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Oct-Nov-Dec 1996 CUB*



Aerial view of Camp Lucky Strike, taken 27 August 1945 by the 540th Photo Squadron. The black "bars" are row upon row of tents.

My Experiences at Camp Lucky Strike

Camp Lucky Strike was one of several tent camps built around LeHavre at the end of 1944. Others were named Old Gold, Pall Mall, Twenty Grand, Herbert Tarrington, Wings, Home Run and Phillip Morris. As you can see they were named for popular cigarette brands. They were created in order to dispatch equipment and troops disembarking from the port of Le Havre to the front. Lucky Strike was built around a German bomber base. Col. Maurice Protheroe, my friend, was in charge of building Camp Lucky Strike.

Apparently, as a RAMP (Recovered Allied Military Personnel), I was one of the first people to be assigned to Camp Lucky Strike, arriving by C47 from an evacuation hospital in Germany 7 April 1944. All I had was a wool shirt and trousers, new pair of Army shoes two sizes too large, and cotton underwear and socks which I received at a shower and delousing unit before being admitted to the Evacuation Hospital., No coat (I remember it was early April and very cold), no soap, no toothbrush.

The camp was divided into sections. My guess is that each section held from 500 to 2000 men. Our section's main street was built of metal strips with holes made for aircraft landing strips. In the center of the section was a canvas tarp covered eating area (we ate standing at shelves), canvas kitchen, huge canvas water tank, Red Cross tent, and several administrative tents.

Rows of squad tents were laid out in opposite directions from the central area. The tents had approximately 12 cots, no lighting, no heat, no chairs, no tables. At the end of the tent row was a large box in a tent. (The Army referred to these toilets as "Quartermaster Boxes") It had a series of round holes along the edge - toilets - and a large hole underneath for the excrement. Again no lights, no water.

Upon arrival I was issued a barracks bag, two Army blankets, mess kit complete with knife, fork, spoon and canteen cup, towel and a canvas bucket. I was then assigned to a cot in the first tent. My guess is that the bucket was to carry water from the canvas water tank to my tent for bathing. What a laugh. Both the weather and water were too cold and I was too weak.

I was very sick when I arrived and sick when I left. After a couple of days there were so many people eating at our mess that you finished one meal and went to the rear of the line to wait for the next meal, a period of up to four hours! I was too sick to stand in that line long. I was very happy to be free but the conditions were still terrible.

On my first night at Lucky Strike I visited the Red Cross tent where I had a cup of coffee and a donut. As I recall that was about all there was, except of course the lovely ladies. The rumor the next day was one of the guys died that night apparently from eating 23 of the donuts. That ended the donuts!

The people in charge didn't seem to know what to expect or how to handle us. Processing consisted of a very brief physical (probably looking for only for contagious diseases), debriefing (at the time I had no idea where I was captured, little knowledge of the Battle of the Bulge, or had not seen any maps). My guess is that the debriefer was very inexperienced and probably thought we were very stupid.

Several days later was sent to the quartermaster tent where I turned in my outer clothes for a new "ke" field jacket, wool shirt and trousers, web belt, a pair of socks, combat boots and a field cap with red braid. It was the only cap they had with braid. It fit me and the red showed that I was artillery. I was not issued any insignia until I arrived at Fort McPerson in Atlanta on May 1.

They gave each of us a neat little cloth pouch that you could tie around the waist. It had a razor, razor blades, shaving cream, comb, soap, tooth paste and wash cloth. It was provided by a Red Cross Chapter in New Jersey. Thank you Red Cross !

I also received \$20 partial pay. Remember the Germans had taken all the money from most POWs. I arraigned for one of the Red Cross ladies to purchase a cake for my 21st birthday on Friday the 13th. I gave her my \$20. On Thursday they posted orders on the bulletin board that I was to go home the next day. Got my \$20 back.

On my 21st birthday I was trucked to Le Havre and boarded the John Ericksen for the trip home. I arrived at Staten Island 28 April, and went by train to Camp Kilmer.

By the end of April the Army had things well organized at Camp Lucky Strike. There were Post Exchanges and movies. During this time 3,000 German POWs were utilized in the mess and laundry area. Of course the infirmary was always full of men who had eaten too much of the rich food after their diet in the Stalags and on the road.

At the peak, 5,000 RAMPS left for home by plane or ship from Le Havre in a SINGLE DAY. Eventually 89,000 former American POWS went through Lucky Strike.

Beginning in June 1945 Camp Lucky Strike was used to deploy units for the war in the Pacific. Later on, whole divisions were deployed through the camp for deactivation in the United States. The 106th Infantry Division was relieved of its POW guard duties and

arrived at Camp Lucky Strike around the 10th of September for the trip home and deactivation.



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