Myron "Mike" Klingman

"German Prisoner No. 25708"

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PRELUDE

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"German Prisoner No. 25708" is my own record and account of all that transpired in my life from the time that I last saw England to the happy day that Stalag IX B became only a dreadful memory,

The book is divided into three parts: Combat, Imprisonment, and Liberation. While the combat story is a different one for every soldier, I believe that all the accounts of imprisonment at Stalag IX B, at well as other POW camps, shall parallel this one very closely.

I sincerely hope that all who read this book shall derive some benefit from the account of the trials and tribulations, the hardships and joys, and the workings of faith, which many American prisoners endured.

Myron "Mike" Klinkman
37 Drullard Ave.
Lancaster, New York

Song of Liberation
Tune: Battle Hymn of the Republic

We're a bunch of Yankee soldiers
And we're leaving Germany.
We're a bunch of hungry Yankees
Butt happy as can be
Georgie Patton came around today
And set the whole camp free
Now we can ramble home.

You came to get us Georgie Patton
We knew you'd not forget us Patton
Let us cheer for Georgie Patton
As we go rambling home

Written by:

Phillip K. Fried
March 31, 1945

PART I
COMBAT

Thanksgiving in London had barely become a memory; in fact it was less than a week later that our outfit, Regimental Headquarters of the 423rd Infantry, was alerted for shipment across the English Channel onto the mainland of Europe. We had been quartered in Nissan huts in the City of Cheltenham, a health resort in Gloucester County, England, since October 25. But now, a month and four days later, we were ready to leave England and the events that followed were, as near as I possibly remember, in this order and on these dates.

I was an assistant driver on a jeep. Our convey, beaded for the port of Southampton on the southern coast of England, left Cheltenham Nov. 29th at 7:30 A. M. As was customary in the wire section, our jeep pulled a half-ton trailer loaded with wire equipment, the jeep itself carrying the driver, Larry White, and my personal equipment. We experienced motor trouble all the way, mostly because of the load. Twice we fell behind the convoy and were very fortunate that we did regain our interval once more. After a lunch of two sandwiches en route, I drove most of the afternoon until we reached our point for refueling. Our day's destination was reached when we parked our vehicles in a camp somewhere near Southampton. Here we had hot "C" rations, following which we attended a movie. I believe the name of it was "Klondike Katie" or something like that, for it was about gold miners in Alaska. This was the last movie for me up until this present date.

After a welcome rest, we again ate hot "C" rations at 4:30 A. M. Thursday morning. Once again our convoy moved out in the dark, and by dawn we were parked near our port of embarkation in Southampton. Following a two hour wait, we finally drove on the runway of our LST (Landing Ship Tank}. The crew directed us onto

the elevator which lifted as to the main deck of the ship. After oar ship and several others had been loaded, we were allowed to go back on shore for coffee and doughnuts provided by the British Red Cross.

Returning to the ship, every man had to chain his vehicle to the deck. All the larger trucks and prime movers were parked on the tank deck, which was just below the main or open deck. Our ship was manned by the U. S. Coast Guard, and had been in the June 6th invasion of France, although it never had suffered a mishap in its year of service. Alongside of us, ship no. 511, boasted four planes and two tanks. Our ship, No. 26, did not share in any laurels for destroying enemy equipment.

We were assigned bunks near the crew's quarters. Each. bunk had a small locker near it. We found the ship very clean. Latrines with showers, hot and cold running water, glistening white sinks and clean rooms made us wish we were navy men. But, more than that, the food was superb. Every meal was well planned and prepared. A typical breakfast consisted of fruit juice, cereal with milk and sugar, toast, butter and jelly, scrambled eggs with bacon, and coffee cake. Coffee could be had twenty-four hours a day from a self-serve spigot on the wall. The mess hall was clean and furnished with radio loudspeakers, it doubled as a day room at other times, providing a place for writing, reading, and

playing games.

Thursday night, our ship hoisted anchor and proceeded with the ship convoy out to sea. However, the channel was unusually rough, and the convoy turned back and dropped anchor again. Friday at noon, No. 28 and her escorts again put out to sea, and sometime on December 2nd, she dropped anchor near Le Havre, France. The channel was extremely rough and many of our men were suffering from seasickness. Even one of the crew was slightly on the sickish side. Again the sea became rough, and the chain holding our anchor broke, so that we were without an anchor for the remainder of the trip.

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The Captain of the ship ordered her put to steam, so we cruised back and forth while we waited for a French pilot to guide us up the Seine river, as it was dangerously mined.

Sunday morning I had a new experience. There was no Chaplain on board ship, so I held my first religious service aboard this LST in the tank deck. We had the portable organ and hymnals from the Chaplain's trailer. I had posted notices Saturday after I had received permission from the ship's officers to hold a service. Many navy men attended in addition to the doughboys, and they particularly enjoyed it, since the only other service ever held aboard ship was the day before "D" day, June 5th. We sang hymns, had prayers, and I read what I thought was an appropriate scripture Psalm 107-vs. 23-31. Since this was my first experience in speaking before a group of men, I was rather nervous at first, but soon quieted down, and was most happy I had held the service.

Monday morning, our French pilot came aboard and we started the journey up the Seine. Passing Le Havre, we saw some of the ships which had struck mines and sank. The river trip was very interesting. Apparently German troops had been taken by surprise on the southern side of the Seine, for wreckage of German equipment and vehicles was strewn along the river for many miles. At various points, we could even picture motor pools, for vehicles were parked in lines under trees of an orchard. Not only was there wreckage of vehicles, but few of the buildings along the river escaped damage from bombings and artillery shelling. some towns were completely destroyed. Yet, all along the trip, the French gave us a hearty welcome with their waves and well wishes. Very noticeable was the absence of both young men and women, all of whom were either fighting or interned in Germany to work in factories or on farms.

Monday night we docked at a small town along the Seine. Early Tuesday we again continued our journey, and soon reached our destination, the port of Boven, 67 miles from Le Havre and about 80 miles from Paris.

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Unloading and reforming our convoy, we pushed onto the soil of France. It was approximately 30 miles north of Roven that we rejoined the remainder of our company, who had already bivouaced along a main highway for three nights. They had come over on an English liberty ship, and landed at Le Havre:

Tuesday night, I drew guard duty, and as it usually happens, just as I was nicely situated in my sleeping bags the little sleep 1 did get after guard was in the trailer which I had half unloaded. Wednesday was rather uneventful except for various duties on the vehicles. We had quite a few French approach us with milk, cider, cognac and cheese,

trying to trade for "0", bars, cigarettes, soap, or gasoline. Wednesday night, I drove well into the wee hours of the morning through a persistent rein, so again I slept very little. Mud was very deep in the fields and tent areas, so I slept in the jeep's front seat.

Thursday, December 7th, the third year since Pearl Harbor's attack, was again spent preparing for the trip across France. Luckily, we were issued overshoes that day, so my feet were dry for the first time since we left the boat. That night, I helped load the supply room equipment and then finished the night folding up tents. Packing our jeep and trailer Friday morning so that four men could ride with all our equipment, our convey pushed off.

The weather was cold, end had it not been that we enclosed the jeep with shelter halfs, we probably would have frozen. As it was, we were able to keep our squad gas burner lit cooking our rations as well as heating the jeep. I had "moonlight requisitioned"' a gallon of chili concarne from the kitchen the night previous, and that helped warm us no end. All through France, civilians continually ran up to the jeeps at parking places- trying to trade or begging food or cigarettes. In other cases, women came out with hot coffee, perhaps
feeling gratified in paying some American for the indebteness because of liberation. We were not fortunate enough to be I one of those jeeps.

