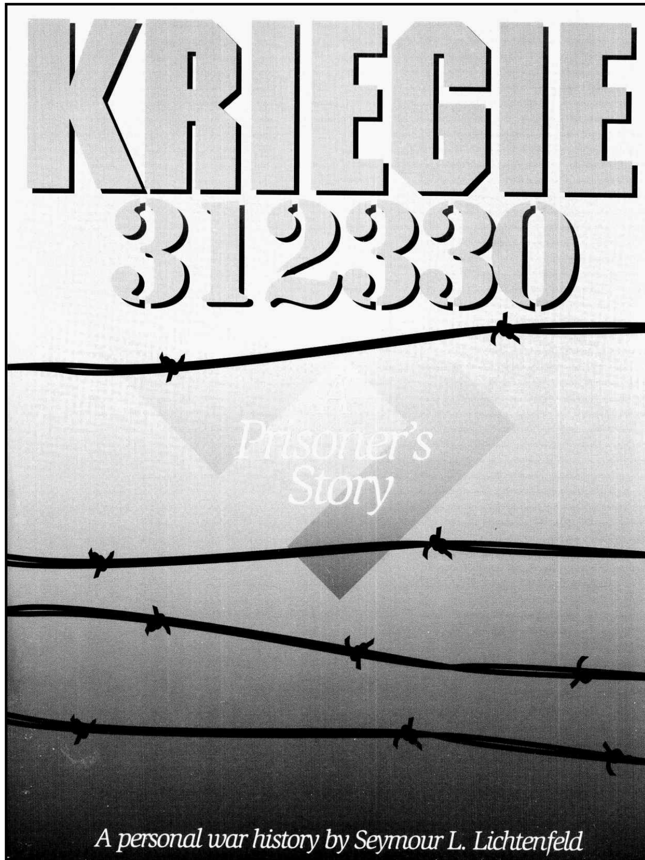
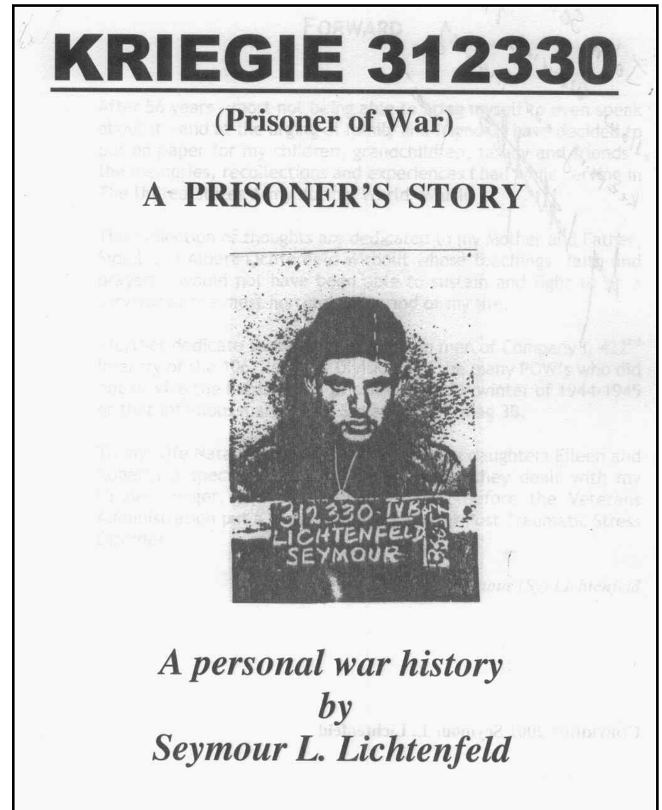
Seymour Lichtenfeld

Company I, 3rd Squad, 3rd Platoon, 422nd Regiment
106th Infantry Division

Stalag IV B , Stalag III-A, Stalag III-B





PREFACE

World War II was the greatest struggle against tyranny in the seven thousand years of the worlds recorded history. It involved 100 million people of more than 70 nations of which 10 million were killed. This war produced the greatest armies, navies, and air forces that the world had ever seen and most likely will never see again. It was fought by millions of men and women on land, on and under the seas, in the air, and for a time - by me.

I will always remember those days, a few with pleasure, but far too many with pain and tears. I am writing this collection of thoughts about what happened to me while engaged in that great struggle against an oppressive, cruel and sadistic enemy, the Nazi regime of Germany.

After the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt, in his speech to the Congress asking for a declaration of war, called the attack of December 7, 1941, *"A day that would live in infamy."*

My day of infamy started, for me and fifteen thousand other men of the 106th Infantry Division, on December 16th, 1944.

CHAPTER ONE

My Early Years

My Dad was a veteran of World War I, (1914-1918), the great war that was to end all wars. He was my greatest hero. During that war, he had been gassed with poison gas used by the Germans and every morning I can still recall him coughing and my mother scolding him for smoking with his condition.

As a youngster I read all the books Dad had regarding his division; the famous 42nd Rainbow Division led by General Douglas MacArthur. Dad was a member of the Gary, Indiana American legion Post 214 and its famous Drum and Bugle Corp. He was. a drummer and loved his parades. I believe to this day my deep patriotism comes from those days that as a family we were off on holidays to County fairs, parades and band competitions all over the State of Indiana and Michigan. Even now at 75 years of age, I still can't stop my feet from wanting to step out when a Sousa march is played. The flying of the American flag was not a choice but a must on each and every holiday.

Airplanes were the novelty of our era and of course we attended all the air shows in and around Gary, Indiana. One of our greatest treats was to go to Chicago's Midway airport, park the car and watch the commercial airliners land and take off. In those days the airplane was still pretty new and people were fascinated at watching them. The country was still in the depths of the great depression and it was cheap entertainment.

My brother, Melvin and I became experts at building model airplanes and the ceiling of our room was filled with hanging models. Then as we had to cull our collection, we would climb on the roof of our garage and fly the planes off. With the German models, we would set their tails ablaze simulating a shoot down.

Upon entering Lew Wallace high School, I was a thin 125 pound kid, who liked sports but was too little and too light to compete. I joined the ROTC infantry training program (Reserve Officer Training Corp.) and enjoyed the camaraderie as well the discipline and military training that was offered.

In June 1942, 1 was a senior and an ROTC officer and was enjoying a lot of the extra curricular activities. I was now participating in parades, US Bond Sale functions, and even got to meet Dorothy L'Amour, a film star that had come to town for a bond sale. My best friends were John Lenburg and Steve Rakos and we traveled in the same circles.

John and I were also senior students picked by Post 214 of the American legion to attend the 6th Annual Hoosier Boys State. About 500 boys from all over the State of Indiana attended this weeklong session. It was here that I received my first indoctrination into the world of politics.

My Class of 1943 was scheduled for graduation in June 1943. I had enough credits to graduate as I had taken a lot of elective courses. Many of my friends including John, who were already 18 and had the credits, were already in the service. At that time, if you enlisted you were given a choice of the branch of service. I talked it over with my Mother and Dad and the school principal, Mrs. Hake to ensure that I would not jeopardize my graduating and so I enlisted.

In early April 1943 with about 65 other fellows I left for Fort Benjamin Harrison at Indianapolis, Indiana on a Greyhound bus from the post office building in downtown Gary. My Army days were about to begin.

In June 1943, my mother walked across the stage in the Memorial Auditorium of Gary, Indiana and accepted my high school diploma.

CHAPTER Two

BECOMING A Soldier

Upon arriving at Fort Benjamin Harrison, outside of Indianapolis, Indiana, I soon learned how the Army could screw things up. I was the only enlisted man on the bus, the others all being inductees. The army clerks in processing me put a 3 on my service number (indicating an inductee) instead of "I" indicating an enlistee. As an enlistee, I

was to have my choice of service and I was going to pick the Air Craft I wanted to fly.

June 1943 - 88th Airborne Infantry

After the foul up was discovered, I had already been sent to an infantry training sector because of my ROTC training. Another schoolmate of mine, Al Fileff, was also in this group and we decided to show the Army they couldn't mess with us so we volunteered for paratroop training. It was flying.

We were ordered to Ft Meade, South Dakota to join the 88th Airborne Battalion. We had no idea that this outfit had been formed in October 1942 as an experimental organization. Its assignment was to introduce all aspects of airborne warfare to America's military forces. In other words: Special Forces, a term that had yet to be invented.

This type of warfare had been introduced by the Germans against the British and French armies, early during World War II with devastating results. In early 1943, our army was first learning this new form of warfare, how to use small number of soldiers to create havoc by using paratroops, gliders, and mountain trained troops. little did I realize that the training that I was about to receive was to put me in the finest physical condition of my life and was one of the primary reasons that I was able to survive that which was before me.

Not only did I jump out of perfectly good airplanes, but I made two hazardous landings in canvas covered troop gliders filled with men and equipment including jeeps and 105 cannons. I was taught how to climb and hike over mountains, with full 75 pound field packs, and how to survive in 20 below freezing blizzards in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

Our training included not only the physical aspects required of infantry soldiers, but how to tie down equipment in the smallest of spaces for transport in the planes and gliders. (This training came in handy in later years when we went on family vacations and we had to get everything in a small trunk of a car.)

We took 25 mile hikes, with full field packs as though they were a stroll through the park and *then went into town afterwards* to party. We had a mountain called Bear Butte which was about 3500 feet high and Units competed to see how fast each could climb it with full field packs and rifles and return with the least amount of men falling-out. I was quite proud that I never once fell out of formation.

Airborne buddies on weekend pass
Deadwood, SD - September 1943

I learned that my best friend was my rifle. We held contests to see how fast one could take it apart in complete darkness and put it back together and fire off a round. I must admit I was pretty fast and won a lot of beer rations.

In order to acquaint us with real war, we were exposed to live artillery fire and had to crawl under barb-wire 18 inches off the ground with a machine gun firing

live ammunition above our heads at the same height. We soon [earned to hug the ground.

After nine months of this training, this scrounge 125 pound weakling was a full 165 pounds with no fat on his frame. Not only that, because of my ROTC training I was promoted right after basic training to PFC. Considering that in the regular army it took a private about 5 or 6 years to attain that rank, I felt pretty good about myself. When I came home on my first furlough, I was like a proud peacock in my paratroop uniform and swagger and with my expert marksmanship medal on my chest.

