

# IKE FRANKLIN, PRISONER OF WAR

By his daughter, Sharon Franklin Hutchison  
for the Lucretia Council Cochran Chapter, DAR



Ike Franklin was an enlisted man in an officers' prison camp. It is not altogether clear how or why he got there, but it has been speculated that his services as a medic were useful to the Germans. For whatever reason, Oflag 64 in Szubin, Poland was my father's residence for over a year and a half during World War II.

I was 16 months old when he shipped out with the Texas 36th Division of the U.S. Army, formerly the Texas National Guard. After a short time in North Africa, on September 9, 1943 the 36th was involved in a beach landing at Paestum, Italy, on the Gulf of Salerno. (The 36th was the first American combat division to land on the continent of Europe.)

This campaign is described in the book **Salerno, A Military Fiasco** by the British author Eric Morris. It

certainly proved to be a fiasco for my dad, because that is where he was captured. After five almost sleepless days and nights of picking up bodies of the dead and wounded, and having narrowly escaped death twice, his luck ran out around midnight on September 14. A detailed description of his capture is recorded in the book by Eric Morris, who came to the States around 1980 to interview several ex P.O.W.s including my dad. Within hours of being captured, German officials tried to convince him to renounce his citizenship and join forces with the Third Reich. The Gestapo already knew that he had a wife and two small children in Fort Worth, Texas and even told him our street address. "Your grandmother is German," they said, "and you are fighting your own people." When he refused to be intimidated, saying he was proud his ancestors had the good sense to leave Germany and go to America, they broke his nose and kicked his teeth out. He was soon on his way to Oflag 64.



For the next eight months, my mother and my grandparents had no information as to his whereabouts – thus the designation MIA – Missing in Action. I can only speculate as to the effect this had on me, because I was too young to be aware of such things as war. I only recall feeling secure and loved, although the adults in the household must have been nearly frantic with worry. I was fortunate to live in a loving home with my dad's parents and his maternal grandmother during this time, along with my mother and brother. I learned later that both my mother and grandmother worked as seamstresses to assist in the war effort and also to help support the family, but I have no recollection of their being away. They must have taken turns caring for me. (I was nearly four when Daddy came home from the war.)

Eventually, word came through the American Red Cross that my dad had been located at Oflag 64. The term Stalag is more familiar than Oflag, due to publicity in books and movies such as "The Great Escape." Tunneling efforts were carried out in most prison camps, including Oflag 64. A good source of information about the day-to-day life in prison camps can be found in the book **The Welcome Swede**, which describes the work of the War Prisoners Aid, International YMCA and Red Cross in obtaining needed supplies and items that made life less miserable. It was long after the war, in fact long after my father passed away, that I learned of the sporting events, arts and craft classes, libraries, orchestra, glee club, newspaper, theatrical productions, and religious services in Oflag 64. This information cast an altogether different light on how I envisioned prison life. These were aspects of P.O.W. camps that might appear

to be "fun and games," but in reality they served two purposes: maintaining the prisoners' sanity, and creating a distraction while tunneling efforts were going on.

Communications between prisoners and their families were few and far between. Postcards, but not letters, could be sent from the camp, scrutinized carefully by German guards before they received the official Oflag 64 stamp of approval. One well-known fellow prisoner was Amon Carter, Jr., whose father, the publisher of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, invited my granddad to visit him at his office anytime he wanted to "talk about their boys" or to just sit quietly and reflect.

My father probably suffered from what today we would call PTSD, but while I was growing up it just seemed that he occasionally withdrew into his own private world of sadness. Three events were significant in changing that in his latter years. The first occurred after I had graduated from college. I was visiting my parents who were living in Corpus Christi at the time, and a friend happened to be vacationing there at the same time, so my parents invited him over for dinner. I had told him that my dad had been a P.O.W., but it didn't occur to me to mention that the subject was "verboten." Innocently, my friend said, "Well, Mr. Franklin, I'm thinking about going to school in Germany, and I understand you spent some time there, so I was wondering if you could tell me about your experiences." After I crawled out from under the table, I was delighted to see my dad light up and start telling stories I had never heard. He told of being crammed into a boxcar for eight days with other prisoners. He also told the story

of “The Long, Cold March” when he spotted a pair of boots in the ditch, and at the risk of being shot, he stepped out of line to pick them up. His own were worn out, and he was willing to take the risk. The evening turned out to be quite pleasant and a much-needed catharsis for the suppressed memories held for so many years.