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Belgium came along, and scenes changed very slightly. Many French towns bad been partly or completely demolished by bombs and shells. Belgian towns were too. Civilians were very friendly - young people were a rarity. French farmers were using oxen and cows with, or in place of horses, but now I saw the famous Belgian horses, and fine looking animals they were, too. Belgian forests were well kept, mostly evergreens, and plentious in number. Buildings looked as though they were built well. We were still on the Military Red Ball Highway, so civilian traffic could not be observed. Bicycles were very prominent, however,

Climbing into the hills of Belgium, we encountered our first snow. As we climbed, the snow became deeper and driving became dangerous. A few accidents occurred, so on top of a hill, the convoy halted and the order was given to put on chains. Once again we moved on until under cover of darkness we reached our bivouac area some sixteen miles behind the front lines.

Lance "Moose" Barsul and I slept in the jeep that night. We were both plenty tired for want of sleep and because of the long trip that day. So by noon of Saturday, we were quite rested and ready for chow from the kitchen that had been set up that morning. A hot meal felt good again, and how! Looking around, I found the scenery very beautiful. The evergreen forests had been hand planted in straight rows. Snow was heavy on the trees and ground converting the environment into a scene of wondrous beauty; that is, it would have been beautiful if we hadn't had to live in the snow.

Strange as it may seem, back in England we were not allowed to have any outdoor lights or fire at night, but here, a few miles from the front lines, vehicles displayed full headlights and camp fires were flaming within our bivouac areas. I know, for that Saturday night I again walked guard and spent my off hours around eafire with the other guards. At 3:30 that Saturday night, or should I say Sunday morning, Maj. Helms, our

regimental supply officer, heated some water and shaved by the fire no sleep that night again... it's tiring now that I think

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of it.

Sunday morning, instead of the customary church service, we made more preparations to move up to the front lines. Rumors were many and various. Sunday, after dinner, we cleaned our rifles for inspection. At 2:00 P.M. the padre announced that services were about to begin. A few of us dropped our cleaning and congregated about the organs. Little did we realize that this was our last organ music for sometime. Later that night, we sat around the fire talking of our movement into combat on the morrow. From all reports that we had heard, life on the front lines was not so bad.

December 11th was the day - our first day of combat. As the 2nd Division moved out, the 106th Lion Division moved in. We used the same houses, the same communication lines, the same setup as the 2nd had. Our 423rd Regiment replaced the 38th Regiment. Because my wire crew had to pick up wire back in our bivouac area, we did not leave for the front lines until noon. Then we had only a list of towns we had to go through, to find our position.
Passing through St. Vith in Belgium, a town partly pro-nazi, we saw most of the tanks used with 2nd Division's Infantry, leave the town by another route. Later we passed a sign saying, "You are now entering Germany Keep your eyes and ears open". (We may have kept our eyes and ears open, but we find it hard to leave Germany). A GI road sign cautioning traffic of "S" curves showed a girl in a bathing suit - the GI never loses his sense of humor.

On we went through Oberlascherd and Radscheid 'til we reached our home for a few days, the town, of Bucket. Message center and wire section shared a house. Our portion was in what was probably a woodshed. Thirteen wire men slept in this room, the bunks being straw covered wooden slats in tiers of three. A large table occupied the center of the floor surrounded by chairs and settees of all descriptions. The room was heated

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by a pot belly stove, upon which set a large can of water. In one corner near the stove was a coal bin. Back against the banks set an open row of shelves which were soon filled with a case of "K" rations.

George Strong of Seattle, Washington, was my 'bunkie". He and I were the only non-smokers in the crowd (and we both liked fruit juice very much) so he reserved a top compartment for us. He had brought along some homemade fudge which he had received in England, so between both of us, we had fudge and fruit juice each night before turning in.

Tuesday morning, I became more acquainted with the setup of our Headquarters Company and the system of communications. From the switchboard room came a jumbled mass of wires, many of them obsolete, and it was some time before we were able to distinguish even vaguely which wire went where. Our first move then was to ascertain where our lines went and identify them by means of tags. Somehow 2nd Division had operated in a lackadaisical manner as far as wire was concerned, but we

were not content to continue doing so, especially since we did not install the wires.

By Tuesday night, our ears were accustomed to the sound of our artillery shells passing overhead, and also the occasional incoming German shells. We also had learned that anyone showing a light outside at night would be shot, for as yet our guards were "trigger happy". Even luminous wrist watches and compasses were covered.

Food in Headquarters Company had always been very good. In combat it still was. Our kitchen was located in a barn about fifty yards behind our house. While we had to eat standing up, tables were provided about waist height, and eating was quite enjoyable. Breakfasts usually necessitated a flashlight. In addition to three squares a day, the wire men delighted in "mooching" enough food from the kitchen for a 9 o'clock snack. This meal we cooked on the pot belly and squad burner. It consisted of boneless canned chicken, fried

potatoes, bread, butter, and cocoa made from "D" ration chocolate bars and evaporated milk. For dessert we had our "K" ration candy. What a wonderful feeling it was to gather around a table with a tablecloth, and eat food of our own cooking. All the cares of the day seemed to float away as cleaned up our meal in the dim candlelight. Then we'd retire after gathering around the candle to write a letter or two back home.

Wednesday, my crew received an assignment to repair a line from Buchet to Winterscheid where the 18th Reconnaissance Troop was quartered. In order to reach Winterscheid, we had to pass through a town under constant German observation. Belialf was the name of this town. Whenever there seemed to be too much activity through this town, Gerry's artillery would drop in a few shells. Signs were posted to "Keep Moving" and we needed no second invitation. By Wednesday night, we had accomplished very little and since the distance from Winterscheid to our home in Buchet was about 14 miles, it necessitated starting back early in the afternoon. That night we again enjoyed our chicken dinner before retiring.

Thursday, December 14th, we started early in the morning on the same repair job. Most of our work took place right in Belialf where artillery had knocked the lines out. By talking cover behind buildings and trees, one kept out of sight as much as possible. Our crew consisted of Moose, Russ, Mac, and myself. Russ was checking a cable joint on a pole when two shots whizzed by his head. One of the guards stuck his head out the window of a building and told us to move out. Belialf was defended by Anti-Tank company, and this guard was a member of that company.

Thursday night, two of the wire men were out to the latrine when they heard noises in the shed where the jeeps were parked. They saw someone run into the valley so they opened fire. This brought us all out with loaded rifles and threw quite a scare into some of the boys. After everyone was satisfied that no one was snooping anymore, we returned for our chicken

dinner. I had just about finished when the wire chief, Bob Grimes, came in and said we were going to post guards around the building that night. I was one of the guards. It

was cold and quiet, and the remainder of the night proved uneventful except for challenging men going to the outdoor latrine.

Friday morning as soon as it was light, I searched for foot prints around the jeep shed and sure enough found what I wanted in the snow lying on the ground. Tracks showed where someone had crouched next to the shed, and the prints showed his return into the valley on the run. So those who thought the two men were just "trigger happy" changed their minds about the whole affair.

Since I had not slept all night, I was allowed the day off. Most of the afternoon I spent cleaning and revamping our living quarters. Friday night, we again gathered around the table for our meal. Bill Ingerson sat next to me. He was telling how his brother was having a pretty good time in Guadalcanal before he was killed. His other brother had been killed, too. I remember well how he jokingly remarked that maybe he'd get his too. We talked a bit on the subject and promises were made to visit the other's family in case one of us didn't return to the States.

We were awakened exceptionally early Saturday morning. Bob came in with the news that artillery had knocked out many of our lines during the night. We were sent out as soon as possible. My crew went out on the line to Anti-tank Command Post in Belialf. We found that they had no communication whatsoever, and no one to operate the switchboard. It was impossible to repair the line without an operator to answer our call, so we drew straws to determine who stayed behind as an operator. The job fell upon me. The line from the CP to the various outposts in town was the first to be fixed. The outposts reported Gerry infantrymen moving in towards Belialf.

Next call came in from Regimental headquarters. My crew had fixed the line. About ten minutes later, it went out again. Reports from the outposts continued to come in. A seargeant had been killed. Others were wounded. Could we send up reserves? - How about artillery ? About noon, Bill Ingerson's crew came in with another line from Regiment.

