WW II THROUGH THE EYES OF

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Stalag 13-C

World War II is now becoming almost ancient history. For a long time my dear wife, Sally Holtzmuller, your mother or grandmother, has been bugging me to write about my experiences during World War Two. When I realized that we have no records of the war experiences of either my great grandfather Irons who was prisoner of the Confederates confined at Andersonville during the Civil War or of my own father, Paul Holtzmuller, who served in the army as a Lieutenant of artillery during World War I, I decided it is about time to get my war experiences down on paper. Perhaps some one will be a little interested in my story some day.

Of course, I hope everyone knows that for the United States, WW II started with the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on December 7, 1941. The war didn't affect me very much during its first year. I was a senior in high school and I remember that I, along with some of the other students, typed up the local ration books for sugar, which was the first item rationed. Later gas, shoes, tires and meat ware rationed. After graduation from high school I got a summer job on a ferry boat which sailed across Lake Michigan from Ludington, Michigan to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The ship's name was "City of Flint" and was operated by the Pere Marquette Railroad Company. Our cargo was railroad freight cars, but if there were any people traveling by automobile who wished to cross Lake Michigan, they got first priority for space on the freight deck and were loaded. Around the holidays, the whole space was taken up by autos with their passengers headed for the resorts in Michigan. It took about 6 hours to make a run between the two cities. I worked in the galley doing almost all the jobs except cooking. I was dishwasher, crew's mess waiter, officers mess waiter, salad maker, etc. In August we went into the shipyards at Manitowoc, Wisconsin to have a new smokestack installed on the ship. In these shipyards, they were building submarines and it was interesting to watch the construction of these undersea craft. After leaving the shipyard, I was assigned to the main dining room as a waiter. The opportunity to get tips increased my pay appreciably.

In the fall I enrolled at Miami University. I registered for the draft on December 22, 1942. Not really expecting to be drafted very quickly, I did not investigate the possibility of volunteering for any of the officer programs (Naval V5 or VI 2, etc,) for which I might have been eligible. I was really surprised when, in January 1943, I received my notice that I was to be drafted in the U. S. Army and was ordered to take my physical on January 15th, 1943. My high school friends, Gerald Kurtz and Bob Breeding and I went to Columbus together for the physical. It is amusing now to think that when we came back to Farmersville, we drove around town blowing the horn, happy that we had passed the physical and could be drafted. Little did we know what we were in for! The induction notice came on February 11th, notifying us that we would be inducted into the United States Army at Ft. Hayes in Columbus, Ohio on February 25th. We traveled by train from Miamisburg, Ohio to the induction center. There we underwent repeat physicals and received all the shots. A lot of the draftees had very sore arms. However, as I recall, I was spared that pain. Also, we were issued our uniforms and all the other gear a soldier in the United States Army would need.

After only a couple of days at Ft. Hayes, we ware put on a troop train. Traveling a slow three days, the train arrived March 8th at Camp Swift Texas, which was near the

town of Bastrop, Texas. Austin was the nearest town of any size. I was assigned to the Service Battery of the 365th Field Artillery Battalion, 97th Infantry Division. There, I underwent regular basic training, such as close order drill, rifle practice, etc. Truck driving and vehicle maintenance were stressed as the Service Battery was responsible for delivering supplies to the rest of the battalion. I was appointed acting Corporal, which didn't mean much except that one wore a red arm band and was in charge of a squad at roll call. I trained until April 25, when I was told to report to headquarters and was informed I was being transferred.

The next day I packed my gear, reported in, and, with destination unknown, boarded a train along with other soldiers. The rail car was an old one with cane seats (I thought it might have been the railroad car which Lincoln had campaigned in). Trying to sleep on a slick seat was practically impossible, but we survived. On April 28th we arrived at Baton Rouge, Louisiana and were taken to Louisiana State University. There I learned that I was being assigned to the Army Specialized Training Program. After a few days of living in the dorms at the college and experiencing grits for the first time, a group of us was loaded on another train. Traveling northward on the Illinois Central Railroad out of Louisiana, our destination proved to be Lexington, Kentucky. The Army had decided that it needed engineers and had set up programs at universities all over the country to train soldiers for this profession. The University of Kentucky was to be the place where we were to study to be engineers.

Needless to say, this was great duty: Easy dorm living, lots of single young female coeds, pretty good food, and proximity to home. I was even taught the Kentucky Double Dip by a dancing teacher provided by the United Service Organization as a diversion from our studies. Unhappily, calculus and I didn't agree with each other and early in November, at the end of the second term, I was told I had failed and was being sent back to the troops. However, my departure wasn't that premature, as the Army closed up the program early in 1944 and sent everyone to the infantry. It was great while it lasted. There was a poem which started out: "Take down your service flag, mother. Your son's in the ASIP." This was the acronym for Army Specialized Training Program which was what this duty was called.

On November 9th we left Lexington by train. This time we had a Pullman and a compartment and our destination proved to be Fort Jackson South Carolina. Fort Jackson, where the 106th Division was training, was just outside of Columbia, South Carolina. There I was assigned to **Company E, 423rd Infantry Regiment**. I qualified with the Garand rifle and most of the time we were out in the field training for battle. Not really liking the infantry, I decided I might like to be a pilot in the Air Force. On December 26th I took a test and applied for pilot training and was accepted. On January 14, 1944 I was transferred to the Fort Jackson base complement to await my assignment. My days were spent walking guard duty around the Fort Jackson warehouses. When I found out that my brother, Dick Holtzmuller was at Norfolk, Virginia, I got a three day pass and took a bus to Virginia to see him. I did get word to him that I was there, but since his ship was ready to sail, he was not able to get to town and I didn't get to see him. To add insult to injury I caught a bad cold, overslept in the YMCA, and almost missed my train, which would have made me AWOL.

