

The Name On The Wall

By

Frank N. Aten
Captain, United States Army
(Retired)

This book represents a collection of my experiences as an American Soldier in WWII, especially the 724 days spent as a Prisoner of War. It is dedicated to my fellow Kriegies, my family, and to the citizens of Tyler, Texas, who during my imprisonment, followed my plight in the papers and supported my family and me with their prayers and thoughts.



A group of American officers at Oflag 64, early in February. Top row left to right: Lt. William Guest, Capt. Stephen Kane, Lt. Robert Aschim, Lt. Anthony Cipriani, Lt. Frank Aten. Bottom row: Lt. Harold Tallman, Lt. Burrows, Lt. Henry Perry, Lt. Sid Waldman.

Figure 1-Lt. Frank Aten at Oflag 64

Table of Contents

THE DUTY OF OFFICERS ii

CAPTURE NOTIFICATION AND ROLL OF HONOR iii

THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS, SUNDAY, MAY 9, 1943 iii

TYLER’S ROLL OF HONOR iii

CHAPTER ONE-THE FIRING SQUAD 4

CHAPTER TWO-KRIEGIES...ALL OF US 15

CHAPTER THREE-CAPUA, HOME ON THE ITALIAN RANGE..... 24

CHAPTER FOUR-THE BITTER TASTE OF FREEDOM..... 33

CHAPTER FIVE-THE NAME ON THE WALL ... AGAIN 46

CHAPTER SIX-MY FIRST POW CAMP 54

CHAPTER SEVEN-CANADIAN POWS IN CHAINS..... 64

CHAPTER EIGHT-THE PRISONERS BUILD ROCK GARDENS..... 73

CHAPTER NINE-THE KRAUTS GET MAD AT ME! 87

CHAPTER TEN-WE MEET THE FERRET! 103

CHAPTER ELEVEN-MY RUSSIAN FRIEND!..... 112

CHAPTER TWELVE-THWARTED AGAIN!..... 124

CHAPTER THIRTEEN-POWS BROUGHT HERE TO BE SHOT 131

CHAPTER FOURTEEN-FREEDOM IS A LONG ROAD HOME..... 149

CHAPTER FIFTEEN-WARSAW--ONE STEP CLOSER..... 159

Figure 1-Lt. Frank Aten at Oflag 64ii

Figure 2-Silver Star Orders 13

Figure 3-Photo of Silver Star Presentation 14

Figure 4-Red Cross Care Package 62

Figure 5-Christmas Package 63

Figure 6-German POW Camps 85

Figure 7-Life in a German POW Camp 86

Figure 8-Fisher Letter 102

Figure 9-POW War Book Log..... 104

Figure 10-Letter Home (April 10, 1943) 105

Figure 11-Letter Home (May 31, 1943)..... 106

Figure 12-Letter from Poland..... 133

THE DUTY OF OFFICERS

The following passage was written by George Harsh. It appears in the Introduction of The Great Escape by Paul Brickhill.

There is something demoralizing about being taken a prisoner of war. At first it stuns the mind and one is overwhelmed with a feeling of helplessness, and hope is only a dim, dim shadow. The new prisoner is sorely tempted to sit back quietly, co-operate with his captors and thus make life comparatively easy for himself. In fact that is the philosophy the Germans were constantly trying to drive into our minds. They offered us many alluring inducements in the form of extra privileges and rations to "behave," to co-operate and to give up our vexing escape attempts. But it is the duty of any officer, should he have the bad fortune to be taken prisoner, to do all in his power to escape. If escape is impossible it then becomes his duty to do everything within his means to force the enemy to employ an inordinate number of soldiers to guard him, to do all he can to harass the enemy and to convince his captors that they have caught a very large, very active and troublesome bear by a slippery tail. If the carrying out of this third duty can be heavily spiced with a rollicking, ribald sense of humor and a sharp sense of the ludicrous such as is possessed by most Americans and British then this duty becomes more a game than a duty, a game to be entered into with fiendish glee. And as such it is considered by all the thousand-odd officers whom the Germans have corralled in the North Compound of Stalag Luft III during the war.

CAPTURE NOTIFICATION AND ROLL OF HONOR

WAR PRISONER—2nd Lieut. Frank N. Aten, son of Reverend Floyd Eugene Aten, last night was reported captured as a prisoner of war in the North Afrika area where he has been with the Tank Destroyer Command, United States Army. In a wire to his father, the Adjutant General's Department stated: **"The Secretary of War desires me to express his regrets that your son, 2nd Lieut. Frank N. Aten, has been reported captured in the North African area. Additional information will be sent you when received."** Lieutenant Aten, a native of Tyler, attended Tyler High School and formerly was employed by the Currier-Times Telegraph. He received his commission in October at Camp Hood, Texas, and volunteered for foreign duty shortly thereafter." *Tyler Currier-Times* [No date listed]

THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS, SUNDAY, MAY 9, 1943

Prisoner in Germany Writes to His Father

Tyler, Texas, May 8—The Reverend Floyd E. Aten has received a card from his son, Lieut. Frank N. Aten, a prison of war. The card bore the picture of Adolph Hitler and was postmarked Germany. Aten wrote he was well and being treated "fairly decently" and that he was in an officers prison camp. He added that he would send a list of things that might be sent to him at a later date. The Adjutant General's department has issued an address to which Lieutenant Aten may be sent mail.

Lieutenant Aten was with the Tank Destroyer Command in North Africa. A native of Tyler, he was commissioned last October at Camp Hood, Texas, and immediately volunteered for foreign duty. He left the states on December 15. The last word received from him before the card received this week was a letter written on February 13, a day before his capture.

TYLER'S ROLL OF HONOR

Lt. Frank N. Aten Home After Long Stay in Germany

Looking fit and fine in spite of the fact that he was in a German prison camp for almost two years, Lt. Frank N. Aten, son of Rev. and Mrs. Floyd E. Aten, is home for the first time in three years. He arrived about midnight Saturday from Fort Sam Houston, having reached the United States a week ago. He was liberated from the German camp last January 21 in the dash of the Russians toward Berlin. Last night Lt. Aten attended church services at the First Baptist Church in Lake Park where his father is pastor. For more than an hour he answered questions from the audience as many of these questions came from persons who have relatives also in German prison camps. Those that involved national security, however, he politely deferred. Lt. Aten is high in his praise for the Red Cross declaring their boxes of food often times relieved their hunger and for the Russian soldiers and the treatment accorded them during and after the release.

CHAPTER ONE--THE FIRING SQUAD

The Gestapo had us slated to be shot at sunrise! I was a second lieutenant in the US Army and a prisoner of war in Poland.

Was this the ignoble end I was to reach after 12 years of wearing my country's fighting uniform.

I was not a spy, and yet I was going to be shot because I had tried to run away from their filthy, lousy prisoner of war camps four times? I wanted the feeling of a full belly once more; to eat, something besides soup made from a hog's eyeballs and ears; to be warm once more, especially at night time; to rejoin my comrades and make use of those many years of training my country had invested in me, on the other side of the wire.

I knew I was scheduled for the firing squad. I had been told this by the Polish women prisoners in the camp. They had risked their shaven heads by sticking them up to my isolated cell window and talking to me with a mixture of Polish, broken English and sign language.

My escape partner, Bill Higgins, and I knew we had aroused the ire of the Kommandant of Oflag 64; we knew this inflated Nazi Army officer, filled with his own ego because of the power he held over imprisoned United States Army officers, would be most happy to let Heinrich Himmler's Gestapo rid him of his two most troublesome POW charges.

But, they would have to make it appear to the Swiss Legation that our recent break for freedom had been successful.

We knew this mousy character, the Kommandant, could make his story believable. We had escaped from the POW jail across the street from our prison camp, Oflag 64. And why wouldn't he want to make it stick? Hadn't we defiled his home on our third escape attempt by boldly walking through his front yard, out the front gate, and into the street? The punishment we received for this taught us quickly enough that we had humiliated him.

Too, on this our fourth escape attempt, we were within hailing distance of a Nazi airfield. Our plans had been to steal a Messerschmitt 109 and fly into Sweden. Of course, I reasoned, word of this bold assault on their security had reached the German High Command.

Our next attempt might be successful. They knew we would have a story to tell the outside world; one that Joseph Goebbels's propagandists had rather keep untold. Maybe our luck had run out. Weren't we recaptured? Is this the end of the road

that has led me through 12 years of regular Army service, to where, when captured, I was executive officer Co. A, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion of 'Old Ironsides', the First Armored Division. If this was to be my last day on Earth, God certainly had provided a beautiful one. The sun shone with an unusual brightness I hadn't noticed while in solitary confinement, until two days ago.

I had heard that when you faced immediate death, thoughts of a lifetime raced through your mind in seconds. Well, I had nearly 24 hours to run across my memories. I resigned myself again to face those German rifles if I had to, come next sunrise. I'd faced them before, but except for the time when I was captured originally, and after my three escapes, I'd had chances to defend myself.

My childhood in Tyler, Texas, paraded before the viewing screen of my mind, and I thought of having been cooped up in school rooms on beautiful days like this when I'd rather have been out under the blue skies. This was a similar day, although a lifetime and a war-torn world away, and I couldn't rush outdoors when the recess bell rang. Memories of ... leaving home and "riding the rails" during the depression; my decision at 17, to carve out an army career for myself, and 10 1/2 happy years spent as an enlisted man in Uncle Sam's peace time army.