I quickly installed the wire in my board. The colonel was given a report on operations, and then artillery was reached through Regimental's switchboard. Firing directions were given through the three boards, and soon Anti-tank men were taking Gerry prisoners. Time bursts rather changed their minds about attacking. They dug in like ground hogs.

Action was reaching a new fervor. Shells began bursting around the house. The first seargeant and I were alone in the switchboard room. We hit the floor. I laid against the door, and he laid against me. With every blast we both flew half way across the room. I crawled. back against the door every time, for windows were shattering all about as. The shelling stopped. Wounded were being carried in. German prisoners were being congregated outside for searching and removal back to the interrogation officer at Regimental Headquarters.

The first seargeant of Anti-Tank yelled, "We'd better get out of here!" So I hooked in a party line, and went downstairs. A man with a back wound walked in and I ripped off his shirt. I went into the kitchen. Two cooks were frying rabbit and pork chops. I grabbed a piece of rabbit and a slice of bread; then I went to see how the

boys outside were doing. Bill Ingerson and Larry White both had their clothing ripped by shrapnel, but fortunately no wounds. Most of the others were shaking, but unhurt. So I returned to the kitchen. Shells began falling again. The cooks hit the floor. I decided I had enough of that, so while the cooks lay on the floor, I fried pork chops. And then I didn't have time to wait until the pork chops were finished. Oh what irony.

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Back to the switchboard, I listened to all the instructions and reports being given. Reserves were supposedly on the way. The situation was fast growing tense and grim. Under" their first fire, Anti-Tank's men held out remarkably well. Two lines to Regiment were now working. The line to the post went out, but was soon fixed. About 4:00 p. m. Col Nagle, assistant Regimental Commander, came up and wanted a forward command post established, so that he might control the situation easier. Bill Ingerson's crew laid the line down to the new CP, and had to remain there since it was too dark to return to the Company. Capt. Avery, our communications officer, also was marooned there as he supervised the installation of radio communications. The forward CP's complement now consisted of about 15 men.

German artillery reached a new intensity that night. Rockets, buzz bombs, and heavy shells flew over head continually. Through the earphones came the reports. Reserves had not come up; artillery had not been heard from; Gerry patrols were moving in. I had no relief or company, food or water since noon. My feet were freezing, but I was hot with excitement. About 2:00 A. M. Ingersoll came thru the line. He said in a voice I shall never forget "We're surrounded. Can't you help us? They're firing machine guns in here now." I felt like going down myself, but knew my job was on the board. About 4:00 A.M., our building seemed to be in danger of capture, so the officer in charge gave the orders to move out. It seemed that only five minutes later everyone had left the place by truck except me.

Basic training had taught me to destroy communications equipment, so I set about destroying the equipment in the room. I burned all instruction books. Next I opened up the back of a walkie-talkie radio set and smashed all the tubes with my foot. My heel care down on a M-209 converter used for encoding and decoding messages. With the bayonet, I slashed all the cords from the switchboard. Piling all the equipment up, I

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wedged a hand grenade under the board, tying a piece of wire to the firing pin. I grabbed my equipment, went out of the room, pulled the wire, and wrote finis to probably $2,000 worth of army equipment.

Leaving the house at about 4:30 A.M., I knew my situation was precarious. It was 3 miles to Buchet. My own men would probably get me if the Gerries didn't. I started crass country taking advantage of cover and making as little noise as possible. I knew approximate where an old road leading to Buchet went through the woods. Through my mind ran a part of Psalm 121, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help". I kept making my way for a steep hill running up into a forest, for I knew I could wait there until daylight. By continual prayer and God's help, I reached the woods, and felt much relieved. Ten minutes later I watched Gerries storm into the house I had just left.

Day-light seemed a million years later, and when it did come, I started ascending the hill carefully, for I knew it was booby-trapped. Upon reaching the road, I heaved another sigh of relief. Proceeding up the road, the first American I saw was Col. Nagle, and was he a welcome sight. I told him my story, and then he told of his escape from the advanced command post. He had been hit in the hip from a Gerry spraying the room, with a burp gun. He smashed through a window and crawled back.

I continued walking back to Headquarters, where I again related my experiences to Bob and the boys. The Company was packed and ready to move. I had had no food or sleep for some time. I gnawed on a niece of candy, and then we loaded up. Sunday night we bivouaced near 3rd Battalion Headquarters, after laying more lines to our various units. Coffee was served for Supper that night. The food and water situation was Critical. We learned for the first tires that we were cut off from supplies.

Sunday afternoon, Capt. Avery and some of the boys came back. They had held off in Belialf all night. They related how Gerries marched up the street in formation. Upon being halted, the command "Achting" rang out. The Gerry patrol dispersed. Larry White knocked off six of the Huns. Had our boys have had automatic weapons, the whole patrol could have have been wiped out. Toward morning, after crawling for almost a mile under sniper fire, our boys reached cover, and finally Headquarters. Bill Ingerson must have had that premonition of death, for he was hit in the head, and never moved again. About 2 dozen Gerries paid with their lives for his death.

After digging in Sunday night, we prepared to sleep in our fox holes. "Moose" and I dug ours together, and had enough room to sit up. We slept only from sheer exhaustion. Monday morning, I ate my last GI meal - that is for a while. Not having eaten in two days, that breakfast as one I shan't forget. Powered eggs and oatmeal, as well as coffee. Three times I had my mess gear filled, and now I know it was only half the number of times I should have gone through the line.

We loaded up and waited to move. Confusion was evident amongst the officers for they knew not which direction to go. While waiting, a few of us congregated at my jeep where we held a carol sing and prayer service. (Strange, but every man who attended that service came through urharmed). All day we moved, but didn't go far. By nightfall, a new CP had been set up and again we laid lines, only this time in the dark. Before we could lay one line the CP moved again. We started on another line. I trudged through mud knee deep half the night. and finally learned the CP had moved again.

All of the 423rd regiment's vehicles were taken down a mud road and parked. The distributor rotors were removed, and preparations made to abandon the vehicles if necessary. We slept in the woods for the remaining portion of the night. Bright on early Tuesday morning, the fatal Tuesday morning, the drivers replaced the rotors and prepared to move. Only a few

got up the hill When all hell broke loose. Shells began falling all about us. We moved about 200 yards to a clump of trees. Shells continued to fall. I saw many of our men hit. Medics were gathering the wounded. Chaplains were administering last rites. Men were digging in with their bare hands. It's surprising what a hole one can make when he

needs to.

Determined to fight our way out, patrols started moving on foot when the shelling had subsided. Throughout the day, we moved a little, waited, then moved again. Rifle and machine gun fire was increasing. The weapons were all in favor of the Gerries. About 2:00 P. M. we seemed to meet stiff resistance as we dug in again. I had just finished digging another hole with my hands when the order came back to destroy our weapons and surrender.

PART II
IMPRISONMENT

Tuesday, December 19th, 1944 was the day - 4:00 P.M. was the time. German prisoners of war --what a sickening feeling! Hands over head, we were double timed to an open field where we were searched. All GI equipment was taken away. We were marched out behind German tanks and emplacements. The Colonel and all his remaining men, as well as most of the men of the 422nd Regiment stretched out into a long column of tired, hungry, beaten soldiers.

Up the road that night came a long line of German equipment. Huge "Tiger" tanks forced us off the road. Intermingled in their convoys were horse drawn pieces. All vehicles were well camouflaged. German soldiers stopped us and removed our wallets, wrist watches, cigarettes; just about everything they can pilfer, they took. I slipped my watch in my shoe, so I lost very little as a Gerry hastily went through my pockets. We walked about 8 miles that night.

Reaching a small town, we had visions of sleeping in a warm build ing. Like so many of our later dreams, we were disappointed, for the night was spent in a barnyard. I gave my overcoat to a wounded man, so like many others, found the night very cold.

