

The Military Service Diary Of
Sgt. Richard McKee
Stalag 4-B
also 12-A, Koblenz, 4-B, 8-A and Oflag I-X
POW Number #325 859

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PROLOGUE

December 16, 1944, the German Armies under General Von Rundstedt mounted a massive counter offensive, historically known as the "Battle of the Bulge."

The springboard for this counter offensive was initiated by a thrust through the Ardennes, into Belgium.

The battle plan was: Occupy the town of St. Vith, (headquarters of the 106th Infantry Division, then go on to the primary target of Antwerp, Belgium with its fuel storage depots. Hitler thought this would be a final blow to the Allied drive and could turn the tide of the battle in favor of the Germans.

The 106th Infantry Division, when they caught the brunt of the German offensive on December 16th, 1944:

1. Had been on the continent only 15 days.
2. Had been placed in a quiet sector for training.
3. Had the youngest troops of any American Division (Avg. 22 years).
4. Held a 27 mile front instead of the usual 5 miles.
5. Had no warning the Germans were were going to attack.

So fierce was the German attack, the 106th had the dubious honor of being hit by a greater concentration of enemy forces than any other U.S. Division in the war. Nor did any other suffer such losses in a single engagement.

Two of its three regiments were isolated and liquidated within three days after the Germans attacked on December 16, 1944.

In January of 1945, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson announced that 416 men of the 106th had been killed in action, 1246 were wounded and 7001 were missing in action. 70 percent of the Division's men were dead, wounded or captured.

Captured on December 19, 1944 in the town of Schoenberg, Belgium, I was one of the 7001 that was missing in action. During my captivity, I kept a diary. The small book in which I wrote down all of the names of the towns we walked through while on the, forced march through Germany (Later known as the Death March). This little book was stored away all these years along with other war memories. Occasionally I would look at the diary and think that I should sit down and put it in print. If for nothing more than for myself and my family.

The small original book was taken from a German soldier, age 14 years, named "Vorne Zeichng" that I had shot and wounded.

The diary contained a minimum of details, but enough to trace my route and give enough facts to prompt my memory. The rest is from my memory.

The last few weeks, as I have searched my memory and expanded on my diary, have not been without emotion. I Have relived many of the episodes, the sounds, the sights, the long marches and the happy return to home.

Someday, I would like to go back to the Schoenberg area and relive some of my youth. I want to visit the Schnee Eifel, walk through the woods and visit the point of my capture in the town of Schoenberg.

Being captured by the Germans was by far, the most important part of my diary. But I have tried to recall other events in my military years, from my enlistment in the Coast Artillery to my discharge. I have included several letters, pictures, etc., that I thought should be included.

NOTE: To show both sides of the situation, from my service side and from those I left home, I have included several letters and telegrams listed on the dates received by my family. This is to show the concern and the long waiting periods for information to arrive.

* * * *

1942

12/11/42

Enlisted and sworn in at Camp Perry, Ohio. Enlistment was in the Coast Artillery (See copy of letter sent to my parents informing them that I had enlisted. The reason that I enlisted in the Coast Artillery was because my father George McKee had served in the Coast Artillery in WWI.)

12/12/42

Left Camp Perry for "H Battery", Provisional Training Battalion at Ft. Screven, Georgia. Located on Tybee Island, Savannah, Georgia, for basic training. (See picture of the men in Battalion. I am in third row from bottom standing, 6th man from left.)

12/25/42

Spent this Christmas on K. P.

12/31/42

Spent this New Years Eve on K. P.

2/5/43

After nine weeks of basic training, was appointed Acting Corporal. (See copy of orders).

2/6/43

Left Ft Screven and was assigned to "D Battery" 53rd Coast Artillery at Fort Lauderdale Florida, guarding the entrance to Port Everglades. I was a breach man on the 155MM gun. In other words I was the man that pulled the lanyard that fired the gun.

3/10/43

Was promoted to PFC.

6/28/43

Was promoted to Corporal (See copy of orders)

7/1/43

Sent to Miami Beach, Florida, for eight weeks to attend Non-Commissioned Officers School. Stayed in the "New Surf Hotel" on the beach, at 150 89th St. Miami Beach, Fla. (See copy of orders and the certificate that was awarded to me).

8/21/43

Graduated from NCO School

8/22/43

Returned to D Battery, Coast Artillery at Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

1944

2/1/44

Sent to Gas Non-Commissioned Officers School at Combat Team Camp at NW 32nd Ave. and 79th St. Miami. Fla.

