

William McCrea Potts

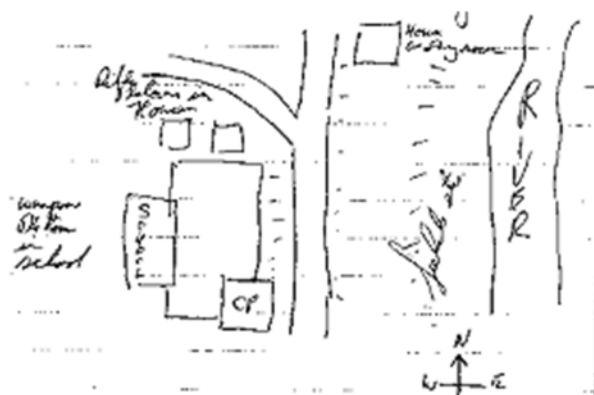
(twin to Arthur Wyman Potts)
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BILL'S RANDOM NOTES ON GERMAN PWs

When the 106th got the PW job we left France for Germany. None of us knew we were not going into action.

At Frankfort we stayed for several days in pup tents (shelter halves as we did in France). One day at Frankfort we went to a big estate like mansion; perhaps a Red Cross.

Next at Langenlosheim we were billeted in and around a schoolyard.



I first remember escorting prisoners from Bad Kreuznach to our stockade. I collected watches and an Iron Cross by going into their ranks and taking them.

At the camp they were put into large areas (as big as a football field) of bare dirt, totally exposed with no shelter. The areas were marked off with white mine field tape. Riflemen were posted along the sides with a machine gun in two of the opposite corners. Grassy areas of equal size separated the group's prisoners.

Somehow they were sorted by rank and nationality. But I never saw this done. I don't remember watching prisoners at the camp as often as I escorted them from Bad Kreuznach.

I do remember one incident at one of the makeshift camps. The dirt areas for prisoners were side-by-side one after the other. Prisoners would wander into the grass areas to pick the tall grass for a bed. We would just yell at them. One old man went too far – almost midway. I fired one round at his feet and then was struck with the fear that I could have hit one of the G.I.s in the opposite corner.

I do remember days watching prisoners with no fences and a rumor the war's end resulted in rifle fire into the air. This diminished with each rumor. When the war ended I don't remember even one shot.

Some days guarding; some days escorting and always taking watches. My letters tell of these watches. I think Dad kind of wanted one. The only one that got home was the Tissot that I gave to Bob.

I didn't pay much attention to the stockade as it was built. I remember first there was concertina wire and the high fences on each side.

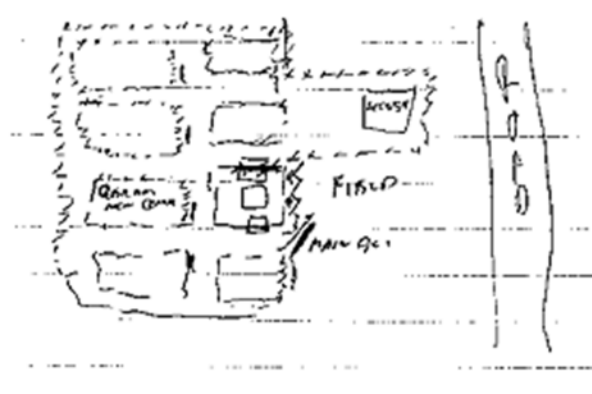
I don't remember feeling any concern for the prisoners even though they were outside in all kinds of weather. Remember, these were the enemy and we ourselves had been living out of doors thru the coldest winter in years and many for two months longer than I. This was mid-April and May and getting warmer each day.

As more prisoners arrived so many more units were attached to the 106. These G.I.s spoiled the collection of trophies by starting to trade cigarettes. First one cigarette and then a pack and finally a carton.

Many of the G.I.s in our outfit did not want to get watches for themselves so I would give them the ones I did not want. I thought this was okay - we were the victors and these the spoils.

I traded away most of my watches. I gave at least 5 watches for a 6x30 field glass of the Africa corps.

When the stockade was complete there were enclosures within enclosures.



