The Service Diary of German War Prisoner #315136

Sergeant John P. Kline 35730410

Company M, 423rd Combat Infantry Regiment
106th Infantry Division
Army of the United States

(If you wish to print this display of my experiences, there are no links to other pages within the story.)

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Der Militardienst Taschenkalender
des Kriegsgefangnen #315136

Sergeant John P. Kline 35730410
Company M, 423rd Combat Infantry Regiment
106th Infantry Division
Army of the United States

Squad Leader, First Platoon, Second Squad
Heavy Machine Gun

The 106th Infantry Division
***Battle of the Bulge* 1944-45**

UPSETTING THE GERMAN TIME TABLE

The battle is known to the American soldier as *The Battle of the Bulge*. To the German soldier as *Wacht am Rhein* (Watch on the Rhine), to the Belgians it is known as *The Battle of the Ardennes*.

We were known as the Golden Lions, because of the shoulder insignia we proudly wore. We were ready, we thought, to handle whatever came our way. We were young, brave and with honor. We have no reason to apologize to any person, State or Nation

for the way we conducted ourselves in battle.

The Golden Lions of the 106th Infantry Division, due to the surprise attack, may have taken a few faltering steps in those snowy winter days of mid December 1944. Yet, as the German High Command soon realized, those young Golden Lions were capable of recovering and fighting fiercely.

As after action reports of the Battle of the Bulge were reviewed, they showed that the 106th Infantry Division played an important role in the outcome of the battle.

Hitler's orders were to bypass all pockets of major resistance. His main objective was Antwerp with its supply depots. He wanted his troops to capture bridges on the Meuse River as quickly as possible.

His first objective, in the 106th's area, was to take St. Vith and its network of roads. He underestimated the time that it would take to overpower the Golden Lion Division.

Entrenched high atop the Schnee Eifel, the 422nd and 423rd Infantry Regiments of the 106th Infantry Division were bypassed on the North and south flanks. However, they chose not to stay in their positions. Instead, they withdrew and engaged the enemy, who had closed the pincers behind them at Schönberg. In doing so, they kept the enemy occupied during the crucial hours at the start of his counter offensive.

The delay which resulted from their action, combined by the stubborn resistance of the 424th Infantry Regiment to the South, blunted the enemy's drive. The Germans burned precious fuel, wasted troops and lost time that would never be recovered.

In the final analysis their resources and time ran out.

The days lost and the men sacrificed, cost the Germans more than they had bargained for.
The 106th's resistance contributed to an early finish of World War II.

Winter 1944-

This year also, Spring will come
to beautify the earth.

The glory in each icy clod
even now awaits its birth.

Spring will come to this hurt land.
Its face will then be gay.

This splendor latent in each bough
will swell, then burst and sway.

Winter yields each year to Spring
its natures rule, so be it.

Even this year Spring will come
and some of us will see it.

The poem above from
"*Before the Veterans Die*"

In Memory of: it's author
Dale R. Carver (Died 14 Oct 2001)
formerly: Ammunition & Pioneer Platoon Leader
1st Lt., 424th Combat Infantry Regiment
Headquarters 3rd Battalion
106th Infantry Division
Awarded the Silver Star for gallantry
in action against the enemy.

The Service Diary of a German War Prisoner #315136

Author John P. Kline
published and edited by John P. Kline

On December 16, 1944 the German Armies under Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt mounted a massive counteroffensive, historically known as the "*Battle of the Bulge*." The Germans called it *Wacht am Rhein*, The rest of the Europeans *The Ardennes Offensive* or *The Battle of the Ardennes*.

The springboard for this counter offensive, started with a thrust through the Ardennes Forest, into Belgium. Their battle plan was to occupy the town of St Vith [a road center], then push through to the primary target, Antwerp, with all of its fuel storage depots. Hitler thought this would deal a demoralizing blow to the Allied forces. He wanted to shame the Allied command and politically convince the Allies to stay out of the German Homeland.

The 106th Infantry Division, when they caught the brunt of the German offensive on 16 Dec. 1944:

- **Had been on the Continent only 15 days.**
- **Had been placed in a "quiet" sector for orientation.**
- **Had the youngest troops (average age - 22) of any American Division.**
- **Had been in their front line positions only 5 days.**

-- **Had no prior warning the Germans were preparing to attack.**
-- **Occupied a front line that covered at least four times the normal distance.**

So fierce was the German onslaught that the 106th Infantry Division had the dubious honor of being hit by a greater concentration of enemy strength than any other American Division in the war. In a single brief engagement the 106th suffered more losses than any other American division in World War II.

Two of its three Regiments the 422nd and 423rd Infantry Regiments, isolated from other Allied troops, were liquidated within three days after the German Offensive started. Its third regiment, the 424th, continued to carry the banner for the 106th and fought proudly through to the end of the war.

Early in January of 1945, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson announced the casualty list for the 106th Infantry Division. The totals - 416 men killed in action, 1,246 wounded and 7,001 missing in action. Over 60 percent of the division's personnel were dead, wounded or captured. Actually the 106th Infantry Division suffered 641 Killed in Action from the start of the *Battle of the Bulge* until the end of the fighting war.

Captured December 19, 1944, on a hill overlooking Schönberg, Belgium, I was one of the 7,001 that was missing in action. During my captivity I kept a diary. Eighteen pages in length, the diary was stored in a cigar box for all these years, along with a few MIA telegrams, V-mail letters, and other war memorabilia. Occasionally, I looked through the old cigar box and leafed through the diary. Each time thinking that I should make it more readable, by putting it to print.

I finally decided to preserve the information for my family and grandchildren.

The old diary has enabled me to revive my memory and retrace my steps. I have been able to preserve the events of those days for history and my family. Other historic events since World War II have brought back memories of those days.

One such event was the return of the American prisoners from Vietnam. The sight of the returning prisoners walking down the ramps, to meet their loved ones, brought my emotions to the raw edge. It reminded me of the day in 1945 that I returned home as a liberated prisoner. On that day, I stepped off a Greyhound bus to walk and run 12 blocks to my home. There, to join my wife, my 9 month old son and my parents. That was a day that I shall always remember. The last few months, (this was written 1987) as I have searched my memory and expanded on my dairy, have not been without emotion. In my mind, many of the episodes and happenings of those days once again became real.

In 1977 after 34 years of marriage, my first wife died of Cancer. She had, in August of 1944, delivered our first son. Then, in December 1944 she suffered through news of the collapse of the 106th Infantry Division during the *Battle of the Bulge*. Then along with my parents suffered the suspense of the "Missing in Action" telegrams. Finally, rejoicing with me in a happy return. Later, she gave me two more sons. Our sons, in turn, gave us four handsome grandsons. Then one granddaughter, one step granddaughter and one step grandson. (1999).

A photo of Bettie and I before I went to service in 1943.
A trip to Shakamak State Park, Indiana just before leaving for service in the Army

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I did remarry, in 1978..... Margot, a native of Frankfurt, Germany - a resident of the U.S.A. since 1951 . She brought to me two more wonderful grandchildren. Margot and I have spent many hours talking about the war and how it affected our lives. We have a common interest in reading about World War II. Our personal library contains nearly as many books about the war, as do the local libraries.

Margot, a War Orphan, suffered many hardships during the war. Bombers buried her for two days under a shoe store where she worked after school. Her father, a railroad crewman, was killed on a troop train. Her mother was killed in their home during a bombing raid.

Margot and I went back to Germany in 1980. It was my first trip since the war, and her second. We traveled from Luxembourg up to St Vith, Belgium then east to Schönberg. We stopped, for a very short time, on the Schönberg-Bleialf Road, where I was captured. It was near what I thought to be the hill in the woods where the Germans took me prisoner. It was cold, cloudy and raining. I had not prepared myself with proper maps. I had not prepared myself for the psychological impact of returning to the battle area. We stood on the road for about five minutes. My heart was pounding. I had to get out of the area.

That evening we dined at the Gasthaus Zum Dom Stein, a lovely restaurant in Trier, Germany. During dinner Margot said "John, while we on the road outside Schönberg, you looked as if you were in a trance. Did it bother you that much?" It did, for I was remembering the events of December 19, 1944. 1 was trying to recall what the area looked like then. I could see the soldiers on the battlefield. I could hear them calling for medics. I was sure I was near the woods where so many were killed. I could visualize Germans in white snow suits and camouflage. Because of the passing of time the forest looked different. The trees had grown, hiding the lightly covered slope I remembered. I was confused, uncertain and could not understand my emotions. I had

to leave. I could not stay. In my anxiety I forgot to take pictures while standing at the foot of Linscheid Hill, southeast of Schönberg. Yet, during our three week journey I took over 600 photos, but none of the village of Schönberg or the battle area by the woods.

Margot's time for trauma was to come. We continued our journey down the Mosel River from Trier to Bernkastel-Kues. Then on to Koblenz, to cross the Rhine using the same bridge that I walked across on my way to Stalag 12-A, Limburg an der Lahn, Germany.

From there we continued to Frankfurt. After checking into the Hotel Intercontinental - Margot and I visited the area where her home had been bombed. The outline of the basement of her former home still could be seen - the house had been razed and cleared from the area in the ensuing years. Then nearby, to visit a Lutheran Church, the place of her baptism. Across the street was the rebuilt school she had attended as a young girl. Behind her school and across a playing field was another large building. Margot told me that was where Horst, her younger brother, had attended school.

The next day we found Horst. Tears still come to my eyes when I think of the reunion of Margot and Horst. Margot had not seen him for 32 years. We found him by looking for his name in the Frankfurt phone directory. They were separated after the war. They had gone to live with an aunt and Horst had left them. Margot then married an American soldier and moved to the United States. After many attempts, over several years, she had given up in her search for him. We learned from Horst that he had returned to Frankfurt several years after leaving Margot and their aunt.

Margot Mayer Kline and Horst Weimar, her brother, in Frankfurt, Germany in 1980. Margot had just discovered Horst. She lost track of him in 1945 and had never been

**able
to locate him, until our trip together back to Germany in 1980.**

We visited with Horst, and his wonderful wife Ericka, then continued our journey through Germany. Three weeks after we returned home to Middleton, Wisconsin, Horst came to visit us. He came again in 1981 bringing his wife Erica. In 1982 Margot went back to Germany for three weeks to visit them. Horst took her to the cemetery where their mother is buried. They then visited their childhood haunts, the park, the lake where they used to swim and their old neighborhood. Margot returned to Germany four times total in the ensuing years.

Horst died in 1988, from complications of a heart problem. I am happy that Margot is able to remember him as a grown man. She can now live with the thought that they had once again been together as brother and sister.

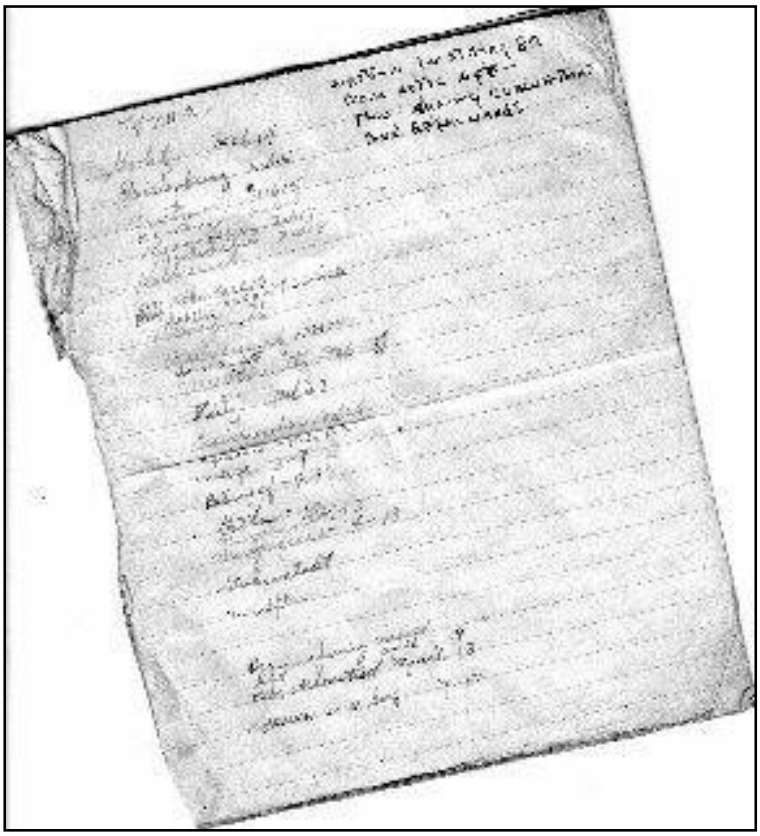
Some day I am going back to Schönberg. I now have more knowledge of the area and the battle. I want to visit the Schnee Eifel. Then I want to take the roads to Halenfeld, Oberlascheid and Radscheid. Most important, I want to walk through the woods on Linscheid Hill. Maybe I can find that place in the woods, where I looked over the valley, listening to the cries of the wounded, the sounds of incoming artillery, and lived through Hell.....

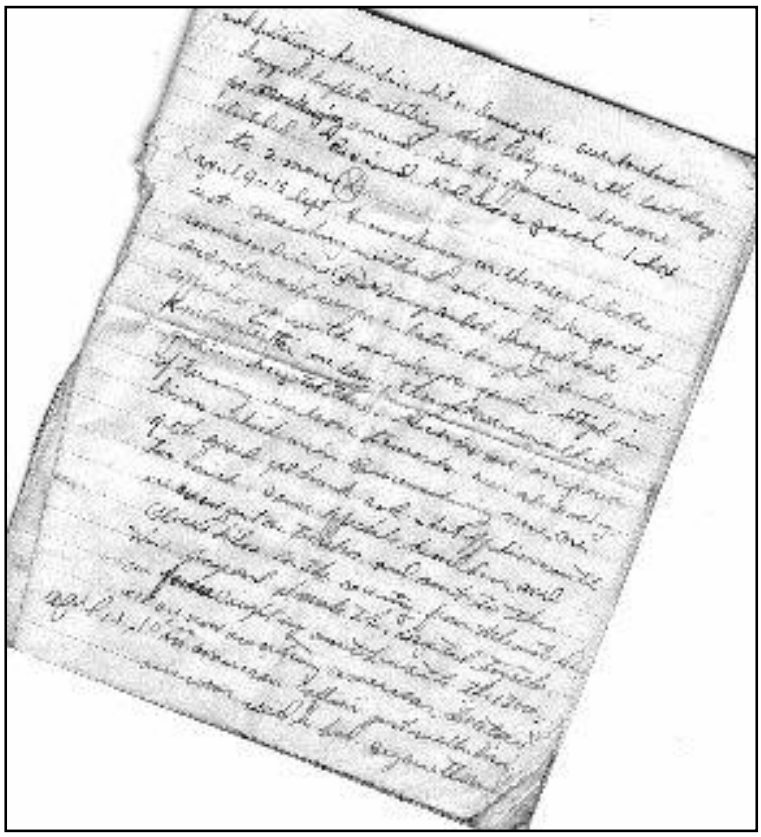
(Footnote: 1995)
I returned to Germany in September 1995 with 14 other 106th Infantry veterans. We met with 45 German veterans from the 18th and 62nd Volksgrenadiers, the two divisions who surrounded us and took most of us as prisoners. I shall document that trip and add it to this diary at another date. It was an enlightening, emotional, fulfilling, journey that opened old wounds and brought back memories (many vivid). But it helped the healing process. I went to Schoenberg, traveled the same roads we traveled in 1944. Went in the forest on the Schnee Eifel where we had been in December 1944. Visited Henri Chapelle Cemetery, Liege Belgium where 128 of the 106th Infantry Division soldiers are still buried. There are nearly 8,000 American graves in that beautiful cemetery. All I could see, when I looked at those rows and rows of crosses, were young men in uniform, healthy, vital and a life to live. Sadly they lay under the ground, as the results of a war that should have never been...

(Footnote 1999)
This September 1995 German/American meeting was so successful that we were invited back in May 1999. The German Bundeswehr Military Reserve, Gerolstein, Germany sponsored the meeting. That organization is similar to our Military Reserve Units. This time we were a group of 62 people, 32 World War II veterans with wives and friends. The German contingent of veterans numbered 32. The healing process continued. 55 years after the war we now recognize we have gained new friends. Friends who understand what war is about, who suffered under a dictatorship and a mad ruler. When you listened to their stories, you could recognize that they also had suffered greatly in their early life. The results of that war never leave us. It will be with us until we die. At least now we know what it was like on the other side of the battle

ground. We found that many of them were younger than us." It is hard to believe," said one German, with tears in his eyes, "that we each stood up in the Ardennes and tried to kill each other."
How true that is 55 years later.....

John Kline
Formerly Sergeant Squad Leader
2nd squad, 1st Platoon,
M Company, 423rd Infantry Regiment
106th Infantry Division, WWII
Email to John Kline
Home Page: http://www.mm.com/user/jpk
Originally transcribed from the 1944 diary in June 1987.Various and ongoing additions and corrections 1999-2000





Left: The front page of the original notebook paper given to me by an English soldier. Right: Part of the transcript I had penciled in as the opportunity arose. I kept these notes hidden under my clothes. I was only searched once and they were not discovered. All in all, the original transcript used 15 pages of handwritten "reminder" notes. I amplified on some of the finer parts when I got back home and my memory was still sharp. As I gained more knowledge, after getting home, I amplified some of the writing to be consistent with the reported "happenings" of the time. Every time I read this diary, it brings back sharp memories of my experiences. I hope you enjoy reading them (my experiences) and it helps you understand how a soldier must have felt under these circumstances...

John Kline

From my original Diary:

I was drafted into the United States Army, at the age of 18, one week after completing my High School education.

Born January 10, 1925, Glen Ayre, Indiana, (near Terre Haute, Indiana). Mother Helen S. Kline, Father Paul H. Kline. My Grandparents / uncles on mother's side were coal miners. (German, Welsh, English.)

My father was orphaned as a teenager, his parents have been hard to trace, but we have traced them back to Pennsylvania. He was raised, as an orphan, in a farming

community near Clay City, Indiana.

