

HARRY C. MCKINLEY, Jr.

422/3rd

106th Infantry Division

Stalag 9-B

A PARTIAL HISTORY OF THE PERIOD OF TIME FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE THROUGH THE PERIOD PRIOR TO MY CAPTURE BY THE GERMANS AND THE ACTUAL CAPTURE ON DECEMBER 19, 1944 AND ON THROUGH MY HISTORY AS A PRISONER OF WAR OF THE GERMANS UNTIL MY RELEASE IN APRIL 1945.

I was in the 106th Division stationed on the Siegfried Line on the German-Belgium border when, on the 16th of December, the Germans started the battle known as The Battle Of The Bulge. Within a day, our unit was cutoff and surrounded by the Germans of many divisions. During the time from December 17 on, we were out of contact with any American units with only orders to proceed toward Schönberg, Germany, and if we found it in American hands, to defend at all costs - if in German hands, to attack and capture at all costs. During this time we had no food except a couple of "D" bars. Upon our attack on Schönberg we were faced on all sides by Germans with all types and sizes of guns and ammunition. We were faced with direct fire from heavy tanks, heavy artillery, anti-aircraft artillery and infantry coming from front and rear. At each moment, with their direct fire, our fighting space became smaller and smaller - to the point that the last few hours I saw heavy tanks and infantry and overhead artillery coming on us constantly to the point that there was no space, no ammunition, and only a mind and body in complete turmoil trying to dig into the frozen snow and ice which was impossible. This horrible beating from explosions in all directions and overhead with the concussions was more than I now believe anyone could possibly go through. But, by some God given power, I stayed alive. All around me were the men of our units lying one by the other - and over each other - so that it appeared to be impossible to walk for the dead, dying, and wounded. Such horror and mass death - screaming, calmness and blood beyond what one could believe. I was captured with a Colonel Descheneaux, the Commander of the 422nd Infantry, 106th Infantry Division.

After being out of contact with American units as of December 16, 1944, I was actually captured on December 19, 1944, at about 4:00 or 4:30 P.M. I was moved many places between December 19, 1944 and April, 1945. After my capture, without food, sometime a day or so later I was loaded onto a boxcar. There were so many of us in the boxcar that we had to take turns just to squat down between others. I have no idea how many were in the boxcars but we were jammed tightly, shoulder to shoulder. There was only one opening in the boxcar for the removal of bowel movements and urine to be thrown out - this was done in or helmets and we received water in the same helmet used for the removal of bowel movements and urine. Our breath actually froze on the walls of the boxcars and we dug at it for moisture and even licked at the icy wall for the wetness and moisture.

I was in the boxcar for, I believe, about 7 to 10 days - but I am not sure just how long - and we were without food or water except for some water a time or two. When I did get out of the boxcar, I was so cramped and stiff that it was almost impossible to walk or move. One night, which I believe to be December 24 or

early December 25, 1944, the train was bombed by British bombers flying very low.

It was believed that the location was Limberg, Germany, but I have no idea if this is correct or not - or how it might have been known just where it actually was. Many cars of the train were wrecked and blown apart. During the bombing and immediately following it, we were continuously fired upon by the German guards. Many, many were killed and wounded throughout this horrible ordeal while we tried to get to the safety of piles of crossties and other things. The guards were behind the crosstie piles and other cars and they continuously fired into the cars and the men trying to get out of the wreckage. I am not sure just how long it lasted but it seemed like eternity. There was total confusion during this bombing and firing and trying to reach safety. I do not know how many bombers there were or how many waves, but it continued for some time I believe. I have no idea of how I got out of the location or how we moved on that night, it being around midnight as near as I can believe. I believe that we got off the train in Frankfurt, Germany and were force marched up a steep hill by road to a place known as Bad Orb to a POW enclosure.

At Bad Orb we received our first hot ersatz coffee which tasted like some kind of horrible tea. The Germans then took our helmets. I don't know how or when we got a small bowl and then, later, received a hot portion of water with what appeared to be alfalfa leaves, thick with hundreds of white worms that looked like maggots. I am sure that is what they were. And one day, there were several little pieces of meat which I feel sure was deer, pork and horse because of the color and texture, and also because I saw the remains of these animals (all shot to pieces) come into the enclosure on a drag, or low wagon, being pulled by Germans.

After taking our helmets and anything else one may have had, I had only a cap, field jacket, shirt and pants, the set of underclothes I was wearing, my boots and the socks I had on. These clothes were the only clothes that I had throughout the whole winter until I was liberated in April. I did have a pair of small rubber boots that I could in no way even think of wearing on my feet. Why I had them I will never know. However, they seemed so valuable that I had a short round of resistance with a German until he rammed his Luger pistol in my kidneys until I could stand it no longer and another POW had me give up and he got the boots. I have always wondered how I lived through the dumb episode, I still cringe and shudder just thinking of it.

I don't know how long I was at Bad Orb, but I believe that it was sometime in January. Then (time unknown), I was marched with other POW's across country, winding around over the countryside, generally keeping out of towns and villages whenever there might be S.S. troops in the towns. However, quite often we were marched into villages where there were S.S. troops, etc., whose actions made one very nervous and shaky with anxiety. And, we were at times strafed by planes.