After a few months of additional training, I saw a notice on the orderly room bulletin board that an examination would be offered to all enlisted men who would care to join the Aviation Cadet program to become a pilot. I wasted no time and my name was at the top of the sign up list. In December 1943, I was notified that I was one of two enlisted personnel that had passed the examination on that post and would shortly receive my new orders to proceed to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri for reassignment to the Air Corp. I couldn't believe my good fortune. My buddies threw me one hell of party prior to my leaving. I was later to learn that my squad was in a glider that was shot down on D-Day with no survivors.

Aviation cadet
Knox College
Jan. 1944

At Jefferson Barracks I was put through a battery of test to determine my qualifications. My assignment: fighter pilot! I was ordered to Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois for three months of intensive studying of mathematics, meteorology, aero-dynamics, and how to be an officer.

I was outfitted with officer uniforms and really looked snazzy. My fellow cadets came from all branches of the service and from all over the world. We had two from Patton's Army in North Africa who had seen action; as well as a couple from the Alaska forces who were fighting the Japanese.

I came to enjoy the clean sheets and excellent meals as well as the companionship of all the coeds at the college. I was in ~ heaven and then they lowered the boom on me.

In May 1944 the Army, in all its infinite wisdom re-evaluated the number of infantry casualties that they would have for D-Day in June 1944. I was scheduled to graduate on May 30,1944 and go to Randolph Field, Texas for flight training. The Army needed infantry replacements immediately and ~ wait for the 13 weeks of basic training to get them, so orders were issued that any trained infantry man that had not started flight training as of May 1,1944 was to be transferred back to the infantry immediately.

To make matters even worse for me I learned that my friend, Sgt. John Lenburg, who was now flying B-24 bombers out of Italy as a radio gunner, was missing in action.

Since most of my cadet class were former infantry, we felt betrayed by the Army and decided that we would show them they couldn't fool around with us. So I went home with out authorization (AWOL) even though I had orders to report to the 65th Infantry Division. Upon arriving home, if the army wasn't going to kill me, my father was almost ready to. He explained in no uncertain terms that being AWOL is like deserting and in time of war a federal crime that could put me in prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas for the rest of my life.

Without any traveling orders or passes to get me past the Military Police, I took trains and busses from Gary, Indiana to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. I arrived in Camp 8 days after I was ordered to report and immediately lost my stripes and given company punishment with about 25 other fellows who had done the same thing.

I had to turn in my officer uniforms and be reissued the familiar GI olive drab. What a let down - from clean sheets, to steeping again in foxholes and mud and eating out of a tin mess gear.

I was assigned to Cannon Company 261st Infantry of the ?? Infantry Division and in no time became a #1 cannoneer and got my stripes back. Training started all over again, the hikes, sleeping in the mud, obstacle courses, night maneuvers and all the other training that I had endured when with the 88th Airborne.

I ran into a problem however that had not plagued me in any other outfit; anti-Semitism. My top sergeant was from a small town in northern Pennsylvania and made life miserable for me with name-calling and crappie jobs. He called me kike, the hook, and other embarrassing names in and out of the ranks.

One day I noticed on the bulletin board that volunteers were wanted to go overseas. I immediately signed up against the advice of my buddies.

I had two choices of outfits. One was in Texas getting ready to go the South Pacific and the other was in Indianapolis, Indiana preparing for the European operations. It took all of ½ second to choose the 106th in Camp Atterbury, which was only about 150 miles from home.

Upon reporting to the 106th I found that the Cannon Company was at full strength and so I became a member of the 422nd Infantry Regiment, Company I, 3rd squad of the 3rd Platoon. The standard infantry company consisted of six officers; 193 enlisted men organized into three rifle platoons of 41 men each; a weapons platoon which had a 60 mm mortar and a light 30 cal machine gun. Again my ROTC training came to the forefront and I was selected for special assignments.

I received one weekend pass that allowed me to go home and then we were packing our equipment for overseas duty. Other than my Platoon leader, lt. Silver, Top Kick Sgt. Perrin and platoon Sgt. Ross Gillikan, I barely got to know my new comrades.

Chapter Three

Off to War

The first of October 1944, we packed our equipment, made up our field packs, and boarded a troop train to Camp Miles Standish outside of Boston, Mass. We were restricted to camp and were ordered not to talk with any of the town people. We learned that this was to prevent German spies from learning of our eminent departure for the European Theater of Operations.

One dark and rainy night again we boarded a train and were taken directly to a New York dock where the old cruise ship, the HMS Aquitania was waiting for us. 10,000 men and material were loaded in a few hours and under the cover of darkness we pulled out of New York harbor never even getting a chance to see the Statute of liberty. Not until we were out to sea, were we told that because our ship was so fast, we were not traveling in a convoy -but on our own. This knowledge did not exactly make us feel good. The next day almost everyone got sick as we ran into a storm.

The ship had been made over as a troop ship. All public areas were now gone and steeping bunks five high had been installed with about a 3 foot aisle in between. Many cabins had been converted to accommodate the officers who also slept in two high bunks. Two meals a day were served, breakfast and dinner. Breakfast consisted of oatmeal and powdered eggs and coffee. Dinner was mutton and could be smelled all over the ship. ,We ate standing up at little counters. The lines for chow were tremendous considering there were 10,000 of us. When you finished breakfast, you literally got into line for dinner.

The second day out we caught the tail end of a hurricane and rode its coattails for a while to avoid the submarines that were looking for us. The ship only had a five inch gun mounted on the stern and another on the bow. The fourth day out they both began firing at supposedly a submarine alert. We were kept below decks in life preservers and the fear among the men even overwhelmed the smell of the buckets that were used for the seasick ones.

We made it across in five days and pulled into a port north of Glasgow

Scotland on a typical rainy day. After getting some coffee and donuts from the Red Cross ladies, we were again loaded on trains and shipped over night to the midlands of England. My destination was Stow-On-The-Wold just outside Cheltenham.

We were assigned Quonset huts, little semi-round metal buildings and started our training while waiting for our equipment and personal duffel bags to arrive. The training consisted of conditioning and so we did our 25 mile hikes every other day through the English countryside.

I was able to get one pass and went to London for a weekend. During my visit, London was under attack from German buzz bombs so I got an idea how the Brits lived in their subway systems and shelters. Although the pay by our standards was low, compared to the British soldier we were wealthy and took advantage of this. We were always able to find dates to go to a movie or stage show, and to restaurants. We were not well liked by the British Tommies at all.

I visited the tourist sights and was astonished at the buildings being protected with sandbags. The realization was first settling in on me what war was really like.

It was the end of November and we were on the move again - this time by truck to the port of South Hampton. We were loaded on landing Craft Infantry (LSI) and assembled in the harbor. This craft was about the size of a small ferry with stairs built along the bow for disembarking troops. It was shallow draft and rocked like hell. It carried 200 men, one full company. There were bunks below for the troops to sleep in stacked four high. We had no idea where we were going or when. During the night a storm came up and the entire convoy left port for France. We tossed about in the Channel for three days and those of us that did not get seasick on the Aquitania, now made up for it on this craft. The decks were awash with vomit and the smell just generated more.

At daybreak on Dec 6,1944, we heard shelling but had no idea what to expect. We had not been told that we were making an amphibious landing. later we learned that a German submarine supposedly had been spotted. We came into the port area of la

Havre, France and for the first time I saw the devastation caused by war. There were no docks, only steel poles sticking out of the water. Ships were sunk all over the place and I couldn't figure out how the Captain was going to get this craft in without hitting one. Le Havre had only been liberated a few short days before our arrival and there was still mopping up being done in both the harbor and on land. I did:. not have too much time to dwell on this fact as we were ordered to disembark almost immediately.

We pulled along side a shattered pier with a lot of holes in it and started to unload down the gangways alongside the bow. We jumped from the gangway to the pier and gingerly made our way inland for about half mile in a downpour.

We piled into open trucks while a cold rain fell on us and were taken further inland. After a few hours of waiting, our first orders came, and we were to pitch our pup tents in an open muddy field and wait for our equipment and duffel bags which were coming in by landing craft. It was a miserable night; full of mud, wet and cold a forecast of what was to come. We placed our trench coats on the ground hoping, that would keep the mud and water out but to no avail.

The next day we were loaded back into trucks and our convoy, which extended over a mite started a three day trip across the northern portion of France, Luxembourg, and into Belgium. We stopped once every 2 hours for 10 minutes for hygiene and smoke breaks, and then back on the trucks. We ate cold rations and tried to sleep in the jolting trucks while it was still raining and getting colder. I noticed some of the names of the French towns we were passing through and remembered that my Dad's books mentioned these same names. later when I was able to write home, I mentioned that I was seeing the same country as Dad had seen only from the back end of a truck and it gave the folks a clue as to where I was. This was good and bad. later when the Battle developed and was being described in the newspapers, they put two and two together and knew it was my outfit that was in the thick of it.

We arrived at St. Vith Belgium the night of Dec 10, 1944. It was cold and freezing and the trucks were slipping and sliding on the icy roads. Our truck slid off the road in St. Vith while climbing a hill and we all jumped over the sides as the truck went backwards into a ditch and turned over.

This was our welcome to the war zone. 2nd Division guides were waiting for us and led us in the pitch dark all night through the dense forest to the front line positions which were approximately 12 miles due East of St. Vith. We made a strange sight, each man hanging on to the cartridge belt of the man in front of him in order not to get lost in the dark.

We relieved the 2nd Division in the Schnee Eifel, a wooded snow covered ridge of the Ardennes Forest just northeast of Luxembourg along a 27 mile front. I did not learn until my return to the area with Norman in 1993 that I was at the furthest eastern penetration of any Army Unit into Germany.

It was a man for man, gun for gun transfer with the 2nd Division personnel on a cold night on Dec 11,1944. My new home consisted of a dugout approximately 10 x 8 feet and 6 feet deep covered with logs and branches. The dugout had dirt shelves cut into the sides and this was our sleeping quarters. There was one oil lantern set at the far end

for both heat and light. The entrance was covered with green canvas and movable branches. Our mobile truck kitchen was in a shelled out barn about 500 feet to the rear and we carried our meals in our mess gear back to the dugouts. We were not allowed any fires as the smoke and light could give away our position and invite artillery fire.

The actual front was about another 500 feet to the east of us, deeper into Germany, and comprised of a line of fox holes about 100 feet apart. In the midst of the dense forest, one could barely see during the day about 25 to 50 feet in front of you.

