

## Clifford N. Austin

589 FA/C

Stalag IV-B (4-B) Muhlberg Sachsen

Arbeits Kommando #1315, Oberullesdorf, Poland near Zittay, Germany for 6 months

### Cpl Clifford N. Austin War Biography

Created on Friday, 16 March 2018 08:45 | Last Updated on Friday, 16 March 2018 08:52  
| Written by Pfc Clifford N AUSTIN |

#### *Cpl Clifford N. AUSTIN War Biography*

Written by James W. Franklin



*This story is a result of several years' work with a fantastic old gentleman who has since passed on to glory. Cliff and I never met in person but spoke many times over the phone from 2008-2011. I initially contacted him in 2000 regarding my grandfather's wartime and POW experience but then lost touch with him. After calling again in 2008, I struck up a good working relationship with him and he got me in touch with several other members of the Zittau Survivor's*

*Group of which he was a founding member. They in turn put me in touch with others so that I eventually spoke with nearly all of the surviving members of the group at least once. From these conversations and other background sources, Cliff and I decided to put together his recollections in a more organized and linear fashion.*

*The "Cliff Austin War Biography" underwent about eight versions during our joint venture with his telling of the story, my attempts at organizing his memories into chronological fashion, typing it up with some attempt at storytelling, and sending it to him to review. Our next phone conversation would be his correcting a minor fact or two then telling an entirely new portion of the story that he had remembered as a result of revisiting his experiences. The story expanded to the length you see here. The final revision was sent to Cliff in late 2010. While we never had the chance to revisit it in great detail as we had before, he assured me that other than a minor point here or there, it was as accurate to his memory as possible. While later versions may change stylistically or be supplemented by outside sources for context, this is as true and accurate a version of Cliff Austin's experiences in World War II. He passed away in May, 2011 surrounded by family and friends.*

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1943, on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, Cliff Austin received a letter from the U.S. Draft Board. The letter began with "Greetings. You've been selected..." Although Cliff was only a junior in high school he was now eligible for military service. Because it was very important to Cliff to finish school first, he sent a letter to the draft board asking them to defer his service until after graduation. Their reply stated that he could defer until the end of the current school year which would still leave him one

year short of graduating. Out of options, Cliff decided to sign up in a "voluntary induction." Cliff said that "it was similar to being drafted, but sounded slightly better when you said it out loud."

Cliff attempted sign up with the Navy but was disqualified because of a condition he had suffered as a child called "temporary partial paralysis". Years earlier, Cliff and a friend had offered to help a neighbor with a remodeling project, hauling loads of stone and debris out of a basement. He and the friend carried a washtub loaded with debris up a flight of stairs over and over for three days. Cliff used his left hand and his friend lifted with his right. They never switched sides because the thought had never occurred to either of them. The next morning Cliff woke up, horrified to discover he couldn't feel his left arm or leg. Heartbroken, he feared he would never play baseball or basketball again. Cliff's coach helped him recover by showing him some exercises he could do to regain strength in his weakened limbs. After about a year of rehabilitation, he was able to play both sports again, although he would remain weaker in his left side for the rest of his life. Despite this weakness, Cliff felt he was physically strong enough to serve his country.

When Cliff tried to enlist in the Army, he went to the local processing center in Rutland, Vermont and told the doctor about his childhood paralysis. After an examination, they decided Cliff was in "fine physical condition." This local processing center was just the first stop in the entry process, much like today's MEPS or Military Entrance and Processing Station. In addition to having their physicals, the recruits signed their paperwork and were assigned to their Army Training Post. In Cliff's case, he was to report to Ft. Jackson, South Carolina for Basic Combat Training in March. After getting his assignment, Cliff went back home to wait for his report date. When the day came, he reported to his local Army Induction Center at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Much like the modern Reception Battalion, the Induction Center was the place where new recruits began their Army transformation. The men now had to line up in formations, saluting and addressing their new superiors properly. They had to get used to being shouted at all of the time whether they were wrong or not. At Fort Devens, the new Soldiers were given all of their shots, got their first Army haircut, and received their initial issue of uniforms and basic equipment. The only real difference in the process today is that the initial in-processing was handled at a regional level in the 1940s rather than in a special Reception Battalion at the Basic Training post.

Cliff's first impression of the Army at Fort Devens was one of "sheer bedlam." It seemed that nobody knew what was going on, including the people in charge. At first they divided up the recruits and sent the groups to different processing stations. After a short while, they changed the plan and the recruits ended up somewhere else entirely. A Soldier could spend all morning in line for something only to be shuffled off to lunch, then back again to wait some more, and hopefully actually achieve a portion of the in-processing before the end of the day. After talking to a recent Army recruit, Cliff was amazed to discover that the modern Army Reception process is remarkably similar to his 1943 experience.

In the chaos that was Fort Devens, there was one constant, one order that overruled any other order—the all powerful, unwavering rule of Alphabetical Order. Your life was now governed by the name you inherited at birth. This was a horrible system if your name was Zimmerman but it worked out pretty well for a guy named Austin. Having an “A” name was especially beneficial when it came to getting shots. During this time period, little was known about the risk of blood borne diseases. As a result, needles were used over and over again until they bent, broke, or stopped working altogether. Cliff knew he was lucky to be at the front of the line because the needle would still be sharp when it was his turn.

Cliff wasn't overly afraid of needles but encountered one person who was—a tall Soldier of Swedish descent named Charlie Finn. Finn was so scared of needles that he kept changing places in line to delay the inevitable stick. The other Soldiers in line called him “*sissy*,” probably because they expected such a big guy like him to be especially tough. When he finally, and very reluctantly, made it to the front of the line and saw the syringe, his eyes rolled back in his head and he dropped to the floor. To this day, when Cliff goes to a clinic or the VA hospital, he remembers the shared needles and the anti-heroics of Charlie Finn.

One major adjustment for Cliff at Fort Devens was the lack of personal privacy in the Army. He had to get used to being in close quarters with large numbers of people, often with little or nothing on. This was true not only during showers but also during the initial clothing issue. Not completely naked but bare enough to be thoroughly embarrassed, Cliff followed the long procession through the clothing issue line. The workers handed him socks at one station and shoes at another and so on. He continued down the line when all of the sudden, something came flying at his head hitting him directly in the face—a pair of thermal underwear. Annoyed, Cliff looked up angrily to protest and to his surprise he saw the familiar face of Martin Casey from his hometown of Vergennes. Cliff stood looking at him, his jaw hanging down to the floor. Martin, who was just a year older than Cliff, jokingly yelled “*Get going, Rookie!*” Cliff laughed, asking Martin how long he had been there. Martin replied “*I’m an old timer, Cliff. I’ve been here two weeks!*”

Cliff made it through Fort Devens with his sanity more or less intact and took the trains and buses south to Fort Jackson. If he thought he had it hard before, he was in for a rude awakening when he met the true face of the Army—First Sergeant Eric D. Green Jr. Sergeant Green was the kind of guy that nobody messed with—physically imposing with a booming voice and bad temper. Cliff never saw him physically abuse anyone—he didn't have to. The fear he inspired and the very thought of what would happen to you if you got on his bad side were enough to keep these new Soldiers in line. Cliff quickly learned to keep his head down and do whatever he was told. Cliff realized that even if he didn't like his superiors, rank and uniform still had to be respected.

Cliff was assigned to “**C” Battery, 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division**, led by Captain Malcolm H. Rockwell. Known as the “*Golden Lions*,” the 106<sup>th</sup> had just been activated in March of 1943 when Cliff arrived. Another nickname for the division was the “*Bag Lunch Kids*”—Kids because most of them were fresh-faced and

barely out of school and Bag Lunch because that's the way they received much of their nourishment during their field training. Their days started early and ended late and were filled with repetition and routine.

A typical day for Cliff started with a literal rude awakening from Sergeant Green. He would enter the barracks with his whistle blowing, shouting, "*Everybody up!*" with the usual profanities for effect. A heavy sleeper, Cliff drew special attention from the First Sergeant during morning wakeup. Sergeant Green made a point of coming to Cliff's corner of the room to do most of his morning shouting. When that didn't wake him, Sergeant Green picked up the end of Cliff's bed and slammed it down—this usually did the trick. Cliff sprang to life and his day began.

The next unpleasant step in the morning routine was standing "*naked as a jaybird*" under one of the four shower heads in the open prison style showers. Once clean, the trainees would shave whether they had whiskers growing or not. For a while Cliff tried to get out of this routine since he could barely sprout a whisker. These attempts ended one day when Captain Rockwell stopped him, asking, "*Austin, when is the last time you shaved?*" Cliff, not wanting to lie to his Commanding Officer, answered honestly that it had been quite a while. He was instructed to shave anyway despite his current state of physical development. From that day on, he had to at least go through the motions. Private Witz, a fellow trainee that was known to have the highest IQ in the Battalion, always teased Cliff about having to shave his imaginary whiskers.

After the shower and shave and regardless of the weather, the Soldiers moved outside for morning formation and Physical Training. Their schedule was announced over the public address system through various bugle calls. After PT, the trainees returned to clean the barracks and straighten up their personal belongings. From here, they were finally marched to breakfast before starting the actual training for the day.