During the time from Bad Orb to Hammelburg, we had only turnips for food - we found those along the way. We got water at times at streams or from mud holes as we traveled across the country.

One night on the march, I got trapped in the basement of a house that later turned out to be a place of many Germans having some kind of a party. In the darkness of the basement entrance, I got out by going through many Germans in the dark and without saying a sound, got out into the shrubbery and trees and then back into an area where other POW's were being held.

On two different occasions I was in barns where there were cows. I was hiding under the cows and, while milking them, drank all the milk I could get - it was warm and seemed to be a life saving food. On one of these occasions a farm woman and a very young girl found me milking the cows and I was sure that this was the end, but the woman took a cup and milked for me as fast as I could drink the warm milk. All the time, I was crouched under the front legs of the cow, under the manger, and the small girl watched for Germans. The Germans later showed up searching the barn, screaming and hollering and waving their weapons. I stayed put under the cow's neck, under the manger, while the woman and small girl stood on each side of the cow, until the Germans were gone. I don't know what they were looking for, or what the situation was with the woman and small girl, but it saved my life and gave me that fine, warm milk. I was so in shock during all of this that I didn't really realize just what was taking place. But, after that, later that night when I got once again with the POW's, it struck me what had been happening and I cannot ever express my feeling and the knots and shakes that went over my body all night. And, I'm not sure just how long it lingered, but it was with me for as long as I can remember - until a next incident would take place. In both cases Germans were going through the barns in search of something, but luckily they never found me. I thought, I'm sure glad they were city boys instead of a country boy like me.

On another occasion, one night when the Germans had us locked in a building, I crawled out through a hole in the foundation. I found German guards out there with lights going over the place. I lay on the ground as flat as possible between some bee hives. The Germans did not come at the bee hives but were all over the place. After their searching, but staying at a greater distance, I crawled back through the hole and into the building where other POW's were, and the bees must have been friendly bees because I didn't get a sting.

During my stay at Hammelburg, our food was very sparse, we were allowed a bowl of watery potato soup each day. But, what we did ourselves was to get permission to use the same amount of potatoes but to make it in two bowls of broth and a few potatoes twice a day. We had one bowl before 11:00 A.M. at which time the American bombers went over our camp every day on their way to other parts of Germany (if anything went wrong with the timing that the broth was late coming, then we had to wait until later afternoon when all the bombers had made their eastward trips and then returned home westward from their missions), and another bowl at about 4:00 P.M.. About once a week we got some carrots in place of potatoes and, occasionally, every week or so, we got a bowl of barley which was a real treat. One time at Hammelburg, we received Red Cross boxes which were divided into either four or six parts for each of us.

While at Hammelburg, General Patton sent a special task force into Hammelburg to the POW camp where we were being held as prisoners. The task force arrived at the camp blowing up the fences and some buildings, giving us a chance to escape. I got on a tank and was lying back against the turret during the fire battle. I was so weak and exhausted that I will never know what power came along to give me strength to stay on the tank, lying against the turret, when a

terrific explosion hit the turret and I was unconscious for a time. But, later I found myself dazed though not actually hit by the explosion. I remember nothing about what was then happening except that I later found myself in a building all alone with noises outside. I staggered outside and thought that I must be with POW's. It turned out to be POW's being thrown together by Germans. I was so exhausted and weak from the long siege of being with so little food, that I just moved along wondering at each step if the next one would be the last - both from weakness, exhaustion, fright and fear - through the complete darkness. I had only the several pieces of clothing on me that I had the entire winter of my ordeal.

Also while at Hammelburg, we used a couple of buckets for urinating during the night. During the day we had latrines which we could use at times when there were no air raid warnings. It was not safe at all to go out to the latrine at night or during the day during times of air raid warnings as the guards shot many of our buddies and always with the excuse that the orders were changed. Thus, one just could not take a chance of going outside the actual building which we were in at most times. I do not know where we got dark, filthy, mixed salt at times - but, I remember eating pure salt for something to eat until it actually came out of my forehead in little beads, of course we had to stop eating at such times.

At another time, sometime during our cross-country marching in our movement eastward into Germany as the American troops advanced, I was pushed in a pitch-dark building sometime in the night. I could feel other men all around on the floor and, in my searching for a place to get down or lay down, I felt a warm place in some kind of dirt-like material, it was about three feet high. Feeling that warm place was the last I remember until I was being pushed, dragged, and pulled all around with a bright light in my eyes. I could see nothing but the bright light. Upon becoming able to see by the light, I found that I had been lying in a blacksmith forge with perfect warmth. I was pushed out of the building and pushed in with other men who I later found out to be POW's . I also found out the next morning from the other POW's that I was almost completely black from the blacksmith forge soot. It was a very, very, long time until I got the soot removed from my face and body. I don't believe that I ever did get the filth out of the few clothes which I had been wearing all winter.