I left Fort Jackson on February 15th and traveled to a Basic Training Center in Greensboro, North Carolina, where the final physical and other exams were conducted to see if candidates were Air Force pilot material. On March 10th, without ever leaving the base or getting any sort of leave, I was shipped to an airfield at Stuttgart, Arkansas along

with other flyer candidates. This was a basic training field where Air Force pilots trained in BT-10's and we were there for what they called "on the line training". It really was just a place to put potential pilot trainees because they didn't know what else to do with us. From March 11 when we arrived, till April 17 when we were shipped out, we had little to do but stand by and wait for the coffee wagon to come around. The only notable thing that happened there was that my wallet was stolen. We trainees were never issued passes during our stay and I never left the air base to visit Stuttgart. I never even got a ride in one of the BTI 0 training planes! The Air Force, upon learning that they had enough pilots, reassigned all of the prospective trainees back to the regular army. Once more I made my way to the local train depot and this time traveled to Indiana.

Arriving at Camp Atterbury, Indiana on April 18, 1944, I was assigned to **Battery A, 589th Field Artillery Battalion, 106th Infantry Division**. This was the division I had left in South Carolina. I had missed the Tennessee maneuvers with the division. I was told it was a very muddy, cold mess. I was not assigned to the infantry, which, in retrospect, was probably a lucky break given the heavy losses they experienced in the Battle of the Bulge.. Battery A was one of 5 batteries that made up the 589th Battalion. It consisted of about 80 officers and men broken down into the four gun sections, a wire section, an instrument section, truck drivers, cooks and bakers. We had four 105 millimeter howitzers, which were cannons that fired a shell which was about 4 inches in diameter and weighed about 40 pounds. The shells we fired were either high explosive or armor piercing and had a range of about 2 miles. We trained all summer long with our 105 millimeter howitzers and I worked my way up to first the glorious position of Private First Class and then to Corporal Gunner of the number one howitzer of the battery. The gunner is the person who moves the barrel to the right and left when aiming the gun. Atterbury was a good camp, as Indianapolis was near and I was frequently able to get home on three day passes. In September we learned that the Division had its orders for shipping overseas. After the chore of loading all our guns, trucks, and other equipment onto flat cars was completed, we entrained for Camp Miles Standish, which was near Taunton, Massachusetts outside Boston. We got passes regularly while there and enjoyed the Old Howard Burlesque Theater and Sally the Tassel Girl in the environs of Scully Square, as well as the Silver Dollar bar down the street.

Finally on November 9th we entrained to Boston and boarded the troop ship "Wakefield" which had been the Atlantic liner "Manhatten". The trip across the Atlantic was uneventful except that for the first three days we were caught in one of the worst storms ever to hit the north Atlantic and almost everyone was seasick, myself included. Finally the waves subsided and the rest of the trip was passable except for the six-tiered bunks and the crowded conditions in one of the lower decks of the ship.

We arrived at Liverpool, England on November 17th and went directly from the ship to a train. Our destination was Gloucester, located in the south of England. At the Gloucester training camp we received our trucks, guns and other equipment. Some of our equipment was missing and we were short some crucial items. I had one pass to the city and, along with some friends, picked up some British Air Force girls. Just a little pub duty and a fairly dull evening. On December 1 st our battalion trucked to Waymouth (Portland Harbor) on the south coast of England and on December 3rd, loaded on an LST (Landing Ship Tank) for a trip across the English Channel. Again a storm came up and we had a very rough crossing. I didn't get sick this time, but it was dangerous, as this ungainly ship rolled almost far enough to turn over. There was some trouble getting into the harbor at LeHarve, France for the trip up the Seine river, but our turn finally came for entry to the river and we steamed up the Seine to Rouen, where we disembarked on December 5th.

As I recall, after leaving the LST, we bivouacked in a field that was more a swamp than anything else.

The next three days we traveled by truck through France and into Belgium, arriving in the vicinity of St. Vith, Belgium on the 8th of December. We passed through the towns of Amiens, Cambrai, and Maubeuge and saw a lot of bomb craters and German equipment which had been destroyed and even some of the trenches remaining from the First World War. We went into bivouac near the village of Wallarode, Belgium. On December 9th we moved into line about 1.5 miles south of Auw, Germany. We replaced a battery of the 2nd Infantry Division, gun for gun, as the 106th was relieving this division in the line. We were later told that when we had registered our gun (this is when the guns were aligned and coordinated for battle) our gun had fired the first round for our division. The days between December 10th and the 15th were spent in getting used to living in the field and firing missions at targets in Germany. The men we relieved had built a hut, so we didn't have to live in tents. Everything was peaceful. We were told that this was a quiet sector and that we were just to get used to combat. We fired a lot of harassing missions at night, mostly aimed at sounds heard by our forward observers. The weather during this period was cloudy, with fog lasting for most of the daylight hours. We saw a lot of German VI rockets, (more commonly known as Buzz Bombs) fly over our position. We were positioned under the path of their targets in Leige, Belgium and the English mainland.

