

Ernest B. Vermont
106th Infantry Division
Stalag 9-B, 9A

Summation Of Service and Prison Experiences of Ernest Valmont
A.S.N. 33563079

Written at age 62

On March 15, 1943 I was drafted into the U.S. Army. After basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina I was then moved with my outfit the 106th Infantry Division to **Camp Atterbury**, Indiana. After advanced training there, I was made cadre and I trained other soldiers. Then we were shipped overseas, after this period of intense training. We were shipped to the east coast and boarded the "Aquitania" and in 15 days we arrived in England. We stayed briefly in England, then we were shipped to Europe. We entered Europe by way of Belgium and were trucked to the front line in the Ardennes Mts. Here we relieved the 2nd Division. This position on line, we were told was considered a stalemated position. That meant neither force was moving. We just faced each other. We patrolled the front line and generally searched for the enemy, but not seizing advantage. The fortifications here were crude but adequate. The 2nd Division had built a kind of log cabin forts all along this line; each was dug into the ground. My first encounter with the enemy was here on line. The Germans would come as close as they dared and fire their guns in our general direction. These weapons were fast operation and fired many bullets at one time. This was a frightening experience. We were told not to fire back and reveal our position. During this time, many of the enemy surrendered to us. These prisoners told us that we were about to be overrun by the Germans. An offensive was being mounted by Field Marshall Rundstedt.

History was being repeated, the Germans were doing the unexpected coming through the Ardennes Mts. They had captured American vehicles and uniforms and used them to disguise themselves. They confused the American troops and caused mass hysteria. We the 106th Division were to say the least in trouble. We were told that we must try to break through to the city of Schonberg to join other American forces. We never made it. You must understand that all this was happening in the midst of a terrible snowstorm and we were freezing cold.

We forced marched for days. Snipers were having a field day killing our men as we were moving to the town. My platoon was pinned down on a hill. Some officer decided to fire his mortars from the top of this hill. All hell then broke loose. The Germans fired tracer bullets at us. I, with others crawled many yards to escape this withering fire. I passed many men who were wounded or dead. Then I heard the command to cease fire. I looked for the rest of my platoon and could not find any of them. It was obvious that we were separated. I turned up a small rise and found my executive officer, Lt. Hildrich, Co. E, 422nd Inf. Div. 106th and waited

for his direction and orders. All around us came the mad screaming of men to cease fire and they called F' Destroy your weapons". I found out later that the Germans had infiltrated our forces causing confusion. Lt. Hildrich proceeded to destroy his weapon and told others there to do the same. This was the worst thing I ever did in my life. Snipers were everywhere, mass confusion occurred. Shortly after destroying our weapons, we

were then told to put our hands over our heads and walk straight ahead to the enemy. We were captured at this point.

The Germans forced marched us along side of all their military forces.

The German soldiers would stop us, look for watches, spit on us and cuff us across the head. In some cases they took our jackets too. We marched for days and finally reached the city of Prim, Germany, where we were stoned by the Hitler Youth. They must have thought that they had captured the whole American Army. I knew at this time that our forces had taken a beating. The humiliation of being taken prisoner was almost more than I could endure. Before the evening was upon us the Germans herded us into a church. They told us if we were quiet we would be fed. This never happened. We did not eat. I don't remember how long we were kept in the church, but I do remember the pangs of hunger and the cold to this day.

We' were then moved from the church building to a railroad depot and loaded into box cars. We were packed in like so much cargo. The box car had benches on each side and a pot belly stove in the center. We were very cold. So we broke the benches and burned them in the stove. We had no place to urinate and defecate, do we did it in the stove. The smell was very bad and we had to restart the fire in the stove often. I was cold. I can't remember exactly how long we were confined in this box car. From time to time the train slowed down and some people (we did not know who they were) would give us water, but still no food. When we moved along we could hear aircraft overhead and we knew we were in trouble. The aircraft sounded like U.S. planes. The sound of the motors identified them as P-51 type. Then we heard machine gun fire from these planes. We were being strafed by bullets. They came through the box car killing many men. I believe I was the only one left alive. The others had either been killed

or were badly wounded. Bodies were all over the car. Later I made it a point to see if the railroad cars were marked with a Red Cross; I could not see any! In the box car, I heard someone praying the "Hail Mary" and then finally he was still. I thought to myself- - - Why was I being spared?