I had enlisted in the Horse Drawn Artillery, because I liked horses. In my early teens I had slipped away from my home on the top of Dawson Hill, to go down the hill where the cavalry unit of the Texas National Guard, 112th Cavalry was stationed. I'd pet the horses and help the personnel curry them.

I remember, as an enlisted man, training the army mounts. I rewarded them with apples snatched from the cook. How good those apples were! I'd never taste another.

Do they give a last meal to those executed by firing squads? If so, could I ask for an apple? I must quit thinking of food. Even as I think of something to eat, the gnawing sensation grows worse in my stomach. It has been there for 20 months since I first was captured at Faid Pass. My thoughts raced on, tumbling over each other in the mad scramble for emergence of that which I would dream next.

I recalled those days when my artillery outfit had been turned into the Army's first suicide division--tank destroyer--newest addition to our fighting unit.

Boy, how I'd cursed the gnats and mosquitoes when I'd laid in the swamps of Louisiana, a top sergeant on maneuvers, helping train the boys now fighting their way towards me across Europe.

My superiors insisted that I attend Officers' Candidate School. Heck, who wanted to be an officer when they could be a top sergeant in this man's Army? But, they'd finally won, selling me on the idea that my training and handling of men would make me invaluable as an officer.

I got even, though. I turned the tables and used this same argument against them when I applied for immediate overseas duty after my graduation as a second lieutenant from OCS.

My time in North Africa was almost cut short in January 1943. I got so tired of sloshing around in the mud I talked Captain Wray into giving me a pass to go into Oran for drinks and a bath. I met up with a couple of friends from another unit and we visited a few bars.

We were enjoying ourselves until some French Foreign Legionnaires started making fun of us in a bar. They talked loudly when mentioning Americana soljers and rat-tat-tat-tat making a motion like firing a submachine gun, then they laughed like hell.

This was because I had a Thompson submachine gun slung on my shoulder with a 30-round clip in it, and more clips on my belt. My friends had only 45 caliber pistols.

We finally left the-bar with no trouble. I threw a round in my Thompson, and things kinda quieted down while we walked out the door.

After we made the rounds of several other bars, it was beginning to get dark and my friends had to leave to go back to their units. I told them that I was going to get a room so I could take a bath and sleep in a bed for a change. A bartender told me of a hotel down the street where I might be able to get a room for the night.

When I walked into the hotel, two of the Legionnaires were standing at the desk, talking to the French couple who appeared to own the hotel. I went up to the desk and asked the man if I could rent a room for the night. All four of them started laughing like it was real funny and the laughter was joined by some people in the next room. This room had a large chandelier hanging from the ceiling ... a ballroom perhaps. The more they laughed, the madder I got.

I turned and started to walk out. The closer I got to the door, the louder they laughed and yelled, "Bon jour."

I whipped the Thompson off my shoulder. By the time the first clip was empty, all of the plate glass windows were shot out, the chandelier was partly down, and the place was being

vacated. When the second clip was empty, the chandelier was laying on the floor in pieces and I was all alone.

I don't know where all of the MP's came from, but it didn't take them long to get there and I didn't have to worry about a place to spend the night.

After a visit with the provost marshal, it was back to the unit and a pup tent in the mud. I was put under arrest and ordered to stay in the immediate unit area.

Two days later, we moved back to the front and my arrest was lifted.

A friend of mine worked in General Mark Clark's Second Army Headquarters. He later told me that the provost marshal told the General that he was going to reclassify me and send me back to the States as a private.

Captain Juskalian said that General Clark told the provost marshal that he would only do what he was told to do. Thank you General Clark.

Yes, I'd traveled down a long road in my short 32 years on this Earth. Is this the end of the road for Kid Nitro? My buddies had hung the nickname on me long ago. This, together with my real name, has been scribbled on the walls of jails and POW camps throughout Africa, Italy, Germany and Poland, long before the name Kilroy.

My highway through life, leading to my capture at Faid Pass, had led me, while in chains, on a degrading march through the streets of Naples, Italy, where I was spat upon by fascist civilians. This road had led me through three previous escape attempts and the subsequent solitary confinement in civilian jails.

It had led through a succession of POW camps, and now to this concentration camp, the ultimate in the Nazi technique of demoralization.

This road had led me through humor, hunger, pathos, sadness, and heartbreak.

My name written on one of those jail walls caused me to be paired up with Bill Higgins. He had seen it and later located me.

Did Bill Higgins regret this? Was he holding me responsible? No, I didn't think so. If the opportunity presented itself again, I felt certain he'd string along.

I remembered how the Kommandant had made those in charge move me nearer to a guard tower so they could keep a closer eye on me.

Oh, the Nazis had lots of reasons for wanting to rid themselves of me.

"Für sie der Krieg ist fertisch!" "For you, the war is over!"

This is what the German lieutenant said when he stepped from behind his Mark IV tank. By the way the long snoot looking gun sticking out of the turret was pointed at us, I knew this Kraut officer meant what he said. He had another tank on the other side of the clearing in the cactus patch which added considerable emphasis to what he said, even if I didn't understand it.

But he was badly mistaken in his statement the war was over for me. Sherman said, "War is Hell." For me, my 12 years in the Army had been fairly pleasant. The next 23 months were going to be pure hell for me. Valentine's Day, 14 February 1943 came on clear and cold like many of the winter mornings in North Africa. This was going to turn out to be a busy day for those of us in Combat Command A, First Armored Division, if all the rumors and advance information we had heard turned out to be true. Cold nights in North Africa usually ran into hot days, and this was to be one of the hottest for many of us.

Officers' meeting the night before revealed that we had a very large stock pile of ammunition and supplies spread out all over the long airfield at Feriana, about 20 miles behind us. Rommel, the Desert Fox, the Nazi's top general, wanted this ammunition and stockpile of supplies so bad that he was going to make a run for them with two Panzer divisions. Rommel's supply lines across the Mediterranean had been badly cut. Montgomery's 8th Army was on his tail, hotly pursuing him. He needed our supplies, if he could get them, badly!

We were told to hold or delay the enemy as long as possible. Scuttlebutt had it that General Eisenhower had been up to the Command Post the night before. There was no time to move the ammunition dump and supply depot. It would be up to us to hold them off. My outfit, Company A, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, less the second platoon, was on the right flank of Tex Hightower's 3rd Battalion of the 1st Armored Regiment. This was our main defending force northwest of Sidi Bou Zid in the wide-open desert country.

As our holding action began, I was sitting there looking at Faïd Pass. We had been trying to get through that pass for over a week and had lost a number of tanks trying to make it. I wondered if we'd ever surmount that obstacle. We could see tanks coming up all around us. Thirty at Dj Lessouda, to our left; forty-five or more from Faïd Pass, to our front; and forty-five were coming through Rabou Pass, to our right. You could hear their guttural chatter on the radio. They were coming up from Maknassy,

behind us, in uncounted numbers. If you didn't believe the radio, but took the trouble to look that way, you would believe the reports because of the dust that was boiling up.

Someone on the radio started talking in the clear and said that some of the tanks, the ones coming from the direction of Rabou Pass, were coming up to reinforce us. Since there was no reason to use code at this point. I called Captain Wray on my radio and said, "Captain, those are not our tanks. I can the black crosses on them!" By then, the orders were to attack in any direction. They were all around us.

A Company Commander, Beecham Wray from North Carolina, and I were with Lieutenant Cox's First Platoon of 37's and Lieutenant Paulson's 3rd Platoon of 75mm destroyers. The 75mm guns were mounted on half-track vehicles. Lieutenant Armstrong and his Second Platoon of 75mm destroyers were attached temporarily to a small force that Lieutenant Colonel J.K. Waters commanded. This force was located at a small oasis, Dj. Lessouda, about five miles to our left. I later learned that Colonel Walters was the son-in-law of George S. Patton.

The ground was very level and open except for a range of small hills or mountains about 10 miles to the northeast. Faid Pass led through this range. Rabou Pass was eight miles south of Faid Pass and about six miles from our location.

Captain Wray had set up his observation post about 2 miles to our rear on some high ground. I remained with the two platoons working on the right flank of Tex Hightower's 3rd Battalion tanks. I was born and reared in Tyler, Texas. Tex Hightower was born and reared at Brownsboro, Texas, 16 miles from Tyler. Here we were, half a world away, fighting side by side. About the middle of the morning, I kept hearing Lt. Col. Waters telling Jesse Haines, Chief of Staff, Combat Command A, that the Germans were closing in on him.

The last we heard of Lieutenant Armstrong, Commander of the Second Platoon, was when one of his men reported that the lieutenant's legs had been shot from under him and that the officer was sitting on the ground, firing at a Mark IV tank with a Tommy gun.

Finally, I heard Waters come on the radio and tell Jess Haines that he was going to have to destroy his half-track, with his radio equipment in it, because he was surrounded by Germans. Waters was afraid the Krauts would capture the radio equipment intact. Waters asked Jess to write to his wife, if he got the chance, and tell her that he would be all right.

I don't believe Colonel Waters really thought that he would

be taken prisoner by the Panzer troops. We had always heard that they didn't take prisoners during a Blitzkrieg. And this was a Blitzkrieg of desperation for Rommel! This is the last I heard of Waters until late that night when I saw him as a fellow prisoner behind enemy lines.