I will include excerpts from the 589th Field Artillery Battalion history to relate what happened to our battery and battalion on the 16th of December 1944, the day the Battle of the Bulge started. See these pages at the end of my story. This narrative is pretty accurate and reflects the events of this day. This was the start of the "Battle of the Bulge". Read more about this battle in the book "A Blood Red Tide" which should be in all your parents libraries.

Our first day of real battle was very harrowing. Our gun was unable to fire on the tanks which appeared in front of our position since a log fence had been built around our gun and one of the upright posts of the fence was right in line with the tank. Also, a German artillery shell had buried itself in the mud about 20 feet in front of our gun, but luckily it was a dud and didn't explode. That night, as we were loading up to move back to a new position, machine gun fire with tracers continually flew over our heads. We were on the edge of a wooded area and the Germans were firing just above the tops of the trees. The enemy must have mistaken the tree tops for the ground.

We left the position and it took us all night to travel only a few miles back toward the little village of Schonberg, Belgium to the location that had been picked for our new position. As soon as our section was told where to go into position, we got busy and unhooked the gun from our 6 X 6 truck and unloaded all our ammunition. The other three gun sections seemed to be distracted and hadn't unhooked their guns or done anything to get ready to fire. No sooner had we made everything ready than someone came running down through the position yelling "March Order! Get out of here, the Germans are coming!" A weapons carrier then pulled into the lane between where our truck had parked and the howitzer and the weapons carrier got stuck in the mud. We closed trails on the gun and were able to roll the gun out by hand. We were then able to push the weapons carrier out and finally were able to move our truck down to the ammunition so that it could be reloaded onto the truck. We hooked up the gun to the truck and drove out to the road with the hope that we were on our way to safety in St. Vith. The other three sections had driven off at the first shout.

We had driven just a short distance down the road and started down the hill into the little village of Schonberg when we suddenly saw a German armored vehicle parked in the middle of the road. We subsequently found out that the machine we had thought was a tank was really a self-propelled gun. Our driver stopped at once. None of us fired our small arms, nor did the German fire at us as he was parked so that his gun was aimed down the hill and not directed toward our truck. The German then drove off down the hill and around a curve, where we lost sight of him. Immediately thereafter a jeep pulled up behind us and our Executive Officer, Lt. Eric Wood, jumped out and asked us why we had stopped. We told him we had just seen a German tank. He said "It couldn't be. It was probably an American tank". He climbed into the cab of our truck along with Cpl. Knoll, our driver, and Sgt. Scannapico our section leader, and said "Lets go".

So off we went, down the hill, around the curve and on toward a little stone bridge, which crossed the Our river into the middle of the little village of Schonberg. The Lieutenant. then saw a tank parked to the side of a house and said "See, it's an American tank". Then he looked again and said "No it isn't! It's a German tank! Pour on the gas!" As we passed the tank the German fired at us and missed. Pvt. Campagna, who was manning a bazooka, fired at the German and also missed but he hit a house and blew a hole in the side of it. We then thought we were home free and on the road to St. Vith but when we went around a curve we faced another self-propelled gun with its cannon pointed right at us. We also saw about three or four German soldiers with automatic weapons beside the gun. Cpl. Knoll stopped the truck and we enlisted men jumped off the truck to the Left into a ditch. Lt. Wood jumped out the right side and ran up the hill into the woods. (See the attachment at the end of this document to read the story of his escape, exploits and eventual death.) Immediately after we had left the truck the German's self- propelled gun fired a round into the motor of our truck, blowing metal and shrapnel all around.

One American truck had been stopped before ours and when we escaped from the truck to the ditch, we found that we had joined a Lieutenant Colonel and four black soldiers from an American 155 mm artillery battalion.. After discussing the situation, and realizing that there was no cover to run to and that our few carbines would be almost useless against a bunch of automatic weapons, we decided that to do anything other than surrender would be automatic suicide. We walked out of the ditch with our hands in the air. Once out of the ditch, we found the truck driver, Cpl Knoll, lying in the road, shot through both ankles and also wounded with shrapnel from the artillery round which had been fired into the motor. The Germans searched us, taking food, cigarettes, watches, etc. - items that they thought might be useful to them. They subsequently indicated we should start back up the road towards Germany.

By this time many other trucks from the 589th Artillery Battalion had come down the hill, been stopped and had their occupants captured by the enemy. These prisoners too were making their way back up the road to Germany toward the POW camps. I indicated that I would like to stay with the wounded CpI. Knoll and they seemed to give me the okay. He wasn't bleeding badly, but I am sure he was in shock. The German infantry started coming by and every so often I would be called back to the road to be searched again till I had nothing left of value. There was really nothing I could do for the wounded man except keep him company and hope a German medic would soon come to his aid. Shortly thereafter, an officer came along, and with his pistol, let me know I had better start up the road into Germany. Unfortunately, I had to leave Cpl. Knoll to his fate, which was, I found out later from his parents, that he was killed in action.

