had no visible effect on the men administering the beating, for they used him as a punching bag. Not once did the delinquent defend himself and soon was beaten until he was unresponsive. Water was tossed over him and the beating continued. After half an hour of merciless pounding, he was allowed to sag to the floor, at which time the medics announced he had received enough punishment. The next day he was sent to the hospital with a broken jaw, broken nose, and punctured eardrum. The scars from that beating would remain with him for the remainder of his life.

That night I began reading the "Great Smith" by Edison Marshall, which had been acquired from fellow inmates by trading one cigarette for it. Certain men had monopolized the books, and upon completion would not release it to another person unless another book was given in return. This clique of book owners was concentrated among the old men who had received books in their Christmas parcels.

The ration of soup was becoming less each day. The soup now was nothing more than hot water with a few potatoes or carrots thrown in for flavor. The bread ration was also cut to six men per loaf instead of the five originally scheduled. Complaints were voiced at a meeting about the peelers cutting deep into the vegetables and then boiling the skins for their own personal use. The sick call usually did the peeling, and from then on, the peelings were to be thrown away, thereby eliminating any personal gain by cutting huge chunks from the vegetables during the preparation. A formal complaint was presented to the Area Control Officer by the president but to no avail. Many vowed not to appear for

work if the food did not improve. The German response to the threat was “no work, no food”, so that idea was quickly forgotten. Even though the guards were cognizant of the fact that prisoners were bringing food from the outside, never once did they apprehend or confiscate any items. It was obvious since ten pounds of potatoes or a bag of bread could hardly be concealed under clothing without being noticeable. As the men returned from work, each one was counted upon entering the door.

Packages sent by relatives, for prisoners of war, had accumulated at the main Stalag because the individuals could not be located, so they were being distributed to various Kommandos. Our Kommando was to receive twenty parcels for the one hundred and eighty men, but upon arrival there were only sixteen. The other four had mysteriously disappeared. Due to the transportation difficulties, they were sent by mail. Their contents were a mystery; therefore, in order to have an equitable distribution, all were opened in the presence of the group leaders. Cigarettes were equally divided and the other items proportioned into separate piles. Then the system of pointing to a pile and naming the group leader it belonged to, was employed. Once that was completed, the group leader had the undesirable task of distributing directly to the new men. Invariably this led to many arguments, regardless of how fair the distribution was. The final outcome was that each man received twenty-six cigarettes, one cracker, a tiny square of cheese, a small piece of candy and one or two nuts, all of which tasted very delicious. My partner supplemented our little pantry by winning one stolen egg (the first seen in many months), seven bars of soap, potatoes, and sixteen cigarettes in a poker game.

The habitual smokers were the ones who had difficulty adjusting themselves to prisoner of war life. Most of them had already traded clothing, shoes, and in many cases food for cigarettes. Many of these men were chronic, self-pitying individuals. They were neither any good for themselves or anyone else and had usually lost all self-respect. The one thing the average prisoner detested, was a beggar; a person who whimpered for drags on cigarettes or a loan of a piece of bread were considered the lowest form of humanity. Invariably these are the men who when they themselves have a cigarette, would run to the latrine and smoke it secretly.

The general impression amongst the civilians was that the war could would be over within a few weeks. It was rumored that thousands of German soldiers had surrendered on the Western Front and that the Americans had penetrated five miles to the east of the Rhine River on a sixty-five-mile front. One of the prisoners was allowed by a German woman while on his job to listen to the British Broadcasting Corporation, which said that the Russians were nearing Dresden and Leipzig. The news was accepted with reservation. Leipzig was only forty-five kilos north of Zietz and if the Russians were as near as it was claimed, there would have been much more activity in Zietz. However, it was pleasant to dream of the Americans or Russians fighting their way into town to liberate us.

At No. 4 Lindenplatz, the work had become routine. Each of the four POW's had a definite duty to perform. The two civilians and the seventeen-year-old boy were very congenial and, in several instances, gave bread or other food to us. Their own meager lunches consisted of two slices of bread and a piece of blood sausage or cheese. They consistently complained about their own dire

circumstances and to date had refused to trade anything, claiming that as much as he desired to, it was impossible under the present rationing.

In one of the rooms, still intact, a German woman, Frau Kluge, maintained a photographic shop, with the help of two young girls both displaying the Nazi youth organization buttons. All three were very pleasant and on several occasions negotiated for cigarettes, coffee and cocoa, giving in return the much-desired bread. Characteristic of the women, they wore high top patent-leather boots and skirts which seemed the mode of dress in Germany. This eliminated the use of stockings, but it did look attractive. It was during a bright-sun-shiny day I urged Frau Kluge to snap my picture, which she obligingly did. Upon receipt of the prints, I in turn, gave her five precious cigarettes. One day she furtively motioned for me to come inside the room. There on the table was a large bowl of steaming soup, which she indicated was for me. During the meantime, Frau Kluge explained in broken, school-learn English, that the soup was the best she could give us at the moment. As the soup disappeared, the thread of conversation turned to the war. Her husband was fighting on the Russian front and had not been heard from for the last three months. It had been over two years since she had seen him. She was frank in her admission that Germany could not win the war, the only ray of hope was that the Americans would arrive before the Russians. Due to the excellent propaganda program, the Germans had instilled a deathly fear in the civilian population, for the Russians. As the conversation continued, one puzzling question was asked, "Why had the Americans traveled thousands of miles, across an entire ocean to bomb and destroy century old structures in Germany?" It was explained that it was not a matter of enmity toward the German people themselves, but a fight against the ideology of a super-race conquering the

world's fanaticism, which prompted my country to war against Germany. She was reminded of the fact that Germany started the process in Poland and continued through dozens of other countries, destroying the century old structures there too. That was all engineered by the Nazis, she explained, at which point I asked bluntly if she belonged to Nazi Party. She was a member, but had been forced to join for self-preservation. Apparently the entire nation was forced to join the Nazi party for self-preservation but as the Allies closed in, buttons and insignias were disappearing and hardly a person would admit being a member of the Nazi Party.

The remaining three men were called individually into the house for hot soup and upon completion, it soon became apparent that the two bosses were conspirators in the feeding. They asked if it was good and indicated by their fingers to their mouths that they wanted to keep it a secret.

Late in the afternoon a guard from of the Lager appeared and asked for the boss. After conversing several minutes, Hans called to us, explaining that the future when an air raid alarm sounded, we would drop everything and rush to the hospital, across the street. We were forewarned of such possibility by the president, so it was not a surprise. Ten minutes after the guard departed, the alarm sounded. The head nurse was at the door to direct us, as the overhead alarm sounded. With her was an English-speaking attendant who explained what would be required of us. The bed-ridden patients were to be carried from the wards to the air raid shelter in the basement on stretchers. It was no easy job to carry people up and down three flights of steps and in return for this extra duty, some provision should be made to feed us extra rations either at the Lager or at the hospital. This matter was presented to the sergeant who explained that the hospital officials had already promised food, and it would probably be given to us

upon finishing work next time we were at the hospital. For once, the sergeant told the truth for upon completion of carrying the patients back to their respective wards, an attendant entered the boiler room with a bucket of hot soup, spoons, and bowls. It was excellent soup, being well worth the hard labor.

On the 18th day of February, the long-awaited Red Cross parcels arrived, brought by our brothers-in-arms, British prisoners of war, who had brought parcels to their own countrymen in Zietz and had graciously consented to carry the one hundred and eighty parcels for us on the truck. They also brought some more news, heard over the British Broadcasting Corporation on a secret radio set or wireless as they called them. The Americans had captured Koblenz and the Russians were over one hundred kilometers from Berlin. The last portion of news was a decided blow to the high hopes maintained by the majority of prisoners of war in the Schutzenhaus. The men were extremely happy when each person received one parcel per man. As usual, the trading amongst themselves was brisk. The non-smokers traded their cigarettes for various items in the parcel.