Our TD company had two heavy platoons. They were 75's on half-tracks and one light platoon of 37mm, mounted on 3/4 ton trucks. They were all obsolete.

Oasis Lessouda had fallen, and with it we lost our Second Platoon. Six Mark VI tanks were pulled off the road from Faid Pass to Oasis Lessouda, and, forming a line, began firing on our open vehicles. After talking with Captain Wray over the radio, I sent the first platoon back to the rear where he was making a stand. There was no use in 37's sitting up there shooting at tanks that would shed its armor piercing shell like an armadillo would shed a fly. The last one of our tanks that I saw moving was Col. Tex Hightower's. He was backing down the road from Dj Lessouda toward Sidi Bou Zid. I knew it was his because there was a small Texas flag at the top of his antenna.

I saw two of our destroyers get hit by shell fire. They exploded, blowing men and equipment out of them. Then the rubber on the tracks of the vehicles caught fire. About this time, we received orders to pull back to a higher ground at our rear and reassemble.

In the confusion, several of our vehicles became stuck in a wadi, an intermittent stream, muddy because of recent rains. When I arrived on high ground, Captain Wray had rounded up some of the vehicles and men, including the First Platoon. He sent them on to a designated area in the rear.

From our vantage point, we could see a German tank park forming about 500 or 600 yards from where some of our men were still trying to get their vehicles out of the mud. At the same point, some of our destroyers were burning. Captain Wray agreed with me that I should go back down and see if we could evacuate some of the men and vehicles before the Germans regrouped and decided to move forward again. Lt. Paulson, the First Sergeant and Sergeant Wright got in my jeep with me. We went back to the area.

We arrived to find one of the men had been hit by a 20mm shell on his left shoulder. Part of his shoulder was blown off, his left ear was gone, and the entire left side of his face was scorched and burned. He walked in a daze, right into a large cactus and did not feel the needles stick him.

We managed to get one of the jeeps and a 3/4-ton truck out of the mud, loaded all of the men we could find on the two jeeps and

directed them to go to Captain Wray. All of these men plus Captain Wray and the First Platoon were able to get out of the trap. They lived to fight again.

One of our destroyers was burning in the yard of a small Arab house nearby. We went over to see if any of the men were still alive. One of the men had been blown out of this vehicle and his torso was standing upright near the burning rubber tracks. The rear gasoline tanks had exploded. Everything was burning. This soldier was sitting there burning, with a smile on his face. After we were captured, some German infantrymen went over and shoveled dirt on the body so it would stop burning.

We found Sergeant John Maples of Knoxville, Kentucky, and the driver, 15 or 20 yards behind the track where they had crawled, leaving a trail of blood. The driver's legs, above the knees, were like jelly. A large hole was in his right side. His right arm was blown off.

Sergeant Maples' left hand was blown off above the wrist, barely hanging on by a string of skin. Several fingers on his right hand were broken. It was pathetic to watch him hold a cigarette between these broken fingers. He had a large hole in his left side. His left leg below the knee was shattered, being held to his body by the cartilage and a little skin. We knew that if these men were to have a chance to live, they would need more than the morphine and first aid treatment we were able to give them.

One of the men went back to drive the 3/4-ton truck close to the wounded. While all of this was going on, I looked over to my right to see my own half-track still burning. I had told the driver to set it on fire. He was having trouble with the carburetor float and couldn't get it started. Since I was executive officer, I had the track with most of the company radio equipment for higher echelon nets on it, for use outside the company communications. I didn't want this equipment to fall into the Nazi's hands, because they could have listened in on most of our radio communications.

I had a nice warm jacket on the half-track my driver burned. Later I was to think of this often and wish that I had that jacket.

The 3/4-ton truck contained, among other things, two stretchers which were part of the equipment on some of the vehicles in our company. Immediately after we found the wounded, I glanced over to the German tank park. They had regrouped their vehicles and were now only about 400 yards from us.

We paid no attention to them and went about loading our wounded onto the stretchers we had opened out on either side of

the truck.

Suddenly there was a noise. We looked up. Sure enough, there were two awfully big looking German Mark VI tanks with the familiar black swastikas painted on the sides. One was just breaking through the cactus in front of us. The other was off to the side and further back. We proceeded to load up our wounded, until a blond German officer stepped out from behind the tank and said: "Hands Up! Fur sie der Krieg ist fertish! "For you the war is over."

Looking around, we could see other men armed with rifles and burp guns surrounding us.

Right then I began wondering if I had done the right thing, keeping the men there and getting them captured while trying to save two men who would surely die, since medical help was miles away. And we would have had to find this medical help, even if we had succeeded in getting the men out.

After worrying and thinking about this for a long time, I have found peace with myself. It is my belief that most Americans, including the men with me, would have done the same thing.

Apparently, my superiors were of the same mind. For this action, I was cited and awarded the Silver Star. In my absence, it was awarded to my wife, Frances Riggs Aten, by Brigadier General Charles K. Nulsen, Commander of Fort Sam Houston.

Many months would pass before I knew this.

[Note: Award Citation and photo displayed on next two pages.]

NOTE: The following is a copy of the Silver Star Citation which accompanied Frank Aten's medal.

CONFIDENTIAL

HEADQUARTERS FIRST ARMORED DIVISION
APO 251, c/o Postmaster, N.Y., N.Y.
AG 200.6 (Misc).

27 July 1943

SUBJECT: Award of Silver Star - Prisoner of War.

TO: Commander Officer, 701 Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Frank N. Aten, (01821553), Second Lieutenant, Company "A" 701 Tank Destroyer Battalion, is awarded the SILVER STAR FOR GALLANTRY IN ACTION ON February 14, 1943 in the vicinity of Sidi Bou Zip, Tunisia. During the forced withdrawal of the company, five of its vehicles were left behind stuck in the mud in a low marshy area. After the company reassembled, a group of men returned to the vehicles to recover them. Observing the start of an enemy tank attack toward Sidi Bou Zid and realizing that this group would be cut off and unable to escape, Second Lieutenant Aten unhesitatingly went forward to warn them of the danger and lead them back to rejoin the remainder of the company. Upon reaching the group he and the others observed some wounded men located approximately twelve hundred (1200) yards to their front. Although enemy tanks were in the vicinity, they went forward to the wounded men and administered first aid treatment to them. While preparing to evaluate them he was surrounded by enemy tanks and foot troops and captured. The courage, initiative and concern for the welfare of his comrades with complete disregard for his own safety displayed by Second Lieutenant Aten reflect great credit upon himself and his organization and are highly commendable. Entered Military Service from Tyler, Texas. Next of kin Reverend Floyd E. Aten (Father) Rt.#1, Tyler, Texas.

By Command of Major General Harmon:

W. L. SCHERT
Major
Adjutant General

DISTRIBUTION:

1 copy to AG Wash. D.C. Att-Decorations and Awards Branch
1 copy to CG NATCUSA, Att-Personnel Branch-AG Section
1 copy to CG, Fifth Army
1 copy to CG, VI Corps
1 copy to CO, 701 T.D. Bn.
1 copy to Off. 201 file
1 copy to Next of Kin
1 copy to AG file

CONFIDENTIAL

Figure 2-Silver Star Orders



Figure 3-Photo of Silver Star Presentation

CHAPTER TWO-KRIEGIES...ALL OF US

Now, the German officer walked toward us. In broken English and signs, he told those of us who were armed to put our guns and pistol belts on the ground.

Naturally, since the main gun on the turret of the tank was pointed directly at us and could have blown us all to bits had we made one false move, we complied with his order.

I told the German lieutenant that we had two very badly wounded men; an 88 mm shell had come right over the motor, bursting in between them. He looked at them and seemed to be sympathetic. He detailed several of his men to go along on our 3/4-ton truck and guard us. They took us to the assembly point for some 40 German tanks.

After we arrived, a klaxon alarm sounded and all the Germans either scattered or buttoned up in their tanks. Soon a flight of B26 American bombers came over low, the first we had seen all day. Everyone took cover except Lieutenant Paulson and me. We were working on the wounded with sulfanilamide powder, first aid dressings and morphine, trying as best we could to ease their pain. It looked as if the planes were going to circle and come back over. I thought, this is ironic. One of the few times I've seen an American plane since I arrived in North Africa. Here we are, sitting in the middle of a German tank park, Panther and Tiger tanks sitting all around us, buttoned up; two critically wounded men on our hands and we are about to get the hell bombed out of us by our own planes.

They must have had a more important primary target, because they made a 90-degree left turn and disappeared.

After the planes left, we missed First Sergeant Blank, but none of us purposely took notice of the fact that he was missing and did not search for him. I don't think the Germans ever missed him.

Later, I learned that he hid in the cactus when the planes came over and stayed there until after the Germans pulled out. He walked a long way back to rejoin our troops. **Returning to the states to guard prisoners of war in a POW camp, he went by Tyler to talk with my father, the Rev. Floyd E. Aten, and tell him the circumstances surrounding my capture. This was, of course, while I was still a prisoner.**

After the planes departed, several German officers from the tanks came over and looked at Sergeant Maples and the driver. They put the guards back on the truck and sent us to Lessouda.

Here, German soldiers came over to the truck, and, as they

had at the tank park, ransacked it, looking for picks, shovels, food, mess kits and clothing. They seemed to be interested in anything that could be used for digging.

Digging is a part of life in desert combat. Every time you stop moving for any length of time, you had better start digging in. It is frightening when planes to come over and you have no hole to crawl into. You had to dig in for protection from small arms fire, artillery, bombs and strafing. The Afrika Corps had learned this lesson well. The best way to stay alive is to dig in.