The second turning point was the television series “Hogan’s Heroes.” When it first came out, I was dreading my dad stumbling onto it. I figured it would upset him to see a comedy making light of such a dark subject, but he actually loved the show and looked forward to seeing it every week. He laughed out loud for the first time in a long, long while. Enough distance had passed that it was a good experience for him and played a big part in his healing process.

The third turning point occurred after my mother passed away and my dad remarried. His new wife required a lot of social activity and encouraged him to get more involved with the American Ex-Prisoners of War. Within a year or two of the war’s end, Daddy had gone to a few reunions of his old Army buddies in the 36th Division, and he had maintained several close friendships, but he seemed to experience a new birth with Sybil by his side. She enjoyed spending time with her new friends in the Ex-P.O.W. auxiliary, and Daddy became very involved in various roles as Commander, Chaplain, and newsletter editor. I helped him with the newsletter, and noticed how enthusiastic and full of life he had become. But nothing compared to what I saw when he served as national chairman of the ex-P.O.W. convention held in Fort Worth in 1981. It was hard for him to contain himself when a new

idea would hit his brilliant mind and he had to rush off to make it happen.

Daddy’s latter years were a mixture of organizational work, illness, travel to reunions, and then adjusting to the loss of his second wife to the same disease that had taken my mother. He was able to enjoy 18 years of retirement from his work as a systems analyst for the Army Corps of Engineers. I knew that he was a genius, but I didn’t realize until after his death that he was more important than I thought he was! In preparing his obituary for the newspaper, I found the book that recorded his burial plans and wishes, and saw that he had been Chief of the Systems Branch of the Corps in Fort Worth. Thinking it was a typo, I did him a disservice and wrote that he had been “a chief”, not THE Chief. Later I found his retirement papers and regretted that I had not known more about his work. Even in his retirement, he stayed connected to computers, and owned some of the first personal computers on the market. In fact, I am indebted to him for giving me my first computer and insisting that I learn to use it. This was long before the internet, and I believed that the computer age had passed me by. Daddy enjoyed dialing up to an online information service and playing dominoes with unseen friends half a country away. He would be totally blown away by today’s internet, smart phones, and all the other technology that has developed since his death in 1990.

A couple of years before his death, I asked my dad to write the story of his military experiences, and he did – on his Commodore 128 – and printed it on a dot matrix printer. His typical dry sense of humor came through

loud and clear. In describing his ocean voyage overseas, he said he was seasick only once -- from the time they boarded ship till they arrived 13 days later. He also said "I was not a private as long as some fellows, but I was a private more often than most of them." It was a streak of insubordination that took him up and down the ranks several times, and I honestly don't know whether I should think of him as a sergeant or a private. But his memoirs disappointed me in one way -- there was a large gap between September 14, 1943, and April 22, 1945. He described in full detail his Army career before his capture and after being liberated from prison camp by the Russians, but for the time in between, he said "that's a story to be told another day."

One of the ways my dad dealt with his P.O.W memories was by honoring his Army buddies and raising money for monuments in Paestum, Italy; Fort Worth; and Brownwood, Texas. The one in Brownwood was dedicated just a few days after his death in 1990. He was also instrumental in



petitioning Congress to issue a P.O.W. Medal that was finally approved (retroactive to 1917) in 1985. In so doing, the thousands of brave men who survived the camps were finally recognized for their service. There remains much