2/4/44

Completed Non-Commissioned Officers Gas School and was appointed Gas NCO of D Battery, 53rd Coast Artillery. (See copy of orders).

5/1/44

53rd Coast Artillery was moved from Florida to Camp Pendleton, Virginia to wait to go overseas. Camp Pendleton is on Virginia Beach near Norfolk, Va.

5/22/44

Volunteered for Infantry and was sent to [Camp Atterbury](#), near Edinburg, Indiana, and joined the 106th Infantry Division. (See copy of orders).

7/19/44

Qualified as "Expert Rifleman" with a score of 180 using an M1 rifle. (See copy of order).

6/1/44

Promoted to Sgt. Made Asst. Squad Leader of 1st Squad, 3rd Platoon. Sgt. Todd was Squad leader. Sgt. Hunter was Platoon Leader.

10/13/44

Departed [Camp Atterbury](#) by train.

10/14/44

Arrived at Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts, near Boston, in preparation for overseas move.

10/18/44

Departed Camp Miles Standish. Arrived New York and boarded the ship "Acquatania" (I have read stories of other GI's of the 106th claiming they boarded the "Queen Elizabeth" and others the "Queen Mary" but I have always believed that the 106th went overseas on the "Aquatania, a French passenger ship converted to carrying troops, at least most of the 106th. The ship was supposed to be the third largest passenger ship).

10/20/44

Sailed from New York. Was sea sick before we got out of the harbor. Couldn't eat much on the trip.

10/23/44

We were told that we were being followed by a German submarine and were called on alert. Ship fired warning shot at a freighter near by.

10/29/44

Arrived at Greenock, Scotland. Very large harbor. "Queen Mary" and "Queen Elizabeth" ships were there along with some other large ships. Got on train and departed for ports south

10/30/44

Arrived at our new camp at Fairford, England. We were billeted in metal Quonset huts while there. We spent many hours in training marches over the hilly country side while here. There was little physical evidence of the war, except for the munitions stored along the roads. Though the training was tough, we did get a few passes into the city of Oxford. Oxford was a unique town as it was the location of Oxford University. On one of our passes we went through the University which was very picturesque. When we did have a pass, we always took the train into town. The town was always filled with soldiers. There were only a couple places to hang out and I cannot remember the names. Most of the time was spent walking up and down the streets, and having a few beers.

11/15/44

Went to London on a four day furlough. Before we left camp for London, our platoon took up a collection to purchase a radio so we could listen to the Glen Miller Band. I was delegated along with a couple of buddies, (I believe PFC Beid was one of them) to purchase the radio when we got to London. After looking all over London, we finally found one in a little shop on one of the side streets near Piccadilly Square.

While in London one night, German V-i rockets came over us and exploded about a block away. We visited all of the sights of London while there. After we had seen it all, we gathered our "radio" up and boarded the train back to Fairford.

11/20/44

Was called to the office. Captain Bertrem C. Finch wanted to see me. It seems someone had told him that I had hidden a .22 caliber pistol into my pack and brought it overseas

with me. It was against regulations to do this. After confessing to the Captain that I had the pistol, he walked with me down to the river where he ordered me to throw it in. He told me not to mention this to anyone as he and I could both be court martialed and busted to Privates.

11/29/44

Departed Fairford for South Hampton for shipment to France.

11/30/44

Arrived South Hampton and boarded an English craft, the "Antenor". It held only a small number of troops. The English Channel was very rough.

12/1/44

Arrived Le Havre, France. After the rough crossing of the Channel, we entered the harbor of Le Havre. After debarking the ship on unsteady LCI's we went ashore. I you entered the Le Havre harbor during that period of time, after the D-Day invasion, like me, you probably saw the one lone demolished house on the beach.

Le Havre had been leveled to the ground during the invasion. There was little standing. As we walked up the long steep hill out of Le Havre, we carried everything: full field packs, rifles, ammunition, gas masks, knives and grenades. We marched 12 miles to board trucks that day in a heavy downpour.

12/1/44

Arrived at Camp J-67 near St. Laurient, France (a staging area).

12/1/44 - 12/7/44

Spent these days in pup tents in mud and rain The area was flat and open with woods here and there. We had little to do. It rained at least once a day every day we were there. I do remember some of the food we had that was prepared by our Mess Sgt. Bob Richardson. He was an excellent cook. Bob had worked at the "Court House View Cafe" back in Rochester, Indiana before enlisting in the Coast Artillery with me. (After the war he came back to Rochester and bought the cafe.) We were together all the time we were overseas. He always saw that I had plenty to eat... (Be-fore capture).