I started up the road and noticed Sgt. Scannapico's body lying by the side of the road. At which point he had left the truck I never found out, but he had probably left the cab to shoot at some infantry soldiers he had seen and was shot down. By this time, American artillery shells being fired from somewhere near St. Vith were falling on the road which we had come down from the second position. I did not want to walk through this barrage. I soon noticed a lane taking off to the left. Since there was no one to tell me which way to go, I started up this lane. I noticed other Americans were following me. Since there was no guard with me, I supposed that there was a guard somewhere in the back of our little column. I kept walking up the lane. The lane turned into a path and then finally ended up in a clearing in a wood. About twenty or so Americans followed me into the clearing. I asked, "Where is the guard?" They answered "We thought he was in the front." Not knowing where we were or which way we should go, we started walking north away from Schonberg. We walked until we came to another small village, which I think was Herresbach, which is located about two miles north of Schonberg. Seeing no enemy, we went to the village. Thinking that this was just a small battle, and that the Americans would be back through on the morrow, we decided to hole up in the basement of one of the houses for the night. The owners of the house we chose seemed to be friendly and even cooked some potatoes for us. In the middle of the night we heard lots of stamping upstairs followed by a voice calling down the basement stairs, "You are prisoners of the German Army!" We had inadvertently crossed the border into Germany during our walk through the forest and someone from the village had turned us in.

My memory of the journey from the front to the prison camp is rather sketchy. I will relate those things I do remember. The first town we passed through was Prum. There, a German officer made me give my rubber overshoes to a German infantryman. The first night we slept in a German bunker on the Siegfried Line. While marching back into Germany we passed a plethora of German war equipment along the roads. Many tanks (Tigers and Panthers), trucks, trucks pulling trucks, cannons of all varieties, horse drawn equipment, and armaments and equipment made in all the countries of Europe. Another night we slept in a big warehouse. At one stop we were made to give up one of our outer coats. Unfortunately for me, they took my overcoat, which left me with just a thin field jacket. As it was getting colder every day, I found I was under-dressed. I had taken off my long underwear the day before the battle and was wearing summer underwear when I was captured. Food during these days was practically nil. Water was also scarse and once I drank water scooped out of a road side ditch with a dirty helmet liner. We were locked in rail cars with no heat or toilet facilities. It was frightfully cold. I remember, what I believe was on the 23rd of December, we were locked in boxcars in the railroad yards at Bonn, Germany. All afternoon the B-I 7s flew overhead. Fortunately for us they were bombing Cologne instead of Bonn. That Christmas Eve was pretty bad. I was locked in a boxcar, was very cold, and had eaten nothing in the prior 48 hours. On the morning of the 25th we arrived at Limburg, Germany. We were unloaded and marched to the gates of the prison camp, but were turned away as bombs had been dropped the night before and many of the facilities had been destroyed. I found out later that Lieutenant O'Toole from my battery had been killed in the bombing of the Limburg POW camp. We were marched back to the Limburg station area and had to wait till night to be reloaded aboard the boxcars. The trains ran only at night to avoid the fighter bombers who flew around Germany in daylight looking for trains to destroy.

I stood all day long in the station area. Although no food was available, there was access to water. Not having had a drink for quite a while, I drank more than I should have on an empty stomach. Soon after drinking the water, I got the chills and shakes and

felt very weak. That day was the only day during the war that I thought I might die. The Germans then brought the train to the station and we were loaded onto the cars. Usually they only loaded 40 men in each car, but for some reason they loaded at least 80 men in the car and we were packed like sardines. Since it was so crowded, I became moderately warm and got over the shakes.

Some time during the night we arrived at the town of Hammelburg, Germany. We detrained and marched up a big hill to German Prison Camp XIII C. Thus, on December 26, 1944 my 128 days of incarceration in a German prison camp began. Prison Camp XIII C at Hammelburg was the camp portrayed on the television show "Hogans Heros". We were put in wooden barracks which housed about 80 men. We were given a small piece of German black bread and a tin bowl filled with a hot liquid which tasted somewhat like tea. I drank the tea, but the bread tasted so bad that I couldn't eat it and I gave it away. In a couple of days this bread started to taste like cake! We kept the tin bowl we had been given and this became our eating vessel for the rest of our captivity. Not having an eating utensil,. I carved a spoon of sorts out of a piece of wood. I still had the spoon when I got home, but I gave it to the VA museum in Dayton. Our living quarters were similar to those portrayed on the TV show "Hogans Heros". The wooden bunks were three high with a thin mattress made of burlap and filled with very little straw. The mattress was supported by very few wooden slats. A few slats in some bunks were burned by prisoners to try to warm the building. We found out later that it was a crime against the German state to burn bed slats.

The next morning we ware assembled outside and the Germans sorted us out. First the black soldiers and the Jewish soldiers were segregated. Initially they thought I was black. The last boxcar in which I had traveled had been carrying what I suppose was black graphite and I was covered with this black material. I had to roll up my sleeve to show I was white. The privates were then taken away. Per the Geneva Convention, privates could be made to work on non-war production jobs and they were put out on what was called Kommandos to do farm work or the like.