The next morning we were reassembled and began our journey to a prison camp. We walked behind the great Siegfried line. It was sickening to see American soldiers lying stiff and frozen beside a wrecked armored car, their shoes removed for use by some Heinie. About noon, the procession stopped at a turnip field and we were allowed to grab some large raw turnips for our dinner. Having had no food for 2 1/2 days, turnips took on a new taste - more like a steak dinner I guess.

Continuing behind the Siegfried lines pillboxes, we saw mine field after mine field. Tank barriers of all kinds were set in the fields. Trees were partly

cut through with charges set in the cut, so that road blocks could be quickly made. Fake gun emplacements set on both sides of the road. Some of the vehicles we had left behind were already parked along the road with our clothes and equipment in them. Drivers saw our vehicles being used by the enemy and it added to our heartsickness. In the afternoon we passed through Pruim. German civilians smiled as though they defeated the whole America Army, but 3,500 of us was only a small portion in an army of 3 million front line soldiers. Undoubtedly this drive had netted the Gerries

more prisoners than ever before in fact, the soldiers were boasting that they would be in Paris by Christmas, but much as Pruim's civilians smiled, we smiled back, for not one of the buildings in the town was untouched by bombs. Many were completely demolished.

On and on we walked, till men started falling by the wayside. We drank water from the ditches along the road. Our total journey for day they was about 40 kilometers or 25 miles, quite a journey without food, water or sleep. We again stayed outdoors that night, and were promised food. This was supposed to be a PW camp. My hips had become so stiff with rheumatism, that I could hardly stand. Men were being carried into the small medical office in great numbers.

Somehow the night went quickly and I received no food. I was now separated from my company. Soon I was herded into a column of men and we were walked back into town finally stopping at a railroad station. Daylight broke and we read the name of the town, Geroldstein. After we had stood for about 2 hours, a truck pulled up, and we were given two small bags of hardtack crackers each, and a can of cheese similar to limburger for every six men.

A train of boxcars pulled up, and we were counted off into groups of sixty. Officers loaded first, but only fifty to a car. I kept dropping back in line until I met two men from Headquarters company and went aboard

with them. Gerry guards were pitching horse manure from the car before we got in. It was approximately 10:00 A. M. December 21st when we saw the boxcar door close behind us.

On the boxcar were men from both the 28th and 106th Divisions. Part of the 28th was captured in the same drive, and they had been walked to Geroldstein from Luxembourg, a distance of about 60 miles. Now 60 of us were sharing a car no bigger than the "40 and eights" of World War I days. A sliding door on both sides of the car were the entrances. One screened window in each of the corners of the ear, with hinged wooden flap provided our daylight. Another set of ventilators near the floor kept the car floor cold , and uncomfortable at night.

We left Geroldstein about 4:00 P.M. The train was jerky and had frequent stops and backups. Next morning we were still in Geroldstein, our only move having been to change sidings. Sleeping conditions were terrible. There was room enough for all 60 of us to sit down by one men spreading his legs and another sitting between them. Needless to say, the nights were long and not much sleep was realized by anyone. We received no food or water Friday; neither were we allowed out of the car. Sometime Friday night, the train started again. It seemed that the only travel was under cover of darkness.

Saturday morning we found ourselves in the town of Diez. From guards, our German speaking comrades learned that there was a prisoner camp nearby. Our hopes rose slightly. We were allowed off the train for five minutes and six men were allowed to fetch water. Steel helmets were filled, and most everyone received a drink. About noon of the 23rd, we received food. Each man was given 1/4 of a loaf of black bread and a spoon of

molasses. The molasses was good, but the bread tasted mighty peculiar then. Little did I know that some day I would look forward to eating it.

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The night of the 23rd shall remain long in my memory and not only in mine but in everyone's in that trainload of probably 3,600 American prisoners. Darkness had fallen, and we had our seats for the night. An air-raid alarm sounded. Bombs started falling a short distance away. Each bomb fell a little nearer. Allied planes were bombing the tracks in Diez, and our position was perilous. Someone broke out in a lord's prayer. Almost instantaneously, every voice was heard in solemn prayer to almighty God for deliverance. There were no atheists then.

The last bomb hit so close that stones splattered against the car as it trembled on the tracks. The bombing subsided. A Catholic man broke out with the Rosary, and many joined in. I led the car in prayer, followed by the Lord's Prayer before our fears were quelled and we returned to our sitting-sleeping positions. Prayer had worked wonders, for quietness again fell in the car and men dropped into slumber.

The day before Christmas we received no food or water. The tracks were out, and we were still in Diez. The prison camp nearby was full, so it was evident we were going elsewhere. Eight men had been killed the night before; 35 were injured. Christmas Eve came around. I led the car in service and prayer. We sang carols; I prayed, and then talked briefly on the birth of Christ and its meaning to us. The only Negro in our car gave us a review of Dickens "Christmas Story''. Another gave a short story review by Guy De Maupassant.

Our prayers for food were answered. Christmas Day we received British Red Cross boxes - one box for five men. We were told this must last us for two days. Before we opened any of them, I was requested to give thanks to God. This I did. The box contained powdered eggs, oatmeal, condensed milk, sugar, salt, cocoa, salmon, crackers, jam, corned beef, cottage pudding, and a chocolate bar. It was a mighty slim ration for two days, but it sure made the day more like Christmas.

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We even received water Christmas Day as well as a five minute airing.

Tuesday we were still at Diez and again we received water. Wednesday afternoon the train started moving and by jerks we reached the city of Frankfort late that night. Instead of two days on that Red Cross Box, it was three. Some of the men's eyes were getting glassy, as though their minds would crack under the confinement. No food, no water, no exercise, no sleep, no cigarettes! Fine treatment when we thought of German P.W's riding in coaches in America receiving the best of care and food.

Thursday morning the train backed up a one track railroad, and we arrived at the town of Bad Orb. Eight days in a boxcar - our only German food being a quarter of a loaf of broat. We were much relieved to alight from the car. Marching through the town, we saw many hotels and tourists houses, giving evidence of a resort town. About 3 miles up the road we arrived at our new home, Stalag (Prisoner Camp) IX-B. It was located high on a hill amidst evergreen forests.

Our first move December 28th was to be searched and registered. Officers went first, then noncoms, followed by the privates. Some of the searchers again grabbed fountain pens and personal items. After registration, we received German dog tags. Next we fell in line for chow. It was a new experience eating from a steel helmet. My dog tag number is 25708. As we passed one window, we received a quart of greens, most likely sugar beet tops, in a greasy water. Passing another window a cook threw in a handful of unpeeled potatoes. Not having washed or shaved for nearly half a month, we looked pretty pitiful gulping down this warm food, but it did taste wonderful. I guess hunger shows no respect for taste, for we would not have given our hogs food that bad back in America.

After dinner we were ushered into a barracks, 42B by number. 300 of us were to sleep in this one room. There were no beds - just a plain wooden floor

with two radiating heaters in the center. Again there was not enough room for everyone to stretch out, especially since we needed aisles so that men could use the latrine at night. There were electric lights from 7 to 9 P.M., but after that time, men continually stepped on one another. Arguments were many, and the un-comfortableness increased every night.

I slept next to Frankie DeLorenzo. I had become acquainted with him on the boxcar and we became more and more friendlier. We picked out a spot near the door, and found it to our advantage later. Ed Cornell slept next to him. Then came Fred Roys, Francis Roselle, and Joe Purl. When we later formed into six man groups, these were the six and this same group has been intact ever since.

We settled down, more or less, just before New Years. We received coffee with sugar in the morning, a liter (1.06 quarts) of soup at noon and black bread, margarine and tea at night. Six men received one loaf of bread weighing approximately 4 lbs. Altogether these three meals would equal about 1/2 of an American meal. The soups for the first week were mostly greens. About every third day, we received a bean soup or a carrot soup, or a pea soup. These were much tastier.