Out further beyond our foxhole line about another 1,000 feet were the out-post foxholes which were the listening positions to detect any enemy movements. These foxholes were connected to the rear headquarters by field telephones with wire strung on the ground. When we had to go on out-post duty at night, one followed the wire in your hand as it was impossible to see anything in the pitch-blackness of the night. The spacing of these foxholes was about 500 feet apart so that essentially you were out there all alone.

This was a quiet sector along the Belgium/Germany frontier and was used as a rest and refitting area for combat units pulled out of the line. For the previous 10 weeks there had been only light patrol activity and we were assigned to it to gain combat experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

Baptism of Fire

The first few days our time was spent trying to keep dry and warm which was a losing proposition. Our foxholes during the day would have water in them and you stood in that. At night the water would freeze and you would be standing on ice for your tour of duty. The first Lines of foxholes were two man foxholes and one man would be in them at all times. In the case of an alert, the other man would come from the dugout on the double. During the day and night, we were assigned to the out- post foxholes; two hours on and four off. You were expected to man your assigned foxhole during your time off. There was very little free time to either sleep or eat.

One night while on outpost duty, it was pitch black and a new snow had fallen and froze. I detected a sound in front of me that I was sure were footsteps crunching on the frozen snow. I called to the rear over the phone and reported what I was hearing. My orders were if they got to close to me I was to open fire with the sub machine gun I was armed with. I was alone, scared, couldn't see a thing and realized that although the weather was freezing I was sweating. As the sound continued toward me, I stood up on the foot shelf of the foxhole and fired off a clip from the machine gun, sweeping my front in a 45-degree arc. The sound of the machine gun firing was like claps of thunder in my ears in the still of the night, and then it was dead silence again.

I had no idea if I had hit anything, as there was no sound whatsoever in front of me. I was very thank full that my orders were to stay put and not go out to see what I was shooting at. My duty time was up and my relief arrived and I explained what had transpired. I made my way back to the dugout past the next Line of foxholes and now realized how uncomfortable I was, due to my sweating. With the arrival of daylight, the

word came back: I had put three 45 caliber slugs into a medium size deer. The cooks retrieved it the following night and the company had venison, and I was the recipient of a few jokes.

On Dec. 14, 1944, I was on a recognizance patrol behind enemy Lines. We heard a Lot of truck noises and what appeared to be troop movement but were unable to determine numbers in our assigned area. During the night of Dec.15, 1944 other patrols and out posts also detected increased activity in the German positions. This information was passed on to headquarters and we returned to our dugouts to get warm and change our socks. It was at this time that I noticed frostbite on both my feet.

I came in from out-post duty the night of Dec. 15, 1944 and as usual was cold and wet. I changed my socks and put my boots back on and hung the wet socks around my neck inside my shirt to dry them with my body heat and fell asleep.

At approximately 05:30 A.M. of December 16, 1944, I was thrown out of my sleeping shelf and my ears were ringing from a tremendous explosion. The enemy was laying down a thunderous artillery barrage all along our 22 mite positions. We rushed out of our dugouts into our foxholes through the barrage to await an infantry attack. Treetops were snapping like toothpicks under the murderous shell bursts. The exploding shells were deafening and grew into a continuous roar as the Germans started to use their new rocket mortars we called "screaming meemies". These were shells that had fins placed on them to create a screaming noise that seemed to be calling out your name as they crashed into the ground from a high altitude. I couldn't get deep enough in my foxhole as each one seemed to be heading right into my hole.
The barrage lifted after about a half-hour of this continuous shelling and we came under infantry and tank attacks. We began to see snow clad men jumping from tree to tree and hear a lot of heavy tanks. This attack appeared to keep our front busy as heavy infantry and tank formations paralleled our front and attacked between our right and left flanks, isolating two infantry regiments from the rest of the army. That night there was sporadic firing of weapons of all types alt around us. We stayed in our foxholes all day and the next night and shot at anything that moved in the front of us.
By nightfall on the eve of the first day, we were in grave danger but did not know it as our communications had been cut many times. German SS with King Tiger tanks had penetrated our flanks and were three miles behind us. Much of our artillery support had either been knocked out or relocated further to the West and could not assist us.

The night of Dec. 16/17 individual units were moved about, digging new foxholes in the frozen ground, trying to build a perimeter defense. Small patrols were sent out to determine the enemy's strength in front of us -some of our patrols never came back. Many of us in the foxholes had no idea what was happening except that we were under attack.

The next day, a German force tried a frontal attack - and were beaten back. Our perimeter machine guns played havoc with their advance. We were surprised that no tanks were used during this attack. little did we know that the tanks had penetrated our flanks and that we had been surrounded since the night of the16th I had no idea of what was happening - except what was in my line of vision. It was only after the war that I learned that the 15,000 men of the 106th Infantry Division strung out on a 22 mile front had been hit by three German Armies composed of over 200,000 troops

including three Panzer Divisions, including Hitler's favorite, The Panzer Lehr.

I spent another miserable night in my foxhole under sporadic firing and mortar attacks. The next day, the 18th of December, we were pulled out of the fortifications each man had made into his own personal fort. We assembled on the backside of the ridge in preparation to attack the Village of Schoenberg, which was about 5 miles to our rear. We were going to try and break out back to St. Vith where a defense line had been formed by troops being rushed into the breech. This was the first solid piece of information that told us we were surrounded.

As the company was being given its orders for the attack, my half of Co. I, and half of Co. K were ordered back into the German concrete bunkers and foxholes, a part of the old Siegfried line, to provide a defensive line. I learned some 50 years later that the half of each company of infantry that were pulled out of the attack were to provide a rear guard protection for the main attack. In other words - we were expendable.

The attack started the next morning, the 19th Dec.1944, and met with disaster from the start. The Germans now held the high ground and with a combination of tanks, artillery and infantry chewed up our attacking forces completely and forced them back into the woods. They were under almost continuous shelling all the time while trying to reorganize.

The commanders of both the 422nd and423rd regiments assessed their situation: they had no communication with the rear headquarters; air-drops that were promised had not arrived; no meals for three days; the units were completely out of ammunition; and the men were exhausted. They decided to surrender to stop the carnage that was going on. This occurred about 2 PM on the afternoon of the 191 Dec. 1944.

Now the Germans decided to give us, the so-called rear guard, their undivided attention. About 4 PM of the same day, we were in our foxholes when mortar fire started to pour in. Rumors were now starting to fly about how the main body had surrendered and nobody knew why or what was happening or what to do. My foxhole partner told me that I should get rid of my dog tags as they had an "H" on them, indicating I was Hebrew. I also had a German stick-pin on me that I had taken off a German prisoner. I removed both and ground them into the mud at the bottom of the foxhole. As the attack started, we had about 12 rounds of ammunition, between the two of us, a clip and half.

When the mortar fire stopped we heard whistles being blown from all around us, and it appeared that behind each and every tree and bush, a white-cloaked German soldier rose and started to advance - firing from the hip at our positions.

As they reached the first line of foxholes, they threw grenades inside and blew the men up in them. We expended our ammunition in a few seconds and as they approached us we climbed up out of our foxhole. A German soldier seemed to focus on me and was rushing towards me with a bayonet on his rifle. As he approached, I could see that the end of the bayonet was rusty and the thought went through my head, "Oh my G-d he is going to stick me with a rusty bayonet". About three or four feet away he shouted: "Rouse mit da Hans". I was so frozen with fear that I could not get my hands up. He lunged at me with the bayonet, which caught on the button of my field jacket and slid off and sliced the jacket on my left side. Again he repeated to raise my hands and I

finally got them up in the air.

(I had no knowledge of the German master plan for this battle. It was only years later, after much reading, did I learn what my part was in this huge battle that over 1,000,000 men had participated in. The Germans needed desperately to take St. Vith (12 miles behind me) and its multiple road junctions in one day. Then they would have clear sailing to Antwerp on the sea, thus splitting the American and British Armies in half. The Germans had hoped that this strategy would create an atmosphere of distrust between the American and British forces and political leaders (which almost worked) that would allow them to negotiate a peace settlement thereby eliminating fighting on German soil. This was the exact method used in WWI and the war never was fought on German soil.)

As this day came to an end, I was scared, cold, demoralized and deep down felt that I had failed my obligations as a soldier.

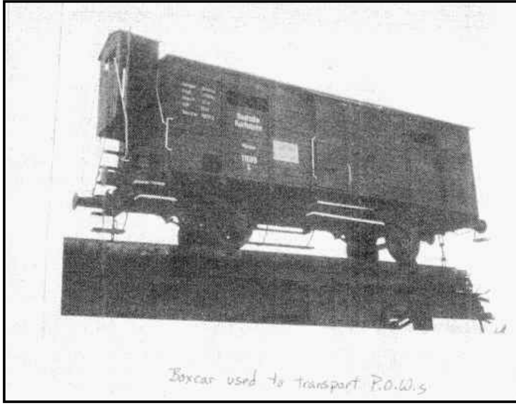
I was immediately searched for weapons. He took my watch and a pack of cigarettes I had in my jacket pocket. They allowed me to keep my cartridge belt with my first aid kit and canteen attached. I was turned around and given a kick in the back with the butt of his gun and was shoved and kicked down the slope of the hill. In stumbling down the hilt another GI also was being pushed likewise and we tried to support each other in the snow to keep from falling down. It was at this moment that I met Sgt. Al Harnish, (from la Cross Wisconsin). We were to be buddies through out our prison days. To this day I have no knowledge as to what happened to my foxhole partner. In fact I cannot remember his name - only his face.

We were herded together to the bottom of the hilt as additional GIs were being assembled by our captors, and Al and I sort of stuck together out of fear.

We were forced to march towards Prum, Germany, about 10 miles further east. We spent our first two nights sleeping in open fields, cold, wet and trying to keep ourselves warm by lying in groups. We had to march during the day in the ditches, to stay off the roads as they were lined up with Tiger Tanks as far as I could see. This tank is about the size of a house and has a huge cannon on it as welt as numerous machine gun ports. The size and quantity staggered me as we all had been led to believe that the German army was on its last legs and that their equipment was inferior to ours. What a shock! Despair suddenly set in with the realization that we were not going to be rescued any time soon.