Marching was another constant in training and some were better than it than others. They were taught Drill and Ceremony by what they called "*Jawbone*" Corporals, because of how loud they shouted, and Sergeants. These were the precursors to today's Drill Sergeants. There were some privates that for the life of them could not keep their directions straight, going left when the rest of the group went right or vice versa. If repeated verbal corrections didn't do the trick, the Sergeant had another trick up his sleeve. He made the directionally challenged private run to the end of the drill field and retrieve a small rock. When he got back to the formation, the Sergeant would tell him to place it in one hand, saying, "*Now remember—the hand with the rock is your LEFT HAND!*"

There was another group that had trouble adjusting to Army life who were given their own special living quarters. Known as the "*Pissy Barracks*," the pungent house of the incontinent was home to any Soldier who showed an inability to control his bladder overnight. Mattresses were checked daily to see if they had overcome the problem but many never did. Some had medical issues and others just had a nervous reaction to the severe change of lifestyle in the Army. If the problem persisted, they would be

discharged. Cliff wondered if these poor guys were really the lucky ones in the long run.

Basic training was rigorous, both physically and mentally. There were a lot of days spent out in the hot sun, sitting in the sand in places like "*Tank Hill*" in between training exercises, trying to make it through to the next day. The training would have been taxing enough even with a full night's sleep and Cliff's efforts to sneak a nap without getting caught were not enough to make up the difference. Back at home, Cliff's mother worried that the strain of soldiering would be too great for her boy who had had partial paralysis as a child. She wrote a letter to Captain Rockwell, explaining that she was not trying to get him out of the Army, but she had concerns for his physical well-being. Captain Rockwell called Cliff into his office to inquire about the letter and his health. He then reassured Cliff that the Army would take good care of him. When the other Soldiers in training heard about the letter, they teased Cliff about getting a "*note from his mommy.*"

Mail call was the high and low point of every day, depending on whether you got something from home. The company clerks, at first a guy named Tomicello and later one called Gollhofer, seemed to have a talent for mispronouncing privates' names. Cliff didn't think his name was too difficult but somehow they managed to get it wrong every time. One might think people with names like Tomicello and Gollhofer would make an effort to get names right, but it was not the case. Gollhofer was especially sour, having no sense of humor whatsoever. The Clerk read off something like the name on the letter and waited for the response of "*Here!*" The Clerk then tossed the letter in the general direction of the voice, almost never actually getting it to the intended Soldier. Their hopes were high and disappointment was intense when no letter came.

Once during training, Cliff received a copy of his hometown Vergennes Newspaper. Soldiers from Newark and Boston thought it was hilarious that Mr. and Mrs. Smith's business trip and Maisey the Cow getting loose from her pen made front page news. Whether it was a letter from a loved one or a "*hayseed*" local paper, any news from home helped the Soldiers remember that they were not just a number on a training roster, they were somebody important to someone back home.

Cliff learned some new terminology while in training such as FUBAR (F'd Up Beyond All Recognition) and SNAFU (Situation Normal—All F'd Up). These acronyms reflected the general sentiment that a situation was unpleasant and beyond their control but that was just how things were. Life in the 30s and early 40s had prepared these young men for dealing with hardship and making the best of a bad situation. Bad times make young men tough, and tough young men are the people you want fighting on your side.

While at Fort Jackson, Cliff was shocked at the way one group of young men—Black Soldiers—were treated in the south. He didn't openly question it at the time, but deep down he knew the Jim Crow segregation laws were wrong. He remembered a bus driver in Fort Jackson threw white people off of the bus if they gave up their seat to a

black person. Although Cliff "*didn't have the guts*" to stand up for blacks at the time, he was always bothered by their mistreatment in the Army during WWII.

In January of 1944, the 106<sup>th</sup> went on combat training maneuvers in Tennessee. Here they endured cold and muddy conditions often without sufficient food. Once, Cliff and some friends found themselves at a local farmhouse in Tennessee where they were invited in out of the cold for some warm southern cooking. Cliff wasn't sure what chitlins or collard greens were but he was happy to get something other than Army food. What really made his day was when the large but very friendly hostess brought out a steaming dish of sweet potato pie. He had never had anything like it and it left a lasting impression of the kindness of Southern hospitality.

During training, entertainment options were limited at best but every now and then the young Soldiers got a pass to go into town. Cliff and some friends went to the Grand Old Op'ry to see a show but instead saw a huge line wrapping around the block. Cliff wasn't even a country music fan. He preferred Big Band music and Harry James to banjos and country twang. However, one can't be too picky when options are so limited, so he lined up with the everyone else. Sadly, lining up was as far as they got, waiting for over an hour and a half before giving up and going back to camp.

In March 1944, just as the weather was beginning to warm up, the 106<sup>th</sup> Division transferred to Camp Atterbury, Indiana for Advanced Training. Camp Atterbury had been constructed just a few years earlier where before there had been empty fields. Now, the yellow wooden buildings with green tile roofs were everywhere. At Camp Atterbury, the men practiced their rifle marksmanship, conducted physical training, ran obstacle courses, and practiced drill and ceremony. The most memorable part of training was the infiltration course which involved a lot of crawling on the ground under barbed wire and through tunnels.

The months passed by quickly, Spring turning into Summer, Summer into Fall and soon weeks until they would leave for combat. Sadly, the deck was stacked against them in terms of combat readiness. Of the 66 Infantry Divisions in WWII, the 106<sup>th</sup> was the last to be activated. Because of this, it was the first to be raided for replacements at the front. Men who had been training for other jobs such as the Air Corps or those in the ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program) were also transferred to the 106<sup>th</sup> when they were reclassified as infantry. As a result of the high turnover rate in the division, a large percentage of the troops had incomplete infantry training when they shipped out on November 10<sup>th</sup>. The 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division left Boston on a lone troop transport ship called the U.S.S. Wakefield. Cliff had reservations about traveling unescorted through U-Boat infested waters but sadly didn't have any say in the matter.

Cliff had been told to fight seasickness by eating everything he could get his hands on. He started storing away extra chocolate bars, first for the Atlantic crossing and also for later when they crossed the English Channel. With his cheeks stuffed with chocolate for most of the overseas journey, Cliff was able to avoid getting seasick. One day while Cliff was in the latrines, he noticed vomit swishing from one end of the latrine to the other following the rocking motion of the ship. Cliff nearly

added his own contribution to the foul, undulating soup but thankfully was able to keep his lunch down.

In late November, the 106<sup>th</sup> landed in Liverpool, England, and were trucked to an area outside the city of Gloucester where they spent a few weeks training. It was like being in a storybook setting for the young Vermonter. Friendly faces and unfamiliar landscapes filled his senses as they covered mile after mile of English countryside. The Soldiers marched along roads whose original foundations had been laid by the Romans and through small villages with thatched roof houses. Cliff wished he could stay and enjoy the beautiful surroundings and hospitable people a little while longer but sadly their time would be all too brief.

After a week or more of plodding their way across the countryside, the men got a weekend pass to go to a nearby town. During the pre-pass briefing, Captain Rockwell advised the men that there was a beer shortage in England. They were told to only have a few drinks at each pub before moving on to another drinking establishment. When the soldiers told a local bartender what the Captain had said he laughed and served them until their money was gone.

Too soon, it was time to leave England's friendly shores and join the fight on the mainland. Although the smaller boats used to cross the English Channel gave them a rough ride on the choppy waves, Cliff's division successfully made it across to Le Havre, France. They were trucked to an area outside St. Vith, Belgium in early December, arriving on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

St. Vith was a strategic crossroads and was vital stop in the Allied supply line. The 106<sup>th</sup> was scheduled to relieve the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division near Schönberg, a sleepy town on the edge of the woods next to the Siegfried line. The Siegfried line was a long line of fortifications, concrete bunkers known as pillboxes, and rows of concrete pillars known as Dragon's Teeth. The assignment was supposed to be an easy one and in a quiet area. The guys from the 2<sup>nd</sup> told them, "*You kids are lucky. You're here where nothing exciting happens.*" The area should have been a good place for new soldiers to get accustomed to the sound of artillery fire, occasional scouting trips, and possible harassing fire. Unfortunately, the area turned out not to be a quiet sector after all.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was supposed to leave most of their equipment in place for the 106<sup>th</sup> to utilize. Unfortunately, much of the equipment was taken away when the Division left. Other than the equipment, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had left their positions relatively intact, including their huts. Huts, occasionally referred to as cabins, were basically dugout foxholes with logs placed over the top for protection from mortar fire or tree bursts. Each hut could hold two to three men and offered a small measure of protection. Cliff shared one of these huts with Corporal Don Stone from Jainesville, Wisconsin. Cliff had known Don since their training days and they were as close as brothers. Believing they would be at these positions for quite a while, Cliff and Don started making plans for the holidays. They even saved two cans of orange juice from their ration for their New Year's toast.

