

Raymond T. Makowske

During the Battle of the Bulge
and

P. O. W. (Kriegsgefangen) in Dresden
(Slaughterhouse 5)

Prelude

Recalling events fifty years old was a trying task. Although the curtain of time raises there remains a veil that blocks your vision into the recesses of your memory. It's only through scattered holes in the veil that I was able to recall my personal experiences during this epic period. I made no attempt to delve into the military wisdom of our leaders; nor was I able to project my inner emotions. However, when I dwell too long on the overall story ,my eyes get watery for a time. My tale is a speedy trip through only fifteen months of my military service, relating those events that I saw through the veil. I tried to place my experience in chronological sequence. Only facts I was reasonably sure of did I record.

Certain people that I did not know well and whose names were familiar I did not cover in my narrative. These are my vague memories of them:

Ervin Szpek - Soon after arriving at the slaughterhouse someone showed me a drawing .Possibly it was Ervin.

Edward Crone Jr. (who died of malnutrition) He was not in my barracks. I remember seeing him on a work detail being very vocal about some unpleasant situation.

Michael Palaia [who was tried and shot for taking a jar of something (peaches)

He was tall ,nice features ,older than most of us. He was in my barracks and bunked near Curto.

Curto -A real opportunist. He seemed to fare better than most of us. He looked neater and went out on less assignments. I saw him in Ocean City ,Md. while on furlough and could only nod a greeting.

Richard Rickard (who was accidentally shot with a booby trapped gun) I had a long conversation with him probably at Helensdorf- a real nice guy. I believe he had a premonition of his death .He did not think he would get home alive. I tried to convince him otherwise.

Lloyd Schulte - (our interpreter). He also handled the rations . I don't know if he cooked.

Kurt Vonnegut Jr.-! remember some one keeping a log with the intent of writing a book. He was not in my barracks but could have been there for a visit.

Our second Kommandant - Tall, very sharp looking soldier. He spoke English and was usually pleasant to us.

German noncom guard- He showed up in Dresden, rode a bike and wore a cape-like rain jacket. Occasionally observed trying to get into various buildings.

German guard (Junior) -A tall ,thin, blonde youth. He walked around with one hand behind his back and his rifle slung over his shoulder trying to look tough.

Service Background

Raymond T. Makowske

Army Serial No.-33 850337

Date of Birth, June 24, 1925

19 years old at time of story

**Home address time of induction 343 Whitridge Ave.
Baltimore, Maryland**

Pre-dental student prior to induction

Entered Service: March 31, 1944 Fort Meade, MD

Discharged: December 21, 1945 Fort Meade, MD

Basic Training: 17 weeks Camp Blanding, FL April, 1944 to July 1944 Heavy Weapons

Expert M-1 and carbine

Assignment: 106th Division Camp Atterbury, Indiana

423 Reg.

K Company

**Light Weapons - 60MM Mortar Squad
Sgt. Hendricks, Thomas Hayduk,**

Raymond Makowske, Thomas Ballowe

Overseas

106th Division left Camp Atterbury in October, 1944. Arrived at Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts, then went to New York to board the Queen Elizabeth. We arrived in Glasgow, Scotland in late October. I was amazed at the large number of ships anchored in Glasgow Bay.

My trip across the ocean was mostly spent on my back. I could not get use to the boat swaying. I did get up once when we had a sub alert at which time we put on life

jackets and went up on deck. Depth charges were dropped.

We were sent to Chelfenham, England and billeted at a race track. Many mornings we would see a large number of planes flying over our area returning from a mission on the mainland. The weather was extremely damp.

I was fortunate to get a three day pass. Thomas Hayduk, a squad member buddy, and I went to London and Stratford. We visited Westminster Abbey, saw 10 Downing Street, pubs, movies and Shakespeare's home. While watching a movie a sign let up - Air Raid. No panic, all stayed put. Shortly after the ground shook. A rocket hit some distance away. Thanks, Sam Giles, for lending me some money to make the trip.

Before we left Chelfenham a dance was held at the race track. Girls from a British military group attended. It was good to relax in a fun atmosphere not knowing what was to come.

Thanksgiving day occurred sometime before we crossed the channel. Our supplies had not reached us. Unfortunately we had no big dinner. Moral was low.

We disembarked from Southampton on an English vessel. The channel was very rough. The first time I ever got sea sick. On arriving at Le Harve, France we climbed down a rope ladder to a launch which took us to shore. We were warned about possible snipers in the area.

It took several days to reach our destination St. Vith, Belgium. One day was extremely rainy. I also remember spending a night in an open field while V-i rockets flew overhead on their way to England. Their sound and fiery light was eerie. During this same time frame we attended a field Mass. Many were present and received general absolution.

Early in December we arrived at the front in the area of St. Vith. We relieved the Second Division.

The Ardennes

The area we were to cover, 15 to 20 miles, was located in Schnee Eifel (Snow Mountain) .It was the deepest the Allies had penetrated into Germany. A large valley was to our front. General Jones was concerned about covering so wide an area. Our squad set up our mortar to the left of our dugout. The area was snow covered. I am sure our position could be spotted from the air since trenches were in front of the dugout and they were not snow covered.

The first day we had our first casualty. Someone in a rifle platoon was shot in the head.

Food was brought to us. In addition we had large cans of K rations. One can contained peanut butter. A system was set up to return our mess gear to the rear (about 400 - 500 yards). We took turns on this assignment. My turn was somewhat memorable. On walking down a frail carrying all the metal gear, I experience a loud explosion close by. Up in the air went the mess gear making a loud racket when they came down as I lay on the ground waiting for something else to happen. I don't know if I experienced

incoming or outgoing fire. It sounds funny now but not at the time. After a few minutes I decided to pick up the gear and continue on my journey. The truck was about to leave when I arrived. I was cautioned to rush back since an order to “shoot on sight” was about to go into effects Great!!!

