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Weapons Platoon of K Company
422nd Infantry Regiment
106th Infantry Division
Koblenz & Stalag IV-B (4-B)

In 1943, I was attending UCLA with a pre-Engineering major. I enlisted in the Enlisted Reserve Corps on July 31, 1943. I entered the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program (ASTRP), which, at the time, was set-up to allow students to continue engineering studies until becoming 18 years of age. At that time, they were scheduled to take Basic Training, upon completion of which, they would return to school under the ASTP program, achieving the rank of second lieutenant upon graduation..

On August 28, 1943, I was sent to the University of Utah at Salt Lake City for the Fall quarter of the 1943-1944 year and had my 18th birthday while attending school. At the end of the Quarter, I returned to Southern California and reported for active duty to Fort Mac Arthur, in San Pedro. From there, I traveled by train to Fort Benning, Georgia, for basic training. While I was there, the ASTP program was disbanded, and instead of returning to school to finish the program, I was sent to **Camp Atterbury**, Indiana, to join the 106th Infantry Division, which was undergoing unit training. I was assigned to the **Weapons Platoon of K Company, 422nd Infantry Regiment**, and trained as a 60mm mortar gunner.

In July of 1944, I was on a weekend pass, and with a friend, "hitched" a ride on a truck, heading north to Indianapolis. We were planning to have a few drinks at the "Canary Cottage" and then see what was happening at the "Indiana Roof" dance hall. The truck was traveling too slow to suit us, so when we reached Franklin we jumped from the truck, hoping to get a speedier ride. As I jumped, my foot caught on something, and I fell to the ground, rupturing my spleen. I was taken back to the camp hospital by ambulance and underwent a splenectomy. During the long recovery period, many of the men with whom I had trained were transferred to overseas outfits to replenish losses sustained in the invasion and Normandy operation.

I returned to my outfit, which then had many new faces, and in October we were shipped to Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts for shipment overseas. We reported to New York Harbor and boarded the Cunard liner Acquitania, on which we were to have guard duty. I had my 19th birthday, October 20th, on shipboard in New York Harbor.

After what I believe was an uneventful passage (It was hard for me to tell, because during most daylight hours, I was stationed at a water-tight door on G deck), we arrived in Scotland at the Firth of Clyde. On shipboard, I learned that the English put salt instead of cream and sugar in their oatmeal and that you could buy a decent sandwich in the galley when the officers weren't looking. From Scotland, we traveled south by train to Stow-in-the-Wold, in the Cotswolds of Southern England. For those of us marching almost every day, as we did, we remember the Cotswolds as hilly country where all roads went only one way - up hill! We marched, and trained, and marched, always up hill, for about six weeks.

During this time I had a three day pass and decided to visit distant cousins living in Liverpool. I drew rations, which we were allowed to do if visiting relatives, and proceeded to Liverpool by train, loaded down with tea, sugar and other goodies. Picture the scene....

it was 1944, and there I was in England and in full uniform. When I introduced myself, the first words out of my cousin's mouth were, "Bobby, what are you doing here?"

He invited me to his home, and they "oo-ed" and "ah-ed" over the goodies I had brought for them. That evening we were sitting at the dinner table with his two young daughters when his wife asked, "Louie, what branch of the service is Bobby in?" He replied, "The PBI", whereupon she asked, `The PBI, what's that?". He lowered his voice so that the girls could not hear and whispered, "*The Poor Bloody Infantry*". That's why I was in England! To learn that I was in the Poor Bloody Infantry!

In December, we were shipped to Southampton and boarded a ship (forgot the name) for the channel crossing to Le Havre. As I recall, it was raining, and we spent the first night in France in a farmer's field, trying to find some dry straw in a hay stack to sleep on. A letter I wrote home was dated December 5, 1943 and noted "somewhere in France". We then boarded "6x6" trucks of the "Red Ball Express" for the long drive north into Belgium. This trip was about the coldest most of us had been, and many cases of frostbite resulted from the extremely cold weather and the lack of circulation in our feet while just sitting in the trucks.

On December 10th, we arrived at our positions in the Schnee-Eiffel, and replaced personnel of the 2nd Division, "man-for-man" and "gun-for-gun". During a brief orientation by one of the 2nd Division men, he told us that we would be manning observation fox holes opposite the German positions. He described the location as being at the crest of a hill, and across a small valley on the opposite hill, one could see German soldiers chopping wood. I asked, "If you can see them, don't you shoot at them?". He replied, "What, and make them mad?" We spent the next six days manning the outposts. During this period, we could hear what sounded like truck engines coming from behind the German lines, but reports seemingly went unnoticed.