Was I to be killed later or tortured to death? What was going to happen to me? All my thoughts were of home and the warm places I would normally be in, the food and drink of which I had none. I prayed in my own way as I didn't really know how. My feet and hands were numb, and I did not have much feeling. I thought of the many times as a child I enjoyed playing in the snow and ice. But now it was an entirely different matter. Finally, I can't remember how long, the Germans opened the box car. I came out. Then I and the remaining prisoners from all the cars were taken to prison camp. This camp was **Stalag IX-B** near the city of Bad Orb, Germany.

In Stalag IX-B we were fed very little. In the morning we were given tea, nothing at mid-day, and at evening we were given a sixth to a tenth of a loaf of black, sour bread, no butter. Sometimes we were given thin soup (potato) with very little or no solid food in the soup.

We we're all losing weight and we were well on our way to starvation. Men were so hungry that it led to a serious incident at the camp.

Several men managed to get out of the main building and into the kitchen area. They were caught stealing food by a German cook. One prisoner killed the cook with a butcher knife. All hell broke loose when the dead man was discovered. Sirens sounded, Germans and dogs were all over the place, orders were shouted. They took all the prisoners out of the buildings and stood us in the cold, snowy weather, at attention, in all stages of attire. The "SS" troops came out of the woodwork and demanded that someone tell them who killed the cook. No one answered. We were told that we would not receive any food until the killer was identified.

We were hours in the cold, and after a long time we were returned to the unheated buildings. My hands and feet were so cold they were numb. We were taken outside many times for many days. Many days passed and the killer was not identified. We had a man in the group, I don't know if he was a chaplain or someone else who had a background in religious training, who talked to us at this time. He explained to the group of prisoners that if the persons or person who could identify the killer did not come forward we would suffer further. Days passed with no food, and we were brought out into, the cold weather each day and verbally chastened by the German "SS". This went on for days and weeks, finally the person who had spoken to us before brought us together once again. He then challenged us once more to reveal the killer. The "SS" were also present and finally one man who had seen the killer washing the blood from his hands in the latrine told the German SS who the killer was. The man who told on the killer wept openly.

By this time my hands and feet were still blue in color. I rubbed them until I thought they would bleed.

During the time we were being questioned as a group about the killing, many thoughts went through my mind. Would the Germans take us out one by one and kill us. Would they torture me to get at the truth, to no avail, because I did not know the killer or killers? Would they continue to starve me and take me outside to freeze? At times we were taken outside so quickly that we didn't even have time to put on our shoes and socks. My head was hurting with all these possibilities.

After the incident with the cook, a bunch of us were moved to another stalag. I cannot remember how we got there. This was **Stalag IX-A** and I think it was near the town of Ziegenhain, Germany. Soon after we got there another incident happened. The prisoners had formed "escape committees". Food and other necessary items were gathered together for those who were elected and willing to be candidates for an escape. The time had come for men to attempt escape. The path was chosen. These men (four, as I recollect) went into a latrine which was located on the perimeter of the compound. They cut the wire screen in the window, which was above the toilet. They dropped down into a drainage ditch outside the prison wire and moved down the ditch to a wooded area. Unknown to the escapees the Germans knew what was going on. At various locations along the ditch the Germans had posted guards. As the prisoners (escapees) passed one German guard they bribed him with cigarettes or candy and the escapee moved along the ditch to the next guard and bribed him also. The escapee got to the last guard and he was shot and killed. The other escapees who were in the ditch got wise and retreated back to the latrine. All hell broke loose.

Guards were shouting commands, and dogs were running all around. The last man never made it back to the main building. We found out later that he was hiding in a latrine hole suspended by his finger tips. While the Germans were searching, he was there in the

latrine hole. We prisoners were once again brought out into the cold weather in all stages of attire and kept there for many hours. We were again grilled by "SS" men as to the whereabouts of these escaping men. Finally we were allowed back into the barracks. Soon order was restored. The man who was in the latrine hole finally got back to the barracks. We knew he was back because we smelled him. We finally got him cleaned up as best as we could.

While in the prison camp you dreamed of food continually. We all participated in thinking up food menus that suited our fantasy. Menus of food that I found out were quite unrealistic, but the thoughts of food was our prime pastime. Freedom was only a close second.