While returning I was startled by a sergeant who popped up out of no where and covered me with a 45. My mind went blank and I could not remember the password, .1 could talk and convince the sergeant I was going back to my squad. He called somewhere and sent me on my way. When I got to our dugout, Captain Bncker was on the phone wanting to know what had happened and gave me some friendly advice.

Occasionally a German recon plane would fly over our positions. Some would fire at the plane which was a no-no. We also sent recon planes over their area.

Nights were pitch black and scary. We took turns on watch while the rest slept or rested in the dugout. Some nights you could hear trucks and see lights. Patrols were sent out to investigate. On one patrol, our squad was selected to send up a flare. The first missile we sent up was defective and left a fiery trail. The second was OK. Reports came back that a large build up was in progress.

Time seemed to drag though it was very tense with occasional in and out going fire. We were looking forward to being relieved in a few days to go to the rear to get a shower and some R&R.

Trapped

Most of us though drafted had visions of doing our part and even returning to tell stories about how we helped win the war. Our fate was not to be -- ours was a fight for survival.

December 16, 1944, 5:30 a.m. Thomas Ballowe who was on watch came rushing in the dugout woke us up. All hell was lose outside. Shells hit our area. Phone call from Command: “Stay in your dugout’ We are under heavy attack.” Things seemed to ease but we continued to hear rockets and artillery fire especially on our right flank.

A request came for truck drivers to help support the right flank. On their return they told of the intense action that was taking place. One of the men was Dudley. Dudley was from the south and will show up again later in my story.

We were advised that help was on the way and that supplies were to be air dropped to us. We stayed in our positions. While there we saw a dog fight, a P-38 was shot down ,the pilot bailed out.

We now know the weather never cleared enough to receive an air drop and the 7th and 9th Armor was having its own problem~ .

Sgt. Hendricks received a call - “we are cut off and our artillery was knocked out.”

One morning some food was brought up - pancakes, syrup and coffee. This was to be our last meal for a long, long time. We got orders to withdraw from our positions shortly thereafter.

I seem to remember spending most of the day walking down roads and through a mountain pass trying to find a way to reach our mainline. As night came we were in a wooded area and told to dig in. The ground being very hard, I was only able to get down about six inches, exhausted I fell asleep while we received enemy mortar fire most of the night.

While in the wooded area two GI's who had a weapons carrier said they had permission to take off down the road. I believe they were the two unaccounted for that Captain Bricher was looking for after we came home.

The next day we advanced on a town. Our column was attacking across an open field with Howitzer support.. We could hear the whistle of our shells over our head. At one point our column stopped. While waiting a strange thing happened. Two trucks full of soldiers came rushing down the road in front of our column. I could not tell if they were ours or theirs, Shortly after this we saw a German tank making a turn around a hill about 500 yards to our left. It appeared to be stuck. One of our officers stopped an anti tank vehicle that was riding in our area. He ordered it to fire on the tank. The gunner set his sight and fired. The tank appeared disabled ,then off the gunner drove. Sometime during this move I made a big mistake as many others did. We discarded our over coats which had become too cumbersome. We'll live to regret it.

We moved on further. Stopped again. A few of us spotted a small church to our right, and went in to investigate. It had been hit by artillery fire and was a mess inside. We moved on further ,some more weapons fire a German soldier with hands over head came rushing to our rear, ironically our prisoner. We seemed to get bogged down. Eventually we found ourselves on a wooded hill. It was about noon. I joined a small patrol headed by Sergeant Turkowicz to explore possible areas of withdrawal. We traveled through a pine or spruce wooded area, eventually arriving at an open field, a possible avenue of retreat. On leaving our wooded cover and proceeding to cross the field we heard machine gun fire. We could not place from where the sound came. Bullets were whizzing all around us. "They are shooting at us! !" Back into the woods we rushed. While deciding what to do next, I started to sit down near a tree. "Don't sit down!! There was a mine tripping device at the spot where I was about to sit. The whole area was probably mined. We returned to our

Afterwards, there were several skirmishes with Germans attacking to our front. One of our mortar squads, headed by Sergeant Brachs was in this area. The Sergeant set a mortar tube on the ground, held it in place with his foot and fired shells at on rushing Germans. (Sam Giles was in this squad). The squad returned to our area. About the same time our Chaplain came running up the bill to take cover.

The Agony of Defeat

When things were quiet we began digging a trench.. To my left about 100 - 150 yards sat three of our officers: one was our commander Col. Cavender, one officer had his head down looking somewhat upset, and the other was wounded.

Rifle fire developed at our front while we were digging in for the night. I asked Captain Bricker ,who was in our vicinity, why we could not send out mortar fire to that area. He stated "we don't have enough clearance". Great! We are now a rifle squad.

Shortly after, in late afternoon ,word got around we were going to surrender. “Does anyone have anything white?” We got orders to destroy our equipment. Sergeant Brachs went into a rage, not wanting to surrender; others were shocked; --myself, I thought what a waste of time and effort. I seemed to be dreaming and observing what was happening rather than being a participant. A Colonel marched out towards enemy positions to return later with what we were to do. Word was passed on in a whisper “if we could get away to go to Liege”.. Down the trail we went, my buddy Thomas Hayduk and I eating a chocolate ration bar we were sharing - our last food.

Occasionally rifle fire was heard. “Cease fir&’ was sounded. I was concerned as were others that the German’s would shoot us down. On seeing the German soldiers, we were told to put our hands in back of our heads. They searched us and moved us on. On reaching the bottom of the hill we observed more Germans with many, many howitzers pointing in the area we had left. One German remarked we were really going to be hit hard that night had we not given up.

Our initial contact with the German soldiers surprisingly was not violent. Some even gave a few of our GFs a cigarette and answered questions about who was in charge of the offense -VON MANTEUF} EL.