On the 16th, we heard the awful sound of the German "Nebelwerfers" , or rocket launchers, plus artillery and small arms fire. The German machine pistols had a very high rate of fire, which resulted in their nickname "burp-duns". We could hear the sound of the "burp-guns" at first in front of us. Later we began to hear them to the sides of our position, and finally we heard them behind us. I asked our Company Commander, Henry Harmeling, "Sir, are we surrounded". When he replied, "I don't know", I thought "Oh Shit"!

On the 17th, we began to withdraw towards Gerolstein. For two days we marched through wooded areas, but not once did I see a German soldier. On the 19th, word came down to us to destroy our weapons because we were going to surrender. We were in a hilly, wooded area, and for about thirty seconds, I considered the possibility of slipping away and hiding. My conclusion was that I wouldn't be very successful, so I gave up with the rest of our Company. (As it turns out, almost two entire regiments surrendered).

We were marched in column by Germans eastward, through Prum, to Gerolstein, spending one night sleeping on the ground. At Gerolstein, 60 of us were loaded into each "40 and 8" boxcar for the trip into Germany. On Christmas Eve, my recollection is that we were in the rail yards at **Koblenz**. (Reports I have read from other survivors place the location at Limburg, but I still think it was Koblenz) We had been in the rail yards for some time, during which we observed one or two air raids in the area. Peeking between the wooden

slats of the box car, we could see a rather large empty field in front of us, and beyond, what seemed to be an air raid shelter into which the populace would go during the raids.

That evening, the rail yards were bombed by the British RAF. The bombing was preceded by the dropping of "pathfinder" flares, and then the bombs began to fall. We couldn't get out of our box car, but somewhere along the train, someone did escape and went down the line opening doors. My position in the box car had been in a back corner, so that I was one of the last to reach the doorway. Many of the men leaving the box cars were running across the field towards the air raid shelter, and when I reached the door and looked out, I saw a bomb drop in the midst of a group of them. Running into that field did not seem to be a good idea, so I went under the car and crouched behind one of the steel wheels for the remainder of the raid. After the raid, we were herded up by guards and returned to the car.

(In terms of the Koblenz vs. Limburg question, I recently met a veteran of the US 8th Air Force, who told me his mission on December 24, 1943 had been the marshalling yards at Koblenz. Their raid was during the day, and the U.S. usually made daytime raids while the British flew at night. This seem to reinforce my recollection that Koblenz had been the target. (I guess it really doesn't matter much, it was one Hell of a Christmas Eve)

From there, we traveled through Germany, south through Bavaria, ending up at **Stalag IV-B** at Muhlberg on the Elbe river. As we went through processing, one of the questions we were asked was, "What religion are you?" That was my big moment of truth....how to explain the "H" on my dog tags. Again, I thought for about thirty seconds and considered the options. Do I tell them the truth and admit that I am Jewish, and with who-knows-what consequences, or lie with the possibility they would find out, and then who-knows-what consequences? I decided to tell the truth, and it didn't seem to make any difference, at least at first.

The barracks to which I was assigned was occupied mostly with British non-corns, the majority of whom had been glider pilots captured during the ill-fated British airborne mission at Arnheim, Holland. A few were "regular" army, and had served in such places as "India". The barracks leader was a sergeant named Spandau, a spit-and--polish soldier captured at Dunkirk in 1939.

After a couple of weeks or so, the names of many of the U.S. prisoners were called and we were told that we were going to be shipped out the following morning on a "Kommando", or work party. We were segregated and spent the night crowded into one large room. The following morning, a few of us were called out and were sent back to our barracks. No explanation was given, but I believed it had to do with the "H" on the dog tags.

Life in the Stalag was a boring routine. Up in the morning, and outside for roll call. Then, we were issued our morning ration of ersatz coffee, made from burnt barley. It was awful stuff, but because it was hot, it was used mostly for shaving. Lunch was usually a slice of brot, as thick as our Kriegsgefangener (or "Kriegie") dogtag was wide, a cup of rutabaga soup, and four or five walnut-sized boiled potatoes. Sometimes a piece of meat would find its way into the soup, and one day I found a strange item which I think was a piece of a cow's lip. Once a week or so, we got a thin, watery oatmeal instead of soup, and we could always tell when it was Sunday because we got sauerkraut, and the whole camp smelled of

it. In the afternoon, we got a cupful of "mint" tea, that was so bad we didn't even shave with it!