After several days in the hut, Cliff developed a case of "*cabin fever*" and decided to leave the shelter to visit another sections' huts. He had only taken a few steps out in the open before he heard a peculiar "*zip*" sound. A bullet had narrowly missed his head, slamming into a nearby tree. He compared the sound to that of a large bee buzzing right by his ear. Cliff hit the ground "*damn fast*" and crawled back to the protection of his hut. Once he was safe inside, Don berated him saying, "*Who do you think you are, a tourist?*"

It was on December 15<sup>th</sup>, while patrolling in front of the battery position with Captain Rockwell, that "*all hell started breaking loose.*" "C" Battery began to take mortar fire and could hear the familiar rumble and "*clickety-clack*" of enemy tanks. The enemy was right on top of them. Their white camouflage had made it difficult for the soldiers to see their approach in the snowy landscape. Some accounts stated that the tanks were painted white and equipped with special tracks to better move through the ice and snow. The Soldiers began to fire back as the German troops kept coming. The small carbine rifles did little against the strong armor of the metal beasts. As the situation worsened, Captain Rockwell ordered his men back to the battery position where they could get into foxholes and mount a better defense. Cliff was more than happy to oblige, since all he could see were an awful lot of German tanks trying to annihilate them. The battery position had more trees and more cover from the incoming fire, so Cliff started back. As they were retreating, the bazooka man, Joe DePaolis, continued to fire at the tanks in an effort to disable or destroy them. His efforts were not successful as the shells kept coming in. Many from "C" Battery were wounded or killed during this attack. Don Stone heard Captain Rockwell say he was "*going to make a break for it.*" He led the men in a charge up the hill which resulted in many being gunned down, including the Captain. Cliff summed up the events of that day well, saying "*We got the hell kicked out of us.*"

Cliff began his "*advance to the rear,*" running football style back to the battery position, dropping to the ground to crawl on hands and knees and then getting up to run a little more. He knew to never run in a straight line because he'd make an easier target. Despite his evasive action, he was still wounded on the right wrist. He called it a scratch, but said it "*stung like hell.*" He wrapped a handkerchief around his wrist and returned to the line where the superficial flesh wound was treated by a medic.

Later that day, Lieutenant Thomas Wright came by to organize a patrol. Sergeant Lloyd Clements, Chief of Section 3, volunteered Cliff for the job. Cliff believed he was volunteered because he was not one of Sergeant. Clements' favorite people. The men of Section 3 called Sergeant Clements "*Old Boxhead*" because his head was very square. Old Boxhead always found unpleasant duties for Cliff, such as cleaning out the grease traps, K.P., etc. This particular patrol consisted of Cliff, Ray "*Michigan*" Greginon, and six or seven other men. The Lieutenant stated their mission was to select a new position for their battery, which consisted of 110 men and 4 Howitzers. The patrol headed out into the cold, dark night to scout out a better position for "C" Battery. They didn't have any flashlights, but even if they had they couldn't have used them for fear of becoming a target. At certain positions, Soldiers would call out "*Halt!*" and wait for the corresponding password identifying them as fellow Americans. Unfortunately, the patrol was shot at several times for answering incorrectly. Somehow, the password had been changed, possibly by undercover

Germans who were known to sneak across enemy lines dressed in American uniforms. Other than these few instances, the rest of night passed without incident.

On the morning of December 16<sup>th</sup>, the situation rapidly deteriorated. The men of "C" Battery were close to Schönberg when they were met by a line of GMC trucks from Battery "A". Cliff and Ray jumped on and recognized the officer, Lieutenant Wood, who had once been a part of "C" Battery. Lieutenant Eric Wood, a West Pointer, was strict but fair. He was described by many as being "*strictly G.I.*," meaning everything had to be done by the book. For example, while the truck was driving through enemy fire, one of the soldiers lost his helmet out of the back. Lieutenant Wood, riding in front, made the driver stop. He ordered the man to get out, go back, and pick up his helmet while they were still taking fire. Amazingly, the young soldier made it back and the truck continued towards Schönberg.

Suddenly, as the truck rounded the next corner, they were face to face with a German tank whose turret was trained directly at them. The truck's canvas exterior only provided protection from the elements, not from bullets and certainly from not tank rounds. A shell was fired, passing right through the canvas and going out the other side. Soon after, a machine gun opened fire and that was all the convincing the men needed to exit the truck and enter a ditch.

Taking fire in the ditch, Lieutenant Wood told the men, "*I'm going to make a break for it. Anyone who wants to come along is certainly welcome. Those who don't want to come, cover us with rifle fire!*" After the war, Cliff was often asked why he didn't go up the hill with them. He always replied that, "*It didn't look like a career enhancing move for me. We were more than outnumbered. It was a mess.*" There one soldier that followed was Witz, the one who used to tease him about shaving his imaginary whiskers. Witz and Lieutenant Wood ran up the hill in a heroic charge as Cliff and Ray provided covering fire. Cliff wasn't sure whether he and Ray hit anyone or anything but knew that if they were even close it might slow the Germans down and provide a little more time for the men charging up the hill. It was just enough cover for the two men to make it up the hill and into legend. Stories tell of a tall athletic Lieutenant and another soldier arriving at a local man's house for help. The officer and his companion disappeared into the woods, gathered other stray soldiers and waged a guerilla war on the German Army for weeks. When they finally found the Lieutenant's body, he was surrounded on all sides by dead Germans. Clearly, even at the end, Lieutenant Wood was more than your average Soldier and certainly more than the Germans had bargained for.

The American troops were quickly surrounded by what would later be known as "*The Bulge.*" The Ardennes Offensive, as it was officially named, was Hitler's last great attack of the war. The objective was to push through the Allied lines, splitting up the Americans and the British, and eventually capturing the seaport of Antwerp, Belgium. Hitler hoped this would be enough to convince the Allies to negotiate a peace treaty and end the war on the Western Front. Reminiscent of the Blitzkrieg attacks a few years earlier, this massive assault depended on speed and the element of surprise to completely overwhelm the opposition.

There was no longer any front line and no rear as German tanks and troops were everywhere, continuing their push deep into Belgium. Outside of the destroyed truck, many that were still alive surrendered or were captured. Cliff and Ray fought their way along the ditch and into another part of the woods. They were almost out of ammunition and were having a hard time seeing the enemy in white. Coming to a clearing, they noticed some houses nearby. Sensing the end was near, Cliff and Ray made a mad dash into the basement of one of the bombed out buildings. They took the now empty rifles, removed the clips, and smashed the stocks into the cellar wall, observing Army protocol and not leaving the enemy with anything they could use against you. They tore off their shoulder patches and tried to remove anything that could identify what unit or division they were with. They sat there in the cold, dark silence anxiously waiting for the end they knew was coming.

Their wait was over when the cellar door opened and a voice called "*Hallo?*" down the steps. The men remained silent until they heard the very distinctive rapid fire of a German burp gun which sprayed bullets on at least two of the four walls of the cellar. That was enough to scare Cliff and Ray into a quick reply of "*Hallo!*" The men were met by a soldier Cliff swore was only about sixteen and appeared to be frightened out of his wits. He marched them up the stairs and motioned them out of the remains of the building. The two captives were led out to a road and past some German troops reveling in their battle success. The two men were then led to the top of a hill where the other prisoners of war or *Kriegsgefangen* were being collected.

The Germans did a thorough search of the "Kriegies," telling them to empty their pockets, confiscating weapons and helping themselves to valuables. The most prized items were American overshoes. One prisoner refused to give his up and was promptly shot. When the German guard got to Cliff, he pulled a rosary his mother had given him from his pocket. A particularly cruel looking German soldier, possibly an SS Trooper, snatched the rosary from Cliff's hands, tore it apart, and spit on it. He then tore it up some more, spit on it again and threw it into the snow, grinding it in with his boot. Cliff's little prayer book suffered similar treatment. The guard also went through his photographs, asking Cliff who each one was. For his Mom, Cliff said "*Mother.*" The guard said "*Ja, Ja-Mother,*" and tore the photo to pieces. He did the same for "*Father,*" but when he got to "*Girlfriend,*" the guard said, "*Ja, Ja-Fraulein,*" and let him keep the photograph. He was such a strange character that it frightened Cliff, who wondered, "*What kind of people are we dealing with?*"

The next morning, they resumed their eastward journey. During the march, Cliff and Ray caught a break when their group was attacked by American planes doing some low-level strafing. It was every man for himself, guards going one way and prisoners going another. Cliff and Ray took off into the woods of Belgium, hiding in trees and brush until evening. When it was almost dark, the two men left their cover and approached some nearby houses. A man who appeared to be a farmer came out of one of the houses onto the porch and fired a warning shot over their heads. The Soldiers put their hands in the air to show him they were unarmed. The farmer motioned them forward and led them to his house where Cliff and Ray saw he had a wife, a teenage daughter, and some maps spread out on a table. They talked to him using gestures and other efforts at communication. After a while, they were convinced he must be friendly and was trying to tell them they would be safe in his cellar during

the night. Cliff figured the Americans would retake this ground within a few days, so they might as well hide out until then. While in the cellar, the two escapees helped themselves to some raw potatoes. They didn't sleep much but were very quiet until the next morning.

Somehow, even in the pitch black cellar, Cliff and Ray were able to tell when it was morning. Their peaceful respite was shattered when from the floor above they heard the ominous sound of hobnail boots walking across the floor towards the cellar door. The door slowly opened and they heard another call of "*Hallo?*" Realizing how foolish it would be to cause any more trouble and with no way to defend themselves, they called back, "*Hallo!*" and went up the stairs to meet their new captors.

Cliff never found out whether the "*friendly farmer*" had turned them in or whether the Germans had found them on their own. He did remember sensing a profound sadness in the wife and daughter over the situation. Cliff always wondered whether they were sad for the captured Americans or for themselves thinking they would be punished for aiding the enemy. One way or another, it meant the end of Cliff and Ray's dreams of rescue and the start of their nightmare as prisoners of war.

The men rejoined the steady stream of captured soldiers heading east. They were forced along under threat of bayonet stabbing or a beating with a rifle butt. If a prisoner slipped and fell on the snow and ice, they had to get up quickly. The guards would cry "*Raus, raus!*" meaning "*Get up! Get moving!*" Those who couldn't keep up were shot by the guards. During the march, Cliff met a man named Louie Baca who would be with him the rest of his journey and POW experience.