12/7/44

We left Camp J-67 in trucks on the "Red Ball Express," a truck convoy route to the front lines.

The sight of miles and miles of destroyed German war material, burned and dumped into the ditches gave us some indication that we were changing from training to the real thing.

We began to sense the war in the faces of the old women and men as our convoy moved through the gloomy forests around Malmady and St. Vith, Belgium. Bastogne was just another town as we moved on jammed together like sardines in a can under the Schnee Eifel's cold gray skies.

12/8/44

Cold, soaked and frozen- no change of warm clothing available, for our barracks bags had not caught up to us yet. The 106th fell from the trucks and took over man for man, gun

for gun from the men of the 2nd Division. Our destination, which we reached that day, was an area in the Ardennes along top of the Schnee Eifel (snow mountains), 12 miles east of St. Vith near Schonberg.

Schonberg, a name I would never forget, was about eight miles east of St. Vith and west of our positions. We were facing the German troops from the former 2nd Division emplacements. that were on the east slopes of the German Siegfried Line. Our position was a log bunker with a field of fire 'partially obstructed by trees out over a ravine. Conditions were quiet. Sgt. Bob Richardson kept me and the other men in our bunker well supplied with food. I remember one day he brought me a gallon of cheese.

Our platoon for some reason was dug in a half mile or so forward of the remainder of Co. A. Compared with the 2nd Division riflemen, we were reasonably fresh but had not received our baptism of fire. Everything in front of us was German territory," we had been told by a 2nd Division man.

One night, while on guard duty, I could have sworn on a stack of Bibles that Germans were infiltrating close to our bunker. I guess I was looking for my chance to be a hero. Our guns had not been fired and the more I looked the more I was certain that men were crawling through the snow on their bellies. After calling out to halt and not receiving an answer, I pulled the pin from a grenade and threw it at the shadow. The next morning, we found some blood in the snow but no body. The Lieutenant guessed it was probably a German scout.

One day we spotted some movement on a hill to the south of us. We assumed it was made by German troops, so we started to have target practice on them. Later that day we got the message that we were firing at one of our other companies and they had been pinned down all day.

It was almost impossible to avoid firing at the slow moving V-1 Buzz Bombs as they passed over us several times a day. They flew slowly at low altitudes, flames shooting from the tails.

I asked if anyone would volunteer to crawl out there with me to bring the German back. Someone did but I do not remember who it was. About this time, the Lieutenant came running up and told me that he wanted the German Luger if the German had one. He didn't, but if he had had one I would have left it out there, so the Lt. couldn't get his hands on it.

As I and the other buddy started to crawl out to get the German, we encountered several booby traps with trip wires strung out, so we had to be very careful where we crawled.

After reaching the German and finding him unconscious, we tried to pull him through the tall weeds back to our positions, but found it impossible to drag him. So I told my buddy to roll him over on my back. I then crawled back over the booby traps through the tall weeds with the German on my back.

Returning to our positions safely we checked the German out and found that he was only a boy about 14 years old. The shot that I had knocked him down with was in his side. He also had some old wounds in his stomach that had healed.

The medics took him back to Co. Hdqtrs and gave him first aid, but I was told that he died that night.

I still, to this day 45 years later, remember looking through his billfold and finding pictures of his family and thinking that it could be me. I felt sorry for him. I still have the shoulder tabs from his uniform which I kept hidden from the Germans during my POW days. (See picture of tabs).

12/16/44

The German attack started at 5:30 on Saturday, December 16, 1944 along an 85 mile front of which the 106th Division held the front on 27 miles when it should have held only five miles. We were ordered to move back from our positions. We didn't know it at the time but I guess we were already surrounded by the German armies.

12/18/44

We marched out of our positions around mid-morning after being told flatly to "pack up and get moving." Before we left, Bob Richardson, the Mess Sergeant, came down and got me and a buddy called "Wines" and said the captain wanted us to get rid of the company payroll which had not been distributed yet. The amount was supposed to be \$70,000 in American, French and British money. We picked up a 50 caliber ammunition metal container, put the payroll in it and sealed it. We covered it with "Cosmoline" and buried it between two trees on the side of the hill about 100 yards east of an abandoned German pill box. As far as I know, I am certain it is still there, because Pvt. Wines was killed when we were captured and Bob was with me all the time until we returned to the states.

It was almost impossible to avoid firing at the slow moving V-1 Buzz Bombs as they passed over us several times a day. They flew slowly at low altitudes, flames shooting from the tails.

Sgt. Carlos Weber, a very wise man, stayed out of sight while the rest of us walked around like we were back home walking downtown. "It is only a matter of time," Weber said, recalling the shellfire in North Africa when he won his Silver Star for firing a rifle grenade into the driver's vision slit on a Nazi armored car.