Crusts of bread were saved daily, so that on the potato-less day, we crumbled them and boiled them to make a bread pudding, the Brits called a "Muhlberg stodge". Red Cross parcels were supposed to be issued one-per-man every week, During the four months I was in IV-B, I never received more than half a parcel, once one-seventh, and most weeks none at all. I don't think parcels were distributed more than a half dozen times during the whole period.

The medium of exchange in the camp was cigarettes, and with enough one could buy just about anything. Word had it that 2,000 cigarettes could buy freedom through Switzerland, but no one had enough to find out. When I first got to IV-B, if one had a U.S. dollar, he could get about 8 cigarettes for it; later a dollar couldn't buy even one cigarette. In the interest of efficiency, most men shared rations in groups of two or three, and I "mucked-in" with two Englishmen, Whenever we received Red Cross rations, we would sell sugar for cigarettes. Then we would buy saccharin (which was cheaper) and use the remainder of the cigarettes to buy other things. I didn't smoke, so was able to buy a pencil and pad of paper to keep notes.

Those who smoked would light their cigarette and take only a few puffs. They would then pinch it out and save the butt in the small tin box everyone seemed to carry. When next they wanted a smoke, they would light up the butt, take a few more puffs, and again pinch it out. When the butt got too small to handle, they would open it and save the loose tobacco in the tin box. After accumulating enough of this foul stuff, they would roll a cigarette and begin the process anew. You can imagine how rank these cigarette became after repeated smoking!

The barracks had a central stove which was lit at mid day when the groups would heat their food, cook a "stodge" or other tasty delight. Fuel soon became scarce for the fires so we began to use the wooden bed slats in the double-deck bunks. Where first we may have. started with six, soon it became four. Where they started four

fiches wide, soon they became two inches wide. Cold running water was available fors period each day in the central portion of each double barracks. Hot showers were given every month or so, with a nice "air dry" feature.

It was cold during the Winter at Muhlberg, so there was not much outdoor activity. Occasionally, we would be called to form work parties outside the camp and dig potatoes, or empty the latrines into wagons. Once, we heard that a train had arrived at the Muhlberg station with a load of Red Cross parcels. A work party was formed and we walked into town to unload the box car. To our dismay, we found that instead of food, the shipment consisted of athletic equipment which should have arrived the previous summer. The result of this was that each barracks got a chest-developer and used the springs to keep the doors closed.

Other diversion included the camp library, which contained donated books. Many of these were of such subjects as college calculus, which we were not in much of a condition to absorb. One of the items in short supply was toilet paper, in fact there wasn't any. One book I got from the library was "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn", which was minus the first and last 50 or 75 pages. These had been used for you-know-what, and while I enjoyed the

middle of the book, I never found out how it started nor how it ended. Early in the year, some of the "old-timers" put on a play, "The Women". The original had an all-female cast, and so the Kriegsgefangener version was something to behold. "Le Cage Aux Folles", P.O.W. style!

Almost every minute of every day was occupied thinking and talking of food. We talked about restaurants we had visited, we spoke of favorite dishes, we exchanged recipes, and on and on. No one talked of wives or girl friends, except as to how they could cook. In my little note pad, I kept meticulous notes about food. I had pages listing every kind of soup I could think of, every kind of cake, every kind of egg dish, etc. I drew pictures of cookies and ice cream sundaes and made a list of food items I would exchange with my English "buddies" after the war. I still have the note pad, and while the pages are now yellowed and the pencil faded, it takes me back to another life.

One day on the camp bulletin board, a Dutch prisoner posted a magnificent drawing he had made of the camp. He planned on having prints made after the war and invited us to list our names if we wanted one, I did so, and two or three years after I was home, I got a post card from Holland saying, "Your picture is ready". It took several days to remember what it was all about, but then I sent a few dollars by money order and later received my print. I have it framed and hanging in my office to remind me of days when things were as bad as I thought they could be.

While there was talk of escape in the camp, very few tried. Remember, it was Winter and it was cold in that part of Germany.: The ground was frozen, and there was no cover in the fields surrounding the camp. So, rather than try to escape on our own, we signed up with the "escape committee", who somehow got a few men out. I signed up, but because of the long waiting list, my name did not come up.

As I recall, the camp contained about 10,000 prisoners. About 8,000 of these were French, Belgian or from Eastern European countries, and the balance of about 2,000 British and American. One of the British barracks had a clandestine radio, and each day someone would come into our building and rep6rt the -news. -Thus, we were able to keep track of the war's progress.

While I never received any letters or packages during my confinement, we were allowed to write. On alternate weeks we could send a "v-mail" type letter and two postcards. My bi-weekly letter was sent to my parents, and of the two post cards, one was sent home and the other to someone else. My parents had absolutely no news about me until mid-March 1945, when a post card I had written in February to a friend of mine arrived. In was shortly thereafter that my parents received official word of my POW status, and just a couple of weeks later that I was liberated.