We were hurried along down a road toward the rear of. the German lines. I began to see many wounded O1’s. Some were in serious condition but mobile. The guards became more impatient and aggressive. Those GI’s that were moving too slow were prodded with a rifle. It was still daylight and I was surprised to see one of our officers riding down the road in a jeep observing our movement.

We continued to move along. All were tired, thirsty, and hungry. I observed many German tanks that were held up. I touched the tanks and heard the tank commander shouting to” clear the road”. It got darker. I could see flashes of light and hear explosions to our now rear, probably in the St. Vith area. If I knew where we were and where to go I might have tired to escape. Eventually we came to a field[probably a farm] and stopped for the night. It got colder and colder. I sure wished I had my overcoat. We tried to stay warm by grouping together, small groups back to back with field jackets to our front. Sleep was trance like.The night brought light snow flurries. We survived.

The next morning we continued our move to the rear. I observed destroyed American vehicles. Nearby lay dead GI’s with no shoes. I remember going through a town, PRUN, passing an inn- like building. Out came German officers in a jovial mood observing our movement.

Eventually we stopped near a train track. We were given some cheese and a few packages of rye- like crackers, which we shared. Then we were put in box cars.

The box cars were small. About fifty or so were in a car. [standing room only]. I don’t remember how long we stayed there before moving. I do know my feet were numb. I removed my shoes and tried to get some circulation. Sleeping was difficult. We could sit down in a crouched position and hope to drop off.

On each side of the box car were a few small openings. Those, near could get a view

of the German countryside during our journey. We saw signs with known German towns. We stopped many times during the trip.

It was near Christmas Eve. After passing Frankfurt we stopped in a rail yard (possibly Limburg). How far from the city I do not know. It was late at night. Dudley noticed a light in the distance looking through the car opening. Dudley in his southern country-like voice began to give us an up-to-date account of what was happening.

“It looks like an air raid.”

“Flares are dropping from the sky.”

“Looks like bombs are dropping.”

“They are getting closer.”

“Closer.”

The box car door flung open. We were urged to get out. Men spread everywhere but no real cover. A bomb hits nearby. Dirt falls on us. The sound of more bombs could be heard. Then it's over, except for the sound of airplane engines. Rumors spread that there were casualties. Back into the cars we went. Seems we waited for days before the train moved. Eventually we were on our way to somewhere. In the later part of December 1944 we pulled into a camp area. Muhlberg, Germany, Stalag TV-B.,

On arriving the Germans took our steel helmets. We were interrogated, given metal tags with an assigned number. Mine was 312703. I took a hot shower and was sprayed with a powder. I assume lice powder. I may also have received an overcoat at this time. Mine was probably French and marked” PW “on the back.

Stalag IVB housed many nationalities. We shared a building with British soldiers. The area was very cramped. We were assigned a wide straw covered bunk type bed which I shared with my buddy Thomas Hayduk. We received a cup of some kind of vegetable soup. When this meal was to be served you heard the phrase “Skilly UP” sounded by an English PW. There was no dinner table. You waited in line to get the skilly and stood around while you ate.

The first few days there I must have gone into a mild depression. I stayed in bed, only getting up to get a cup of Ersatz (synthetic) coffee in the morning and the skilly later in the day.

We were given a mail form ,similar to V-mail. I wrote a frill page to my girlfriend Doris. (See copy)

When I did pull myself together I moved around the building area talking to the British soldiers. They seemed to have adjusted to their situation well. Some were playing cribbage, some cards, some would be cooking some type of dough on a pot belly stove.

There was one British soldier whose parents were German. They were allowed to visit him though I never saw either.

In the area near our bunk, a tunnel had been dug which was discovered by the Germans and closed up.

The British were well organized. There was an escape committee which would review plans before you could carry it out. Somewhere there was a radio which kept us informed.

If a German soldier was in the area you would hear the phrase "Jerry Up". After about a week or so we got notice that we were being shipped out. I believe at this time we received a Red Cross box. At least we had a package when we arrived at our destination - Dresden

Dresden

It was night when we arrived in Dresden early January 1945. The city had felt little effects of the war. On arriving we saw people getting off a trolley car. We marched to our new quarters Kommando 557 to be known as Slaughterhouse 5.

The compound was the lower floor of a slaughterhouse complex. There were two separate sections which were set up similar to barracks. Inside were two tier wooden bunk type beds crammed together. The beds had straw stuffed burlap bags as mattresses. I shared a bunk with Thomas Hayduk. Next to us was our friend Sam Giles.

On arriving at the compound the German commandant gave a long winded speech. I remember him as a short middle aged man with Hitler type mustache and talking very loud and emotional. I'm not sure if he spoke German or English. We had an interpreter who at that time could have been Vonnegut. We received a small ration of bread and meat. The meat was stringy and could have been horse meat. The ration was to last for a week however we did get Ersatz coffee in the morning and skilly at night.

Basically we were slave labor. Work assignments varied. Some worked in the slaughterhouse, others in a malt factory. A short time after we were there, a small daylight air raid occurred. Our efforts were then directed to clean up. A company named "Tiefbaum" was handling the work. We were fortunate. They fed us a big bowl of soup for lunch, that was good and varied. Some days it had a pickle flavor. We ate in an enclosed wagon or shed.

Our daily routine was get up early, assemble outside to be counted, have ersatz coffee, and march off to work. Our march to work gave us an opportunity to see parts of the city: the Elbe River, a stadium, some impressive buildings, people waiting in line at various food stores. Occasionally we saw a truck marked "Goebbels Propaganda". Most of the men wore some form of uniform. Working was more of an attempt to look busy. I believe it's called "passive resistance". One day we were cleaning up near a store. Many of us picked up some things - food, trinkets, etc. On arriving back at the compound we were searched. All this stuff came falling to the ground. We then received a long talk from the commandant with emphasis on "plunder is punishable by death."