The men were taken to what appeared to be a schoolhouse for interrogation. They had been trained by the Army to give as little help or information to the enemy as possible—name, rank, and serial number, nothing more. The Germans were known to employ various tactics and tricks to elicit information. Some used a kind of "*Good Cop, Bad Cop*" method and others used the temptation of food. Few caved in to the pressure, but it didn't really matter how much the soldiers revealed. The Germans seemed to know everything anyway.

During the next few days, the prisoners slept out in the open, in barns, and anywhere else they could find a small amount of shelter along the way. They went without food for at least three days. Near the end of the march, Cliff's group of POWs spent a night in a very peculiar location. It appeared to be an underground bunker just large enough for fifteen to eighteen men but with very little room to move. The bunker's unusual ventilation system was operated by a hand crank and was designed to draw in fresh air and pump out the stagnant air trapped in the bunker. Although he never found anyone else who could remember the place, Cliff clearly remembered the night he spent in the dark, smelly hole in the earth.

The next morning, the POWs arrived at the town of Flamersheim, Germany, where they were rounded up into a large group. Once again Germans tried to get information from them. The Germans addressed their captives in English, saying,

"Those of you from the 106<sup>th</sup>, line up against this wall. Those of you from the 99<sup>th</sup>, stand over there, those from the 100<sup>th</sup> over there." Only one man fell for the trick and started to move before realizing his mistake. The prisoner, Arthur Langworthy who Cliff recognized from "C" Battery, knew he was in trouble now. The Germans asked him, "So what Division are you with?" Panicking, the man pointed in Cliff's then. The Germans direction and said "The same Division as him!" Cliff wanted to strangle the man right there and led Cliff and the other man away, separating Cliff from Ray and the rest of the men he had trained with for the last two years. Now, surrounded by strangers and cut off from everything he knew, Cliff felt very much alone.

Cliff's group of prisoners was kept in a jail in Flamersheim. At a nearby rail station they were put to work loading and unloading cargo from boxcars. One day it was bread, another day it was ammunition. According to the Geneva Convention, Prisoners of War were not supposed to be forced to do any work that aided the German war effort, and loading ammunition clearly fell within this category.

One day, Cliff and three other POW's were put to work evacuating the belongings of an elderly station agent and his wife whose house had been badly hit in a bombing. The station agent wore a very impressive, ornate uniform as if he were a high ranking official. His wife had "a kind and comforting look about her." The prisoners' job was to move furniture down from the upper floors while a single guard stood at the base of the stairs on the ground floor. While on the upper floor, Cliff noticed something interesting. From the higher vantage point, he could see a curious paint pattern on top of the nearby ammunition filled train cars— bright red crosses on a white background. The Germans must have thought this particular pattern would discourage Allied air attacks.

Later that day as the prisoners were on the stairs of the bombed out house, the station master's wife looked down to see if the guard was paying attention. Seeing that he wasn't, she went up to the men and showed them a photograph. It was of a woman, most likely her daughter, with a New York skyline behind her. She looked down the stairs again to check on the guard, went inside, and brought out a cake for the starving men. She motioned for them to eat, saying, "*Essen! Raus, raus, tempo, tempo!*" meaning "*Eat! Hurry up! Quickly!*" Cliff had never eaten a cake so fast in his life and never forgot how good it tasted after days of little or no food. He assumed she was trying to repay a kindness for kind treatment that Americans had given her family in the past. It may have only been a cake, but her unexpected kindness to those hungry men was greatly appreciated. Also, every little bit of food helped!

When the foul overcast weather in Flamersheim began to break, the sky overhead was obscured by something else—thousands of Allied planes on bombing missions. These flying fortresses would continue to pound military and industrial targets and towns into submission for the remainder of the war.

Around December 24<sup>th</sup>, the German soldiers took their captives to the railyard, and forced them into boxcars. The boxcars were called 40 X 8's, designed to carry either 40 men or 8 horses. The guards stuffed the cars so full of prisoners they had to kick the last few in with their hobnailed boots. The POWs later counted 72 men in the car

made for 40. That Christmas Eve, crammed together like sardines in a can, the men sang Christmas carols to keep each other's spirits up. They got a little choked up by the lyrics of "*I'll Be Home For Christmas*," but the rest of the carols went better and seemed to raise their spirits.

At one point, the boxcars were dropped off on a railway siding near Limburg. The town and railyard were bombed and strafed by American planes while the men were trapped in the cars and it was rumored that many were killed in the attacks. The Germans left the prisoners on the sidings for several days before moving on. The prisoners tried to huddle a little closer so wounded men could sit or lie down, but without much success.

Inside the boxcars, there were no lights, no water, and no bathroom facilities. Even if there had been any, you would have had a hard time squeezing past all the other men to use them. One POW from the 106<sup>th</sup> recalled having to use his metal helmet as a toilet (the same helmet that days later had to be cleaned out and used as a food bowl). The other men had to relieve themselves where they stood and try to ignore the smell.

The guards never let the prisoners out of the boxcars, but did occasionally open the door. The men got so thirsty they licked the frost off of the inside of the boxcars for moisture. Some prisoners that were closer to the doors got the German children to throw snowballs at them on one of the few occasions that the guards opened the door.

During one of the many lulls in conversation, a voice came out of nowhere with a familiar northern twang and shouted, "*Is there anyone from Vermont on this car?*" Cliff said it was "*like hearing something from heaven*" to hear a voice with a familiar accent. "*There sure as hell is!*" replied Cliff. "*Yeah! Geez, yeah! I'm Cliff Austin. I live in Vergennes.*" The other man said, "*My name is Howard Bailey and I live in Morrisville.*"

Somehow, without lights and stepping on toes as they went, they made their way through the packed car. Howard held his hand up in the air and Cliff followed his voice and felt for his raised hand. They finally met up somewhere in the middle and talked all night long about the places they were from and who they might both know. Howard knew a family named Stygles and Cliff went to school with somebody by that name. They hoped it was the same family as it would be even more of a connection. While the two strangers didn't initially know each other, Cliff and Howard, whose nickname was "*Tip*," were both from Vermont and that little connection was enough to comfort them during their shared ordeal.

After a few days on the Limburg siding, the train began moving again and slowly made its way towards their destination in the eastern part of Germany. While there were several other times during the long, arduous journey that they were put on other sidings to let the more important rail traffic through, they eventually reached the end of the line. Just before the New Year, the trains arrived at Muhlberg-on-Elbe, a "*sleepy little market town with cobbled streets straight out of a Grimm's fairy tale.*"

The prisoners walked the last few snowy miles to their destination, Stalag IV-B. A Stalag, short for *Stammlager*, was a standard prisoner of war camp. The Stalag camps were run by the regular German Army, or *Wehrmacht*. Other types were the *Dulag*, or transit camps, and the *Stalag Luft* camps that were reserved for captured pilots and were run by the *Luftwaffe*, or German Air Force. Stalag IV-B was one of the largest POW camps in Germany, located about 30 miles north of Dresden and about 5 miles northeast of Muhlberg. At IV-B, the prisoners were deloused and then showered. The men were shocked to see how much weight they had lost since their capture. They dressed again in the clothes they had arrived in, registered, and had a red POW triangle painted on the back of their shirts or jackets. Some prisoners would stay at this big camp for the remainder of the war while others were sent out to smaller labor camps called *Arbeitskommandos*. This large central camp was "a melting pot of the whole world" with thousands of POWs of many different nationalities. Once a day, the Americans were allowed to mingle with the British, Russians, and others. Men traded personal items for food or traded one kind of food for another kind they wanted more. While almost anything could be traded, cigarettes were the most common currency.

After about a week at IV-B, while Cliff was sleeping on the cold floor of the American barracks, a skinny kid named Bob Norton flopped down next to him. Cliff and Bob struck up a conversation, discussing where they were from and what they had done before the war. Bob was from Winnetka, Illinois but had family in Vermont. His dad drove him out to Lake Champlain in the summertime and he often spent several weeks at a time there with his relatives. It cheered Cliff up to find another POW that was familiar with some of the same places he knew. It was another case where any connection, no matter how small, brought comfort to the men so far from home.

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Cliff's twentieth birthday, a group of prisoners was taken out of the camp and marched to the town of Muhlberg. He remembered thinking the Germans must be very religious people because he saw so many shrines in the towns and at many of the crossroads. Along the way, Cliff also noticed that there were explosives strapped to the side of some of the trees. It appeared the Germans were ready to create a roadblock should the need ever arise.

When the prisoners got into Muhlberg, a mass of people from the town, upset at the damage caused by Allied bombing, came out into the street to harass the prisoners. They shouted at them, spat on them, and began to beat them up. Cliff tried to mind his own business and not respond to the abuse, but the angry mob attacked him anyway. He was hit in the back of the head, spit on, and punched in the groin. They cried out "*Amerikanische Flieger bomber!*" meaning "American flying bombers." Cliff tried to protest, saying "*Nein, nein!*" and pointing to his combat boots. He was trying to convince them they were ground troops and had not been responsible for the bombings. Maybe they didn't understand or maybe they didn't care. Most likely, they just needed somebody to blame their troubles on. The guards did little to discourage the rough treatment by the villagers.

For some reason (Cliff has never been able to fathom why) a lone villager stepped out of the mob and put a lit cigarette into Cliff's mouth. Cliff hadn't had a cigarette in weeks! This generous act, while unexpected, was still greatly appreciated. It was one of the few kindnesses Cliff ever received from the German people. A guard rewarded the kind villager with the traditional Reich greeting—a rifle butt to the face.