Suffering from a boil, I had my name put on the sick book for the first time. The sick call assembled with the rest, in the morning, but instead of going to a job-site, the sick soldiers were marched to a nearby French prisoner of war Lager. Where a French doctor was stationed. He treated my boil and issued a two day "no work" slip. This doctor was lenient with the "no work" slips and it was a difficult job for the medic to determine which men were to be put on the sick book since only twenty men were allowed on it each day. Upon returning to the Lager, the president assigned men to certain cleaning details. The entire hall was inspected by the sergeant every day excepting Sunday, and cleanliness was the first requisite. After inspection, those who were able assembled for the purpose

of peeling potatoes, turnips, carrots or celery whichever were to be used in the soup that night. After this job was complete, the men were free for the rest of the day. It was because of this that the sick call had long been suspected of much of the stealing.

The following day was supposed to be a day of rest for me, but the sergeant needed a detail to work at the Army Garrison. We walked for more than three miles through the city, finally arriving at the garrison. The work consisted of cleaning out the stalls in the barns where transient prisoners of war had stayed the previous night. While we were cleaning, a small group of British prisoners staggered into the garrison. They had been on the road for over five weeks, having been evacuated from Lamsdorf, in the Breslau area which the Russians had overrun. The majority were in miserable shape and a few were being carried on wagons, being too weak to walk. They told us that thousands of POW's were on the road, including many Americans. Their destination was unknown, seemingly just tramping over the countryside. Here again, some fellow Americans showed a trace of selfishness. One Britisher who was conversing with a group of Americans, from the Schutzenhaus, and during a lull in the questions had asked for cigarette. Everyone in the group refused to offer him one with the excuse that they did not have any, which was a lie since every one of them had received at least five packs two days before. Being a non-smoker and not having expected to leave the Lager, I was without cigarettes, but after much persuasion one of the men loaned me two cigarettes until we returned to the Lager, which were turned over to the Britisher, who had not received a parcel in over five weeks of continuous travel on foot.

Later, taking notice of the garrison, it was a large, well-built and well-kept post. All of the buildings were brick and in the form of a triangle with a huge parade grounds in the center. At present, men were exercising. Bald heads were in the majority; as they flashed in sunlight, it brought to mind that the younger men were noticeable absent. An officer came to the horse barn to inspect our work and he seemed pleased by the results.

By the 21st of February, making trades on the job was becoming more difficult. The civilians were that formerly did the trading, simply did not have bread to trade with. Our ration was cut to eight men on one loaf of bread. The air raid alarms were becoming more frequent than ever, and about half of the working day was spent at the hospital, where there was a noticeable increase of bombing victims from the surrounding towns. Since we were there so much the hospital had discontinued feeding us. This caused the men to be reluctant about dashing there each time the sirens started. Because of these frequent visits some of the nurses and patients had become friendly to the stretcher carriers, and on occasions, slipped men items of food before departing. One nurse in particular became partial to me, having worked in her ward continuously. Practically every trip there was rewarded by some small parcel of food, a piece of bread, boiled potatoes, jam, and one occasion with a precious egg. During one of the alarms, I innocently opened the door to the room where the stretchers were stored and found a prisoner locked in the arms of a nurse. Blushing profusely, she scurried down the hall. The fellow prisoner good naturedly was cussing. He had been trying to get her alone for weeks, and now that he finally succeeded, I had to appear. Some of the prisoners could not forget about women, even in a constant state of physical weakness and the pangs of hunger continuously gnawing at their

stomachs. What accentuated these desires for women were probably the common occurrences encountered in the hospital. Such as walking into a patient's room to find her in the nude or various stages of undress.

At the hospital, as patients, were two Americans from a Kommando about five kilometers outside of Zietz. From talking to these men, it was learned that two Americans had died from malnutrition and the general conditions at their Lager were unbearable. Guards were brutal, there was no toilet facilities in the building, the men were unorganized and were slowly deteriorating to the level of animals, fighting and stealing from each other. Working conditions were intolerable, awakening at 5:00 am and starting work at 6:00 am some six kilometers away. Return trip started at 5:30 pm and arriving at their Lager around 7:00 pm. By the time the men returned, they were too tired to do anything but eat and go to bed, never bothering to wash themselves or clean their sleeping quarters. An appeal was made to our Kommando for a volunteer to aid these unfortunate prisoners, and bring about some semblance of organization. Several transferred and later verified the conditions as described by the patients.

By now, the newcomers had learned to like or dislike our varied guards. We made up names for each of them. The sergeant in charge was the most disliked because of his arrogant attitude and apparent hatred for Americans, which was mutual. If all of the threats were carried out upon liberation, he would have been in sorry shape. Unfortunately, the loud, boisterous, an egotistical individual disappeared before the arrival of the Americans. Whenever seen outside the building, he invariably wore the famous "Afrika Corp" hat. Even in normal conversation, his voice carried throughout the entire hall. His second-in-command was a short, stocky person afflicted with asthma, which limited his

attempt to be overbearing. By the time he quit coughing, the incident causing the anger was forgotten. "Perky" was probably the best liked in the entire guard and was in his 60s. He had a chubby face and in reality, bore resemblance to a pig. It seemed ridiculous to see a man sixty years of age, parading in a private's uniform. Because of his age, he was allowed to carry a small .22 caliber pistol instead of the usual rifle. Two of the quietest men were "Limpy", who was minus a leg and "Hans", who was sporting around with a wooden gloved hand. Both had seen action on the Russian front and knew the horrors of war, which was a distinct difference from the other two pimpish individuals. "Specs" was in charge of the sick book and took great delight in sending men to work when they were really sick. His horn-rimmed glasses, humped back and the movement of an old man, caused him to appear comical. But the most ridiculous looking guard was known as the "English-speaking Bastard". He had endeared himself to the men by striking one fellow with a rifle butt. The man was about to attack the wielder, but was restrained by fellow prisoners, while the guard turned a pasty white. Prior to entering the army, this character had worked in a bookstore where he'd acquired a smattering of the English language. His uniform was a tailor-made suit, but apparently not for him, since the sleeves were over two inches long and the blouse came almost to his knees. He took his Army career very seriously, ordering the men not to talk in the ranks, to keep in step, or put their collars down. As these orders were given, usually two thirds retorted in curse words, some of which were understandable to him, infuriating him to a degree that his collar seemed ready to burst. These incidents were never taken seriously by anyone but him. In as much as the other guards took out time to laugh at him.

At the first sign of Jews, many a man was startled and haunted by the expressionless, resigned look on their faces. As we passed a group of two on the road, neither looked one way or another and calmly pushed a car full of lumber. They were dressed in robes of faded white and blue stripes, running from head to foot, trailing in the street.

At the beginning of our friendship, it was agreed that my buddy would do all of the gambling for the both of us, and now that agreement was paying off because he was winning cigarettes consistently. In one game alone which lasted all night, by moving into the wash room when the lights were extinguished, he won over twenty-five packs of cigarettes. A nice addition to our hoard of cigarettes. Our bread supply had now reached four loaves, having traded a can of coffee and a can of cocoa for them. Recently we had obtained a lock for fifteen cigarettes which gave us an added sense of security.