After a day's activity most of us were tired. We spent the night near our bunk area talking about home and food. Especially food and our minds would dream up weird types of combinations, like chocolate covered bananas. There was little to occupy our

time, although one member did some drawing. We had no source of news. One day a visitor showed up. He appeared English and said he was from the Red Cross. He asked questions concerning our conditions and gave us some idea what was happening. Naturally he received a lot of complaints. He may even have inferred that we could join the German army.

Conditions were far from the best. Food was sparse, the area was cold and damp and toilet facilities primitive. Our bodies were lice covered and most of us had dysentery. We had no change of clothes which hardly ever came off. There were no shower facilities. We may have had a place to wash but no soap. Surprisingly even with these poor conditions I don't remember ever getting a cold.

About the middle of February all of this changed. Late February 13, 1945 we were awoken" Air Raid" .We were marched to a shelter a few levels below the slaughterhouse .I don't remember returning to our compound but a few hours later came another raid. This time bombs hit above us .The area shook and the lights went out. We stayed sitting in the dark a long time not knowing what to expect. Finally a door opened. We walked in the dark toward the door. Those, at the top of the stairs where the door was, were frantically urging us to move out as quick as possible. We got outside. The area was ablaze. German civilian defense was fighting fires. Not too much different then some of the pictures I saw of the English fighting fires in London. We moved out of the area. The ground was so hot heat came through the soles of our shoes. Sparks were flying everywhere landing on our heads and coats. The sky was lit up. Bombs were falling in other parts of the city. Then machine gun fire. A fighter plane with a star insignia ,which was flying not much higher than the buildings, whizzed by in front of us. On we walked through this inferno till we reached a road that led us out of the city to a village on the outskirts.

Gorbitz a pleasant suburban residential area about 5 or 10 miles from the center of Dresden.

Gorbitz

It was very early in the morning February 14, 1945 when we arrived in Gorbitz. We passed a large guarded road block, probably constructed of heavy timbers, a short distance was our new home, a compound that housed South African PWs that were captured in the African campaign. The men were clean and well kept; what a contrast to our ragged, pathetic, lousy group.

I don't know how this compound was able to accommodate all of us. The sleeping arrangements were similar to what we left. I don't recall what rations we had, probably "skilly".

Air raid alerts continued for a day or two at which time we took shelter in a deep trench near the barracks. I remember one South African remarking in disgust that it was pointless to destroy this city when the war was almost over. Though bombs did not hit in our area we could hear their whistles as they fell, making our stay in the trench somewhat tense.

We did very little for the next few days while the city smoldered. Finally we began our next gruesome assignment. Day after day we marched into the city and march back

that night. We tried to be more military. We viewed the terrible damage. Everything was rubble. Some structures if not down were partially destroyed. We saw furnished rooms with a wall or two removed.

Our job was to look for and remove the dead. The dead were then pulled to a collection area usually at the intersection of two streets. Lime would then be thrown on them. Sometimes we would see a wagon full of dead bodies carted off down the road to somewhere. The bodies we recovered were discolored, bloated and some times naked. Not a pleasant smell or pretty sight. After awhile you became numb to the horror.

One assignment took us to a destroyed railroad station. On a lower floor was a very large room. On going in we saw the floor covered with a few inches of ash. In among the ash were several skulls almost pulverized. Mixed throughout the ash were rows of metal canteens indicating soldiers all of which were probably cremated. Sitting on a chair was a charred helmet wearing mass burnt beyond recognition. What terror must have occurred before their death.

In other areas of the city we saw messages written on the piles of stone rubble. Frau xx est tot. Herr xx is at xx Strasse.

Destruction and misery was everywhere. How did we escape not being killed? How would American citizens handle this chaos? You could not help pity those Germans that survived.

One of our guards was an elderly man who wore a patch on one eye and had a Popeye appearance. He lost his family in the raid and appeared resigned to his fate.

On one occasion a passing German officer, distraught over personal loss, grabbed one of our group pushed him against the wall. He began shouting at the GI while pointing his gun at his head. Fortunately our guards controlled the situation.

Through it all GI's could find more mischief. One of our objectives when we had the opportunity was to wander off into basements in search of food -just like rats.

We now know the fate of Michael Palaia who was caught with ajar of fruit, later shot. My experience did not end as tragic. One of my buddies was Jesse Benavides was a Mexican with a dark completion, who had lots of charisma. He loved to sing and tried just to be happy. Well, he and I wandered off to a basement. We found a room loaded with jars of food. I don't know if we had a chance to eat anything but we heard voices getting closer to our area. One was a woman so we knew it was civilians. Only one way out. What do we do? Well, Benavides and I walked out like nothing was unusual and passed the two or three civilians. We rushed back to our group. No problem? No so! Shortly after, all were lined up to be viewed by the civilians who were very upset. I pulled my knit hat down over my ears; pulled in my cheeks to disguise my looks as much as possible. The civilians went down the line stopping in front of each one of us. When they came to me my heart was beating pretty fast, they paused, looked, went on to the next. I breathed an inner sigh. Benavides was not so lucky. His dark skin and mustache gave him away. ~Ben" in his Mexican voice was doing his biggest selling job —“ no I was only looking for a place to relieve myself”. Well it worked but I think the guards helped. We could have ended with the same fate as Mike Palaia.

Another time, not as dramatic, Thomas Hayduk and I were exploring for food. We came upon a basement area similar to a condo type complex. There were separate storing sections which covered almost a whole block. We heard male voices. This time they were military men who were at the far end of the area. We hid and watched. At the right time we rushed out and back to our group.

All experiences were not as dramatic, some were rather humorous. One day several GIs wandered off and came upon some wine or fermented raisins. Well, they had their fill. One of the men, probably Hollingworth, got so drunk he could not stand. We ended up hauling him home in a wheelbarrow.