Greens had caused another problem. Nearly everyone had a case of diarrhea from the new diet. Our day latrine was outside. At night the only convenience was a 10 inch hole in the floor. 300 men had to use that hole, most of them many times a night. Every morning found our hallway and latrine room a filthy mess - worse than our hog pens have ever been.

Sunday, December 31st we had church services, New Year's Eve slipped by unnoticed as did New Years Day. During the week, we received straw to sleep on and wood for our stoves at night. Improvements seemed on the way. Cardboard was furnished for the broken

windows, and a German blanket was issued. A hospital was set up with no medical supplies. A collection was made of supplies from the men in camp. It all helped for a little while.

Russian cooks gave us our food. We needed a German interpreter to talk to the guards who needed a Russian interpreter to talk to the cooks. Much trouble was had by the German guards in keeping us from slipping back into the chow lines for doubles. I managed to slip back in for bean soup a few times. We had to stand in the cold and snow for at least 1/2 hour to receive our soup. Our other food was brought to the barracks.

On January 6th, we wrote home on PW stationery. Most of us requested packages from home, three days later we received post cards, and I asked that my packages be discontinued, because it sounded rather hopeless that we should ever receive them. We never did.

The cigarette situation was critical. Cigarettes cost 1000 francs or $23 each. 1/6 of a loaf of bread sold for 500 francs. Watches were worth $200 and good fountain pens brought $100. One man who was fortunate enough to bring along an ample supply of tobacco made a young fortune. G.I.'s would take their jewelry to the Russians and French and trade for American Red Cross cigarettes. Potatoes would sell for $1 each and a half-ration of soup went for $5. Inflation in America Mould be no problem after this.

On January 10th, the officers shipped out. Those who remained were three medical officers and two chaplains who volunteered to stay behind. Lt. Sutherland, Capt. Buxton, doctors, Capt. Eder, dentist, Chaplain Neel, the protestant chaplain, and Chaplain Hurley, the Catholic chaplain comprised our staff of officers. Kasten and Eddy were the American representatives for the camp.

The officer's shipment was quite a break for us. While they ate the same chow awl received almost the same treatment as we, they had the best barracks and they did sleep in bunks. The bunks were wooden slats built 3 high. Excelsior was piled on the boards. We had already been put through a sulfur delousing process, but that was of little help when we mowed into the officer's barracks, 42A. Germany's collection of bed bugs, fleas and annoying little bugs is both unique and complete. Many a sleepless night has been spent because of those little German friends, or should I say enemies. Hand delousing is a daily routine with the majority of men. Unconsciously, various fellows have scratched so much, that they have received fingernail infections. All in all, though, I was very glad to get off the floor at night, as well as in a warmer barracks.
American cooks, all privates, took over our kitchen on January 12th. Meals were a little worse for a week. Ladles of "lawn mower stew" became smaller until the cooks knew how much to make. An oatmeal soup bolstered our opinion of the GI's cooking; in fact, it was our best soup thus far.

On January 14th, we received our first news, through the Germans. The Russians had started a new winter offensive. Two days later, admission was made that Germany was in its darkest hour. By January 23rd, Warsaw and Kralsow had fallen; Czeckoslovakia was cut in half; upper Silesia was invaded. Rumors said that Russia was 60 kilometers inside German.

A Red Cross representative visited our camp on the 24th of .January. Our food and fuel improved that day, but fell back to normal the next day. Germans started giving us cheese, marmalade, and sometimes meat with our bread and margarine. Tea and coffee was void of sugar, and we had to wait some time for sugar to some in.

Saturday, January 27th was another long remembered night for the prisoners in Stalag IX B. About

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11:00 P. M. our doors were opened and in rushed guards with steel helmets, rifles and bayonets. "Ouss, ouss" was the cry, and they started using the butts of their rifles. The barracks was cleared in short order. Even the very sick were forced out into the cold night. Snow was at least 8 inches deep. Many fellows had no overshoes, some had no shoes. One man was barefooted. It was very evident that something "big" was up. We were taken under spotlights and searched. After 3/4 of an hour in the cold, we were locked in the barracks again. It was then we learned the meaning of our treatment. A German guard making his final check in the kitchen had been attacked by two men. He had seen a man's feet under a table. Ordering him out, someone hit him with a hatchet. Fourteen times he was hit, but before he lost consciousness, he had summoned help and described the slayers as Americans.

Sunday morning, all Americans were again lined up in one group. Machine guns covered us from all angles. An ultimatum was given by the camp commander Either we Americans apprehend the guilty party or we would receive no food, water, or fuel. We returned to the barracks, a heavy feeling in our hearts. 2,800 of us suffering for two men, and conditions looked black indeed. I know I prayed and probably every one else did too.

Each individual barracks started their own investigation. Our door had been found open by the guards the night before. The barracks leader swore that our German guard had locked it. All clothes, overshoes, and bunks were searched. A pair of bloody shoes were found on an upper bunk near mine. More bloody clothes were found. The owners were questioned. Chaplain Neel came in and furthered the investigation. By 2:00 P.M., confessions had been signed and we received the good news that not only would we receive our bread, tea, and margarine, but soap as well. We later received a half ladle of thick oatmeal soup. So relieved were we, that I jumped upon a table and lead the entire barracks in a church service. The

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next day our barracks received extra soup for the fine work of apprehension. German officers were so pleased with our cooperation than they sent up a bag of tobacco and papers, enough for a 'roller! apiece. Our prayers were answered.

On the 1st of February we received our first Red Cross package. These were loaned to us by the Serbian prisoners, so no credit is due the Red Cross for these. Four men had to share the box designed for one man. All cans were opened necessitating the disposal of the food within 2 or 3 days. It was good of the Serbs to give as their boxes, but pathetic to think every nationality was receiving American boxes except Americans. Our box consisted of the following items: 5 packs of cigarettes, 2 chocolate bars, 1 lb. of powdered milk, span, salmon., liverwurst, corned beef, 1/2 lb. sugar, coffee, biscuits, preserved butter, jam, and Velveta cheese. Cigarettes helped, a lot, and trading food for cigarettes occupied our minds for a few days.

400 men shipped out on February 6th. In the afternoon, American P-47's dive-bombed Bad Orb. Four planes strafed our camp, killing four Americans and wounding

seven. Many Russians were also hit, killing three. Later we heard that it was an accident and that our Air Force knew this was a PW camp. This information came from a captured flyer.

Stealing amongst the GIs never helped our situation. Our possessions were few, but we did value them. We did have those weak minded Americans who
although everyone was hungry, persisted in taking another man's bread. Thefts were numerous and some-times almost unbelievable. Smitty, the fellow in the bunk below me, and I had soup on his bunk which we had intended to warn up the supper. Someone emptied the helmet even though we never left the bunk all day. It's a pity that men could be so low as to steal the hosts from the Catholic Chaplain. I guess this life is the real test of a man.

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Our meals were fairly good ever since the GI cooks were out in the kitchen. A blackboard listed our meals daily with the weight of each item listed. 453 grams equals one lb. A typical pea soup consisted of 50 grams of peas, 550 grams of potatoes and 40 grams of meat. In other words, if we received a
piece of meat, usually horsemeat, weighing 1-1/4 ounces, our limit was reached. At night our rations consisted of 300 grams of bread and 20 grams of margarine or about 3/4 of an ounce. Twice a week we received marmalade, usually 50 grams. On Sunday night we almost always received sausage, mostly liverwurst. This was again 40 grams. Sometimes we received a head cheese sausage. They also gave us cheeses occasionally. One was a round cheese almost like limburger. Twice we received 125 grams of cottage cheese.

Chaplain Neel carried on many religious activities in camp. On February 8th, barracks 42A won the Bible quiz. Royal Meservy, Hank Hoen and I were the barrack's entries, and we finished the contest with a perfect score. On Wednesday afternoons, the Chaplain held a Bible class. On Friday afternoons, he held a community sing. Both religious and secular songs were sang, and specialty numbers provided added entertainment. Chaplain Neel introduced the Stalag IX B theme song, "Come and Get Us Georgie Patton". At a community sing, I soloed the song I wrote, "The Spud Soup Serenade". Chaplain Neel has done a fine job. In fact I daresay we can attribute more lives saved to the work of both Chaplains than to any other factor.