The hospital detail had become a drab, arduous routine. On one trip the shocking news that one of the Americans had died during the night was conveyed by the remaining American patient. The nurse claimed that the patient died from a blow on the head, caused by falling against the iron bedpost, while attempting to go to the latrine across the hall. Being in such a weakened condition, the shock of the blow killed him, more so than the blow itself. All during the other air raid alarms, both of the Americans claimed they were receiving excellent care and treatment and was the same as their fellow patients of German nationality.

During the alarms, after all of the patients were safely stored in the shelter, many of us would stand outside and stare at the bombers going overhead. It was a thrilling sight to see Americans even at such a distance. After they were gone,

the conversation turned to guessing what the crew would be eating upon returning to the airfield.

In the Lager stealing was becoming rampant. The old men were making veiled accusations, "Before the new men arrived, there was no stealing". This vein of talk merely aggravated the already unsocial attitude between the two groups and in some cases caused fist fights. A lot of the thefts occurred during the air raid alarms, when a few remained within the hall instead of racing for the air shelter like the majority of the men. Even though suspicions were boiled down to a minority, it was difficult to get a conviction without proper evidence. There was some talk about the president and his cronies. It was suggested that food be planted in an unlocked locker that had rat poison in it, but this idea was abandoned because the Germans would not supply the poison. This tentative plan was a good indication of the mood prevalent among the men with regard to thieves. The audacity of some of these thieves was amazing, even with the severe punishment if they were caught. One stole two packs of cigarettes from shirts hanging from the bunks during the night. Another one crawled under a fellow's bunk and opened a cardboard box which had been tied with a rope, while the victim was asleep. To untie the rope must have required at least ten minutes of work in the darkness, and stole several rations of bread. To make matters worse, the convicted thief who had been admitted to the hospital was returned to the Lager. He was caught stealing at the hospital by the Germans, and even though his condition was still serious, he was thrown out. Stealing from the Germans was condoned, but he was in no condition to take the chance of being caught.

February 27th found the rumored war news was still good. Even with the war apparently so near to an end, the Germans continued to train their youth.

The seventeen-year-old boy on the job was called for the Army and it was with genuine sorrow that we bid him farewell. The girl working in Frau Kluge's photo shop was also summoned and was so distraught at the news, she cried continuously. Children were seen drilling in the parks, the oldest in the group being thirteen or so years of age. The youngest seven or eight, all dressed in uniforms of the **Hitler** Youth Organization consisting of a blue cap with the swastika pin, a blue neckerchief, similar to our own boy scouts, brown shirts, brown short pants, and a small dagger hung from their belts. Some of the older boys had holsters containing .22 caliber automatic pistols. When marching the taller ones were at the head of the column with the shorter boys trailing. The Nazi salute was given each time an order was shouted by the youth in charge. On occasions, the goose step was executed and it was comical to note the seriousness of the tots as they attempted to keep step with the long strides of the taller boys. The training of boys for war was no laughing matter, when one recalls the youths fighting in the present war, who had practiced those same maneuvers a few years previously, instead of leading a normal teenage existence.

One day the Germans discontinued the small portions of meat or cheese usually issued in the morning. The excuse for the discontinuance was that lack of transportation. Noticeably the trading outside of the Lager was becoming more and more difficult. The civilians had received another cut in rations and were now receiving about six kilograms of bread per week. Some of the prisoners were offering more than the usual number of cigarettes to make trades. This practice was causing hardship among the other men. A law was enacted prohibiting the paying of outlandish prices for commodities and a "price list" was established. Anyone caught overpaying would be duly punished. The prices were as follows:

For trading outside of the Lager:

15 to 20 cigarettes for 2 kilo of bread

2 ounces coffee, soluble, for 4 kilo of bread

4 ounces of cocoa for 4 kilo of bread

5 to 10 cigarettes for 5 kilo potatoes

A bar of four ounces soap for 2 kilo of bread

1bar of chocolate, Ration "D", for 4 kilo of bread

For trading within the Lager:

60 cigarettes for 16 ounces of milk, powdered

20 cigarettes for 8 ounces cheese, American

40 cigarettes for 16 ounces oleomargarine

25 cigarettes for 12 ounces of beef, corned

15 cigarettes for 12 ounces of pork, luncheon meat

10 cigarettes for 6 ounces of liver paste

10 cigarettes for 8 ounces of tuna, sardines or salmon

25 cigarettes for 15 ounces of prunes or raisins

15 cigarettes for 7 ounces of biscuits

15 cigarettes for 6 ounces of jam

50 cigarettes for 2 ounces of coffee, soluble

50 cigarettes for 4 ounces of cocoa

25 cigarettes for 8 ounces sugar

All of these items came from the Red Cross parcels accepting bread and potatoes.

The next day the Germans surprised everyone by announcing there would be no work. There was much speculating as to the cause for such an unusual and

delightful order. It was afternoon before the truth was known. Each man was to be X-rayed. Arriving at the factory building, every prisoner of war of all nationalities in Zietz were assembled awaiting their turns to be X rayed. Russian, Polish, British, French, and Americans intermingled with each other. Because of the language barrier, conversation was limited, but the general train of thought was that the war would be over within a few months. The actual X-raying took only a few minutes. By the time we returned to the Schutzenhaus, it was past six o'clock. One could not help thinking that the Germans were examining prisoners in order to make an impression on the onrushing Allies, if and when they arrived.

The month of February was unusually mild and the men were able to work without overcoats. This was beneficial, since the weight of an overcoat caused extra exertion and was very tiring. After many weeks, I had really learned to use a shovel. Previously, I used only the muscles in my arms, but by using a knee to push the shovel into the dirt, shoveling had become easier. From a desk job to shoveling was quite a change.

At the Lager, several of the inmates were bragging about buying bread at the bakery. Next day, armed with a ration stamp bought for a few cigarettes, I decided to attempt to purchase at a nearby bakery. As Hans and Mier worked on the second floor, I stealthily slipped away and proceeded down the street. The streets were almost entirely devoid of people. With a thumping heart I turned the corner. To my amazement there stood a German officer calmly conversing with the civilian. Quickly collecting my wits, I boldly started past, saluting smartly and within several feet of them. It was returned with a Nazi salute. Apparently thinking I was one of the privileged prisoners, allowed to roam the streets unescorted by guards, or civilian bosses. At the bakery was a matter of waiting

until all the other customers had departed before entering. Once inside, I laid the ration stamp on the counter in my best German and asked for two kilos of bread. Examining the stamp thoroughly, the woman looked at me queerly. My heart was in my mouth, but after several seconds she calmly turned and laid a loaf on the counter. Handing her the money I dashed out of the store and strode briskly back toward the job site. Halfway there, a woman who lived in an apartment in the court yard approached. She gave me a peculiar look and nodded. Safely back on the job, I waited for the storm of words that would emanate from both Hans and Mier when they learned from the women of my escapade. Nor was I disappointed for they cornered me and with eyes blazing put forth a torrent of loud, meaningless words, for several minutes. The only understandable word was "Gestapo". Upon completion of the reprimand, they raised their arms in resignation and turned away. The only other time these two were in a similar state, was when I accidentally, on purpose, dropped a bag of cement on the ground while unloading a wagon. Apparently, this was a hard-to-get item. After scraping up the bulk a few grains were wasted. Otherwise, tranquility reigned on this job.

The hospital detail was still in effect and most of the men were more reluctant than ever to go there. Several love affairs were still flourishing and it was not uncommon to find a couple in a darkened room, or hall, embracing and kissing or indulging in various forms of love making. This was a very dangerous past-time for the nurses, if they were caught, it would have meant dismissal which in turn meant induction into the Army. The air raid alarms were more prevalent at night and it was with leaden feet, that we trudged to work the following mornings. Extra sleeping time, the next day following those frequent

alarms was proposed, but the Sergeant-in-Charge flatly refused the proposition, thus adding another notch of hatred in the already long list.