On April 23, 1945, we awoke in the morning to find that the guards had "disappeared" during the night. Soon, a motorized group of Russians arrived at the camp and told us we were "liberated". They said that arrangements would be made to repatriate us. For the next few days, life went on much as before, with the notable exception of our being able to leave the camp. Groups of us would leave the camp each morning, spreading out into the rural countryside, foraging food. Many of the farm houses had been vacated as being in the path of the advancing Russian army, and we would ransack them for food which we would take back to camp to cook.

On one of the expeditions, four of us came upon a goose. Two of the other fellows captured it and announced that the remaining guy and I should slaughter it and cook it as our share of the deal. That the first time (and definitely the last, I hope) that I had to do that, and pulling feathers was new to me. We entered an abandoned farmhouse and put wood in the kitchen stove to prepare our feast. In the basement of the house, I found a bin of what I think was millet , which I mixed with water and stuffed the bird. (Luckily, I knew enough to clean out the innards first) We put the bird in a pan and into the oven. The oven was extremely hot, so that the bird looked "done" very quickly. Also, the heat expanded the stuffing and blew the goose apart. Anyway, done or not, blown open or not, we feasted on our first real meal in months.

Another day we found flour and cooked pancakes.

So it went, day-after-day, but we soon found that it was most efficient to bring back as much of one thing as we could carry and then pool our resources for dinner. One day, I got into a warehouse and found a load of small packages similar to "Jello" cartons. My limited German did not allow me to decipher what was inside, but I brought back as many as I could handle. When I got back to the camp, one of the German-speaking prisoners told me it was a powder used to preserve eggs! Not much food value!

One day, when one of the other prisoners and I were walking along a road, we were stopped at a cross-roads by Russians in a tank. They pointed their sub-machine guns at us and shouted, "Deutch!". With our hands tip, we pleaded, - "Amerikanski ! "- ---We must have convinced them as they left us alone.

After a week or so, we were all taken about 20 miles south to Riesa to again await repatriation. There, we were housed in barracks and pretty much left to our own devices during the day. One day, I stole a bicycle and planned to travel West. I returned to the barracks to get my "things" (such as they were), and while there, someone stole the bike from me. I guess crime doesn't pay!

About May 23rd, or maybe 25th, we were taken by truck to an area west of Riesa, where we were met by U.S. Army units and taken by truck to Halle. There, we were de-loused, processed and sent on to the 77th Field Hospital at Camp Lucky Strike near La Havre. At the hospital, we were treated for the results of malnutrition, mainly a bland diet.

Obviously, we craved other foods, so one day I raided the Mess tent to see what I could find. I found some cocoa, sugar and powdered milk, and figured I could find a way to make something like fudge. No nuts could be located, but there were some Corn Flakes that could be used as a substitute. I took the ingredients back to the tent and looked for a suitable container for cooking. The only thing close to a cooking pot was a bed pan, still brand new and in the original wrapping. I mixed up the batch of fudge and was stirring it on the tent stove, when a nurse walked in. She said, "I hear you're making fudge", took one look at the brown mess in the bed pan and ran away.

From Lucky Strike, we were shipped by liberty ship (forget the name) to New York and then to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Then, by train to Camp Beale, California and then -- HOME! Had my thirty day furlough and reported for R & R to the Miramar Hotel in Santa Barbara. Then assigned to the Registrar's office at Mitchell Convalescence Hospital at Camp Lockett, California on the Mexican border to await discharge, which arrived a month after my twentieth birthday.

Here are a couple of incidents, as I remember them.

In July of 1944 I was hospitalized at Wakeman General Hospital, Camp Atterbury after an operation for a ruptured spleen suffered in a fall. At that time, many of the patients were casualties from the Normandy invasion, and USO troupes of celebrities made the rounds of military hospitals to entertain the patients. One of these groups visited Wakeman while I was recovering from the operation, and included in the troupe was a young film actress named Marcy Macguire. She sang several songs, and after her routine, asked for requests from the audience.

In those days, I was living in Hollywood, and I called out, "Sing San Fernando Valley", which she did, and then she asked if I was from California. I replied that I was, and we had a brief conversation about things back home.

Later, she walked back to my ward with me. Well, the word got back to my outfit that a Hollywood movie star had come to the hospital to visit me. Something like that is pretty hard to live down (not that I wanted to), so that later when I had a short pass to go home, the guys asked me to bring back autographed photos of movie stars (of the female persuasion, of course)

I not only didn't know any movie stars, but didn't know anyone who did. I asked my dad how I could comply with the requests and not lose my reputation. He said that he had a friend in the accounting department of one of the movie studios and would call on him for help. The result was that I got back to camp with a whole fistful of photographs, autographed to company noncoms.