I remember a special enclosure outside of the main camp that included a house for women prisoners. Over the fences I collected several coins. One coin with EB on the back was tossed to me with the prisoner saying Eva Braun. Next to the house was a field. In the field was an empty apples & applesauce

box. I filled the box with dirt and then walked back and forth outside a main stockade asking for watches. The prisoners tossed watches over the fences. I tossed them back until I got one that I liked and then I kept it. Then I decided to give them the box of dirt.

This was stupid but I went thru the fence wire and the concertina wire to the second fence and pushed the box to the prisoners. The prisoners were mad. Later a G.I. said that if they didn't recognize me they would have let me have it.

When we were at the stockade but not a guard, I would walk into the enclosures. I cannot understand why no one stopped me. One day I had a carton of cigarettes from some GI that wanted me to get him a good watch. While inside, two Germans came up to me. One had a bullet **** just under the side of his chest. The bullet had entered from the air just behind the collarbone. I pointed the way to the aid station and continued looking for watches among the PWs.

I don't remember the PWs looking under fed or so bad off.

On another day I was inside the stockade but outside the prisoner part. PWs were gathered up to the wire. I was trading cigarettes for what ever I could get. A German handed me a diamond ring to me with two diamonds each side of a sapphire. I put the ring on my finger and kept the cigarettes. The German protested that he was a priest. Over the years this bothered me. I didn't take rings except this one. The prisoners would part with their wedding rings for one cigarette. (Their only connection to home for a 10 minute cigarette in the rain and mud.)

It rained a lot because I wore my poncho often. The day I got the diamond I went to a tent (8 man tent) by the stockade to sleep. I rolled up in my poncho on the ground and looked at the diamonds. I did get two other rings, a rose with a diamond and one with a coat of arms.

Some days I would stay in the company area as orderly or something. The company was on their way to the stockade when a GI came running in demanding all of the rubbers. A German lady and her daughter was making themselves available to the whole company. I gave him all that were there, but I could never understand this.

One night after truckloads of new GIs arrived, perhaps from some other camp, gun fire erupted; enough to sound like an all out attack. I stayed at the CP with a machine gun while the others went to the sound of the gunfire with a Jeep. The new arrivals were just nervous. There were rumors of a German underground. Some joker was just firing at a jackrabbit and that started it.

Another time I was watching Germans do KP when work was done one offered to draw my picture. After mine was done I sent for you so yours could be drawn.

The day that you got shot someone came to me and said your brother has been shot, but he is OK. Some how the "OK" part made me not worry. I went to the CP and they didn't know where you were. I enquired often but got no information until the day you got back. In fact I saw you coming with those powerful field glasses.

Some of the things I can't remember such as the party for the Captain.

I remember swimming and fishing in the river near a destroyed bridge. I remember our adventure along the narrow railroad and the ride back down hill in the mining car after trying to start an engine. I remember the car gained speed; the stick for a break didn't

work. Everyone was afraid and jumped off. Flories and I were too afraid to jump. As the load lightened the car slowed down and stopped.

One day I walked alone to the west to get strawberries; there were grapes too.

After the picture was drawn we saw the building, terrace of stones and statues in the German non-com stockade. The Hungarians and Czechs never seemed as well off. I think the Germans got extra rations for doing KP.

Towards the end I remember pulling guard at a tower on the west. On the tower at night I would watch the moon and play the harmonica. With only moon light the Germans easily could have slipped thru the wire. I wonder how many did? (How many of "The Other Losses" could be escaped prisoners.)

As for the tent with bodies we never got close to it and aren't even sure if we saw it. A lot of them must have been sick when they arrived and the exposure didn't help them. We never saw their aid station, never saw them feeding. I don't remember even one PW chow line.

The PW that I had contact with seemed healthy enough. I don't think our camp was too bad. They weren't heroes, they were the cause of our being there. I think we would have been very troubled if we thought they were more mistreated more than taking a few Jerry watches as spoils of war.

I worked (at Carbide) with Karl who was an Austrian in the German Army. He told me how he surrendered and how he worked for the US Army. He would know if prisoners were mistreated.

Typed April 22, 2006 from Bill's handwritten notes.

AWP



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