In order to secure more food while in the prison camp many of the prisoners would trade cigarettes or U.S. invasion money that we had hidden when we were first captured. The French prisoners that we had some contact with were able to get us some food. Some of the prisoners who were on work crews in the surrounding cities were able to secure some food that they brought back. Be mindful the amount of food that we secured this way was very limited. Eventually I had to concentrate on my physical condition and find ways to stop the constant diarrhea that I had. I got some relief from the medical supplies that Capt. Morgan had in the form of medicine. This was also very limited. At one point during this confinement I dreamed of finding a way to do away with myself, but I knew that was something that I didn't have the courage to do. I knew that if I did not get the right medical attention soon that I was going to die. Fortunately for me liberation was close at hand.

In our group of American prisoners, a man named Capt. Morgan was a great help to the fellow prisoners. I am not sure but I think Capt. Morgan was with either the 82nd Airborne or the 101st Airborne. I also believe he was a medical officer. Capt. Morgan had announced to the American prisoners that in his medical opinion we prisoners were receiving just enough calories a day to survive. I weighed 140 lbs. when I went into prison and weighed 92 lbs. when I was released. I had loose bowels all the time. (I found out later I was rapidly becoming de-hydrated) I had diarrhea or dysentery all the time. I believe this diarrhea problem began when I was first captured. When the Germans were not looking I would scoop up handfuls of snow from the aide of the road and eat it. Sometimes, when walking beside fields of turnips I would grab some of them and silently consume them. After a few days, I could not control my bowels.

Another incident from prison. The Germans wanted to de-louse us. They herded us into showers. I was told to take all my clothes off and step into the shower. I was then told by an attendant to take a jar off the shelf and spread the contents of the bottle on the hairy parts of my body. My skin began to burn. My penis burned and erected, and had burns all over it. My underarms burned until I thought my arms would fall off. My chest where I spread this solution was afire. I called out in my high school German that the water was too hot. The attendant obliged me and turned on the cold water. I will never know whether this was an accident or whether this was done on purpose. I was taken to Capt. Morgan and he treated me with what he had in his meager medical supply. (I think this was some kind of creosote solution that was used in the shower area) I suffered with this condition for many weeks. The Capt. told me that the burns on my body were equivalent to second degree burns. I was returned to the rest of the prisoners and not allowed to see the medical officer again.

While in prison the German Sgt. would come in to get the prisoners awakened for roll call. He sometimes would fire his P-38 pistol to get our attention. This action caused many of the men to hide under the bunks when time allowed them to do so. There was much fear while this German Sgt. fired at the floor and ceiling. I would shake and sweat every time this man came into the room. He would also shout at us and call us to attention and if we didn't move fast enough he would fire at the floor and ceiling again. He would come into the room when you least expected it. The other men sometimes would stay under the bunks or crawl under the few blankets that we had. Some men would cry out loud and sob with fear for a long time.

Red Cross packages came in one time toward the end of the war. Most of the breads, dried milk, and other food stuffs were moldy, but we ate them. Finally, we knew that the Americans were coming because the French underground with which we had contact, told us that the Remagen Bridge was about to be crossed by Gen. Patton's forces. The Germans knew that the end of their involvement in this prison was close at hand. We were told that we were to be moved to the interior of Germany. Capt. Morgan arranged a meeting of all cabin leaders and he advised us to participate in a "passive resistance" movement. The old German soldiers had been left behind to guard us, because the other elite guards had fled the scene. These older soldiers were left to escort us to the interior. While we were in formation some men would collapse and other men would try to assist them. This caused great confusion and the Germans were getting anxious. Eventually the Germans found it impossible to wait around anymore. They ran and left us to our own devices.

This passive resistance had worked.

All the time we were lined up outside the main barracks we could hear the guns in the distance. The men who were really sick were lying on the ground and moaning. The German soldiers tried to get these men up by taking their bayonets and prodding them. Other men tried to help them, but the soldiers would threaten them. I once again felt fear. Would they shoot some of us or all of us? Men would try to move when they prodded them and then fall to the ground. I will never forget the cries of these guys. I still wake up some times from sleep, even now hearing their cries.