With the coming of March, the weather became extremely cold again, with the wind whipping through our clothes, as it did in the winter months. Some of the more pessimistic POW's had not anticipated the cold weather and had traded overcoats, gloves and other warmth giving clothes in exchange for food.

March 1st was also a day of reckoning for another man caught in the act of stealing. To add to the already chagrined men was the fact that half of them had suffered losses by the thief. Since the German issued soup was now extremely watery and the issue of blood sausage had been discontinued, the hunger ridden men showed the thief absolutely no mercy. After the usual wash room beating by the six-man wrecking crew, the culprit was thrown into a circle of volunteers who pummeled, slapped, kicked, and took "hay makers" at his face and body. Anyone desirous of striking the man had an opportunity of doing so, each one, taking their separate turns. He was literally used as a punching bag. The protests of the medic went unheeded until the victim sank slowly to the floor for the tenth or so time, bleeding profusely. Even the water poured on him didn't seem to faze him. After the beating, he was carried to his bunk, finally stirring when smelling salts was used. His face was a mass of blood and swollen twice to its normal size. All during the night he moaned and groaned, despite the threats of another beating if he did not quit. The disagreeable feature of this sort of punishment was the show-off puny, little men, who during the course of the beatings, would batter the defenseless man and afterwards brag about the number of times he struck the man. Ordinarily, they were the cowardly type of person and in a fair fight with the beaten man would have been thrashed within an inch of their lives. But these

exhibitions did not seem to stop the wave of stealing. That very night several thefts were made and bread was taken from some of the lockers.

The job at No. 4 Lindenplatz was temporarily discontinued, because of the lack of materials and I was forced to go to work on another job at a former baby carriage factory known as the Saxonia Werks. Half of the factory was demolished during the November bombings and the remainder was in the process of producing airplane parts. The plant was situated on the extreme western end of the city, requiring over an one hour walk. Upon arriving there, we were immediately met by the “big boss” or the German equivalent of the word “master”. At least it sounded very much like master. After a few words by our guide, we were ordered to a huge pile of bricks, which had already been cleaned of the former cement and were ready for reuse. Here we formed a line, standing six feet apart and began tossing the bricks to each other, down the line finally arriving at the ladder. There some women workers took them to be forwarded to the third floor of the shell of the building where they were placed on some boards thrown across the beams. This activity continued until the noon lunch period. Why it was known as a “lunch period” for us was silly, since none of us had anything to eat.

During this rest interval, I took notice of the women scattered in various positions throughout the building. They all wore slacks and bandanas around their heads. Of course, their clothes were very dirty and grimy from the very unladylike occupation that they were doing. Their faces were unattractive and rough looking. The majority were buxom but anyone would have to be very hard up to have any relations with them.

As time passed, it could be noticed that the majority of the German workers were deathly afraid of the “big boss”, who leisurely strolled among them, and continually berated anyone whom he thought was slow in their work. Later I learned that this individual was very powerful, and could at the slightest pretense have any of the workers inducted into the armed forces, even though many of them were incapacitated or otherwise deformed. From his pretentious home situated on the grounds, his power could be discerned. He maintained the only hen house I'd seen in my stay in Germany. Enclosed in a high brick walled in yard, chickens strolled around munching on feed. They were eyed enviously by the workers and prisoners alike. Even the feed itself would have been a treat for many of us, who were subsisting on the usual fare of bread and potatoes. The free workers had not tasted meat in any form, for many a moon since it was against the law to hunt, fish, or even butcher their own livestock without the express permission of the authorities and this authority was seldom granted.

From my position in the line, I could see the railroad station, situated just across numerous tracks which ran parallel with the outer portion of the building. It was, with a slight twinge of homesickness when we watched the loaded trains move in and out of the station. Of course, the schedules were unheard of in these days of continuous strafing and bombings. Consequently, the trains were packed and jammed with humanity. Their whistles reminded me of the pleasant trips I had taken, what seemed years ago and usually brought to mind the question of “When could I take another pleasant train trip?” Frequently trainloads of soldiers whizzed past, heading for the Russian front and just as frequently, hospital trains came from the opposite direction, loaded down with the pawns of the so-called great powers engaged in conflict. On occasion, some of these troop trains would

halt in the vicinity of the plant and the women would rush to the soldiers, embracing them and kissing each other. This was even tolerated by the big boss, since it was for the good of the cause.

Our immediate boss was a “good egg” and did not push the work at all, when the big boss was not in the vicinity. He would even discontinue his own labors and carry on a conversation with us. We learned that he was a World War I veteran and was now sporting a wooden leg to show for it. Even though he was handicapped, he did manual labor, such as pushing a wheelbarrow, shoveling and carrying heavy weights around the job. He had a healthy hatred for Hitler and apparently did not care who heard his denunciations, which was very unusual, since the Germans used to whisper Hitler's name in a hushed voice. In exchange for two cigarettes, he gave me a jam sandwich and promised to bring me a jar of jam the next day, in return I was to give him three of my precious cigarettes. Trades on this job were notoriously hard to work up, since most of the workers would not talk to us for fear of being seen by any of the others.

Again, the Red Cross parcels were promised us by the Confidence man, and were to be there by the 4th of March. But as before there was no transportation. A meeting was called and it was decided that 600 cigarettes would be offered to any civilian who would use his truck to transport the parcels to Zeitz. After searching the various jobs for someone to volunteer for the job, finally a man was found who would accept the proposition. The proposed deal was then presented to the Sergeant in Charge. The proposal was flatly vetoed. Upon hearing the verdict, the prisoners began pounding on the chairs and other furniture, causing a loud commotion. This continued until the guards filed into the room with their rifles and pistols in their hands, posed for action. In the face of this armed

reprisal, the clamor ceased, but abuse was hurled at the non-comprehending guards, in English. Because of the poor quality of the soup the men were receiving, they were becoming a reckless, hungry group of individuals and the thought of one person preventing the acquisition of additional food irritated them. The Sergeant was repeatedly told that we could not hope to subsist on the ration of watery potato soup and minute pieces of bread we were receiving. This plea for more food was answered with a noncommittal shrug of the shoulders. At that time, three of the men were in such a state of weakness that they were unable to move from their bunks and surprisingly they were not disturbed or forced to appear with the work details. Again, the gods of fate were with us and the British brought the parcels to us the next day.

Upon awakening on the morning of the 8 March, it was discovered that eight men had escaped during the night. The barbed wire had been cut on one of the windows, leaving a gaping hole. By dropping a few feet, they had easily dropped to the ground and disappeared. The escape would not have been discovered quite so early if one of the escapees had not been the interpreter. Early that morning, one of the guards came into the room and asked for Hans. Receiving no answer, he went to the bunk and found it deserted. Raising his voice, he shouted Han's name but still to no avail. After a few minutes he departed and returned with the hated Sergeant in Charge, who ordered immediate lineup and count. It was then that the guards ascertained that eight men were missing. In less than an hour, additional guards were summoned from the nearby barracks and were stationed around the building. Several high-ranking officers inspected the cut wire, made notes, shouted at the nervous sergeant and stared at the lined-up of prisoners. The usual daily routine was disrupted and no one had to

work. That night guards were stationed on all four sides of the building, something new and unpleasant for the guards.

