

Walter Samuel Parks, Jr., M.D.

1919 – 2012

EARLY YEARS AND EDUCATION

Walter S. Parks, Jr. was born in Galveston, Texas, on 25 November 1919 to Walter S. Parks, Sr. and Mamie Kate Walker Parks. Walter Parks, Sr. was a medical student at the time of his son's birth.

After completing high school, Walter Parks, Jr. attended The University of Texas at Austin, graduated with a B.A. in Chemistry and belonged to honorary societies Phi Beta Kappa, Alpha Epsilon Delta, and Alpha Omega Alpha and a social fraternity Phi Rho Sigma. His extra-curricular activity included marching with the University of Texas Longhorn Band.

Following in his father's medical profession footsteps, Walter attended the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas, graduating in December 1942 at the age of 22. He interned at Philadelphia Graduate Hospital where he met Jeanie Wilson Tennant, a teacher of surgical nursing. They were married in 1943 in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

MILITARY SERVICE

Walter Samuel Parks, Jr, entered military service in 1943 and became a medical officer in the 1st Battalion of General Terry Allen's 104th Timberwolf's Infantry Division, which was activated 15 September 1942. After organization and training were completed, Lt. Parks, joined other soldiers and support personnel who boarded a troop transport leaving an East Coast port on 25 August 1944. Destination: France.

1Lt. Parks' war experiences were recorded in his writings; some are typed, others hand-written, with additional footnoted passages noted in a book about the history of the 104th Infantry Division. In concert with this profusion of information, Parks included two professionally produced maps. One displayed a Hagstrom's Map of Europe, the Mediterranean, and North Africa, on which he marked his travels by use of symbols displayed below.

- - - - - for ships
- _____ for coach or American boxcars
- for German boxcars
- o o o o o for Russian boxcars
- x x x x x for foot marches

Hand written references on the side of this map served as date and location guides:

Left USA – 25 Aug. 44

- 1 Belgium – Entered combat 25 October 44
- 2 Holland – Captured 5 Nov. 44
- 3 Holland – Amiersfort Prison
- 4 Germany – Fallingbostel Stalag XI-B
- 5 Poland – Schubin Oflag 64
- 6 Poland –Schokken Oflag 64-Z
- 7 Germany -- Wugarten-Liberation 29 Jan. 45
- 8 Poland – Wreschen (Wrzesnia)
- 9 Russia – Odessa—left 25 March 45
- 10 Naples – Italy

Returned USA 20 April 1945

(with the map notation “straight home”)

On the alternate map, a colorful World version, Parks used straight lines with arrows which traced his travels around the U.S., across Europe, and his return to the U.S.

CAPTURED IN HOLLAND

“Halt! Wohin Gehst Du?” With these few words spoken in a harsh guttural voice my life as a battalion aid surgeon in the 104th Division was abruptly ended. I had been a soldier (as much as doctors can be soldiers), and now I was a POW. To be more specific, I was a Kriegy which is slang for “Kriegsgefangener”.’

‘It was November 3, 1944 on a cold, dark night in Holland. The roads are built up like dykes around the square fields. The Germans were retreating but making life miserable with their 88’s zeroed in on all intersections and anything moving. So I was limited to nighttime for evacuation of the wounded. Walking with ½ of my aid company, I probed for our frontlines but could not make contact. Then with my sergeant, I walked further ahead from our frontlines searching for our troops. I found them alright, the German troops.’

‘Knowing we were only 10 feet from a burp gun that we had seen cut a man in half with its rapid fire, and that we were silhouetted on the elevated roadway, we froze in place. My sergeant said, “Lieutenant, if you have a pistol, shoot now.” I thought best to be very still. As a doctor, I did not have the knee jerk reaction of a combat soldier. Furthermore, I could not hit the side of a barn with my .45 pistol, the only weapon allowed in an aid station. I thought damn, I have surely messed up this time.’

‘Two Germans came out of the ditch with the expected burp guns and walked us to the nearby field HQ. There a German captain spoke in perfect English and asked me a bunch of questions, and then told me all about our outfit including some names of soldiers whom I recognized as belonging to my 413th Regiment. We had

had no POW training other than to say only name, rank, and serial number if captured. However, I had the brilliant idea to emphasize that with my being a doctor, they should just leave us behind as they retreated. This made no impression at all! Guess I was a feather in their caps.'

'It was daylight now and the two German soldiers during the escape were delighted to get out of the war and escort us about 10 miles along a road to the large bridge at Moerdijk across the Mass River to the Dutch city of Dordrecht. During the walk to the bridge, I thought about trying to escape but we were on an elevated road where the only place to run was across an open field. The Wehrmacht soldiers did not appear very alert, but they might have been good shots at 30-40 feet. These thoughts hurt, because I knew our troops were coming my way that very day. In fact they did advance, looked closely for my body and wrote Jeanie that I was Missing In Action (MIA).'