They asked around for a doctor and found that none were available. The driver died in the meantime and we buried him.

From Lessouda, our guards took us through Faid Pass, a heavily fortified strong point, vital to any American advance in that sector. After a week of trying to storm it, I was finally able to see it from the German side, but it was the wrong side for me.

John Maples was beginning to turn dark and looked very bad. His breathing was hard and fast. About two miles east of the pass, we finally came to a German field hospital. One of the guards went in and came out with a doctor. He looked at the sergeant for a minute, then shook his head and said he was sorry, there was nothing he could do for him. About 10 minutes later, Sergeant John Maples died.

Our guards loaded us back on the truck. We went further down the road to some tall hedges growing in a 75-foot square area. We were herded through an opening in the hedge row and found the Germans had set up a behind-the-lines interrogation station.

The Panzers had not made a practice of taking prisoners and none of us had ever expected, if we were captured, to come out with our lives. But the tactics had been changed because the Germans were now running into Americans in force. They wanted to question prisoners in the effort to learn as much as they could about the American Army.

Under the supervision of one of the German officers, we took the personal belongings of Sergeant Maples and turned them over to him. The sergeant, if my memory serves me correctly, had over \$500 in French francs on him, which he had won gambling. I asked the Nazi what he would do with the money. He said they would send it to his relatives in the states. I knew that he was lying and later proved it.

We were allowed to dig a grave under one of the nearby trees and bury Sergeant Maples. We left his helmet and identification (dog) tags on the grave.

When I returned to the States after my fifth and final

successful escape, I was sent to the Redistribution Station at Miami Beach, Florida. While there, I wrote to Mrs. Maples in Knoxville. She was working as a waitress in an effort to rear her child. She told me that she had not received the money, had not been notified that her husband was dead, and had not received any insurance money, nor any of the other benefits due her as a war widow. I wrote, instructing her to contact a claims officer, tell him what I had told her, and ask him to send me the necessary papers to fill out. This was done. Eight months later, while I was stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky, I called her. The paperwork had been processed and their lives were a lot easier. I was ordered overseas again before I could accept the invitation to visit them.

Two German officers were interrogating 10 or 12 other prisoners at tables. They had been brought in before we arrived. One of them was First Lieutenant John Jones of Houston, Texas. Now the publisher of the Houston Chronicle, he is the nephew of the late Jesse Jones, one-time RFC chairman, owner of the Houston Chronicle, Houston financier and philanthropist, and himself a great American.

Lieutenant Jones was a sad looking sight. His tank had been hit by direct fire and caught fire after he had cleared it. One of his wounded men was trapped in the tank. This brave officer and two of his men tugged and pulled the man to safety. He lost his eyelashes, eyebrows and part of the skin on his face doing it. The Germans started interrogating us. Most of our answers were standard POW--name, rank and serial number.

Geneva Convention rules stated that a soldier is required to give only name, rank, and serial number when captured. If the Nazis wanted pertinent information, the rules were disregarded, and they used beatings, bribing, scaring, getting the prisoners drunk and death threats to obtain that information.

So soon after capture, we didn't give a damn whether they shot us or not. If they believed that we felt that way, they were right.

When it became my turn to undergo interrogation, a German officer threw some letters, taken from the glove compartment of my truck, across the table. These were addressed to a couple of GI's in my company. He asked me what outfit I was in. I gave him the stock answer, "Under provisions of the Geneva Convention, I am required to give you my name, Frank N. Aten; rank, Second Lieutenant; Army Serial Number 0-1821553." He then told me what outfit I was in and said we would talk more about it later. He talked with Lieutenant Paulson and the other officer talked with the sergeant.

We continually tried to impress upon the men the necessity of

destroying letters after they were read. Innocent remarks about the soldier's whereabouts, and troop movements ("Your friend John is in the 1st Armored Division and he's on his way to join you") can be valuable information in the hands of the enemy. Any enemy, and more especially the Nazi, could glean much information from letters. Getting soldiers to destroy much treasured mail was hard.

Many enlisted men and officers would hold on to love letters, letters from home, wives, folks, and in fact, any sort of mail.

We waited around for a long time, and it was beginning to get dark. Several Kraut enlisted men gave us soup in German mess kits. It wasn't very thick but tasted good. We had not seen our kitchen or hot meals for a long time. Most of the time we had to be satisfied with cans of Army C (combat) rations filled with beans, hash and more beans. Sometimes we were able to heat it up on top of a hot motor or transmission, after punching a hole in the can, but nothing beats a hot meal.

We finished eating and waited around another hour or so. Then they loaded all of us into a closed in truck and guards stood at the back. The driver took off in a hurry and we traveled for several hours. Stopping, finally in the rear of a building in a town called Sfax, Tunisia, we were unloaded and pushed into a large room on the ground floor at the rear of the building.

Then I saw Colonel Waters. Together with several other officers and a number of enlisted men, he had arrived sometime ahead of us.

This room was bare except for long shelves built along the walls. We spent a long, hard night taking turns trying to sleep on those shelves, with no bedding to soften the hardness of those boards. By now we had all had time enough to think things over; to start feeling sorry for ourselves, for all of the American soldiers in North Africa, and even for the folks back home.

Look at what had happened to our small group! It made us feel everything was dark and real! We had been captured, and because of this, everything was lost!

The war was lost! We had let the folks back home down! The war could not possibly continue to be fought and won after so many of us in the First Armored, the best fighting division in North Africa, had been captured by the Nazis!

Our fear was very real. Not for our own safety, but because we felt so sure the war was already lost.

Thank God, the Germans themselves soon jarred us out of this feeling. About 8 A.M. they guided us out to the back of the building and pointed to a pile of very rusty tin cans. You could take your

pick, but they were all rusty. Using a little elbow grease and some sand, most of the rust came off. Somebody had a knife which the greedy eyes of the Krauts had overlooked. We passed this around and soon all had whittled a passable wooden spoon. **Lack of facilities for POWs bore out our feeling that we were a special group; Panzers didn't ordinarily take prisoners.**

Shortly, they brought around a large can of soup. Each of us received half a can. It may have been slop. The cans may have been rusty and unsanitary, but it tasted pretty good to us.

Here we were, officers and enlisted men, all in the same soup line. Thrown together under the worst of circumstances, one would think that we would get to know those we hadn't known before. Just the opposite was true. I suppose this is because each of us was filled with disgust of ourselves, mostly. No one felt like going out of his way to say anything, good or bad, unless it was absolutely necessary.

About an hour after we finished our breakfast soup, the truck again pulled up to the rear door of the building, and we were all loaded into it. Our next stop, several hours later, was an old one-story brick school house, surrounded by an iron fence. This was somewhere in the middle of Tunis.

Officers were separated from enlisted men. We were split into small groups of five each; each group assigned to a room. The rooms contained no furniture. There were 6 to 8 inches of hay spread over the floor, and something else--cooties. I had heard about these body lice from men in World War I. Believe me, everything they said was true! After they had sucked enough of your blood to get fat, you could chase them into the seams of your clothing, crush them and watch small spots of blood soak through your clothing.

While we were in Tunis, the Germans continued to feed us twice a day out of our now shiny tin cups, and for a short time each day, the school yard became our exercise area. We were turned out in small groups to walk around and stretch.

"The Name on the Wall"

On the wall in my room, I found the name of one of the previous occupants. Roy Chappell of McKinney, Texas, had printed it there, while he confined.

Little did I realize that the owner of this name on the wall was to become one of my best buddies; that we would spend many hours together, planning escapes, carrying them out, and spending many resultant hours in jail together.

One of the first and most important Germans we met the week

we spent in the school was a Sonderfuehren, a rank equivalent to our warrant officer. We called him Charlie, because that was the English translation of his name. He personified the homosexual tendencies we had heard existed among top ranking Nazis. This feminine talking character could be pleasant, nasty, soft-voiced, or shouting, depending upon his mood, or the method he was trying to use to make you talk. His favorite expression began with "My dear."

We were locked in our rooms. Charlie then would send a guard for us, one at a time, any hour of the day or night, and interrogate us. He would offer wine, food, cigarettes, or threaten to starve us to death. We knew he succeeded in getting some of the enlisted men to talk by getting them drunk. We could hear them whooping it up.

Colonel Waters spent more time and had a rougher go of it with Charlie than any of us. I don't think he was allowed to sleep more than two or three hours any night we were there. Thank God Charlie did not know that he was George Patton's son-in-law!

When Charlie sent for you, you were placed in one room. When the interrogation was completed, you were placed in another room. This kept prisoners from talking to one another about what Charlie had asked you.

Charlie had a TO&E (Table of Organization and Equipment) of the First Armored Division pinned to the wall in back of him. I noticed that it was an old one which did not show the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion. He knew that I was an officer from that battalion and was more interested in pumping me for information than most of the other officers.

Once while interrogating me, Charlie said, "You have eight 75mm destroyers in a platoon." "If you know this, what the hell are you asking me for?" I shot back.

Charlie really got mad and blew his stack this time. He shouted and stomped the floor. He stomped my feet and made threatening gestures as if he intended to hit me. He finally said, "My dear, I am going to stand you outside this door and give you five minutes to make up your mind. If you still don't know how to talk, then you will know what will happen to you.

I must admit that many things went through my mind in the short five minutes I stood outside that door. Talking was one of them. But then I reasoned, if the son of a bitch was going to shoot me for not talking, he might also have me shot if I did talk, so I could tell no one how they made me do it.

By the time the guard motioned me back into the room, Charlie had changed his attitude and disposition. He smiled, talked softly,

and the treats were forgotten. As I was escorted from the room, I wanted the chance to talk to Charlie on an even-Steven basis, to tell the SOB what I thought of him and bash his damned head in. Charlie and the cootie infested straw couldn't last forever. One morning, about a week later, they lined us up on a road outside the school. **By then, there must have been around 200 of us, including large numbers of doughboys from the 168th Infantry.** I don't know where the Krauts had been keeping them until now. Some of them had only recently arrived, so maybe Charlie's place was getting too crowded, or maybe, he was ready to question a new group.

When we were assembled, guards were posted on both sides of the column and we were marched off through the city of Tunis.

Ten miles later (it felt like twenty!) we arrived at an airfield that had been visited by American bombers. Wrecked and burned planes were stacked high on two sides of the field, keeping the runways cleared.

Our own Colonel Waters had made a sortie to this same air field with a tank task force soon after the initial North African landings. It was then deep behind enemy lines. He and his men had shot it up. For his own safety, this was another reason to keep his identity from the Nazi High Command.

The big, old, lumbering Junker 52's, trimotored planes, with corrugated tin fuselage and wings, began landing and discharging their cargoes of supplies and fresh troops for Rommel's forces. His supply lines across the Mediterranean were all but completely cut, making it necessary to bring in the needed supplies and replacements by air. After the planes were unloaded, we were divided into groups of 14 to a plane and loaded. The planes took off and circled the field until each flight was assembled. Heading out over the water, we flew close to the surface unless a British destroyer or some other warship was seen on the horizon. This happened several times.

The way the wings flopped on those old planes reminded me of an old buzzard lazily staying in the sky on a hot summer afternoon. They didn't hold a steady formation. Each plane seemed independent of the others, by picking its own place in the air.

After an unpleasant ride of several hours (many on board were air sick), we passed over the island of Capri. A few minutes more and we were over the large city of Naples, Italy. The Italians call it Napoli. It was beautiful from the air. Most of the roofs seemed to be brilliant colors of tile: red, yellow, and orange. The buildings were gleaming white with lots of green foliage scattered around.

As we circled the field before we landed, the city looked very picturesque, except by the docks. Our B17s had begun to "pay their respects" to the Black Shirt crowd, and we could see the effects of their calling cards. Unfortunately, these visits by our aircraft may have had a negative repercussion on us. We heard that a couple of the planes had been shot down by our ships and by our own air force. True or not, I never found out. However, men who had been captured and seen in Tunis were never seen in Italy.

After we landed and were unloaded, a smart-aleck Kraut officer came over and singled **Lieutenant Paulson** and me out of the line. He made us carry his foot locker across the field to the hangers. This was no way to treat officers! We threatened to tell the Swiss, the Swedes, and everybody in general what he was making us do. We were officers and shouldn't be made to do enlisted men's work. But he "sprechen Deutsch" and used his guttural tone on us. We sweated, struggled, and swore the foot locker to hell, along with this Nazi lieutenant before we finally got it to the hanger.

I remember one POW lieutenant, a guard house lawyer, **Jim Bickers**, kept saying that according to the Geneva Convention, this German couldn't force us to carry his locker, but Bickers didn't offer to help us carry it. The damned thing was heavy too!

Naturally, some of the GIs in the group thought this was a pretty good deal. Officers were doing manual labor! I didn't blame them one bit. But that damned Kraut officer filled me with a hatred of the Germans that was to stay with me. He kept acting as if he didn't think we second lieutenants were officers. And after all the trouble we had had, going through Officers Candidate School!

Finally, the foot locker was delivered where our blonde friend indicated, and the guards reassembled all of us. **We were crowded and made to stand on open bed trucks, heading, we thought, for another POW camp, but the Germans had other plans for us. We were to discover why the Panzer Division took us prisoner.**

II Duce's good people were wavering. Our B17's were pounding them, and their morale needed bolstering. They needed proof that the supermen were winning the war, and we were the first large group of prisoners the Nazis could show off to the Black Shirts.

This was proof the fool American troops in North Africa were getting the hell whipped out of them! They wanted every Italian in Napoli to see us, so word could be passed over the entire country.

We were exhibited all over the city. Spaghetti eaters jeered at us. Some threw rocks and pebbles. Others spit on us. Right then, I vowed that if I ever came back to this filthy city under more favorable circumstances, I was going to kick every Italian I could catch. I came back, too, and left sore butts all over Naples. I

even made some of them bend over so I could plant my shoe more firmly. While parading us around, they took pictures. Still shots. Moving pictures. They showed us loading up, under armed guards.

When they were through using us as a political football, we were driven to some small place on the edge of Naples, called Capua. Another good place to take pictures ... American prisoners of war entering the barbed wire compound.

CHAPTER THREE-CAPUA, HOME ON THE ITALIAN RANGE

Hailing from Texas, I was accustomed to the idea of using barbed wire to fence in cattle. This was the first time I'd even thought of being fenced in by the tough wire, myself.

Capua was nothing more than a fairly large fenced area with large tents, similar to kitchen tents used by our own army, except that these had canvas across each end and could be closed up. There were sheds across each end of the camp. Our food was boiled in some of these sheds. I never found out what was in the others.

The ground was bare and hard, with no vegetation. Low places were filled with sand and resembled blown drifts, the kind a West Texas wind makes.

The latrines were down one side of the fence. Walls covered front and back, and the floor was lined with holes along the back side, like a bunch of French style squat commodes. Once inside the compound, we were given two small blankets. Those of us who had left our clean tin cans behind had to get another rusty one to clean out. With the turnover they had, I just couldn't see how those cans got rusty so fast.

A few prisoners were there to meet us, and as new prisoners arrived two to three times a day, our numbers swelled. Spotting a new group, we rushed over and asked questions on the status of the war. "Are we losing the war?" "Have you heard anything about my outfit? I was with the so and so." It was all news to us, and none of it good. "Did you happen to know a buddy of mine? He was with such and such outfit." "Did the First Battalion get out?" "What happened to the Second Battalion?"

I heard from one officer that Tex Hightower had had three tanks shot out from under him and was wounded.

I knew that my own outfit had suffered a lot of casualties and had lost a lot of equipment. Men from Lt. Armstrong's Second Platoon of my company drifted in and told me that many had been killed or wounded. My company must have had approximately 75 casualties.

The third day, a real character came in. He was wearing Arab clothing, sandals, and was bare headed. If I'd known him before, his "dress" wouldn't have surprised me. His name was Amon Carter, Jr., and his father owned a newspaper, radio station, and about half of Cow Town, otherwise known as Fort Worth, Texas.

I thought he was in disguise and had been scouting behind enemy lines. Amon had hidden his own expensive equipment, artillery range finders and B.C. scopes in a cave, to keep the Krauts from getting their greedy hands on them. A group of Arabs found him

there and held him prisoner for several days. They took everything he had. One of them even liked Amon's clothing better than his own and forced the Texan to trade.

Several days after our arrival at Capua, the Germans actually did exhibit a little human kindness, and performed the most humane act I saw during WWII ... they deloused us. After we were told to remove our clothes, we took the first shower most of us and had in many moons. Our clothes were thrown in a large boiler and even though they had been only steamed out and were no cleaner, it made us feel awfully good to put them back on, soft and warm, minus the cooties and their blood sucking pincers.

Seven days after we staked our claim on a hard spot of ground on which to sleep at Capua, a West Texas sized blow hit our tattered tent city. It took real effort for a day and a half to keep all our tents from blowing away. Many of them blew over and ripped, but we did manage to keep all of them inside the barbed wire, I think.

Since we all were sleeping on the ground, the storm made us realize what is really meant by the expression, salt of the Earth. When you sleep in that much blowing dirt, you find out how salty it is.

We all came out of this ordeal dirty and tired. Many did not care whether they ever washed off the dirt. Some of us tried to get the enlisted men to wash and clean up, so they would feel better and improve their morale. But the GIs were sullen and filled with the attitude that they did not have to take orders from American officers any longer. We found that the best thing to do was to leave them alone.

I must mention the food at Capua. The Italians around Naples seemed to grow an abundance of a green leaf vegetable we used to eat in Tyler. We called it collard greens. Every day, about 8 or 9 A.M., and again late in the afternoon, they brought out of the shed, several large pots of water containing the greens and set them on rough service tables. We lined up with our tin cans and wooden spoons to go through the chow line. We tried to get as much of this juice as they would let us have, and we could get away with, without spilling. Sometimes, if we were lucky, and they had any left, we could go back through the line and get seconds. You could consider yourself lucky indeed if your helping had several pieces of the vegetable leaf in it. Many times, we tried to decide, "Would it be better to try to get toward the end of the line and get more leaf, or try to get in front of the line and stand a better chance on seconds?" If you got at the end of the line, they may start running short and cut down the amount of the servings. There was more dirt in the bottom, but it was a little thicker,

too. If they ran out, you wouldn't get any at all. Funny, but they never seemed to let any big tin cans get thrown in those piles. Sometimes you wished they'd put a little salt in that juice. They must have used it all at one time, for once it tasted as if they'd used a whole sack. Oh, well. The dirt they forgot to wash off put a little salt into it.