1943

05/10/43
Induction physical examination Evansville, Indiana.

05/17/43

I was inducted into the Army at a swearing in ceremony at Fort Benjamin Harrison - Indianapolis, Indiana.

05/43-08/43
Three months of Infantry Basic Training. Company B, Seventh Infantry Training Battalion Camp Wheeler, GA. Qualified as "Expert Rifleman" with a score of 193 (the second highest score in the training battalion) on Toombs Range, 2 July 1943.

09/30/43
Married Bettie Lue LaFollette, daughter of Milton and Edna LaFollette of Terre Haute, Indiana. (Bettie died September 1977 of Cancer)

09/43
I was sent to University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa for Army Specialized Training (ASTP), Civil Engineering.

This was especially difficult schooling for me, for I graduated from a small high school Near Terre Haute, Indiana who had a limited curriculum. My best subjects were basketball and girls. I was not the best "math" student in high school and the pace was very fast at the level of training presented at this university. I was honored to have

been chosen to attend, but felt that my time was limited, particularly because of the math section. As it turned out, the war in Europe had depleted the human resources and the Army was looking for replacements to be shipped overseas for D-Day landings. To do this they drew thousands of men from existing stateside divisions. Along with many of my fellow students, we were destined to replace some of the men who were being shipped over as replacements. Our ASTP training was canceled and the students were sent to various Infantry Divisions throughout the Continental United States.

1944

03/28/44
I was transferred to the 106th Infantry Division, Camp Atterbury, Indiana. My first assignment: M Company, 423rd Regiment. Was Jeep driver, 2nd Squad, 1st Platoon, M Co. was a Heavy Weapons Company, 81 mm mortars and 30 caliber water cooled machine guns.

I learned, later, that this division had lost over 600 officers and 6,600 enlisted men to the replacement process. Many of these men were involved in the D-Day landings in France in June 1944. I was amongst the 1,220 ASTP students who had been sent to the division to replace these trained men. There were also 1,100 Air Cadets, 1,500 men from other divisions and 2,800 men from miscellaneous sources such as disbanded military police units, special training battalions and various service commands. Our commanding general, in a report after the war, said that all this was fine, since these men were of high caliber, but the division had one foot on the gangplank. In other words, a division that had been highly trained now had nearly 50% of its personnel that had to be trained in the short months from April 1944 to Oct 1944 before we shipped overseas.

05/23/44
Asked for transfer from Motor Pool to Company and was assigned to 2nd gunner, 2nd squad, 1st Platoon. Sgt Smith was our Squad Leader.

08/08/44
Hospitalized, Camp Atterbury, Surgery.

08/21/44
Wife delivered our son, John Theodore.

08/24/44
Released from Wakeman General Hospital. My wife tried to tell how tough the birth of our son was. I tried to tell her how tough my surgery was on me.

08/24/44
Appointed acting squad leader, 2nd squad, 1st Platoon, M Company. Squad Leader Sgt. Smith sent to Replacement Depot.

09/06/44
From my Service Mementos:

My Last Will and Testament was signed by Pfc John Paul Kline (me) and witnessed at Camp Atterbury, Indiana by Pvt. George R. Claffy, Chicago: Pfc Gilbert J. Helwig, Chicago; Pvt Donald A. Palmer, Detroit. ***In 1987, I discovered Gilbert Helwig, having had no contact with him since the war.***

10/04/44
I was promoted to a rank of Corporal.
Wet down stripes (a custom after promotions, you go out and try do drink up the town) "Wet Down your Stripes"

10/05/44

Appointed Squad Leader
Promoted to Sergeant, 2nd Squad, 1st Platoon
M Company, 423rd Infantry Regiment, 106th Infantry Division
Dominic Damore 1st gunner, Lloyd Breeden 2nd gunner.

10/09/44
Left Camp Atterbury, by train, early Monday morning.

10/10/44
Arrived Camp Myles Standish, near Boston, Mass. Staging area for overseas move.

10/16/44
Left Camp Myles Standish. Arrived New York after dark, boarded Queen Elizabeth, assigned to State Room B-95 with eight or nine other company members.

10/17/44
We left New York in the early morning. We did not see Statue of Liberty. The trip was peaceful. I ate mostly Spam sandwiches and Malo Cups, for I could not stand the greasy English sausage and potatoes. I would like to bring wife and family on the *Queen* after the war. We were told that the *"Queen"* was chased by two submarines. I understand that the she had a record of outrunning fifty subs on one mission.

10/22/44
Arrived at Glasgow, Scotland, Firth of Clyde. This was the only time in crossing the Atlantic, that we were placed on alert. We were instructed to stand on the outside deck with our life belts on. They told us this is standard practice going into a harbor, where the subs could be lying in wait.

10/24/44
We left Glasgow by train late evening. Rode all night. Breakfast was coffee, chips and meat pie on the train.

10/25/44
We arrived at Cheltenham, England. The 423rd Regiment was billeted on the grounds of the Cheltenham Steeple Chase track about ½ mile from town. My squad was billeted in the press building atop the main grandstand. The surrounding country side was very hilly. It was a beautiful area. Before the June invasion of Normandy, the track area and grounds had been a very large encampment. There were countless wooden floors, in row by row formation throughout the grounds. They were used as floors for the hundreds of squad tents sheltering the multitude of troops.

We were fortunate have quarters in the Press Room, atop the Main Grandstand - overlooking the finish line on the track. Below us in front of the Grandstand building, was a picturesque recreation building. It was used for administrative purposes when the track was active. It had a lounge, and a pool table. We enjoyed it. Some of our troops were billeted in metal "Quonset" huts, a building that looks like a very large steel culvert pipe sawed in half, horizontally lying on its side. The Quonset huts were scattered throughout the area near the grandstands.

We spent many hours in training marches, over the hilly countryside, while here. There was little physical evidence of the war, except the encampment area mentioned before. There were munitions stored along the roads in protective bunkers. During one of our many training marches, we came across the remains of an English bomber, lying scattered across a hill top. From what we could see, this area had not been damaged by the German bombers.

Though the training was tough, we did get a few evening passes into town. To me, as a country village boy, Cheltenham was a unique town. It was picturesque as I suppose most English towns were.

The steeplechase track was on the edge of town. When we did have a pass we could walk into the town. Of course, it was always filled with soldiers. There were a few places to eat, and food was not plentiful. We probably had more than the local townspeople. I remember going into town for dinner one evening. After a couple of warm glasses of ale in a Pub, I found a little restaurant on a side street. It had quaint little embroidered table clothes. It was relaxing, but the meal was sparse. I don't remember what I had to eat. I have a great distaste for lamb, so I am sure it was not that.

Most of our free evenings were spent walking the streets, having a few beers and trying to find some familiar face. The town was always "loaded" with soldiers. Little wonder the British were glad when we all went home.

11/06/44
In a letter to my wife on this date I wrote:
"*I went to a double feature movie last night.* Calling Dr. Gillispie *and* Lend Me Your Ear *were playing. I became bored and returned to quarters to listen to the radio. Charlie McArthy and Edgar Bergen were being featured. I am listening to the ABC Armed Services Network. It's sure nice to hear American songs. Bing Crosby just finished singing* Dreaming of a White Christmas. *That song will never get old. We listen to a lot of songs and news from the Armed Services Network. M Company is on guard detail. I was lucky and missed out on it. Not much going on this evening. Love*

11/09/44
Shown as from "Somewhere"
I *don't see how I am going to write tonight. The fellows are playing cards and arguing about the North and the South. Doesn't make much difference, we are all Yanks to these people over here. We put our patches on yesterday, so it won't be long till we can tell where we are. ... Just saw* The Song of Bernadette *and* The White Cliffs of Dover. *Both were good.... Came back to quarters to play a little Pinochle, I don't play Poker anymore... How is Teddie (our son) tonight? I haven't received the pictures yet. I sure would like to see him. I'll bet he is sweet. He ought to be, look at his Ma and Pa. We are into heavy physical training. They [the Armed Forces network] are playing "Amor" the fourth time today..... Love*

11/19/44
Right now I am listening to Glen Miller on the Armed Services Radio. I went to Cheltenham last night with another Sergeant. We ate in a Greek Restaurant. They charged us 5 Shilling for one little hamburger, a few so called French fries and a cup of coffee. That's a buck. Food here is no comparison to food at home. They us different seasoning, and the bread is flat. Remember, - you're the sweetest little gal I ever knew .... Tell Teddie hello for me and to keep his little chin up. Love Forever.

11/25/44
Another letter sent: ***Hi Sweet, How's the little gal. I just received three boxes. I got the fruit cake, candy bars and a box of caramels. Boy, it sure was nice to receive a box from home. I even smelled the paper to see if I could smell a little bit of Indiana.***

We have been very busy lately, Tonight, I am Battalion Charge of Quarters (CQ). I ate about fifteen minutes early today and the First Sergeant stuck me with this duty till 0200 tomorrow morning. We took a little trip yesterday on some detail. Saw a lot of the countryside. The towns over here are real quaint. The homes and business buildings are all built of stone. All the streets except the main street are without sidewalks. The houses extend right out to the edge of the street. I have to admit the homes over here are very pretty. The countryside is beautiful. The beer is bitter, and it doesn't take much to set you on your can. Well Sweetie, better close for now ..... Remember to send me a pair of one-finger mittens (trigger finger open).

We occasionally were assigned work details away from camp. I recall traveling through the country side in the rear of a 4X4 truck, to get supplies from another base. On another day off, I hitched a ride to an English base nearby and visited with some of the troops there. There were a lot of Quonset huts, I spent most of my time in their recreation hall. There was little difference between the English compound and ours. I did find it interesting since this was my first visit with troops, other than American.

We were issued the new, longer style field jackets with tighter cuffs and a draw string around the middle. That evening I volunteered to go into a nearby Pub and bring back some Fish and Chips. Since I did not have a pass, I sneaked through a hole in the perimeter fence and walked to a nearby Pub. Fish and Chips are always wrapped in newspaper for carry out.

On the way back I was caught in a rainstorm. The newspaper containing the fish and chips was soaked. I stuffed the bundle inside my jacket and made my way back across the track to our billet. It took a lot of work to get the grease out of my new field jacket. The Fish and Chips were very good. My squad applauded my heroics in saving the chips. Then they took a couple of English pound notes from me in the evening craps.

11/28/44
After a heavy training schedule, we went by train to the port of South Hampton for shipment to France.

11/29/44
Arrived in South Hampton. Boarded the *Duke of Wellington,* a small English craft. It held only a small number of troops. It was showing its age and had seen a lot of action. There were ominous signs all about, like "Don't Prime Grenades" and "Keep Weapons Unloaded." The English Channel was very rough. I understand that it is always choppy. I had never been on a seagoing vessel, other than the "*Queen" on* our way over here. The *Duke,* pounding the waves with its bow, pitched and rolled like a roller coaster.

We were happy to reach the temporary harbor at Le Havre. It is standard practice on entering a harbor area to stand to, on the outside deck, with life jackets on.

11/30/44
Le Havre, France. The original docking facilities had been destroyed during the invasion. It was now made up of many old ships, cabled together to make the temporary harbor. We debarked and formed up on the docks. It was still light.

If you entered the Le Havre harbor after the invasion, like me, you probably saw the demolished house on the beach. It had a bathtub hanging out the window. I saw a picture of it after the war, in Life Magazine.

Le Havre was leveled to the ground during the invasion. There was little standing. I remember seeing a few German pillboxes that had been camouflaged to represent commercial buildings. There was a very heavy downpour of rain, as we marched nine miles to board trucks late that night.

12/01/44
Arrived at Field J-40 (a staging area) near Rouen, France. We joined other M Company members who brought along our squad jeeps. We used our pup tents for sleeping. The weather was wet and miserable. We could hardly keep the tent stakes in. As a consolation the food was good. The terrain was flat and open, with a few small woods. It reminded me of Indiana farm land. We had little to do. One afternoon, a couple of us, walked down the road and bought a bottle of wine from a farmer. He got our money, and we got his bad wine. We went across the road into some woods, where we found an old wooden building. We finished our sour wine, and then went back to camp.

We bivouacked in our two man pup tents for the six days we were at J-40. It rained, at least once a day. We were never able to get completely dry and comfortable.

12/07/44
Left J-40 combat loaded with jeep, driver and 1st gunner early morning. It was getting colder. We had the jeep top up and the side curtains on. We kept warm by using our new liquid fuel cooking stove. It was a small stove, enclosed in an aluminum canister about the size of a large thermos bottle. Some men used a can filled with sand and gasoline to keep warm. As we traveled along the French road towards Belgium, we came across miles and miles of German vehicles that had been strafed and burned. They were lying in the ditches, either completely burned or stripped.

12/09/44
As we entered St Vith, Belgium, older, established troops gave us the normal "new kid on the block" salutations. They yelled at us, "You'll be sorry" and other similar phrases, some not so nice. We set up bivouac in woods on the edge of town. The large pines, looking like huge Christmas trees made the woods quiet, warm and very beautiful. The silence and peaceful surroundings of the pines and snow, was pleasant. Especially after the week near Rouen, France, where we had rain beating on the pup tents and the hustle and noise of the motor march on the way to St. Vith.

12/11/44
We left the woods near St Vith for front line positions. Our destination was a defense line in the Ardennes forest atop the Schnee Eifel (Snow Mountain). The positions were 12 miles east of St. Vith and were in Germany. A name we would learn to remember, Schönberg, was 9 miles east of St Vith and 3 miles west of our positions. We were facing the German troops from emplacements on the East slopes [reverse slopes] of the German Siegfried Line, known as "The German West Wall."

We took over positions held by the 2nd Infantry Division and exchanged much of our new equipment for their old. The exchange was to be made as quickly and quietly as possible. The 2nd Division was being transferred to Aachen to participate in an attack on the Roer Dam area. My machine gun position was a log bunker with field of fire obstructed by dense forest. Conditions were quiet. Excellent chow was served twice a day.

Historians and military strategists, argue that the Schnee Eifel positions should never have been occupied. They say that it was impossible to launch an offensive from there. They argued that the positions presented no defense against an assault from the east. This the Germans proved, on Dec 16, as they cut off our positions by attacking around the north and south ends of the Schnee Eifel. They, the crystal gazers, were right. A static defense line was not the answer for a thinly spread force. Any penetration through our lines would result in disaster.

M Company, 423rd Regiment, was assigned positions along the front line to support the rifle companies. An Infantry heavy weapons company, like ours, is equipped with 81 mm mortars and water cooled 30 caliber machine guns. A rifle company, is equipped with automatic weapons and mortars that are only 60 mm mortars and air cooled machine guns. Our duty was to support the various rifle companies of the 3rd Battalion, 423rd Regiment. They were, I, K and L Companies. Such was our deployment along the tree covered ridge atop the Schnee Eifel.

The Ardennes forest is, for the most part, heavily wooded. It is interlaced with many small logging trails, fire fighting lanes and streams. We slept in rough, but warm dugouts and enjoyed solid gun bunkers. Built by the 2nd Division, they were built of logs, with a log and earth roof.

We completed our changeover with the 2nd Infantry Division as darkness came. We had no time to become acquainted with the territory around our new positions. Because of that, and since we were new and inexperienced troops, our first night was unforgettable. We were facing, for the first time, an enemy that we only knew from newsreels and training films. It was a sleepless and anxiety filled night.

I can personally confirm that a snow covered tree stump will actually move. That is, if you stare at it long enough - and if you are a young, nineteen year old machine gun squad leader peering, into the darkness, towards the enemy through a slit in a machine gun bunker. Every sound was amplified. Every bush could be an enemy crawling towards you. Your eyes grow bleary from staring into the darkness. You are happy when the relieve crew shows up. The next day, you take a good long look at the stump that moved during the night. You take note of all unusual objects, and then things start to settle down.

There were two gun emplacements (bunkers) for my machine gun squad. One was higher on the hill, and the other a couple of hundred yards down the slope. When we first moved in, our gun position was in the lower bunker. After the first night we were asked to move back up the slope, to the alternate bunker. For what reason, I don't know. We did appreciate the move, for the alternate bunker was much warmer and drier. As in the lower bunker, there were "trip lines" running from the bunker down into the forest and through the barbed wire. The lines were attached to hand grenades and flares. Then, they were placed in their shipping containers and attached to tree trunks. If we detected movement in the area beyond the barbed wire we could pull a trip line. This would cause a grenade to explode, after it was pulled from its container. A flare could be ignited to light up the area in the same manner. Our field of fire was good, but very limited. The 2nd Division had cut down a lot of trees and cleaned out the brush. However, the forest still offered the enemy excellent cover.

I remember one day being convinced that I could see a vehicle, in the woods, several hundred yards down the hill. The contours of the hill and the thick forest were playing games with my imagination. When I looked at it from another vantage point, the illusion disappeared.

There was one rifleman to the left of my bunker. He was entrenched in a log covered foxhole. According to members of the patrols, this rifleman was the last person between my machine gun emplacement and the 422nd Regiment. The 422nd Regiment was reported to be several hundred yards north on the Eifel. The two regiments sent alternate patrols across the unoccupied space each half hour. They reported very little German activity. The first days passed without incident. The most excitement we had in my bunker area was when a nearby 50 caliber machine gun started blasting away. The gunner had become bored and decided to kill a deer.

We left the bunker area twice daily to eat our meals in a mess tent. It was back of us, to the West, on the opposite side of the hill. To get to it we had to walk along a trail,

through a clearing, and down the other side. The Germans had the clearing zeroed in. As we crossed the clearing, we had to be prepared to hit the ground in case they decided to harass us. The 2nd Division's squad leader that I relieved, said two men had been killed crossing the clearing a few days ago. Our daily trips to the mess tent were something to look forward too. The food was good and the Mess Sergeant seemed to be friendlier since we have moved up to the front lines. I did enjoy those meals, there were generous portions and we could chat with the others and get brought up to date on the local news.