'In Dordrecht I was separated from Sergeant Marshall (never to see him again), put in an open staff car with snotty SS officers and driven to a collection point at a large country estate. I thought that this was not going to be so bad after all. But my dream ended when we were packed into box cars for a trip to Germany. Food for 3 days was one bowl of soup courtesy of the German army and an apple with a small sandwich furnished by Holland civilians at a railroad station stop. They had to feed the German guards first. A Dutch doctor looked for the "American doctor" and gave me a few ointments and meds for use. Great people, the Dutch!'

'My first POW camp was in Western Germany, multinational, and only a collection point for allied prisoners. Adjacent to the officers' compound was one for the Dutch, mostly underground plus a few soldiers, and they were treated like animals. Though the weather was freezing they had only tattered scraps for clothing and wooden shoes on their bare feet. As hungry as we were, we would throw a few potatoes over the fence to them. After a week there, I and 5 other officer POWs were taken by regular passenger train to Oflag 64 at Alzburgund (The Polish name had been Schubin or Szubin) in Poland, southeast of Warsaw. On the way we made a night stop in Berlin where we were taken to an underground mess hall. I was served wurst, bread, and kaffee—the best meal the Germans ever provided for me.'

[Parks' hand written notes also related a situation he had experienced after a night spent under German mortar fire. He had his aid man load emergency supplies onto back tracks and about 1 AM he followed the 1st battalion in boats across the river and then walked across the flat mud to the east side of Standdaarbuiten, Holland. There Parks set up a station at one of the liberated houses but only had minor injuries to treat. By that afternoon the bridge was in use and his jeep with the trailer arrived. He followed the fighting as it went

north-east along the dyke road. It was here that a Spitfire strafed his jeep and he found himself in a ditch.]

OFLAG 64

'Oflag 64 had been a youth's school with 2 large stone buildings and 12 one-story barracks. One of the buildings was a hospital and also there was a chapel. In 1940 it had been a POW camp surrounded by high wire fences and guard camps. At first a few British officers were the occupants, but by 1943 there were 250 American officers from ground troops. On my arrival, there were 1400. Air Force prisoners had separate camps. It was very cold, snow covered, bare with the ever-present odor of rotten cabbage from the latrines. The long barracks had a large, tile stove at each end. A small amount of peat was doled out daily which kept the stove lukewarm. Kriegies sat around with their backs against the stoves. I was very fortunate to have been captured in my winter clothes. I had on long johns, wool shirt and pants, the bib-type wool tankers coveralls, a combat jacket, and finally the thick wool, short "ass freezing", officer's overcoat. Most important were heavy wool socks and combat boots which had just been issued in the European Theatre. On arrival at camp, I was issued a long, Polish overcoat and 2 thin blankets. I later found a Russian type cap with ear flaps and made mittens out of an old blanket to go on over my wool gloves. I relate all this because I was always cold. This turned out to be the coldest winter in 50 years. By January it was 40 degrees below zero at night.'

'On entry to Oflag 64 November 22, 1944, they took my dog tags and empty wallet and issued me a POW TAG #3328/44. The next day I was visited by Lt. Amon Carter from Ft. Worth. His job was to verify that I was truly a Texan, but his visit turned out to be truly amazing. I told him my wife, Jeanie, was working in Harris Hospital in Ft. Worth. Amon immediately wrote to his father [Amon Carter, Sr.] the owner of the Ft. Worth Star Telegram newspaper and a very influential man. He phoned Jeanie at the hospital to tell her the news. This was the first news Jeanie had had about me since I was declared MIA. She then began to write and I did receive a few letters.'

'Here is what a typical day was like a Oflag 64. Each morning before daylight, we were awakened by the German guards slamming open the barracks door and shouting, "Rous". We slept in long underwear or even all our clothes so it was easy to jump out of bed and head for the parade ground. There we stood in formation, known as Appell, to be counted. Considering the temperature was zero degrees or lower, this was always a miserable way to start the day. After we went back inside,

breakfast was delivered by the enlisted cook detail. This consisted of a five-gallon pot of hot ersatz coffee. The coffee was made of toasted grains and had very little flavor. I took my tin cup full and used the first half to shave and brush my teeth. The remaining I drank along with a bite of bread or some food I had saved from the day before.'