I tried a little experiment with two cans. By filling one of the flat oval shaped cans with water and pouring it into one of the regular sized round tin cans, I found that the flat one would hold a little more, but I finally decided on the round one because we had to walk with them. I reasoned that by the time I spilled some out of the flat one, I would wind up with less juice than that held by the round one. We couldn't afford to waste this precious juice!

Everyone was hungry and should get an equal share. But we didn't think we were cheating if we found some way to get a spoonful more in a tin can. **This was the worst time for me as a POW. I was to be hungry for the next two years.**

I think anyone who has undergone this experience will agree that the first several weeks are, by far, the hardest. Your stomach goes through a shrinking process. You feel as if a gnawing pain right below your naval is trying to eat through your backbone; that your stomach has collapsed and is stuck together with a hard, fast glue; that a hand is on each stomach wall trying to pull them apart.

You never really get used to living with the gnawing feeling day after day without relief. After several months, the feeling dies down considerably, but it's there ... you just try to ignore it.

Hunger had a very unpopular "cousin" in our camp. It was called dysentery, and nearly everyone had it. Lack of proper foods made our stomachs hurt; dysentery made our intestines feel like they were loaded with hot coals. Because of this, many of us spent a lot of time in the open-air latrines, and soon, there was a sickening stench in the camp. Many were to keep this cousin for a long, uncomfortable time.

On several occasions, we could hear the ack-ack and see puffs of smoke in the sky. We could also hear the bombs raining down on the harbor area in Naples. But we were too far away to see the B17's very well. This always made us feel good. The Germans took some of the men down to the airfield to work one day. One American told us that while he was there, American planes came over unexpectedly. "It was so funny," he said, "to watch the Eyeties taking off for air raid shelters and trenches. One pilot came in real fast in a small training plane. In his rush to land and get

into a shelter before the bombing started, he forgot to put the wheels down. As soon as the plane stopped skidding, he took off for the trench, apparently figuring, to heck with the plane."

One day a bombing raid started about the time the lumbering old Junker 52's came in with their load of prisoners and troops. These Junkers circled the area around Capua until after the B17's were gone, then they landed. This was one time we were glad the German planes did not get shot down in a bombing raid.

Even the worst things don't last forever. After two weeks at Capua and several rumors that we were going to leave, the Germans passed the word that we would be shipped out the next day.

We also heard that they would distribute **Red Cross Parcels-- wonderful little boxes of food**. Prisoners, who were at Capua when we arrived, told us to expect them. They had received an issue once.

Sure enough, one morning they distributed the parcels, the contents of one box being divided between four men. **Lieutenants Paulson, Koch, another man whose name I can't remember and I divided one.**

We had been using our steel helmets to wash up and wash clothing. Since our parcel had oatmeal in it, we quickly found another use for it. Koch filled his with water. We scrounged small scraps of lumber, made a small fire, and pretty soon the water was boiling. I'll never forget how good oatmeal tasted, even from a tin can. This was the best we had felt in a long time. Paulson's steel helmet ended up smutty and black, but we found it to be a fairly good cooking pot. **We split the food between us. My part came to a half block of cheese, the type weighing one pound and packed in a rectangular box; six C ration biscuits; a small can of condensed milk; a package of cigarettes and some toilet paper. It's hard to imagine how important toilet paper is until you need some real bad, there isn't any, and you can't run to the corner store for some! One final memento--the Germans also gave us a bread ration consisting of about one sixth loaf of black German bread.**

I was a career soldier. I had spent six years of my army life in horse outfits while serving in the Horse Drawn Artillery. Working with the bangtails, I was outside much of the time. I also played a lot of baseball. Because of this, I chewed tobacco except when inside the barracks, then I smoked a pipe.

Here in the POW camp we could get a few cigarettes but no pipe or chewing tobacco. It was possible to remove tobacco from the paper, and use it for chewing or pipe smoking, but this used up the tobacco too fast for any longtime benefits. Here I was, 28 years old, and just starting to smoke cigarettes. But we had found

that when hunger pangs hit us real hard and we smoked even a small portion of a cigarette, it seemed to relieve those pangs a little. You had to be pretty good to smoke a cigarette down to what we called gut scorchers, real short, but we became experts.

Finally, we were lined up and marched to a siding near the main rail line about a mile from Capua. This was about 10 A.M. on 9 March 1943. We numbered about 160 officers and 1200 enlisted men. When we arrived at the siding, we found a long string of box cars with two coaches on the front end. As soon as we saw those coaches, I'm sure the same thought ran through each officer's mind, "Boy, I hope I'm lucky enough to get on one of those coaches." We learned quickly who would ride in them. All of the field grade officers stood in front as we were lined up. The Krauts started counting at the first of the line and told the first group to get in the first coach. I was lucky now, being counted in the second group. They didn't have to tell us twice to get in the second coach. The remaining officers and men were counted off, 40 to a group, and herded into box cars.

The G1 jargon for these cars is 40 and 8. They are 40 feet long and 8 feet wide. Doughboys of the First World War found they could hold 40 men or 8 horses. The fun group of the American Legion 40 & 8 derived its name from these cars.

The Nazis put 40 men in each car. The train had a full complement of German guards, assigned to the train for the trip. I suppose they belonged to the Wehrmacht Transportation Corps, a lot like our TC, not hand-picked nor the smartest in the world.

When the train stopped, guards stationed themselves all around it and some went through to check the insides. The coaches were regular European railroad tourist cars, consisting of eight rooms on each side, separated by an aisle down the center. Each room had a window and two seats and was entered through sliding doors which opened into the aisle.

Lieutenant Paulson and I landed in a room on the right side, about the center of the coach. There were eight of us, all lieutenants, in this room. **I also remember John Scully and Joe Saringer.**

Eventually an engine puffed alongside, switched, and hooked onto the train. We were on our way.

I don't believe there was a man on the train who was not glad to be leaving Capua, with its dirt and thin vegetable juice.

We realized that we were headed for a confident Nazi Germany, and even though we knew once we were inside the Fatherland, escape or liberation would be practically impossible until the end of the war. Still, we were not sorry to be leaving.

We traveled the remainder of that day and into the night, making normal passenger train stops, to take on water, fuel, new crews, etc. Our ever-present guardians got off the train and stood out about 20 feet from the sides of the cars on both sides. **About midnight, we passed through a large, lighted city we knew to be Rome.** No sightseeing or audience with the Pope for us.

There were five or six guards on our car. One usually sat at either end, and one walked down the center aisle, checking the compartments at frequent intervals.

Above the seats were baggage racks. Several of us took turns climbing up into these wide baggage racks to sleep. This gave the other fellows more room to stretch out below and rest. These choice spots usually fell to Joe Saringer and me, since we were smaller and could fit into them. It wasn't too bad, except for a brace, which ran across the middle. This prevented your body from sagging in the middle and was uncomfortable.

The scenery was beautiful as we passed through the Italian countryside. Our enjoyment would have been greater had we seen it under more agreeable circumstances. But, all we had to do was look out of the window and see the box cars, now ahead of us in the train, to realize how fortunate we were.

There was a toilet at one end of the coach. We were allowed to use this, provided we first checked with the guard and got his permission. On the wall by the toilet was a small painted outline relief map. It showed only where that particular rail line went, and was not very detailed or correct, but it gave me an idea. Every time I went to the toilet, I tried to time my request to the guard when someone else was in the toilet or waiting, so that I could stand there and study the turista map as long as possible.

ESCAPE MINDED

That morning, I started talking to the other fellows in the compartment about trying to unload off Adolf's train before it carried us inside Nazi Germany. No one seemed very interested. They didn't see how it could be done without the "master race" picking us off with the rifles they were carrying. Finally, Lieutenant Joe Saringer said that he would go with me if I'd actually make the break. We began trips to the toilet in earnest, so that we could study the map and determine a place to leave this conducted tour. The map didn't show the names of towns, so we decided to wait and hope that the train would stop at a town this side of the Brenner Pass. If it did, we would try our escape there. We asked everyone for information about towns in northern Italy. No one seemed to know more than we did.

When I was in school, I hated to study geography. Right now,

one of those old-world geography books would have been handy! Soon after noon, the mountains began getting higher and higher. As the day wore on, we knew that we were climbing fast, for we began to see snow and ice.

Joe began to hedge. He talked about how cold it was going to be out there. Finally, he said it would be foolish to try, and he didn't believe he'd go. After that, I didn't try.

I was still determined and told the others that, regardless of snow, ice, mountains, or Nazis, if the train stopped at dusk or later, south of the Brenner Pass, or on the other side, I was still going to try and escape. Several of the fellows gave me a little of their food. This was a very unselfish gesture, considering that we all were very hungry and food was more precious than gold.

In late afternoon, I began making final plans. Taking stock of what I had, I knew exactly how I would do it. In addition to short underwear, I had on a wool OD (olive drab) shirt and pants under a fatigue jacket and fatigue pants. The pants were split across the backside and both knees were worn from crawling around the cactus patches near Sidi Bou Zid. I had no socks, since mine had blown away in the big wind at Capua. But, I had a good old pair of ever faithful GI shoes. Most GIs will tell you that they are the best. I had my camouflaged steel helmet and liner, with a small knitted bill cap that was issued to keep cold air off the head.