Soon the tanks of Patton's forces came and took control. They threw out food to us. (10 in 1 Type rations) to the prisoners. Many prisoners acted Unwisely and stuffed themselves with food. We also discovered potatoes buried under manure. The men were eating all over the place. Fires were everywhere. They cooked potatoes and the men were getting sick. I was so Lick anyway that I could not move in this direction, and it probably was a Messing in disguise. We were advised not to leave the camp grounds until we would be under the full control of our Govt. troops. When we were finally released by the Americans, we sought revenge on our captors or any German soldiers. Many of the prisoners sought out some of the guards to kill them. I saw many prisoners converge on these men who were held by one or two American soldiers and started to beat these German captors. We were like wild beasts. I stood and watched as long as I could stand it and then I left the scene quickly. I don't know why I didn't join them, except I was very weak.

When we were finally under control of our Govt., we were trucked out of the camp to Frankford, Germany. We were later flown in C-47 planes to Le Havre, France to the medical camps.

I was very sick aboard the plane to Le Havre, and threw up many times I also had no control over my bowels again.

At "Camp Lucky Strike", Le Havre, France hospital I was placed in a ward and fed eggs and milk and all the medications that they deemed necessary. I was in the camp hospital for about a month. After medical release we were placed aboard the ship " U.S. Geo. Washington" and sailed for home. It took 15 days to get home and I was sick most of the time.

After arriving in the States, the service sent me home for a brief stay. Then I was sent to Miami, Florida for two weeks of "R and R". Then I went back to Fort Meade, Maryland. I served as a Duty NCO in. the separation center. The Govt. discharged me under an "Article Convenience If of the Govt. This ended the worst nightmare of my life. I was alive.

My wife is writing her observations of me under a separate, sealed cover.

I spent the 21st birthday of my life in an unfriendly place. The U. S. military was good to me and my family. I have no complaints. I love my country and my God.

October 18,1999.

World War II experiences of Ernest B. Vermont
Written at age 75

I was a Sgt. And part of the 106th infantry division. We were taken to Belgium from England to relieve the 2nd infantry division that was in the Ardennes forest. This was in the winter of 1944 during the month of Dec. I was a squad leader of 12 young men, and we were about to experience the worst nightmare that war could offer.

Europe was in the throes of the worst winter it had had in many years. It was snowing and very cold in the Ardennes mountains.

Unknown to us, in Sept. Hitler named the port of Antwerp, Belgium as his staging area - - the Eifel region. Hitler intended to mass twenty-five divisions for an attack through the thinly held Ardennes forest area of southern Belgium and Luxembourg. His purpose, after the Meuse river was reached and crossed, was that his forces would swing northwest some 60 miles, to envelop the port of Antwerp. The maneuver was designed to sever the already stretched allied supply lines in the north and encircle and destroy a third of the allies ground forces and supply lines. If successful, Hitler believed that the offensive could smash the allied coalition, or at least greatly cripple its ground combat capabilities, leaving him free to focus on the Russians at his back door.

Timing was crucial, allied air power ruled the skies during the day, making any open concentrations of German military strength on the ground extremely risky. Hitler, therefore, scheduled the offensive to take place when the inclement weather would ground allied planes, or at least limit their attacks on his advancing columns. He

postponed the starting date of the attack from Nov. until mid-Dec. This gave him more time to assemble the necessary forces and supplies. He did assemble these forces and he did attack in mid-Dec. This is what we faced on the line in the Ardennes. His plan almost worked, but as we know now it did not! This was due to the brave men of the US army, fighting and repelling him and defeating him badly!

Located in the center of Bradley's sector, the Ardennes had been quiet since mid-Sept. Referred to as a "ghost front" one commander described the sector as a nursery and old folks' home.

An important point was that the allies top secret communications interception and decryption effort, coded "ultra" offered clues but no definitive statements of Hitler's intentions. Yet "Wacht am Rhine" best security was the continued allied belief that the Germans would not attack, a belief held up to zero hour on 16 Dec. Designated as null-tag (zero day).

The map indicated that the 106th Inf. Division, two regiments; the 422nd & 423rd, were spread out over a front of about 60 miles. This spelled disaster for us.

I would like to give you my experiences, first as a soldier in battle and second as a prisoner of war.

Our division, the 106th inf. Was made up of three regiments and support artillery. We replaced the 2nd Inf. Division on the 60 mile front. The 2nd Inf. Div. was a veteran outfit and had seen many battles. We, the 106th inf. Div., were green troops fresh from the states.

We were not on line very long until we heard the sound of artillery fire. This was Dec. 16, 1944. We were ill equipped for winter, as our supplies had not been delivered. The winter gear, such as winter coats, overshoes etc. Was not in our hands.