In a couple of days we Non Commissioned Officers, Corporals and Sergeants were moved to new barracks. Our new quarters consisted of a large brick building which had been a horse stable. This area had been a training camp for German soldiers. There were three of these buildings, one above the other on the side of a steep hill. The barracks were surrounded by high, triple barbed wire fences with watchtowers at the corners. Ten feet inside the barbed wire fence was a single wire supported about a foot off the ground. This wire was called the dead line. All prison compounds had this particular feature. The rule was that if you crossed this trip-wire, the guards in the tower could and would shoot you. One end of our building was filled with 3 tiered steel bunks with the same thin mattresses. The only other pieces of furniture were a couple of benches. There were two small stoves and we were given one small pail of coal each day for each stove. Needless to say, it was never warm in the building, especially since the winter of 1944/1945 was one of the coldest winters in memory. Water for the 80 or so men in this building was made available through only 2 cold water taps. The toilet facility was an open air latrine which every so often had to be emptied by hand into a tank and then transported away. Thankfully, I never had that duty. We had each been given a blanket when we first arrived. A little later I was given an army overcoat, one which had probably come from an Eastern European soldier. The Germans also provided me with some long underwear. It was not as good as the long underwear that I had left in my barracks bag, but was better than nothing. Needless to say, until I reached the hospital in May after liberation, I never took them or any of my other clothes off except once or twice when we were taken up the

hill for a shower and occasionally to search for body lice. Soon after incarceration, these small creatures became a problem. The only remedy was to take off your shirt and hunt through the seams and pick out the little white parasites.

A German sergeant was in charge of the barracks and lived in a little room at the front of the building. He had a very wrinkled face and was probably put on light duty because of wounds from the Russian front. We called him Prune Face after one of the characters in the Dick Tracy comic strip. We didn't have too much contact with him except that he came through the barracks each morning to wake us up or to shout at us for breaking a rule. Daily we were ordered outside, lined up and counted. Our captors always seemed to get the count wrong and we had to stand in the cold until they got it right. After the weather warmed up, we "got even" with them by moving around while they were counting.

We soon settled into the routine of prison life. After being awakened by the compound guard, our warm morning drink arrived in a big barrel. There were two different drinks. One was made from roasted barley, was dark in color and tasted slightly like coffee. The other, brewed from some kind of leaves which we never were able to identify, was a little like tea. Around the middle of the morning the bread was distributed. The loaves were rectangular, about ten to twelve inches long. Each loaf was to feed seven men. As soon as we got the bread it was cut into seven pieces. I was the bread cutter for my group. Each day we rotated turns as to which of us would choose his piece first and second and so forth. The first man choosing would carefully look the pieces over to see which one was the largest before picking out his piece. Usually after the bread distribution, a barrel of cooked potatoes was brought down to the compound. The same distribution procedure used for the bread was followed for the potatoes. Seven piles of potatoes were laid out and, again, the first man to choose a portion was rotated each day. Each man received only four or five very small potatoes. Some of the men had great will power. They would save the bread till the potatoes came and then mix the two together with water and heat the mixture on the stove. I, like the majority of the prisoners, wolfed down the food as soon as I received it. To complete our diet, we received a ration of watery soup once a day, either at noon or in the evening. It was usually made either of barley or some kind of dried green leaves or sugar beet pulp. Once in a while there would be a little piece of what was probably horse meat in the barley soup. Interestingly, all the prisoners lined up in the same order for the distribution of soup. If there happened to be seconds, the line would then rotate to equitably distribute the remaining soup. The other foods which we occasionally received were: a tablespoon of a red jam which we had heard was a coal tar product, a small piece of blood sausage and a small piece of cheese. These items were usually distributed in the evening. The only other food we received while in Hammelburg, was, as I remember, one-fourth of an Australian Red Cross Parcel. Needless to say with this low calorie diet we lost weight very rapidly and were hungry all the time. I probably weighed 170 lb. when I was captured and weighed about 125 lb. at liberation. We were given one other Red Cross parcel donated by the Australian POWs. The box contained toiletries. The box contained a toothbrush, mirror, comb, and other various items. Since we only had one box we had a drawing for the articles. I think I got the best items, an aluminum spoon and fork.

I became friends with my bunk mates, Charles "Pud" Dissinger from Lebanon, PA. who was in the 99th Division, and Ray Seckler from Buffalo, NY and who was in the 76th division. Ray had a deck of cards and we played a lot of cards, but I don't remember what game we played. Most of the time we sat around and talked about food. We traded menus and recipes, and made up lists of all the foods we could think of. We wore all the

clothes we had all the time. We were taken to a shower room twice during our captivity, but any washing and shaving the rest of the time was pretty minimal. Twice we were marched to an auditorium and shown movies. There was no heat in the auditorium and it was very cold. The movies were in German and the language was unintelligible to us. They were regular films, not propaganda films. Sometimes they would take 6 or 8 of us, walk us about 2 miles to a forest and allow us to gather wood to bring back to the barracks as additional fuel for our little stoves. There was always a German forester in the woods and he would tell us which pieces of wood we could pick up and take back. We were never allowed to cut down a tree unless it was dead. There were a couple of houses near the woods which were inhabited by a few young boys who were being trained as soldiers. We stopped at the back door of one of the kitchens once and the cook gave me some sauerkraut juice to drink. Before we got back to our barracks, I wished I hadn't drunk it. Another diversion we had was a Bible study class which was started by one of the prisoners. Each evening he would gather everyone together who was interested in his class and conduct a Bible lesson. He spoke on the book of Luke and had just started on Acts when we were moved. The only other diversion we had was when an American Chaplain came to our barracks a couple of Sundays and preached to us.