I decided that the helmet would be an unnecessary burden and a dead giveaway if someone saw me, so I left it on the coach and told the fellows to give it to anyone who needed one. This was a hard decision, for I wanted to keep it as a souvenir, and to show my kids, if I ever had any. A lot of WWI veterans I knew had brought their helmets home. I wanted to take mine home too.

Darkness. It looked more and more forbidding out the coach window. But, I kept thinking, darkness will increase my chances. Finally, about 8 P.M., the train pulled into a station to take on fuel, water, or both. There was a long lighted platform. The engine was at the far end, and our coach, next to the last car on the train, was half way down the lighted platform.

The guards got off, but in fewer numbers. I suppose, since it was cold outside, they were taking turns.

Taking my cap off and raising the window a little, I looked out, trying to appear as nonchalant as possible. I asked Joe one last time if he wanted to go. Still he said "No." Soon the train tooted, and the guards moved away and boarded. As it started pulling out of the station, I raised the window the rest of the way and watched the guards. They boarded quickly and closed the

doors, for the train was gathering speed fast. I wished it would hurry up and get out of the lighted area before it picked up too much speed.

I later learned that people in Germany and other European countries are not allowed to walk down railroad tracks, as we do in the States. No one, not even a train man, is allowed to jump on or off moving trains. It might cause injury or death. The Germans are rules conscious--and they abide by them. Besides, they reason, no one would be crazy enough to jump from a moving train. He might be hurt or killed. I was going by *my* own rules, and lessons learned from hopping freights during the depression helped me now! I had seen no one on the platform except for our guards, but I was not going to take a chance on anyone seeing me get off if I could help it. Will we never get to that last light?

The fellas in the car were not helping much. "Some of the guards may see you!" "The train is going too fast. You'll fall and break a leg!" At long last! Here comes the last light. Boy, am I glad!

I am gonna jump off this train if it kills me.

As we started moving past the last light, I grabbed a curtain rod over the window, and swung my feet outside. I sat on the ledge and said "good-bye". I dropped to the window level by sticking my left elbow inside the car and dropped to my armpit. I dropped again and caught hands on the window ledge. Here I set my feet in a running motion fast, because by now the train had picked up lots of speed. I let go and hoped that I could stay on my feet. There was lots of gravel along the roadbed. I skidded and stumbled, slid and tried to take longer steps. My ankle scraped a signal wire brace that ran along the track. A knot popped up on my ankle.

Managing to stay on my feet, I slowed down a bit and angled out to the side of the track. I slipped and slid and came to a halt. Whew! I laid down in some weeds and caught my breath. Then I waited anxiously for the train to stop and discharge a detachment of guards to search for me. If they found me, would they take me alive, or invoke the law of escape and shoot me in the back as if I was running away? I didn't have to find out, for the train kept right on going, into the darkening night. My intense anxiety faded into the loneliest feeling in the world.

IN THE ALPS, ALL ALONE

After the train quickly disappeared, I laid in the weeds in the dark for several more minutes. As the train sped out of hearing, I glanced up and down the track to be certain that no one was in sight.

Suddenly, everything was very quiet. I heard nothing but the

small noises that circulate around a small village during the early part of a cold winter's night.

Once in a while, I could hear a barking dog, a weird sound in my situation. My ankle was beginning to throb a little. But, I was interested in getting away from this vicinity and I paid little attention to it. My hiding spot was out of the direct rays of the platform lights. But, if I stood up, I might create a silhouette for anyone coming from the opposite direction. I stayed as low in the weeds as I could, and as far from the rails of the fence at the edge of the right of way as I could.

I moved slowly, until I was well out of the lighted area before I allowed myself the comfort of straightening up and walking. When I thought I was far enough from the lighted area, I moved over to the roadbed beside the rails. I walked as lightly and as fast as I could. I wanted to get away from the station area as fast as possible.

Since the night was pitch black, I couldn't see much except the rails and crossties stretching out in front of me. The lights of the village grew dimmer behind me. Dots of lights of farm houses spread out in isolated places in the dark.

CHAPTER FOUR-THE BITTER TASTE OF FREEDOM

I could hear water to the left of the roadbed. Several times I saw reflections of lights in the water, and it looked like a fairly large stream. At one place, near the village, I passed one of those covered bridges that look so picturesque when you see them photographed over a stream.

About 10 minutes after I started walking, I could see a well-lit place about 50 feet to the right of the tracks. I kept wary eyes on it as best I could and still watch my footing. It seemed to be the only place around showing much life, because people were laughing and talking ... probably a tavern.

I walked out to the side of the tracks, sat down, and tried to think. Lights from the tavern did not shine on the tracks, but there was a road in front of the building which crossed the tracks ahead of me. I didn't want to take the chance of meeting someone who was using the road where it crossed the tracks.

I could not move to my right. I think that Switzerland was off to my left. This was the direction I would have to go when I could not go straight ahead.

The stream of water running along the left side of the railroad track was fairly large, so I eased over and sat beside it. In the dark it appeared to be 30 or 40 feet wide. The covered bridge was near the village and I did not want to go back.

There might have been a bridge up ahead, but if I crossed it, I might as well keep going straight up the track so that I could get as far away from the village as fast as possible. I then went back across the tracks and sat in the shadows, trying to decide what to do.

If I waited in the shadows, until the tavern closed and everyone went home, I would waste a lot of valuable time. And if I was going to try for Switzerland, I would have to make use of the darkness.

Also, if I continued up the tracks, the foliage would play out, and this would leave me with no quick hiding place.

Finally, I decided to stay in the shadows for as long as I could and continue up the tracks. If I turned left over the bridge, it might lead to a farmhouse and stop, or the road might lead back to the village.

So, I shuffled my feet and started out. Soon, I found that I could not stay in the shadows of the trees on the left. Before I realized it, I was walking next to the cross ties. There was nothing to do now but keep on moving.

The lights from the tavern were drawing near on my left, when suddenly, I saw a man walking quietly along the road. He turned and started walking swiftly down the tracks in my direction. Had my luck run out? There was a lump in my throat and I didn't know what to do. I was certain that to turn around and go in the other direction would be a mistake.

Without hesitation, I crossed to the other side of the tracks and kept on walking, as casually as I could. As he drew near, I could see that he was a fairly small man, about my size before my enforced dieting.

When we were almost opposite one another, **I could see that he was a soldier, wearing the uniform of his country. He had on a cloth cap, which resembled the overseas cap that American soldiers wear. I had on the uniform of my country, or rather, what was left of it. Here we were on a lonely railroad in northern Italy. Two soldiers in the service of their countries. One, me, friendless and forlorn on foreign soil. Two pawns on the chessboard of war.**

He spoke a few words to me in Italian. I didn't understand them. I was at a loss to know what to do, but I felt certain that to keep walking would be wrong. He kept talking, coming closer to me from across the tracks. I shrugged and pointed to my ear, trying to indicate that I couldn't hear. He kept pointing and making motions toward the tavern. I could tell that he had been drinking and was suspicious of me. He wanted me to go over to the tavern with him, and I didn't think the invitation was meant to be friendly. When he reached out to take my arm, I took his hand and gave him a judo flip. At this moment, I was glad that Lt. Hall Green, my OCS instructor, had taught a class in close quarters combat. I didn't realize at the time that it might come in handy later on. This Eytie soldier was lying on the ground, out like a light, even before he realized what was happening to him.

Apparently, his head had hit the rail when I flipped him. I drug him over to the side of the rails, near the rock fence, and I laid down beside him. I listened to see if anyone was coming to investigate. The chatter and laughter continued in the tavern.

I shook him down quickly and silently. In his side pockets were some coins and a pocket knife. I took the knife, placing it in my own pocket. Then I picked the soldier up and lifted him over the rock fence. I laid him down, not realizing that the bank was so steep and before I knew it, he had rolled down the bank and into the water. That was the last I saw of him.

This upset me very much. I didn't want to be accused of murdering an enemy soldier in his country. Quickly, I walked up the tracks, continuing in the direction I had originally headed. My luck held and I walked past the crossroad without being seen.

I don't remember how it looked, for I kept my eyes to the front and walked as fast as I could, trying to get out of this area in a hurry!

About a mile down the tracks, I slowed the fast pace I had set for myself. I was tiring and I wanted to be able to keep going for a long time that night. About every 45 minutes, I found a dark place in the shadows along the track, sat down and rested for 5 to 10 minutes.

Since the night was so dark, I could not make out the terrain on either side of the tracks. Soon after I passed the crossroad, I lost the canal or river, for it no longer followed the railroad. Most of the time I could see the dark, blurred outline of the mountains on each side of the tracks. Sometimes they crowded in on one or both sides, then faded back into the night. Once in a while, I came to a small bridge or trestle. Here I sat down, listened, and peered into the darkness as hard as I could, to see if anyone was near. While I was on the POW train, I noticed that the Italians had guards on larger bridges and at each end of the tunnels. I suppose this was to guard against sabotage.

I was certain that I had jumped from the train some distance from Brenner Pass. From my present location, Switzerland would be in a northwest direction. That is the direction I must follow. Without a map, I was handicapped. If I tried to follow the rails until I found another track leading off to my left, I would surely come to villages, towns or farms. Should I risk going through them and getting caught, or waste energy and time by skirting them? I didn't have the energy or time to spare.

I knew that there was a railroad going from one of the larger towns to the north, but finding it was a different matter. A map would have helped, especially if I could pinpoint my present location.