Back at IV-B, it was easy for the "*Kriegies*" to lose track of time. There were very few variations in the daily routine and when there were any they weren't pleasant. It was cold, they were hungry, they were dirty, and they wanted to get home as soon as possible. The prisoners were always looking for a way to improve their situation. One day, during the time they were allowed to mingle with the prisoners from other countries, Cliff and Louie Baca went into the British Barracks to warm their fingers and toes. The British prisoners had settled in pretty well by this point, some of them having been there for several years since the retreat at Dunkirk in 1940. Their barracks were heated and they were fairly well fed. Some of them were even receiving parcels from home. On this particular day, as Cliff and Louie were leaving the British barracks, they saw potato peelings in a garbage pail outside of the door and decided to eat them. One of the British prisoners saw them, came out, and knocked the potato peelings from their hands. He said, "*Don't ever let these Germans see you acting like animals.*" Louie said, "*But we're hungry and we haven't eaten for days!*" The Brit said "*I know you haven't, but don't ever let them catch you doing anything like that.*"

The men were led to believe that their situation would improve if they were lucky enough to get sent to an *Arbeitskommando*. They were told their rations would improve and they would get better treatment. Cliff and many other POWs believed the guards and volunteered to go. The men waited until it was their turn to go, watching other groups being sent out ahead of them. Cliff said it seemed like they spent only a week or two at Stalag IV-B, but later came to realize he was actually there close to a month. In an account found in the book "*We Were Each Other's Prisoners,*" Glenn C. Miller, another POW from the 106<sup>th</sup>, confirms their arrival at Stalag IV-B on New Year's Eve. Cliff's group didn't leave the camp until January 29<sup>th</sup>, according to Bob Hartt's memoir, when Cliff and around 300 other prisoners were again loaded onto boxcars and sent to a small work camp near Zittau, Germany.

There were several different *Arbeitskommandos* in and around Zittau. Cliff's camp, *Arbeitskommando 1315*, was actually located several miles east of Zittau outside of a little town called Oberullersdorf. It had been a German town until the end of World War I, but became part of Poland when the borders were redrawn in 1918. It changed hands again when Hitler invaded Poland and was later occupied by the Russians at the end of World War II. Poland remained under Soviet control until 1989 when they broke away from communist rule and became a parliamentary democracy. Today Oberullersdorf is known as Kopaczow.

The camp near Oberullersdorf had recently been built by Russian POWs and was surrounded by two rows of barbed wire fence with a gate. The nearly ten foot tall double fences were spaced several feet apart, creating a pathway through which several German Shepherd guard dogs would run. The fenced enclosure and gate

separated the three prisoners' barracks from the rest of the camp. The largest prisoner barracks was a long building along the back fence. There were also two smaller prisoner barracks, one of which was known as the *Krank* or sick barracks. Outside the fenced area, the other half of the camp had a barracks for the guards, a small kitchen building, a kennel for the dogs, and a tool shed.

The camp was run by a Commandant and guarded mostly by members of the German Home Guard. The Home Guard consisted of older soldiers and wounded soldiers from the Russian Front. Some of the guards were more accommodating than others. For instance, POW Russ Guerra recalled in his diary that he was caught trespassing on two separate occasions. The first time he was caught, he was beaten with a rifle butt. The next time, Russ received more lenient treatment because the guard's son was a POW in Oklahoma so felt he owed it to them to treat them fairly. Some guards were bitter because members of their family had been killed in combat or in Allied bombings. Other guards who had been injured were bitter because they thought they had already served their country and fulfilled their duty. The end result was that the treatment of the prisoners, while always strict, varied depending upon which of the guards was assigned to them.

In the mornings before heading off to work, the Germans made the prisoners line up in rows of five to be counted. The roll call, or *Appell*, was held in the morning and at night. When the morning count was complete and accurate, the prisoners were led out of the camp and transported to the worksite. Because it was dark in the morning and the men were in no hurry to get to work, they would do whatever they could to throw off the tally. Sometimes they made rows of four instead of five and other times, after being counted once, a man would make his way to the back to be counted again. This caused great frustration among the Germans, who had a reputation for accuracy and meticulous attention to detail. When the guards began to threaten beatings or worse, the Kriegies would cooperate and the workday would begin.

The prisoners worked inside another fenced compound on the opposite side of Zittau near the town of Hirschfelde. At first, transportation to and from Hirschfelde involved a combination of walking and riding trains. They walked west to Zittau and then continued northeast by train to their worksite. Later on, as the railroads were more heavily bombed, they had to walk the whole way, cutting across open ground and crossing a small river. At the worksite, all of the jobs involved some form of unpleasant manual labor. The men were forced to work even though they were starving. For this reason, they were not a very effective or efficient work force. Even if they had been healthy and well fed, they had been instructed by the Army to cooperate with the enemy as little as possible without getting themselves shot.

In Hirschfelde, Cliff worked with a group digging a massive hole for an addition to a synthetic fuel plant. At the worksite, the POWs tried to master the art of appearing to work while accomplishing little or nothing. One man tried to see if he could make one shovel full last all day. Another work detail involved working a pile driver along the riverbank and pouring concrete. The men pulled on the rope until the piledriver was fully raised then let go letting the piledriver drop. The workers were too weak to get much accomplished and the pile driver didn't have much effect on the frozen soil

anyway. POW Jim Benkert called it "*job security*" because he knew the project would take forever. One detail moved dirt on narrow gauge rail carts. Jim Benkert's hand was injured while working with this group. Some careless worker was pushing carts together but wasn't paying attention to what he was doing. Not seeing Jim's hand on the coupling, the cart slammed into Jim's hand, badly dislocating his fingers. The injury was bad enough that they sent him to get what little medical assistance was available, which ended up being a small town doctor and a splint made out of what looked like paper mache and popsicle sticks.

One of the biggest crew was the railroad crew which worked to repair tracks damaged by allied bombing. The railroad crew was run by a fanatical civilian foreman known as "*Gestapo Joe*." Joe had a bad temper and was known to be harsh with his workers. One of the crew remembered that Joe wore a military style uniform complete with swastika armbands. When there was a rumor that the enemy was close, he would show up for work in a civilian suit instead. This was one way they could tell how the war was going.

Workers on all of the details worked from morning to night with only a "*lunch*" break in the middle, although there was never any lunch at the break. This lack of food was one of the prisoners' chief concerns. Their diet consisted mainly of a daily bowl of "*skilly*," a watery soup with some kind of vegetable and occasionally a tiny piece of what the prisoners believed was horsemeat. Also, in the mornings before work, they were given what the Germans called *Ersatzkaffee* which meant "*replacement coffee*." Another word for it was *Getreidekaffe* meaning "*grain coffee*" since it was made from roasted barley. This coffee substitute was hot and brown but was otherwise entirely unlike coffee. Even though it had a foul taste and provided no nourishment, the prisoners drank it anyway because it warmed them up for a short while. Some POWs remembered having a flour soup as a part of their "*breakfast*" which also consisted mostly of water and had no flavor. At the end of the day they received their meager bread ration.

The bread, if you could truthfully call it that, brought very little nourishment and tasted absolutely awful. The Germans used a similar term for the bread as they did for the coffee—*Ersatzbrot* or "*substitute bread*." It was made of the lowest grade flour, potato starch, and often sawdust to make the recipe stretch further. It came in a two kilo loaf which was to be divided among seven prisoners. The men organized themselves into groups of seven and chose a man to divide the loaf into equal pieces. Cliff couldn't remember how the bread was cut, but one account describes pieces of scrap metal being used as knives. Methods of deciding who got which piece varied from group to group, as did the method of measurement. The responsibility of being in charge of the bread was a great one, as every set of hungry eyes was watching with great interest. Cliff was once asked to divide the bread, but he declined the "*awesome responsibility*." Some ate their entire piece right away and others, like Cliff, saved a piece to eat for lunch the next day.

Medical care, or at least effective medical care, was almost non-existent in the Zittau camp. Only the sickest of the sick, those on death's doorstep, were sent away for medical care. Many of those sent out for care died on the way to the "*hospitals*" or

soon after their arrival. At the camp, a few of the POWs knew some home remedies, but that was about it. One popular "cure-all" was called mercurochrome. This silvery liquid was used to treat many conditions and did little to help any of them. One time, Cliff asked if anyone knew a home remedy for dysentery. He was told that if he toasted his bread until it was black like charcoal and ate it, it would cure him. Cliff tried to do this, sticking half of his bread to a stove with saliva. He turned away for only a second but when he looked back, the bread had been stolen. He joked that if there was any justice in the world, the thief got his own case of dysentery from the scrap of bread he stole.

Another constant annoyance was the body lice which everybody had, but no one could seem to get rid of. No matter how many you eliminated, there always seemed to be more. The prisoners had been deloused when they left Stalag IV-B, but soon found new lice in their excelsior filled bunks at Arbeitskommando 1315. Some joked that the body lice were a housewarming gift left behind by the Russian POWs who had built the camp. They were an ever present nuisance to the already weakened, dirty, and demoralized men. The guards were not immune to the plague of body lice either, perhaps adding to their already cheery disposition.