The thought of escape was frequently a part of our daily thinking, but the tremendous odds were too much. The actual escape was simple in itself. On any of the larger jobs, no one would be missed if they desired to walk away until it was quitting time, when there was a count of the men. Some of the many problems that would be encountered would be the fact that we would be traveling in enemy territory without a compass, over one hundred miles to either the Russian or American front. If a prisoner dared to steal civilian clothes, he would be in danger of being shot as a spy if caught and the chances of being caught would be very good, since this was a country where the gestapo had the privilege of questioning anyone at the slightest suspicion and everyone doing any traveling was required to have a permit. Accumulation of food sufficient to sustain a person during their escape would have to be carried. After due consideration, it was better to wait until the Americans came a little closer, before attempting such an escape.

While assembling for work the next morning, word began to circulate that four of the escapees had been recaptured. This rumor was soon verified by the appearance of the men on the porch, escorted by several guards. Not knowing what to expect is a very grim outlook for them, and they looked it. It was assumed they would be transferred to a concentration camp for "incorrigible prisoners of war", some 20 miles from Zietz. The rumors about this camp were horrible and the prospect of being taken there would give any person a chill. The next thing we heard about the men was that they had been beaten with a strap and thrown into a storeroom. They remained there for several days, without contact with the rest

of the inmates. It must have been a horrible experience, “sweating out” the possibility of being sent to the other prison, and it was probably the desire of the Germans to cause the apprehensive escapees to “sweat it out”. What probably saved them from such a fate, was the fact that the interpreter was well liked by the majority of guards. They were pleased with him and didn’t want him to be sent away.

During the period of confinement, a collection of food and cigarettes was made and the firemen, who had access to the whole building, slipped them a note explaining that items will be lowered through the tiny window. With the aid of some cord, the plan was executed perfectly. After four days of solitary confinement, they were released. It was then the story of their escape and subsequent recapture was told. The escape had been planned for weeks. A guard had supplied them with a pass indicating they were on official business, and were permitted to travel. Boldly approaching the ticket window at the station, they bought tickets. Remaining aboard the train for an entire day, and as darkness closed, they decided to disembark and walk. The train had traveled a distance of approximately twenty Kilometers, which was too close for comfort. From there, the plan was to travel at night only. There was no moon and it was pitch-dark. Starting across a field, voices were heard. Reversing direction, they stumbled into anti-aircraft emplacement, who had been alerted to be on the lookout for escaped prisoners of war. They were recognized immediately. With all of their elaborate preparations, the four men were caught.

Soon after, a show-down surprise inspection was performed. All of the lockers were ordered open and as the men stood in ranks, several guards and the president, who was there to prevent the unauthorized acquisition of cigarettes.

Primarily, the search was for tools, weapons and large accumulation of food. When the searching was complete, the floor was piled with tools of every description brought in from various jobs. None of the food was tampered with, but for the next several days the men were searched as they entered the Lager from work, but after a week this vigilance was relaxed and reverted to the previous procedures.

By the 14th of March, air raids were more frequent, and most of the time was spent in the air raid shelter. Soon prisoners were conversing with the civilians, where the two portions of the shelter joined. The guard who was assigned to the door leading into the civilian portion would invariably adjourn to the civilian part and converse with several young widows, ignoring the prisoners, as long as there was no attempt to escape. This would have been impossible anyway, since both exits were well guarded. The women habitually came to the same section on each alarm and it was not long after that that one lantern was doused and giggling and phrases in German could be heard in the darkness. The other men did not object to the extinguished light, since this made it possible to sleep. On 15 March, I was back at the old job at No. 4 Lindenplatz, and with the return there, we assumed responsibility of aiding the nurses at the hospital. Frau Kluge soon informed me that the Americans were definitely in Erfurt, about a hundred kilometers from Zietz. The news must have been authentic since both of the bosses reiterated the same and it made us extremely happy. Now our prayers were intermittently for food and the near end to the war.

For the next few days, most of the time was spent either at the hospital or in the air-raid shelter. The planes over head seemed to be attacking targets in the vicinity, rather than in the town, and the hospital was filled to capacity. Even the

rooms in the cellar, formerly used as part of the air shelter, were converted to regular wards. One day after one of the raids, a half-track reconnaissance armored car rumbled into the hospital driveway and proceeded to unload several soldiers wounded in a recent strafing attack. Curiously the prisoners of war working there just stared at the soldiers being loaded on stretchers. Looking up, an officer spotted them. With hatred gleaming from his eyes, he began, cursing vehemently and finally the superintendent stated that he wanted them to carry the stretchers. The rest were told to stay out of sight until the soldiers had departed. In their present state of mind, they would have thought nothing of shooting at the merest provocation. A crowd of civilians had gathered at the front of the hospital and was openly hostile, as the Americans walked through the door. Several spat and muttered what sounded like "swine". Prior to leaving, the superintendent told the guard that our services were no longer required at the hospital and it was a nervous walk back to the Schutzenhaus.

Saturday was supposed to be a half day at work, but volunteers were requested for a special job of shoveling coal into a building several blocks away and upon completion of the job, food would be provided. With the prospect of more food, I eagerly volunteered. When we arrived, we saw a wagon in a court yard loaded with coal. We were ushered into a store room and told to take off our coats. It was a mistake for the manager to leave us unattended inasmuch as the potatoes and onions were stored in the same room. Quickly loading our pockets with these precious commodities, we emerged from the room and proceeded to work. Before very long a girl appeared in the first-floor window. Typically, American work came to a complete stop, as she stood demurely smiling. Sensing something was wanted, one of the fellows offered her a briquette of coal. She

nodded “yes” and opened the window, and retreated to the bedroom, where she watched as briquettes were tossed into the room. As if to compensate us for the coal, she calmly began undressing. As each piece of clothing was taken off, a huge smile appeared and unheard words were spoken to herself. Once completely nude, she proceeded to comb her hair. Seeing that her performance had brought all thoughts of shoveling completely out of the minds of her “victims”, she seductively slipped on a kimono and continued to comb her hair, which was the final act of her show. Upon completion of the work, a bucket of soup was brought into the dining room, where we had been told to remain. Looking around the room, it was noted that hard to get salt was on every table. Upon leaving the salt was not on any table, and with potatoes and onions, plus the soup eaten, it was a very profitable day with a floor show.

Widespread rumors were being circulated, putting the Americans from one hundred fifty kilometers to within fifty kilometers of Zietz. Smuggled maps were scoured in an attempt to locate towns named in many rumors. Activity within the town itself had increased. Convoy after convoy of trucks, loaded with soldiers, rumbled through, going westward. The transferring of troops from the Russian Front was a good indication that the Western Front was becoming a serious threat.

As rumors of the approaching Americans became prevalent, there was a tendency among the prisoners of war to loaf openly on the job. On one particular day, two of my comrades were standing in front of # 4 Lindenplatz, leaning on their shovels and gazing abstractly into space. The appearance of an irate German officer seemed to have no visible effect on them, until he began speaking. One began shoveling slowly, but the other fellow was amused and stood smiling

insolently at the officer, who by this time was quite irritated. His voice became high pitched and was at a breaking point. As usual only a few words could be understood, but they indicated the general trend of the berating. The one word was “essen” or eat and the other was “arbeit” or work, two words common to a prisoner of war. By now it had become a very ticklish situation because a small crowd gathered, and those in the block who were not there had probably heard him. The POW maintained his contemptuous attitude which aggravated the officer more. Finally in anger he drew back his hand as if to strike him, but as it happened the smile faded and the grip on the shovel tightened. The blow was never administered. The officer turned sharply, edging his way through the crowd and disappeared. During the scene, the bosses were having conniptions, but from that time on, no work was performed outside the court yard and the door remained closed all day, so we were able to loaf in peace.