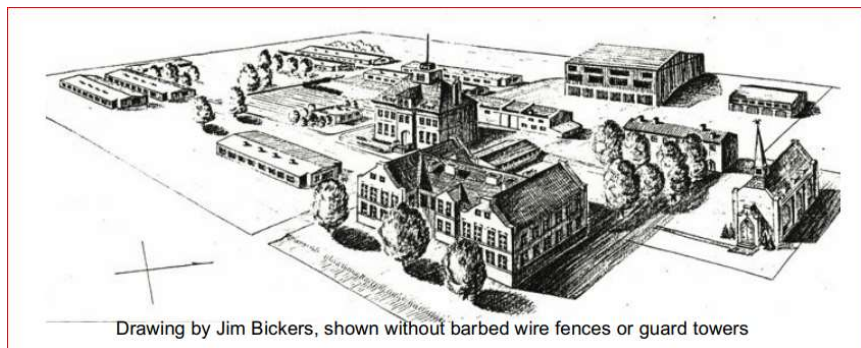
unknown about the atrocities of life in a P.O.W. camp, but there was a bond between comrades that would last for the rest of their lives. When my dad was dying in the Veterans Hospital in Dallas, he was visited by his friend Col. Roy Chappell, a fellow Oflag 64 resident who had

been involved in a couple of escape attempts. (Daddy was unconscious and within hours of passing.) Describing the visit, Roy said he just stood at the bedside and wept.

Sgt. Ike Franklin, aka PFC Ike Franklin, was a survivor. Some people, including his doctor, called him "a tough old bird." The inhumane conditions of P.O.W. camp caused health problems for the rest of his life. He was a very tall man, 6'5", but returned from the war weighing 110 pounds. As a medic, he had cared for many other prisoners who suffered from malaria, dysentery, near starvation and other debilitating conditions. The last six weeks of his life were spent in the VA Hospital, a place he had successfully avoided since the war. He described it to me and my brother as a place where old soldiers go to die. He finally checked in for "the last roundup" (his words) because he had run out of options. He just needed to be cared for. A few days after his death, I ran into his internist who had not heard the news. The doctor asked how he was doing, and when I told him my dad had passed away, he looked genuinely surprised. "I guess I really didn't think he would ever die. He was such a survivor."

It has now been seventy five years since Oflag 64, and a permanent museum is in the process of being put together in Szubin, Poland, in the one remaining building that once housed American officers as "guests of the Germans." Much can be learned about Oflag 64 by visiting the website [oflag64.us](http://oflag64.us), maintained by family members of some of the ex-P.O.W.s. Perhaps the experience can best be summed up in the words of Col. Thomas Drake, himself a prisoner and the Senior American Officer of Oflag 64:

*“Let no man believe that there is a stigma attached to having been honorably taken captive in battle. Only the fighting man ever gets close enough to the enemy for that to happen. That he is not listed among the slain is due to the infinite care of providence. Be proud that you carried yourselves as men in battle and adversity. You will be enriched thereby.”*



*Drawing of Oflag 64 campgrounds. A Polish boys' school had been converted to barracks to house over 1400 American officers and a few enlisted men.*



THE VICE PRESIDENT  
WASHINGTON

June 6, 1981

Mr. Ike Franklin  
2005 Grand View Drive  
Fort Worth, TX 76112

Dear Mr. Franklin:

Greetings on the occasion of the 34th National Convention of Ex-Prisoners-of-War, Inc.

Certainly there are never words adequate enough to express the appreciation that all Americans owe you. Your display of courage -- your endurance of suffering and pain -- your willingness to sacrifice for your country -- all are indicative of the price you paid to preserve our freedom.

Your presence here today is a testament to your fortitude and inner strength -- and I join with all Americans in saluting you.

Barbara joins with me in extending our very best wishes for a most happy reunion. Our thoughts are with you.

Sincerely,

George Bush



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## Ex-POWs oppose military action

By MARTY WIEDER  
Daily News Staff Writer

Frank McDaniel told a small crowd outside Arlington city hall Tuesday the American Ex-Prisoners of War are a close knit group.

"But we hope we don't grow," McDaniel said.

Shortly after the 1 p.m. flag raising ceremony honoring POW's and those missing in action, the commander of the American Ex-POW's Fort Worth Chapter learned of the United State's plan to send 1,000 Marines to Lebanon.