My reputation was secure, at least until now, 56 years later.

Another story;

During the same convalescence, I was in the surgery ward, and near me was a fellow who had gone through operation after operation for what had started out as an ingrown toenail. The poor guy's toe had become infected, and after all sorts of treatment, they finally resorted to a skin graft. That is what brought him to the surgery ward about the same time as the casualties from Normandy started arriving.

Picture, if you can, this shot-up casualty of Omaha Beach, finally arriving back in the States, and in the bed next to him was this other post-surgery patient. The "D-day" guy leaned painfully over to the next bed and asked its occupant, "What are you in here for?"

Here's one that perhaps will relate to a few riflemen:

On two or three occasions, my buddy, "Scotty" Shane, and I were assigned to pit duty at the rifle range. Those who used the range will remember the set up. Concrete pits protected the target crews, while firing lines were set up at various distances, up to, I think, 500 yards.

Those in the pits were substantially below ground level, and the targets were attached to frames which could be raised and lowered from the pits. The targets, themselves, were made of paper, and from the bottom of the pit, it was possible for the pit crews to hear the bullets when they struck the target.

All this you probably remember, and you will remember that after you fired a round, the target would be lowered below ground level, stay there for some period of time, while the pit crew searched for the bullet hole, applied a patch, and then it would be raised. As it was raised, a disk on a stick would also be raised and be located at the spot where the bullet hit, thereby indicating where you had struck the target. (If you missed, a red flag, affectionately called "Maggie's drawers" would call your attention, (and that of all around you, to your miss.) So far, you say, you remember all this.

Well, when Scotty and I were down in the pits (and brainless work it was), we tried to think of ways to make it more interesting and to improve the lower target-hunt for hole-patch hole with paper-raise target-indicate bullet entry point-procedure. First, we tried speeding up the lowering and raising to shorten the cycle time. This did not satisfy us, as it seemed too erratic. What we finally decided on was the following: As soon as we heard the bullet strike the target, one of us would begin a slow, but steady lowering of the target. The other would stand on tiptoe, and as soon as the target came into view, begin looking for the hole. As soon as the hole was located, a patch was glued over. While this is taking place, the target kept its steady motion downward, and once it hit bottom, immediately began to rise. The whole procedure took only a very few seconds, and required some stretching and stooping to follow the target on its downward and upward travel. The net result was that from the shooter's viewpoint, once he fired, the target began to lower and come up again with a smooth motion. It took some time for us to perfect the procedure, as we were constantly striving for shorter and shorter turnaround times. I think we finally got it down to about five seconds.

Perhaps, some of the 422nd riflemen will remember the target that was operating differently than the others. If you do, now you know that it was Scotty and Bob, a couple of kids trying to make the time pass a little quicker.

And, one more story, not quite about Atterbury, but close.

I'm sure most of the guys will remember places in Indianapolis like the Canary Cottage and the Indiana Roof. This story has to do with the latter.

During the war, good liquor was almost impossible to find, at least near military installations. As a result, we resorted to drinking all sorts of stuff we wouldn't consider today. One night, a buddy and I planned a trip to the Roof, stopping at a liquor store on the way. (Remember, the Roof didn't sell booze, but made its profit on selling mix.) I don't remember the brand that we bought, but we took a pint of it to the Roof. As soon as we tasted it, we knew we were in trouble. It was B-A-D! Tasting, I remember, somewhere between kerosene and bore cleaner.

We were sitting there, bemoaning our bad fortune, when we struck up a conversation with the guys at the next table. Seems they, too, didn't like the liquor that they had. After some discussion, it was decided that we would trade. My buddy and I winked at each other, because we knew how bad ours was, and theirs couldn't possibly be worse. And besides, they had a fifth and wanted to trade even for our pint. WHAT A DEAL! We couldn't lose!

Well, trade we did and lose we did, and you can guess the outcome. Kerosene or bore cleaner would have been an improvement! Their bottle was undrinkable, and for want of something better to do with it, I reached up and placed it behind one of the artificial plants located on the shelf around the perimeter of the room.

A couple of months later, I was again at the Roof, and wondered....."Could that bottle still be there?" Yep! It was still there. Maybe one of the vets living in the area could tell me what ever happened to the Roof. Is it still there? Is the bottle still there? (Hm, I wonder what aged, 56 year old rotgut tastes like)

Bob Baron