One afternoon, as we were standing in line for chow, three artillery shells tore through the tree tops close to us. No one was hurt, but Sgt. Weber peered out from his bunker and said, "I told you so." He flashed a cat-like grin and went back into his bunker.

During the nights preceding the attacks, we could hear the rumbling from the Germans as they moved up for the attack.

The morning before the attack lunged through our lines, I was on guard duty looking out over the valley or ravine in front of our position. As I was looking I thought I saw some movement about 200 yards out in front. The ground in that area was tall weeds but no trees. I took out binoculars and focused on where I saw the movement. I was pretty sure it was a German uniform I had spotted. I called another GI over and handed him the binoculars and instructed him to tell me if he also thought it was a German. After all, I did not want to fire on another one of our men again. He said it was definitely a German, so I leveled my M-1 and fired. He went down with the first shot but it only wounded him as we could hear him yelling, "comrade help me." About the time he fell, someone else came up with a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) and let loose. I yelled to the guy to stop shooting as the German was already down.

While we had no idea of how devastating the German attack was, we felt we were headed for trouble. As we marched back in retreat, the side ditches were strewn with gas masks and equipment, so I discarded mine. Everyone was in such a hurry they were throwing everything in the ditches so they could go faster and easier. No one bothered to tell us if we were advancing or retreating.

Around mid-afternoon our column was crossing an open field toward some trees, when three German 88 artillery shells screamed over our heads and detonated to our right. One of the shell fragments hit me in my right leg. We picked ourselves up and ran to a woods in front of us. We found that two others and I had become separated from the rest of the column. We stayed in the woods until dark and slept under some trees. The next morning we started out towards what, we did not know. After a while, we saw some men digging in at the edge of a woods. We moved in with them. They were friendly troops, a cannon company and some headquarters personnel with radios.

After we had dug in, an officer, I believe a Captain, came up to me and told me, "You are now promoted to Staff Sgt. and squad leader." He said to pick some volunteers and take a radio, go down the hill and cross over a small stream (the area was like a pasture — (no trees or weeds). We were told to check out a woods up on a hill about three or four hundred yards away. If there were Germans in the woods, we should radio back and let them know. I picked five men and started out. We had advanced down the hill and crossed the small stream when a couple of Germans came out of the woods and yelled to us to throw down our rifles and surrender. So as the Capt. instructed me, I told the Private who had the radio to report the Germans in the woods. He was so nervous and scared he couldn't talk, so I grabbed the radio and called the Capt. He said to get the hell back here immediately." We ran back and by the time we reached the outfit we had only enough time to jump on the last Jeep in the convoy. In their haste to leave the area, some of the trucks had slipped into ditches and overturned. Others were stuck in the mud.

One truck, a kitchen truck, had overturned and a big pot of about 25 gallon of steaming hot pork chops was laying in the road. It was panic, pure and simple. It was no withdrawal. We were running for our lives.

We rode a short distance backing up and turning around more than once after finding Germans ahead. We kept going a while longer. As we were entering the small village of Schonberg, it was reported that the lead Jeep of the convoy had hit a land mine and was blown up. The commanding officer was killed. All of the trucks stopped. It was around 9 a.m. and one of our officers who was holding a white flag, told us to destroy our guns, equipment and surrender to the Germans.

We could not believe it. We were not under fire and we could not see any Germans. We could not understand why we were surrendering.

I took my M-1 apart and threw the pieces over a fence into a field. At that time a Private Kenny Wines, (who lived in Niles, Michigan in civilian life) took his Carbine by the barrel and slammed it against a tree stump. The gun discharged and hit him in the stomach. It was reported later that he had died.

We stood around a while. Everyone was told to get rid of family pictures, money, billfolds and knives. Keep only your dog tags, blankets, etc. Soon there were a lot of Germans

around us. I remember at the time, a couple of us almost decided to jump in a Jeep with a .50 caliber mounted that was in the road and take off across country, but we decided no to.

Around 10:30 a.m. the Germans came up and took over. They were like a bunch of kids with new toys, trying to start the trucks and going through them. Our captors ordered us to get rid of our helmets and put our hands on top of our heads. I remember the trail they took us on down through a field filled with booby traps across a small stream and back on the road. They took us into a small village, "Belialf", lined us up and searched us. They took our watches and anything else they wanted. After this they put us in a church yard with a brick wall around. They told us that if anyone attempted to escape that night, they would shoot everyone.

The war was over for me, but my battle for survival was just beginning.

12/20/44

Started 137 mile march to Stalag 12A at Limburg, Germany.

12/22/44

Marched through Prum, Germany. On the way we only met horse drawn German guns and soup kitchens headed to the front. On the road we saw many GI's killed a day or so earlier. They were still in their long overcoats and were frozen where they died. Only their shoes were missing.

12/23/44

Marched to Gerolstein where the Germans gave us some cheese and crackers.

12/24/44

We marched to Duckweiler and spent two nights in box cars and chicken coops. While in the chicken coops we were strafed by allied planes. Time became a blur.

12/24/44

Christmas Eve. We found a barrel of molasses in a farmer's shed and that was our Christmas dinner that day.

12/25/44

Christmas Day we marched all day. It snowed.

12/26/44

It was a hilly walk to Mayon and then we came to Koblenz, Germany on the Rhine river.

12/27/44

Arrived at Koblenz. We stayed in a large building someone said was previously used for a German Officer School. We stayed here three days. We were bombed almost every day by American bombers. During one of the bombing raids, a buddy of mine and I were standing by some windows watching the bombers, when a bomb exploded near by, blowing the glass windows in on us. I was not hurt, but the buddy was killed. The glass had cut his throat.

The next morning we looked out and the buildings around us were destroyed but our building still stood.

12/31/44

As we marched out of Koblenz, much of the city was in shambles. As we crossed over the bridge over the Rhine river I remember the German civilians threw rocks at us and shook their fists. The Hitler Youth kids were especially mean. They kicked us and threw rocks at us. We arrived at Stalag 12A at Limburg that day, New Year's Eve, after our march of 137 miles.

At 12A they fed us some carrot and cabbage soup and then given a shower. I remember the shower they sent us through resembled the gas chambers at the prison camps where S9 many Jews were killed. We were lucky it was water and not gas. After the shower we lined up so some German doctor could give us shots in the arm. I don't know what it was for. Also they took any money that we had and gave us a receipt for it. After I returned to the states, I turned in the receipt and the army paid me what I had given the Germans.

1/2/45

We were put in box cars at Limburg for an odorous, depressing week long ride to Stalag 4-B at Mulburg. 65 men locked in a box car without toilets and nothing to eat. We had to take turns lying or sitting down as there was not enough room for everyone. German box cars are only about a third as large as U.S. box cars. The make shift toilet was a can and it filled up the first day.

1/7/45

As we arrived at Stalag 4-B and got off the box cars, we found Germans loading the GI's who had died on the trip onto wagons pulled by horses. I suppose this was for burial.

At 4-B, we were registered with the Red Cross as a POW. That was the first my family had heard anything about me. The U.S. Govt. notified them that I was a POW. I also wrote a post card home while at 4-B. (See Copy)

1/13/45

Arrived at Stalag 8-A at Gornitz, Germany. Gornitz is located about 80 miles east of Dresden near the Czechoslovakian border.

The camp held prisoners from several different countries. There were hundreds of Russians and Polish. Everyone either had a leg or arm missing. They said the Germans would cut them off so they could not fight anymore.

Stalag 8-A was in a desolate, wind swept area. There were the~ usual two fences of barbed wire around it, with guard towers. There was a wire about knee high, about 75 feet from the inside fence. If you were caught there you could be shot and probably would be. There was a large bare area that could be used for recreation and exercise. The buildings were single story wood frame. They were quite large and made into sections rather than one large room. There were no beds. They had wooden platforms, about four high, very much like the chicken coop that we slept in. All we had were our two thin blankets to sleep on. The barracks were not too cold. There was a small stove. We were inside and there were bodies close together.

The toilet was outside in another building and you were not allowed to use it after the lights were out. There was a small open pit in the corner of the barracks for emergencies. If you had to use it, it was usually occupied. Paper was non-existent. There was a wash room but it didn't work. The wash room was always ice cold. There were no towels. We had a daily morning roll call. The guards were very strict about the proper count.

As time went by, rumors were that we would soon be leaving this camp because the Russians were coming. The British prisoners had a hidden radio and they informed us that the war news was getting better.

Looking back, while in Gorlitz, Stalag 8-A, we were offered post cards to write only one time. A lot of prisoners came in from other camps because of the Russian advance. BA was supposed to be a medium sized camp. Other than Americans, there were Russians, Poles, Czechs, French, British and Serbians in camp. The other foreign prisoners told us that the Germans did not like Americans, therefore, we were the poorest fed. Also we were separated from the other foreign prisoners.

While here at 8-A. I cannot remember much what we did to pass the time away except sit and talk about food and the best way to prepare it.

Sgt. Bob Richardson was the best at preparing our imaginary food since he was a cook. I remember during this time the Germans would play American records over the loud speakers in the huts. I remember one song they played over and over, it was Bing Crosby singing "White Christmas". I think everyone cried when we heard it. They of course did this to torment us. I also remember while here, we would walk around the camp for exercise.

One day Bob and I managed to get close to the German kitchen where they cooked the food for the guards. We looked in a basement window and saw hanging row after row of butchered horse carcasses. But we never got any of it.

You always had to sleep on top of any of your possessions. If you didn't someone would steal them at night. One night someone started yelling that a GI had stolen his shoes. The thief was caught. stripped of his clothes and shoes and forced out into the zero and snow weather naked. I don't know what happened to him.

Rumors were that the Russians were near by. We could hear gun fire. The regular guards were sent to the Russian front and were replaced with older men to guard us.

2/12/45

Lincoln's birthday. The Russians were reported on three sides of us.

2/14/45

Left Stalag 8-A on foot. (Starting at this point I have listed each and every town, village, city that we walked through for the next two months from Feb. 14th to April 14th. I kept this record in a small note book that I took from the German soldier I had shot before my capture. On this 2 month march called the "Death March" we walked approximately 465 miles across Germany.

We did not know where we were going. The guards were silent. The first day we walked through Fridensdorf, Gersdorph,, Relchonbach and Wiesenbach. We slept in a barn.

2/15/45

Walked to Baulzen. We slept at a military post. It rained all day.

2/16/45

Walked through Blantechuz to Kamenz. We slept at a military post.

2/17/45

Braunaneukirch, Konigsbruck, Nerkirch. Slept at a military post.

2/18/45

Laulnetz, Lauscho, Anbau, Kalkreath. Slept in a barn.

2/19/45

Machean, stayed in a military post.

2/20/45

Zehren, Piskowitz, Lommatzsch. We stayed in a brick factory.

2/21/45

Melia, Schalhausen, Dobeln, Pommlitz. Slept at a military post.

2/22/45

Zsch'epplitz, Zschurits, Fishendorph, Liesnig.

2/23/45

Brovn, Skaploa, Coldemtz, Ballendorph, Bad Lausick. We stayed in a barn two days because of the bad weather.

2/25/45

Gornitz, Deutzen, Heversdorf, Ramsdorf, Wintersdorf, Messelwitz, Prehlitz, Peckwitz, Spora, Werchwitz. Stayed in barn two days.

2/27/45

Bockowitz, Zeitz.

2/28/45

Grobosia, Raba, Haynsburg, Gossra, Hartmansdorf, Rauda, Kursdorph, Jasenburg.

3/2/45

Sassa. Serba, Rauschirtiz, Witzdorf, Studnitz. Lots of snow and ice. We slept in a barn.

3/3/45

Dorendorf, Norkwitz, Altengonna, Krippendorph, Jesserstads, Hohlstedt, Frankendorph, Millingen. Very cold, lots of snow. Stayed in barn.

3/4/45

We stayed in the barn. Very cold with lots of snow.

3/8/45

Taubak, Wilmea, Passledorf, Nokra, Bussleben. MOre snow.

3/9/45

We slept in a barn.

3/10/45

Erfurt, Schmira, Gamstadt, Gotha.

3/11/45

Warza, Westhausen, Lancensaln, Schonstedt.

3/12/45

Gossengotten, Seebach, Hongeda, Mulhausen, Ammen, Hasner, Zetta, Helmdorf, Silberhauseri.

3/13/45

Slept in a barn.

3/14/45 to 3/19/45

Dingelstadt, Kalimarrode, Leinolea, Worbis, Wintzingrode,. The night of 3/19/45 we stayed in a village called Wintzingrode. It was kind of a closed in barnyard with barns all around the area. When we came into the barn yard we noticed several wagons of sugar beets sitting in the yard. The guards warned us not to try to steal any beets or they would shoot everyone. Well during the night some hungry GI tried to get a sugar beet and was caught and killed. The guards were so mad they came into the barn with guns blazing, shooting wildly up through the hay mow floor where we were. 3 GIs were killed that night. In the morning when the guards moved us out on the road again three GIs stayed behind and hid down deep in the hay. The guards missed them and took the dogs and sniffed them out. I don't know or remember what happened to them.

3/20/45

Ferna, Duderstadt, Mingrode.

3/21/45

Obernfeld, Bilshausen, (we were bombed), Walften.

3/22/45

Osterode, Lasfelde, Gittelde, Stauffenberg.

3/23/45

Munchehof, Therrhgusen, Seesenaha, Lutterlage.

3/24/45

We slept in a barn.

3/25/45

Salzgitter, Beinum, Barjum, Jammendorf.

3/26/45

Thiede, Runingen. We arrived in a camp at Braunschweig, Germany.

This was a work stalag. When we arrived, we were fed carrot soup and told that we would be working on roads and railroads that had been bombed. On a map it shows only one prison camp near Braunschweig. That is "Oflag I-X." While at this camp the guards wanted volunteers to go out and work. If you went, they promised you more rations to eat. I volunteered one day. They took us into town to fill up bomb craters. We were so weak we couldn't do the work. We didn't receive any extra food. That was the end of my volunteering.

We didn't have much to do while here at Braunschweig. During the day, we would sit outside the barracks in the sun and pick the body lice out of our clothes. The lice would drive us crazy at night when you were trying to sleep.

We heard that the Americans were close to the city.

4/10/45

We departed Braunschweig. We walked back east from where we came to keep away from the Americans. The guards said we were marching without orders. The guards were very nervous and were not watching us as close as they were earlier. We went through Kongislutter (23 km). The guards didn't know what to do with us, so we just marched on.

4/11/45

After going through Kongislutter, we were getting weaker and weaker. The guards were paying even less attention to us. Sgt. Bob Richardson (we were still together, another GI I decided that we would try to escape. Bob went first. He pretended to pass out and fell to the road. The guard came up, kicked and beat him, but he just laid there. So the guard went on. Next, it was my turn. I strayed off to the side of the road behind some bushes and the guards didn't see me. The other GI (I forgot his name) went with the column a little further and then he also dropped off behind some bushes.

Before we decided to try to escape, we had agreed if we were successful we would meet in a woods located about a half mile from the road. As we were going across the fields, we discovered that the fields were planted in potatoes. We were so hungry that we dug some up and ate them. That evening we started working our way back towards the American lines. We came to a farm house and the farmer let us stay in his barn for the night. The next morning his wife and daughter brought out a cooked breakfast for us. We had eggs, potatoes and bread. It was the first real food we had had since December 19th. After thanking the farmer, we headed down the road. We met hundreds of German troops on foot, riding bicycles and running away from the advancing Americans. The Germans did not pay any attention to us, so we continued on. One German officer riding a bicycle stopped and drew out his Luger, but we ignored him and continued on. He did the same.

4/12/45

We walked back to the town of Kongislutter. As we were entering the town, sirens began to blow at the town square. We met an American tank column coming into town.

After talking to the commander of the tank outfit ...and convincing him that we were Americans, he ordered the three of us to take charge of the town. The tanks had the Germans on the run and they wanted to keep them that way, continuing to drive them back.

We looked up the mayor's office (Bergermeister) and had him issue orders to the town residents to turn in all of their guns, knives, swords, etc. to the office. The towns people brought wagons full of guns and knives. We stacked them in a pile in a room at the office. There were hundreds of pieces. We took our pick to bring home as souvenirs. I had a matched set of German Lugers to bring back, but while on the hospital ship returning to the states, an officer took them from me. I guess that was the only way he could get his souvenirs. I did manage to bring home some fancy swords and knives, which I still have.

After looking the town over, we went out to the edge of town where there was a small POW camp that the Germans were holding some British POWs. We freed them. They had

been held as POWs for a couple of years. Later, we went back to town and took over a hotel which had been vacated by the Germans. Bob, who was our company Mess Sgt., found a completely stocked kitchen. He cooked up a big pot of hash for us. We ate until we got sick because we had not eaten like this for so long.

That night we slept in real beds in the hotel. I might mention that by this time I had come down with dysentery and was vomiting the rich food that we had eaten.

After getting a good nights sleep in beds, we awoke the next morning and went downstairs at the hotel. During the night the ex-British POWs had wrecked and smashed everything. Took everything from the kitchen including all of the food.

4/14/45

After a couple of days, we decided to try to find a car and go back to Leige, Belgium to find the area we were in when captured. We wanted to find the company payroll that we buried before our capture, go on to Paris, France and have a party before turning ourselves in to the American command, since we were listed as MIA—POWs.

We walked around Kongislutter for a while. Someone told us there was a garage with motorcycles at the other end of town. We got there only to find that the Germans had removed all of the batteries from them.

We then found the local fire station with a big diesel fire truck which we happened to get started. As we were driving down the street, the tank that held the fuel located in the cab behind the driver's seat, sprung a leak and was throwing fuel all over us. We jumped out and let the driverless fire truck continue on down the street. We last saw it going down a hill.