'Then we would sit around talking about food, do crafts like making mittens, house slippers, or tin can stoves. Occasionally there would be a little Red Cross food, or some would prepare cakes or puddings to put names to odd mixtures of whatever was available. Once a day we were required to get out and walk. This was to prevent mental and physical deterioration which was the result of malnutrition and confinement. There was a library and college courses. After Christmas I enrolled in a music theory course. We had a monthly newspaper, Sunday church services, and musical theatre. Once every 1 or 2 weeks we got a 3-minute hot shower depending on how much coal the Germans gave us.'

'Lunch was the big event of the day. There was a dining room in the large stone house and we sat 8 to a table. There was a contingent of enlisted men to run the kitchen and work around the camp. Usually there was a "soup" which was barley and cabbage with whatever else. Occasionally, a fleck of flesh or bone could be seen. They used to serve a little horsemeat once weekly, but by the time I got to camp, that was no longer available. Once or twice a week there was a tablespoon of greasy oleo and fibrous sugar beet jam. There was a daily loaf of bread. This bread was 80 percent fiber (sawdust, ground up beet roots and whatever). I have a piece of that bread which is now 60 years old. It looks like the original but for being hard as a board and shrinking by about 5 6/8. By vote, one person at each table was elected to cut the loaf into 8 pieces. It was then passed around with the cutter taking the last piece. Supper was leftovers.'

'This all amounted to about 700 calories per day. Everyone lost weight but to varying degrees. The tall people looked like walking skeletons. At 6 feet in height, I lost 25 pounds to around 140 pounds, but seemed to keep up my strength.'

'In the early years of the Oflag 64 the German diet was supplemented by weekly Red Cross pkgs. each with 14,000 calories. As time went on the frequency decreased until by the time I arrived, they came infrequently. I received one package and a part of another in the 6 weeks I was there. The Germans said the railroad system had been destroyed by the Allies, but when the Russians liberated the camp, a warehouse full of Red Cross packages was found. So much for the German interpretation of the Geneva Convention regarding the treatment of POWs.'

'People have often asked me about torture of POWs. Personally, I had no interrogation after the field HQ in Holland. However, I heard about some not so lucky, mostly aviators and airborne troops. At Oflag 64 several officers were placed in solitary confinement for attempting escapes. In October 1944 there were 4 in prison under death sentence for complaining about being forced to walk in the street instead of the sidewalk and to refusing to post warnings about any POW attempting an escape. Fortunately, the Russians liberated Oflag 64 before the Americans were executed.'

'In early January 1945, I was ordered to be the medical officer for another cadre to set up a new Oflag at Schokken, Poland, about 50 miles south of Oflag 64 and to be titled Oflag 64 Z. There were 10 of us and I was glad to be back to doctoring (at Oflag 64 there were 12 doctors and no need for my services). The new camp was to house an influx of POWs from the Belgium Bulge, mostly the 106th Division. The camp had been established in a large Polish estate with brick multi-storied buildings. Already at 64 Z we had about 30 high ranking Italian officers, each with an orderly. These POWs came from the capitulation of Italy to the Allies while the German army was still in Italy. There was a young Italian medical officer, but the Americans made no effort to socialize with the Italians. Personally I never thought much of Italians and Frenchmen, and my experiences yet to be related merely strengthened my prejudice. I was proud of my own little medical facility set up in a room off the stable. I had a few medicines, some tongue blades, a stethoscope and two cots for patients. I held sick call every morning and "hospitalized" one soldier with pneumonia. Of course I had no antibiotics until later when I found sulfanilamide in the medicine cabinets of homes. The new POWs were fairly fresh from American rations so there was no malnutrition yet and no severely wounded. They had some shocking stories to tell of a German attack. There were about 90 in all.'

'We were in this camp for less than three weeks when told by the Germans that the Russians were coming and that we were to evacuate the camp. They never mentioned Hitler's order to kill all the POWs. I theorize that hectic communications and/or unwillingness on the part of the camp commanders worked to our advantage. We had one night to pack. The cadre had been POWs for over a year and had accumulated food from the Red Cross packages. They now had a bash of D Bars, etc. and shared excess with the new POWs. In addition to my few personal items, I packed a medical kit in a metal box with a red cross on it. Also, I picked up a small blank booklet in which to keep a diary.'

'The next morning we were all lined up about four abreast with guards on each side. The German Commandant rode in a wagon

with supplies. It was a motley sight. Our cadre had the mixed nationality overcoats and hats, the new POWs were in American uniforms but without enough overcoats, the Italian admirals and generals also had a mixture of uniforms, as did each of their orderlies. The latter were burdened with suitcases, bedrolls, etc.'