I shared my canteen with those that had no water. I was lucky that I had two purification tablets with me and I was able to refill my canteen from the dirty ditch water twice. We were not given any food or water and many of the men were becoming very ill. The third day we got to Gerolstein, another German town about another 15 miles east of Prum. We slept in a church graveyard huddled around the gravestones, which help to block the wind and snow. The fourth day Dec 23,1944 we were herded down to the train station.

We were lined up along a gray wall for about five hours waiting for a train. Finally we were given a few soda crackers and some water for those lucky enough to have a canteen cup. I was one of the lucky ones.


Boxcar used to transport P.O.W.s

A freight train arrived pushing about 25 to 30 boxcars. The boxcars were about 3/4 the size of our freight cars and had a I x 2 foot vent cut into the corners on opposite sides of the car. The car was similar to the old 40 and 8 used during WWI, which meant they could carry 40 men or 8 horses. The Germans pushed and forced over 75 men into each car and slammed the sliding door shut and bolted. The floors were covered with a thin layer of straw and many still smelled or contained remains of dung from their last cargo - horses. We were packed in so tight that we took numbers in order to sit or stand on the floor.

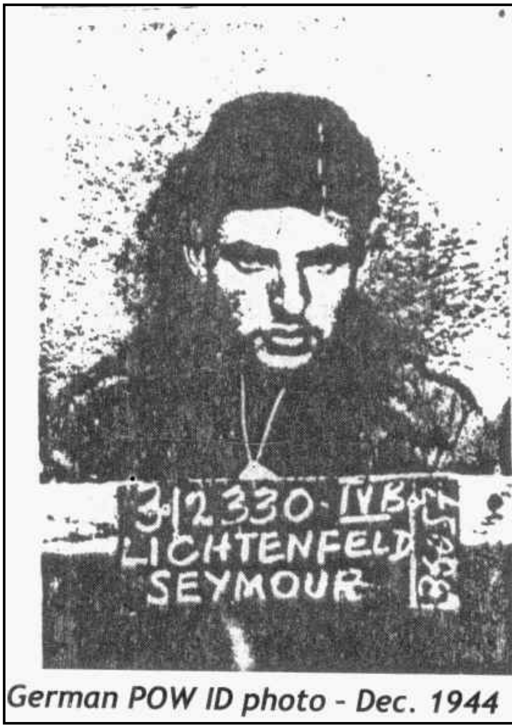
This was my home for the next seven days. We were not given any food or water the first 3 or 4 days and were not allowed out even for hygiene purposes. The night of Dec 24th we were parked in the marshaling yards of Limburg, Germany when the RAF made a bombing attack. They had no way of knowing that we were POWs and many of the cars were hit. Some who escaped from those cars opened other cars and let prisoners out. A large group made their way into a field near by and stamped out the letters POW in the snow. The RAF must have seen it and the bombing stopped and all through the rest of the night a RAF fighter flew cover to protect us from other bombers.

The Germans collected all of us strays and reloaded us into the remaining box cars and the next night we started east once again. Al and I kept close together so we were together in the same boxcar.

The next days were miserable. The wounded that had died in the car were pushed erect into one corner. When we stopped after a few days we were told to hand out our helmets for water. We also received one loaf of bread for each five men. Needless to say the helmets had been used for other purposes, but the men near the door tried to scrub them out as best as possible with the snow from the roof of the car. Many of us came down with dysentery, which only made the situation worse.

We finally got to Stalag IV-B near Muhlberg, Germany, just north of the Czechoslovakia border. We had to march a mile and half to the camp from the railroad siding and I had my first of many experiences with guard dogs.

At this camp I was interrogated by a German officer, who spoke perfect English. He told me he was a graduate of Penn State University. I thought that after giving my name, rank, and serial number I would be through (per stateside training). Was I ever wrong. He not only told me what outfit I was with, where we had shipped from, what ship we came over on, and where we trained in England. I was flabbergasted. When he wanted to see my dog tags, I indicated that I had lost them. (Much later after liberation by the Russians, I got a hold of my prison record and I found "Jew" marked on the face of it. So much for destroying my dog tags.)



German POW ID photo - Dec. 1944

We were in this camp about two weeks and Al and I were stilt together. We shared with a group of British Tommies, Aussies and New Zeatanders their barracks, alt of who had been prisoners for a tong time, and were provided a quick course on how to survive as a POW.

Their camp, having been established for a tong time, was receiving Red Cross parcels on a regular basis and they shared their meager rations with us. Each package was issued once every two weeks for two men and contained powdered milk, crackers, tins of cheese, canned meats and cigarettes. The latter became the currency of the camp. With these you could buy from German guards just about everything except your freedom. The ingenuity that these long term prisoners used was and still is an astounding feat for men determined not to have their will broken.

I celebrated my 20th birthday at this camp on January 10,1945. I wrote a Prisoner of War letter that one of the Brits said they would try to smuggle out. This letter, by paths unknown, found its way to my parents in April 1945. That's how they learned I was a Prisoner of War. The letter was forwarded on to the War Dept. and they changed my status from Missing in Action to Prisoner of War.

The second letter I wrote was also smuggled out of the camp, of course with many others, and it made its way to my home in Gary, Indiana 14 months later. The day the postman delivered it, he knocked on the front door and handed it to me personally with his congratulations that I was there to receive it. Ironically, none of the letters that Al wrote ever got back to his family.

All this time I was fighting the effects of frozen feet with no medication and/or medical assistance. Due to the swelling, I no longer was able to wear my combat boots and kept them strung around my neck.

After two weeks, just about when I was starting to get out of my depression and feeling maybe POW life was tolerable, we were suddenly ordered back to the train station. Again we were loaded like cattle in the boxcars and shipped further East to Stalag III-B at Furstenberg on the Oder near the Polish border east of Berlin. This trip lasted only three days and we were able to tolerate it much better with the rations that the British POW's provided us, from their meager rations. We were stilt given no water.

This was to be my new home for the duration. I again felt a little relief, as the camp appeared to be an old WWI German army camp. There were permanent barracks with four high bunks with wooden stats, a stove that we could cook on (if you had something to cook). Space that you could seek out for solitude, rather living on top of each other. We even had our own permanent latrine. The camp was fairly welt organized much like Stalag IV B had been. Most of the American prisoners were from the North Africa Kassirine Pass disaster, the Italian campaign and the Holland disaster of General Montgomery.

The camp held some 50,000 prisoners of alt Nationalities. The Russians were the most predominate, about 30,000. The remainder were made up of the remains of the French Army, civilians, and lots of Hungarians, who wouldn't fight for the Germans. There were 5,000 American prisoners and each nationality had their own compounds separated by barbed wire fences and each guarded by high towers with machine gun emplacements within them.

All this time I was struggling with my frozen feet. I had been massaging them ever since I was captured and at every opportunity that came along. The fact that I had put my extra pair of socks around my neck at the start of the battle I feel helped to save both my feet. I was one of only a few that had extra socks to change to when our feet got wet, which was continuously. By now both my feet had turned black and the skin was peeling off them. My feet had swelled to the point that I was unable to get them back into my combat boots even with no laces. With the help of a great coat, given to me by a Brit back at Stalag IV B, I cut the bottom off and made myself booties.

A Russian medic, who made the rounds of the prisoners once in a while, said that I should have the right foot amputated, as it was looking pretty bad. I was determined that this was not to be; especially by someone that I couldn't even understand. This only caused me to rub them even more vigorously than before. An American medic from another hut heard about me and after his examination told me to keep up what I was doing as he thought circulation was starting to come back.

Every time I got to the point that things were starting to look up, disaster struck. The Russians started their winter offensive the latter part of January 1945, and were driving straight towards our camp. The Germans did not want American prisoners to fall to the Russians as we learned in latter years they intended to use us as bargaining chips. With only a few hours notice, we were told to prepare for an evacuation march. Those medically unable to march were left behind. Frozen feet did not count.

The Russian prisoners were not going with us and their fate became readily known as we heard the machine guns in their compounds firing tong and steady bursts until tong after we were out of hearing range from the camp. I was unable to put my boots on and had to resort to wearing my cloth booties and shuffling along on the ice and snow. The weather was below freezing the entire 10 day trip. The records show this was coldest winter for Europe in over 100 years. We were forced to march in columns of five abreast in order that the German guards could count us easily. The column made about 10 miles from daybreak to sunset and stretched as far as the eye could see.

We received no food or water for the entire march. We survived on eating snow or rummaging through the dung heaps in farmyards. At dusk we were forced into whatever fields were near and laid down in the snow and ice. We used to form human piles so we could keep warm, with the outside men allowed in after a few minutes so that everyone had a chance. When we were lucky and found ourselves near a farm, a few would slither off in the snow seeking the dung heaps.

We knew that the farmers piled their crops of potatoes and rutabagas into the dung heaps of the animals to keep them from freezing during the winter. When these delicacies were found, they were distributed to buddies and others in bad shape. It was quite a sight and smell to see the number of men constantly rubbing the potatoes on their clothing to get the dung off so they could peel them and eat the raw potatoes. It is

for this reason that I still can not eat the skin of a potato. The German guards would yell and scream at us but no one ever gave up his potato.

Our guards were old and wounded German soldiers. Many of the old ones couldn't keep up with our snail pace. The wounded guards were the ones we dreaded and feared. They usually were Panzer or SS troops and had no mercy whatsoever. If you fell out of formation you were either bayoneted or shot. Many a man was carried between his buddies to keep from falling out.

As the column crawled through the small narrow streets of the villages, the women in the upstairs stories would pour water on us to make us more uncomfortable. Small children threw snowballs and rocks and would sic their dogs at us. If we took any kind of defensive attitude, you were immediately dragged off and either shot or bayoneted. During the entire course of this march we were constantly guarded by the barking and snapping jaws of German Shepherd or Doberman Pincher dogs. To this day I am still terrified of a barking dog.

I carried my combat boots around my neck by the shoestrings, and needless to say many a German guard or villager noticed them. I always moved into the center of the column to prevent them from snatching the boots, as I knew there would be no way I could retrieve them.

The German line of march took us north of Berlin, then South and West until we came to Luckenwalde, Germany and Stalag III-A - a distance of 110 miles. We arrived about the middle of February 1945 in a snowstorm and immediately were bedded down outdoors in a huge field. The next day we received our first hot of anything. Horse drawn carts were brought in with two huge barrels on them. The content was a colored water they called tea, but it was hot and those of us that had canteens got a cup full. Those that did not have a container substituted their hands and couldn't care the least about burning them.