12/16/44--12/17/44

History shows -- *The Battle of the Bulge*" started at 0530 on the morning of December 16, 1944. Because we were high atop the Schnee Eifel and out of the mainstream of the German Offensive, we were probably the last to know that it had been launched. I cannot remember any evidence or any sounds that would have indicated to us the size of the battle that was to take place. A battle, that was to become known as one of the largest battles in the history of World War II. The 40 days that battle raged were the coldest and snowiest weather remembered in the Ardennes Forest area. More than one million men, 600,000 Americans and 500,000 Germans and 55,000 Englishmen fought in this battle. 32 American, 3 British and 29 German Divisions were in the battle before it ended. The Germans suffered 100,000 killed, wounded or captured. There were over 81,000 American casualties, including 23,554 captured and 19,000 killed. The British suffered 1,400 casualties and 200 killed. Each side lost 800 tanks and the Germans lost 1,000 aircraft. The Malmedy Massacre where nearly 90 American Soldiers were slaughtered was the worst atrocity, against the Americans, during the European Campaign.

My division, the 106th Infantry Division, suffered over 416 killed in action, 1,246 wounded and 7,001 men missing, in action in the first days of the Battle of the Bulge.. Most of these casualties occurred within the first three days of battle when two of the three regiments were forced to surrender. In all, there were 641 "Killed in Action" from our division through to the end of the fighting. In losses - the German Ardennes Offensive, later to become known as "The Battle of the Bulge," was the worst battle for the Americans in World War II.

Our company commander set up his headquarters in one of the enormous Siegfried Line bunkers. The bunker was not completely demolished, as they usually were. The underground rooms were intact and accessible. He had taken a room several flights down. The command bunker was on a crest of a hill. The firing apertures faced west towards Belgium, the backside towards the present German lines. There were steep slopes on either side, with signs and white caution tape warning of "Mine Fields." There was a pistol belt and canteen hanging in one of the trees on the slope. Apparently, some GI had wandered into the mine field.

German activity was reported along our front on the 17th (*remember the Bulge started on the 16th*). The commander called me back to the command post. He informed me that I should be prepared to move my gun to his area to protect the command post. While visiting with him, I noticed that he was very nervous. His 45 Colt pistol was on the table, ready for action. Our Master Sergeant, who was also present, seemed equally concerned. Later I was to learn the reason for their anxiety. I suspect, in

retrospect, that they had been made aware of the German breakthrough, yet did not yet know the importance of the news.

While in the vicinity of the command post bunker, I watched a U.S. Army Air Corps P-47 Thunderbolt chase a German Messerschmitt (ME 109) through the sky. They passed directly in front of us. Our area being one of the highest on the Schnee Eifel, gave us a clear view of the surrounding valleys. The P-47 was about two hundred yards behind the ME-109 and was pouring machine gun fire into the German plane. They left our sight as they passed over the edge of the forest. We were told later, that the P-47 downed the German ME-109 in the valley.

As it turned out, my machine gun was not moved to the command post. During the night of the 17th we heard gunfire, small arms, mortars and artillery. We also could hear and see German rocket fire to the South. The German rocket launcher was five barreled and of large caliber. The rocket launcher is called a "Nebelwerfer." Due to their design, the rockets make a screaming sound as they fly through the air. Using high explosives, but not very accurate, they can be demoralizing if you are in their path of flight.

12/18/44
On the morning of the 18th I was instructed to report to the mess tent for a briefing. As I was walking to the tent I noticed two German prisoners being guarded by an American GI. They were setting under a tree near the mess tent.

During the briefing we were told that the Germans had broken through our supply lines. This rumor turned out to be true. However, we were not informed of how grave the situation was. The facts were, as you will read later, that we were cut off from the rest of the division early in the morning of the 17th. The artillery and rockets that we had heard to the south, were sounds of the battle that was taking place at Bleialf, a small village on the road between Prüm and Schönberg. The 423rd Anti-Tank Company who had that defensive area had been thrown out of Bleialf on the 16th. They used all available troops in the area and pushed the Germans back out of Bleialf, only to be overrun again on the morning of the 17th. They were overpowered by the tremendous numbers of German troops heading northwest up the Bleialf-Schönberg road. The Germans had closed the pincers behind us, at Schönberg. We were like a boulder protruding from the middle of a stream. This proved the military strategists to be correct. A mountain is not the place to be when you have no support.

But, I am getting ahead of my story....

We were told to eat a big breakfast because we were going to hit the road. We were ordered to head west and join with the rest of Regiment. We, presumably, were to make our way to St. Vith. The cook made stacks and stacks of pancakes. We all ate like it was our last meal. Little did we know that this would be our last decent meal for the next four months. We then prepared to leave our positions taking only the bare necessities and as much ammunition as possible. Our personal gear was in our duffel bags, stacked near the mess tent. We left them there, thinking that we would retrieve them later. I had an old Kodak Autographic camera in my duffel bag. It had been given to me as a gift by a high school classmate. I always regretted the loss of that camera. One of my active hobbies after the war was "photography."

We left our Schnee Eifel positions, heading west towards Schönberg. I was in my squad jeep, with my driver and gunner. We were traveling between columns of troops that were afoot. At that time I was not familiar with the names of the villages or towns in the vicinity. In my studies after the war I read that we evacuated from the Schnee Eifel positions west through Halenfeld. Then we took a right fork at Oberlascheid to Skyline Drive. Then near Radscheid we made a left then a right (northwest) onto a logging road leading into the woods overlooking Schönberg.

(This special note was added during the update of this diary in March 1993.) In 1987, I read a book written in 1985, A Time for Trumpets, by Charles B. MacDonald. He had written another book just after the war, Company Commander, which was about his infantry company that fought in the Bulge. He was the youngest company commander in the European Theater of Operations in World War II. He had spent five years prior to publication researching the battle, traveling to the area and gaining information from many of the participants.

His book explained in more detail what happened during the Battle of the Bulge and seemed to be written from the ordinary soldier's viewpoint. For whatever reason, this book turned me on. I began to think back, my mind searching for details of my personal experiences, and at the same time trying to remember the names of my buddies, who I seemed to have pushed out of my mind for all these years.

Eventually, from April 1987 to this date, March 1993, I have located or accounted for 77 of my former buddies from "M" Company. Of this number 10 have passed away. One of those that I contacted early in my search - 1987 - was Colonel C.C. Cavender, the Regimental Commander of the 423rd Combat Infantry Regiment, of which "M" Company was a part of. I was privileged to have the Colonel as my roommate at the 106th Infantry Division Association's 1990 Annual Reunion in Sacramento, California. At that time the Colonel was 92 years of age. We spent hours talking about his and the 423rd's part in the Battle of the Bulge.....

Colonel C. C. Cavender told me that we, the 3rd Battalion of the 423rd Regiment were attempting to get to Radscheid to assist the 2nd Battalion of the 423rd Regiment. They were engaged in a fire-fight along the Bleialf-Schönberg road during their attempt to cut the road which had been taken by the Germans. He told me that originally the two regiments were to march south of Schönberg and make their way back to St Vith to join the rest of the division in a defense situation. Instead of assisting the 2nd Battalion Colonel Cavender received orders to move the 3rd battalion to the right of the 2nd battalion and head it toward Schönberg. The route was to be through the hilly woods, later identified as "Linscheid Hill" southeast of Schönberg, Belgium. According to orders, we were to cause utmost damage to the German troops there and continue to St. Vith.

Colonel Cavender, after the war, received much criticism for moving the 3rd battalion to the right around Puett. In a recent conversation, October 1989, with him, he said, "Those were the orders I received from General Jones." He then told me more about the battle at Bleialf. He formed a provisional battalion, the 423rd Anti-Tank Company plus a mixture of men from other units. This provisional battalion threw the Germans back on the 16th, only to be thrown overrun again on the 17th. After moving into the

Schnee Eifel front line positions he, Colonel Cavender, inspected the whole area, including the area around Bleialf.

Accompanying him was his counterpart, Colonel Boos, the 2nd Division's Regimental Commander. Colonel Cavender expressed concern to him, to about the open corridor from Prüm to Schönberg. It was defended by a thin line of troops. He was concerned, as had been his 2nd Division counterpart that, in case of an attack there was a lack of secondary defense. His fears turned out to be true. He asked Colonel Boos what reserve or "backup" resources were available and Colonel Boos replied, "None."

When the Ardennes Offensive broke, the Germans poured around the Schnee Eifel from the South, through the Prüm Corridor. They then closed the pincers by joining with the Germans coming into Schönberg from the North along the Andler-Schönberg road.

In November of 1989 Colonel Cavender sent me two packets of his personal papers. These are mostly personal letters from 423rd Regiment friends and from a few of the division officers. He had to explain, after the war, his reasons for his strategy during the first three days of the Bulge, and also explain the reason he surrendered his regiment on 19 December 1944. I have read and reread these papers, many which relate to what happened during that period. I can confirm that those facts I mentioned above are the same as his written notes and papers and his conversations with me on the telephone since 1987 as well as our personal visits in 1990 at the reunion in Sacramento.

It seems, at least to me and some of my buddies, that the Prüm Corridor, the area that the 423rd Anti-Tank Company was defending and the Losheim Gap, the area that the 14th Cavalry was defending, were left open for a purpose. Could that be true? Were we part of a calculated risk, or were we setup? It looks as if we will never know. (After much study, after the war and into 1999, I do not believe we were "Set Up." I simply think that our Army and Corps Commanders were over confident that the war was about to end.

I, personally, can relate what we were told as we left the Schnee Eifel to march to the rear towards Schönberg Belgium (about three miles to the West). There we were to meet a combat team of an armored division in Schönberg, Belgium. Later, after getting underway, we were informed that the Germans had encircled us, and that we had orders to fight our way through Schönberg and try to reach St. Vith. In fact, the Germans did occupy Schönberg, the promised armor was not there.

After the war I learned that on the 16th of December 1944, part of the German 18th Volksgrenadier Division and the Fifth Panzer Army's Fuhrer Begleit Brigade [Tank Brigade] broke through the 14th Cavalry Group, who were on the left flank of our division (north of us on the north edge of the Schnee Eifel). The Germans drove through along the Andler-Schönberg road. They were in Schönberg on the 17th. We did not leave the Schnee Eifel until the 18th of December, 1944.

The 423rd Regiment's Anti-Tank company at Bleialf, on the South edge of the Schnee Eifel, had been overrun on the 16th by troops from the German 18th Volksgrenadier Division. A miscellaneous group of troops, including the remains of the Anti-Tank

company had recaptured it. Then on the 17th the 18th Volksgrenadiers made a final plunge and once again broke through Bleialf. They were pushing towards Schönberg, a few miles to the Northwest. We were to see them hit our backside during the night of the 18th and 19th as we overlooked Schönberg from Linscheid Hill southeast of the town.

Both German units, those from the North down the Andler-Schönberg road and the ones on the South on the Prüm-Schönberg road had converged on Schönberg. They had closed the pincers. By that action the 422nd Regiment, and my regiment, 423rd Regiment of the 106th Infantry Division were trapped in the Ardennes forest southeast of Schönberg. Considering that, Captain Hardy, my company commander had reason to be nervous when they talked to me on the 17th, as he explained that I was to bring my gun crew back to his Command Post to guard it. He must have been aware of the seriousness of the situation as it developed, but did not reveal that to any of our personnel that I can learn. Whether he was aware or not will never be learned. He was killed on the morning of the 19th, when the battle opened up on the Schönberg Hill.

German units involved in the battle:

The 18th Volksgrenadier Division was formed in Denmark around the cadre of a Luftwaffe field division, with fill-ins from the Navy. It was at full strength [17,000 men] and had two months experience, in defensive positions in the Eifel area. [The 106th Division was not at full strength. They probably were at less than 12,000 men. They had 5 days experience on the front line].

The Fuhrer Begleit Brigade, under control of General der Panzergruppen Hasso von Manteuffel, was built around a cadre of troops from Hitler's headquarters guard. It included a tank battalion from the Gross Deutschland Panzer Division (still on the Eastern Front). It was strongly reinforced with assault guns [large caliber guns mounted on tracks]. They were equipped with 88mm and 105mm pieces from the 460th Heavy Artillery Battalion.

It should also be noted that even though there were many young German troops and some fillers from other branches of service, the German unit commanders were veterans. The 106th Division commanders were, with a couple of exceptions, facing the enemy for the first time. The complete surprise of the attack, the overwhelming numbers of German troops and the static position of our two regiments atop the Schnee Eifel eventually led to our defeat and capture.

12/18/44
Our column did not come under fire until we were near our destination, a heavily wooded area (Hill 504) southeast of Schönberg. As we approached the logging trail, near Radscheid, we were shelled by German 88's. My driver drove the jeep into the ditch on the right side of the road. A bazooka-man had hitched a ride on the jeep over the right rear wheel. As we hit the ditch, his weapon fell apart. The rocket fell out and landed in the mud along side of me, where I had fallen. Fortunately the bazooka rocket did not arm itself. As I picked myself up, I noticed a pair of German binoculars lying in the ditch. I picked them up and hung them around my neck. They were probably left there by German troops who had been patrolling in this area. I have often thought, "What if they had been booby trapped?"

A point where my memory fails is that I cannot remember what happened during the night of December 18. It would have been logical to set up defensive positions and sleep in shifts, which we probably did. However, my mind is completely blank about the events of that night. M Company men I have met in recent years, 1988 and 1989, tell me that we spent most of the night trying to get our jeeps out of the mud. The number of vehicles on the road and an unusually warm spell caused the fields to be very muddy. The weather turned much colder and stayed that way until after the end of January.

12/19/44
Battle positions: In early morning of the 19th I received orders to position my 30 cal water cooled machine gun in the edge of the woods overlooking Schönberg. I was high on a hill, several hundred yards from Schönberg overlooking a slope leading into a valley. I could see the house tops of Schönberg.

Company M, 423rd Regiment, my unit, was assigned to support L Company, a rifle company, who were preparing to enter Schönberg. They were advancing down the slope, attempting to enter Schönberg along the Bleialf-Schönberg road which was several hundred yards in front of my gun position, in the edge of the woods. The town and area was infested with Germans, but from my position I saw no sign of them. I saw little, except the roof tops of Schönberg ahead of us, and a few of our troops on the slope below us.

A rifle company to our rear, I Company 423rd Regiment, was waiting on orders to proceed down the hill in support L Company. It was about 0900 when we were suddenly hit by very heavy artillery fire. It seemed that all hell had broken loose. The shells were exploding all around us, on the ground and in the trees. Men were screaming for Medics. I heard during the day that M Company's Commander, Captain Hardy, had been killed and the Executive Officer, Captain Wiegers was blinded by a tree burst. There was a terrible lot of confusion at that time. I thought to myself that the officers could be from one of the rifle companies. That was not so, it was our officers that were hit by tree bursts.

Captain James Hardy, M Company Commander, was killed by the very first tree burst as the German shells landed in the woods around us. Captain Wiegers, M Company Executive Officer, although hit, was not blinded. I learned in 1988 that he rode a tank out of the officer's camp, Oflag 13C, Hammelburg, during an attempted break-out. "Read the book about Patton's raid on the Hammelburg Oflag, where he tried to rescue his son-in-law". The name of the book is *Raid*. Hammelburg was about 80 miles behind the then existing front lines.

Most of our officers ended up being held at Oflag XIII-C (13C). After the aborted attempt by Patton to liberate the camp, the Germans put all the officers on the road, marching in the direction of Bavaria. Colonel Cavender, 423rd Regimental commander, was wounded on that march. He and others were caught in the target zone of hundreds of bombers. Cavender spent several months in the hospital as a result of his leg wounds. It was during that time that he issued his 423rd Regimental Order #51 awarding all of us the COMBAT INFANTRY BADGE.

During the day, 19 December 1944, Smitty, my gunner was injured in the leg by an

artillery shell. I was hit on the backside of my right boot on the same burst. My right overshoe and combat boot were ripped. I sustained a small wound in the area of the right Achilles tendon. (In the excitement and trauma that followed, I did not realize I had been hit.) It was not serious enough to prevent me from walking and eventually healed. I learned later, in 1987, that Smitty had his leg amputated in a German hospital and had also suffered stomach wounds. His stomach wounds caused him to be unable to continue to work after 1963. He is one of the first men I discovered in 1987, after reading MacDonald's book that I mentioned earlier.

The first hostile artillery barrage, at 0900, was unbelievable in its magnitude. It seemed that every square yard of ground was being covered. The initial barrage slackened after forty-five minutes or an hour. I could hear the men from K & L Companies, on the slopes below, screaming for medics. Shortly after that the shelling started again. The woods were being raked throughout the day by a constant barrage of small arms and artillery fire. We were pinned down in the edge of the woods and could not move. I found some protection in a small trench, by a tree, as the shelling started. It must have been scooped out by one of the riflemen the night before. The front of the trench, pointing towards Schönberg, was deeper than the back. My feet stuck up above the ground. I suppose that was the reason I suffered a leg wound. At one point during the shelling, I heard a piece of metal hit the ground. It was a large jagged, hot, smoking piece of shrapnel, about eighteen inches long and four inches wide. It landed a foot or two from my head. After it cooled off I reached out and picked it up. I don't think it was a mortar or an 88mm shell. It might have been flak from an antiaircraft shell.

I read in 1987, in MacDonald's book, that the Germans had many antiaircraft guns (88s and 128s) with them during their Ardennes Offensive. They were for protection in case the weather turned better. They knew for sure that the Allied air support would eventually come. The German antiaircraft gun is capable of being used to support ground troops. This is done by elevating the guns downward, and firing timed bursts or tree bursts into the trees that explode on contact. There is very little protection as the fragments rain down from above.

They also had 20mm antiaircraft guns, mounted on quad mounts and half-tracks. They were fired into the tree tops, and sometimes at point blank range, causing severe damage to our troops. The tree bursts, exploding high in the trees, were hard to hide from. They caused many casualties. There is no doubt that they were used to our disadvantage.

The weather was overcast and foggy and did not turn to the better until December 21st or 22nd. The sky cleared and it got much colder, as we were then walking, as prisoners, back into Germany. When the weather did clear, the Germans had the opportunity to use those antiaircraft guns for their intended purpose, for there was much Allied air activity. There is no doubt that it was their fortune in having their antiaircraft battalions near Schönberg, as we approached it from the East. Those guns were a decisive factor in the outcome of the battle for that c*ity*.

