

# **CPT James Paul Forsyth**

## **1916 – 2012**

### **EARLY YEARS**

James Forsyth was born in Leavenworth, Kansas, the son of James West and Lily Forsyth. Raised in the town, he completed his schooling and entered West Point Academy in the Class of 1941—the last class to graduate before the U.S. entered WWII.

### **MILITARY SERVICE AND CAPTURE**

Class members are remembered for their ability to take positions of command immediately as Second Lieutenants. Forsyth's leadership skills were already framed by his father, Master Sergeant James West Forsyth, who fought in the Spanish American War and as a Master Sergeant in World War I.

Following extensive combat training, Captain James Forsyth took part in the D-D Invasion as part of the 320<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. As his unit's commitments expanded into France, he was captured in Mortain, France, by the SS while on reconnaissance to find a suitable for headquarters. The date was 12 August 1944. An article published in The Hartford Courant (according to Anne Kaxel-Wilcox, who with her husband, PJ Wilcox is writing a book about the class) states the following event:

*'He had been thinking about his sister's birthday...and was not supposed to encounter battle that day. That's the thing that many of these men discovered...the front turned out to be everywhere.'*  
(Walsh, p. M14)

Noted for his quiet dignity and strength of character, Forsyth endured the trials of being captured by the Germans and the near-death experience of surviving three bullet wounds to his helmet. Capture for most meant interment and for Captain Forsyth, this meant joining the vast numbers of Americans and Allied soldiers who became POWs—his final destination, Oflag 64 in Szubin, Poland on 15 September 1944.

### **ARRIVAL AT OFLAG 64, THE LONG MARCH AND LUCKENWALDE**

Established 15 months previously as a new camp for American Ground Offices, Captain Forsyth with other POWs arrived at the its front gate on 12 September 1944. They were processed in, given a simple meal (and/or a Red Cross parcel) and assigned to a barracks cubicle. Camp life included a daily routine: Awakened at 7:40, Appell (roll call) at 8:00, Breakfast at 8:15, Lunch

at 12:30, Appell at 4:00, Supper at 6:00 and Lights Out at 10:30. Meals were often meager and sometimes included only hot water for tea or a portion German bread and thin soup. Red Cross parcels sometimes filled the nutrition and taste gaps, but they were not reliable food sources. American soldiers were given rations or meals of 3500 – 4000 calories per day, so the 500 – 700 rations relegated by the Germans left many men with nutrition gaps and weight losses.

Fortunately, camp activities were offered to improve their minds and stamina. Forsyth realized the importance of this and exercised daily. He wanted to ensure that his physicality and endurance would enable him to evade his captors if the chance presented itself. Other opportunities were available as well: sports, theatre presentations, games, and college level courses taught by very knowledgeable men like himself. Another aspect offered realistic support to the men: BBC reports. These were made available to the men through secreted radios spread throughout the camp. Runners would visit each barracks to spread news about the war and the world outside.

Liberation and escapes were constant subjects among the POWs, so the announcement made during Appell to return to their barracks and pack their belongings was news, but not one they had hoped for. They would be leaving the next day, 21 January 1945, in marching formation toward Germany; no transportation would be provided. Staying mostly in barns and given little food along this treacherous 400 mile march, this group of 1300 men endured incredible weather, and constant encounters with fleeting refugees and engagements between German and Russian troops. Captain Forsyth was finally freed at Luckenwalde.

## **CONTINUED MILITARY SERVICE**

After returning home and being welcomed by family, his next permanent assignment was Korea. His 27 year career in the U.S Army included his promotions to Lieutenant Colonel and an assignment as Acting Attorney General of the US Army in 1968. LTC Forsyth's commendations include a POW Medal, a Legion of Merit, and two Purple Hearts.

## **RETIREMENT**

*'After retiring from the Army he lived in Virginia and moved to Windsor where he became a member of the former Wilson Congregational Church and had been a Manchester resident since 1989. He was employed at Aetna Insurance for over twenty years and was a member of the Manchester and Windsor golf leagues, playing two rounds a week up to the age of 92. Jim enjoyed*

*playing his piano, stamp collecting, and loved and cherished his family and friends.’ (Caldwell, p. 25)*

A graveside service with military honors was held at the Windsor Veterans Cemetery. Survivors included his daughter, Pamela, son, James Paul Forsyth, and other family members.

## **SOURCES**

Walsh, Michael. “WWII Vet Had ‘Quiet Dignity.’” THE HARTFORD COURANT Thursday, 20 Dec. 2012.

The “Post Oflag 64” ITEM. Ed. Elodie Caldwell. 4<sup>TH</sup> Quarter 2012. “TAPS”.

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