That night the men seemed in a gayer mood than any other time since being captured. Bosses had confided in many of the prisoners. The Americans were really less than one hundred kilometers from Zietz and that particular rumor seemed universal among the men. At that point, one could distinguish between rumors and rumors with a semblance of truth.

A few of the inmates appeared to be happier than the rest, laughing, shouting and reeling as if drunk and in reality, they were. On the job they had located a wine cellar. While the boss was indisposed, the men broke the lock and “borrowed” a half a dozen bottles, bringing them back to the Lager. Naturally, the owner reported the loss to the Sergeant, who appeared before the work formation the next morning in a very bad mood. Without any preliminaries, he demanded the names of the thieves, but no one answered the query. Irritably he

ordered the men on that particular job, the previous day to remain behind, after the others had departed for work. Upon returning from work, it was learned that the detail was told that their rations would be withheld until the guilty parties confessed. The threat was never carried out, and the whole matter subsequently was forgotten, which was a good indication that the Americans were not too far off. Ordinarily, the threats would have been carried out.

The next several days, the war news was contradictory, but the general theme was that the Americans and Russians were closing in. All of us were excited and began singing to and from work. The guards attempted to discontinue the singing, but we merely told him to “go to hell” and continued to sing merrily. He merely shrugged his shoulders and trudged along behind us.

On April 8<sup>th</sup>, American P-47 fighter planes appeared, flying and diving over the city. The panic-stricken populace dashed for the shelters. Hans had been working on the third floor of the building when the attack commenced. At the first sound of the machines, he practically fell down the scaffolding into the cellar. In a little while it was noted that their main objective was the railroad station, some ten blocks away. Climbing atop the roof, I watched the planes diving and strafing the station. A mixture of fear, an exultation gripped me as the planes flew in low. They were Americans, a part of America, so close and yet so out of reach. It also brought to mind the strafing attack of last Christmas Eve. The plane circled lazily and then one at a time, dove, with machine guns firing the whole way. For the next several days, the planes were continually flying overhead, either attacking the station again or ferreting out the anti-craft aircraft positions. The AA soldiers did not seem to relish the idea of even firing their guns at the planes,

since once they were spotted the P-47s would swarm to the area and attack in force.

On the 12th of April, upon arriving at the job site at # 4, Lindenplatz, Hans and Mier told us flatly that the Americans were less than twenty-five kilos from Zietz, and they were leaving for the country. After solemnly bidding us goodbye and shaking hands nervously, we made our way back to the Schutzenhaus. There we found the other inmates being returned from various jobs. All the work had apparently ceased. Excitement ran high as groups congregated within the hall and discussed the turn of events. Inwardly there was always the fear of being struck by American bullets and bombs. All during the morning the low flying planes zoomed over the building, sending the men in a concentrated rush towards the doors. On one occasion, the guards were lax in opening the doors and nearly caused a riot. Once inside the shelter, we would draw a breath of relief. Seriousness of the situation could be noted on the faces of the civilians in the shelter. There was no more giggling and singing which had been the previous practice. The women cried silently, and stared mutely at the Americans.

During one of the frequent raids, a group of Polish prisoners in transient were forced to join our group of prisoners in the shelter. During our two hour stay in the shelter, a Polish speaking American prisoner began conversing with them. The Poles had been in Germany over three years, and had traveled the length and breadth of the entire country, during that time. When they first arrived, they were beaten and starved and forced to do work. Whenever a prisoner was unable to work, he usually disappeared when the workers returned from their jobs, and was never heard from again. Over two thirds of the original group had vanished that way. At first the beatings and cruelty were prevalent, but as the number of

men able to work decreased, the Germans eased up on the brutality, in order to keep the remainder fit for work.

At noon, the guards entered the hall and selected, at random fifty men for a work detail. I was picked and within a few minutes, we were on our way to a cemetery. The roads leading from town were clogged with evacuees, carrying their pitiful belongings on their back or in small wagons. The sound of big guns seemed to be drawing nearer. Arriving at the cemetery, a gruesome site awaited us. Laid out upon the ground where hundreds of victims of strafing and bombing attacks. They were all in various stages of decapitation and women, children, the aged and soldiers were included among them. A German officer was seated at a small table writing their identifications on a pad. Searching through the clothes for identification was a huge, buxom female, who nonchalantly tossed the bodies around as if they were sacks of flour. We were forced to walk between the rows of the dead to the designated spot where a hole eight feet long, six feet deep and about fifty feet long was to be dug. Intermittently planes would fly low overhead and we were forced to dive behind tombstones to wait for them to leave. During our stay at the cemetery, two more truckloads of dead arrived. The unloading consisted of merely pushing them off the back end of the truck and allowing the bodies to hit the concrete with a sickening thud. The procedure caused blood to be splattered in all directions, making the scene that much more horrifying.

Later, black draped relatives of one of the victims arrived, accompanied by a Lutheran minister. The body was placed in a wooden coffin and the burial ceremonies began. Several women were crying profusely as it was carried to an open grave. In the midst of the service, planes, dove overhead and the mourners were obliged to duck into a building nearby. When the ceremony was completed,

one of the women became hysterical as she was compelled to walk among the rows of dead, in order to leave the cemetery. Their dreams of conquering the world were symbolized by the scene of death before their eyes.

At 5:00 pm, work was halted. The ground had barely been scratched, having dug less than one foot. On the trip home, the Volkssturm, or Home Guard, could be seen digging gun emplacements along the road. There was a momentary pause in their labor as we passed. With hate filled eyes they stared at us until we had passed. For the first time, the presence of our guard was appreciated.

That evening the prisoners were jubilant when the announcement by the sergeant was translated. If the city was declared an open city, we would not be evacuated. The mayor had stated his intention of surrendering the city without a fight. When the Sergeant departed, a meeting was held to formulate plans for assurance for our safety, prior to the arrival of the American troops. This plan was in anticipation of irate German civilians storming the building in revenge for the death and destruction caused by the advancing Americans. Every visible weapon, such as hammers and tools, legs of tables that could be suitable for clubs were collected and distributed. The plan called for overpowering the guards as they entered the room, but when the Sergeant entered again, he was slightly inebriated but had enough presence of mind to leave his pistol in the guard room prior to the entering. He announced that the Major had formally proclaimed Zietz an open city, so there was nothing to worry about. Everyone was extremely happy at this news, but the possibility of American shells hitting were still a threat and dampened the spirits of many. That afternoon, gun fire could be heard plainly and the discussions turned to guessing the length of time it would take the Americans to arrive. The elaborate plans of protecting ourselves were forgotten for the

present. As the night dragged on, men lay on their bunks, praying and waiting. All were packed and ready for any contingency.

At 1:00 am on 13 April, the Sergeant who was second in command, came through the door, followed by a reinforced guard. At the point of a gun, he bluntly told us to prepare for evacuation immediately. The military had ousted the civilian government and were prepared to fight for Zietz. Despairingly we formed columns of threes between the guards and started away from the Shutzenhaus. In their haste to evacuate the building, the guards overlooked five prisoners hidden in various hideaways in the hall. As the sound of marching feet on the cobblestones was heard, between the flashes of artillery bursts, windows flew open and civilians still remaining in the city, stared silently at the column as it passed.

As daylight began and the city was left behind, it was soon noted that the Sergeant in charge was missing. The guards trudged, limped and puffed along the road. They neither spoke or paid the slightest bit of attention to the prisoners. Along the road the Volksstrum were digging in. Elderly men, with bald heads shining in the morning sun, labored on their holes, but appeared ridiculous in their attempts at trying to be soldiers.