Dresden had a zoo which was destroyed in the bombing. One day to our surprise we saw a llama wandering around the area where we were working. One of the men grabbed the llama around the neck and tried to wrestle it to the ground. Eventually it was let go - to where I don't know.

Sometimes a short man dressed in dark clothes would walk past our group whispering to us while looking straight ahead - "the Allies are at Freiburg" (or "the Rhine").

Life could not be more miserable; meager rations, walking long distances, dirty, lice covered bodies. How much longer could we survive?

A minor break came Easter, April 1, 1945. Easter and Easter Monday were big holidays in Germany - so we were off. The guards even made arrangements to have our clothes washed. Why now? We were left with only our overcoats and possibly underwear. In the compound was a building which had an overhead spigot. Thomas Hayduk and I decided to take a shower. We were cold and so was the water but we got clean and felt better. The first shower since leaving Stalag IVB in early January. It was also the first time we had our clothes off since then. We could see the tiny sores that the lice had made and the thinness of our bodies. Our spirits picked up. We may have even received a Red Cross package at this time.

A few weeks later we were on the move again. The Russians were coming. Off we went toward the Czeck border to a nearby village "Helensdorf". The horrors of Dresden were gone for the time being.

The Road Back

I have only vague memories of "Helensdorf". We arrived in mid April. In the distance you could see the mountains of Czechoslovakia, a possible direction for escape.

The following are highlights of my memories. Sometime after we were there a guard informed us of the death of President Roosevelt who died April 12. Another time we heard rumbling in the distance which could have been another air raid on Dresden (which occurred April 17) or the Russians shelling the city. One day a US fighter plane flew low over head while we were outside. All waved. It tipped its wings in recognition. Next we heard machine gun fire and saw black smoke rising not too far away.

We were kept in a building which had a large hall and stage. It must have been used for meetings. German and swastika flags were near the stage. We spent our time sitting on the floor, wasting away. I do remember reading a poem about the Lackawana Railroad. There was a piano in one corner of the hall. I knew one number fairly well "Boogie Woogie". One night I was playing. It caught the guards' attention. They stood around listening. Unknown to me at the time a few of our men were in the process of escaping. So I was encouraged to keep on playing so as to continue distracting the guards. Well it worked, however several hours later they were caught and brought back. I believe one of the men was Curto.

After a few weeks the Germans fearing a Russian advance, began marching us toward American lines, possibly Chemnitz. The road we were traveling was filled with refugees moving in the same direction. They used all sorts of carts to carry their possessions; baby carriages, wagons, bikes anything with wheels. Suddenly from out of the sky, Russian airplanes began strafing the lines. I don't know why? Unless there were German soldiers also fleeing. Chaos occurred. People were running every which way. Thomas Hayduk and myself along with other GI's took to the woods. The guards lost control. We were now on our own. The planes left. Recently I was told that Jesse Benavides, my Mexican buddy, was killed in the raid.

Tom Hayduk and myself continued our journey through the woods. We came upon an opening. We saw a large long brick warehouse- type building. It was empty. About twenty yards in front of the building was a smoldering campfire. In

the fire were potatoes which we removed and ate. The area no doubt was occupied very recently. While sitting and eating our baked potatoes, a Russian plane flew low overhead and began to circle. We waved but fearing possible strafing sought cover near the warehouse. We did hear gun fire. The plane made a pass over the warehouse. We stood in front of the warehouse by the wall so that we could get in or out if necessary. The plane left our area.

Not long afterward , towards a hill about 500 yards away we saw small objects that appeared slowly to get larger. They were dispersed and as they came close we recognized them as Russian soldiers probably an advance scouting group. Weapons were slung on their shoulder therefore they did not anticipate any hostile action. They approached us with curiosity. We greeted them with "Americanski -PW ". Little reaction as they went about their business. They were rather short a direct contrast to previous impressions, the Russians were big and mean looking.

Some time later Tom and I were on a road filled with Russians some riding in cassocks. They were on their way to Czechoslovakia. We continued our journey on another road leading to Chemnitz. We entered a very small village. Tom Hayduk had a bar of soap (siefe). Soap was a needed commodity,so we decided to try to barter it for something to eat. We approached a young man who appeared to be French and offered the soap for bread (brot). He did not speak but motioned us to follow him, which we did. We walked a short distance down a narrow path ,went into a building, and up the stairs to a small room. Other young people, male and female, were in the room talking French and only glanced at us. Our guide told us to sit down at a table. Along came a bowl of soup for each of us. He refused our soap. The French people continued to ignore us while we ate. When finished we thanked them and went on our way.

It was late in the afternoon. It would be sometime before reaching American lines. What would we do that night? To our left we spotted a barrack-like building on which was painted in big letters, "US PWS Welcome ". We investigated. Only one person was inside. He spoke English was dressed in tan colored clothes and carried a sidearm. He welcomed us gave us something to eat, and encouraged us to stay. He said he was Canadian and was caught in Germany when the war broke out. Sounded a little odd. He noticed my shoes were practically worn out and gave me a pair that were almost new. They were light tan and had metal in the heel that would click if you snapped them together. Fortunately they fit and I was grateful as my feet sure did hurt.

That night Tom and I slept in bunk type beds. Throughout the night we heard Slavic voices - male and female. Sometime we heard sobbing. The next morning we saw no one.

The Canadian had a wood burning truck. He was going to drive to Leipzig and offered to take us with him. We went after a breakfast of millet onto which we poured milk (powdered) and sprinkled sugar. There seemed to be sacks of food in the room where we ate.

Well, off we went hoping the truck would not breakdown. After riding for a while we came to a stop. In front were other vehicles. It was a road block,

—Russian territory. We were back in Dresden. The Russians confiscated the truck but the Canadian was successful in getting us bikes. We now had a decision to make. Should we go to Leipzig with the Canadian or go through Dresden towards Chemnitz. The Canadian tried to persuade us to go with him to Leipzig and was disappointed when we parted.