A group of Russian prisoners was housed in the barracks just next to and above our barracks. They were real brutish looking men and were in very bad shape. We had no contact with them. However, they came down periodically and searched through our meager garbage for scraps of food. At most, they would be rewarded with a few potato skins. Every day they were marched across the road to a building which was filled with sewing machines. I never found out what they were sewing.

There were some Serbian and a few Australian prisoners in this camp. Once we met some of the Serbians out in the woods when they were gathering wood. One of them gave me a cigarette which was greatly appreciated.

To my knowledge, there was only one prisoner who died while in the Hammelburg camp. I don't know what he died from, but I imagine it was pneumonia. I was picked as one of the dead soldier's pallbearers. He had a wooden casket, but it was too small for his body and I noticed that when they nailed down the lid some of his hair was sticking out between the boards.

We Americans had become pretty sloppy in the weeks after captivity. I had grown a real good mustache which curled down around my mouth. One day a German officer came into the quarters and really let us have it. He admonished us about our slovenliness, and told us that we were not good soldiers. He wanted us to shave and get cleaned up. This diatribe helped all of us to quit feeling sorry for ourselves. I don't remember where I found the razor, but I shaved off the mustache and did try to look more soldier-like from that point onwards.

We existed through the cold winter months and when spring came, the warmer weather made our lives much more bearable. On March 27th our routine was temporarily shattered by nearby gunfire. Not knowing what was happening, we stayed in the barracks keeping a low profile. At the time we were unaware that up the hill from our compound was another compound filled with American infantry officers. We learned later that Gen. Patton, whose army was about 60 miles away, had sent a task force of soldiers and vehicles to Hammelburg to liberate his son- in-law, who had been captured in North Africa. The task force had made it to the camp and managed to afford the officers an opportunity to escape. However, the Germans had rallied and cut off their chance to

retreat and succeeded to capture almost all of the task force. A few of the imprisoned officers did take off, among them my battery commander Capt. Menke, who was one of the few to make it back to the American lines. Also, Patton's son-in-law, who was severely wounded, made it back alive. The story of this raid is documented in the books A Blood Red Tide, and 48 Hours to Hammelburg. Patton's Only Mistake, an article in the Saturday Evening Post, included in the appendix, documents the events of this operation. Our guards had taken off and we could have escaped, but not knowing where we were ~r having any idea which way to go, we stayed put. Soon SS guards were around the camp and things went back to normal.

On the night of March 31 St we were told to get our belongings together and to get ready to leave. After dark, we were marched back to Hammelburg and loaded on boxcars. This time, a German guard was put in each car and, fortunately, we were not locked in. Dawn came and we were still traveling when suddenly we heard airplanes and machine gun fire. The train was being strafed by two American P-51 fighters. The train stopped and the guard opened the door and we all jumped out and waved our arms at the planes. The pilots then recognized that the train was loaded with POWs and wiggled their wings and flew off. We looked in our boxcar and found that an American had been hit in the head by a bullet and killed. The Germans ordered us to get back on the train. We refused to return to the train unless they painted "POW" on top of the cars. They hollered and threatened to shoot us if we did not return to the train. We still refused to board the train. They finally persuaded us to march to Schweinfurt, which was about 12 miles away, on the reassurance that they would paint "POW' on the cars and then continue our journey. We walked to the town and it was dark when we arrived. We ended up boarding the cars even though they had not painted the letters on them. By the next morning (April 1 st), we had arrived at our destination, which was Nurnberg, and were marched to Camp XIIID. We were housed in large tents. In the tent, Pud, Ray and I met two British soldiers, Albert Brown and Edward Macey. They had walked from a camp in Poland where they had worked in a coal mine. The reason for the movement of the prisoners was that Hitler did not want any prisoners freed and, as the front lines were moving closer into Germany, he ordered the prisoners to be moved to other camps in the heartland of Germany. We banded together with the two British soldiers to share any food that we might receive. Albert and Edward were both from London and were typical British soldiers - all spit and polish. Their uniforms were clean and neat as compared to the uniforms of the typical American prisoner, which were generally pretty sloppy and dirty. Somewhere along the line, Edward decided he liked my field jacket. He offered to trade his clean British battle jacket for my filthy, green field jacket. I made the trade at once! I still have the British jacket.

On April 4 we were told once more to get our belongings together and were marched out of the camp and onto the road to march to an unknown destination. We walked for the next two weeks along German country roads and finally reached camp XII A, located at the town of Moosburg, which was about 34 kilometers northeast of Munich and about 170 kilometers southwest of Nurnberg. I do not remember a lot about this march, but I will relate what I can recall. The weather was mild, so cold was not a problem. The pace of the march was slow. Although we could see the autobahn from time to time, we walked on the by-roads away from this super-highway. Also, the food was better because white-painted Red Cross trucks brought us Red Cross packages from Switzerland. I think we received two packages during the trek, one package for each group of five or six men. To also augment our food supply, we could trade cigarettes for good old German black bread. We slept out in the open only a few times. On most nights we were housed in the barns of German farmers. On these nights, we usually found the