Further along the road, we came abreast of a small bridge over a creek, I leaped down the embankment, followed by another man, and crawled under the bridge. As we waited breathlessly to find out if the guards had seen us, several other prisoners who had witnessed our successful escape, decided to attempt the same maneuver. Upon leaving the column they were seen by the guards and shortly we were all looking into a barrel of a rifle and ordered to return to the ranks.

On the rest of the way to Kayna, attempts to escape were frequent but few were successful.

As the column entered the outskirts of Kayna, the excited townspeople sent a deluge of questions at the guards. When we finally stopped in the courtyard of a Shutzenplatz, the guards appeared fidgety and undecided about the next move. Artillery fire sounded closer and closer. Appearance of a P-47 fighter plane helped the guards to make a decision and there was a wild dash for the cellar of the building. The plane flew harmlessly overhead, circling the town. Several of the men jeopardized the lives of over one hundred and fifty by standing outside the cellar door, gazing upward at the plane. Apparently, the pilot noticed them and then discovered our belongings strewn all over the ground, within the court yard. Assuming the owners of the packs were inside the building, he dove his plane strafing the building from one end to the other, eventually dropping a one-hundred-pound bomb squarely on the roof, causing an ear-splitting explosion over our heads. By some freak of nature, the concrete cellar remained intact, while the rest of the building was completely demolished and was burning furiously. Sensing the probability of the cellar collapsing, the men began streaming outside and racing for other cellars within the town. By the time all we're situated, we were scattered in ten or twelve different cellars. In many cases, civilians were already occupying them, but accepted the intrusion without qualms.

Sitting quietly awaiting the disappearance of the planes, I wondered what had become of our erstwhile guards. After the plane was gone, we soon discovered that the guards were still in the vicinity and were attempting to round up the scattered POWs. As the first men started filing out of the overcrowded

cellar, I discovered a coal chute and preceded to crawl into it. Turning around and facing the opening, I notice several of the German civilian woman staring at me. I was tempted to give myself up then and there, but being determined not to give up so easily, I waited nervously for all of the others to depart. When the last one finally left, I held my breath in anticipation of the woman telling the guard of my whereabouts. But to my surprise, they remained silent as the guard walked out the door. Breathing a sigh of relief, I relaxed in my cubicle awaiting further developments. After an hour sitting in my cramped position, one of the women motioned for me to come out. While stretching my tired muscles, I noticed that a wounded man had been brought down and these women seemed to be caring for him. After further investigation, it was noted that he was an American POW from another stalag and had been hurt during an air attack. He spoke German fluently and soon the woman inquired if I had blankets or food with me. Through the interpreter, I informed her that all my belongings were in the court yard. She immediately dispatched a young boy over there, who returned with four blankets and several pieces of bread, which the wounded man and I divided. She then suggested that I return to my hiding place, as a precaution against unexpected visitors. Several hours later a wounded civilian was brought down on a stretcher and placed at the entrance of the coal chute. It was impossible to leave without stepping over him. I made up my mind that I would attempt to find the American lines the next day, if they did not arrive by then.

Later, as I began to doze, voices were heard of the door of the cellar. As the word “gefangen” was repeated numerous times during the conversation, I realized they were talking about prisoners. It was a hectic ten minutes while a man and the woman, who had befriended me, continued to talk. Probably

realizing the futility of arguing with a woman, he departed. Later, my wounded comrade explained that the man was one of the local Gestapo, who was looking for escaped prisoners. The woman had emphatically denied any knowledge of our whereabouts.

Upon preparing to settle down for the night, the woman interrupted by handing me a jam sandwich and a hot cup of coffee. She had moved the wounded civilian to another portion of the cellar. So, it was on that lucky Friday the 13th, that I endured a sleepless night, with burning questions piercing my mind. When would the Americans get here?

During the period of hiding in the coal chute, my guardian angel kept assuring me that the Americans would arrive soon.

At approximately 10 am the next morning, April 14th, 1945. Her prophecy came true. A Second Lieutenant from the 6th Armored Division entered the cellar in search of a wounded American, which some civilians had reported was in the building. We were delirious with joy, and I became so excited that I reached over and kissed the woman who befriended me. The Lieutenant told me to go to the Command Post situated at the end of the street and report to the Commanding Officer. Upon leaving the building, a tank blocked the street. Realizing the invaluable assistance, the woman had given me, I asked the tank crew if they had some extra K rations to spare. They obligingly threw down a whole case. Grabbing the box, I returned to the cellar and presented it to the woman. Solemnly bidding them goodbye and thanking them for their assistance, I departed, a free man once again. The feeling was indescribable.

Soon at the command post, there were over twenty ex-prisoners that had managed to leave the guards unnoticed. The tank outfit treated us like kings.

Everything they had was ours for the asking. Several days previously the Company had located a warehouse full of liquors, and the tanks were overflowing with bottles of all types. Taking a bottle of Brandy, several buddies and I commenced to consume the contents. In between eating "C" rations and swallowing the delicious Brandy, the prisoner of war days were but a memory, like a bad dream.

The first night with the Armored Division, the communications platoon offered us refuge in one of the houses they had taken over. It was a well-furnished house with an excellent larder. Several dozens of eggs, chickens, jarred meats, can fruit and butter were located stored away in closets. We had the most enjoyable meal I ever consumed and for the first time in months I went to bed on full stomach between immaculate white sheets. Prayers of thanksgiving were heartfelt that memorable night.

For the next several days, we elected to advance with the 6th Armored Division. Acquiring a Spanish .32 caliber automatic from the systematic collection of weapons and optical equipment, I felt human again. The advancing encountered very little opposition and the two days were uneventful. Finally feeling the urge to leave the Fatherland, I requested transportation to the rear echelon.

It was not until April 20th that I finally left German soil, by C-47 transport plane. All of the personnel encountered during the trip out of Germany were considerate and offered everything within their means, except one Major. We were in Weimar Germany seeking transportation for the twenty ex-prisoners of war. Upon being ushered into a Major's office, who was the Provost Marshall, by an M.P., He scolded the M.P. for bringing us into his office and then unceremoniously told us to "get the hell out of there". When we attempted to

explain our position, he remarked that he didn't give a damn who we were and to get out.

After a grand and glorious week in Paris, I was sent to La Havre, where on the 7th of May 1945, we sailed for home, America, the only place in the world, the only place in the world!

**Timeline: I attempted to assemble as much of Sam's timeline in the military as I could find. Below is what I was able to piece together.**

All notes are from Sam Archino unless annotated. His dates were taken from either his diary he kept as a prisoner, the book he wrote above, or the various documents he collected that I assimilated into a three ring binder. Other notes have source last name taken from indianamilitary.org personal accounts from other members of the 106<sup>th</sup>. Anything in parenthesis is my commentary.

Really detailed breakdown of the battle: <http://62vgd.de/106/JonesStory.htm>

Reference books

[http://www.indianamilitary.org/MAINMILITARY/Shop%20in%20the%20PX/106th/106th\\_infantry\\_division.htm](http://www.indianamilitary.org/MAINMILITARY/Shop%20in%20the%20PX/106th/106th_infantry_division.htm)

24 Jul 1943:

- Inducted into the Army.

21 Oct:

- Departed the U.S.

30 Oct:

- Arrived in Scotland.

16 Dec: (German attack began at 0600)

17 Dec: Moon (Commanding officer Narratives on indianamilitary.org) . The 2d battalion was pulled back of the Siegfried line abandoning their kitchens and duffle bags.