'The pace was slow due to the age of the Italian officers, and malnutrition and illness of the Americans. Everyone was cold, particularly when not moving; some had diarrhea and some respiratory infections. I noted that one Lt. Col. from Houston had bad diarrhea and the guards would not stop the column. His pants were full of crap even running down to his boots and he was crying from shame. After an hour we had a rest stop. The guards fanned out and set up machine guns. The Italian orderlies threw away some of the suitcases, and I saw some bottles of perfumes and other useless items. We stayed off the main roads to avoid the lines of refugees fleeing the Russians. As we stopped in one little village, the Polish women came out with hot milk, cakes, and bread. Larger towns were deserted, even the large government buildings and the silence was eerie.'

'To make the story brief, we marched 100 KM in eight days. At night we would be housed in a barn or school house. One night a friend said to come with him because he had contacted a Polish family and could get something to eat. We slipped past the guards to the house and had eggs and pork—what a treat. Usually we slept three together for bodily warmth and to combine our blankets. I always took off my boots and socks at night and slept with the wet socks near my body. It was difficult putting on frozen boots, but I knew frostbite threatened. One night I took several of our sickest to see the German doctor and requested that they be left behind. There were some badly frozen feet and hands, one rheumatic heart and one with high fever. My request was refused. Several soldiers escaped by hiding in the barns until the Germans left on the next day's march. It was my job to stay with the column to help with what little I could medically.'

'Each night we had a pot of barley soup, bread and cheese. One night we were in a dairy barn and one of us knew how to milk the cows. Most of the time artillery could be heard in the distance. The German civilians filled the roads with little carts and household goods. They were frightened and desperate. We thought they should be after what the Germans had done to the Russians.'

'Finally the Russians came. We were barracked in a church, almost sleeping on top of each other, when after midnight the Commandant came to us to give us a letter of protection in event German troops attacked us and said all the guards were leaving schnell. We heard later that they did not make it. One of our

German guards, Hagel, was from New York and had been very helpful to us, so we put him in an American uniform and gave him a new name and serial number. This worked and he went with us all the way back to Naples where he became a POW himself.'

'The Russians came in small groups, always entering the church machine gun first. We would holler, "Amerikanski" and hand them an explanatory note written in Russian by one of us. When daylight came, we found we were in a village of Wugarten, Germany. We commandeered some houses and got organized for protection from the Russians. One house was HQ for the Colonel and staff. About 15 of us took a large home, and therein I established my hospital. It was an enclosed porch on the second floor. I had 4 beds, and had scrounged through all the houses looking for medicines.' [Photos of these houses are located in Parks' personal album.]

'Basically I had aspirin, sulfanilamide, opium tablets for pain and diarrhea and some antiseptic ointments and alcohol. We required the village bakers to bake a loaf of bread daily for each of us and this was GENUINE rye bread. The butcher killed cows for us and once we went deer hunting with success. Of course there were potatoes. So we ate heavily and gained back all of our lost weight. In the form of fat. I got up to 180 pounds from 140.'

'The locals were happy to have us in their village, thinking it would protect them from the Russians, but actually we could not do much. They even stole or asked for our watches. One group raped a bunch of old women (the younger ones had been hidden). The men were taken for work details and never seen again. The mayor told us he had blood in his urine and that I should certify that he was not to go on a work detail. The urine specimen was obviously red from his ingesting the red sulfanilamide tablets. Russians would set a house on fire at night to see the Americans try to put out the blaze with an old, hand-pumped fire wagon.'

'One morning I was asked to come and examine a woman who had delivered two days ago. There were two Russians in the room when I arrived and found she had a severe vaginal laceration from childbirth. The Russian had already raped her once. I explained her injury to him, but I bet as soon as I left, he was at it again. Sometimes they were riding a horse or pulling sleds of supplies, or just running and whooping, but ALWAYS DRUNK. It was 10 days from the arrival of the first troops until a real army appeared. This was a small HQ with a drunken Major and 2 pretty blond secretaries. They settled in for a week and American trucks with American supplies rolled through the town. The drivers had no idea that the USA had supplied the trucks and insisted they were Russian made.'

'About this time the Italian doctor sent word by his orderly that he had gonorrhoea and requested some sulfa. I did not think that was serious enough to use my precious sulfanilamide. Some of our officers also socialized with the natives, but I did not know of any VD caught. I was fairly busy with my little medical unit. Wounded from many countries would wonder through Wugarten. Once I had the grandnephew of Marshall Fochs (of WW I fame) with cellulites of a leg wound. I held sick call for the 100 Americans, checked their outdoor latrines for proper use, and in general acted like a medical officer.'