We had very little artillery support. I learned after the war that the 423rd's artillery support, the 590th Field Artillery to the rear, was overrun by the Germans troops that were fighting westward towards Schönberg along the Bleialf-Schönberg road. They

fought as "Infantrymen" but as they learned after the war, were not eligible for the "Combat Infantry Badge."

On the Schönberg Hill, rifle companies, mortar and machine gun squads were being pinned down in the woods. In the confusion, caused by the demoralizing artillery fire, they were being separated from each other. The 422nd and 423rd Regiments lost track of each other. The day was going bad. There were no targets in view, at least from my point of view. The Germans were waiting for their artillery to neutralize us, before they moved. With the ravaging artillery fire, and no chance of counter artillery, we were literally sitting ducks. There was some action on the edges of the perimeter. From my position I could see two German tanks. They were scouting around the area, in the edge of the woods near Schönberg. One of them threw out a smoke grenade. I was not able to identify any German infantry troops, prior to being captured. I learned later that the tanks I saw were mopping up troops that were pinned down in the fields and road below. Most of the action occurred early in the fight, between the rifle companies below us and the Germans across the road.

K & L Companies, in trying to push into Schönberg, were caught in the ditches and fields. It was their men that I could see and that I could hear screaming for help. They were being ripped to pieces by the tremendous artillery barrages. Unfortunately, my machine-gun was placed too far back of the infantry company as they attempted to get into Schönberg. Normally, we would have moved forward, but the same artillery that was destroying L Company was also hitting us. At the same time German troops coming up the road from Bleialf were hitting us from the rear. This trapped the reserve company (I Company) who were preparing to come forward to assist K & L Companies.

In 1987 I acquired a list of the 106th Division members belonging to "The Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge. I called one of the listed men, Harold Gene Songer of Danville, Illinois. (6/4/87) He, was a member of I Company, 423rd Infantry Regiment. He said, "Yes, I was in the woods. I don't know exactly where. "

He said, "I" Company was being slaughtered. A sniper was killing a lot of them. We had spotted the sniper, nearby, in a clump of bushes. The range was too short for the elevating mechanism. My squad leader (mortars) was trying to elevate the mortar, by holding it vertically. He was killed by a bullet in the temple. Another mortar man and I grabbed the mortar and dropped three shells in the area of the sniper, killing him." Songer, like myself, was captured. He ended up at Stalag IV-A, Hohenstein, near Dresden.

From Norman Gruenzner's Postal History of American POWs: World War II, Korea, Vietnam [State College, Penn.: American Philatelic Society, 1979]. Stalag IV-A was located close to Hohenstein, near Dresden. The American camp population in December 1944 was 300. In February 1945 it reached 2,217. There were several work detachments, living in a variety of places. One group lived in Dresden. There were eleven British work detachments, but only three or four American work groups. The camp was closed in March 1945.

Songer asked, " Were you in the prison train that was bombed on Christmas Eve?" My answer, "No, I was in a small barracks in Dockweiler, east of Gerolstein, on Christmas Eve. We were not put into box-cars until 30 December, at Limburg." That story

follows.

The German troops advancing from the Southeast, along the Bleialf- Schönberg road were the ones who took over our artillery battalion.

I remember throughout all the shelling watching a Tech Sergeant, I thought from one of our mortar platoons, walking and running through the woods giving orders. He was trying to get troops moving. The mortar, antiaircraft and artillery fire was fierce. Trees flying through the air, shell were bursting every where. I hope he made it. He was a very brave soldier, but was exposed to fierce, ravaging artillery fire.

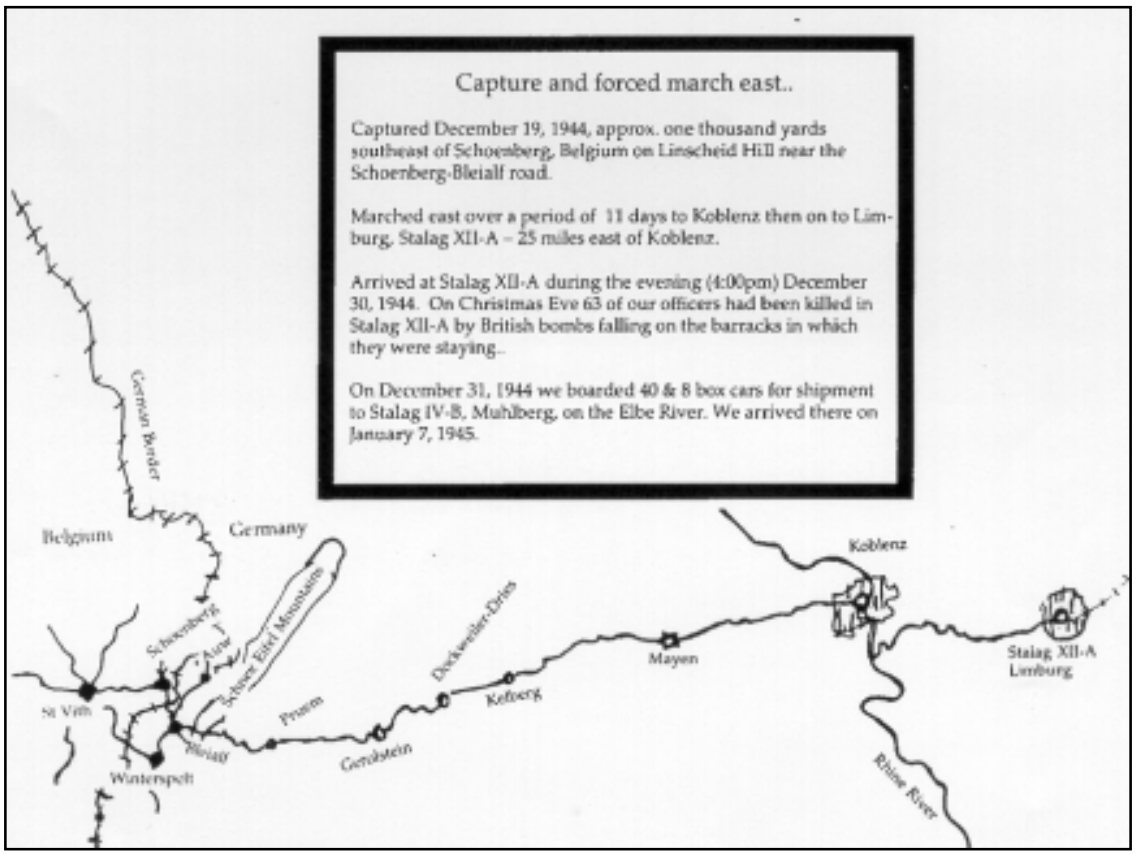
At one point, as I looked to the right along the edge of the woods, I saw six or eight ground bursts, probably 88's. They hit in a small area along the tree line where several soldiers were trying to find protection. One of those men was hurled through the air and his body was wrapped around a tree trunk several feet off the ground. There were continuous cries from the wounded screaming for Medics. The woods and open areas on the slope leading to the road, was littered with dead and wounded. Some time between 1600 (4 p.m.) and 1630 (4:30 p.m.), an American officer, accompanied by a German officer told us we were surrounded. He told us that we were cut off from the other battalion, the 422nd, and that our Regimental Commander, Colonel C. C. Cavender, was ordering us to surrender.

As the history of this battle shows, we were surrounded on all sides by German troops. They were heavily armed, with many mortars, antiaircraft guns, assault guns and artillery pieces. They were being reinforced by more and more troops from the Southeast and there would have been no possibility of reversing the battle situation. We disabled our weapons by breaking them on tree trunks or by taking them apart and throwing the parts in different directions. After that the Germans led us to a clearing in the forest and directed us to throw down our equipment. E.g.: ammo belts, packs, hand-grenades and trench-knifes. I quickly disposed of the German binoculars that I had found earlier.

We were lead in a small column down to the Schönberg-Bleialf road in front of the rifle companies. There were Germans on one side of the road and Americans on the other. They had been facing each other, in a fierce fire fight, from ditch to ditch. There were many dead, both Americans and Germans. The wounded were still crying for help. As we approached the Schönberg road, it seemed that hundreds of Germans rose up out of the field.

There was a German truck burning in the middle of the road. Behind the truck was an American infantryman lying in the middle of the road. He was dressed like an officer, but with no insignia, as would be normal in combat. His was wearing his winter uniform, a heavy winter coat, ammo belt and canteen. He was lying on his back, as if he were resting. The body had no head or neck. It was as if somebody had sliced it off with a surgical instrument, leaving no sign of blood. All my life I have had flash backs of that scene and I still find it hard to believe. I always wonder how it happened. He was the only soldier, either American or German that I saw laying on the road. There were many wounded and dead in the ditches and fields as we were led out of the woods.

The Germans then walked us in columns to Bleialf (recorded in my diary as "*St. Beliath*) where they herded us into a church court yard. I probably recorded the church name by mistake. It had turned dark and the temperature was dropping. Most of us were without overcoats. We had only our field jackets and our winter issue of "Olive Drab" uniforms with long johns. I recall that I wore two pair of pants, my long johns and my field jacket. We had to sleep on the ground. I remember how nervous I was. Every little sound was amplified. I wondered what was going to happen to us when day break came. We had nothing to eat since early morning, December 18th. (remember - the pancakes).



Captured 19 December, 1944 - Marched 110 miles to Stalag XII-A, Limburg, Germany

12/20/44
Left Bleialf at 6:30 AM, we were on the road until 2300 that night. We had no water or food except for the snow from the ground. During the march, as we were going through a very small village, the Germans stopped us in front of some civilians. They made us take off our overshoes and give them to the civilians. That was when I discovered that my right overshoe had been ripped open on the backside by shrapnel. The shrapnel had cut through my backside of my rubber overshoe, leather combat boot and heavy sock. It had then cut around, but not through my Achilles tendon. It was a small wound, but had it gone any deeper it would have cut my tendon and I would have been unable to walk.

There was much evidence, in the area, that a large scale battle had taken place. I remember as we were leaving Bleialf walking through a small village. It could have been outskirts of Bleialf, or some small village nearby. There were German troops in

American jeeps. They were opening ration boxes and meat cans. They were eating our Christmas dinner. My guess is that this had been our battalion supply depot. As we walked through the area, I was surprised to see my jeep with four Germans in it. I was positive it was mine. I had personally painted my son's name, "Teddie" on the jeep, and the name was there. There had been had been a real shoot out, with hand to hand fighting. There were dead Americans and Germans lying in doors, ditches and hanging out of windows. The infighting must have been fierce, for some of the bodies were on top of each other.

As we left the town and just before we made a slight right turn that led us into the country, I saw a two story stone building. Its upper floor was occupied by several young women, who waved at us through the open windows as we went by. I have often wondered if they were brought along by the Germans. The road we were on eventually took us through Prüm, Germany, the town that I could see from our positions on the Schnee Eifel. We ended up that evening sleeping in an open field near Gerolstein, Germany.

12/21/44
At Gerolstein we were awakened at 0600, and given our first food since breakfast on Dec 18th. They fed us hard crackers and cheese. Seven men to one can of cheese. We left Gerolstein during the evening.

12/21/44
Arrived in Dockweiler Dries 2300. Billeted in an old German barracks. During the three and one-half days there, we were fed one ration of very weak potato stew. We received two bread rations of one loaf split between five men, one ration of cheese and one small can between four men. We were each given two old German Army blankets. They were old and worn, but did give us some warmth. They would prove to be lifesavers as time went on.

12/22/44
During the night the road along side the barracks was strafed and bombed. We could not see the target, but in the moonlight the plane we could see that it was a British Spitfire. The English usually flew night missions, the Americans flew during the day. The weather was clearing and cold. There were many planes in the sky, so we will probably be moved during the night, to avoid the possibility of being strafed.

12/23/44
No reason given for our delay. Someone said there had been a lot of prisoners taken. Maybe they were not sure what to do with us because of the large numbers. I am sure, from what I can see, we were clogging their transportation system.

12/25/44
Christmas Day Dockweiler Dries: On the march by 0630, marched all day and night, no water, or food, except snow. No Christmas, except in our hearts.

12/26/44
We stopped at a cluster of farm homes about eight miles north of Mayen. We are billeted in one of the barns. No food.

I notice that here, in Europe, that the farms are not laid out the same as they are back home. You can walk through the country for several miles before you see any farm

buildings. In the States there is a farm every half mile or so. In Germany you always see several farm homes and barns clustered together, as if they were built that way for protection. Many of them have a common courtyard arranged around a square, with each family living in buildings on opposite sides of the square. Maybe a "throwback" from the old "feudal system."

12/27/44
Koblenz: We arrived here in the afternoon. We were fed soup and bread served from a portable kitchen. Koblenz is a big city. It has taken a lot of punishment from bombings. We were walking in groups of about 500. I was on the left side of our column, next to the street curb. There was a uniformed German photographer taking pictures of our group, as we walked by. I noticed he used a Leica camera. A civilian, dressed in a business suit walked over to the curb near me. He made a loud remark, and then hit me along side the head with a brief case. The guards made him get back. They told us that the civilians were very upset because of the recent bombings. Maybe the civilian had lost some of his family. Later, I thought this might have been a staged protest for propaganda purposes. Why would there be an Army photographer there with a business man, alone, with a column of POWs marching by.

We were billeted in one of three large brick barracks (which I remember being just on the south edge of Koblenz). They were three stories in height. Somebody said they were part of a former officer training center. We were forced to take all of the beds out of the three story building and store them in a large building across the street. When we were in Dockweiler Dries we had been issued two old gray German army blankets. We slept on the floor using the blankets. It was at least out of the weather.

12/28/44
As we entered the barracks area, yesterday, we noticed antiaircraft guns on the hill back of the barracks. At 1430 (2:30 PM) bombers began to bomb the rail yards near us. The guards herded us into the basement. Many of the bombs fell around our barracks. Fortunately, there were no direct hits. We counted fifteen bomb craters around the buildings. It was very cloudy and overcast. It had to be American planes bombing by radar, for the practice was that Americans bombed during the day and English by night.

12/29/44
Again at 1430 the antiaircraft guns started firing. We were bombed again. This time the guards would not allow us to go down into the basement. I was in a room on the third floor. Again bombs fell around us. They were hitting very close by. The window frames blew into the room and crashed on the floor. The window glass shredded and flew into a million pieces. To protect myself I huddled in a corner on an inside wall covering myself with my two blankets. When the dust settled, the blankets were covered with shredded glass. The double window frame was intact, but on the floor. There were only three of us in the room. Fortunately the window frame had missed us. After the raid we all went outside, to see what happened. There were bomb craters all around the area. The bombers had been aiming at the nearby railroad yards, but hit in our area. The building across the street, where we had stored the beds, was completely demolished. It was a pile of smoking rubble. As we stood watching, the one remaining corner post and wall of the building fell to the ground. So much for the German beds that we were not allowed the use of. Our high ranked noncommissioned officers asked for a meeting with the German guards. Our noncoms insisted that they could not keep us in a place of danger. They told the Germans, if they did not

voluntarily take us out of town, we would walk out on our own, as a group. The guards were as frightened as we were. They agreed, but told us that we would have to walk all night, over 25 miles, without stopping. The noncoms agreed to that and we prepared to leave Koblenz on a forced overnight march.

12/29/44
1700 - Darkness had set in when we left Koblenz. We crossed the Rhine over a wooden bridge that had replaced the one that had been bombed. We turned right after we crossed the Rhine River bridge. Then we followed a road to the left, up into the hills. We walked until 1030 the next morning. One of the toughest trips so far, 40 kilometers with very little stopping. When we did stop we were not allowed to get off the road. The guards were afraid we would try to escape. It had turned very cold and the two German Army blankets did little to ward off the cold. But, as thin as they were, the blankets kept us from freezing. There was no water, so we ate snow. Some of the men were developing diarrhea.

We had traveled at night most of the time since leaving the front lines. The roads were narrow and rough. There were many German troops and vehicles, including tanks, moving in the opposite direction, towards the front. In the blackout conditions it was difficult to see how large the towns and villages were. You could be walking along on a valley road and the silhouette of the hills with a building on the skyline, would give you the impression you were in a large town. The German troops, in particular the tank troopers, would not give way for our columns. It was a matter of just stumbling along, following the man in front of you.

12/30/44
Arrived Stalag XII-A, Limburg, Germany 1030 in the morning. This was a large prisoner transit camp. Large circus style tents and what seemed to be adequate food. We were still not registered as Prisoners of War.

From Norman Gruenzner's Postal History of American POWs: World War II, Korea, Vietnam [State College, Penn.: American Philatelic Society, 1979]. Stalag XII-A was near Limburg am Lahn. It was a permanent camp for the British and Italian prisoners. In November 1944, there were 1,500 Americans in camp. Later this figure rose to 3,026. The total camp population now was 20,357.

I learned in 1987, that 63 officers had been killed in a 23 December 1944 bombing. They had been placed in a concrete block building in Stalag XII-A, Limburg, Germany. The British were bombing a railroad yard nearby and one of the bombs made a direct hit on the officer's barracks. The British bombers, 50 Mosquito bombers, were after the Rail yard at DIEZ, Germany. The winter winds blew the "pathfinder markers" over the POW Camp nearby. I understand that many of those officers were from our Medical Units.

We left Stalag XII-A, Limburg at 1600, 30 December 1944. We were loaded into old 40&8 style box cars. Sixty men to each box car. Their box cars are much smaller than those in the U.S.A. There was a small amount of straw on the floor. There were two small windows, high on the each side near the end of the cars. The windows were covered with boards and barb wire. There was one metal can for our sanitary facility. It was about the size of a five gallon lard can. We had no canteens or jars with which to carry water. The trip lasted eight nights and seven days.

During our short stay at Stalag XII-A, we were given a large portion of bread, but no water. One of the fellows tied a can to a string and dragged it along the ground to catch snow. It was not easy, but he was able to catch some snow to melt for water. Some, including myself kept our steel helmets. On the couple of occasions when we were furnished water, we filled our helmets and shared with the others. Now that I look back, I don't remember losing my helmet, but I did not have it with me when I was liberated. I wonder where I left it.