Sometime in either late March or early April, during the time of larches from Hammelburg past Schweinfurt and past through what we understood to be Furth, Germany, after passing through Furth and I believe a canal or waterway, we were moved into a wooded area along the roadside. While there, we head American bombers which I believe to be B-17's in the first flight. As we watched and listened to the bombs falling not too far from us, they hit an oil storage, I think, and flames and smoke were going sky high for as long as we could see that day. Then, immediately following the first wave came a second wave a greater distance in our direction, and again I watched the bombs falling and the whistling from them falling. They hit much nearer to us and landed in a railroad yard which apparently had an ammunition train or some type of high explosives in it which continued to explode. Fire and smoke rose again as far away as we could see.

Then, came the third wave, B-24's I believe, coming farther than the first two waves - which must have put them on us. And, as the bombs screamed and fell

toward us, I was in a squatting position and there was an old bomb crater about six-to-eight feet in front of me and my buddies (there were hundreds of POW's in the exact area). I remember saying to myself, lightning never strikes the same place twice - and I remember starting a leapfrog jump toward the bomb crater. That is the last I remember until I later came to consciousness. I could not move or breathe. As I became more fully conscious I realized I was buried. Trying to get free, I got my head out of the dirt which covered me and eventually got my breath. But, something was over my lower body and legs - but I couldn't seem to understand or know what was wrong. I thought tree limbs were over me but upon getting loose I found that I had a small piece of metal in my leg from the bombs. My one buddy was lying under my right arm beside me. Upon realizing it to be him, I also saw that my buddy had been hit with a very large piece of metal in the middle of his back and had died instantly as we dove for the bomb crater. I have no idea how many. All were in a daze and as Germans arrived we got out of the area. That was the last of any friends I had met during the imprisonment. From there I just move to this day and remember how I got to the prison enclosures skirts of Nuremberg, Germany.

The next few days were generally without food, or at least I don't remember of any food - except, I believe, a part of a Red Cross box. These days were too busy to think about anything except a small group of British POW's and a couple of others with myself were checking guard times, checking every nook and corner of barbed wire and fences, making plans for escape. I can't remember the plans but we had to change the time set at the last minute for some tea on. We had pliers, wire cutters, etc. and where they came from I was never told and I didn't ask any questions. Several days later we were released when American troops came into our camp and smashed fences and got us out. I believe that it was armor of the 45th Division or armor attachments with the 45th Division, I am not sure of this but believe it to be correct.

Miscellaneous final comments and thoughts:

Throughout this whole time of being a POW, it must be remembered that there were guards over a person at all times - especially when we were on the marches throughout the country. These guards just seemed to be endowed with the mind and desire to kill and maim POW's to their hearts content - and, I must be sure that they were under strict orders about any escapes from the guarding that they were in trouble. With this fear in them, and their animal desire every second was a very traumatic experience and all must be assured that constantly one was trying to survive while at the same time there was always a ray of hope, of prayer, or fear and the constant mind demanding the love of home, family, children, food - along with the human demand for survival.

It must be understood that time was lost throughout much of the ordeal and as such the length of times at various locations and of different matches is remembered only partially. During the period January 19, 1944 and April ?, 1945 I received parts of seven Red Cross food boxes, all were divided by from two to eight persons per box. This was very little, but was a delight beyond reproach if given for just several minute snacks.

Much activity and many episodes are without time and detailed remembrance now, but many come back to one's mind constantly over the years in the form of dreams; just thinking back so often with ones mind wondering; in one's daily and nightly prayers, and just about any time when pictures, comments, or conversations may take place. One can be assured that the experiences never leave the mind throughout the course of each day and night.

There were constantly searches, lineups, interrogations and harassment - at all times and without reason. One was constantly on edge and on nerves - while getting through one episode and awaiting the next move.

At different times, especially at Hammelburg, many POW's were killed because the guards claimed that the orders were changed. One was not allowed out of the buildings for latrine or any other purpose, that only a certain number, (example: one or two at a time maybe) then, when only one or two would go out and get killed the guards would say that the orders were changed and only a single person could be out at that time - or even that no one was permitted out of the buildings during that period. Also, one could never tell if someone was outside from the other side of the buildings and thus more killings.

It must be remembered that at all times and at many times throughout this time our buddies were shot or just taken away, never to be heard of or seen again. The pressure of this constant harassment was at times beyond a person's caring about anything and then each time the remembrance of home and family and friends and of the buddies disappearing would give strength to keep going just a little farther.

On the many, many lineups at anytime both day and night for the Germans to make counts of the POW's, we stood until I was sure that I couldn't possibly stand another second - and, many times I was certain that my feet were frozen. However, with care, I managed to get back to being able to line up again the next minute or the next time.

It must also be noted that through the battle period from the beginning of the Battle Of The Bulge and through the continuous period following as a prisoner of war of the Germans we constantly kept hearing along the lines about the killing of American Prisoners of War just several miles north of our positions which was to become known as The Malmedy Massacre. One must be assured that these actions weighed heavily on the mind continuously throughout each day and each night and continued all of the time while I was a prisoner of war of the Germans. It kept the nervous system in a constant terrific uproar of the mind and body all of the time.

It should be remember that the things here named of were very horrifying and it must also be remembered that at every second and every minute through the hours and days that the threat of death and treatment controlled a man's mind.



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James D. West
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