19 Dec:

- In the early morning, ordered to cover the rear of the 590<sup>th</sup>

- Saw the men of the 590<sup>th</sup> surrendering, at first thought they were Germans surrendering.

- Started down a paved road (Has to be skyline drive) and met up with an AA unit at the regimental motor park.

20 Dec:

- They were reorganized in the motor park and a defense was established.
- "A stream was running through the area". (Likely the Ihrenbach).
- Germans played jazz music over loud speakers, telling them to surrender.
- Walker: While In this log shelter, we heard an enemy sound truck open up from a hill across the valley. It demanded our surrender, played popular American songs, and told us how nice it would be to be playing baseball in a prison camp. SSgt. Thomas rounded up a few volunteers, took out a patrol, and one of his men erased the sound truck with a single well-thrown grenade.
- Walker: Maj. Ouellette called a conference of Company Commanders, and recommended surrender because of the uselessness of rifles against tanks and artillery, because of the lack of ammunition reserve and food and medical supplies. Capt. Kielmeyer and I were the only ones who suggested that we continue to resist for another two days in the hopes of planes and help coming to us. The consensus of the meeting was that additional loss of life would be frightfully large and of no help to the general tactical situation.
- Walker: At 2100 a German officer hostage appeared to extend the hold fire order and to continue dickering. Maj. Ouellette held out to a full surrender at 0800 the 21st, requesting a truck until then. The German argued against this, because he could not guarantee us against attacks from another division bearing down from the north. We took a chance to give our men time to get some sleep, gather what food they could, scrounge extra clothing from all the bags in the area, and for those who felt they could - a chance to escape.

21 Dec:

- 0700 Surrendered, started marching on road
- Walker: At 0800 21 Dec 44 several hundred disillusioned men and about four dozen officers assembled in the gully and were marched to Schonberg through the valley road end woods where the 423d was so badly shot up.
- Adams: Major William P. Moon Jr (1stBn/422) and Major Albert A. Ouellette, 2d Bn XO made the decision to surrender.
- (Found at least two detailed accounts of the surrender that said they initially were marched to the West into Shoenberg. Then they walked to the South East over the Our river bridge toward Prum)
- Arrived in Prum: slept in an old school house
- Brumfield: Captured on the 21<sup>st</sup> with the "Lost 500" in a motor pool.
- Czestaw: Captured in a motorpool near Shoenberg on 21 Dec. Walked all day to Prum. Slept in bombed out school house.

22 Dec:

- Marched most of day.
- Arrived in Gerolstein around 1600-1730 pm and slept in an abandoned factory/warehouse.

- Czestaw: Marched from Prum to Gerlostein slept in railroad barn.

23 Dec:

- Marched to the Gerolstein rail station at 1100. Loaded onto boxcars.

- Czestaw: Loaded into boxcars. Traveled a short distance at night to vicinity of "Dberbettering." (I cant find this on a map)

24 Dec:

- Strafing. Locomotive damaged/destroyed. Locked back into bloody boxcars that night.

- Baron: Noted that the strafing was near the rail yard at Koblenz (not sure if this was the same attack. Many trains were strafed and bombed holding POWs.)

- Chase: Notes about 1200 his train was strafed killing 8 and wounding 42. (I am almost positive this was the same train. He also notes that when they left Gerolstein, they only traveled about 10K and stopped for the night in the trains because the tracks were bombed out ahead. Also stated that starting on 25 Dec, they walked for several days before boarding another train, traveling for a day and a night in the train and arriving on 1 Jan. The 1 Jan date is also close to Sam's account.)

Clark: Captured on the 21<sup>st</sup> on hill 575 "lost 500". Also noted stopped in boxcars because of bombed out tracks. Was strafed resulting in 5 killed, 47 wounded. Laid in snow spelling out USPW. Spend night in boxcar.

- Czestaw: Strafing at 1100. Formed POW in snow. 10 dead and 47 wounded. Spent rest of day back in boxcars.

25 Dec:

- Early morning, let out of boxcars.

- Walked about 12 hours. "Arrived at a small town" and slept in barns.

- Chase: Given quarter loaf of bread/1 spoon of molasses (need to check, but think this matches Sam's account)

- Clark: Given half loaf of bread and one spoon of jam. Then says..after three days of marching put on another train.

- Czestaw: Left boxcars started to march. Given 1/3 loaf of bread, 3 gallons syrup split with 160 men which was 1 tablespoon each. Walked to Kilgore (cant find on a map) and spent night in barn.

26 Dec:

- Walked through Koblenz, crossed the Rhine, crossed another bridge out of the city.

- At the top of a long steep hill, they rested.

- Slept in a large horse arena.

- Czestaw: Walked all day to Mayen and slept in a tile factory.

27 Dec:

- Marched about 20 miles from Koblenz to Wirges
- Slept in factory building.
- Czeslaw: Marched all day to Koblenz and spent the night in a big barn.

28 Dec:

- Czeslaw: Marched to Wheirs (think this is Wirges) and stayed night in old slate mine near Montebaun (think this is Montebaur or Montebaum on the map near Wirges)

29 Dec:

- Told to move out, got back on boxcars
- "Doors not open for two days"

30 Dec:

- Czeslaw: Got back on boxcars at 1am.

31 Dec:

- 0600 Arrived about a mile from Stalag 4B in Muhlberg
- Showers and inprocessing
- Czeslaw: Arrived at 4b at 1800, deloused and searched.

1 Jan:

- 0600 Assigned to a barracks
- Czeslaw: 0200 assigned to barracks.

17 Jan:

- Departed Stalag 4B
- Hiked back to Muhlberg and got on box cars
- End of day, arrived at Belgern on the Elb river.
- Marched through Belgern and slept in a hunting club building (approximately 150 men)

27 Jan:

- Approximately 100 of the 150 men were told they were leaving
- Got back on box cars. Passed through Torgau and arrived in Zeitz.
- Marched to a Schutzenplatz (this means recreation center in German, referred to as a dancehall in most descriptions). This is where the prisoners stayed.

8 Feb:

- Started work at No 4 Lindenplatz in Zeitz, which was across the street from the hospital. Worked in the courtyard, clearing rubble and sorting bricks.

26 Feb:

- Assigned to carry hospital patients that could not walk down to air raid shelter during air raid alarms (at least two per day). "Exhausting, quite a job"

12 Apr: Basnik: From Stalag IV-B, I was sent to Zeitz on a work detail. We tore down damaged buildings, repaired sewers and water mains and did a lot of cleanup from air raids, etc. We were marched out of the camp on April 12, along the way discipline broke down and we broke into small groups and escaped. I eventually made it to a civilian air raid shelter in Kayna, a small town 10 to 15 miles from Zeitz. The first unit to reach us was the 6th Armored Division.

13 Apr:

- Column hit by P47 aircraft. Escaped into a basement and hid.

14 Apr:

- Liberated by the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division and rode along with them for several days.

20 Apr:

- Flew out of Weimar, Germany on a C-47 to Paris. (There is an airport called Erfurt-Weimar today. It is likely the same location that Sam flew out of.)

7 May:

- Sailed home out of LeHarve, France after a week in Paris.

20 May:

- Arrived back in the U.S.

Facts:

- The Germans who surrounded and captured Sam was the 18<sup>th</sup> VolksGrenadier Divison

- I know Sam was in Stalag 4B and later 4F. I believe 4F was where he stayed from 17-27 Jan (I think this is most likely). I also believe the Kommando in Zeitz was designated Z-133. This was written on a small card in my binder and also on the back of the picture that was taken of him at #4 Lindenplatz in Zeitz.