This camp was a very large camp and already had over 60,000 prisoners in it. Prisoners from all over the eastern part of Germany were being brought in by rail, truck and by foot. There was no room for us in any of the permanent barracks. They brought in five huge' circus tents and in the field where we had bedded down the tents were erected and became our new home.

We were issued two very thin German blankets to keep us warm. Two inches of straw was placed as a base in each tent and this was to become our bed. We had no heat and the wind whistled through the tents. We laid huddled in each others arms to try and keep warm. The long term prisoners gave their extra clothing to the newcomers, who had lost everything.

At each corner of the compound tall guard towers were erected complete with machine gun emplacements. We were contained with three barbed wire fences. The space between the two high fences was about two feet apart and the guards, with their dogs, would patrol within this area. Ten feet in front of these fences was a foot high single wire warning fence. This fence was called the dead wire. If any prisoner crossed this wire, the guards in the towers would open fire on you.

Our daily routine was to arise at daybreak. Fall out for roll-call, which consisted of

counting our column of fives. Many a time men would purposely foul the count with horseplay or cover up a missing man. This also was the cause for additional time to stand in front of the tents for punishment. pur tents were constantly being searched for crystal radios or any kind of a weapon that could have been fashioned or obtained. After morning roll call, the horse drawn wagon would come in and stop at each tent and we would line up for our colored water called tea or coffee.

Lunch-time the process was repeated, only this hot water was called soup and if you were lucky there might be a small piece of wild boar in it. A treat would be a piece of meat but it usually had the fur still on it. Dinnertime was a repeat of the breakfast wagon only this time they called it coffee. Once every other day a one pound loaf of black bread that was made with 50% sawdust was distributed to five men. The slicing of the bread was one of great artistry. We rotated slicing each loaf and each man watched very carefully that no one slice was larger than another. Upon completion the crumbs were counted and distributed. Hunger and cold were our biggest enemies.

About the middle of March 1945, Red Cross parcels started to be distributed. The Germans were getting worried that they would be caught with their warehouses piled high with the parcels. We had one parcel every two weeks to be divided between five men. With the coming of parcels, cigarettes again became the currency and our diets were now augmented by bread that we could buy from the guards. Of course each bargaining session was a risk, as you had to be inside the warning barrier wire to get to the guards. We did this mostly at night and especially during the air raids when we knew the camp lights would be shut off. Although I am not known for my Yiddish, I had heard enough in my home with my grandmothers around that I could interpret German from it.

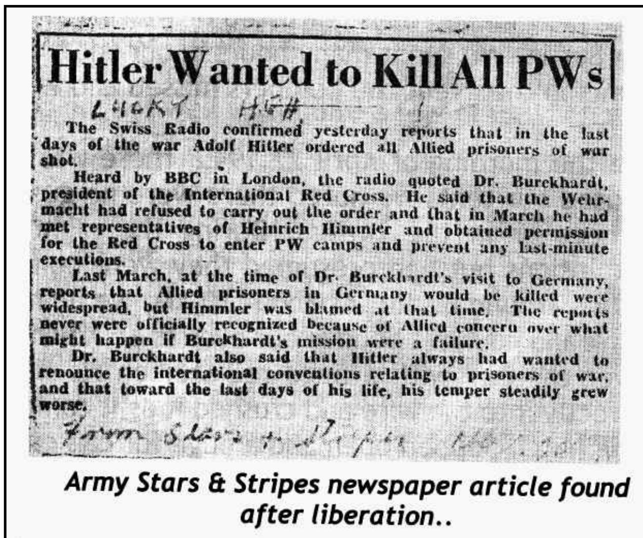
In my tent, I became the trader and would go out to the warning wire to trade with cigarettes. One night during an argument with a guard over the price of a loaf of bread, the all clear siren suddenly sounded and the lights immediately came on. I was caught in the warning zone and started running back to my tent yelling all the way to open the flap. The guard in the tower started firing at me with the machine gun and although I couldn’t see them I knew the shots were landing at my heels. I dove into the tent and the firing stopped. The tent commander chewed me out royally for possibly getting the whole tent shot up. I was very careful after that and paid attention to all sounds especially the all clear siren.

A military table of organization was set up for each tent. The highest ranking non-com (non-commissioned officer) was the tent commander with platoons set up and the sleeping rows became squads. This created a military organization complete with orders and commands as well as establishing discipline within the ranks. The first law in the camp was you did not steal food from a fellow prisoner. If you were caught, tried and found guilty, you were tossed headfirst into the open pit latrine filled with feces and lime. Even after one crawled out, he was shunned by the others. His odor gave him away; not to say that the rest us did not stink.

I had not had a shower since I was in England and was still in the same clothes I had been captured in. When we were deloused for lice it was taking our clothes off, being sprayed with a powder and then putting our louse infected old clothes back on. We used to have contests as to’ who had the most lice on them and cracking the lice between your fingernails. Sleeping on the straw, one was never able to get rid of them.

As spring approached, my feet were getting better so that I was able to put my boots back on and get around pretty good. Al and I used to walk the perimeter of the inside barrier wire for hours - talking about our futures, home, but mostly food. Food became an obsession with all of us and the talk would go on for hours day and night outside and inside the tents.

More and more crystal sets were showing up in the tents and driving the Germans guards crazy trying to find them. The sets were broken down into little pieces and various individuals carried them around and got together at preset times to assemble them and listen to the BBC. We learned about the crossing of the Rhine and Patton's rush into Czechoslovakia and lower Germany. The Russians were also making tremendous progress and our spirits started to soar.



Hitler Wanted to Kill All PWs

The Swiss Radio confirmed yesterday reports that in the last days of the war Adolf Hitler ordered all Allied prisoners of war shot.

Heard by BBC in London, the radio quoted Dr. Burckhardt, president of the International Red Cross. He said that the Wehrmacht had refused to carry out the order and that in March he had met representatives of Heinrich Himmler and obtained permission for the Red Cross to enter PW camps and prevent any last-minute executions.

Last March, at the time of Dr. Burckhardt's visit to Germany, reports that Allied prisoners in Germany would be killed were widespread, but Himmler was blamed at that time. The reports never were officially recognized because of Allied concern over what might happen if Burckhardt's mission were a failure.

Dr. Burckhardt also said that Hitler always had wanted to renounce the international conventions relating to prisoners of war, and that toward the last days of his life, his temper steadily grew worse.

Army Stars & Stripes newspaper article found after liberation..

On or about April 1, 1945, we were called out for a special roll call. We noticed extra guards were in the towers with additional machine guns. The German Commander ordered all Jewish prisoners to step forward. Immediately whispers went through the ranks that no on was to step out. After a few moments, the command was repeated again and with a lot of gesturing and hollering. Then the word went through the ranks that everyone should step forward. The Germans were furious and kept us in formation all day. We all were worried as to what would happen. After dark, we were dismissed and went back into our tents with no meals served that day.

About a week later again, again we were called out for roll call with extra guards and weapons in the towers. No orders were issued, but a tot of high ranking German officers were arguing near the camp Commandants Headquarters. It was later learned that Hitler had ordered all allied prisoners of war were to be executed that day. This order was later confirmed by the Swiss and sent on to the BBC that the German high Command refused to carry out this order for reasons unknown.

On April 13,1945, we received news of President Roosevelt's death. As prisoners we were forbidden to have a flag or sing or even hum our national anthem. All 5000 of us gathered in ranks in front of our tents and sang as loud as we could our national anthem while standing at attention. The German guards were beside themselves blasting out over the loud speaker system, their propaganda that Roosevelt, the warmonger, was dead. Our singing drowned out the garbage the loud speakers were spewing out.

The next eleven days consisted of waiting and watching the air raids on Berlin. We spent many hours in our slit trenches alongside of our tents in the event the bombers missed and we were bombed instead.

On the morning of April 22,1945, there was no roll call, and as we exited our tents we noted there were no guards either between the fences or in the towers. During the night, we had heard many explosions but had presumed they were bombers attacking German cities around Berlin. At about 10 AM, we heard the familiar roar of a tank and

couldn't believe our eyes as an American Sherman tank came over the rise with a huge red star on its side. It made a left turn directly into the wire and crushed it as it came on into the compound. The hatch popped open and a huge fur cap came out with a toothless face attached to it and said with a grin "Me Rusky".

We went berserk, shouting and yelling all over the place. We were free.

CHAPTER SIx

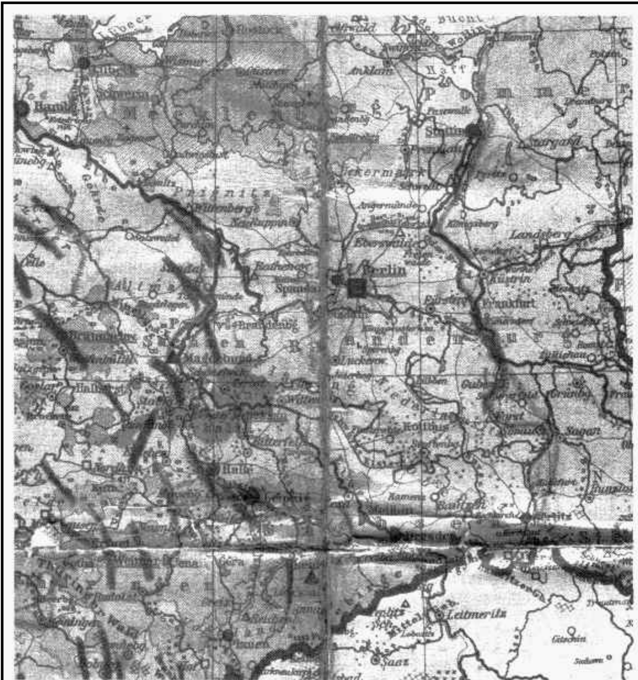
Liberation

The next few days were chaotic. Alt forms of discipline vanished as guys ran amuck. Many including myself went looking for food. We found chickens in farm houses and immediately cooked and ate them on the spot. To a man, we all became sick and were throwing up all over the place. We could not handle food in our shrunken stomachs. I, with a few others ransacked the German headquarters and I found my German prison record, which noted thereon that I was Jewish. Why the Germans had never checked out the records on that fateful day I will never know. Finally, order was restored and foraging parties were sent out and brought back food to be prepared in the German field kitchens. The Russians also brought in horse drawn flat wagons loaded with captured German weapons. Immediately those of infantry background, armed ourselves to the teeth - there was still a war on.