Fear loomed over the camp like a constant, dark shadow. For Cliff, it was the fear of death, fear of the unknown, and fear for his mother and father at home who were worrying about him and his 3 brothers (Richard, Lawrence, and Bernard) who were also in the service. The men worried about the health and well-being of other prisoners as well. Loneliness and isolation were common to all prisoners of war. Russ Guerra stated it best in the forward to his diary. *"We tried to develop shells to shut out the terror and the uncertainty of our total vulnerability. Some couldn't do this and gave up...and died."*

Most prisoners had only a small group of friends. Sometimes it was their seven man bread ration group, or maybe the guys in the next bunk. Sometimes it was the men they worked with most on the work details. Somewhere along the way, Cliff made friends with an older Soldier named Jim Twinn who was also from the 106<sup>th</sup> from Headquarters Battery. He was a father figure to Cliff and some of the other men, reassuring them and providing them with guidance and perspective. Cliff still had Howard Bailey with him and Howard's good friend Arthur Noblin of California.

Cliff was a little jealous of the close friendship between Arthur Noblin and Howard Bailey. He wondered what Howard saw in the Californian that he did not see in his fellow Vermonter. Long after the war, Cliff discovered the origins of the close bond between the two men. Before their capture, Howard had risked his life to save Arthur's in battle. He had run into harms way to draw fire away from Arthur who was being pursued by an enemy tank. Obviously, this was a bond that transcended any normal friendship, but Cliff didn't know about it until well after his time in Zittau. He jokingly said it was good to finally know that his scruffy looks and body odor hadn't driven Howard away. Instead, it was a noble act of courage on the battlefield that had drawn the other two prisoners into a lifelong bond.

Other prisoners Cliff remembered were Maurice Clark of Tennessee, a very religious southern gentleman who never hated anyone, and Stan Moquist of New York who was known as "*Krank*." Stan was in charge of the sick barracks. He was older than a lot of the men, but not quite as old as Jim Twinn. Jim Benkert of Pennsylvania and Bob Hartt were other POWs that Cliff was often with at the camp and worksite, and later on during the journey home.

Cliff also spoke of Willie, one of 2 or 3 black POWs at the camp. Nobody remembered Willie's last name, but they all remembered him as being good natured, always smiling and joking. The Germans were fascinated by him, having never seen somebody of African descent up close. They were always touching his curly hair or rubbing his arm to see if the color would come off. Willie was from Mississippi and had been with the 333<sup>rd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> Howitzer and was captured by the same unit that was guilty of the "*Malmedy Massacre*." Jim Twinn remembered Willie saying they had made him run under machine gun fire. Considering the Aryan views on racial superiority and the reputation of the men that captured him, Willie was lucky to be alive and probably knew it.

Cliff remembered another prisoner nicknamed "*Chappy*." He was a self proclaimed chaplain who had been wounded and captured in Italy. Cliff thought his name might have been Moriarti, but others from the camp thought Chappy was named Earl Poole. He wanted to be a priest and had a gathering of men who would say the rosary every night in secret. Cliff was brought up Catholic and took comfort in his faith while he was a prisoner. Faith was an important way in which many of the men endured their POW experience. Those who knew little of God tended to be those who lost hope, some becoming more like animals than men.

One of the other things that kept the men going was talking to each other. The main topic of conversation among them was food. Everyone would talk about the foods they missed the most from home, arguing about which recipes were the best, etc. POW Russ Guerra dedicated four pages at the end of his journal to a list of foods he craved. Each man would brag about his region's signature food item and why it was better than the other guy's. Cliff and Howard's local favorite was Vermont maple syrup. Louisiana's Pearce Didier boasted about his region's sorghum molasses (which Cliff later was able to try and said was absolutely terrible). Arthur Noblin bragged about California's figs and dates. After the war, they sent each other packages filled with these regional items so they could try them for themselves. Most of them still thought their local favorite was the best.

Many men would sit around and dream about food, some to a fanatical degree. Half of them believed that fantasizing about food made them hungrier and others thought it made them feel better. This long period of food deprivation often led to behaviors that lasted a lifetime. For more than six decades after the war, Cliff saved a piece of his dinner each night to have for breakfast the next day because there was still a hunger "*hangover*" from his POW days. After the war, many former POWs ate their food at a rapid pace as if they were still afraid someone would steal it or made sure they cleaned their plate no matter what.

The prisoners in Zittau fought a constant battle against boredom. Some invented games to occupy their minds while others began to deteriorate psychologically. One prisoner nicknamed "*Recipe*" had become so manic in his obsession with food that he began to "*go off the deep end.*" He pestered men for recipes of the foods they enjoyed at home. He would then dream up new concoctions and combinations he was convinced would be delicious. When the other POWs heard Recipe's ideas, they thought they sounded horrible. Jim Twinn remembered him saying he would start a restaurant when he got home. Nobody ever heard what happened to him, but most were convinced he was no longer in his right mind.

Although the "*Kriegies*" were happy to get any food, they quickly tired of the bland prisoner's diet they were subjected to. They tried anything that could possibly make their food taste better. One day at the worksite, the men found a curious red substance that was added to the concrete to keep it from freezing. It tasted like salt, so Cliff put some in his pocket to bring back to the barracks. He found that if you spread the "*salt*" sparingly on the black sawdust bread, it improved its flavor. Word got to POW Tom Myers on the other end of the barracks that there was a young kid from Vermont who had gotten his hands on some salt. Tom made his way over and traded for some. Cliff found out later that the substance was chloride, an element found in the basic structure of table salt. He later marveled that he hadn't done himself any internal damage by consuming mysterious substances as a POW.

It didn't take long for the combination of starvation, cold weather, exhausting work, and unsanitary conditions to take its toll on the men. Most had become shockingly thin and sick with disease. Most of the deaths in Zittau were due to malnutrition and lack of medical care. Cliff remembered a tall Englishman named Robinson who suffered this fate, and also a Californian named Robert Bagley. Cliff described Bagley as a "*hell of a nice guy*" who knew his time was near. His bunk was near Cliff's, and when he was dying, Cliff stayed up with Bagley all night holding his hand and arm as he talked about home. Bagley expressed his wish not to be buried in Germany and gave Cliff his wedding ring to send home to his wife or mother, which he was later able to do. Bagley died the next day and was buried in a graveyard next to a little chapel that was near the camp. It was one of the few times they were able to make a casket for a burial and have a more formal funeral service. Jim Benkert remembered being a pallbearer only once in his time in captivity and that having a casket was unusual. Russ Guerra's diary confirmed Bagley died of malnutrition and lack of medical care and was buried in early March in a casket.

In sharp contrast to nice guys dying of starvation, there were others in camp that collaborated with the enemy. The POWs could tell who they were because they began to gain weight while others withered away to nothing. The worst of these collaborators was the "*Chief Interpreter.*" Cliff remembered his name was Zeke Dolmincher, but many doubted it was his true name. Some doubted he was even an American. The POWs had heard stories of German soldiers stealing uniforms from dead GI's and trying to pass themselves off as Americans. Some wondered if "*Zeke*" might be one of these imposters. He was described as a big, rawboned hulk of a guy. He was also called "*The Farmer,*" because of his peculiar walk, which looked as if he was following behind a plow with very long steps. He wasn't personally brutal to the other men, but he would often report to the guards when the prisoners did

something wrong. He was rewarded by the Germans with better food but was universally hated among the prisoners. Later, the other soldiers wished they had gotten his real name or serial number so they could report him to the Army for punishment.

Another man, known as the "*Tech Sergeant*," was very tall and had a more soldier-like appearance than Zeke. He left the group during the day and came back just before roll call, looking well fed. Cliff found out later that the Tech Sergeant had been trained as a welder and had been able to trade his skills for better food and better treatment. Some prisoners viewed this as collaboration, but when the Tech Sergeant contacted Cliff after the war, Cliff did his best to be kind to him. You could call it collaboration or you could call it survival by any means possible. It's hard to judge a man for doing whatever he could, short of stealing, to stay alive.

There were a few instances of prisoners stealing food from one another. Sometimes the thieves got away with it, but occasionally they were caught in the act. When a thief was caught, the other prisoners hauled the offender to the latrine at end of the barracks and dropped them in the waste pit. If that didn't stop them, repeat offenders were put in the pit up to their mouths. They were then pulled out and made to run a gauntlet where other prisoners whipped the offender with belts. None of them were proud to admit they had witnessed this, but all agreed that something had to be done to discourage this kind of behavior and maintain some level of order. Cliff was convinced he did not take part in any of these actions, but agreed that nothing was lower than stealing food from another starving man.

At one point during their captivity, the prisoners received fliers from the Germans trying to convince them to fight with them against the Russians. It warned them of the dangers of Bolshevism and painted the Russians as a common enemy. In hindsight, it seemed to predict the coming Cold War, but at the time nobody took the claims seriously. The Germans hoped they could make peace with the Allies in the West and still drive back the Russians in the East. Few if any of the prisoners fell for the propaganda campaign. None of them could imagine joining with the enemy, even if some of the Germans were more likeable than the others.

Early on in their stay at Arbeitskommando 1315, the prisoners began giving their guards nicknames. One example was "*Sad Sack*," a guard who resembled the comic strip character perfectly. Others were self explanatory, such as "*Lard Ass*," and "*Yippety-Yip*," a guard who talked constantly. By the end of their captivity, even the guards were using the nicknames. The guard that Cliff remembered most clearly was the one he called "*Horsecollar*." Horsecollar was described by Cliff as "*not a bad guy, but nothing ever seemed to fit him. His coat looked about two sizes too big.*" Cliff once told him, "*Horsecollar, you are undoubtedly the homeliest ugly thing I've ever seen!*" to which the guard replied, "*Ja, Ja!*" Cliff and some other prisoners tried to teach him some English words and numbers. Cliff also remembered that there was a lady from the town who would wave and call out to Horsecollar when he was leading the POWs to the worksite. The guard would look back at her then laugh and laugh. The men never discovered if there was anything more to the relationship, but seeing a human side to one of their captors made them view their situation

differently. Some of the guards were normal people like them, drawn into a horrible situation by a fanatical but charismatic leader. Most of them just wanted to get home to their families and a normal life too. However, there were also a few guards that were genuinely cruel and heartless as well.