On February 9th Royal Meservy and I initiated a nightly prayer for the barracks. We'd sing out patriotic song, offer a prayer, and then sing a religious song. Royal and I alternated on giving prayers. Upon recommendation that Royal be a church soloist (for he has a fine voice) Chaplain Neel chose him choir leader and a better choice could not have been made. He organized and directed a fine choir whose singing has been inspirationaI throughout

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the camp. Chaplain Neel also organized prayer groups for each barracks. I was chosen chairman of the group in 42A and have led a Bible class every morning. This was quite a new experience to teach the Bible to over 15 men, since I've never taught any class before, especially not a Sunday school class.

Our allowance of 2 letters and 4 cards a month gave us some diversion to keep up our writing ability. Of coarse we never expected to receive an answer from any of them, but

we did hope our letters were reaching home. Paper was more scarce than snow in Florida, but most everyone saved the 2 sheets a month toilet paper allowance. On these went diaries, news, addresses, and recipes, mostly recipes. What concoctions some fellows dreamt up. Every conceivable way of fixing every conceivable food was discussed and written down. Every man's dream was to learn how to cook when he reached home, and many of them will, but in my opinion, as soon as some of our hungriness is relieved, we'll forget a lot about revamping our old styles of cooking. In addition to foods, topics and plans ranged from gardens to businesses, Army life to church life, hobbles to jobs, and past parties to future banquets.

The Germans were getting jittery. A recreation hall was opened on February 12th. Musical instruments , a gramophone, playing cards, checkers and games were provided. The 'rec' hall was also used as a chapel. Later tables and benches were placed in the hall along with a ping pong table. An increasing number of men used these facilities every day to help pass the time.

By February 15th, the weather had warned considerably. Bombers flew overhead continually. Hundreds would pass over every clear day. Almost every day and night, Bad Orb's siren wailed. News was better. On the eastern front, Russia had bridgeheads over the Oder. Germans admitted gains

daily, and when the Germans admit anything, it's usually mach worse for them than the news they release. On the western front, Prium was taken. Americans were attacking all along the Rhine, and the Gerries had to retreat to the eastern bank of the river in some spots. Germans claimed. to stop a British drive by flooding the Ruhr valley. Rumors stated Berlin had fallen and that von Ribbentrop was in a peace conference with Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin.

For the remainder of February, our existence remained about the same. Because of transportation difficulties, Our scan meat did not cone in regularly. At the and of the month, more PW's were being marched in. A group from the camp at Geroldstein marched eight days. Americans were getting close in that area. Our spirits were raised by the sound of artillery in the distance. Russians were gaining near Berlin, Breslau was reported under attack. Americans still had not crossed the Rhine, but rumors almost convinced us that they had.

March came in like a lion. Despite the cold weather, the Air Corps flew over day and night. Rumors had it that Roosevelt said this would be our happiest Easter. It seemed like an all out offensive was launched. Bad Orb was bombed one night when someone became careless with a light. Seven Germans were killed. From then on we had no more electric lights in camp. Fires had to be extinguished at 6:30 P. M.

From March 1st to March 10th, life was still a dull routine. The weather was gloomy, and our spirits fluctuated with new rumors. On March 1st, barracks 42A was pitted against barracks 29 in a "Take it or Like It" quiz. Royal Meservy, another man, and I were the representatives from our barracks. 29 beat us, but I came out on top for high score, and won the only prize, a pipe. This is another souvenir of stalag IX B.

News continued to sound better and better. Tanks had taken the whole western bank of the Rhine by March 10th. Street fighting was reported in Cologne. British

and American troops had joined forces. Russia was still making gains and breakthroughs but their rapid advancements seemed to have been stopped.

Rumors of Red Cross packages had practically disappeared when on March 12th, Eddy, the chief interpreter, came in with the news that packages had arrived at Bad Orb and that we would get them soon. We did receive our packages on March 14th. Three men shared a one-man package. Our package consisted of prunes, cocoa, cheese, oleomargarine, biscuits, jam, sugar, salt and pepper mixtures, corned beef, chicken pate, coffee and sardines, as well as 5 packs of butter.

Weather warmed considerably about the middle of the month. The warm sunshine invited us outdoors for the greater part of the day. All was not well in camp, however. A case of spinal meningitis had broken out, and Americans were quarantined to their area for ten days. This threw a scare into all of us, especially since we had no medical supplies. The man died. Throughout the winter we had very few deaths considering our situation. Men coming in from other camps reported high fatality rates. Our hospital was full of pneumonia cases. Hot chocolate from a Red Cross package saved one man's life. Deaths were increasing mostly because men had no reserve energy from the small amount of rations to fight off sickness. It was a pity to have these American soldiers die helplessly, especially after coming through this far.

News continued to sound better and better. Our hopes for liberation in the month of March increased. Our nightly prayer always concluded with a petition for freedom in March. A rumor circulated that the Philippines in the South Pacific had fallen. Yanks were still driving, and had crossed the Rhine at Remagen. Artillery was heard in the distance. At night flares were reported seen.

Russians were still attacking heavily. The Rhine crossing sounded very good, for on March 21st, Germany news reported the 1st Army was driving hard on the Audubon highway, and that fighting for Koblenz was taking place.

On March 20th, 400 British prisoners were brought in. They had been walked clear across Germany, a distance of 400 miles. Walking for six weeks straight, 800 men were lost on the way. Oh, how happy we can be that we haven't moved from this camp. These chaps reported many civilians as pro-British. German towns were leveled all along the way. Other shipments of British Indians reached camp. They had walked for eight weeks, averaging about 15 miles a day. Russians were close to their camp near Breslau, on the Polish border. It seems that this camp is the last resort. Pressure on both fronts must be terrific. Why doesn't Germany give up?

Rations were cut on March 13th. Bread was reduced from 300 grams to 250 grams. On Wednesday and Saturdays, we dropped to 210 grams or 8 men dividing a regular six man loaf. Marmalade was cut out. Margarine dropped to 1/2 ounce per day. Soup meat was lowered to an ounce a day, and sometimes none. Salt was not to be had and our systems soon suffered from the lack of it. Dizziness was prevalent throughout our camp,

mental blackouts were frequent, Sugar was reduced to 1/4 of our regular amount. Soups were flat, and only half of the regular potatoes were allowed. Rye flour made the soup thick. German "C2" rations seasoned it a little, but it was still flat and rather untasty. We couldn't say a word against it, though, if we'd only remember the greens they once served us.

Morale increased by leaps and bounds. On March 23rd, artillery smoke was seen on the horizon. I actually saw a burst of artillery the first since combat. Vehicles were heard moving on the road. A vehicle around here is an innovation. All travel is

on foot, or by horse and wagon. Immediately, we all assumed that Germans were moving out of the area. Hopes for liberation in March increased.

On March 24th, another case of spinal meningitis broke out. The quarantine was again stuck us for another ten days. It was almost a daily routine to line up along the kitchen street and pay our last respects to another American soldier.
Funeral processions were taking place regularly, it seemed. Malnutrition or "German pneumonia" was taking its toll. Those who made the supreme sacrifice in a PW camp took their last ride on a two-wheeled cart. No casket was provided - blankets covered the body. Burial was made in a small cemetery outside of camp. Crosses printed in German script marked the graves of the deceased. Oh ! why must wars be fought and men suffer so ?

Sunshine and warm weather helped morale a lot. The sun was warm enough that some received burns on the face. A beach atmosphere prevailed as everyone lay on their blankets with their shirts off. Morale again leaped on March 25th. Rumors were that the camp commander had signed the camp over to the Americans and had taken off. Other guards were leaving for home that night. Spirits were very high as we talked of powdered eggs and "K" rations for Easter. American PW's acting as military police were placed inside the barbed wire fences to prevent any of us from trying to escape. Our safety within the garrison almost seemed a surety.