farmers potato bin and stole his potatoes. An amusing incident took place one night when we had washed our potatoes in a wooden tub by the front door of the farmer's home before cooking them. That night, as we were sitting around, an old German granny came out of the house carrying a slop jar and threw the contents on the manure pile in the middle of the homestead. Then she walked over to the wooden tub and rinsed out the slop jar, just like she had been doing it every day of her life. Another noteworthy aspect of our trip was, how much our British comrades liked their tea. Any time we had a ten minute stop on our hike, they wanted to brew up a pot of tea. I had found an enamel wash pan with no bottom and a length of steel rod which I had bent into an s shape. With these two items we had the makings of a grill. I carried these articles along in loops on my overcoat. As soon as we stopped for a short halt, one of our group would run to find wood, another would find water and we would get a fire started and brew a pot of tea. We drank it with sugar and KIim (a powered milk), which was part of the Red Cross packages. We always had plenty of tea, as some Red Cross packages were British and the Americans were always wanting to trade the tea for coffee or cigarettes. One other memorable event was that President Roosevelt died while we were on the road. The German guards were jubilant upon learning this, as they thought this might change the course of the war. Another occurrence which I do not remember but was related in a book I recently read, was that the column was strafed by American P-57 fighters which caused some POW casualties. The only large city I am sure we passed through was Regensburg where we crossed the Danube River. The bridge over the Danube was heavily mined with huge aerial bombs ready to be exploded if an allied army came close.

Arriving at Moosburg's Prison Camp VII A, we were again housed in huge tents. Prisoners from all over Germany had been brought to this camp and it was very crowded. At night when we all lay down, our bodies were head to toe and side to side. There were prisoners from the allied armies of many countries: Australia, New Zealand, France, Poland, The Balkans, Russia, French Africa, etc.

The officers' compound was next to ours, but was separated by four barbed wire fences with a guard stationed in the middle. The usual "dead wire" was positioned ten feet further out from the main fences. If anyone stepped over this trip wire, the guard was allowed to shoot to kill. For some reason, we, the enlisted men, had more food than the officers. The officers would trade rings, watches and other valuables for food. At first, the only way to trade was to throw the goods back and forth across the wires. Then the trip-wire became trampled and was discarded. Next, a hole in the first set of barbed wire appeared and the Germans, seeing the writing on the wall, relieved the guard and allowed holes to be made in all the wire so that traveL between the two compounds was unhindered. Some of the good traders had watches strapped all the way up their arms! Our British friends found their commanding officers and had them over to our tent for tea and crackers. It was all very proper.

At last, on April 29th, we awoke to guns firing around the camp. There was a pretty good fire fight going on and bullets were flying overhead,. The prisoners stayed close to the ground while the battle was in progress. Then, about ten o'clock a.m., an American tank broke down the front gate of the camp and we were liberated.

The next ten days were spent waiting for transport back to an area under American control. Pud's division was one of the divisions which had liberated us. He went out of camp, found his old mess sergeant and had a jeep-load of food sent in to us. We really pigged out on that food! I ate so much that I got sick. I felt so ill that I couldn't get out of the camp to see what was going on. I did have someone get me a German helmet

which turned out to be my only souvenir from the German army. Soon afterwards it was our turn to be trucked to an airfield in Landshutt, Germany, from which we would be flown back to France. Shortly after we arrived at the airfield there was a rain shower. One of the C-47 transport planes which was flying in to pick up the released prisoners had an accident when landing and the field was closed down for the rest of the day. While we were sitting around that evening, planes of all varieties started landing at the airfield. Apparently the Russians were getting close to an airfield in Austria and Germans pilots, some with their families, were fleeing the area and coming over to where the Americans were in charge. As soon as the planes landed, the men, women and children who were aboard deplaned and immediately ran off, and just leaving the planes where they had landed.

The next morning the field was reopened and we were soon on our way to Rheims, France, our first processing point on our way home. Shortly after arriving at Rheims I was feeling so ill that I decided to see a doctor. I went to the dispensary, not realizing that I would never see my friends again. As soon as the doctor saw me he ordered me to the hospital, as I had developed a bad case of jaundice or hepatitis. As soon as I found a mirror, I saw that my eyes were as yellow as bananas. I was in the hospital for longer than I should have been, as every time they would get my fever down to normal I would eat something fatty and my temperature would shoot up. Finally, I was well enough to be sent home. I traveled to Paris, where I had almost a whole day of sightseeing before catching a train for LeHarve and camp Lucky Strike, where the final processing of POWs was completed.

Soon I was transported to the LeHarve docks, where I boarded a troop ship for my return trip to the U. S. A. Standing on the deck of our ship I saw soldiers from the 97th Division (the division I had started out with) loading onto the ship docked next to ours. They were probably headed for training and then on to the Pacific for the coming battle for the mainland of Japan. We disembarked in Boston and I was able to call home and assure my family that I was all right and would soon be home. The next leg of my trip was by train back to Camp Atterbury, Indiana for final processing. Coincidentally, I ran into Gerald Kurtz, who had been drafted with me and had gone to Camp Swift at the same time as I had. We then met another boy from Farmersville, who was stationed at Atterbury, who offered to drive us home. Planning to surprise our families, we accepted his offer. Alas, halfway home, his car gave out and we had to call my father. So much for our surprise.