The bikes we received did not become an asset. Tom Hayduk could not ride a bike, though he tried. I made an attempt to pedal with him sitting on my bike. Tom was a heavy set guy even after having lost a lot of weight; in contrast I was light and skinny. I just did not have the strength to do the job. So we walked the bikes through Dresden.

Russians were throughout the city but did not bother us. We made our way over roads we use to walk daily. "Berg Strasse" comes to mind. The city looked worse then when we last saw it, if that were possible. We did not make good progress. During the journey we saw a German armored vehicle. Riding in it were four or five young German uniformed boys who looked like they were joy riding and trying to avoid the Russians. They appeared to be having fun.

On we walked toward Gorbitz. We passed the large timber road block and our former barracks. The Russians had a curfew. It was getting late and we had to find shelter for the night.

Gorbitz had many well kept suburban homes. Tom and I decided to stop at a house on one of the side streets. We told the occupants that we were Americans and were staying in their garage for the night. We lucked out. A middle age couple invited us into their kitchen and gave us some Ersatz coffee. I communicated with them in my

high school German. The man of the house worked for the railroad.

Their son was in the German Army and they had not heard from him. They showed us his written English school assignments. We talked with difficulty for hours. It was getting late. They took us upstairs and allowed us to sleep in a bedroom. The bedroom was neat as a pin. I felt strange putting my lice cover body in between those nice clean sheets. I quickly fell asleep.

We arose early the next morning, drank their coffee. We were hungry but they had no bread to offer us. We asked for their names and address in order to write back later. They were apprehensive about giving us any information. We showed our appreciation and left, leaving the bikes in the garage.

We continued on our journey hoping to reach Chemnitz that night. We walked for a few hours. Looking up the road ahead we saw a jeep with an American Flag waving at its side. We could not have been any more surprised or happy. It was so unexpected. The jeep was followed by a truck convoy. It stopped for some unknown reason. One of the drivers offered to take us aboard. He gave us a can of rations.

The convoy was from the 87th Division. Their mission was to go to a village maybe Konigstein, to pick up a group of French-Belgium high officials that were held prisoner in a castle. Since we moved through Russian territory all were cautious. Well, we rode back over much of the ground we previously covered. On arriving at the castle out came a large group of officers. There was lots of saluting, hand shakes, etc. The officers were loaded on the trucks. Then we were quickly on our way back.

It was late when we arrived at our destination. I don't recall the name of the town. About this time I became aware I was developing jaundice.

Within a few days Tom and I ended up at a large camp area in Le Havre, called Camp Lucky Strike. I'm not clear as to the sequence of events that got us to this point. However we were interviewed, showered, deloused and re-uniformed. We had a short stay at a former Luftwaffe airfield near Rheims. There I got very sick in the stomach. I also had my first airplane ride. It was in a transport plane DC-3 that flew at a low altitude.

At Lucky Strike we met with many of our PW buddies and exchanged experiences but I continued to get sicker. I spent several days lying down with awful stomach cramps. My urine was blood red. I could not eat. Tom Hayduk faired better. He could move about. He found where the Red Cross was serving an eggnog mixture to GI's. Off I went to see if I could drink the stuff. It was sweet so it went down easy. After a few days of this meal my stomach cramps eased and I moved about. I even went to the infirmary to report my condition. The person who checked me over could put me in the hospital if I desired but it would delay my chance of going back to the States. Since I was improving I chose not to go. With more eggnog and increasing solid food I felt better. My urine returned to its normal color.

Life at Lucky Strike was boring but relaxing. There was some entertainment, socializing, and nothing. We could send a telegram or make a phone call home if we had the patience to wait in line. Eventually we were put on a ship. "Admiral Faragut."

Going Home!

The trip back was a direct contrast to our initial trip over. I could eat normal. The weather was beautiful. At night one of the GIs pointed out the constellation "Southern Cross" four stars far off in the southern horizon. Tom and I helped chip paint on the ship deck in order to pass the time. After several days we pulled into Norfolk, VA., greeted by an Army band. Here we got more good food and relaxation. Then a train ride to Fort Meade and an eighty day furlough.

The rest is anti climatic. Time with my sister, Bertha, getting updated on all that's happened. Time with my sweetheart, Doris Grund, whose intense prayer devotion helped me survive these trying events. Time with relatives, friends and neighbors. At least one thought I was dead.

After a great furlough. I was sent to Miami Beach, Fla for more R&R. The army had taken over many of the hotels just for that purpose. Tough life but somebody had to do it. About two weeks went by and I was assigned to the 4th Division at Camp Butler, NC. Odd, the 4th Division was one of the units on our southern flank when the Germans attacked. I finally got an easy job in communications. Even got a Corporal Stripe (I believe PW's were given an automatic grade jump) Finally, I was discharged under a special regulation for former PWs - December 21, 1945 a year and two days after our surrender.

After two weeks I started work with a Savings & Loan Company, enroll in night classes at Loyola College, pursuing an accounting program. Eventually I married my sweetheart, Doris and raised five great children. Which makes all the trouble worthwhile. Eventually I obtained a position with American Sugar Company and spent the next thirty-five years working through various management positions until retirement in 1982.

I spend my time with f2mily, golf, church activities and other hobbies. Except for the fact my wife died in 1991, I have been blessed. Hope all my fellow former PWs are as fortunate.

After thoughts

To paraphrase a famous writer it was the most exciting of times and the worst of times. Never have I to date or ever expect to experience such excitement. Where else could a person feel the tenseness of a sub alert, a treacherous channel crossing, or an overwhelming enemy attack? What could be worse than the fear accompanying a bombing or strafing, the degrading existence of" PW " life, the pangs of starvation, the horror of death of both friend and foe, or other examples of mankind's cruelty to one another?

I am awed at a human beings ability to survive such hardship. The tough physical training we received was instrumental in our survival, not to ignore the prayers of all back home, especially those of Doris, my wife to be, who had unshakable confidence in God answering her prayers.