Oh joy! Liberation seemed almost at hand. Souvenier hunters started working, and on March 27th, we again recieved American Red Cross. packages. Rumors had placed the number of boxes sufficient for one per man. Cigarettees sold like hotcakes for $23 a pack. About noon we watched 20 fighter planes mostly P-47's, continually circle our camp. On the Plaza near the the hospital, a huge white PW had been painted with lime. One pilots had swooped down, tipped his wings and waved with his hand

showing his recognition of us. Watching the planes maneuver overhead was a thrilling sight. A target would be found, and one by one the planes would peel off in a dive, at the same time opening up with their machine guns. Our Red Cross boxes were a target, or so the Germans say. On the way up from Bad Orb, two wagonloads were claimed destroyed, as well as the four horses. When the news was divulged, smiles disappeared. What boxes we did get were enough for 11 men on a box - just a good mouthful of food. We all believe the Germans story of those wagons being strafed is a lot of poppycock. Some Germans are probably eating good American food today, but if the story is true, we should have a lot of horsemeat for our soup. You can't keep an

American doughboy down!

This is March 28th. My diary has now been brought up to date permitting me to write in the present tense at various times. Today was another tense day of waiting. Hopes are still high for freedom by Easter. German guards were giving away bread. A number of them were seen leaving camp with suitcases, evidently for home.

Again today our heels clicked together and the hand salute was given to two more men who have given their all for their country. Oh, please, dear God, send in our Army that we may have the medical supplies to save these American comrades. Our death rate is increasing. Today, also, two barracks were quarantine because of diphtheria; another disease to contend with.

Holy Thursday has passed away. News released by the Germans through their "newspaper ", "The Wermacht Express"' placed Yanks 14 miles from Bad Orb. Another Spearhead has bypassed us on the south. Better news than that is the news we hear of combat within the area. Early in the morning, and again in the after noon, German convoys of tanks and trucks rambled down the hill past our camp towards Bad Orb. From our map, we believed one end of this road has been cut off. Late this evening, blasts of tank guns were heard probably four or five miles away. Apparently the

Germans have been trapped on this road, for vehicles are coming back up the road.

We also have some new prisoners. A prisoner brought in last Tuesday was a captive of four days. Wednesday another came in having been captured but two days. This morning, a wounded Yank came in and he was taken just yesterday evening. His reconnaissance car had been hit and destroyed. Walking to Bad Orb, he stayed overnight, walking the other three miles this morning. It can't be too long now.

Today also the finals of the camp quiz contest "Take it or Like it" came off. Camp Champion is a man from barracks 24. I was one of the four men entered in the finals, but did not end up so well. Questions were asked on several topics. Some were history, geography, religion, sports, radio, movies, science, current events, sociology, personalities, food, and many others.

It's Good Friday and with all due respect we remember the death of our Lord Jesus Christ nearly 2,000 years ago. In commemoration of the three hours He spent on the cross, the Protestants held services from noon to 1:30 P.M., while Catholics held mass from 1:30 to 3:00. The Protestant service was an all musical service presented by the choir. Holy Communion was participated in at the Wednesday service. Liberation by Easter! Will those Yank soldiers make this hope a reality? Our water supply will last but two days. Fuel for pumping the water is practically gone. Food supplied from Bad Orb is cut off. While our rye flour soup was very think, and tasty today, we received no bread, or brot as the Germans called it. In place of it, we were given three large potatoes or four medium spuds, many of them rotten, but then we are used to rotten potatoes, having eaten them every day for 92 days now, peelings and all. The spuds were boiled with the skins. Our regular 1/2 ounce margarine improved the flavor greatly.

News is very encouraging. This morning an American .50 caliber machine gun was heard. The infantry can't be too far away. This afternoon, fighter planes supported a terrific barrage of artillery. Bad Orb must be taking a beating. Civilians were reported rushing wagons, baby buggies, and carts full of personal equipment on the hill past the camp. The Gerry guards are still leaving for home. This morning wood details were sent out of the gates without a guard! The end must be close!

The surprise of all surprises came last night when it was announced more Red Cross boxes were found somewhere in camp. Enough were found so that 20 men shared one man's box, a ridiculously small amount. Yet it did supply five cigarettes for each man, and God only knows how many men have suffered in this camp for lack of them. Someday I'm going to the Red Cross and ask to buy one whole box. I'd like to know how it feels to eat one by myself.

Unofficial liberation! This Saturday, the last day of March, has brought with it good news - excellent news. While official liberation is still pending, spirits arose to a new high as barriers between nationalities were torn down allowing our Allied prisoners to exchange greetings. A near riot occurred in front of the kitchen when someone started a rumor that the Yanks were here, but like so many rumors, this was only a temporary morale raiser. Artillery was again pounding away, and small arms fire was very distinctly heard. In this evening's closing hours, tracers from a 30 caliber machine gun or a Browning Automatic were seen over the ridge.

That wood detail which went out yesterday really went out further than they needed to; in fact, two fellows took off for the front lines. Keeping well in the woods, they saw the German's line and the approximate American positions about four miles from Bad Orb. They went to a farmhouse where a German woman fed them well, showing that some Germans must want a cessation of this brutal war and that they do not all hate the Americans, as German propandandists have taught them to do.

Evening surprises are becoming a regularity. Instead of bread or potatoes this afternoon, we were given another ladle of that thick rye flour soup we enjoyed this forenoon. In addition to that, every man was given 2 packs of French cigarettes. I hope these last until the Yanks do bring in supplies.

Easter Sunday! What a grand, glorious day, even for a Prisoner of War. Sure, we attended church services in a drab, cold, combination recreation hall, chapel and barracks, but the hope of soon rejoining our loved ones in our own church back home unlifted our spirits to a new level. Both Protestant services and Catholic mass were well attended. Chaplain Neel baptized 3 more men at the morning service, bringing the total number of baptisms up to 25 since the entrance of Americans into this stalag.

Easter dinner! More thoughts of home, Baked Virginia ham, Easter eggs, sweet potatoes, candy – its all a dream this year. We lined up in our usual lines with our steel helmets, tin cans, and pails, passed by one of the four windows where a GI cook stood beside a barrel of soup, and watched the usual liter of spud soup fall into our container. It was a delicious soup, flavored with peas, and heavy enough to support the ounce piece of meat. No matter what or how little I get, I'll not fail to give thanks, for deep within me are the remembrances of foodless days. A lesson this life has taught me!

After dinner, morale dropped to a new low. In every barracks, a quiet tenseness prevailed. Never before was waiting so trying. Our liberators are out there, but why don't

they come? Rumors had died out; the water supply was again cut off, our usual black bread and margarine was distributed and devoured. But evening came, and with it a surprise, and what a surprise!
Hardly a shot had been fired all day. We almost believed our troops had been driven back. About dusk all heIl broke loose as mortars, machine guns, and

rifles blazed out in a steady volley. Barracks were emptyed as we rushed out to hear the fireworks more distinctly. "This is it" said everyone, as they watched smoke arise from the valley. Morale soared higher than the mercury of a thermometer in hot water. I don't believe there should be any break between Sunday and Monday. Due to "Jerry Bedbug", hardly anyone has had a nights sleep for a time. With the additional news Sunday night that liberation may come at any moment, it seemed foolish for us to even think about sleep. Accordion music and singing, followed by the nightly prayers, kept spirits soaring. Noise and confusion died down slightly, and many of us tried to catch a few winks of sleep.