The Germans came through the mountains with heavy equipment, tanks, guns, and many troops. As I first stated the Germans had gotten many replacements for their army from many sources. The Germans, I learned later, had parachuted English speaking troops in American uniforms into our sector. This disrupted our troops badly.

Our commander decided to move us toward the town of Schonberg and join up with the 7th armored division. While we were moving toward our destination we experienced a lot of sniper fire from all around us and it played havoc killing some of our troops. In military terms we were making a "strategic withdrawal" toward our military objective. The snow was still falling at a very heavy rate, and it remained very cold.

The first night, we managed to find a heavy wooded area and we placed guards, and then tried to sleep. The next morning we found ourselves surrounded and outgunned by the Germans. We fought as long as we could, until the order came to surrender. This was the worse possible command that I would forward to my men.

Hitler had planned well concerning the absence of air support, the weather was very bad. This was all in favor for the attack the Germans were waging.

We surrendered to the Germans after a limited hard battle. Our ammunition soon ran out. The Germans were lined up on the roads, as we were led into the interior of Germany. They took everything they chose to take from us, food, personal belongings, shoes from some, wallets, watches, everything that could be useful to them.

The first town we were taken through was the town of Pruim. We were paraded through the town in front of the townspeople. We were screamed and shouted at, spit upon, and struck by people with rocks, all kinds of things to our bodies. These German people thought they had captured the whole American army!

We were then taken to a building which was a church, and secured in it. They told us that if we were quiet we would be fed. This was a lie, we never got fed.

Not too far away there was a railroad station where we were then herded into boxcars. These boxcars were about 40 foot long and 8 foot wide with sliding doors on both sides. In the center of the boxcars was a pot bellied stove (wood burning or coal). Around the sides of the boxcars were a few wooden benches, and not much else.

Once we were packed into these cars and the sliding doors secured, the train soon started on its way. It was very cold and stuffy inside the cars. In order to have a little heat, we broke up the wooden benches and burned them in the stove. Naturally the wood did not last long and the smoke did not help us a bit.

I do not remember how long we traveled. I do know the train stopped often for long periods of time. We did not know why it stopped, but it seemed we were on the train for many hours and days. There was no place to go to the bathroom except in the car, and the odor became quite sickening to say the least. We still were not fed, and had no water, no nothing!

As we were moving along on the train, we heard airplanes overhead. They were shooting at the moving train. The train was being strafed by our own air force! Bullets came through the roof and sides and a lot of the men were wounded or killed. There was blood everywhere, men crying, screaming and they were dead or dying. There were very few, if any, alive in this car. I was alive. None of the prisoners were allowed out of the cars, as the Germans sought safety where they could find it.

After awhile when the strafing stopped, the train continued to move towards its destination- - - the prison camp. I found out in later years from others that there were no indications or markings on the boxcars to let our planes know that there were P.O.W.'s in these cars. As far as our air force was concerned, the moving trains represented moving stock, and had to be destroyed.

We finally got to the prison camp, bad orb, **Stalag IX-B**, and were interrogated by the Germans. We gave our name, rank, and army serial number, and that was all we were required to give them.

I lost track of time during this phase of my P.O.W. experience. I was always very tired and hungry. This prison camp had many men of different nationalities and backgrounds.

Our camp, the American one, was made up of all ranks in the US army, i.e. officers, non-coms, privates.

The Geneva convention was an agreement on the conduct of the warring parties as to the treatment of prisoners. The conditions set down in the convention allowed for many rules to follow in this instance the treatment of all prisoners of war. The officers were to be placed together in one camp, non-coms in another and privates in another camp. The Germans and the US were both signers of this convention, it was an agreement. The reason for my mentioning it is this: all our ranks would have to be moved to our respective camps. This meant another move for all of us.

The next camp (non-coms) of which I was one, would be **Stalag IX-A** near Ziegenhein, Germany. This also had many nations represented, many countries that Hitler had conquered. We were in the American one. This camp was to be the one that I would be confined the longest.

I would like to tell you about a few experiences in this camp. We still ate very poorly, as a matter of fact, we were starving! We were given a watered down tea, very weak, and sometimes, anywhere from a sixth of a loaf of "black bread" to a tenth of a loaf of this most sour bread. It also seemed to me that it also contained sawdust as one of its ingredients. One meal of the day was a thin soup. We thought it might be potato, very few potatoes were in the soup, and sometimes it appeared to have insects in it also. The quantity which was ladled out was less than a cup of liquid.

My wife asked me one day, "Ernie, what did you do from day to day? I answered, "we were all too weak to do much of any kind of activity."

We stayed in our bunks made out of wood slats and straw. We used some of the wood slats to burn in the stove to keep warm. There was no other heat, so that was it when the slats were gone. So much for the support of the bed. We slept, cried, thought and talked about food and we worried. To spend time in the endless waiting, men would tell us what their occupations were and stories concerning them.

The men worried a lot. In the waiting and wishing, wondering when the allies would rescue us. Some of our men had access to the "French underground" and would receive information about the whereabouts of the troops, and what was happening to them.

Mornings in the camp was a terrible time! The German Sgt. Would come into the sleeping quarters and shout "raus, raus, (get going) and then scream at the top of his lungs "aufstehen" which means "stand up to be counted". He would then take his pistol (a p-38), a type of German pistol, and fire into the ceiling and the floor. This would put tremendous fear in our hearts and minds. We were then counted in roll call procedure. Sometimes he would miss counting a man and the total would come out wrong. He then would get angry and excited and he would again fire his pistol close to one of the men, just missing him. It was nerve-racking to say the least!

There was an incident that happened in the prison that almost cost many prisoners lives. Some of the prisoners were attempting to steal food from the kitchen. The cook caught them in the act of stealing, so they killed him. These men returned to the sleeping area. Soon the killing was discovered, and the German elite, the SS were in the area. We were taken outside of the prison into the prison yard and told that we must tell them who the

men were that did the killing. No one told on the man or men that did the killing. The cook was a Russian prisoner. I did not know this until, sometime after the war. The information concerning this killing was written up in the P.O.W. magazine. The SS men still did not know who had killed the Russian cook. One of our men considered the position that we prisoners were in if the Germans did not get an answer to the killing.

He felt quite sure if we would not give the Germans an answer to this matter, some of us, if not all, would be killed in retaliation. We were again quizzed outside in the cold, freezing weather, standing for a long period of time in very thin clothing. No one confessed to the killing. We were then put back inside our buildings. Some of the prisoners told us that they had seen some men washing blood from their hands. The SS troops were told, who these men were. We never saw the accused men again, and we feared the worse.

We had another incident happen concerning an escape attempt. We had an escape committee and several men volunteered in this attempt to become free. The plan was to equip each escapee with food, water, cigarettes and maps etc. The escape would be made through a window in the latrine to an outside ditch. The escapee would be able to drop into the ditch in intervals and crawl along it to nearby dense woods. Hopefully, their escape would not be observed. We thought this was a well planned escape. Unknown to these men, guards were placed along the ditch to intercept them. There was an informer somewhere.

The men would bribe the guards with food, candy, and whatever else they could to allow them to continue on. Then they would move along further down the ditch and sure enough there was another guard. Then the first man was finally shot and others retreated back to the latrine window and eventually to the prison living quarters. The last man was not so lucky. The shots brought the rest of the guards and German shepherd dogs out, and all bedlam broke out. This last man needed to hide, and he slipped down the hole in the latrine and held on by his fingers, until quiet prevailed. He was undetected and he was then able to get back to the living quarters. We had quite a time washing him, as you can imagine!

Another incident happened to me. One day we were told that we would be de-loused in a shower. We were put into the shower, and the water was very cold. I called out in German that the water was cold. I can't remember if we ever got warm or hot water. I noticed a shelf in this shower room and on the shelf was a bottle of brown liquid. I thought it was soap. I applied this "brown liquid" to my body as you would apply soap. After the shower I realized that I was burning under my arms and between my legs. What I had used was a creosote mixture used in cleaning the shower area. It also burned me in many other places. I had very bad burns. I went to Capt. Morgan, our leader, who was also a medical officer, and he treated me as best as he could with some medicine from the German dispensary. Needless to say, I was in serious pain for a very long while.

We were given reports from the "French underground" about the position of advancing troops. This would cause another incident to happen.

If you listened carefully you could hear shellfire in the distance, and it was getting louder. The guards got us out into the prison yard in a preparatory move to lead us to the interior of Germany. We noticed that these German guards were rather elderly and they were not in very good condition. The other German guards had left sometime before. Capt. Morgan

related to us that we must passively resist this movement into the interior of Germany. We would be considered displaced persons on the roads and may not survive. We had no idea to speak of so we understood what he said. Here is how we passively resisted this movement. As we were being told to start moving down the road, here is what we did. Keep in mind, that most of us were very sick and weak, poorly clothed. Some of us had dysentery very badly, elephantitis (a swelling of the legs due to lack of vitamin A, I was told later). We were in no condition to travel. Here is what we did - one man would fall down and another would pick him up. We all entered into this pattern. We would groan with pain and fall down and cause a great deal of confusion. The Germans were totally confused! They could have shot us on the spot if they so desired, but they did not! You could hear the gunfire and heavy tanks moving down the road. The guards took off also, leaving us alone in the prison yard. "praise the Lord", it worked!

We were now waiting for the allied troops to come into the camp. They did come and rolled the tanks right over the barbed-wire! I don't remember the unit that came in, but I know as soon as they saw us, they threw food to us. They were rations called 10 in 1 type containing cheese, dried milk, candy, soup in cans, cigarettes, and all manner of canned goods including good old "spam". Capt. Morgan, the medical officer, cautioned us about stuffing ourselves with too much food in a hurried fashion. We must not gorge ourselves with food, as our stomachs had shrunk and it could kill us! The Germans had buried some potatoes under manure to keep the potatoes from freezing. All over the prison camp men had built fires to bake these potatoes. Unfortunately some of the men overate and became very ill.

When our liberators gained control over the camp, we were told not to wander away from the camp. Once again we would be considered displaced persons and would be treated accordingly. Before we prisoners were brought under the complete control of our govt., we had to stay in the confines of the camp. We had Red Cross people, medical personnel, reporters(UP & AP) and others connected with the military. Many of our men had lost a great deal of body weight. I estimate that more than one half of our healthy weight. We were in terrible shape. We looked like skeletons by some we were told.

The Baltimore Sun papers had a young reporter who was there in the camp. He asked, "is anyone here from Baltimore, or the state of Maryland?" his name was Lee McCardell, I am not sure of the spelling. He interviewed several Marylanders including yours truly. He had my name printed in the paper the very next day with my Baltimore address. I can't remember who called my mother to let her know that I was still alive. My mother was overjoyed and very relieved that I was alive.

The time had come for us to be taken out of the camp to various hospitals for much needed medical attention. We were taken by army trucks to Frankfurt, Germany. We boarded airplanes - C-47's to camp lucky strike for treatment. At the port of Le Havre, France, the govt. had set up hospitals all named after cigarettes. (field hospitals) we were treated for our malnutrition and other illnesses. I stayed in the hospital, with many others, until they thought we were well enough to travel home.

I was placed aboard the ship "the George Washington". Many of the ex-P.O.W.'s were really not well enough to travel but somehow a few did go aboard. They did not fare well and some died.

We ex-P.O.W.'s had the complete freedom aboard ship. The food was great and it seemed that we most of the time. It was our dream come true. It took fifteen days to cross the Atlantic ocean until we reached New York.

Passing by the statue of liberty was a meaningful sight to see and was very appropriate.

After processing by the medical teams, we were given new uniforms and leave to go home for a 15 day furlough. I arrived at Ft. G. Meade in Baltimore after many months of imprisonment. We arrived back in the states just before "VE day". It was a great day for all citizens of this great country. There were parades, parties, and prayers that the war in Europe was over. We now had the Japanese to defeat. You can only imagine how my mother & sister felt to finally have me back home.

After my furlough at home was over, I was given orders to go to Miami, Florida for rest and rehabilitation. We ex-P.O.W.'s had the complete freedom to go anywhere to eat in the city. I remember the hotel's name, it was the "white house" in Miami, Fla. On the beach. We were there about 3 weeks.

When I returned home to Baltimore, I was assigned to Ft. George Meade as a duty NCO. I assisted in discharging other returning veterans. After a few months I was given my discharge. This was on Nov. 20,1945. This was not soon enough for me.

I was given my old job back at Glenn L. Martin's plant in middle. River, MD. This is one of the mandates of the president to see that the returning veteran would get his job back when he came home.

You will never know how happy this ex-soldier was to be back home. Being a P.O.W. is an experience I would not like to have happen to anyone ever again. I give all praise to my lord and savior for his protection through all of this experience.



Page last revised
James D. West
www.IndianaMilitary.org