The sanitary conditions, using the lard can as a toilet, was terrible. Many of the men had developed diarrhea. We could not all lie down, to rest or sleep, at the same time. We slept in shifts and when you did get settled down, someone would have to run for the lard can. Usually there was someone over it. It caused a lot of problems, since a man with diarrhea has little "holding power." The stench was terrible. Fortunately, I had not yet taken the diarrhea. My time was to come.

We were not allowed out of the box cars. That was until at one point, during the day when we were being attacked by one of our planes. The train stopped and the guards headed for the fields. The prisoners in the car just ahead of mine managed to break out of the car and get to the fields. They formed the letters "POW" in the snow. This kept us from being strafed. Those of us in my boxcar were not able to get out. We were told that the pilot dipped the plane's wings and waved when he recognized us as prisoners. I had no opportunity to see it for I was not next to the small window. Most of us huddled on the floor, in fear of our lives, when we heard the plane.

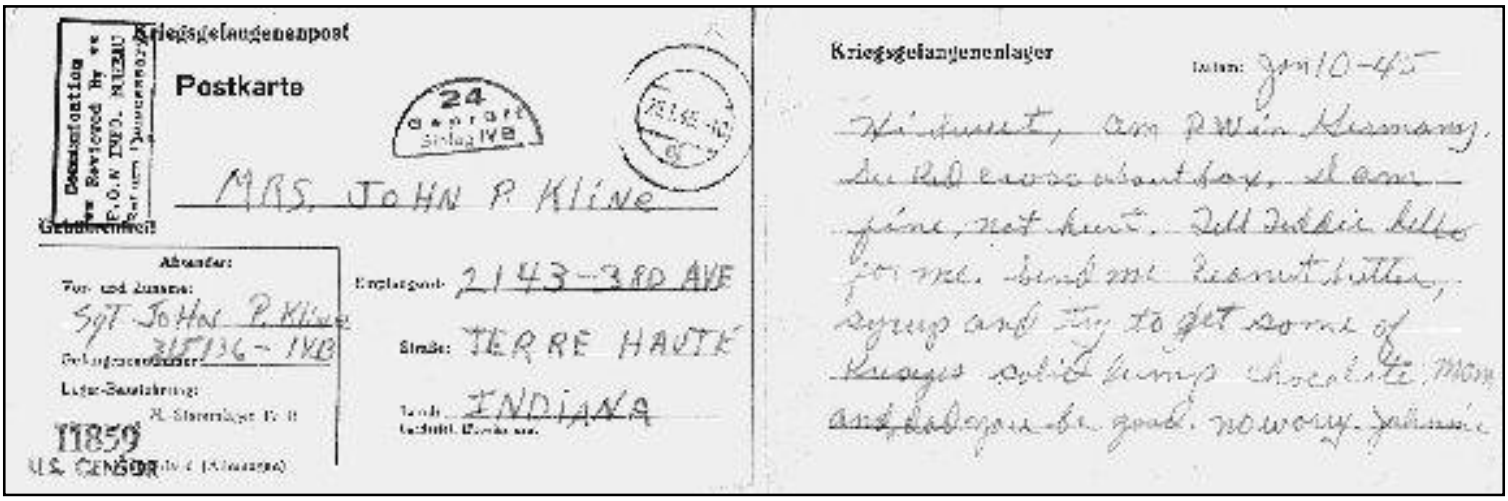
After that, due to the heavy Allied air strikes, we traveled at night. The travel was erratic. We would go for a long time, stop and sit, then we would go again. It was difficult to make out where you were, so I was unable to record the exact route. There were not many signs along the tracks. We did go through rail stations in Mülhausen and Leipzig. They were several large cities and I was able to identify those railroad stations through the small window in the box-car.

From Leipzig, the rail system leads southeast to Dresden a major railroad center. Our destination turned out to be Mühlberg, about thirty-two miles north northwest of Dresden. A couple of months later, Dresden, was to suffer a horrible fire bombing that killed over 100,000 civilians.

1945

01/07/45
Arrived Stalag IV-B, Mühlberg, Germany - Thirty-two miles northwest of Dresden. We finally had a shower and had our clothes deloused. We were given some medication injected into the muscle area of the left chest. I never did learn what that medication was, possibly it was to prevent typhus or tetanus. We were billeted in small barracks, with sanitary conditions that matched those in the train. The sanitary conditions were deplorable.

01/10/45
My 20th birthday. I am spending it as a guest of the German government at Stalag IV-B. I had 1/6th loaf of bread, one tablespoon sugar, one slice of margarine and a pint of Grass Soup with five boiled potatoes as a birthday meal. Not bad fare, as I later realized. We were finally registered as Prisoners of War. I became German prisoner # 315136. We were also each given a German POW postcard to write home.



Front side - address **Back side - message**

Kriegsgefangenenpost - Postkarte
Prisoner of War - Postcard
Sgt John Kline - 315136 - Stalag - IV B
Sent from Stalag IV-B, Muhlberg, Germany on my 20th birthday Jan 10, 1925

From Norman Gruenzner's Postal History of American POWs: World War II, Korea, Vietnam [State College, Penn.: American Philatelic Society, 1979]. Stalag IV-B, a POW Camp, is located near the town of Mühlberg east of Leipzig. In October 1944, it held fifty Americans captured while serving with the Canadians. By the end of the month, the number of Americans reached 436. At the same time, there were 7,252 British in the camp. It was known as a permanent camp for the British, and as a transit camp for newly captured prisoners. By December 1944, there were 4,500 Americans in the camp. It is thought that the number of British prisoners remained about the same. It is reported that 6,500 Americans passed through Stalag IV-B on their way to other camps. There is a possibility that these transit American prisoners may have been allowed to write home for the first time since their capture.

We were allowed to send a POW post card. On the address side it says, "Kriegsgefangenenpost" (War Prisoner's mail), PostKarte (Post card). Location: M.-Stammlager IV-B, which was located at Mühlberg, and has the approval stamp "24 Gepruft Stalag IV-B." It was written on January 10, 1945, my 20th birthday. It was postmarked on January 25th and was received by my wife, around April 20th, a week after I was liberated.

The letter to my wife: *"Hi Sweet, Am POW in Germany. See Red Cross about box. I am fine, not hurt. Tell Teddie (our son) hello for me. Send me peanut butter, syrup and some solid lump chocolate. Mom and Dad you be good. No worry." Signed Johnnie*

Peanut butter and syrup (remember the pancakes, on the Schnee Eifel, Dec 18) have always been my passion, and still is. I did not receive a package during my captivity, nor do I know of any person that did. We were prisoners for such a short time and were constantly on the move.

01/11/45
The following telegram was received by my wife:

C251 43 GOVT=WASHINGTON

MRS. BETTIE LOU L KLINE

2143 3RD AVE [Terre Haute, Ind.]

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR HUSBAND SERGEANT JOHN P KLINE HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE TWENTY ONE DECEMBER IN GERMANY IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION IS RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED

DUNLOP ACTING THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

> **[note: it says "twenty one December." The date of my capture was nineteen December]**

01/12/45
We left Stalag IV-B (Muhlberg) in box cars. We were given a good portion of bread and water and traveled all night.

01/13/45
We arrived at Stalag VIII-A Görlitz, Germany. Görlitz, Germany is located about 70 miles east northeast of Dresden on the Polish border, a few miles north of the Czech border and about 135 miles southeast of Berlin. Görlitz straddles the River Neisse in the territory of Lower Silesia, Germany.

During the prewar years the Hitler Youth held its camps on the outskirts of the eastern suburb, Moys, where the barracks were built within 800 yards of the River Neisse. By early 1940 the former Hitler Youth camp took on the looks of a prison camp, surrounded by wire, sentry towers and named "Stammlager VIII-A." The first prisoners were Polish, some fifteen thousand. Later there were French and Belgians. At one point there were eight thousand Belgians and thirty thousand French with barracks that would hold only about fifteen thousand. By Easter of 1941 the Polish had disappeared from the camp, presumably taken to Kommandos (work camps). By the end of the year there were thousands of Russian prisoners in camp. By midyear of 1943 almost all the nationalities in Europe were represented in Stalag VIII-A and it held nearly 4,500 men. That is until 2,500 British prisoners were taken into the camp. They had been captured in Italy.

In 1944 the total number of attached Kommandos (work camps) numbered nearly two thousand. Those Kommandos took much of the load off the Stalags, There were about

1,500 N.C.O.'s in camp from the countries of Britain, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Food supplies were adequate and Red Cross parcels regular. Then, in the last weeks of December and the first part of January 1945, some eighteen hundred American prisoners reached the camp. It is presumed that these men came from the large number of prisoners taken during "The Battle of the Bulge."

In early 1945 the Russian advance approaching the Oder was the cause for evacuation of prisoners from Poland and Upper Silesia. This situation caused cramped quarters in Stalag VIII-A, and the food supply dwindled to meager rations. On February 14th, 1945 after several false starts, the first party of a large number of Americans (We were told there were sixteen hundred Americans in our column that left February 14th, 1945) and nearly 200 British were evacuated to the West. On February 15th twelve hundred British set out following the first party that departed on February 14.

I was in the first party, the one leaving on February 14, 1945 (Valentine's Day). The second party followed us until we reached the town of Duderstadt, the infamous "Brick Factory" camp. It was not an official Stammlager. It had no numeric designator. It was just a point where the Germans had decided to accumulate several thousand prisoners. It was four stories in height with one narrow staircase. Each floor was piled high with clay bricks that had not yet been "baked" in the kiln. Dust settled through the spaces on the wooden floors, as well as urine and excrement from the diarrhea infested men who could not wait to go outside. There was only one water pump and a slit trench outside for sanitation purposes. Some four thousand prisoners were put into this building. I must have been one of the more fortunate, for I spent only one night in the Duderstadt Brick Factory. (A photograph of this "Hell Hole" appears later)

As various groups went on their way from Duderstadt, they went in one of two directions, Northwest to Stalag XI-B, Fallingbostel. Or, like me, north to Braunschweig. The groups that went to Stalag XI-B were liberated on or about April 5, 1945. Our group was liberated on April 13, 1945, just a few miles east of Braunschweig. Though I am ahead of my story, I felt this information would give any reader of this diary a better overall view of what was happening. Parts of the above were described in Interlude [A story of British Prisoners of War in Stammlager VIII-A at Görlitz in Lower Silesia, Printed by Patridge-Cooper, London, right after World War II]

From Norman Gruenzner's Postal History of American POWs: World War II, Korea, Vietnam [State College, Penn.: American Philatelic Society, 1979]. Stalag VIII-A was located near Görlitz, about three miles from the Czech border. Although the camp population is unknown, several work detachments were assigned to this camp.

Work Camp No. 2167 located near Waldenburg.

Work Camp No.12403 -in the Folkhammerkreis near Waldenburg.

Work Camp No. 11504 -located near Neisky.

Work Camps No. 11505-06, 1001 -located near Ruekenwalde.

Work Camp No. 10503 -located near Herschberg.

[No mention was made of the influx of American Prisoners from the Ardennes. There were about 1,800 from the 106th and the 28th American Infantry Divisions... J.K.]

The Stalag at Görlitz was in a desolate, wind swept area. There were the usual two fences of barbed wire around the perimeter, with guard towers. There was a wire, about knee high about 50 feet from the inside fence. If they caught you there you could have been shot, and probably would have been. I have not heard of any attempts to escape - where would you go and where would you get the strength to try. There was a large barren area back of the barracks, used for recreation and exercise. It being midwinter, I only ventured into that area a couple of times, to see what it was all about.

The buildings were single story wood frame and would accommodate, normally, about 500 men. (*I have no idea of the number in each building at the time I was there. They were extremely overcrowded)* They were quite large and separated into two sections. There were no regular beds. They had wooden platforms, about four high, that we slept on. Very much like in a chicken coop. All we had to spread on the bed slats were our two thin blankets. I carried bruises on my hips and upper legs for months after I was liberated. They were caused by the hard boards I slept on in camp, as well as from the floors in the many building we slept in during the evacuation march.

I don't remember the barracks as being too cold. There was some sort of small stove, but not much fuel. We were out of the wind, and the many bodies huddled close together probably accounted for the warmth. I did not catch a cold during my captivity. I did come down with a very severe cold during my first sick leave at home.

The toilet (latrine) was outside and it could not be used after lights out. There was a small open pit toilet in the corner of the barracks, for emergencies during the night. Heaven forbid if you had to use it, for it was usually occupied. The small convenience of toilet paper was nonexistent. There was a wash room with an industrial type wash basin, with spray nozzles for washing your hands. Unfortunately the nozzles did not work. Fortunately there was another ordinary faucet on the wall that did work, so we used it. The wash room was always ice cold. There were no "Hilton Hotel" towels nor was there any toilet paper for our use.

We had a daily morning roll call. The Germans call it "appell." (Formation) - The guards were very strict about the proper count, sometimes counting us four or five times. We were told on several occasions during these roll calls that after this war was over, we would be fighting with the Germans against the Russians.

This brings to mind a joke I heard after being liberated: During one appell (line-up), the commandant said,

"I have for you Gut News und Bad News!

The Gut News is that you will all receive a change of underwear.

The Bad News is that to do so you must trade with the prisoner next to you."

As time went on, rumors were that the Russians were coming and we would soon leave this camp. The English had a hidden radio and they informed us that the war news was turning to the better.

Once while in Görlitz Stalag VIII-A, we were offered post cards to write home. We were there only one month, so I guess I should not complain.

When I was digging through my old memorabilia to put this diary together I found two "*Postkarte*," from VIII-A. They were duly approved by the stamp. These do not contain a German post mark, like the one from Stalag IV-B. They are stamped "M-Stammlager VIII-A" and were written on February 3, 1945. That was eleven days before we evacuated camp. One is to my parents and one is to my wife.

The message to my wife reads:
"*Dearest Wife, I hope this day brings us one day closer together, By time this reaches you our son will be over one-half year old. I sure wish I could see you both. Everything is O.K. with me so don't worry. Tell your dad that he and I can really talk after this is over. I love you sweet, till then, Johnnie.*"

My wife's father was in World War One. He and I had a lot of good talks about the Army after I was drafted. He was stationed in Prüm, Germany in World War I. I walked through the town after being taken prisoner...

A "Postkarte" written to my parents the same day: *"Hi Folks, Here it is February already, Kathryn Ann's birthday. (A cousin) I'm still O.K. I hope you are. How are the Pavers? (Old family friends) Don't worry about me. Everyday brings us closer. I am still expecting last Xmas dinner the first time I see you. Don't forget the peanut butter fudge. I have a lot of recipes for you. I love you both. Till then your son, Johnnie."*

My mother never forgot my plea for peanut butter fudge. She fed it to me every day for the first thirty days I was home after liberation. I gained 30 pounds during that time. Those days, back home again in Terre Haute, Indiana, were great days. Lots of food, the warmth of home, and being with my family. The cards mailed February 3, 1945 were received May 20, 1945 by my wife and parents, a few days before I came home for my first sick leave.

01/14/45
The following letter from the War Department was received by my wife.

Dear Mrs. Kline

"This letter is to confirm my recent telegram in which you were regretfully informed that your husband, Sergeant John P. Kline, 35730410, Infantry, has been reported missing in action in Germany since19 December 1944.

I know that added distress is caused by failure to receive more information or details. Therefore we wish to assure you that at any time additional information is received it will be transmitted to you without delay, and, if in the meantime no additional

information is received, I will communicate with you at the expiration of three months. The term "missing in action" is used only to indicate that the whereabouts or status of an individual is not immediately known. It is not intended to convey the impression that the case is closed.... Experience has shown that many persons reported missing in action are subsequently reported as prisoners of war. But as this information is furnished by countries with which we are at war, the War Department is helpless to expedite such reports. .

Permit me to extend to you my heart felt sympathy during this period of uncertainty.

Sincerely Yours

J. A. Ulio

Major General

The Adjutant General"

02/05/45
The food has not been good. I have had trouble with bleeding gums. I reported for "sick call" and was sent to the camp dentist. He gave me what looked to be a sugar pill, and told me he had no medicine. His quarters were very plain. I would hate to have a bad tooth ache.

We are seeing a lot of prisoners coming in from other camps because of the Russian drive. We have hopes of being liberated by the Russians. I hope we don't evacuate. I would like to see the Reds march in. They have been reported as being very near Stalag VIII-A. This is supposed to be a medium sized camp. Other than Americans, there are Russians, Poles, Czechs, French, English and Serbians in camp. The other prisoners told us that the German Commandant does not like Americans. Because of that, we were the poorest fed. We have to trade or bum food off the other prisoners. I traded my wedding ring for some bread and butter. The Serbians, right next to us, just received a good sized bag of rice. We normally get grass soup and rotten spuds.

02/10/45
Saturday, I am on tea detail. Had to get up early and help carry water and tea down to the kitchen. Strong rumors that the Russians are nearby. Hopes are high for liberation. The regular guards have been sent to the Russian front and have been replaced by older men. We each received 1/12 of a Red Cross parcel (each parcel was designed for one man). On one occasion I ended up with a packet of condensed onion soup. I mixed it with water hoping to get some nourishment. Because of that, I spent most of the night on the inside latrine. Apparently the onion was too rich for my stomach. I now have a bad case of diarrhea. The English doctor in our compound gave me some charcoal tablets to stop the diarrhea, but that has not helped. I am going to toast my bread to see if it will help.

The Serbians are moving today. We will soon be evacuating camp. I hope not, I am too weak and we are not prepared for a long march. I am losing weight every day. The food rations are getting worse all the time. Before you know it, they won't have any

food for us. What I remember most about the Serbians was the odor of the food as they prepared it in the barracks. It was, to me, a sweet sickening smell. They have been in prison camp a long time. By working in the Kommandos they must get more food, and their customs are different.

02/12/45
Lincoln's Birthday: They called off our move again. The Russians are reported 30 and 60 kilometers from us, on three sides of us. Hopes are high for liberation.