I hate to lose but I congratulate the German military for developing and executing their plan, code name "Wacht am Rhein". Fortunately their time clock ran out.

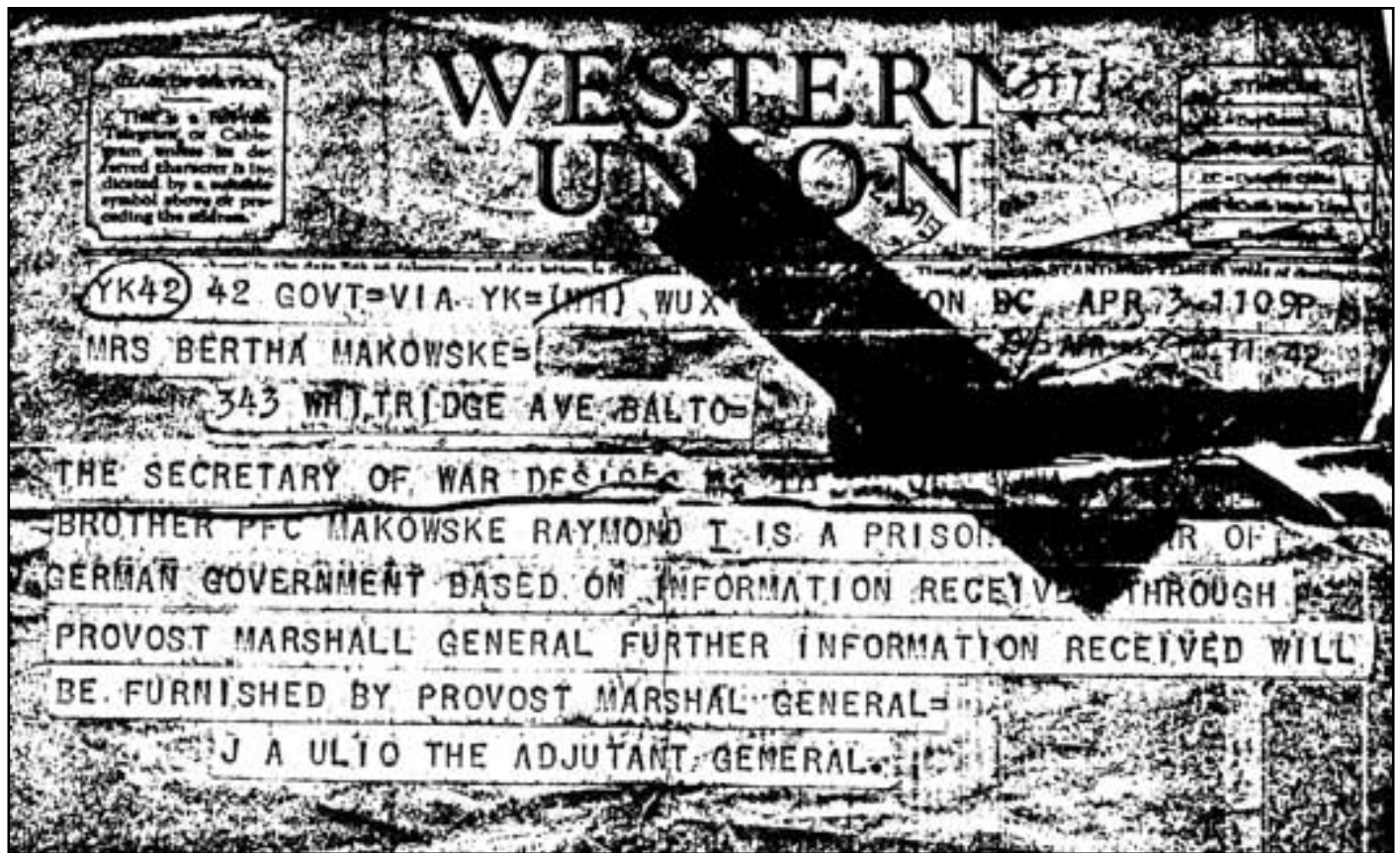
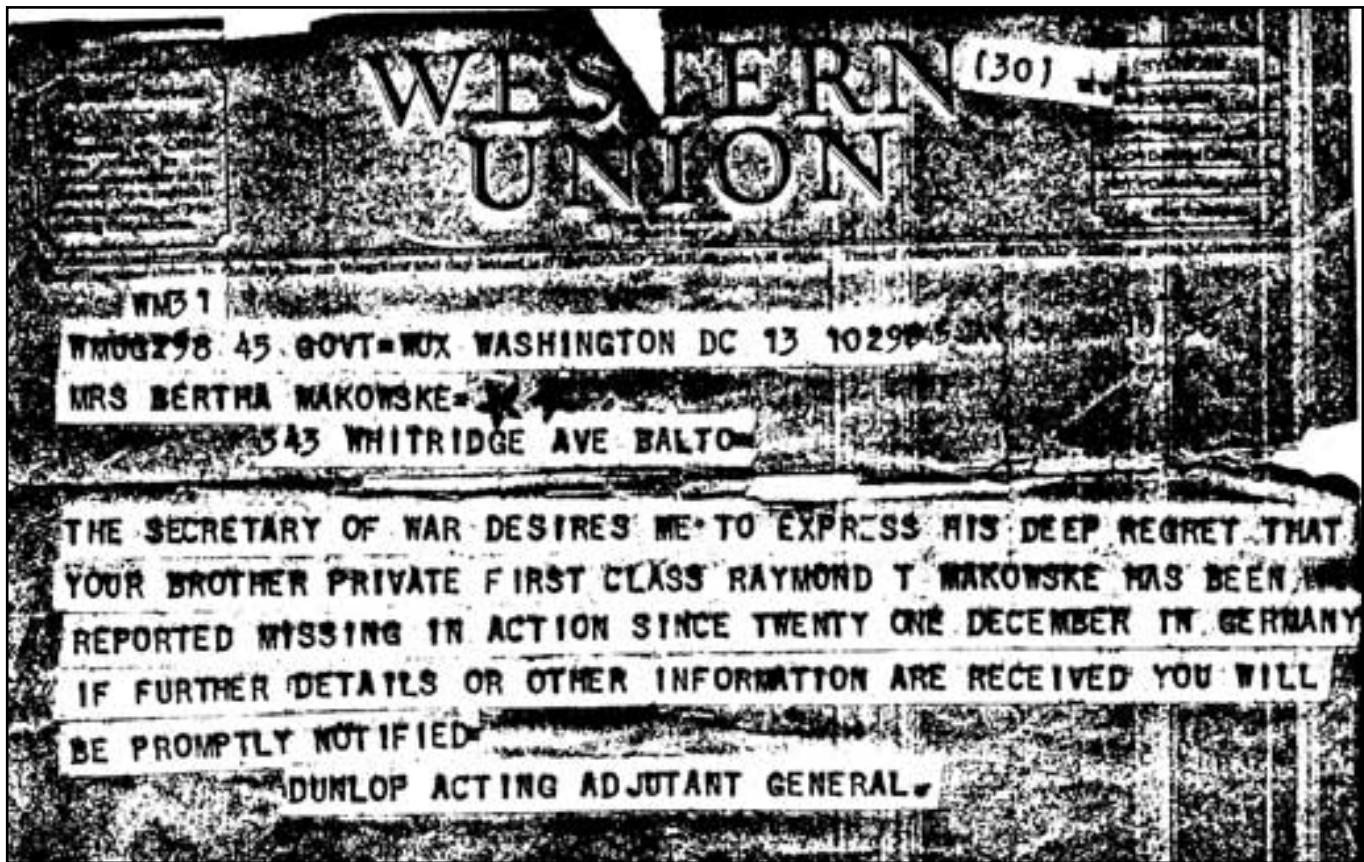
I am thankful that the Allied command was able to regroup and turn the tide with the advantage of better weather, air superiority, and more equipment. However, I dislike the overconfident attitude of the upper command which caused them to disregard reports of an enemy build up in progress. Why didn't our intelligence system know what the Germans were up to, when the Russians did? I criticize their failure to accept blame for their lack of caution. In addition, what was so important about the position our two lost regiments were holding that we did not get orders to immediately withdraw, since our escape route was weakly fortified? And finally, why was our hopes built up with promises of help and supplies when fulfilling that promise was remote?