The most memorable example of this cruelty happened in mid to late March. Three prisoners were planning to escape. A few prisoners found out about their plan and tried to convince them not to go. All indications were that the war would be over in a few months time. The prisoners tried to reason with them—was it really worth the risk to try to leave now? They soon realized they couldn't talk the three men out of it. The prisoners gathered what little food they could offer the escapees and wished them good luck. One Zittau survivor remembered nicknames for two of the three escapees—"Shorty" and "Paratrooper." Another remembered that one had red hair and was from the 28<sup>th</sup> PA Infantry. Nobody remembered the men's actual names or anything else about them. They managed to get away from camp, possibly while out on a detail but only got a few miles away before stopping. Either they were so weak they couldn't keep going or they couldn't resist the siren call of a hot meal. They built a small fire and started roasting some small potatoes. Most likely they were laughing and joking while warming themselves by their cozy fire, eagerly anticipating the meal to come. The smell of potatoes still hung in the air as another figure, possibly two or three figures, approached the clearing, weapons raised. Nobody's quite sure how it all happened but what is known is that the fugitives were tracked down by the guards who had either been tipped off by an informant or had just seen the smoke from their fire and gone to investigate. Whatever the case, the three escapees were discovered at the campsite and executed on the spot. The guard or guards shot all three in the head, between the eyes, at point blank range. Jim Benkert and two other prisoners who had been left behind at the camp due to injuries were sent with a cart to retrieve the bodies. The only witnesses to the scene, they found the men lying face down in the ashes of the previous night's fire. It was no easy task for the injured men to move the rapidly stiffening corpses but somehow they managed to get the bodies in the cart and back to the camp. The guards forced the prisoners to put the bodies on display at the gate as a warning to all others who might think about escaping. The bodies were placed in the center of the walkway so the prisoners had to step over them every time they went to and from work. Cliff tried several times to cover up the bodies out of respect for the dead, but the guards kept uncovering them. The three corpses were left out in the elements for several days until the prisoners' complaints finally convinced the guards to let them bury the bodies in the cemetery.

Near the end of their captivity, the men were ordered to dig a large ditch near the largest of their barracks. The long, deep hole in the ground was supposedly for the prisoners' protection in the event of an air raid. Around the same time, one of them discovered that there was a large machine gun being stored around the corner of one of the barracks. They didn't figure it out at the time, but looking back on it later, they were convinced that their "*protective shelter*" was intended to be their mass grave. Hitler had given an order that all POWs were to be shot, but for whatever reason, the order was never carried out.

Near the end of his time at the Zittau camp, Howard Bailey's health began to deteriorate. His hair had turned white early on in his captivity and he had gotten

several teeth knocked during an altercation with a guard. He had lost a lot of weight and became sick enough to leave camp. He was told he was going to a hospital because of his condition. His skin had begun to turn yellow and his arms and legs were swollen up like water balloons. Just before Howard left, he and Cliff shook hands and promised to make contact with each other's family if the other guy didn't make it back. That was the last time Cliff or anyone else saw Howard in Zittau.

In early May, with the Russian Army advancing close to the camp, it was clear to those in charge that the end of the war was near. On May 7<sup>th</sup>, the prisoners and guards were called to assemble. They were addressed by the Camp Commandant who informed the men that the war between Germany and the Western Allies was over. The Commandant then announced that the United States and Great Britain were giving "*lend lease aid*," or material support, to the Germans in their fight against the Russians on the Eastern Front. None of the prisoners believed this for a minute, and many wondered whether the Commandant or the guards genuinely believed it either. In reality, the German Soldiers wanted no part in surrendering to the Russians. The Russians were a different breed of soldier altogether—tough, brutal, and severe. They had a reputation of far crueler treatment of prisoners than that of the Americans or British. Since the Germans had been particularly cruel to Russian POWs, they knew they could expect no favors from the Red Army.

After hearing the good news about their impending freedom, the men lined up to be counted. This time, they didn't try to throw the Germans off their count. It was the quickest, most efficient count ever conducted at the camp. Everyone was glad they would finally be leaving their prison home behind. At about 7:30 AM, the prisoners left the camp under guard and marched towards the American lines, staying in whatever barns other improvised lodging they could find along the way. They had walked most of the way into Czechoslovakia when their group was attacked by Russians who thought the POWs were Germans.

Later, they were also attacked by some remaining pockets of German SS Troopers who thought they were Russians. One prisoner, Bob Maynard of Benington, Vermont, had been too weak to walk was being wheeled along by the others in a cart. When they came under attack, he miraculously regained his strength, leaped out of the cart and sprinted down the road so fast that the others couldn't catch him. During the attacks, the prisoners were separated from their guards who scattered to whatever safety they could find. That was the last they saw of their former captors who were either killed in the attack, captured, or found their way back home to Germany.

The newly freed POWs crossed the Elbe River at a town called Litermetz where they found a Czechoslovakian Red Cross Station where they were able to rest and eat. Soon after their arrival, Allied aircraft attacked the bridge they had just crossed, killing some of the prisoners who had stayed behind on the other side of the bridge. From Litermetz, they marched a little further and were then taken by truck to the village of Bechilyn. Here they were treated quite well by the locals—especially Willie, who became a local celebrity. While the men were washing and changing their clothes, the locals tried to sneak a peek at the first black man they had ever come in contact with. When Willie went to wash in the fountain, some locals even came up to

him to try to wash the color off of him. The former POWs stayed in Bechilyn for a few days eating, resting, recuperating, and mixing with the locals. It was a welcome change from what they had become used to over the last few months. Eventually, the former prisoners made their way to Prague by train, then continued on to Pilsen to meet up with the American troops. They were soon transported to Regensburg where many received medical treatment. From there they were flown to Reims where they were issued new Army uniforms—the first change of clothes they had received since their capture.

Cliff was amazed at what a good job the US Army did in getting tens of thousands of ex-POWs back to their homes. After a few days in Reims, Cliff and the others boarded an American hospital plane, most likely a C-47 which had no seats. The men stood, sat, or laid down on the floor as the plane buzzed over Brussels and dropped down into Camp Lucky Strike near Le Havre, France. They spent several weeks at Lucky Strike putting on weight and waiting for transportation home. Here Cliff was reunited with a few other soldiers he'd known before his capture, including his old friend Joe DePaolis from "C" Battery. When the POWs were examined by doctors at the camp, they were told their experiences had probably shortened their lives by ten years because of malnutrition, disease, and body lice. Digestive problems plagued them as well since their stomachs had shrunk to about half their original size and would take a while to return to normal.

While Cliff was at Lucky Strike, General Dwight D. Eisenhower came to the camp to visit. Since there was such a massive crowd gathered at the airstrip to listen to him, Cliff only saw him from a distance. Eisenhower told the men they could either wait for later transportation or double up on the ships to get everyone home quicker. The men said they'd rather just get home. Many of them had been living in such crowded conditions as prisoners that the thought of a packed but clean ship didn't faze them at all.

Cliff sailed home on his overloaded ship of more than a thousand ex-Prisoners of War. The ride took more than a week, culminating with a welcome and very familiar sight. The very distinctive angular shapes of skyscrapers jutting skyward from the ground signaled their arrival to the shores of the good old United States of America. The cherry on the top of this delicious vision was the serene but severe beauty of that torch-bearing symbol of freedom, the Statue of Liberty. The ship continued on past Liberty Island on its way to their eventual destination of Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Near their landing point were several large office buildings with signs in nearly every window, each with the name and phone number of a lonely young woman hoping to catch a returning soldier's attention.

As they pulled close to the pier, Cliff heard a band playing a song to welcome them home. He thought this was a thoughtful gesture until he recognized the song they were playing—"Don't Fence Me In." Whether it was intentional on the part of the band or not, we will never know, but Cliff took it to be an insult against the returning group of former captives. At Camp Kilmer, the men were given pamphlets and briefings on what was expected of them at the Camp and what they could expect upon reentering

the civilian world. The food at Camp Kilmer was terrible, but the men who had starved all winter ate it happily anyway.

When he was finished processing in New Jersey, Cliff went to his separation center in good old Fort Devens, Massachusetts, and got a set of orders sending him home for 68 days of recuperation furlough. When Cliff got off the bus in Vergennes, he knelt down and kissed the pavement in front of what would later be O'Brien's Hair Salon. He walked down Maple Street and waved to Clessie Hawkins, the first person he saw. He then continued on to Green Street, up to the corner, and walked into his parents' house, barracks bag slung on his shoulder. When they saw him, they hugged him, kissed him and said "*Thank God!*" They stayed up all night talking, but Cliff remembered how his parents were more focused on bringing him up to date with matters at home than pressing him for information on his war experience.

