

1LT Edward T. Berlinski 1914 to 1994

Early Years

Edward Thomas Berlinski was born to Polish immigrants Alex and Sophie Berlinski on August 27, 1914, in Bloomfield, New Jersey. He was the middle child of three. At the time his parents arrived in the United States, his father in 1897 and his mother in 1908, Poland was occupied by and considered a part of Russia. The family were Roman Catholics.

Eddie grew up in Bloomfield. He graduated from Bloomfield High School in June of 1934, where he was an outstanding athlete, lettering in football, baseball and basketball. He was also All-State high school quarterback in 1932 and 1933, and All-American high school quarterback in 1933. North Carolina State College in Raleigh, North Carolina, recruited him for his athletic ability. At the college he again played football, basketball and softball, and was awarded the title Most Outstanding Athlete in 1937. He graduated in 1938 with a degree in Education.

With college behind him, Eddie returned to Bloomfield, New Jersey. He played professional football from fall 1938 through fall 1941 with the Newark Tornados and Newark Bears, both minor league football teams. Professional football was not a full-time job in the late 1930s and early 1940s. These teams were members of the American Association, a minor league. The Newark Tornados were purchased by the owner of the National Football League Chicago Bears in 1939 and renamed the Newark Bears. In 1939 Eddie returned to Bloomfield High School as assistant football coach. In 1941 he married Dorothy M. Belanske.

World War II and Military Service

In late 1941, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Edward Berlinski was drafted into the United States Army, entering as a Second Lieutenant. His basic training was at nearby Fort Dix, New Jersey. The 1st Armored Division, known as Old Ironsides, arrived at Fort Dix in April 1942. 2LT Berlinski was assigned to the 13th Armored Regiment.

On December 7, 1941, the 1st Armored Division had just returned to Fort Knox, Kentucky. The division was completely reorganized after the Pearl Harbor attack. All tanks, light and medium, were placed in two armored regiments, the 1st and the 13th, Eddie's regiment. On April 11, 1942, the division was ordered to Fort Dix, New Jersey. On May 11, 1942, the entire division shipped to Northern Ireland for training. The plan at that time was to use the division in the attack on Europe. Instead, on October 29, 1942, the

1st Armored was sent to England for eventual transport to North Africa. A portion of the division was sent to participate in Operation Torch, landing at Oran. 2LT Berlinski was probably not in this group. The rest of the division was sent to the Tunisian Campaign, which was waged from November 1942 through May 1943. According to Rick Atkinson in An Army at Dawn, page 53 “*Old Ironsides, the only American tank division to see desert combat, was the only one to get no desert training.*”

Captain Berlinski was captured March 29, 1943, in Tunisia, North Africa. At the time he was a Tank Commander, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division. On that date the 1st Armored was fighting to open the road to Gabes, Tunisia, east of El Guettar. From then until June 1943 CPT Berlinski was shuttled from prison camp to prison camp, out of Africa and into Europe, by boat, train, and on foot. On June 6, 1943, he entered Oflag 64 in Szubin, German occupied Poland, a member of the first group of United States Army prisoners of war to occupy the camp. He had also returned to his ancestor’s homeland.

Oflag 64 and Escape

In November 1943 the first issue of The Oflag 64 Item was published. Eddie Berlinski was frequently mentioned, especially on the sports page. He was active in organizing and leading the sports programs in the Oflag. The first issue included him in an article on all the notable college athletes in



The Phillips 66 Basketball Team, Eddie Berlinski in front

residence. He captained the “Reds” touch football team in Fall 1943, the champion Phillips 66 basketball team of 1943-1944 (photo below), and the New York Yanks softball team in Spring 1944. All-Star games were organized to celebrate July 4, 1944, and Eddie captained the Old

Gold softball team and refereed the basketball game. In September 1944 he offered a class for future football coaches and also captained the “Benedicts” team for the Benedicts versus the Bachelors softball game. September 1944

was also when Herb Garris, a fellow North Carolina State alumnus, arrived in Oflag 64. The two became good friends.

David Little, grandson of Thomas Wingate, provided the following Eddie Berlinski story.

To break the boredom, he (Thomas Wingate) and LT Edward Berlinski (former North Carolina State University athlete), decided to play a prank one morning. Instead of boiling hot water in a tub as assigned, they decided to just yell "hot water" and see the reaction of barracks mates rushing to find an empty tub. This would have been fine except the LTC in charge of the barracks was first in line and embarrassed to find no hot water. The punishment for the two pranksters was to heat hot water each morning for 30 days. This was a serious challenge to find enough wood each morning to heat the water. (Story based on LT Wingate interview in 1998)



Eddie Berlinski on the right.

CPT Berlinski was also an MIS-X Red Cross Parcel receiver. The MIS-X parcel program was organized by the United States War Department. The parcels contained items that the War Department hoped would help prisoners escape. The parcels had to be smuggled into the camp hidden among the bona fide Red Cross parcels.

On January 21, 1945, CPT Berlinski formed up with the rest of his fellow Kriegies to begin the long march back into Germany. Berlinski and his friend Garris, together with dozens of other Kriegies, opted that first night to escape and head eastward. Meltesen reported Garris' escape in detail (Roads to Liberation, pp 216-218). If Berlinski stuck with Garris all the way, this is a summary of their escape through Odessa.

The night of January 21, 1945, the Kriegies took shelter in the barns of Baron von Rosen in Siernicki. Eddie burrowed into the hay and stayed there until the column left the following morning. His group then went to the home of Baron von Rosen, where they joined as many as 85 other officers who had either hidden or simply walked away during the night. His group hung around the area until January 31, when they caught a train in Kcynia for Wrzesnia. Next stop was Kutno, where they stayed in a barracks. At this time, there were no organized means of dealing with POWs and Eddie and his companions were on their own to find food, shelter, and transportation, competing with other refugees for what was available.

The group hitched a ride on a Russian truck to Warsaw. Rembertow, to the east of Warsaw, was developing into a collection point for refugees. The truck broke down, and after a night in a farmhouse, the group arrived in Warsaw. They checked out the Rembertow facilities and decided to move on. The group hitchhiked onward and four nights later arrived in Brest, Belarus. Next, they wound up on a train that delivered them to Minsk, Belarus, then made it to Kyiv, Ukraine, and finally Odessa, Ukraine. On March 7, 1945, Herb Garris was on the first troop ship to evacuate Allied Prisoners of War, the Moreton Bay. Perhaps Eddie was still with him. Odessa evacuees were shipped to Port Said for initial processing and evaluation, then shipped to Naples, Italy, and then shipped back to the United States.

Life After World War II

Eddie Berlinski was discharged from the United States Army in 1946 with the rank of Major. He returned home to Bloomfield, New Jersey, and to Dorothy. They raised a daughter and a son in Bloomfield. He resumed his job as first assistant coach at Bloomfield High School. In 1947 he became the head football and baseball coach at Belleville High School in nearby Belleville, New Jersey. From 1963 until his retirement in 1980, he taught physical education at Belleville High. He was named Bloomfield New Jersey Father of the Year in 1962. In 1978 he was inducted into the Bloomfield Hall of Fame and in 1989 into the Belleville Hall of Fame for coaching. That same year he also received the Distinguished Coaches Award and was inducted into the Hall of Fame, Essex County Chapter of the National Football Foundation. He was a member of the New Jersey Education Association, American Legion Post 0448 of Bloomfield, New Jersey, and the Retired Officers Association.

Edward Berlinski died on March 17, 1994 and was buried at the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Wrightstown, New Jersey.

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