'We had been in Wugarten six weeks. It was March, the snow had melted, and the little pond in the center of town stunk of manure. A Russian medical unit appeared and said we were to be deloused before being sent back to Russia. The equipment was on an old, beat up truck and consisted of a boiler to run steam through our rolled-up clothing. In the meantime, we took a shower from water pumped out of the stinky pond. If we had lice, we would still have them. The unit disappeared and a few days later trucks appeared and said we were to load up. They drove hell bent to a nearby railhead. There we were loaded onto wide gauge, larger boxcars than the Germans furnished. There was straw on the floor, a central wood stove and a kind of bunks around. Much better than when we were POWs, but it was a long ten-day trip through the Ukraine to Odessa on the Black Sea. The food was not much, but enough. Spent a lot of time talking to the Russians and learned about their education and medical training. Traded cigarettes for the red star they wear on their hats.' [This star was placed next to his rank bar in his souvenir album when he returned to the states.]

'We were marched through a part of the city and tried to look as military as possible. This was a vacation town for the Russians and the villas were being used to house the repatriated POWs. Barbed wire surrounded the houses and we felt like we were prisoners of the Russians—and in a way we were, because we were bargaining chips for the Russians back in Europe. One difference was some chocolate and canned goods from the nearby ships, so we obligingly ate ourselves sick. The Russian doctors wanted to hospitalize our cases of diarrhea, and I could not convince them that it was dietary. Finally, as a compromise, I let them send two of our officers to their hospital. The doctors were fearful that if an epidemic of any kind broke out in the Americans, the doctors would end up on the front lines. Food at the big mess hall was Russian, like pickle soup for breakfast. We tried a little humor by posting a fancy menu at the door of the mess hall. The Russians thought it was a code and started to investigate. Yes, "The East is east and the West is west and never the twain shall

meet.” We began to worry we would never be released back to the real world.’

‘At last we were trucked down to the dock and walked onto a British ship HMT Circassia, but could not relax until we pulled away from the dock. Pure luxury awaited. Linen table cloths, silver ware, white bread that tasted like cake, and a nice bunk to sleep in. Through the Mediterranean to Naples, Italy, where we came back into American hands. I had made a quick seven months tour of Europe and Russia.’

The following announcement was posted onboard the ship:

H M T CIRCASSIA

It is our pleasant duty to take you home and we welcome you back to British territory. A British ship is British territory, and this ship sails under the British flag.

We shall do all in our power to make your return passage happy and peaceful.

Signed: *David W. Bone C .B. E.*

Commodore

Master

Arthur H.C. Hope

Lieut. Col, R. A.

Officer Commanding Troops

CIVILIAN LIFE

After arrival home, Dr. Parks received a 60-day leave before reporting to the Miami Beach, Florida, Redistribution Center. The handwritten note *‘And home to this’* was written below this notation. Discharged from medical service in 1946, Dr. Parks served as a general practitioner in both Slaton and Breckenridge, Texas, followed by an OB-GYN residency in University Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio, from 1947 to 1950. Following a short practice in Ft. Worth, the Parks family moved to Midland, Texas, where he established the Midland Women’s Clinic, recognized for its “exemplary” standard of care. He was instrumental in pioneering the use of Pap Smears in 1951, the Laparoscopy in 1965, the electronic fetal monitoring system and specific surgical techniques.

Known locally and nationally for his total-care medical practices, Dr. Parks was Director on the Board of Trustees of the Midland County Hospital and a Governor of the hospital’s foundation. Other humanitarian services include

his elder duties and membership at the First Presbyterian Church and YMCA classes in Human Growth. Semi-retired in 1989, he and Jeanie moved to the Austin, Texas, area to be closer to family. Ever the caring physician, he also continued to practice gynecology at Bergstrom Air Force base until his final retirement at the age of 91. Dr. Parks' professional medical certifications are lengthy, including his past presidentship of the Midland County Medical Society, The Texas Medical Association; and the American Medical Association.

Dedication and love of family were no less important. He was survived by his loving wife of 67 years, Jeanie Wilson Tennant Parks; son, Walter S. Parks III; and daughters Linda and Janice. Spouses, siblings, grandchildren and great-great grandchildren will carry family legacy forward. The state of Texas is indeed proud to include within its history, a father and son, both medical doctors who served their state and their country with dignity and ethics befitting the medical profession.

SOURCES

Timberwolf Tracks: The History of the 104th Infantry Division 1943 – 1945 by Leo Author Hoegh and Howard J. Doyle

Personal notes, commercial maps, etc. used by Lt. Walter Samuel Parks, Jr. of U.S. Army Medical Corps to plot and organize the events of his WWII experiences

Obituary notices published in several Texas based newspapers

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers