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STILL SINGING THE PRAISES OF
GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON, USA

A RATHER LOOSE NARRATIVE BY A FOOT SOLDIER WHO GOT CAUGHT IN THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE - DECEMBER 1944 BY **D. B. FRAMPTON, JR**.

These recollections were committed to paper to serve as an outline for a speech delivered to the Benjamin Franklin Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution, September 16, 1988

I used to smile when I heard stories about contemporary Round Tables which discuss the Civil War "That's history" was what I was thinking I used to wonder how one could recall all the details of WW I from so long, long ago. I said I used to smile...I don't anymore, because here I am about to talk about something from World War II and to anyone outside this room, that almost qualifies as a course it4rcheologY, or that other lovely word, paleontology. You know, old fossils ! Well, let me tell you how lucky I feel to be an old fossil and how I almost missed the chance to become one.

I was shipped out of Fort Benning, Georgia on D-Day 1944. I ended up at Camp Atterbury, Indiana and was made a part of the 106th Infantry Division. This was the highest numbered Division in the U. S. Army. The unit was activated at Fort Jackson, South Carolina in March of 1943, sent to maneuver all over Louisiana during the winter and spring of 43-44, and arrived in Indiana with the sole distinction of having the highest VD rate in army. Oh, that was not their sole distinction, they were also the youngest division on record. The average age was about 19. I turned 21 that summer, so I was considered an "Old man". I was supposed to be a rifle squad leader, but because I had been taught the full course about "cannons", I became a section chief in Cannon Company, a part of the 422nd Infantry Regiment. One section serviced one small howitzer, a short barreled 105 mm. We used the same ammunition as did the regular field artillery, but our range was accurate only to about 3500 yards, about half that of the regular 105 mm howitzers. That was okay, because we were usually attached to one of the infantry battalions and that meant we were no more than 500 to 2000 yards behind the front lines. Quite often, we could see what we were shooting at. Incidentally, we had six sections, meaning six cannons, in our company. That was the same fire power as half a battalion of field artillery, right under the control of the regimental commander, not the division commander. Think about this.. .we could put four shells in the air before the first one hit ! Firepower !

We shipped out of Atterbury in late September '44 and went to a staging area called Camp Myles Standish, near Taunton, Massachusetts. All the last minute checking went on there. Then we took a train down to New York and sailed out of the harbor, all by our lonesome. We ran at about 28 knots and convoys were out of the question.

We arrived in England 4½ days later. Actually, it was at Gurrock, Scotland, near Glasgow, up on the river Clyde. We went south by train to the area around Cheltenham, England and there we spent another two or three weeks in getting all the equipment sorted out once again. The day after Thanksgiving, which must have been late that year, we once again got on trains and went to the ships for a channel crossing. The next day, December 1st, we landed at LeHavre, France. All the invasion damage had been pushed into piles of rubble, but it was easy to see that some stiff fighting had been going on here in the recent past. We spent a short four days at the top of the hill just outside LeHavre and then we took off for Luxembourg. We learned that we were going to relieve the 2nd Infantry Division, man for man and gun for gun. They took our new cannons and we took their battle—tested material. That was December 8th. I'll tell you how green we were, we still had chalk marks on our helmets to indicate our berthing compartment5 for the trans-Atlantic crossing.

We spent the next week in doing a little guard duty around the perimeter of our areas, a little scouting

and night patrolling in the woods, and we executed fire missions at the rate of about six per day. Late in the night of the 15th, say about 4:00 AM on the 16th, we heard all kinds of artillery overhead and said, "Boy, we're really socking it to 'em tonight'" It sounded like box cars rattling through the sky. When the shells began landing close to us, we were sure it was stupid friendly fire. Well, we tried to call our own artillery and learned that they had just been wiped out. All that stuff we heard was 'incoming Mail" What we could not know at the time was the Germans had started their famous Battle of the Bulge. By noon on the 16th, they had bypassed us on the left, or northern flank. There was a sixteen mile gap there with nothing more than a few scout cars to guard it. We had all three regiments on the line, an unheard off military tactic, and we were spread out over 28 miles, about double the front normally allocated to a single division. We were spread thin !

At the same time that we were bypassed on the north, a panzer group broke through the point were the 106th Infantry shared a common border with the 28th Infantry Division to our south. The two German columns joined up behind us and we were an island. Our six cannons were very busy since we could fire to almost any point of the compass and hit enemy troops. But we ran out of ammunition for the guns. We saved the last shell in each gun, blocked the barrels with a bazooka round, and destroyed the cannons. Then we took off to the West, thinking we might break out of the circle. On the 19th, we were captured. Boy that's depressing. Ruins your whole day, for sure!

I said that we were lucky...let me tell you why. A Panzer Group commended by a Col. Sepp Dietrich had a rule, "Take no prisoners!" That's what happened at the little crossroad town of Malmedy, a bloody massacre. That was about four miles from us. We got captured by driving into a small town along a road lined on both sides by German soldiers. They remained out of sight until our lead truck hit the land mine they had planted and the column of trucks came to a halt. Then they simply stood up, pointed their machine pistols at us and looked tough! Three word was passed down from the front of the column, "Put your hands on your helmets, lay down your weapons, and assemble at the head of thee column." When we got up to the head of the column, we were in a little crossroads village called Buchet. Perhaps 8, maybe a dozen houses, no more. The German soldiers began to circulate among us and patted us down for any weapons. We had seen German soldiers before; in fact, we had four of them tied to the hood of the truck behind the one I was riding. What we didn't know was whether these Germans had had their fill of shooting khaki-colored uniforms. Minutes before if we had met on slightly more equal terms, we would have been trading small arms fire.

We were doing whatever we were told to do, for the time being, feeling our way.

Now might be a good time to tell you that we were in an area called the Schnee Eiffel, meaning snow mountains. We were in the Siegfried Line, built by the Germans to counter the Maginot Line built by the French. This whole area was called the Ardennes Forest and we had all the snow that ski—lovers would cheer about. And it was cold! We had no fires or stoves we kept warm with clothing and food energy After the 16th, food stopped coming, but we had C-rations for the first day, K-rations for the next two days, and D-rations until they were gone. It is altogether fitting and proper to tell you what I was wearing...let me explain: my first layer consisted of khaki CI underwear, olive drab boxer shorts and sleeveless top, plus a pair of wool socks The next layer was a soft wool sleeveless sweater that had been knitted for me by my older sister. On top of that came the GI long-johns, similar to long wool underwear. Next, the uniform, olive drab wool pants and wool shirt, complete with the Palm Beach-brand light khaki necktie and my regular high-top army shoes We had just been issued a new item called a fatigue sweater. It had a collar that could be worn up or down and seven buttons at the neck. Pure wool, olive drab, naturally. Since I had never been issued a dress Class-A jacket or blouse, I was allowed to wear my field jacket. Topped off with an overcoat and an overseas cap, I was on my way to Cheltenham for a night on the town When I got back, we were packing and scheduled to leave in less than one hour. So, I put on my leggings, rolled up my full field pack, strapped on my web belt with assorted goodies such as a canteen, a first aid pack, a pouch with two magazines of Cal. 30 Carbine ammo and a trench knife, complete with

sheath and thong leg strap Everything else I owned or was issued was packed in a duffel bag. I slipped on my gas mask carrier, slung my carbine on my shoulder, put on my knit cap and added my helmet. Oh, I forgot to mention that I was also wearing a muffler which had been crocheted by my mother, in olive drab. She couldn't knit.

I don't actually recall, but it seems to me that since it was our habit to carry a rain coat doubled up under our web belt, something like a geisha girl's kobuki, I probably had a rain coat in the ensemble My combination Dick and shovel was attached to my field pack, along with two blankets, a half of one pup-tent, with one tent pole and six tent pegs and rope, a mess kit, six K-rations, 4 D-Rations and one day's supply = six cans of C-Rations Yes, there were extra socks, extra underwear, all my toilet articles, an an extra pair of army boots. I weighed 178 pounds naked, but I'll bet I weighed close to 350 going up the gang plank with my duffel bag on my shoulder. No porters or redcaps anywhere to be found. If you think I got captured because I couldn't run, your opinion has been mentioned before.

When we finally got to the positions of the 2nd Infantry Division, and I saw that I was surrounded by big pine and hemlock trees, I thought that a green costume would be better suited to the background, so I reached in my duffel bag and brou^{g}ht out a two-piece fatigue suit, green herringbone twill. This went on top of everything , but under my overcoat. Add wool gloves with leather palms and there I was, ready for anything, even well prepared for what was the unexpected jolt of being taken prisoner After we had been in the front lines for about two days, the supply people came up with a truckload of what you and I would call "five-buckle antics", with the rubber bottoms and the rubberized canvas tops. I got to wear mine for about five days.

After our captors got through searching us for weapons, they relieved us of anything that looked like cigarettes and they really wanted our first aid kits, and took them all. We had sulfa drugs in those kits and it really helped the wounded, so the Germans had found. They also made us throw our helmets on the ground; why, I don't know. That was true in the case of our captors, but other prisoners were allowed to keep their helmets. I guess there was some symbolism in stripping a soldier of his distinctive headgear. They made us double-time across a plowed field to join a long column of other prisoners who were being marched along another highway at the bottom of a valley. We felt that there may be more safety in being part of a larger group, so we hustled as best we could. By the time it was getting dark, we finally got to a headquarters area in a small town just east of our point of capture. We slept in the streets and had access to one water spigot to supply about 400 prisoners. We milled about talking to each other and began to understand just how big this attack was getting We heard all kinds of stories about how tanks had overrun the positions of the 422nd and 423 Infantry Regiments We talked to survivors of the three Artillery Battalions, the 589th, 590th and 591st, all 105 mm howitzer outfits We were hungry and cold, but we had hopes. We just didn't understand that we were used to eating better and more regularly than were the Germans.

At the very first hint of daylight far off in the east, we were ordered to line up and move out, toward the east,. I remember that the first town we passed through was called Prüm. We saw lots of German soldiers riding in trucks heading the opposite way One column of trucks stopped and told us to take off the arctics... they wanted them. We obliged, but not willingly Guys with big feet hunted out guys with little feet so that they could mismatch a pair of arctics, buckle them together, and throw them in a pile.

To meet the need for water, we scooped snow off the sides of the highway... a little mud couldn't hurt too much. One time, waiting for some trucks to pass in the opposite direction, some of our men investigated the big earth piles in the corner of a field and found turnips stored there. At some considerable risk, they dug up a few and jumped back into our long column Each of us took a bite and passed the remainder back over our shoulder to the rear I never developed a taste for turnips, then or now. We finally arrived at a railhead town called Geroistein. It was very late...we must have been walking for 14 or 15 hours. I

have looked the town up on a map and determined that we must have covered 30. Km = 20 miles that day Our line of prisoners was growing all the time and it would eventually increase to around 8,000 men from my 106th Division, with more from the 28th to our south flank. The same rail cars used to bring German foot troops to the front were used to take prisoners in the other direction. The box cars had stoves, but no fuel for us. There was straw on the floor. When we were loaded, we were packed in, all standing, and then the doors were shut. Just before we got in the cars, the Germans gave us one large can of cheese food and a bag of hardtack biscuits for each six men. You can bet that we hung closer than skin to the guy who was carrying the food Many of the GI's were disgusted with the biscuits and called them dog biscuits. They were right, they did taste like Ken-L-Biskets I used to share the same with my dog, Spot I liked them and salvaged more when anyone wanted to give them away My overcoat pockets were perfect for that extra material.

Now I ought to mention that I had pockets on my field jacket, four big pockets on my fatigue pants and jacket, four pockets on my olive drab wool pants and two on my OD wool shirt. And, I had a big overlapping fly front on those wool pants...it was part of the defense against exposure to poison gas...and by cutting a slit in the top of that flap, I had a place to hide a deck of cards, some English currency and some CI invasion francs. I think I had a pack of Chesterfields in each pocket, along with about three of those marvelous~ chocolate bars that we called "D" rations. I had been stripped of my personal wrist watch and my CI wrist watch early in the searching games with my captors, but they missed the old English alarm-type pocket watch that I carried in the watch pocket of my OD wool pants. I would later have a chance to trade that one for some bread and cigarettes.

When we finally got on the box cars and started to move, we counted ourselves by calling out the next number until everyone had spoken. We had sixty-five souls in a box car that World War I Legionnaires called miserable with 40 men. Each of these cars had ventilators up close to the roof on each of the four corners. I was lucky enough to have climbed up on a second deck close to one of these "windows" On the several times when the train would stop at a station, and we could see civilians on the platform, we would beg them for "Wasser" Really and truly, lack of water is tough...it's way ahead of hunger in the list of things to be avoided whenever possible Believe it or not, we got civilian help, although I'm sure they were as afraid of the train guards as we were. On Christmas Eve, the guards opened the car doors and handed in another ration of dog biscuits and a large can of corned beef again, one ration for each six men. We got eleven rations!

Sometime around noon the next day, we arrived at a town called Bad Orb. We crawled out of the cars and lined up for the long march which took us up to Stalag IX B on top of the mountain. I remember how the civilians stood at the curb and watched us. We were not exactly in a parade mood or mode. What shocked me was the way the youngsters would pick up a rock or bottle or anything they could get loose enough to throw at us. I guess we were spoiled by the attitude of the civilians on the station platforms. We were not very popular around this town.

After we got to the top of the hill, we found that the only way they had been able to make room for us was to double up the other prison nationalities; in this case, Italians and Poles. We numbered about 5,000 commissioned and non-commissioned officers and privates The separated us by rank and religion...that was the shocker ...the Germans said that it was not permitted to have Jews and Gentiles sharing the same shelter. We protested like crazy, but in the end, assured that it was a physical separation with identical treatment, the Jews were assigned to separate barracks. There was no restriction of free movement into and out of each others barracks. Sounds like the old separate but equal rules of our southern states, doesn't it ?

Our very first meal at Bad Orb was soup. Boiled greens Someone said it was turnip greens It must have had some fat in it because I could see the little globules glistening in the daylight. I tasted it and retched.

It was godawful stuff. One week later, I was a connoisseur of the same recipe, commenting on the full flavor, the aroma, the warmth. It just proves you can get used to anything, even hanging.

We went through an interrogation process. The interviewer (I remember him ~ looking like Paul Muni, the actor) made it very clear to me that I was presently classified by friend and foe alike as "Missing in Action" Whether I was finally classified as "Killed in Action" or "Prisoner of War" was his decision to make. He already knew what unit I belonged to...I was wearing the patch of the 106th Infantry He had a list of rosters and quickly found my name under the heading of Cannon Company, 422nd Infantry Regiment With his blessing, I was permitted to get up and move to the ID station. I signed into a big book and was given a number. The number was mounted on a board which I held across my chest while being photographed, front and profile Then, I was issued my German dogtag with my number, 24245 It was a square piece of metal with perforations down the middle, the long way. The number appeared on both sides of the perforation. It was suggested that I guard this tag very carefully.

The Germans left us very much alone and to our own devices except for a marvelous game called "Roll Call" They, the guards would burst through the door with whistles blowing and then they would shout, "Roll Call -- make a column of five in the middle of the barrack. -- Left face! Line up straight!"

Well, we would line up in sixes, fives and fours, and they would be screaming, "Dumkopf...mach fimphr Finally, all lined up, the count would start and men from the tail of the column would sneak up to join the men who had been counted. This meant that the guards would end up with 10 or 12 less than they were supposed to have Whistle blowing supreme would begin. More "Mach fimph" und "Dunkopf" Now the count would repeat and they would have seven or eight more then they were supposed to have Apoplectic whistle blowing now, followed by, "Raus",, Out in the snow we'd go Then, in two minutes or less, we'd line up in perfect rows and their count would be exact Then we went back into our "shelter" Now this scene seems ridiculous to some people, hard to believe Please believe. It happened every morning and again every evening, every day It never ceased to amaze us that the guards didn't think of starting the count outside in the snow. We wonder just who should be calling who "Dunkopf."

When we first arrived at **Stalag IX B**, we were issued one blanket each It was a non-descript dark color and just a little bigger than a terry cloth bath towel Two G.I.'s would sleep together so that they could share the extra blanket coverage and a little of each other's warmth During the day, each man would carry his blanket everywhere he went.. .it would be stolen if left unguarded for a moment Wearing their blankets over their heads didn't add to the military bearing on any of the G.I.'s, but it did provide some relief from the cold. The Germans did provide some wood for heating Once each day, a two-man team would be taken to the wood pile, one team for each stove and two stoves per barracks. One man would grab two pieces of split wood, one in each fist, and hold the pieces upright with arms extended. His partner would load up the space between his face and these two end pieces with as much wood as they thought they could move. Then, the partner would help lift the first man's arms like the handles of a wheel barrow and they would shuffle back to the barrack and the area stove. The amount of wood did not permit anything rosy and cozy as a hunting lodge blazing fireplace, but it did take some of the chill out of the bones.

The various nationalities were kept separated in this case, the Poles from the Italians, and each nationality had their own supply of Red Cross Packages These were sent up from Switzerland by rail after each nationality became settled in and organized as a formal Prisoner Of War Unit When we arrived, the Italians offered to share some of their packages with us and we got one package for each six G.I.'s. We were in heaven at the sight of such food. There were candy drops, chocolate bars, vitamin tablets, instant coffee, tea and lemonade, sardines, prunes, cigarettes toilet paper, canned dried milk, cheese and crackers, soap, raisins and corned beef. It was, indeed, heaven-sent We all made a promise, right then and there, to bust the teeth of anybody who ever said a bad thing about the Red Cross, anywhere,

anytime, forever! When things could be divided with precision, we did so. When it was impossible, we divided things by drawing straws, winner take all We saved all the containers and especially, the boxes...few of us had anything else in which to carry any personal belongings. Except me...I had pockets galore!

I mentioned that we arrived at Bad Orb, Stalag IXB, on December 26, 1944. Shortly after the new year, the officers were moved out and taken to trains which would carry them to an Oflag, just for officers That's the last time I ever saw my platoon leader, First Lieutenant Leon T. Kastenbaum. He died in an Allied air raid on his way to or just after he got to Limburg, Germany Or so I was told I was one on the 1,250 non-commissioned officers who were transferred to a different prison on January 28, 1945 Down the hill we marched and boarded the old box cars again, but this time we had room to stretch out - I think we numbered about 40 men to each car. The privates and Pfc's were left at Bad Orb, Stalag IXB. They had a rough time of it, right up to the point of digging their own graves when Hitler was ordering his people to destroy everything lest it or they fall into allied hands.

Our train full of non-coms left Bad Orb about 2:00 PM and did the usual start-stop, clear the main-line for priority traffic, until the next morning. We arrived at Zeigenhain about 10:00 AM. It was snowing. It seemed as if the flakes were moving sideways instead of falling. It was the kind of wind that sliced like a knife. Our troops fell into a column of fours and we marched about five miles out of town. We arrived at a large barbed-wire covered complex, all single story, all pine board and batten construction, but lots of buildings. We all hoped that we were in time for the noon meal, but that was just a wishful thought. The Germans told us that the corned beef and dog biscuits issued to us as we left Bad Orb were supposed to last us for three days! We all finished those rations before we got to the bottom of the Bad Orb Mountain! So, we just stood on the highway outside the main prison gate while the snow collected on whichever side we turned into the wind.

It was dark when we moved into the prison, even though it was late in the afternoon. We were told that each man was going to get two bedslats and one bag of straw. It was suggested that we pair-off with a buddy to double our comfort I teamed up with our supply corporal, Bill Lucas. Witheach pair of slats busted to make eight instead of four pieces, we could support our feet, our knees, our fannies, our shoulder and our heads. We placed the bags of straw end-to- end and used one blanket for the bottom half of our bodies and the other for the top half The bed frame was 24 " wide by 6 feet long We were both taller than 6 feet, so we slept on our sides in the "S" position When either one of us got too cramped from facing to our right, that person would say, "Shift!" and we'd roll over to face the left, readjusting the blankets as we rolled. It worked for the next two months; but then, we never knew how much longer anything would last.

The prison that we landed in was called **Stalag IX A**, Zeigenhain. We learned through the barbed wire conversations with other nationalities that there were about 16,000 prisoners in this unit. This number included French, British, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, Polish, Italian, Russian, French Moroccans, Belgian Congo natives, British Senegalese and others. Some of these prisoners had been around there since 1939 and 1940. Others, like the Russians, Russians were fresh as we were, but only because there were no Russians who lasted more than about 6 months. There was absolutely no mercy shown by the Germans towards these despised Russians I personally saw them being kicked down flights of stairs and beaten with clubs until they must have been dead, all for the crime of spilling a little soup from the tubs used to haul the liquids from the kitchens to the barracks.

The daily routine started with the overhead lights coming on at 6:00 am followed by inspection and roll call at 6:30 AM If all went well, the two-man teams from each group of 50 POW's were sent to the kitchen for food. Breakfast canteen was a cup about half-full of ersatz (imitation) coffee. I think it was made by roasting barley and other grains to get the dark color. The only thing one can say on behalf of

this brew is that it was warm. A new crew was dispatched to the kitchens about 11:30 AM to bring back the tubs of whatever kind of soup was planned for that day. The soups were rotated from barley to potato to rutabaga to turnip to mixed greens to carrots and back to barley. Every now and then, someone would be lucky enough to find a small piece of meat in their soup...it never bothered anyone that said meat had once worn iron shoes and pulled a wagon. The evening meal called for an extra man in the crew because rationed bread was part of that meal Admittedly, it was always rationed with one loaf for every six or eight men, but each group of fifty would require the kitchen to issue between six and eight loaves, and each loaf was heavier than a paving brick It was always dark bread because they just didn't have much white flour in Germany, or anywhere else on the continent of Europe The regular tubs were used again, this time to bring a form of hot liquid called "tea", but a far cry from anything made by Thos. Lipton & Son Company. To give the Germans credit for trying, I'll say that just about every other evening, they would slip in some sweet jam or honey, with a spoonful per prisoner, or maybe the treat would be some reconstituted cottage cheese. These meals were the main event of every day. We were losing weight fast and we were hungry all the time. That was it; coffee, soup, bread and tea and a "spoonfUl of sweet". I think the only reason we did not fade away was the Red Cross Packages.

Red Cross Packages were designed to provide three meals a day for seven days for one man. Not great big meals, but a variety of food with enough energy-giving quality to sustain a person. We never did get to the point where we could have one whole package just for one man, but we did get, to a point where it was divided between just four men...almost luxury.. .certainly most welcome. And always, these packages were being loaned to us from the supplies belonging to the other nationalities. There used to be a lot of grumbling about just whose Red Cross was supplying the packages for everybody, but most of us saw every sharing as a gesture on appreciation by the other nationalities.

When we were not engaged in chewing and swallowing this precious stuff, we did what came naturally.. .we talked about food. All the time. Food, food, food. We all had lists that we scribbled on the backs of photos and everybody loved the one for pound cake that read, "take one pound of butter, one pound of sugar, one dozen eggs, one something of milk, etcetera." In fact almost all recipes started out with "Take one pound of butter"! When it's all imaginary, one can afford the extravagance. Truthfully, prisoners of war were the only military outfit I ever knew or listened to where the subject of procreation was <u>never</u> mentioned. There's got to be some truth in the old adage that says, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach!"

The evening meal would be history by 6:00 PM and the lights would be turned off by 8:00 PM, sooner if there was a hint of an air raid. Most everybody got into bed even before the lights went out because it was the best way to stay warm. We were treated to German news broadcasts over a loud speaker public address system about noon every day. But it was soon after lights out that a soldier named "Phil" made a roundtrip of all our G.I. barracks and gave us what news he had been able to ferret from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio news. Apparently, he had some kind of clandestine radio that he got from one of the other nationalities Phil gave us lots of good news and was able to tell us what the Germans were unwilling to tell us...they were losing the war!

We in barracks 26-A had a Chief guard who looked a lot like John Carradine, narrow-faced, squinty eyes, but relatively good-natured. He was a top sergeant and rated a salute from all of us, such being the rules for POW's. He was willing to argue with us about who was winning the war He had a withered right arm from having been wounded on the Russian Front. He was never "too familiar" with any of us, but he was jaunty and confident, up until one morning early in March He appeared in our barrack, snapped on the ceiling lights, and said nothing. His shoulders were slouched, his head was bent forward and he was looking like a whipped dog We eventually got the news that his family who lived in the City of Bonn were now under Allied control His war was coming to an end, crashing down on him He was beaten I have never, before or since, seen such an overnight change in a person Of course, for us this meant that changes were coming and coming fast.

I mentioned air raids and would like to go back to that subject. They seemed to be an every night occurrence. We could hear the planes after the sirens had been wailing and then, after the rumble passed overhead and faded, the all-clear would sound. These night raiders were the British Air Force.

We had one daytime visit from a flight of about six U. S. Air Corps P-47 Thunderbolts, a fighter designed to accompany the bombers all the way across Europe and return. On the way home, they were given clearance to attack any targets of opportunity, and these boys took a hearty interest in what looked to them like a first-class, large size German Army Barracks Complex, which is exactly what our prison was, once upon a time. So they strafed us, two or three passes. 0n the first pass, we were waving "Hello" to them. When they started to shoot, we were stunned, and then we hit the deck, prone, flat, small as possible. None of the G.I.'s were hit, but we all had some holes in the ceilings. There were some casualties in the French Moroccans area, how many l don't know. I have a lot of respect for what six wing-mounted .50 caliber machine guns can do

The U. S. Air Corps came to bomb our neighborhood late in March, about the 25th. It was the railroad tracks that they were after. Waves of 12 B-l7's came several from different directions. There were at least three of them that I watched. We could see the bombs leave the aircraft and start to string out in a curve We watched the puffs of smoke from the explosions, then felt the earth shake and finally, heard the booming roll of the string of explosions. Later that evening, the German army came to our prison looking for volunteers to go out in the night and repair the tracks. They had lots of German Shepard dogs, lots of machine pistols, and funny-sounding flashlights that were actually hand operated generators. As they squeezed the handles, the generators would whine and the light would fluctuate from dim to bright and back to dim. "Volunteers, hell!" They came for live bodies and we were chosen. I was among the chosen. I didn't think that I could walk farther than the distance to the latrine and I was marched at least five miles back toward town and the blasted-apart tracks. Under the watch of armed guards, we shoveled ballast back where it belonged, laid the steel cross ties where they were needed and placed the rails on top. Hard to believe, by 4:00 AN, the Germans were able to run a locomotive through the area. We marched back to camp with a lot more confidence in our own abilities than we might otherwise have had.

I feel I ought to mention bathing. I had a bath the day after Thanksgiving, that's the Friday that I went into Cheltenham on a pass. The next one came in February at Stalag IX A. Our barracks was ordered to form up in a column of two's and move out. We were marched through several separate areas divided by high barbed wire fences until we entered a low building. We were told to remove all of our clothes and to place our dogtags on top of the pile. Then we were herded in what looked like a shower room. I thought it was a gas chamber and that we were in for trouble. There were windows high up on the wall and I wiggled and squeezed to get near one of them. When the water started, I almost went through the roof with fright. My God, it was water. It stayed on for a minute and then it quit. This is it! I'm hanging from the window sill. And the water resumes again. We were probably supposed to soap ourselves in between water blasts, but I edged my way back toward the entrance and burst out when it was once again opened. I was shaking like a leaf and not from the cold. I called out my number "Zwei, Vier, Zwei, Vier, Fimph" and got my bundle of clothes back. I dressed and stood at the front door promising myself that if I ever got back to my barracks alive, this bath house would see me no more. I had read all about German gas houses in the Reader's Digest, and I wanted nothing to do with them. Of course, I was being silly, but I didn't think so at that time. I didn't like it, but I was able to live with the body lice that eventually hatched and ran happily across my skin. My next bath came about April 5th at a repatriation camp in France. How I got there is another story.

People have asked me, "What did you do with yourselves all day?" A good question, indeed'. Of course, on our way to our prison camp we were scared we wouldn't make it. We were walking out of a combat area and we knew that if the skies were to clear, even for a few hours, the fighters and bombers would be all over this area like locusts. It didn't clear up. After we got on the first train, we tried to figure out where

we were and wheQwe were going. More fear about strafing. We were in the boxcars around Frankfurt on Christmas Eve and the bombs were falling. We were told that one of our boxcars was hit. That was scary. All our time at our first POW Camp, Bad Orb, Stalag IXB, we were occupied with trying to get our bowels back in working order and get some food. We used to hang around the wagonloads of potatoes that were being unloaded outside the kitchen, hoping for a loose one to roll away and into our hands before some friend stepped on said hand. Trying to stay warm seemed to occupy all of our waking hours. The main game was to screw up the roll call every morning and evening.

I remember one very worrisome moment at Bad Orb. It seems that one of our G.I's had been surprised inside the kitchen area and had killed a guard in the fight that followed. All I know is that we were assembled in a very formal outside formation and heard a statement from the prison commandant. He said that he was sure that whoever did this horrible crime would be willing to confess and turn himself in for punishment. Failing such confession, the commandant said that he would arbitrarily pick ten P.O.W's for execution in his stead, the first day, and twenty the next day, and so on, until he either ran out of bullets or prisoners. There was no second day, because the man turned himself in and 1 can only assume that he was given a trial, an execution and a burial.

During the day, when we weren't watching the potato wagon being unloaded, we tended to stay close to a stove and talk about food. The way we were mixed in rank and representing three or four infantry divisions, there wasn't much organization. To tell you the truth, military discipline sort of went to hell in that first prison. Our officers were being treated like G.I. 's and given no way to exert any influence for our betterment. The noncommissioned officers were without authority and this led to a certain degree of slovenliness. I don't know what it was like when the privates and Pfc.'s were left on their own, but it could have been a mite tacky.

At our second prison, **Stalag IX-A**, Zeigenhain, we were at least a homogeneous group...all non-commissioned officers. We organized ourselves into groups of 50, with the highest ranking master sergeant as the leader. We selected a staff, really we approved a self-appointed staff consisting of about six master and first sergeants. Each of the six was given a staff responsibility which touched on areas such as health and sanitation, food supply, military discipline, and a chain of command. Our leaders spoke to their leaders and that was that. Other staff people organized religious groups and educational programs. We found out what civilian backgrounds we had and how they might be able to deliver interesting talks. We had an architect who helped us build dream castles for our future civilian life. We had two chefs who had run restaurants in New York before they were drafted...they were very popular. We had several people who had worked in food markets and they kept us spellbound just talking about food. We had quiz games, things like "20 questions", a take-off on a then-popular radio show. Eventually, we were able to get a soap ration from our captors and this led to some shaving. That did more than anything to restore some semblance of military bearing to our group.

Among my many pockets I had managed to hide a briar pipe. This was passed around to those who had scrounged a little tobacco from the butts of cigarettes. I also had a deck of Kern cards. If you don't know what this brand name means, it describes a type of card that is printed on washable plastic. They were slippery, but we all got used to them. They were in play from shortly after morning roll call until lights out at about 7:00 pm.

After we started sprucing ourselves up a bit, we asked for and got three or four sets of barber shears and combs. We were able to give ourselves, meaning each other, haircuts. A representative of our elected staff pulled an area inspection every morning before the leujtfeldwebel did his own inspection. Eventually, he abdicated this responsibility to our own people.

I think I mentioned that the Germans had a news broadcast over the loudspeaker system shortly after 12:00 noon each day. This was countered by the news that "Phil" was able to bring us each evening after

the roll call and the nightly lockup. These events gave us plenty to talk about during the day. We knew that we were going to survive and that we were going to get back under Allied control. That is to say, most of us knew it. We lost some G.I.'s to pneumonia, one of them was a dear friend, our company clerk, Robert Dolan. There was no medicine available other than aspirin and charcoal. Charcoal was the standard remedy for diarrhea. And we all had that, much of the time. I think we all feared or dreaded some major calamity such as breaking a bone; I know that I sunk through the floor with my right leg when a floorboard broke - I went in up to my crotch and had to be lifted out. I was mighty happy that nothing was broken. Other times, we would go through the agony of cutting a finger with our crude home-made knives, and we wondered what would happen it it got infected. How we avoided it, I'll never know, for I cut myself twice. We had a few G.I. 's who knuckled under to depression. They moaned the old "Woe is me!" song to themselves so.~1ong and so loud that they eventually up and died. I didn't think it was possible until I saw it with my own eyes.

Something very good happened to us around the end of February, we were joined by a Captain Morgan, U. S. Army Medical Corps. The fact that he was a medical doctor was a bonus; he was actually sent to us to become a commissioned officer capable of dealing with the German Captain (Hauptman) who was our prison commandant. The Germans were very conscious of rank and the privileges thereof. Captain Morgan answered medical questions that were on the minds of all of us, things like, "How long can we keep going on rations like these?" The answer: "I figure that we're pulling in about 800 calories a day, or less. Six months of this would be about the limit. That's the bad news. The good news is that we will soon have our very own supply of Red Cross Packages and that will put the roses back in our cheeks!" The poor guy didn't have any medicine to offer us, but he encouraged us in many other ways. He was the leader who brought us all together. Let me explain. We were divided into five barracks with about 250 non-corns each. Each barrack had its own pecking order, but there was no top leader for all five barracks. Captain Morgan filled that role.

Those of us who were "selected" to go put the railroad back together after the bombing at Zeigenhain were exposed to some civilians who had been picked as guards. I think of them as being a "Home Guard" or Civil Defense Corps type of individual. They were armed, but the weapons were civilian sporting rifles, .22 caliber, primarily. I was able to converse in French and I struck up a conversation with one of the guards - he turned out to be a dentist. He told me in no uncertain terms that he expected our roles to be reversed in the very near future. How soon? "Moiris da deux sernaines! (Less than two weeks!) I can tell you that there was a definite spring in my step as we headed back to prison.

When we awoke on Monday, March 26th, we were all hustled to a large field just outside our compound and were given the word that we were about to be moved to the east to keep us out of the hands of the advancing US Army. We were told that those who were too sick to march would be taken by train. Trains were to leave on Tuesday. The march would commence at 0600 on Wednesday. All day long, after we~ were put back in our barracks, we talked about this new development. None of us who had watched the trains being strafed and bombed felt sick enough to ride one of them again. We would march, but with a plan.

We remembered that it was a German habit to assign one guard for each group of 50 prisoners. We counted-off in groups of 50. Then, our own sergeants randomly chose any two numbers between 1 and 50 and the winners of these numbers were designated to be guard killers. The plan was simple. A whistle signal would be blown when we reached the very first wooded area, and the chosen pair would jump the guard and kill him with his bayonet; the other 48 men in the group would take off and run. It was decided that hiding until the Allies arrived was the best idea. I was designated one of the Kraut-killers!

Captain Morgan, bless him, had one more idea. He said that we would all claim to be too sick to move and see what stalling might lead to. We counted-off in threes - number 2 was supposed to faint and numbers

1 and 3 were supposed to drag number 2 to the infirmary , such as it was. All of this was going to take place just before they ordered us to march.

Captain Morgan also gave permission to escape to anyone wanting to leave before the evacuation started. Two people tried to go on Monday, the 26th, and they were caught and pistol-whipped, badly. One more tried to go on Tuesday night and his body was in the same field with us when we lined up to start the march on Wednesday. Incidentally, he was the only black man in our prison. He had been a truck driver for the Red Ball Express and had been caught delivering supplies when the Bulge began. I should have said that he was the only U. S. black man, because the Sudanese and the Nigerians, Senegalese, Belgian Congo citizens and many Moroccans were black.

We formed up at 0600 and by 0615 fully one-third of our troops had fainted! This screwed up the marching plans, so the Germans just put us on "hold". Our Captain Morgan was in constant contact with the German Lieutenant who had been left in command when the Hauptman evacuated to the east. After about 16,000 other prisoners had shuffled past our gates, the prison was empty except for the 1,200 G.I. *'s,* our Captain, their Lieutenant and his 20 guards. Captain Morgan asked for the surrender of the Germans and it was given, all except for one really mean S. O. B. whom we had nick-named "Hawk-nose". He objected. He died.

The word was passed quickly, "get back into your barracks, stay away from windows, use the sinks for latrines, no lights, no fires, no smoke or cigarettes and be quiet. If the German troops who must pass this way ever look in here and see what we have done, we are all "goners". We did as we were told. We hid all the rest of the day, Wednesday, all day Thursday, the 29th of March and half a day on Friday, March 30th. We could hear the sounds of heavy artillery, the 155 mm stuff, always getting closer and closer. On Friday morning we saw an L-5, a Cessna scouting plane used by the artillery as a forward spotter. Lordy, it was a beautiful sight. Then we heard the sound of rolling armor, half tracks and tanks. They arrived about noon. And who do you think "they" were? You guessed it! George Patton's Third Army. My, oh my, they looked like giants. They were clean, dressed for parade but in a killing mood. We were free, really free. Not out of harm's way, but free.

These G.I.'s could hardly believe what they saw in us. Yes, they saw us as G.I.'s, but walking skeletons with sunken eyeballs and bony cheeks and jowls. Skinny hands and legs. And even though they loved us as one of their own, they couldn't get over how bad we smelled. We had grown accustomed to the smell. They nearly gagged.

They reported what they had found and then they left. They had a lot more war to fight. By late Friday night, they had caught up with the marching columns and turned them around after switching a few prisoners into the role of guards. These other nationalities began returning to our prison on Sunday, April 1, 1945. After they got back, we all moved freely back and forth to each other's compounds. I remember asking for and receiving a tooth brush and some dentifrice from one of the French P. O. W.' s. That first brushing in four months tasted mighty fine, but my tongue was sore as can be. Of course, we sampled every kind of food we could find and we overdosed,...we all had diarrhea, I am talking serious "GI Quick-Step."

By early Sunday, the Medical Corps arrived with ambulances to haul away the G.I.'s most in need of hospitalization. Surprisingly though, most of us felt pretty good. I know I felt great, even with the "trots".

The Transportation Corps wasted no time in getting large 2 1/2 ton trucks into our prison to carry out the G.I.'s. I got on a truck on Monday, April 2nd. We were taken to an airfield near Giessen. We arrived at about the same time as a group of about six C-47 transports began to land. The planes killed their port engine and let the starboard engine idle while we jumped aboard. In less than ten minutes, we were airborne and heading back to the west coast of France. We were seated in bucket seats facing the aisle.

I'm guessing that there were as many as 24 of us on each plane. I walked up and talked to the two pilots and got a first class view of the tortured landscape...pock-marked by bomb craters as far as the eye could see. In driving through Giessen on the way to the airport, I noticed that there was not a single building complete with four walls. By the way, the mission of the Air Corps planes was to deliver five-gallon jerry cans of gasoline to the advancing armored forces. They were diverted on their return trip to pick us up.

We were safely delivered to another set of trucks at the airport serving Le Havre, France. The Army was all set for us. They had prepared a tent city called Camp Lucky Strike. They had others prepared, too. Camp Chesterfield was one that we heard about. They had a field hospital ready to treat us for lice, malnutrition, wounds of any kind...whatever was needed. They issued us new clothing and the/'ld stuff was burned. They gave us vitamins, milk, good food, cigarettes, anything we thought we wanted. I can recall that by this time, my tongue was one seriously burning piece of raw meat. A glass of grapefruit juice almost killed me, or so I thought. Being back under allied control meant one more thing, paperwork. Lots of forms to be filled out. It was all part of the reconstruction of our Service Records. I should mention that our prison group of 1200 non-coms were the first liberated prisoners to arrive back in allied control. Everybody was doing their level best to give us excellent care and consideration. We didn't think of ourselves as heroes, but our receivers and handlers seemed to feel that we were something close to it. It was a great feeling.

On April 8th, we got back into the trucks and were carried down to the docks at Le Havre and loaded on board the USS General William P. Richardson. She carried bow numbers of AP 118. We sailed to Southampton that evening. We picked up some more passengers, Air Corps - types heading home on rotation, plus some wounded being evacuated to stateside hospitals. We sailed that same night. The stop at this port allowed me to do something special. A representative of the Postal Telegraph Company (a competitor of Western Union) came on board to ask if anyone wanted to send any cablegrams. I grabbed his pad of forms and sent a collect cablegram to my parents telling them that I was among friends and expected to see them soon. This was the first message that they had received that told them anything more than the fact that I was missing in action.

We joined up in a convoy with merchant ships of all descriptions and a few destroyer escorts. It was a two-week cruise across the Atlantic, compared to 4-1/2 days coming over in The Acquitania! Incidentally, the General Richardson had a Coast Guard crew, but the Coast Guard was a full war-time partner of the U. S. Navy. The only difference we could notice was the little silver shield emblem that they wore on their left sleeve, below the elbow.

Our first day at sea settled into a routine of breakfast, lunch, eggnog in the afternoon and supper. The commissary folks did not anticipate that we would gobble up all their white bread as fast as they could put it out on the tables. They put out an intercom call for volunteer bakers to work the dayshift. I figured out that baking was done in the galley and the galley was where the food was kept. I volunteered. I got a button that proclaimed me to be "Baker" and that was all the pass I needed to go anywhere that food was being handled.

I even got to sample what was being cooked for the wardroom. I had ice cream and pie and soup after pancakes and syrup for breakfast. I had all the milk I could drink. I gained back fourteen pounds in as many days.

We arrived in New York harbor and wept when we saw the Statue of Liberty once again. Boy, did we miss her! We figured that we had helped keep her safe, too.

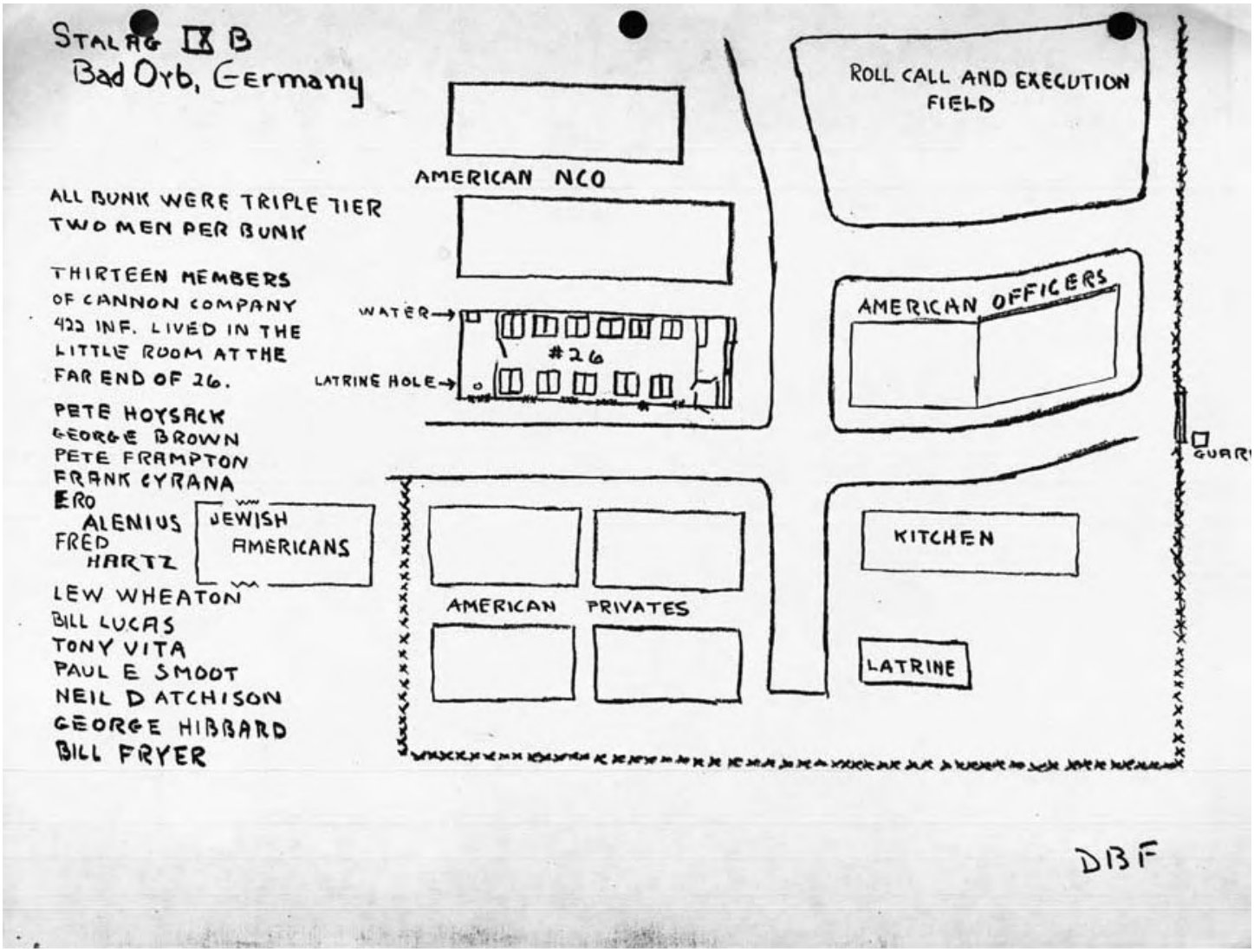
We were taken down to Camp Kilmer at Brunswick, New Jersey for a little more processing and then we learned that we would be getting 60 days furlough with 3 more days for travel. Plus an advance of $100. against our back pay. We were ecstatic. The phone lines were jammed with everyone trying to call out at

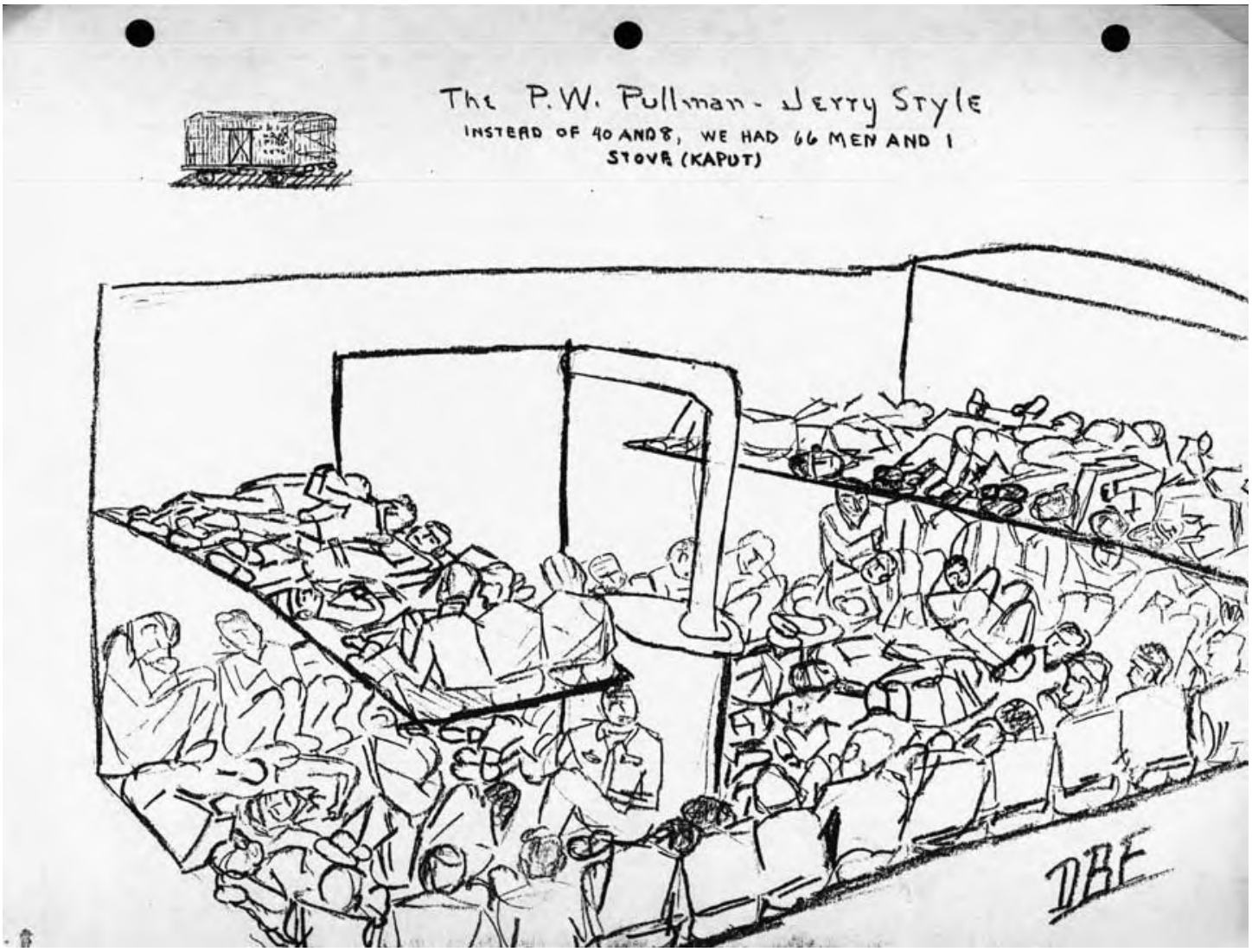
the same time. As soon as I could get loose, I got a ride to the train station and bought a ticket on the next train to Pittsburgh. I knew it would get me there at 2:00 AM, but I didn't care. I was going to surprise my folks.

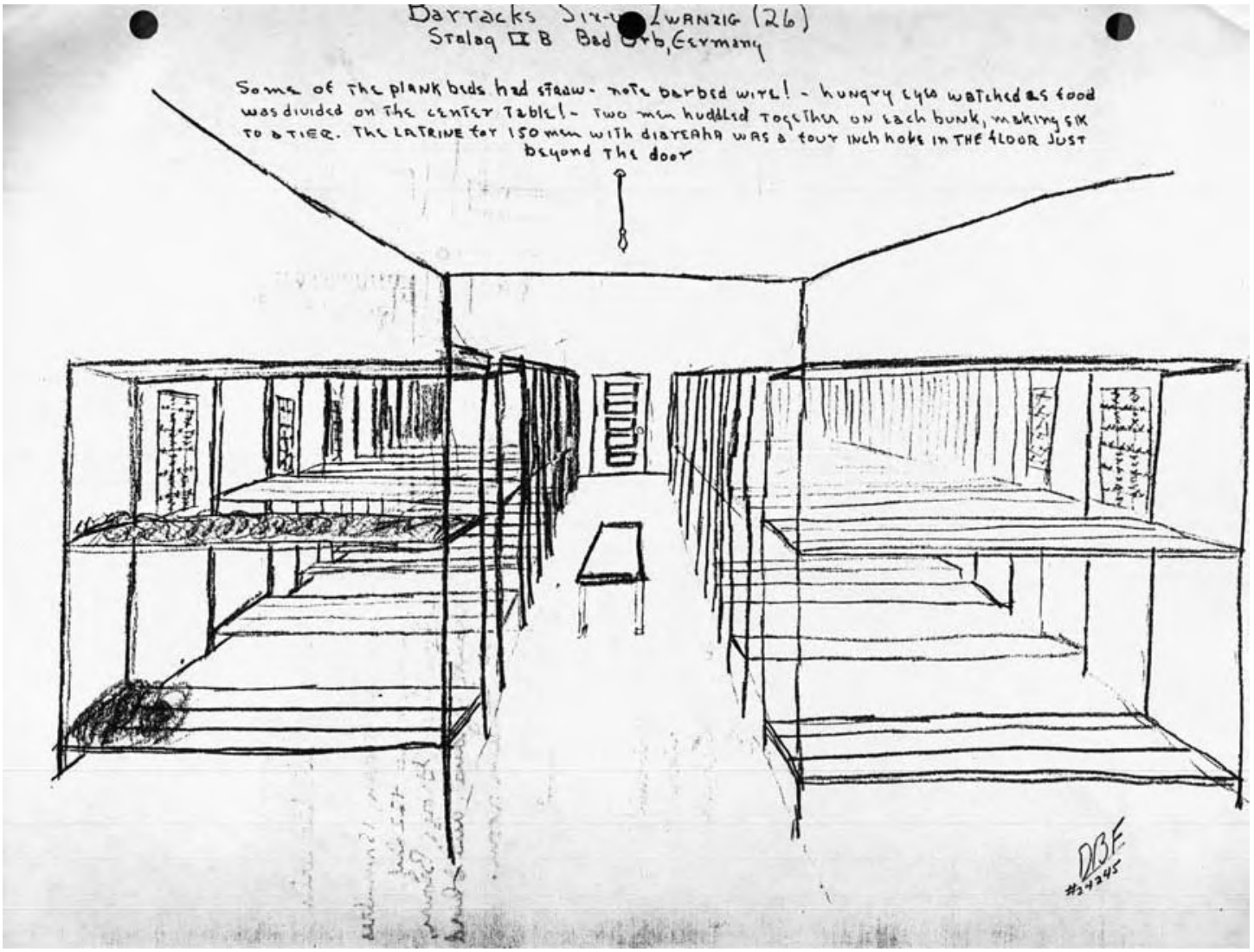
I spent the time in the men's lounge of the Pullman car and had an audience of traveling salesmen and other civilians who seemed overjoyed to be talking to someone who "had seen it all!" I was impressed by the way some of them wanted to talk about the way it was for them in the Great War; they had had tough times, but none so tough as mine, so they said. At that moment, I thought that the Great War was about as current as the War of 1812. How wrong I was. In 1945, the war that was current in their minds was just 27 years before. Here I am talking about something that happened 44 years ago and to me, it's as real as yesterday. That's the way it is with us old fossils. We have a lot to remember.

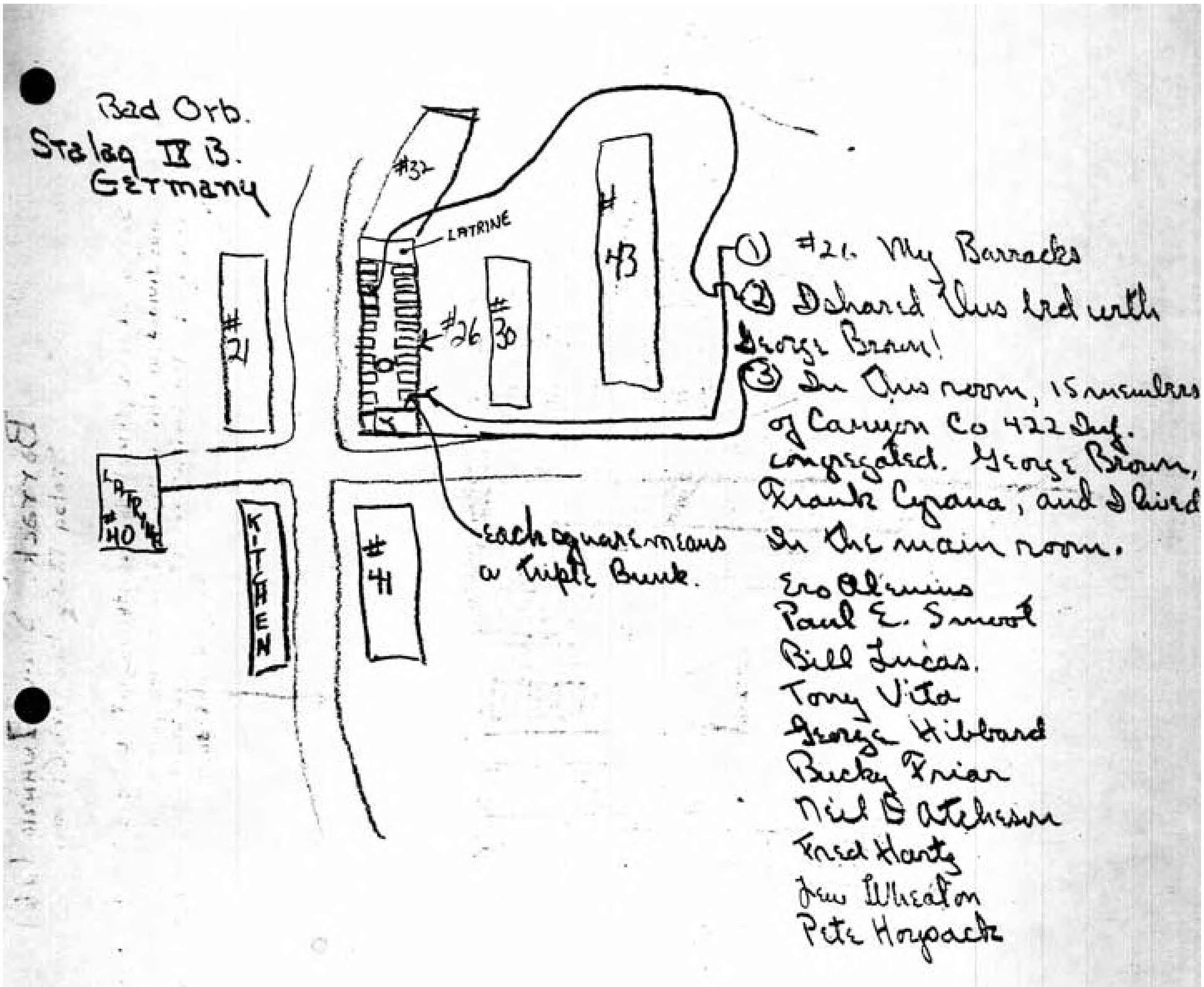
Thanks for listening to this rambling recollection of an ex—kriegsgefangener. And Thank you , God, for leaders like George Patton.

D. B. Frampton, Jr.

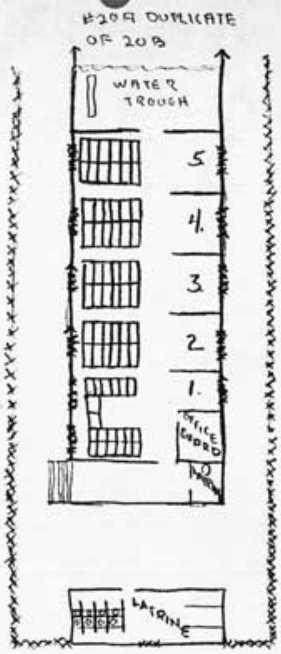



The P.W. Pullman - Jerry Style
INSTEAD OF 40 AND 8, WE HAD 66 MEN AND 1
STOVE (KAPUT)
DBE


Barracks Six-u- Zwanzig (26)
Stalag IX B Bad Orb, Germany
Some of the plank beds had straw - note barbed wire! - hungry eyes watched as food was divided on the center table! - two men huddled together on each bunk, making six to a tier. The latrine for 150 men with diarrhea was a four inch hole in the floor just beyond the door
DBF
#27245


Bad Orb.
Stalag IX B.
Germany
#32
LATRINE
#43
#26
#30
#21
LATRINE #40
KITCHEN
#41
each square means a triple bunk.
(1) #21. My Barracks
(2) I shared this bed with George Brown!
(3) In this room, 15 members of Cannon Co 422 Inf. congregated. George Brown, Frank Cypana, and I lived in the main room.
Ero Alemino
Paul E. Smoot
Bill Lucas.
Tony Vita
George Hibbard
Bucky Friar
Niel D Atcheson
Fred Hartz
Jim Wheaton
Pete Hoypack

Stalag IX A Ziegenhain, Germany



I lived in Barracks 208.
We were all non-commissioned officers transferred from IB
BARRACKS WERE MADE OF WOODEN BEAMS FILLED WITH A PLASTER AND EXCELSIOR MIX.
OUR BARRACKS WAS DIVIDED INTO GROUPS OF FIFTY - EACH GROUP WAS ASSIGNED TO A BLOCK (1 TO 5) WE CANNON CO BOYS WHO STAYED TOGETHER AT BAD ORB WERE IN GROUP 5.
EACH GROUP HAD A BUNK BLOCK, 6 BUNKS LONG, 2 WIDE, 3 DEEP. FOR WARMTH, WE SLEPT IN PAIRS.
WE SPLIT OUR FOOD IN SQUADS OF SIX. IN MY GROUP, NO. 5, WERE GEORGE HIBBARD, LEW WHEATON, BILL LUCAS, FRANK CYRANA, GEORGE BROWN.
WE WERE ISSUED 3 ONE INCH BED SLATS A PIECE - BY COMBINING AND SLEEPING TOGETHER WE HAD SOMETHING JUST A LITTLE LESS COMFORTABLE THAN A BED OF NAILS.
WE MADE BROOMS OUT OF A BUNDLE OF TWIGS AND WIRE - EACH HAD HIS OLD TIN CAN TO EAT OF.

THIS IS GROUP 5's AREA, OPPOSITE BUNKS
{HOLES REPRESENT 50 CALIBRE VENTILATION LEFT DAILY BY THE ALLIED AIR FORCES}