After returning home, Cliff kept his promise to call the family of Howard Bailey. Howard had been in such poor shape when Cliff last saw him that he was sure he had died. He dialed the number waited nervously for somebody to answer. When they picked up, Cliff very gingerly said "*I was a prisoner with Howard Bailey and I promised him I would call...*" The voice on the other line asked, "*Would you like to speak with him?*" Cliff nearly dropped the phone—he couldn't believe it—Howard had made it home after all! After a joyful greeting, Howard told Cliff that his "*hospital*" turned out to be a barn nearby where the sick were kept—just a place to die. Here he was visited by a Serbian doctor who gave him an injection which Howard thought was something intended to finish him off. Instead, the injection brought his swelling down and saved his life. He never learned the doctor's name but was forever grateful to him. Howard and Cliff renewed their friendship and kept in touch until Howard's death more than sixty years later.

A few weeks after getting home, Cliff's mother informed him she had been approached by the president of the local rotary club. He thought Cliff should tell the story of his captivity to the group at the next meeting. Cliff wasn't too keen on going in front of a group of people who he was convinced could never understand where he was coming from. There was a common misconception at the time that anyone who had been captured had just thrown up his hands and surrendered at the first sign of danger. It was common for ex-POWs to feel a little ashamed of their captivity. Even when it wasn't a case of cowardice, there was a perception that you must not have given it your all. The former captives wouldn't voluntarily tell their story because as Cliff said, "*It wasn't any of their damned business.*" So when Cliff's mom asked him if he would like to speak at the event, he responded with, "*You tell him that if he would like to know what it was like, let him go over there and experience it for himself.*" He admitted it wasn't a nice thing to say but he felt he had to say it anyway.

While on recuperation leave, Cliff met up with some fellow soldiers and the group celebrated so heavily they said they needed another furlough to recuperate from all of the celebration of the first one. When his sixty-eight days were up, he was sent to the very ritzy Lake Placid Club for 13 days of "*reorientation.*" At this time the Ex-POWs were able to file claims for anything that was taken from them upon capture, such as

money, wristwatches, or anything else of value. These claims took several months to process but eventually led to compensation from the Army for the stolen goods.

From the Lake Placid Club, the men were sent to Camp Miles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts. At this Camp, the former prisoners were assigned guard duty over German prisoners of war. The Army must have thought it would be a kind of justice to put the Americans in this reversed role, but it was a poorly conceived notion. The Americans had seen how badly their men had fared under German control and now saw how well the Germans were fed and treated in comparison. Within a few short weeks, the former POWs complained loudly enough that they were removed from further guard duty. It wasn't much longer until these Soldiers were officially discharged from the Army.

Soon after being discharged, Cliff went to a dance at Cove Point on Lake Dunmore where he met his future wife, Pat. They soon fell in love and were married in 1947. They had two daughters, Sally and Nancy, and thirteen years later had two sons, David and Michael. Cliff had found a job at a local electronics factory, Simmons Precision Products, where he started out as an Electronic Assembler. He moved up to Supervisor, then Manager of Production Control, and later on to Manager of Materials. A few years later, as the company was growing, Cliff's supervisor, Mal Benton, called him into his office. Mal explained to Cliff that the company had reached about 250 employees and was soon going to need a Personnel Manager. When they reached 500, they wanted Cliff to give this new job a try. When they reached this milestone, Mal called him back into the office to offer him the position. Cliff answered the request with *"I don't know whether the word personnel has two n's or two l's, but if you have confidence in me, I'm willing to give it a try."* He held this position for a while, then moved up to Manger of Industrial Relations, and then Manager of Employee and Community Relations. Today the position is called VP of Human Resources. He loved his job and worked hard at it for nearly 41 years until health complications in the early 1980s made him consider retirement. In 1987, at age 62, he decided that he should retire and rest for the few years he had left.

Cliff had always intended to finish up his GED and had even taken classes at a local college but somehow had never gotten around to getting his high school graduation certificate. Years later, Cliff's granddaughter contacted his former high school and finally got him his diploma. He may have missed his senior year of high school, but Cliff learned more than he had ever bargained for while in Hitler's Europe.

As was the case with many other former POWs, Cliff had a lot of trouble readjusting to civilian life. Early on, he had seen therapists on and off but was eventually told he could either go home and try to make the best of things or he could spend some time in a psychiatric hospital. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, while common was not known or understood very well until decades later. The symptoms, such as hyper-vigilance, avoiding others, numbness, and reliving traumatic events, would hit Cliff at the oddest times and affect him to the point that he would have to excuse himself from whatever he was doing. It could be a sound that reminded him of combat, a smell or sight that would take him back to an unpleasant time—there was no telling what would strike that chord and set him off. Sometimes when he looked into the

mirror it was hard to recognize the man in the reflection. There is a certain look that ex-POWs get—haunted, vacant, and hopeless. It didn't help matters when all too often people made insensitive and uninformed remarks about having been a POW. The popular viewpoint at the time was that to have been captured, you must have been a coward. They just didn't or couldn't understand. Only those who had been there could know what he was dealing with.

One such incident occurred when fellow Zittau survivor, Louie Baca, was in Vermont visiting Cliff. They were at a restaurant when Cliff met up with somebody he had grown up with who had been in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. When he introduced Louie, he told him that they had been in a slave labor camp together in occupied Poland. The man, perhaps intending it as a joke, said to Cliff, *"Well, I wouldn't brag about that."* Cliff was so upset by the remark that he stormed out of the place. His former friend came out after him and apologized and said that he didn't mean what he had said, to which Cliff replied, *"But you said it."* Feeling very hurt at the attack, he then shot back with, *"I wouldn't brag about being in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force and going over Germany and dropping bombs and then being able to go back to England at night and go out with those English girls and drink that wine and sleep in a warm, clean bed."* He later regretted saying it, but at the time he felt he had to fire back at his old friend after he had belittled both Cliff and Louie with a thoughtless remark.

Another more dramatic occurrence took place during a military parade in Bennington, Vermont. Cliff and a local group of Ex-POWs had been invited to participate and had been marching near the front of the procession. When they had finished their portion of the parade, they got some coffee and found a good spot to watch the rest of the groups go by. Cliff was standing next to the group's leader, Elden Marks, who was dressed in a crimson sport jacket like the rest of the group. As they watched the parade go by, Cliff heard a familiar *"clickety-clack"* sound as a tank rounded the corner as part of the parade. At the same time, there came the thunderous sound of aircraft flying close to the ground in the *"missing man formation."* The combination of the tank and close flying planes caused Cliff to flash back and react with some leftover wartime reflex. Cliff grabbed the person closest to him, the Commander, and tried to drag him to the ground, spilling both cups of coffee all over Elden's crimson sport jacket. He was never sure whether he was trying to save him or trying to *"push him the hell out of my way."* He soon recovered his sensibilities and tried to think of something humorous to say to make light of the embarrassing situation. He came up with *"Put me in for a Bronze Star, I just saved you!"* Even years later, his experiences during the war could make him *"a little jumpy"* at times.

In 1965, Cliff and a few other ex-POWs started meeting on a yearly basis as the *"Zittau Survivors Group."* Cliff placed ads in Stars and Stripes magazine and other publications to try to draw other survivors out of the woodwork. In May, 1969, when a group of 5 men met in Harrisonburg, Virginia, the local paper wrote an article entitled *"Five Former Nazi Prisoners Turn Back The Clock 24 Years"* The men in attendance were Jim Benkert, Stan Moquist, Bob Hart, Bill Franklin, and Cliff Austin, all accompanied by their wives. The host, Bob Hart, had made a large map of their camp with the words *"Zittau—A Great Place to be From!"* at the top. At these reunions, the men would reminisce about their shared experiences with the only people who could understand—other ex-POWs. Over the years, some of the guys were more eager than

others to get together. Most found it to be helpful to talk to each other about their experiences but others just wanted to forget about it. Even after Cliff was no longer able to travel to the reunions, the Zittau Survivor's Group continued to meet on a yearly basis, although the numbers attending the events dwindled as time went by.

Cliff was diligent for many years in tracking down ex-POWs and making sure they were getting the compensation they were entitled to. He fought for fair compensation for veterans with disabilities, going all the way to Washington, D.C. on one occasion to testify about the conditions and stresses ex-POWs live with on a daily basis. He kept in touch with the men and with their families after they passed away. He met with other veterans groups and a support group for those suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. He was very willing to talk about his experiences and was a pleasure to talk to throughout the research and writing process

Cliff may not consider himself to be especially heroic—most former soldiers don't. But he did sacrifice a lot for the country he loves. He endured the horrors of battle, capture, fear of death, disease, and the aftermath of coming home to a world that no longer understood him. He came home a changed man, robbed of his youth and innocence, and often haunted by his experiences. In spite of this, he was able to find happiness in his family, his faith, and in the company of other veterans. As more and more of these great men slip into their final rest, we should remember their quiet strength and their enduring example of selfless sacrifice.

Miriam Webster defines a hero as "*a man admired for his achievements and noble qualities*" or "*one that shows great courage.*" In my opinion, Cliff Austin fulfills all of these criteria. I found him to possess these noble qualities and admire his achievements in dealing with other veterans and ex-POWs. I know it took courage for those men to endure what they endured. In my opinion, Cliff and the men of the Zittau Survivors Group are all heroes not just for the battles they fought in the 1940s but for the quiet inward battles they have fought every day since.

*Source: Received by email from Ellen Marchese and dated February 27, 2017*  
<http://www.battleofthebulgememories.be/stories26/us-army25/906-cpl-clifford-n-austin-war-biography.html>  
*Henri ROGISTER, webmaster*

Clifford Austin died 05/26/2011. Buried at Vergennes VT