"We haven't got any business over there," McDaniel said. "What do we think we can do? I surely don't agree with it."

McDaniel and several Arlington members of the Ex-POW's attended the ceremony to proclaim July 5 through 9 "POW/MIA Week" in Arlington.

Councilman Leo Berman, former mayor Tom Vandergriff and Ken Baldwin, substituting for Rep. Martin Frost, spoke to the gathering. Mayor S.J. Stovall presented the proclamation to McDaniel.

McDaniel, who was held prisoner three-and-one-half years in the Philippines during World War II, said he feared U.S. intervention in Beirut would cause the war to grow.

"We were in World War II, Korea and Vietnam," he said. "Didn't

we learn something?"

Chaplain Ike Franklin, who gave the invocation following Berman's introduction, disagreed.

"If we need to be there to preserve peace, well then fine," Franklin said.

Berman, a retired Army colonel who spent two years in Vietnam, said Arlington has many reasons to honor the more than 1,000 men still thought to be missing or held prisoner.

"We sit in an area between two military installations — Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth and the Naval Air Station in Dallas," said Berman. "And we literally have thousands of ex-military people in the metropolis."

Berman was credited with first requesting the special week.

After the presentation of the proclamation, the 1 Troop, 3rd Squadron 163rd Cavalry Regiment of the Texas Army National Guard presented the colors. Lt. Col. John Yuill, a former Vietnam POW who was shot down in a B-52, raised the black flag bearing the words "They shall not be forgotten."

Following the Pledge of Allegiance a trio of horns played the national anthem.

President Ronald Reagan has designated July 9 as National POW/MIA Day.

The city of Arlington plans to raise the POW/MIA flag each year to remember the war veterans, Berman said.



Daily News Photo by ED CUTWELL

**CALL TO THE COLORS** — Ike Franklin, Chaplain of the American Ex-POW's Fort Worth Chapter, salutes as the color guard raises the POW/MIA flag. Mayor S.J. Stovall declared July 5-9

"POW/MIA Week" during the proclamation ceremony Tuesday.

*This hand-carved wooden box was made by a fellow P.O.W. at Oflag 64 and given to Ike Franklin. The design is made of thinly sliced match sticks. It was probably made in an "Arts and Crafts" activity, closely supervised by German guards.*



# CAPTURED

In Ike Franklin's own words  
(excerpted from his military memoirs)

## THE INFERNO OF SALERNO

In early September, I think it was the fifth or sixth, we sailed toward our baptism of fire. The Salerno landing was a surprise operation (to everyone but the Jerrys). They had dug their self-propelled 88-MM guns into the side of Mont Soprano and were zeroed in on the beaches. We landed near the town of Paestum, where there was an ancient Greek temple of the goddess Diana. Boy, did they paste us! Casualties were high on both sides, and it was about a week before the beachhead was firmly established. By that time, I had been told 'for you, the war is over.'

At the town of Altavilla where Commando Kelley won his Congressional Medal of Honor (the first issued to an American on European soil in WWII), I was captured by the Germans. I was serving as liaison agent for my collecting company (C, 111th Medical Battalion) with the Third Battalion aid station of the 143rd RCT (Regimental Combat Team) and when the litter section of the aid station was cut off, I took a couple of litter squads from our ambulances and furnished litter bearers from the front lines to the aid station. When the Third Battalion infantrymen withdrew, we medics stayed behind to care for the wounded. About midnight a German patrol overran and captured us. For the next twenty months I was held Prisoner of War but that is another story, and I will not trouble you with it now...





**PHOTOS SHOW DIFFERENCE**—Pfc. I. Earl Franklin of Fort Worth, left, as he appeared shortly before going overseas with the 36th Division, and at right, as he was photographed in a Nazi prisoner of war camp.

## Prison Camp Thanksgiving Of Starving Men Is Recalled

On Thanksgiving of 1944, Pfc. I. Earl Franklin and his buddies in a German prison camp were so near starvation they roasted a cat and called it rabbit; they ate stale bread and called it plum pudding.