02/14/45 Valentine's Day.
We Evacuated Stalag VIII-A (Görlitz) on foot. We do not know where we are going. The guards are silent. We know that they want to get away from the Russians. The guards are older men, probably Polish German. They wear long gray winter coats and have the little red triangular patch on the lapel that shows they have had service on the Russian front. They carry old bolt-action rifles and wear a leather belt, much like our web pistol belt. The belt has a pouch hanging down in the back which is used to carry their food and personal articles.

02/16/45
Kamenz I can't remember much about this town. I was told after the war that some of us slept in a church there. That it was so crowded that it nearly burst. Many had to sleep outside on the ground in the freezing weather.

02/17/45
Königsbruck We stayed in a factory.

02/18/45
Radeburg

02/18/5
Kilburch

02/20/45
Lommke

02/21/45
Döbeln

02/22/45
Leisnig

02/25/45
Bad Lausick. We have been on the road since the 14th, early morning. We are marching in groups of about 500. I don't know how many groups there are in the whole column. There are hundreds of us on the road. We are now in a barn hay loft at Bad Lausick, Germany. We have traveled 223 kilometer (139 miles). All we do is walk, walk, walk and walk. Görlitz is reported as being occupied by Russians. We arrived here, at Bad Lausick, around 1600 on the 24th. In the barn, where we were billeted, George found four hen's eggs and I found some pigeon roosts. We are not allowed to use fires for cooking. When you're hungry, even raw pigeon meat is good.

George and I had accumulated some cigarettes from the Red Cross packages before we pulled out of Görlitz. We have been trading cigarettes with the guards for food. The guards are now driving hard bargains. It now cost us a whole pack of cigarettes for a

loaf of bread. We had been getting by for five to ten cigarettes for a loaf. We have stayed ahead of the March rations by about one loaf. As a result of the higher prices, we are now out of cigarettes. Today our menu was tea and barley soup. The best soup I have tasted, since being a prisoner. I wonder if they make barley soup in the USA.

Food rations seem to be better than they were in camp. They are still not sufficient for the walking we do. We have been getting about 1/6 of a loaf of bread and a little meat for two days of walking. Day before yesterday was my walking partner's 27th birthday. He is Staff Sergeant George Crouthamel, He was my Section Leader. There are two squads in each machine gun section, led by a Section Leader and two squad leaders, like myself. We teamed up together while in Stalag VIII-A. We shared the same wooden bunk for warmth.

02/27/45
Borna: 7 miles since the last stop. Stayed in barns and were fed barley soup. We drew one-half loaf bread and a piece of pork roll. At least I thought it to be pork roll.

Worchwitz: 28 kilometers (18 miles) from Borna, Gasthof Worchwitz -skilly (soup) of barley soup and flour. We were fed, while on the march, from a portable kitchen wagon.

Zietz: 8 km (5 miles) from Worchwitz. We are now on the fourth floor of a large brick barracks waiting for our soup and dry rations. This is the first bombed town we have seen on the journey from Görlitz. We saw many bombed towns from the train going to Stalag IV-B (Muhlberg). Up until now this is the first on this evacuation march that we came across a bombed town. We have traveled approx. 273 km from Görlitz, Stalag VIII-A.

Eisenberg We are in a brick factory. Only drew one-fourth loaf today. May not draw any bread tomorrow, rations are getting scarce, have not had our skilly (soup) yet. Rumors are that we get no bread tomorrow. The guards say that rations are going to be short, due to the bombings.

03/02/45
Spadatra This could be Stadtroda (in my 1974 Atlas) 28 km (17 miles) from Eisenberg. We were first put into a large barren, cold, windy brick factory and then moved to some barns in town for a one days rest. (I remember looking in a locker in the brick factory, there was some sort of engineers gauge, I wonder if the brick factory was just a camouflage for a war goods factory. I did not take the tool - It would have been bad news had I got caught with it.)

Staff Sergeant George Crouthamel and his wife Vera. June 1944.

I lost track of George after we were taken to the 108th Evacuation Hospital near Helmstedt. (Today called MASH units). I re-discovered him in Mid-1989. He lived in Burlington, New Jersey. I met him personally the first time since April 1945 at the 44th Annual Reunion of the 106th Infantry Division Association in Sacramento, California in August 1990. George died in 1993. I owe my life to him, and he said he owed his to me. We stuck together through all those horrible long days as prisoners. Sleeping together, walking together and comforting each other. It was that way with most all the soldiers. They ganged together in two's, three's and four, as security to each other in those dark days.

The food supply is getting sparse. It is surprising how a man will act if he is hungry. George has a knack for begging and finding food. Probably, because he is so small, and looks so feeble. I am sure I also look awful, but he seems to get more handouts. The other night George had a loaf of bread and a can of salt in a burlap bag under his head. The next morning, after awakening the bread was gone. The other prisoners would cut your throat for something to eat, like a bunch of starved rats. This is the great American soldier. Nothing, but a bunch of sneak thieves. Your own buddy would turn you into a guard, if it would bring food as a reward.

Everyone is afraid the other fellow will get something that he won't get. My captivity was really getting to me at this point. We are all so skinny, our clothes hanging like rags. My hips have bruises on them because I have no meat on them. My combat boots are loose on my feet. I feel this march is going to be the death of some of us yet. Several have dropped out from exhaustion, I don't know what happens if you do. At times we feel as if we are going in circles, nobody knows where we are going or where we will end up. All they will tell us is that we are going away from the Russians to meet the Americans. Each day the sky is filled with vapor trails from the bombers. They are flying at very high altitudes, and must be B-17s. Somewhere the Germans are getting a shellacking from the American Bombers. That is the only good sign we have right now.

03/07/45
Millingen (near Gotha) Drew two loaves of bread between nine men. After we arrived in Millingen, drew one Red Cross parcel between five men. (They are packaged for one

man). They gave us one-fourth loaf of bread (Sawdust crust and doughy insides). The Germans do mix saw dust with their dough, it is known as "ersatz bread." The turnip soup was good. I have always hated turnips. My diarrhea is causing a lot of problems. We had to stop and wait, while a town ahead was being bombed. It was a long wait. I spent the entire time in the ditch on my haunches with my drawers down.

03/09/45
Besseldorf or Ollendorf (?) 28 kilos (17 miles) Drew one days rations, stayed for one day's rest. I don't know what we would do without these rests. George and I had some wheat we found in the last barn. A bauernfrau (farm lady) cooked it with some potatoes. The taste was not good, but, is was very filling. The farm women will help you a once in a while. Most of them are kind, but we have found some that are not willing to help. We have been drawing our bread in one day portions. They told us this would stop some of the stealing, since we could not save ahead. I like it better this way. It was too much of a temptation to gorge with two or three days rations on hand. There was more stealing and you always were tempted to eat it right away.

All we talk about and think about is food. Used to be we told jokes and about women,. Not anymore. I have written menus for just about everything there is. We would be talking and then someone will start telling us about their favorite recipe. For example, like basting Turkey with Cola or making peanut butter fudge. Our mouth waters for good food. I still have my bill fold. I have used the back of all the pictures to write down the recipes. I am keeping my notes on the journey on a few pages of an old note book. I keep the notebook next to my body, in my jacket. I want to keep a record of where I have been, so I can tell how it was when I get back home.

We have had a change of guards. The new guards seem tougher than the old Polish-German guards. The soldier in charge, the same rank as our Master Sergeant, in the German Army known as "Oberfeldwebel" is a real tough cookie. I am not sure whether he is SS for his uniform is not black. I understand some of the SS, especially the infantry soldiers, do wear gray uniforms. He shows up each morning, in full uniform, and polished boots. He will not stand for any slowing down on the march. He walks up and down the columns with his swagger stick, urging us to press forward.

Today, for the first time, we saw a group of political prisoners. There were 15 to 20 of them pulling and pushing, struggling to get a large wagon load of bread up a hill. They wore old dirty and tattered striped prisoner's uniforms and caps. I thought we looked terrible. If we do, then they look like they are dead. They were nothing but skin and bone. Some of the men in our column, walked towards the wagon, apparently to help. Our new German Oberfeldwebel pulled his Walther Luger pistol and fired it into the air. He then ran screaming into the crowd, pointing his Luger at our men, herding them back into the column. I have never seen a man so furious.

03/13/45
Helmsdorf

03/14/45
Dingelstedt
On the evacuation march, one month today. It is a beautiful day regardless of our circumstances. We walked only a short distance, the sun is out - nice and warm - reminds me of Indiana. We bedded down in some barns near Duderstadt.

I am confused, in my diary, about the location and name of this town. I had it as "Wenzingrode." I later felt that this was probably in the outskirts of "Duderstadt." We did stay in the town for five days. To have gone to Wenzingrode would have caused us to backtrack to the Duderstadt area, which would not be logical - but, maybe things were not logical at that time. I was becoming a little confused during that time. I hope I can find someone who kept track of the towns we walked through, so that we can compare notes.

George and I feel good today. George just traded his dog tag chain for a bread and butter sandwich. It was really good. We both share things like this when we get them. This has been our lucky day. This morning after we drew rations going through Dingelstedt, we were standing on the road and a young boy came from a house and gave me a half loaf of bread. A GI ahead of us had asked for it, but the line had moved forward before the young German lad got back with the bread. As he gave it to me, the GI ran back to us, arguing that we took his bread. We gave him a slice and told him it was his unlucky day. Later, in the day, a lady gave us a half loaf. A young girl gave us a sandwich. Then one of the guards walked by, evidently he felt sorry for us and gave us part of his sandwich. A real lucky day for George and I.

War news is lacking, we have heard nothing. The war may not be going on, as much as these guards know, or tell.

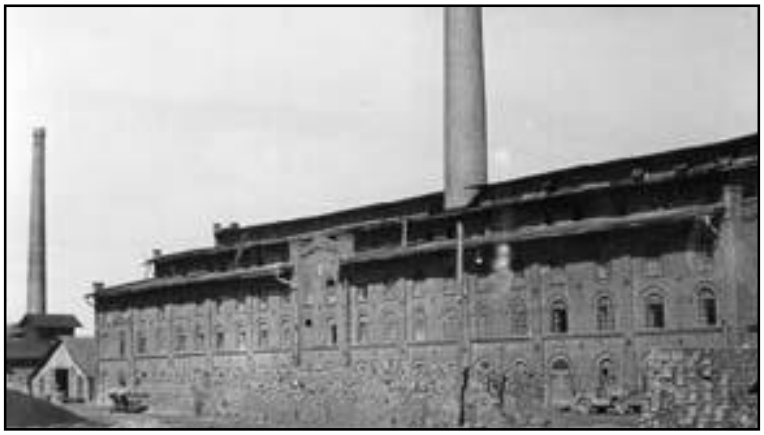
One of our boys was killed last night. He tried to get some sugar beets that were in the barn yard and one of the guards shot him. George and I volunteered to dig his grave. We were led up a hill to a small cemetery; the guard showed us where to dig. There were several fresh graves. We found, as we started digging, that we had lost most of our strength. I could hardly take two strokes with the pick at a time. When we were about half finished a lady came with some food. She brought coffee and rolls of some sort. The guard told the lady to set them down and come for the dishes later. She sat them on the ground and left. After she went down the hill, the guard told George and me to finish digging. He then sat down, ate every roll and drank all the coffee. I could have killed him given half a chance.

We continued digging. When we were just about finished the grave beside us caved into the hole. About that time the old lady came back and we told her what happened to the food. She scolded the guard and said she was sorry. Just then she saw the grave and ran crying down the hill. Later two other women came rushing up and looked at the grave. They bawled out the guard and raised plenty of cane. They told us that their brother was buried there. That by digging too close to it, we had ruined his grave. The guard decided not to dig any further and we went back to the barns.

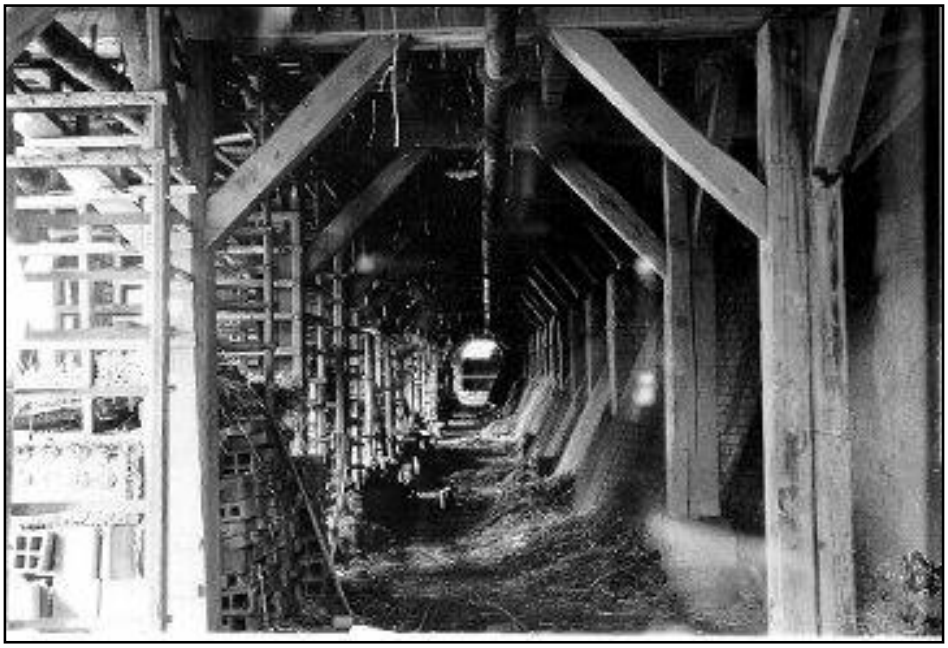
We were told that the GI's body was taken to the next town and buried. George and I were really worn out by the time we got back. We had missed soup, and had to beg the farm lady for some potatoes. As I now remember, this is where we watched the townspeople carry large trays of Apple Strudel and Kuchen from the local bakery. It looked delicious.

03/21/45
Duderstadt We then moved to an old brick factory outside of Duderstadt. (I mentioned this in my earlier description, 1/13/45, of Stalag VIII-A, as it was written in the book,

***Interlude*. This was a large building, four floors, and very cold. It contained several large kilns (for "firing" brick.) The rooms where the kilns were located were warm. I was able to catch another pigeon. We then were called, (all of us) to line up outside in large groups. There were over 4,000 prisoners in this building. There was one water pump outside, no toilet facilities. The floors were wood and the waste form those above seeped down to those below.**



The infamous Duderstad Brick Factory
(It was a real "Hell Hole.")



A section of the Duderstad brick factory, second floor of three or four floors. Note the kilns on right, the straw on the floors which had wide cracks. There were 4,000 POWs crammed into this structure.
Imagine the excrement and urine from sick POWs running through the cracks on the floor.
That's why I call it a true "Hell Hole." Thank God I stayed there only one night, some stayed there three weeks.

While we were milling about, George and I were pointed out and told to step forward. A German officer told us (through an interpreter) that we were accused of destroying German property (the pigeon). It turned out that he thought it was a chicken. All live

stock in Germany was government property. We caught hell, but he eased off.

The whole group (there were hundreds of us) were told that we had to sign papers agreeing to do labor for the German Government. They told us that if we would sign up, we would be taken off the road and put into clean barracks. According to the Geneva Convention we, as noncommissioned officers, were not supposed to be made to do forced labor. We could sign voluntarily. We were of course, being coerced. Even so, we did sign because we are all so weak from walking and from lack of proper food. We stayed here one night. The rumor was that the night before, there had been two Americans and nine Russians killed for lighting matches during a bombing raid.

Wolfsan A farm lady, cooking potatoes for her cattle, gave us 12-14 potatoes a piece, hot and right out of the cooker. I ate two days bread rations on that day and saved the potatoes to carry me over. During the next two to three days we hiked towards Braunschweig (Brunswick?) - I haven't kept track of dates the last few days. I am getting very tired and weary.

03/24/45
Braunschweig This is a Kommando (work camp). As we arrived we were fed, a thick carrot soup. We were then told that we would be working on a roads and railroads that had been bombed. On a map that I have (6/87) it shows only one prison camp near Braunschweig, "Oflag IX." Braunschweig is listed as "Brunswick." I am not sure that we were in Oflag IX even though the barracks seemed to be permanent. I saw road signs showing both names for the city, Braunschweig and Brunswick, as we were walking through the area.

03/31/45
For the last week we have been trying to clean up this filthy camp, the barracks were in horrible shape.

Our bombers just gave Braunschweig a good going over. The sky is full of vapor trails from the planes. I see nothing here to bomb except the railways. It looks as if all the buildings are already down. A group of us were marched out to a bombed out street and told to clean up the debris. We were all so weak that we could not lift the pick axes or use the shovels. The guards swore at us, lined us up, and took us back to camp. They must have recognized that we are in terrible shape.

During my 1987 contacts with former prisoners I was told by one EXPOW that Braunschweig was not a work camp. That may have been generally so. But, in fact, S/Sgt Crouthamel and I with others were forced to walk out of camp to a bombed area and were given pickaxes and told to work..

I still have the diarrhea. I don't know of anyone that does not have it. It is making us all so weak we can hardly walk.

Still 3/31. Today American bombers dropped leaflets which fluttered down all over the area. The leaflets stated that the big offensive had started. This town (Braunschweig) along with four others are going to be bombed off the map. That is, unless there was an unconditional surrender by the Germans. Our guards are concerned. It doesn't look good for us here. We can hear our planes over to the West or northwest bombing some

towns. They must be softening up the Germans so they won't resist. We have heard that the Americans are very near Braunschweig.

Even though we were in Braunschweig several days - I cannot remember much about the barracks - except that they were filthy when we first walked into camp. The prison yard was littered with debris and human excrement. We spent a few days trying to clean up our barracks. The outside area was terrible. There obviously were not enough latrines to handle the situation.

04/09/45
We left Braunschweig walking in an eastward direction to keep out of the American drive. The guards said we are marching without orders. George and I tried to escape. We rolled into a ditch and got away from our guard. Another guard, in the column behind us, saw us. He asked what we were doing in the ditch. We said we were resting. He said to come out of the ditch. I said, "OK" and he thought I was talking back. He hit me over the head and shoulders with what looked to be a pick handle. The guards are very nervous and on edge. They are probably wondering what will happen to them.

After the incident, George and I were allowed to get on the kranken-wagen (sick wagon). We were both weak from diarrhea. The guards have separated the sick group from the regular columns. Those of us in the sick group have taken a different route. We are now able to ride instead of walk which is a relief. Along the way, we traded for bread, using packets of coffee from our Red Cross parcels that we shared at Braunschweig.

04/10/45
Königslutter We stayed here one day. We thought we would be taken into a hospital here, but the guards said "No." There are 32 Americans, including George and I, and 12 Englishmen in this separate "Sick Column." They have now taken our kranken-wagen away for other duties. The guards are doing a lot of talking among themselves. They don't know what to do with us. Some want to turn us towards the American line, which we understand is now at Braunschweig, the town we just left. I hope the Americans catch up quick. I am getting very weak.

One of the guards got drunk and shot off his mouth. A town official heard him say that they were going to turn us towards our own lines. The official said, "No!" then he told the guards that they were preparing transportation for us to continue to the East. To where - we don't know. He did find some trucks for us travel in. I would have been unable to walk.

04/12/45
Helmstedt Late afternoon: We arrived on the outskirts of Helmstedt. As we got off the trucks, I found some old carrots that were buried in a dirt cellar. Like the old earthen cellars the farmers used in States, where you put potatoes or carrots on straw in a hole, then cover them with straw and dirt for the winter. There were a lot of carrots, not all of them good, but it was food. I am sure that they had a disastrous effect on my diarrhea. For two weeks now I have had severe stomach cramps. I am really getting weak, my legs are giving out. I can barely walk.

Later that evening they made us get into the ditches, and cover our heads. They were

blowing up the munitions dumps which were nearby. There were several large explosions. We were taken to a nearby infirmary that serves the munitions factory. This installation is a Farben Industries ammunition plant. We are now in warm clean beds and have access to inside toilets, the first we have seen for a long time. They have no medicine, but we do have warm blankets. I could hardly walk up the stairs as we entered the building. I was assisted by others as I entered the building.

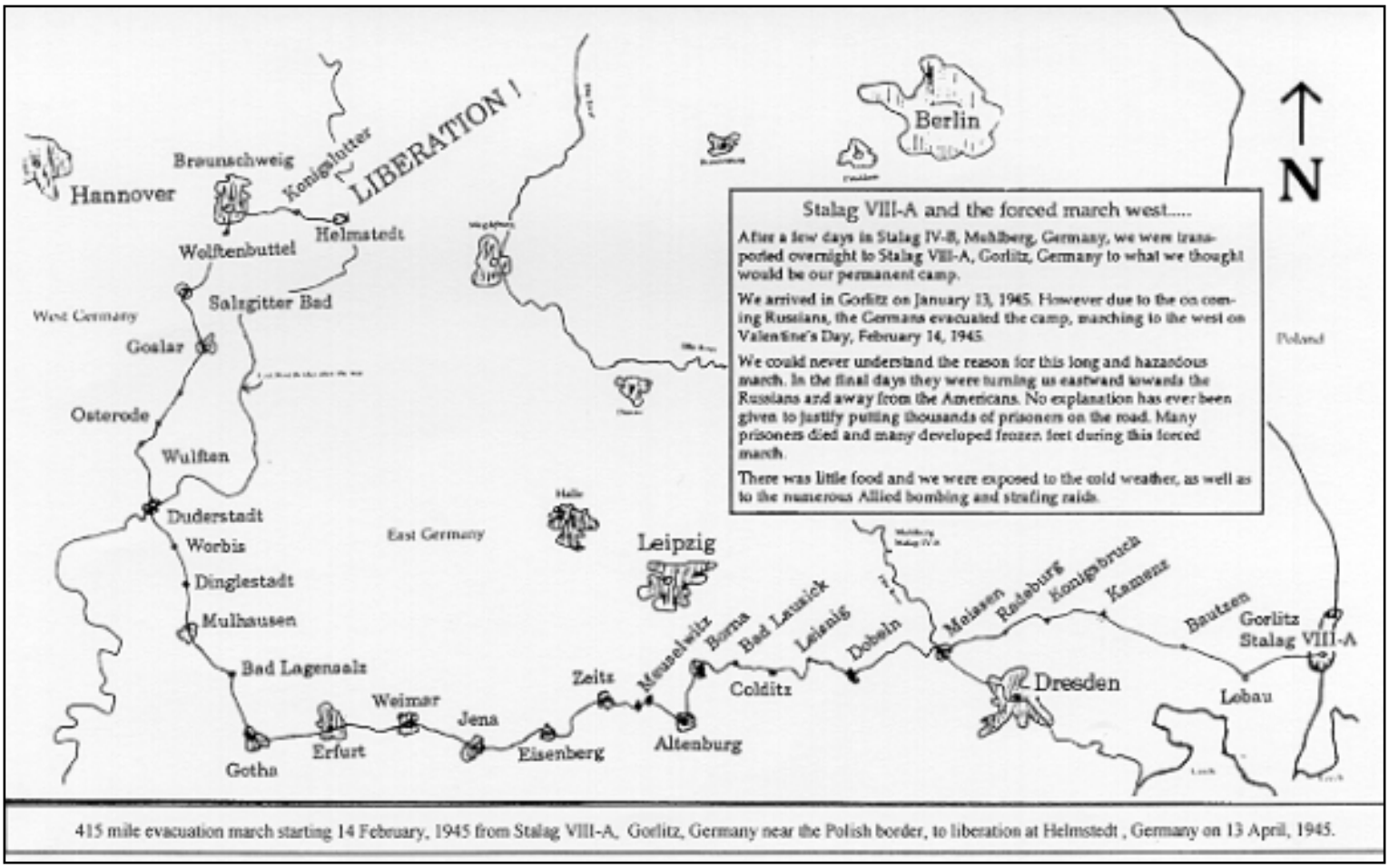
We have been told that American forces are on three sides of us. They are not fighting in Helmstedt, because it is classified as an Open City (because of the hospitals). I wonder why there is ammunition factory on the edge of town. We are waiting on our troops. The German doctor asked us to please tell our doctors that he would have taken better care of us if he would have had medicine. Sounds like he wants to be on our good side, when the Americans come.

04/13/45
Helmstedt, Germany
Liberation, 1000 -Friday the thirteenth:
An American Artillery Captain just walked into the infirmary with a large box of cigarettes and D-Ration bars (Chocolate, hard as a brick) and K-rations. Boy he looks good. He says, he is happy to see us. If he only knew, how happy we are to see him. I couldn't help it, I had to cry. The Captain said the Americans were moving about sixty miles a day and he cannot keep set up his guns or keep up with the Tank and Infantry units.

1700 - We were taken to a General Hospital in the city to wait for ambulances. I am so weak that I cannot walk without help. They took us to the second floor of the large hospital. Then gave us a shower and delousing. It is so nice not to be scratching every minute of the day. Those lice used to run races up and down my back. The German doctors looked us over as if to diagnose our problems. Most all of us are diarrhea cases. The beds are nice and clean. It looks like the road home now! I hope so. It has been a long terrible, humiliating four months.

George doesn't give up when it comes to scrounging for food. He came into the hospital with some gin and bread that was given to him by a tank driver. He seems to be a little stronger than me, and he doesn't have the severe cramps that I have. He is able to walk. I could not stand the gin. I think George only had a little sip of it. Our stomachs must be about the size of a golf ball. Later, in the evening some boys from a tank repair battalion brought us white bread, butter and eggs. That was the best meal we have had for a long time, even though the bread was stale. Who in the army likes scrambled eggs - we do!

This has been a great LIBERATION DAY!



04/16/45
The following received by my wife, from The War Department.
Dear Mrs. Kline

As promised you, I am writing again as regards your husband, Sergeant John P. Kline 35,730,410 who was reported as missing in action. It has been my fervent hope that favorable information would be forthcoming so that you might be relieved from the great anxiety which you have borne during these months. It is therefore with deep regret that I must state that no further report in his case has been forwarded to the War Department ...I wish to once again emphasize ... are making a continuous effort to establish the status ...

I will again communicate with you in three months.

Sincerely

J. A. Ulio

Major General

The Adjutant General

04/17/45
108th Field Evacuation Hospital. My case has been diagnosed as Severe Enteritis, which I understand to be diarrhea and malnutrition. I am in ward 2 bed 33. I am being fed three times a day with some kind of fruit between meals. I take a small paper cup full of pills three times a day, apparently to help stop the diarrhea. The GI in the bed to my right, a tank sergeant, has tonsillitis and cannot eat. I eat my tray of food and when the nurse isn't looking, he passes me his tray.

I took a good look in a mirror today. I hardly recognize myself. I am skin and bones, with bruises on my hips and the skin is taut over my face. My face also has blotches over it, like lack of pigment. I look about as bad as the political prisoners we saw a few days ago. The Doctor weighed me in at 125 pounds. I probably had already gained 5 pounds with the food and good water we had been getting. I lost 45 to 50 pounds. My fighting weight, no fat- all muscle, was 170 pounds. Funny, but my hair and beard hasn't grown. The Doc said the lack of growth was due to malnutrition. (Lack of proper food.) I also lost some of my hair because of the lack of proper vitamins. He said it would all grow back. (He was almost right).

04/21/45
The following from Army Service Forces - Office of the Commanding General, Washington - to my wife.

RE: Sergeant John Kline

United States Prisoner of War #315136

Stalag 4 B Germany -

Via New York, New York

Dear Mrs. Kline

The Provost Marshal has directed me to reply to your recent inquiry concerning the above-named-prisoner of war.

Based on information appearing in the prisoner of war communication, he is listed in the records of The American Prisoner of War Information Bureau as a prisoner of war of the German Government interned at the place indicated above.

You may communicate with him by following instructions in the enclosed mailing circular. One parcel label and two tobacco labels will be forwarded to you every sixty day period without application on you part. Label for the current period will be forwarded under separate cover with the least practical delay. Further information will be forwarded as soon as it is received.

Sincerely yours, Howard F. Bresee Colonel

CMP Director

American Prisoner of War Information Bureau

Provost Marshal General's Office

04/23/45
Feel so much better, good food all the time. It is wonderful to be back in good hands and eat American food. I hope to go to a General Hospital soon. We have good medical care. There is talk that we (the prisoners) will probably get to fly home. The nurses at the evacuation hospital have been so nice to us. They are just great. The Doctor said most prisoners are being flown from Germany to France or England then home. I was just talking to another POW that was in my group. He said we walked 650 Kilometers (415 miles) from Görlitz to Helmstedt. Add to that the 110 miles we walked from the front lines to Limburg, Stalag XII-A. I had walked nearly 525 miles while in captivity.

I honestly don't know how I made it. I know I could not have gone another week, maybe two weeks. I was so fortunate that the Americans were able to catch up with us when they did. Had they not liberated us then, I would have undoubtedly perished.

The guards said they were trying to get us back to our troops. If you look at the map in the appendix, you will see that the route of March from Görlitz to Gotha was slightly southwest. Then, we walked northwest to Duderstadt. Then, we wandered about in a northerly direction on our way to Braunschweig and then east to Helmstedt. If we had kept walking in a westerly direction, we would have been liberated much earlier. I think at first they wanted to get away from the Russians, for our sake and theirs. I think mostly theirs. It seemed that after we turned the corner towards the Northwest at Gotha they were confused. The war was going badly for them and system was falling apart.

It was right after Gotha that the "Gung Ho" Oberfeldwebel took over. It could be there were arguments amongst those that controlled our destiny as to what to do. Later, the town official at Königslutter was very emphatic about us not being turned back to our troops, who were less than twenty miles away. Maybe their plan was to get us to an open city, like Helmstedt, so we would not be in danger, or in the way of the defending troops. I have also heard that they were taking us to Berlin to prevent our troops from destroying the city.

I shall never know. It really doesn't matter - I am free.

There were a lot of prisoners who dropped out of the columns. I wonder how they were treated, and how many died just before liberation.

04/23/45
The following telegram was received by my wife:

C425 INTL. SANSORIGINE VIA RCA (71 9 62)

EFM MRS. BETTIE KLINE

1. ALL WELL AND SAFE. 2. LETTERS SENT. 3. BEST WISHES FOR A SPEEDY REUNION =

JOHN KLINE

(You were allowed to pick out numbered phrases. Only the numbers were transmitted overseas to home. Then the phrases added by Western Union when it was sent to your home. This was done to cut down the load on the transmission lines from Europe to the USA)

04/24/45
Still being treated. At the 108th Evacuation Hospital. I had eggs and Cream of Wheat for breakfast. Spinach (I always hated it) vegetables, meat stew, macaroni and pineapple for dinner. Beef broth between breakfast and dinner. I had Rice pudding a while ago and now am sweating out supper. The Red Cross brought cigarettes, a Milky Way bar and some cake today. They give us gum or candy every day. I also received a new Gillette Razor today. When my beard starts growing I can use it. I am still waiting for orders to go back to a General Hospital.

04/25/45
Still here in the evacuation hospital. The Doctor took my bed tag a while ago. That means I am getting out of here tonight or tomorrow.

1430: I was given a new uniform and am at the air strip in a tent waiting for a plane. I don't know where we are going. I was just told that the plane will come for us tomorrow. We slept in the tent alongside the air strip.

04/26/45
I am on my way to Paris, France. The airplane is a C-47 transport plane. We all had a big scare as we took off. Two P-51 pursuit planes just buzzed us. We thought it might be Germans. We are nervous and over-anxious. The fighting, back of us, is still on.

Same day: Just arrived in Paris, France. I passed through the Arc de Triumph on the way to 194th General Hospital. The plane ride was real rough and choppy. A few of us were sick. Our stomachs are still in bad shape. At the Paris hospital they told us to take off our old clothes (which had just been issued - brand new) and to put on Pajamas and bathrobes. They said we would get other new clothes as we leave. I can see the Eiffel tower from my room on the fourth floor. Paris looks like a real modern city. I am unable to get out on pass (I probably could not stand it, anyway), because I am to be shipped out on a boat or plane soon.

I just had a reminder of the effects of sleeping in barns. I was scratching my lower extremities when I discovered two white body lice hidden away, tucked in close, under my thighs. That has to be the last of them.

My legs are swelling. I thought I was gaining weight. I noticed it when I was sitting up and crossing my legs. One leg left an impression in the other. I can punch my thumb into my leg and it leaves a big depression. The doctor said my body was lacking a lot of

vitamins and was maintaining water. I am supposed to lie down and not walk around. The Doctor said it was caused from the lack of Vitamin B. Yesterday I enjoyed my first American movie, since liberation.

I went downstairs to get a hair cut. I must be doing better my hair is starting to grow. As the barber was cutting my hair, my name was called over the loud speaker announcing that I was due to ship out after noon. On the way out of the hospital I was carried down four flights of stairs by two German Prisoners. At the bottom I stepped off the stretcher, thanked the prisoners, and walked across the court yard to the ambulance. (A small reward for past suffering) ?

04/26/45
The following telegram received by my wife:

> **C119 42 GOVT=WUX WASHINGTON DC 26 343P**
>
> **MRS. BETTIE LOU L KLINE = [sic]**
>
> **THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR HUSBAND SGT KLINE JOHN P IS A PRISONER OF WAR OF GERMAN GOVERNMENT BASED ON INFORMATION RECEIVED THROUGH PROVOST MARSHALL GENERAL FURTHER INFORMATION RECEIVED WILL BE FURNISHED BY PROVOST MARSHAL GENERAL - J A ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.**

[Note- this notice that I was a prisoner of war was received 13 days after I was liberated.]

05/04/45
We are in the air, on the way home. The plane is a Douglas C-54 (4 engine) aircraft. The last day I was in Paris, I ate my 1100 lunch of chicken and trimmings and then sneaked downstairs and ate the same LUNCH with the walking patients. Just before we left the airfield, we had another chicken supper. We had three chicken meals in one day, plus a big breakfast.

The plane stopped at the Azores Island airport, was refueled while we ate. This trip has been great, knowing we are on the way home. We are now headed for Newfoundland. In Newfoundland we had to wait until an engine was changed before we resumed the flight.

05/05/45
Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York. We just arrived and have been checked by the officials and will be going to the hospital in a few minutes. We arrived at the hospital, very early in the morning, and were taken to the mess hall. There were 22 ex-prisoners on my plane. The cooks were preparing food for breakfast. There was a bushel basket of bananas setting on the kitchen counter. When we left the mess hall, there was not a banana left. We ex-POWs will pick up food to eat, wherever we see it. Even if our stomachs are full. That is how good food looks to us after starving for so long. We stayed at the Mitchell Field Hospital over night. Could hardly sleep.

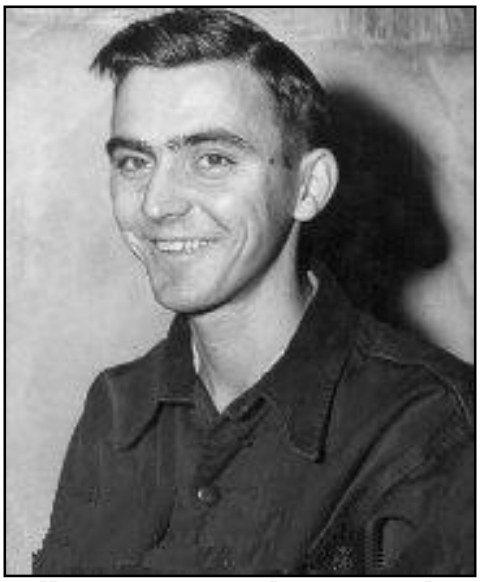
I had the opportunity to make a free call home. My mother answered the phone. Bettie,

my wife was visiting one of her friends a block away. Vivian, a friend of the family was visiting mother. Mother sent her to get my wife, while she talked with me. Later they told me that my wife, Bettie, was so excited that she ran all the way home dragging her coat, in one hand, along the ground. It was so nice to talk to her and mother. Unfortunately, I did not talk to Dad since he was working.

05/06/45
Flown to Indianapolis, Indiana, Stout Field (75 miles from my home), then taken to Billings General Hospital, Fort Benjamin Harrison.

I found in my mementos a service "boarding pass" for the flight:
21 Name Kline, John P.
306 Plane No. 9
Amb Hospital Billings
The 'AMB' means "ambulatory." I was the only person to get off at Indianapolis.

I checked in and was assigned to Ward 1120. I stayed there two weeks. The first day at Billings, I was awarded a Purple Heart for the wound I received on December 19, 1944. The nurse, a Captain in charge of the ward, was so nice. She gave the other nurses orders to bring me food, whenever I wanted it. I had a milk shake every evening after supper. I couldn't stop eating.



When I checked into Billings General Hospital I weighed 140 pounds.
I had gained over 20 pounds since I first arrived at the 108th Field Evacuation Hospital, April 17, 1945, in Germany.
Still have 30 pounds left to gain. My original weight was 170 fighting pounds.

05/09/45
The following telegram received by my wife:

ND148 41

GOVT=WASHINGTON DC 9 442P

MRS. BETTIE LOU L KLINE

=2143 3 AVE

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR HUSBAND SGT KLINE JOHN P RETURNED TO MILITARY CONTROL 17 APR 45 REPORT FURTHER STATES HE IS HOSPITALIZED IN EUROPEAN AREA NEW ADDRESS AND FURTHER INFORMATION FOLLOW DIRECT FROM HOSPITAL

J A ULIO, ADJUTANT GENERAL

[Note- 17 APR 45 was the day I was admitted to the Field Hospital, after Liberation. I was actually liberated on the 13th, but I suppose they count the first official American installation, which was the Evacuation Hospital.]

05/09/45 (same day as above)
My mother received the following letter from the Terre Haute, Indiana Chapter, American Red Cross.

Mrs. Paul Kline
Dear Mrs. Kline
We have just heard from our Eastern Area concerning the location of Stalag VIII-A. The most recent information, in regards to that particular Prisoner of War Camp, was, that the prisoners, in that camp, have been evacuated to Thuringer, which is a German State located in Central Germany. Mrs. Kline, we sincerely hope that by the time you receive this letter you will have heard from your son because of the total victory in Europe. Mrs. Mildred Schmidt, Home Service Director

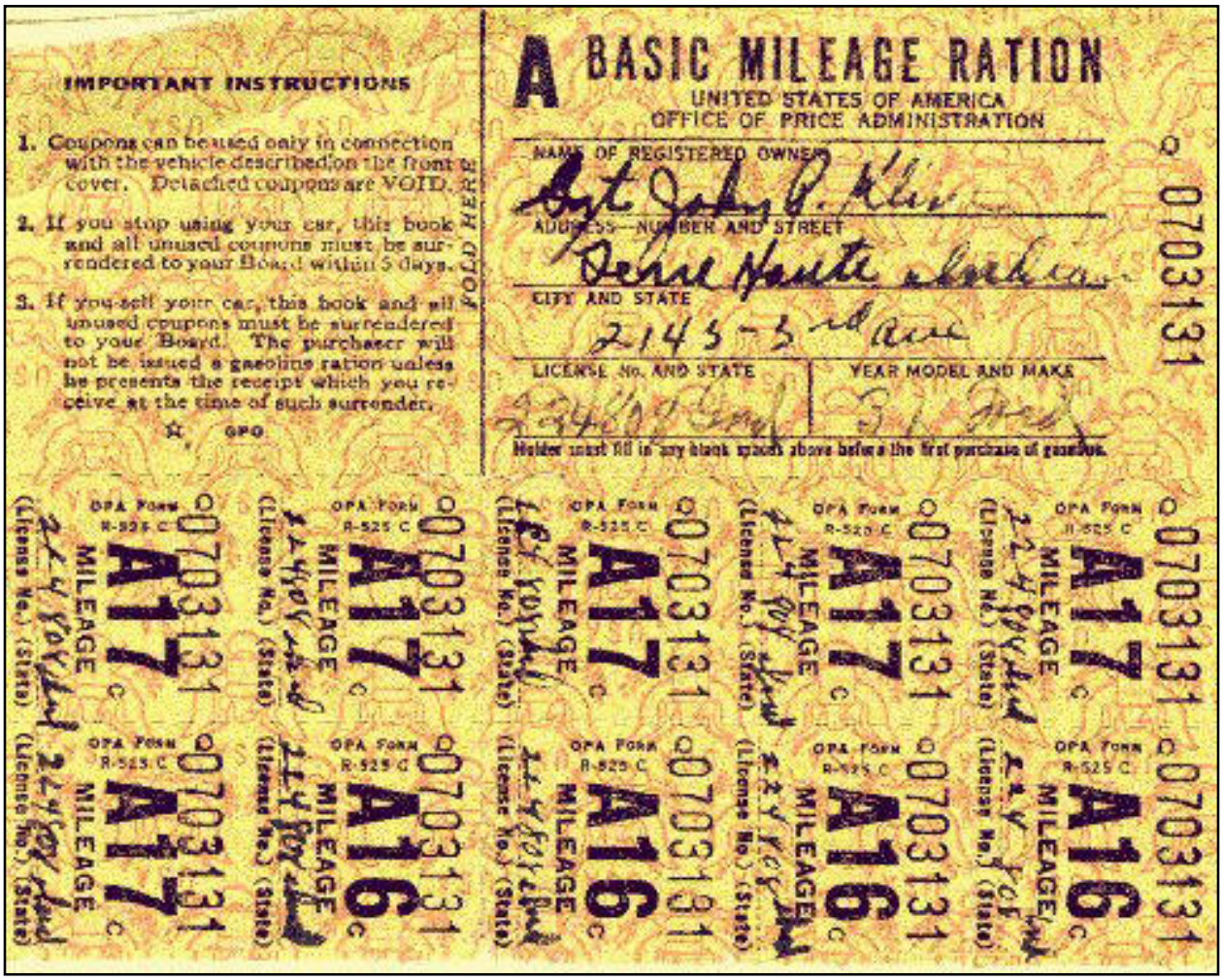
05/20/45
After two week's observation, I received one month's sick leave. My home was then in Terre Haute, Indiana - seventy five miles west of Indianapolis. My wife had been living with my parents since I went overseas.

I took a Greyhound bus home. My wife and parents knew that I would soon come home, but did not know when. We didn't use the telephone much in those days. Today I would have been on the phone every night. Another thing - neither my wife nor my parents came to Indianapolis to see me in the hospital. I suppose it was because I was not sure when I was going to be released to go home for my first sick leave.

My home was on the East side of town, about twelve blocks north of the highway that led into Terre Haute from Indianapolis, Indiana. I was so anxious to get home that I got off the bus twelve blocks south of my home. I ran and walked all the way. I kept telling myself, "I'm home, I'm home." When I went into service I had an English bull dog, her name was Bizzy. She was getting old, but still very alert. Mother said that on the day I came home, she knew something was happening, for Bizzy kept looking out the back screen door, acting like she wanted out. She normally never asked to go out. This happened about five minutes before I walked in. Did Bizzy know I was coming home? Do you think she really sensed me coming? We think so.

After a few days at home, I grew tired sitting around. My cousin had an old car. I don't remember what make, but I spent hours working on it. It was good therapy. The month went fast. It was so nice to be home again, enjoying our son, Ted, was now ten months old. He was a good baby, so full of life.

Rationing of food and gasoline was still going on at home. I was told at Billings General Hospital to report to the local ration board at Terre Haute, when I arrived home. I brought home, a large suitcase full of cigarettes and chocolate candy from the Billings General Hospital PX. Those were items that were still in short supply at home. A couple of days after arriving home, I went to the ration board and applied for ration coupons. The clerk at the Terre Haute Ration Board read my sick leave papers and said, "As a former POW, you get the top ration allotment of each category." I left the ration board office with books full of gasoline tickets, food tickets and meat coupons. My parents and my wife went a little silly with all the coupons for food, meat and sugar. I then realized how much, in the way of food and gasoline, they had been deprived of. When I returned to Billings Hospital 30 days later I weighed 170 pounds. I had gained 30 pounds. That is what good old Indiana cooking can do for you.



Gas Ration stamps given to me as I returned home.
The family loved me for an Ex-POW got the top bracket of every ration stamps category.

06/20/45
After checking in to Billings for one night, for a physical checkup, I was released on

another thirty day sick leave. After the second sick leave, I was released from Billings. As a RAMP (Repatriated American Military Personnel), I was eligible for three months leave. I went to work for my former employer, International Harvester, for those three months. It was good therapy.

11/20/45
Ft Oglethorpe, Georgia after my RAMP leave (3 months). I was eligible for reassignment. A couple of weeks after arriving at Ft. Oglethorpe I had accumulated enough duty points (Combat, Service Time and wounds) to be eligible for discharge from the service.

12/13/45
I was shipped to Camp Atterbury, Indiana (Where I had originally joined the 106th Division) and was Honorably discharged on December 13, 1945.

Postlude.....

While the glow of victory and the happiness of return are in our thoughts, we must remember there are many sad stories involving returning prisoners.

As I sat here in 1987, looking back over the various letters and mementos that I had stored away in the old "King Edward" cigar box, I came across a very touching letter from the parents of a British Soldier. He was one of the prisoners that were liberated at Helmstedt on 13 April 45. I wrote a letter to him, in the summer of 1946. Here is the answer:

Dear Friend,

I am taking the liberty to answer your letter to my son. But it is with deep regret that I have to inform you that he died in the Warwick Military Hospital November 3rd, 1945 from Tubercular Meningitis, which was contracted during his captivity and was due to the bad treatment received. I suspect you had suffered the same according to your letter but I hope you do not have any ill effects, as there are quite a lot of returned POWs here that are in bad condition. Besides, a lot have died in awful agony. It has been a great shock to his Mother and me. He was away from home for 4 years, going through the Palestine War also the great World War. We were anxious to see him again. He was buried with full Military Honors at Stratford on the Avon. Please remember us both to your wife and child.

Good Wishes.

Mr. & Mrs. H. A. Green

..... I do have much to be thankful for.

In tribute to: Sergeant Harold Greene, British Coldstream Guards.
He was liberated with my group at Helmstedt, Germany on Friday April 13, 1945.
He died from tuberculosis from the results of his incarceration. He was a prisoner for four years.
He was away from home for four years going through the Palestine War and World War II.

John Kline

My life after the War...

***W*ritten August 2, 1993**
Some of my life is explained in the first few pages of this diary in the remarks made about my reasons for writing this diary.

I have had, what I feel, is a reasonably good life. Like others I have had ups and downs, good jobs and jobs that did not seem so good.

As I set here writing this page my mind goes back over many episodes that have happened during time on this earth. (born 10 January 1925)

My war wife died after 34 years of marriage. We were young. The war influenced our decision to marry, like it did with many young couples of that era. We had a child before the division shipped over to Europe in October 1944. I have three sons, the oldest, Ted, was born on August 23, 1943, By the time he was two months old I was in England. By the time he was four months old I had been in battle, wounded, captured and was sitting in Dockweiler Dries, east of Gerolstein, Germany waiting of our German guards to move us eastward to our unknown destination. When he turned six months old I was with about 1,600 other Americans who had been evacuated from Stalag VIII-A, Görlitz, Germany, in the corner of the Polish-Czech border about 80 miles east of Dresden. His seventh month I was still on the road just out of the hellhole at Duderstadt, on my way to Braunschweig. I was weary, sick and didn't think I would make it, but the thoughts of never seeing my son and family again seem to keep me

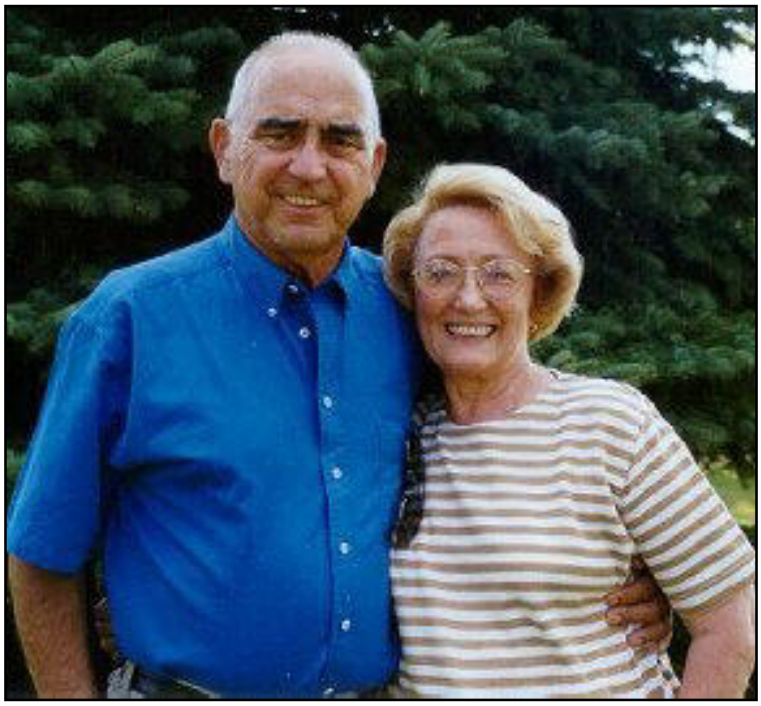
going. On his eight month I was in the American 108th Evacuation Hospital near Helmstedt, the town in which I was liberated.

A lot had gone in those short, but seemingly long months. The return to the States was exhilarating. Life soon returned to normal and like thousands of others, my wife and I turned our attention to raising a family and surviving the hardships of civilian life. Two more sons were born and life was unfolding.

I had worked part-time for the Terre Haute, Indiana branch of International Harvester Company. I returned to work for them, and eventually transferred to sales. I took over a territory as "Dairy Equipment Representative" traveling 44 counties in Indiana and Illinois.

Later I moved to the DeLaval Cream Separator Company as a territory representative in Illinois, worked in a milk plant in Elgin, Illinois, went with The Creamery Package Manufacturing Company, selling Milk Factory equipment. I soon realized that I was seeing very little of my three sons and wife. At that time we were living in Viroqua, Wisconsin (1958). I went to a local banker friend and asked if he knew of any person in town that needed a person like me. He directed me to an insurance agent, who had just lost his salesman. That started my career in Commercial Insurance servicing contractor clients, providing casualty insurance, and surety bonds.

I purchased the local agency form my employer, followed him later to Madison, Wisconsin, and purchased his agency again. I sold out to a conglomerate. I was offered a handsome purchase agreement contract. I managed their agency for ten years, helped them sell out. Worked for the firm we sold out to for three years, then moved to Apple Valley, Minnesota to work for one of my largest insurance clients as Safety and Insurance manger. I had since remarried after my war-wife died in 1977. As you have read in the "Prologue," my wife was a "war orphan" born in Frankfurt, Germany. We moved to the Minneapolis/St Paul, Minnesota Metro area in January 1986. I retired in 1993, was called back and work half-weeks, finally retiring (fully) in June 1998.



Margot and I, Summer 2000 at a neighborhood picnic.
I was born January 10, 1925 near Terre Haute, Indiana.
Margot was born January 10, 1928 in Frankfurt, Germany.
We were married November 27, 1978.

We have, in the ensuing years, grown accustomed to this territory and find it a place that we call home. Convenient libraries, store, malls and the largest shopping mall in the world - MEGA-MALL – located 12 minutes from our doorstep. My wife has found a dentist that doesn't scare her to death, I've found a tough but beautiful public golf course and we are beginning to see ourselves as permanent residents.

As I look back, one of the highlights of my life has been the discovery of the 106th Infantry Division Association. I never knew it existed until mid-1987. Since joining I have taken over as editor of The CUB magazine, the Association's quarterly publication. I have attended its reunions each year since. I have discovered or help locate 78 of my former "M" Company, 423rd Combat Infantry Regiment buddies, of which 44, at one time, belonged to the 106th Infantry Division Association. World War II veterans are as of this date (22 September 2000) dying at the rate of 1,000 per day. My "M" Company buddy count, those that belong to the Association is now 24. At one point in time it was 44.

My hobbies over the years have ranged from photography, ham radio (Extra Class license K9GN) to aviation. I hold, but am not presently current a Single Engine-Land Commercial License, with a Flight Instructors endorsement and an Instrument endorsement. It's probably true that I will never get involved again in private-flying. I have over 950 hours, most all of which was in a Cessna -182 retractable.

Probably the most satisfying hobby started when two of my sons introduced me to computers in 1978. I have lost track of how many different computers I have owned, but it was this hobby that enabled me to take on the editorship of The CUB, for the 106th Infantry Division Association.

It has, since 1987, been one of the most gratifying experiences, to correspond, write to and publish a military organization's quarterly publication. Many of my nagging doubts of the cause of the experiences related in this diary have been calmed through associating with my peers.

John P. Kline
Burnsville, Minnesota
Past-President (1997-98)
Editor of the Cub Magazine (since 1987)
106th Infantry Division Association
Email: jpk@mm.com
Http://www.mm.com/user/jpk

PHOTO GALLERY:

Photo from an article published in the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, 1994, describing my POW experiences.

This brought many requests from local clubs and groups where I presented my POW story.

1943 Glenn High Basket Ball Team - John Kline, me, #10 on the back right.
I played four years, as a guard, on the Varsity team.
Glenn High was a country school about 8 miles east of Terre Haute, Indiana.

My dog BIZZY.

This photo was taken just before I joined the 106th Infantry Division in March 1944. BIZZY was the one that met me at the back door of our home when I returned from

Billings General Hospital, after returning from overseas. . Nobody knew I was coming and she kept standing at the back door, as if she knew I was coming. My mother said she never acted that way before. That was the day I ran 12 blocks after getting off the bus. What a wonderful sight it was to see my home, my wife, my new son and my Mother and Father, and of course BIZZY, my dog.

Contact 106th Infantry Division Association

http://www.mm.com/user/jpk Email to John Kline

Revised: 25 September 2005

Page last revised 11/28/2006

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