After a 30 day furlough at home during which V J Day came with full Allied victory, I was sent to Miami Beach, Fl. for a "rest and recreation period" of 10 days. I was billeted at the Hotel Shelbourne. A hurricane had just blown through southern Florida the day before I got there and, for a couple of days, there was no electricity in the hotel. The elevators were not operating so I had to climb seven flights of stairs to my room. My days were filled with medical exams, activities and sun and passed very quickly. The army provided my first deep sea fishing experience. From Miami Beach I was ordered to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and there, I was assigned to the Military Police. This duty included riding around the area checking for AWOL soldiers. I spent one night in charge of the post prison, an experience which didn't turn out so well as it seems I was too lenient with the prisoners. My Military Police duty was followed by a short stint as post bugler. My duties as bugler included firing the morning and evening cannon and playing reveille and taps and the other bugle calls for the post.

I had applied for a discharge from the army when I arrived at Ft. Bragg. My discharge was granted early in November. I traveled home by train, arriving in Farmersville on November 10th 1945. Thus ended my World War II experience.

My daughter in law Jennifer, whom I want to thank for editing this manuscript, asked me what were the most important things I learned from my experience. Briefly these are: that a soldier really doesn't know what is going on and he is just doing a job and following orders; one can survive a lot of adversity, affliction, hunger and stress; the average person doesn't know what real hunger is and the experience gave me a first hand grasp of what the truly hungry people of the world are going through.

Appendix
Pages 4 & 5 from Sgt. Aspenwalls HDQ Battery 589th FA Battalion Memoirs
General Patton's Mistake, Saturday Evening Post May 1, 1948
The Incredible Valor of Eric Wood, The Saturday Evening Post
Copies of Original Telegrams of Missing in Action and Report of Capture
Copy of post cards written from prison camp
Copy of V-Mail That families and soldiers could mail to one another and not take up a lot of shipping space.

November 11, 2004 - Veteran remembers POW days

FARMERSVILLE | Don Holtzmuller thought things were going pretty well in December 1944.

He was with Battery A, 589th Field Artillery Battalion, 106th Infantry Division, and had just moved into a position about a mile and a half south of Auw, Germany. The men were getting used to living in the field and would fire missions at targets from their Belgium location into Germany. Since the men his unit relieved had already built huts, they didn't even have to live in tents.

He remembers watching German V1 rockets soar overhead and describes them as sounding "like an old Fordson tractor, noisy and loud and sharp." Passing only 300 to 500 yards overhead, Holtzmuller said he "could see the exhaust coming out." The V1's were targeting England. "Everything was peaceful," Holtzmuller wrote in an eight-page memoir about his WWII experiences. But not for long.

The men spotted a German tank and soon German soldiers were everywhere. "We didn't have a tank up there with us at all."

Holtzmuller was captured with six others in his gun unit, and a sergeant and truck driver were killed. Holtzmuller stayed with Cpl. Knoll, the truck driver, who was bleeding and in shock until a German officer came along, pointed a pistol at him and suggested it was time to move along. "I had to leave Cpl. Knoll to his fate," Holtzmuller wrote. Later he learned that he was listed as killed in action. He saw Sgt. Scannipico's body lying beside the road.

"Thus on Dec. 26, 1944, began my 128 days of incarceration in a German prison camp," Holtzmuller wrote.

Earlier, Holtzmuller had been excited about passing his draft physical. When he and friends Gerald Kurtz and Bob Breeding (now both deceased) passed their physical, the group returned to Farmersville and drove around town blowing their horn. "I should have been crying," Holtzmuller said.

The months in German captivity was a time without enough food and never enough warmth. Still, Holtzmuller said he was never mistreated. During his time as a POW, he remembers only one or two opportunities to take a shower. When I took off my pants, they just stood there," he said.

Plagued by lice, Holtzmuller's weight fell from 170 pounds at capture to about 125 pounds when he was liberated. Holtzmuller was moved between several German POW camps. He began at Prison Camp 13-C at Hammelburg, the camp portrayed on the *Hogan's Heroes* television show. He also was held at camps near Nuremberg and Moosberg.

There was only one opportunity of escape.

General Patton had sent a task force of soldiers and vehicles to Hammelburg to free Patton's son-in-law. For a while, the POW camp was unguarded. But Holtzmuller said no one attempted to escape because they didn't know where they were or which way to flee. "We didn't know which way was north or south, east or west," Holtzmuller said.

He was only sure of one direction. "I knew which way was up," he said.

He still keeps a small Bible and pages from a notebook he kept while a POW. It's not a diary, though, but more of a list. "The tiny notebook kept track of foods they wanted to eat, not girls or sex," said Holtzmuller's wife, Sally.

Don fingers the handwritten pages. "My mother always made the nicest mush," he said. Other penciled entries list more basic foods: oatmeal, macaroni, pot pie. Still, Holtzmuller never felt he would die in captivity. "I don't know why," he said. "I just knew I was going to get out of it."

On April 29, 1945, he awoke to guns firing around the camp. At 10 a.m., a tank broke down the front gate of the camp. They were liberated. Though the trip home was rocky — he contracted hepatitis and had to be hospitalized in France — it was during a 30-day furlough at home that VJ Day came.

Holtzmuller, 80, met his wife, Sally, 76, when her brother and he were fraternity roommates at Miami University in Oxford after the war. The two married in 1949 and had five children. Holtzmuller operated the Ford tractor dealership in Farmersville until 1980.

While he doesn't see himself as a hero, he has no trouble describing himself in other terms. "I'm the luckiest man in the world," he said. (By William G. Schmidt, For the Dayton Daily News)