On Thanksgiving Day 1945, Franklin, son of Mr. and Mrs. E. Franklin and husband of Mrs. Mamie Ruth Franklin, 2402 NW 27th, ate real turkey at William Beaumont General Hospital, El Paso, where he is recovering.

Of that prison camp Thanksgiving, Franklin said that he and his buddies, though faint from hunger, carried out their observance as best they could.

"Out of starvation and suffering, freedom took on a new light," he said. "We were thankful for the feeble spark of life left us. The experience will forever make us thankful for simple things we used to take for granted—the right to eat, to work and to sleep."

Franklin served with the 111th Medical Detachment of the 36th Division, and was captured in Italy in September 1943. For 20 months

he was imprisoned in various German camps. Shortly after his capture, Nazi officers suggested to Franklin that he join the "Free American" group, composed of Americans of German descent, to assist the enemy on the Eastern Front.

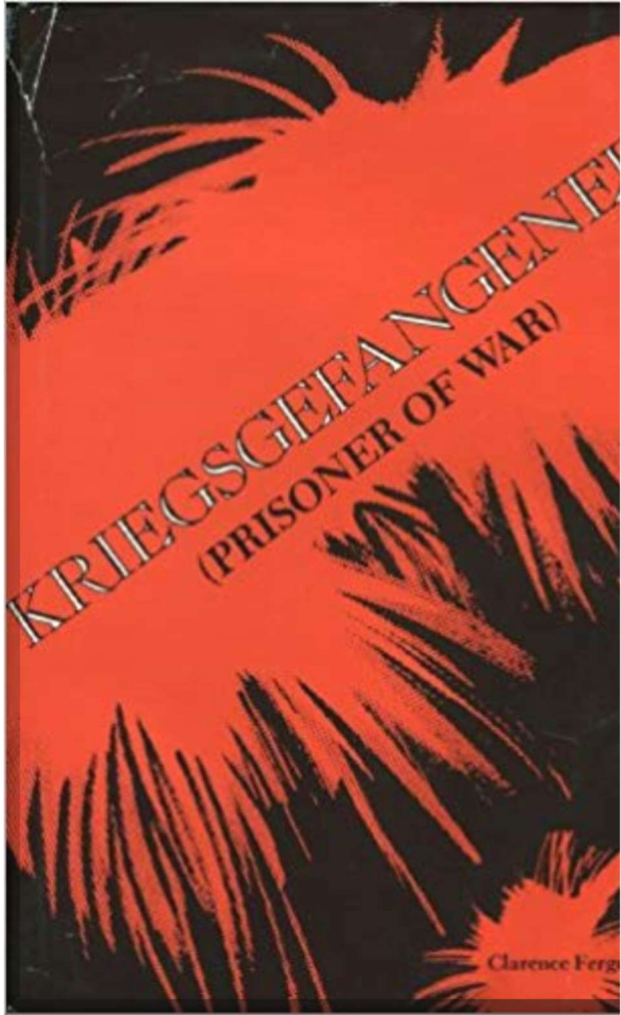
"They told me they knew my maternal grandmother was German-born, and they accused me of fighting her people and said I was ashamed of my heritage," Franklin said.

"I refused to join the group. I told them I was not ashamed of my heritage, but proud that my ancestors had had sense enough to go to America."

That remark cost Franklin. The angry Gestapo beat him, knocked out his teeth and crushed his nose. He was treated in a German hospital where the diagnosis on his chart was "bronchitis."

"This Thanksgiving I am just thankful to be alive," he said, "and grateful that my two children, Morton Lee and Sharon Ruth, and my wife and parents, live in a country where there is liberty to believe and speak freely."





11-5-86

To Ike E Franklin an old  
Kriegsgefangener who did outstanding  
work in Ceylon 64. This book is  
given in appreciation and admiration  
and who helped me during some  
trying times with my battle with  
Malaria.

Ike, I join all America in  
appreciation for the tremendous service  
you gave our great Country.

Sincerely  
Clarence Ferguson