We kept waiting for American troops to come and take us home. We did not understand that the Americans had stopped at the Elbe River some 75 miles west of us per the pre-arrangement made with the Russians. The Russians started to tell us that they were going to send us back to American lines via Odessa, on the Black Sea, some 1500 miles to the east. This did not set well with quite a few of us when we knew that Americans were only 75 miles away.

With food in our stomachs and a weapon in our hands, seven of us decided to head west against the advice of our commanders, to find the American Army. We left on the night of April 29,1945 and headed west. A Russian tank driver gave me a map of Europe and drew in red crayon where the approximate lines were. Our second night, we were in the town of Juterburg, Germany and took refuge in a barn. The Russians were going crazy, looting and raping, and they were all drunk and storming houses looking for the German women. We stayed out of their way all the next day in the barn and then left the following night. We traveled like this for the next few nights. On the fourth day, we figured that we had pretty well gotten past the Russian lines and so we traveled in the woods by daylight to make better time.

On the sixth day, about 15 miles from Magdeburg on the Elbe River, we ran into a 40 man patrol of German soldiers. Much to our surprise they did not fire on us, and an Officer came forward with a white flag. He spoke broken English and indicated he wanted to surrender to us and be taken prisoner by Americans rather than by Russians. We told him that we could not take his patrol with us but if he wanted to come, he was welcome. We told the Germans to lay down their weapons and head west with a white flag to the American lines.



Map of Europe given to me by Russian tank driver.

On May 7,1945, eight days after we had left the prison camp, we came into Magdeburg, only to find no Americans and the bridges down. We spent the rest of the day and night looking for a boat to get us across this wide river. We found a leaky rowboat and in the morning started to cross the Elbe river three at a time. One would come back and two more would go across. The last trip we filled the boat and had to leave the German officer behind. We were exhausted but elated that we had made it this far.

We started across a field when we saw and heard at the same time an American two and half ton truck with a 50 caliber machine gun swivel over the passenger side. We started to shout and fired our weapons into the sky to attract their attention, which we did - as they began to fire at us.

We then took a took at ourselves and understood: we looked like the thousands of refugees that were in the area. We hung up the white cloth the German officer had brought to us and shouted that we were American POWs. We were instructed for one of us to come forward~ and identify himself. I was the closest to them and so I went out. The truck driver asked where I was from and I answered Gary, Indiana. He then asked what high school I attended and I answered Lew Wallace High. Then he answered with the most beautiful words I have ever heard, “Come ahead you SOB, your high school beat my school - South Bend Central - for the state championship”.

There were hugs and back slapping all around and they piled us in the truck and headed for the Company command post. We were beside ourselves as we were American soldiers once again; at least that is what I thought.

From the command post we were trucked up to Hildershine, Germany for processing and the start of the return home. When we arrived, there was a mass of hundreds of refugees at the gate all saying they were American and wanted in to the camp. When my turn came to go through, I was asked for my dog tags. Having none, I was told that I would have to wait ‘outside the gate. The other fellows would not hear of it and they stayed with me until my name and unit were properly identified.

I showered, was deloused and given a fresh uniform and started to look like a soldier once again. I shaved and used after-shave lotion that just about burned my face off. Went to the barber shop and got all the curly locks cut off and gave my overseas cap that jaunty tilt and started to feel pretty good about myself. At the camp infirmary,

I tipped the scales at just over 100 pounds. This meant I had lost some 65 pounds during my 5 month prison stay.

I immediately sent a telegram home letting them know I was back in American hands. I

also visited the Camp Chaplain and he wrote my mother a V mail that I was fine. She didn't believe him and thought that he was writing because I had lost my hands.

I was put on a plane and ferried to Camp lucky Strike in France. This was one of the assembly points where POWs were taken prior to sending them home. My first evening, I was walking with Al and they started to play retreat, the flag was being lowered and the Stars Spangled Banner was being played. I stood in that street with tears pouring down my cheeks. When I looked at Al sort of embarrassed, I saw that he too was crying like a baby.

There must have been a few thousand men at this camp. I was standing in a chow line one day and in the next line I hear my name called out. looking across there was John Lenburg, my high school class mate. As mentioned before, he had been shot down over the Ploesti oil fields. His first remark to me was "What the hell are you doing here as a prisoner, you were suppose to rescue me!"

John tells the story of the day we were walking down the road in the camp and a staff car pulled up alongside of us. We noticed that a five star pendant was flying from the fender. As the car came to a halt, the driver got out and opened the rear door. Out stepped General Dwight D. Eisenhower. He asked what state we were from and we both answered in unison "Indiana". He wanted to know what POW camps we had been in and we told him. After this he said "Soldiers, we are going to get you home as soon as we can." With that he turned around and jumped back into his car and left. We both stood there with our mouths hanging open and just looked at each other in a daze.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Homeward Bound

I was at Camp lucky Strike about 10 days. They refitted me with uniforms again and the duffel bag was now getting full. An announcement was made, that those Ex-POWs that wanted to go to Paris could have a three day pass. There was one catch; if your name came up for shipping out, you lost your rotation and would have to wait for it to come around again to go home. I had no desire to go sightseeing and was just content to read every past Stars ü Stripes, the official army newspaper, trying to figure out what happened to our Division that past December 1944.

The weather was balmy and I was getting fed regularly so I was content to put on weight and sleep on an army cot. It felt so good. Al and I finally parted company as his name came up first for the trip home.

My name came up for shipping out and I got very excited knowing that I was going home. We boarded trucks with closed tops and headed for le Havre. I could not believe that this was the same harbor that I had landed in only eight months before. Most of the sunken ships were gone. Docks and piers rebuilt and cranes unloading ships with trucks hauling off the supplies like a colony of ants.

My ship was the SS Santa Margaretta, one of the small liberty ships that had been

produced almost one a day. It was small and took 199 EX- POWs. We left le Havre, France May 22,1945 and arrived in New York Harbor June 4,1945. We had good weather and I do not remember getting seasick on this trip. We slept in cabins with two rows of bunks and plenty of room. The cooks made us anything we wanted and we ate like kings. It was noted that the crew did not have the same rations.

On the East night out of New York, the Captain told us he was slowing down a little so we could enter the harbor at daylight. At the break of dawn, every Ex-Pow was at the rail watching for our first sight of the lady. Just as the sun was coming up behind us, we spotted her in all her glory. I don't believe there was a man among us who was not crying. As we went passed the Statue, fireboats came out to greet us with their nozzles spewing huge geysers of water skyward and ushered on to the New Jersey side. Bands were playing and Red Cross ladies were there to handout their famous donuts. They made us feel like heroes.

We boarded busses and were taken to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. I called the folks and I do not remember if we could talk, we were alt so choked up. Again I was outfitted with new uniforms and within 24 hours was on a train for Fort Benjamin Harrison at Indianapolis, Indiana. It was ironic that Camp Atterbury was only 35 miles away from where I had started my overseas journey.

First visit home after return to States. June 1945

Within hours after arrival, I was on a Greyhound bus headed for Gary, Indiana. I arrived about 6:30 AM in front of the Gary Post Tribune building and called that I was home. I believe my brother Mel and Dad made it from Glen Park to downtown Gary in record time.

When I walked into the house, there was plenty of crying all around. My mother grabbed my hands and smiled. She had to assure herself that I had both of them.

My Aunt Dory and Uncle Lou, like second parents to me, were also there. I also learned that my brother, Melvin, had just graduated from high school and they had his graduation party the previous day. All the relatives were staying in town, as they knew I was on my way home. I felt guilty that I was taking some of my brother's glory away.

The greatest shock for me was seeing my Mother completely white. She had beautiful auburn colored hair when I had left. I soon learned that the day they received the telegram that I was missing in action, Mom's hair turned gray. It was the day after my birthday, January 11, 1945. I was told that my mother talked to my high school graduation picture on the piano every night and would continuously tell everyone that I was all right and would come home. I am convinced that it was her faith and everyone prayers

that brought me back.

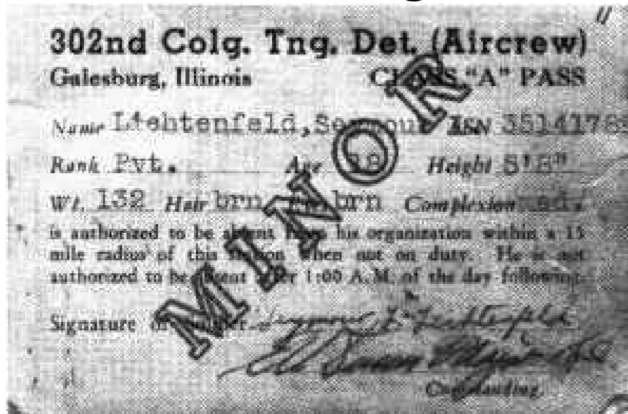
John Lenberg and I on VJ Day. - August 1945

I was home for a two month furlough and Mom made the most of it, putting weight back on me. I teamed up again with John Lenburg and we did the town right. I had a lot of back pay and a chest full of ribbons and medals. I was issued the Purple Heart, Combat Infantryman's Medal, The Bronze Star for meritorious service in combat action against the enemy, and the European Theater of Operations with three star cluster.

We were home for VJ Day August 8,1945 and headed by streetcar for downtown Gary. We never made it. We were pulled off the car about ~ Ave. and congratulated all the way to 5th Ave. I think we kissed every girl in Gary on that trip. It was one that I will never forget.

My orders then sent me to Miami Beach for rest and rehabilitation for two weeks. It was tough duty. I was put up at the Poinciana Hotel and relaxed on the beach and partied at night. After that, I was ordered to Camp Blanding, Florida, where I was discharged from the service on November30, 1945.

I was still not old enough to vote or buy a bottle of liquor.



302nd Colg. Tng. Det. (Aircrew)
Galesburg, Illinois CLASS "A" PASS
Name Lichtenfeld, Seymour ASN 35141768
Rank Pvt. Age [illegible] Height 5'[illegible]"
Wt. 132 Hair brn [illegible] brn Complexion [illegible]
is authorized to be absent from his organization within a 15 mile radius of this station when not on duty. He is not authorized to be absent after 1:00 A.M. of the day following.
Signature [illegible]
Commanding

MINOR

CHAPTER EIGHT

RETURN TO THE ARDENNES

In October 1996, at the urging of my son Norman, I made an exploratory trip to Belgium and especially to the Ardennes to see if we could find where I had been fighting.