The 106th Division was a well trained and disciplined organization. I take exception to any criticism we have received. There are numerous reasons why we met the fate we did. The purpose of war is not to kill or be kill but gain control and hold critical positions. I thank Colonel Cavender for having the wisdom to recognize we lost the ability to meet that objective and had the guts to make a tough decision.

I am thankful for the effort Ervin Szpek and his family have made in developing this project. Using their list of names I was able to contact Sam Giles and have started a correspondence that I hope will last.

Some would not want to give up the experience we acquired. I do. Give me back that lost period in my life. Remove the worry and anxiety from my family and friends. Remove the lingering memories, occasional nightmares, and threat of learning more of what is behind the veil. Let me enjoy the ways of youth and pursuit of worthwhile dreams.

"Peace"



The Sun, Maryland, June 17, 2003
Raymond Makowske, 77, Veteran, accountant



Raymond T. Makowske, a retired accountant who wrote of his experiences as a World War II prisoner of war, died of multiple myeloma June 10 at Stella Mans Hospice In Timonium. The Lutherville resident was 77.

Born In Baltimore and raised on Whitridge Avenue, Mr. Makowske was a 1943 graduate of Loyola High School. While a pre-dental student at the University of Maryland, he was drafted into the Army in 1944.

During the Battle of the Bulge, his infantry unit was forced to surrender to the enemy.

“I was concerned as were the others that the Germans would shoot us down. On seeing German soldiers, we were told to put our hands In back of our heads. They searched us and moved us on,” Mr. Makowske wrote In an unpublished memoir.

“On reaching the bottom of the hill we observed more Germans with many, many howitzers pointing to the area we had left. One German remarked, we were really going to be hit hard that night had we not given up.”

Mr. Makowske and his comrades were placed in cramped boxcars and taken to Stalag IV-B in Muhlberg, Germany. They were then moved to a labor camp in Dresden called “Slaughterhouse 5” by inmates.

“Conditions were far from the best. Food was sparse, the area was cold and damp, and toilet facilities primitive. Our bodies were lice covered and most of us had dysentery. We had no change of clothes. There were no shower facilities he wrote.

After an Allied air raid In February 1945, the POWs were moved to another camp at Gorbitz, about 10 miles from Dresden, and then for a final time to a village near the Czechoslovakian border.

The Germans marched their prisoners toward American lines in late April and abandoned them. They eventually made contact with Allied

forces.

“I am awed at a human being’s ability to survive such hardship,” he wrote, crediting his survival to the training he had received.

Mr. Makowske returned home, leaving the service in 1945 with the rank of corporal.

He worked for a savings and loan in Baltimore while studying accounting at Loyola College at night. He later Joined American Sugar Co., and was an accountant for 35 years until retiring in 1982.

Mr. Makowske was married for 45 years to the former Doris Elaine Grund, who died In 1991. Mr. Makowske was a golfer and coin collector. He was a communicant and Eucharistic minister at Roman Catholic Church of the Nativity In Timonium, where a Mass of Christian burial was offered Saturday.

Survivors include three sons, Raymond T. Makowske of Catonsville and Ronald L. Makowske and Michael L. Makowske, both of Timonium; two daughters, Patricia Makowske and Mary M. Vincent, both of Timonium; a sister, Bertha Trainor of Towson; and six grandchildren.

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