After walking back to the town square, we found a small car that a couple of the British POWs had found. Since I was very sick and needed medical attention they let us have it.

We started back, meeting a lot of American outfits on the road. That night we stopped at a German farm house at Gutersiough. The family there was very friendly. They fed us and let us sleep in their beds.

4/15/45- 4/16/45

We went as far as Munster, Germany and as we were coming into the town, we had a blowout on the car. Since I was getting weaker and weaker, Bob and I decided to turn ourselves into the Americans, which we did. They took us out to an airfield where American planes were bringing in supplies for the advancing GIs. We caught a ride on an empty C-47 going to Liege, Belgium.

Later we found out that the plane had to avoid a section that still had some German aircraft, so we were flown back into Germany and around that area. As we flew back toward France, we were almost at tree top level. As we flew over the towns, all you could see were bombed and burned out buildings.

4/17/45

If it had not been for Sgt. Richardson, I would not have made it because I was so weak I could hardly stand. Bob was still in pretty good shape, so he stayed with me.

After landing at Orle airfield in Paris, we were taken to the 217th General Hospital, where they gave us our first showers and clean clothes.

We were some of the first POWs to come back to this hospital and they gave us exceptional care. I had dropped from 190 lbs. before capture to 137 Lbs. They had me in bed for a week with IVs in both arms, giving me glucose and plasma.

I was skin and bones when I entered the 217th. My condition of severe malnutrition and Diarrhea was diagnosed as severe Enteritis.

4/23/45

Met Billie Conn (prize fighter). He wanted to see how bad the POWS were.

Bob got a pass to go uptown Paris. I was still to weak and the doctors would not let me out of the hospital.

4/25/45

General Eisenhower heard about us and came into the hospital for a first hand look at sick POWs.

5/3/45

Left the 217th G.H. on a hospital train for Cherbourg, France. By this time I had gained back 25 lbs. to weigh in at 162 lbs.

5/4/45

We were carried on stretchers and boarded the hospital ship "St. Mihlia." Bob did not come with me on the hospital ship. He was flown back to the states.

5/18/45

We landed in New York on Staten Island and were taken to Camp Kilmer, N.J. to the hospital there.

5/19/4 5

Had a pass to N.Y. City. Made first call home from Times Square.

5/23/45

Departed Camp Kilmer by train for Billings General Hospital at Fort Ben in Indianapolis, Indiana.

5/23/45 - 10/11/45

This time was spent at Billings General Hospital and on sick leave.

10/11/45

Was discharged at [Camp Atterbury](#) where all this began. I had accumulated enough points for a discharge.

3/7/78

33 years later, I was awarded the Bronze Star medal.

5/19/8 8

43 years later, I was awarded the POW medal.

1/25/88

In summary, I honestly don't know how we made it. I could not have gone another week and I guess I owed a lot to Bob Richardson, as he stayed with me and helped me walk into the 217th hospital.

I guess we were lucky that the timing was right for the Americans to catch up with us. If you look at the map you will see that our route of march from Gorlitz to Gotha was southwest then to the northwest to Duderstadt and then north, northeast, northwest direction to Braunschweig and then east to Konegluter. At first they wanted to get away from the Russians. When we were at Braunschweig and the Americans were coming they turned back toward the east and the Russians and then the Americans caught up with them.

POSTLUDE

While the glow of victory and the happiness of return is in our thoughts, we must remember that there are many sad stories involving returning POWs.

As I sat here, in 1989, looking back over the various letters, mementos and souvenirs that I had stored away. I came across a couple of very touching letters from the mother of Sgt. Sherwood Horn who was with me as far as that brick factory with the warm ovens. He was so weak the next morning he could not continue on the march. I left him there where he died.

I wrote his mother who lived in Orwigsburg, Pa. and told her what happened. Here is a copy of the letters she wrote me in 1947 and 1949 along with a picture of Sgt. Horn and his mother.

I do have much to be thankful for

Richard McKee

I also, as a last thought want to thank Dan Bied from Burlington, IA and John Kline, Editor of the "Cub" from Apple Valley, MN. who helped me more than they know by sending me copies of their diaries.

I have spent a lifetime in the newspaper publishing and commercial printing trade, owning 2 newspapers when I retired in 1983. But I never had the "gift of gab" so therefore I was never into the journalism end of it much. I was more into the mechanical and management end of the newspaper business. So John and Dan, when you see a copy of this diary you might notice that some of it looks a little like yours.

Thanks Dan and John

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