For almost eight months, we had obtained action reports, maps, history, and books that had been written about this great battle in which over one million soldiers participated. It has been recorded as the largest land battle ever fought. We made contact with a Belgian organization, that has studied and welcomed returning Battle of the Bulge Veterans. There have been a multitude of monuments erected to many fighting units for

heroic action that helped turn the tide of the huge battle.

Upon our arrival in St. Vith, Belgium, we met our hosts Willie and Adda Rikken, under unusual circumstances. Norm and I arrived a day earlier than we were expected and were investigating hotels to stay at. As we were walking down the main street, we heard the click clack of heels chasing us and calling out our names. We were astounded that someone even knew that we were there. This gray-haired elderly, lady is almost out of breath and asking if we were the Lichtenfelds. She had been in the beauty parlor and her husband was having a beer in one of the hotels that we were looking at and overheard us. He put two and two together that this was a returning veteran and his son who they were expecting the next day. He grabbed Adda out of her beauty parlor and told her of us and hence she came running down the street. This was the start of lasting friendship.

Two of the most wonderful people 1 have ever had the pleasure in meeting. They were very excited to be our guides. They had a planned itinerary for us that included showing us all the monuments that had been erected in the area. We sensed their disappointment when we informed them of our intention of retracing the actual battlefield where I had fought. But when we showed them all our maps and action reports, they also became very excited, as they had never done this before.

Willie became our driver guide and following our maps took us into farmers' fields and back roads that Norman and I would never had found. It was at this juncture of the trip that I first realized that I had been fighting in Germany all the time; whereas before I had assumed it had been Belgium.

Standing in the graveyard I had slept in the night before being loaded into boxcars. Gerolstein, Germany Oct '96

We discovered the actual areas that I had been. Even more thrilling in the midst of the dense forests of the Ardennes were the foxholes. Some have never been disturbed in over 55 years. We retrieved rusty mess kits, lantern, and ammunition clips for both rifles and machine guns.

We had a memorable experience at a crossroads called, Baraque de Fraiture, where Battery A of the 589th Field Artillery of the 106th Infantry Division put up a remarkable defense that has become known for its leader, Major Parker, as Parker's Crossroads. With only three of their remaining howitzers, they made a road-block and held up two German SS Panzer divisions enabling the 82nd Airborne to get into defensive positions. They were literally blasted to pieces and overrun.

Norman and I went to see the memorial they have erected at this crossroads by the Belgian people. It was dinnertime and there was a *smaU restaurant across* the street, so the four of us went *in.* Adda mentioned to the waiter that I was a returning veteran with his son. The Madam of the restaurant was sick in bed but as soon as she heard that a returning vet was there she got dressed and came downstairs with an armload of scrap books. Her daughter was actually running the establishment now and no one could speak English. Between Norman and his limited French, Adda with French, België and a

little Flemish and German we had a grand time.

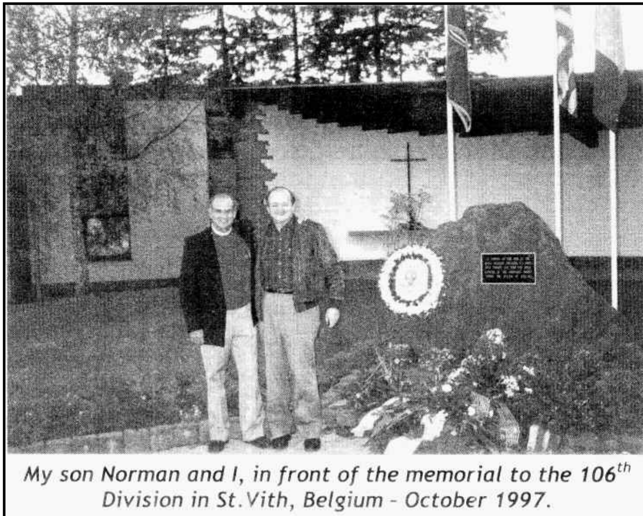
I started to notice that other patrons of the restaurant were starting to gather around us until we had over a dozen people all trying to talk at once in five languages. One gentlemen in broken English pulled from his wallet a worn picture of a GI of WWII vintage. He told me that his father gave this GI shelter in his home after he had been wounded. The Germans later found him and took him away as well as his father. This man was asking me if there was any way I could find out if that GI was still alive. All he had was a partial ID and no name. Needless to say, I have been unable to get any kind of information. During the evening drinks were poured very generously and I had to have my picture taken in a GI helmet for the cameras that came out of nowhere. It was a extraordinary evening and one that I will not forget easily.

For the next few days we toured battle sites and although the weather was sunny, inside the forest the sunlight was shut out and it was dark and misty. As I stood there among the majestic trees and closed my eyes, I again could feel that eeriness that had plagued me many years ago.

Since that first trip, I have returned again with my wife Natalie, first to meet the wonderful Rikkens and to share with her that portion of my life that had been locked in me for so many years. Norman has returned many additional times, seeking relics to enhance his personal World War II museum.

I feel that I have been able to close a chapter in my life and answered the so many questions that have bothered me through the years. But most above all: Was it worth it? Does anybody care?

Willie and Adda and the wonderful people of the Ardennes answered a resounding YES to both.



My son Norman and I, in front of the memorial to the 106th Division in St.Vith, Belgium - October 1997.

CHAPTER NINE

Epilogue

History now credits the 106th Infantry Division as a major contributing force in blunting Hitler's last great offensive of the war. We were an untried green outfit that went into a major battle for the first time. The German timetable called for the taking of St. Vith (5 miles behind us) a transportation hub with its rail and road junctions that opened up the entire Belgium countryside within the first 24 hours for they needed this to turn loose their Panzer tank divisions. The long lines of tanks and equipment that I saw as a prisoner, while being marched to the rear, attested to the fact that their main forces had been unable to enter the battle. It was also very discouraging as we were led to believe that this was a broken army.

They were suppose to capture both St. Vith and Bastogne by the evening of December 17,1944. Due to the tenacious defense by the 106th, 99th and 28th Infantry Divisions and other units, they had to assign more troops to dispose of us, which held up their attack on those cities.

Our three days of defense against this huge Army gave American and British forces time to bring up reserves to stop this counter offensive attack. The 101st Airborne came out of reserve to establish defense positions at Bastogne (27 miles behind my position). Gen. Patton's Third Army turned North to establish a southern shoulder and the 82nd Airborne and the two armored Divisions made up the Northern shoulder and the battle-front took on the shape of a bulge and thus the name '~Battle of the Bulge".

Stephen Ambrose said in his book, The Citizen Soldier, 'that some regarded the American recovery from the Battle of the Bulge attack, a miracle. It was not a miracle, it was Infantry".

Field Marshal Montgomery (who was not prone to compliment American Forces) praised the five American Divisions that contributed most significantly for the defeat of the German effort. He singled out two armored divisions, two airborne divisions and the 106th Infantry Division.

This knowledge, learned many years later, has helped to make my experience a little more bearable.

On the day I was captured December 19,1944, the first elements of the 101st Airborne were arriving in Bastogne for their heroic defense of that city. lt. General Courtney Hodges, First Army commander (our boss), said of the l06th's stand: "No troops in the world, disposed as your division had to be, could have withstood the impact of the huge German attack which had its greatest weight in your sector. Please tell these men for me what a grand job they did. By the delay they effected, they definitely upset Von Rundstedt's timetable".

Upon being taken prisoner, the despair that overwhelmed me was partially due to the fact that I felt I had not performed my duty as a soldier. I had little knowledge of the overall battle and only knew what was happening within the ten feet of my foxhole. After three days of fighting, changing positions, no food, and running out of ammunition, I felt that the rest of the Army had abandoned us. It has taken me over 55 years to research and discover the truth as to why my combat days, which I had trained so hard for, were so short.

Many Prisoners of War never returned home. Throughout the years, rumors arose that many were sent to Siberia by the Russians. I reflect on this when I recall how the Russians wanted to send me home by way of Odessa.

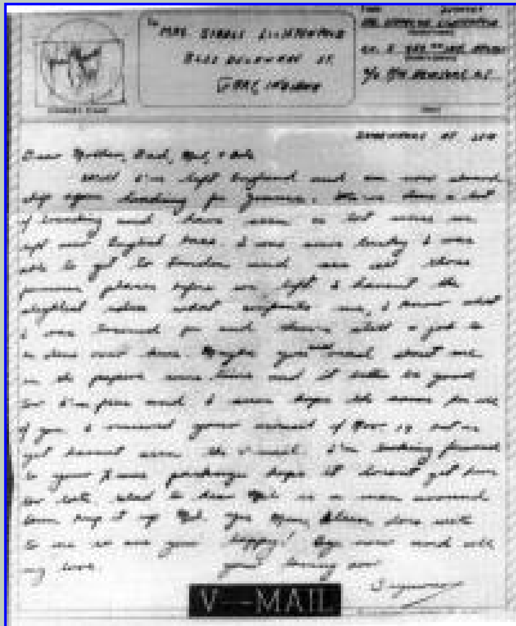
My combat and prison experiences have given me a different aspect of what we have here in this country. The word freedom is bantered about, in the press and by politicians, similar to any product that can be sold by an ad agency. It is not until you lose your freedom, that you first really understand what it means. I believe that I have been able to get a clearer perspective of what is real and what is genuine because of those experiences.

John Lenberg and I still maintain contact with each other. Al Harnish and I kept in touch with each other for a few years with Christmas cards and then as we got on with our lives, we somehow lost track.

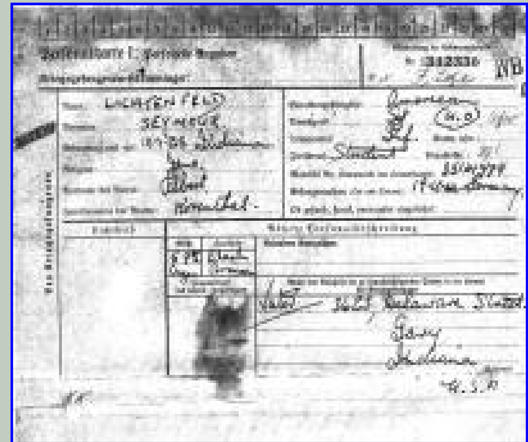
About 1989, we found each other again through the Ex-POW organization and started to rekindle our lost friendship. Al died in August 1998. Upon learning of Al's passing, I felt that a thread that connected me to that portion of my past had been broken.