LIBERATION

Monday, Easter Monday, April 2, 1945 is here. It's a day not one of us shall ever forget. I was lying on my bunk reading my Testament. No one seemed to have any rumors or news. At 8:15 A.M., our barracks leader returned from a meeting. "Boys, we're liberated" he exclaimed. "There's three tanks at the gate, now". A wild cheer went up throughout the barracks. Leaping out of bed, I rushed up to Royal Meservy grabbing his hand. Together we were able to quiet the barracks. I asked that every man kneel down on the floor while we thanked God. Three hundred men responded by falling to their knees while I offered a short prayer of praise to Almighty God for our deliverance, followed by the Lord's Prayer. 11:00 A.M. of November 11th shall never equal this time and this date. I shall always respect it, by repeating every year my actions of this morning.

Rushing out of the barracks, we saw our first powered vehicle of the year, an American recon car; at least we saw a very small part of it. Both of the Chaplains were riding. More recon cars, a jeep and some tanks came in. The mob of prisoners went wild as they fought for "K" rations, souvenirs, ammunition and autographs. Tanks were stripped barer than Gypsy Rose Lee in her prime. What a sight! Everyone happy, cheering, waving, shaking hands, crowding the tanks. Paris girls reception of American doughboys couldn't possibly equal this.

Our liberating party was the 71st Cavalry troops of the 2nd Corps, part of Gen. Patton's 3rd Army. Official liberation time was 6:15 A.M. Sunday evening. Eddy, the chief interpreter, was taken to Bad Orb. He was told that the Germans would surrender the town and camp if the Americans would cease firing. Eddy started for the Yank's front lines and here we are back in the custody of the United States Army.

Some boys were lucky. They managed to pilfer

the vehicles for "K" rations. One fellow secured a can of chopped pork and eggs. I was given a taste of these eggs. Who said there is no Easter Bunny ? Another man was given a live chicken. Having been a cook in the Army, he stuffed the bird with potatoes and onions, and then roasted it over an open fire in the furnace. It takes a hungry PW to appreciate food American style. As for us who were content to wait for a chow truck to come in, our usual ladle of flour soup was dished out. Someone gave a taste to one of the liberating party. He spit it out. At night, the usual loaf of bread for seven men and a pat of margarine were distributed. Never before have I been so hungry,. Watching other fellows eat crackers, candy, cheese and chicken is a bad thing to do, especially when there's no way for one to do the same.

In the afternoon of liberation day, we were told to prepare ourselves for immediate evacuation. Rumors that we were to fly back kept popping up all over camp. Estimates as to when we'd get back home varied from ten days to two months. Everyone was happy.

Night came around. The white flag still fluttered over Stalag IX B's clock tower; no evacuation as yet. We prepared for another miserable night. They seem so interminable when there is no sleep to be had. I hope this is our last night here. I've had the same clothes on for 105 days. In that time I've taken three showers and consider that more than the average number for each of us. Most of us shave once a week whether we need it or not. So far I've had one haircut since November. Our bodies are bony, and most of us have lost at least four inches at the waist line. Many former "fat Boys" have dropped eight inches. What a shame that this must happen to civilized people - that men must endure such conditions ! May we never experience an existence like this again.

Another sleepless night passed away. Tuesday morning we received no tea. High hopes of GI chow for dinner faded away, when we again passed through the familiar food lines for a ladle of thick flour

soup much like the flour paste Hitler probably used to hang wall paper. Were we liberated or weren't ? A barracks guard was placed at the door allowing none of us to leave the building. Still there was no evacuation, except the hospital patients who had been taken back by ambulance within four hours of our liberation.

Finally the great announcement came. "C" rations, cigarettes and candy bars were on the menu for the evening meal. A cheer went up just as though we were liberated again. How many times have combat troops become disgusted with "C" rations? They have not been prisoners, or with me and 2,800 boys, they'd agree that these two cans of food were designed for kings and royalty. Many of our boys have never tasted these delicacies until tonight, especially what we call the "new" rations. Noodles, and beef, meat and beans, ham and eggs, beans and frankfurters, spaghetti and meat balls - these are just a few of the delicious canned meals. And then the improved biscuits with jelly and candy! Oh, joy!

German food was still being used, but in a different way than usual. Prisoners of all types were leaving the camp to capture ducks, geese, rabbits and foodstuffs from the surrounding farms and Bad Orb. The lost art of cooking "tin can" style is very popular again. As far as German rations were concerned the new American commander of the

camp had this to say: "The stuff they've been feeding you is not fit for a dog to eat. The remainder of the soup from today will be spilled on the ground. From now on you will eat three meals a day of American food!"

Beside evacuation in order to clean up and live, we had but one other thought preying on our minds. Had our folks back home received word that we were prisoners of war? Chaplain Hurley announced this afternoon that a buddy of one of the prisoners had seen a picture of his hometown friend, in the local news. The hope that if this news reached one man's

parents, it reached ours also enlightened us all. Now all we need is a letter from home!

Oh! that GI chow. I guess maybe we're not as well as we think. Most of us are sick again, this time not from lack of food, but from over abundance. Our stomachs have to stretch a little more to live the American way. Diarrhea has hit many of us, along with stomach cramps. We should be put on a liquid diet for a few days, but until we are flown back to another country, we'll just have to resist our long-suffering appetites. Most of us sit up all night adding to our discomfort, for our German "buggy" friends still have their front lines intact. A shower and new clothes should make a successful counterattack on the Krauts "57 Varieties" of lice.

April 10th is here. It hardly seems possible that I'm still in Stalag IX B, but it won't be long now. Within 20 minutes, a convoy of trucks will be here, and our stay at the largest prisoner of war camp in Germany shall come to a conclusion. I regret not having been here. I only ask God that I or any other American won't ever experience suffering such as we have experienced in the 105 days of our captivity.

Farewell, Stalag IX B. May the memories of you instill in us ideals for a nobler, richer life.

Good-bye foul living conditions, rotting potatoes, rye flour soup, black bread, bedless barracks, sleepless nights, filthy latrines! May the recollection of you encourage us to be more thankful for the American way of life.

Adios, Germany! May the end of this war bring about a peace that shall never be disturbed by you or any other aggressive nation.

I find no words more fitted to conclude this story than those expressed by Don Blanding in his poem "Interview."

"What did you see, soldier,
What did you see at war?
I saw such glory and horror
As was never seen before.
I saw men's hearts burn naked
In red crucibles of pain;

I saw such godlike courage
As I'll never see again.

What did you thing, soldier,
What did you think at war?
I thought how strange we have not learned
From wars that were waged before,
Except new ways of killing
New multiples of pain,
And all the blood that men have shed
Is blood shed all in vain.

What did you learn, soldier,
What did you learn at war?
I learned that we must learn something
That wasn't learned before.
That victories won on battlefields
Are victories won in vain,
Unless in peace we kill the germs
That breed fresh wars again.

What did you pray, soldier,
What did you pray at war?
I prayed that we might do the things
We have not done before.
That we might mobilize for peace
Nor mobilize in vain,
Lest Christ and man be forced to climb
Start Calvary again.

STALAG IX B THEME SONG

Tune: Battle Hymn of Republic

We're a bunch of Yankee soldiers
Living deep in Germany
We are eating soup and black bread
And a beverage they call tea
And we're going to keep on singing
Until Patton sets us free
And we go rambling home.

Come and get us Georgie Patton
Come and get us Georgie Patton
Come and get us Georgie Patton
So we can ramble home.

written by:
Chaplain Neel

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THE SPUD SOUP SERENADE

Tune: Stormy Weather

Don't know why
There's no cake or apple pie
For our dinner
Haven't had a piece all this winter
It's spud soup all the time

Just don't see
Milk or sugar in my tea
Night or morning
Goes through my kidneys without warning
I'm running all the time.

Since we've come to camp we've had a lot of troubles
Slipping into chow lines trying to get doubles
Just another ladle full of cooked cat stubbles
Can't get along on one.

And that broat
It's so heavy it won't float
Don't be blue boys
GI chow is on it's way thorough boys
Keeps coming all the time

Written by:

Mike Klinkmen
February 6, 1945

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Presented through the courtesy of Judith Shelton,
daughter of Mr. Myron "Mike" Klinkmen.