During World War II, there were about 142,000 American Prisoner's of War from all theaters of operation. As I write this, there are less than 39,000 survivors, and our numbers grow smaller by the day.

My Prisoner of War comrades, whether we shared the same camps or not, all have a bond with each other that is indescribable. As I reflect back on that time of my life, I have been able to finally find some closure to all the questions that I have asked myself through out the years. I also realize that I gave something to my country that not many people can say they have. I risked my life and gave up my freedom in defense of my country, and that is something never to be forgotten.



V—MAIL



RECIEVED FEBUARY 8

Dear Mother, Dad, Melvin, and Betty

Hello everyone here's your

I'm swell and in the best of

and already have given

new life so far I've met six fell

boys too from Allen Park so I ha

plenty of friends. I hope all of y

O.K. and that goes for the rest of

well. I could use plenty of parcels

cigarettes, Candy

plenty. Life as a prisoner

time, but I'm studying algeb

Trigonometry and it helps to pa

time. Give my address to the

and have them please write, I pr

won't be able to answer them as

letterwriting is restricted. Best of

to you Mel when you go to and

good care of yourself always. Don't wo

about me mother dear as they treat

decent. By the way I don't feel

different now that I'm on my twenty

I did when I was in my teens. Bye

your loving

Seymour

WRITE VERY CLEARLY WITHIN THE LINES. IN ORDER TO EXPEDITE CENSORSHIP, LETTERS SHOULD BE TYPED OR PRINTED IN BLOCK CAPITALS.

Dear Seymour: Feb. 28, 1945

Received your wonderful letter today which made all of us very, very happy. Yes, we were very [illegible] worried about you but thank God everything is all right now. Your wishes for packages will be taken care of just as soon as we possibly can. All of friends, relatives and neighbors called to express their joy upon hearing about you and all [illegible] to be remembered. We are all well, hope you [illegible] times being likewise. Melvin is taking a post gra[illegible] uate course in school in the morning and working half days with Dad at the store. He now has a conditional license to drive the car which is [illegible] in good running order, and kept tuned up for the coming annual ball, given by the school. The teachers all ask about you. Betty is growing by leaps and bounds, passed to 3-a. Have written to Shirley in Mt. Vernon, New York, also called Eileen giving them your new address. Lew Wallace basketball team are now the Northern Indiana champions. This coming week they play the sectionals and if they survive they will then be the State champions. Dad and I as usual witnessed the Golden Glove fights, hope you will be with us when they fight again. Keep well son, thank God you are all right chin up, our courage and faith is as strong as yours. With everlasting love from your devoted Father, brother, sister and

MOTHER.

I know how you felt on your 20th birthday but

CONTINUE ON TOP PANEL OVERLEAF

TOP PANEL

you will have many more birthdays which we will share with you in the future. Ella's baby is now five months old and he really is cute. Waved a magazine the other day and hit his Grandmother in the eye and she now carries a gorgeous black eye. Can you visualize Betty taking piano lessons and will do nicely if she continues to practice. Piano is out of tune but the old melodies sound just the same as when you first started to play. Good night darling

FROM SENDER'S FULL NAME AND ADDRESS

MR. AND MRS. ALBERT LICHTENFELD
3662 [illegible] STREET
GARY, INDIANA.
USA

This communication is returned because the addressee could not be identified as an American Prisoner of War or Civilian Internee at this time.

Form 1745

11030 12127

AMERICAN RED CROSS

May 8th 1945
Germany

Dearest Mom, Dad, & M.L. & Bob

Gee it sure feels funny to be writing home again and not as a P.O.W. I'm safe and in good health thanks to the American Red Cross. I was liberated April 23 by the Russian forces and just now have landed in American hands. Boy its sure great to be a G.I again. At this place I'm at I'm awaiting a plane to fly me to the coast and then U.S. bound. I'm still excited being in American hands once again.

My prison life in war is just a bunch of experiences most of which were bad. When folks tell you hear of how good American prisoners of war is treated is a bunch of bull. (I could use a better word) Jerry treated us awful, our living quarters weren't fit for a dog and then he starved us. If it weren't for the American Red Cross I wouldn't be here to talk about it.

AMERICAN RED CROSS

#2

I was captured on Dec 15, 1944 in the Siegfried line while on patrol. Lots the Jerry caught most of the men in that Dec. offensive. He threw his attacking [illegible]. That's why I'm thankful today I'm alive.

There are a lot of things I would like to tell you but I don't believe they would get by the censor.

How how are all of you? It won't be long before I'll be seeing you I hope, and when I do the first thing we do is feast. I never had any Xmas or New Years dinner so I am making up for it when I get back.

I've walked all over this German country with men who I was first captured and then when the Russians got too close to our camp in January, Jerry marched us about 100 miles to another camp. If anyone in the future ever says Europe I should

AMERICAN RED CROSS

#3

visit Europe I'll tell him he must have stones in his head and I'm not kidding. Has Mel gone to the Navy?

By the way I never received any mail or packages from you during my prison life nor did I receive any of your packages before I was captured.

Oh I forgot the most important thing you notice I'm a Sgt. now. I was made on the field about a week before I was captured. I have plenty of back pay coming so I'll be able to have a start at college.

During my dull life these past 5 months I've tried to study a little math and to brush up on any subjects which I could get my hands on. I've finally decided that Diesel Engineering is the field I want to get into. I hope I'm not fooling or making a mistake anyway what's

AMERICAN RED CROSS

#4

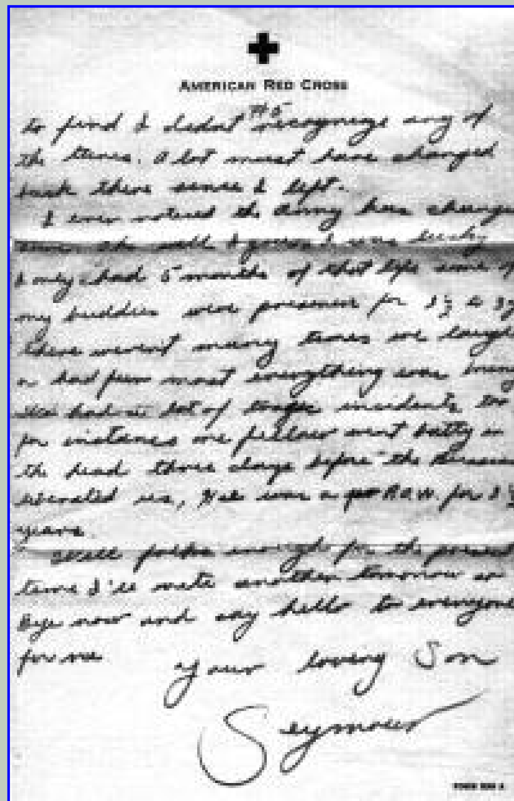
what's your opinion of the subject.

Today I saw a Red Cross girl and it sure was a sight for sore eyes to see an American girl once more. What a world of difference between an American girl and one of these square heads.

I had a candy bar today and was my first since X-mas. You don't realize how much you miss something until it's taken away from you and you can't get it. I know one thing this boy will eat anything now (including fish).

During our starvation by Jerry we ate dogs & cats and believe it had to be enough you know that before this boy would indulge. Enough of that I'll have plenty to tell you when I can see you so no need to waste space now.

I was listening to some records this afternoon and it sure surprised



AMERICAN RED CROSS

#5

to find I didn't recognize any of the stores. A lot must have changed back there since I left.
I even noticed the thing have changed [illegible] I guess I was lucky I only had 5 months of that life since of my buddies were prisoner for 1½ to 3½ [illegible]. There wasn't many times we laughed or had fun most everything was [illegible] [illegible] a lot of tragic incidents too for instance one fellow went batty in the head three days before the Russians liberated us, he'd been a P.O.W. for 3½ years.
Well folks enough for the present time I'll write another tomorrow so bye now and say hello to everyone for me.

Your loving Son
Seymour

TO BE A PRISONER OF WAR

To be a prisoner of war is to know hunger. I ea not talking about the hunger you feel when you miss your lunch or when you can not stand your diet. I am talking about hunger from the lack of solid food for weeks and month. Hunger that gnaws at your vital organs and strips the flesh from your bones. Hunger that forces you to eat anything and everything available...black stale bread made from sawdust, watery soup infested with worms and made from garbage, rotten potatoes and turnips dug from the muddy fields, and, if you are lucky, hot water to wash it all down.

To be a prisoner of war is to experience cold. Not the cold, blustery Minnesota winter when you wish you had worn your gloves. I am talking about standing for hours in soup lines in freezing weather pelted by sleet, feet numb and fingers nearly frozen. You are sick; your body is racked by uncontrollable shivering and your mind is a mask of pain. Dysentery knots your stomach, adding to the misery. You begin to wonder if death is far away. It never comes...it merely teases you.

To be a prisoner of war is to experience fear. Nameless terror as you

lie packed into a railroad box car, doors locked and barred, while attacking aircraft bomb and strafe and not knowing if you will be blown to bits the next second. The terrible fear of catching a horrible disease that runs rampant throughout the camp and no medicine or strength to fight back The fear that you might never again be *free...*

To be a prisoner of war is to experience anger end deep depression. Anger knowing that your enemy counterparts, imprisoned in the United States, are well fed and clothed. Thoughts of family and home lock your mind in bottomless depression and is perhaps the cruelest torture. Anger at your captors and wishing for their death.

To be a prisoner of war is to suffer the agony of rehabilitation in a suddenly alien world. It is the frustration of trying to cope and fit into a society that seems foreign and unable to relate to your experiences. It is the resentment you immediately feel for those who have never felt what you have, seen what you have, and whose personal problems pale by comparison. It is the recurring nightmare. that will plague you for the rest of your days. It is the nagging question, "What was it all for? What good did it do? Who cares?

Perhaps there was a purpose. Perhaps the ex-POW has a clearer perspective of what is real and who ii genuine. Perhaps he understands what is really important in life...

Bill Hall, Ex-POW, ET0
8 Nelson St., St. Paul, MN 55119

EX-POW Bulletin
OCTOBER 1991

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