Following the tracks provided other problems, too, in addition to the bridges and trestles and possible tunnels that might be ahead. Three times I had to stumble out to the side in the darkness and find a quick place to hide while trains were going by. Two were headed south and one north.

The signals were a problem, too. Even though I did not look directly at them, even glancing in their direction up the track blinded me. This was a serious problem, because it took my eyes several minutes to adjust to the darkness once I had passed a signal. They gave me an eerie feeling, for I felt that someone was standing there watching me as I hurried my step to pass. There seemed to be one every mile, but I didn't count them, because I hated to see them loom up ahead. The plan to cut across country would pose its problems, too. If I tried to follow a road,

it would lead me by farmhouses and pass through villages. If I headed in a straight direction, I was certain to run into some of the taller Alps, making a detour around them necessary.

Suppose I got into the mountains and fell into a crevice? No one would know to look for me and I would die there.

These were the wrong thoughts for someone in my situation, and I knew it. So, I started thinking about something I liked a lot better. Suppose, I thought, I got lost up there in all that snow, and a great St. Bernard dog, with his keg of warming rum found me and led me to a little Swiss village. My picture would be in all the papers back home. There would be stories of how I had escaped from the Germans and crossed the Alps into Switzerland. Imagine! Six months internment in that beautiful snowy country where there were beautiful girls, everyone drank the best beer, and danced and yodeled day and night, year-round. Not cold there like it is here. Nice location and all of the people wearing warm clothing. Yes, it made me feel better. But, I had better forget the fantasy, get back to reality, and start doing something, even if it was wrong. I decided to follow the track until I came to alternatives. Perhaps I could find a low place in the skyline that might allow me to cut through between mountains in a northwest direction. Or, if I came to a road that went off to my left, I would take it, follow it until it turned in the wrong direction, then take off cross country. This way, if I was lucky, maybe the road would take me far back in the hills away from the railroad tracks and out of reach of any Italians who might have been alerted to look for me. In the morning, a thorough search would be made for me, for I would be missed from the POW train. A soldier died last night. Would they find him and look for me? What would happen to me if I was found?

I was very cold by this time, so I made myself get up and start walking up the tracks. When I had walked about half a mile, a small blacktop road appeared on my left. It followed the tracks a short distance, then seemed to angle off to the northwest. I left the railroad right of way and climbed over a small rail fence which ran alongside the road. I worried about the sound I was making walking along the road, but I doubted that it would awaken anyone this time of the morning. However, I walked down the middle so that I wouldn't run into anything sticking out from the sides, like tree branches.

After about a quarter of a mile, I could see a farmhouse, set back from the road, so I decided to chance it. I shortened my step and tried to walk lighter. When I was a little past the house, a dog barked from somewhere in the back. I increased my pace, still walking as quietly as I could. The dog must have gone back to

sleep, for I didn't hear him again.

About 400 yards past the house, the road made a sharp turn to the left and appeared to double back. The time had come for me to find out about the mountains. I climbed over another rail fence, wishing that I could see where I was going. It wasn't bad though, for it was a fairly level field, with a large hill bordering on my left. Later, a higher skyline started climbing on my left. Then I could tell that I was following a valley. At times I was in a plowed field. Next, I was in an orchard. After about a mile, the field played out. There was a low skyline on both sides and in front of me. From the outline in the dark, it seemed to be a low, rambling hill. I started taking my time and picking my way up to it.

I was dead tired, so I sat down, took the peg stopper out of my condensed milk, and drank a couple of small mouthfuls. The climbing was rough and tiresome. It must have been 5 A.M. and **I had been off the train for 10 hours.** I decided to find some sort of shelter or windbreak and rest, perhaps sleep if I could ever get my feet warm enough. I got up and started climbing and stumbling higher. About 30 minutes later, the tree line was gone. A rock formation was sticking out.

Feeling around on the leeward side, I found an overhang with a small depression, under which I could climb and keep most of the wind off me. I went over to the small trees and broke off some of the branches, piling them in front of the depression. After several painful trips I thought I had enough. I pulled them as close as I could to the depression, leaving room enough to enter. Crawling to the side, I reached back and pulled the branches around the opening. I hoped they would keep me warm, as well as make it impossible for me to be seen from any distance.

I spent the next 10 or 15 minutes trying to smooth out the rocks so they wouldn't stick me in the back. Wishing I had the foresight to do this before I prepared my camouflage, I drifted into a fitful sleep, dreaming I had each foot in a pail of ice.

I awakened about 8 or 9 o'clock, peered through the branches to see if there was any movement, and then pushed them away for a better look. I was stiff and cold, but I could tell it was warming up. Nothing was moving. I climbed out and moved over to the trees for cover. I broke off some bread and cheese and ate them, and I felt a little better. I walked along the side of the hill for a few yards to stretch and warm my cold bones.

There was a farmhouse off to the left from the way I thought I had come. A barn was set about a mile away in the middle of the orchards and fields. I could hear a train rumbling in the distance, and noises that seemed to come from a small village or farm out of

sight to the right behind the mountain.

I was about 200 yards from the top of the mountain, so I decided to walk along and up it at a right angle so it would not be so tiring. From the direction of the sun, that was the way to go. I left my little improvised shelter and started climbing. There was still a high overcast, but it was getting warmer as the morning wore on. This climbing was rough on fatigued, tired muscles. I found it necessary to sit down and rest quite often.

There were plenty of trees for cover right up to the top of the hill, so I dodged outcroppings of rock formations, going around them. The way the hill curved behind me and back to the right, I could not see much around me except to the left of the valley behind me. It ran into another hill.

After several hundred yards, I finally made my way to the top. I could see a little village on the back side of the hill, as I had suspected. There was another valley, with a sprinkling of farmhouses, to the northwest.

I located a spot near the crest, in some underbrush. There I would be hidden unless someone walked right over me. I ate more of my bread and cheese and wished I had a drink of water. I would have to find a stream somewhere that night and drink my fill. I had nothing to carry water in. In the mountains to the north, I wouldn't need water, because there was plenty of snow in that area. I pulled off my shoes and rubbed my feet. This warmed them. I was beginning to feel better, so I curled up in my hole and slept.

When I awakened, I thought it was late, but I suppose it was only about 4 P.M. The crest of the ridge appeared to run for several miles in the approximate direction I wanted to travel. I got up and started walking on the top of the hill toward the north.

I came to the northern end of the mountain before dark and went down the side for a short distance to rest and think. I needed a mental map of the valley since my traveling would be at night.

When darkness came, I was at the edge of the valley. The first part of the night went well as I crossed it. When I reached the other side, I crossed the next range of hills by climbing the saddle between two hills I had spotted before dark. But, beyond this range, I ran into trouble. I headed for what had looked like a pass between two taller mountains in the next range.

This night was a little brighter than the night before, when I had escaped. Still, I could not see more than a few yards and had to be guided by the dark outline of the skyline. I walked for hours toward what seemed to be a pass. Finally, the dark line in front of me leveled out and started getting higher. My fears were confirmed. Sheer rock wall 50 or 60 feet high was across my pass.

RECAPTURED!

This was disheartening! I could do nothing but retrace my steps. I angled off to the left, following the base of the mountain.

Later, following the procedure of the night before, I climbed up the mountain, stopping to rest more frequently now. I found a place to hide before dawn, rubbed my feet to warm them, then slipped into a fitful sleep. It was much colder, and I believe I was much higher than the night before. The next morning, I finished what was left of my cheese and a couple of C ration biscuits. My food was gone! What a blow to my morale!

All around me was silence and I began to feel frantic. The effects of loneliness coupled with extreme fatigue and hunger were beginning to get the best of me. I tried to think of ways to procure food, because I needed this above all else if I was going to make it to Switzerland and the friendly Saint Bernard. I headed northwest, up and around the side of the mountain. I found a saddle to the west and went through it to keep from having to climb over the mountain to the north. What I saw from the other side discouraged me even more.

There stretched out, was a long, wide valley with roads running in several directions. A village lay across the valley, six or seven miles away, and it was located in the direction I wanted to go. I felt that if I was to continue, I must have some food.

My time was running out. I did not feel that I could spare either the time to go around the village, or for nightfall to cover my passage through it.

I spotted a barn in the direction I wanted to go. Maybe the farmer would have some carrots and other vegetables stored in the barn. Did the Italians raise carrots? I hoped so. The kind I could picture were clean, round, firm and mouth-watering. Not the runty kind we dug out of the Arab gardens in North Africa. But, anything would taste good. I felt the barn was worth a try, so I headed toward it.

When I arrived, my hopes plunged. The only thing it contained was a lot of loose hay and some pieces of farm equipment. Feeling hungry and discouraged, I covered up with the hay and slept. About 2 P.M., I woke up and started thinking about a plan.

If I approached one of the houses near the village, maybe I would

be lucky enough to find friendly Italians who would give me food and tell me how far I had to go. That plan was discarded. It would

hardly work in the daytime. Even had I been lucky enough to pick out a friendly house, it was likely their neighbors would see me and turn me in.

There was a creek, or canal, between where I was and to my right. I decided to follow it to the right, or north, and attempt to get around the village before darkness. I would then try to steal something to eat from a barn or house at the far end of the village.

If anyone started chasing me, I would have the mountain beyond in which to get lost. My plans worked well for a time. I passed one fellow several hundred feet to my right. He was cutting wood, but he either paid no attention to me or didn't see me. Later, I passed several other people working in the orchards. Naturally, I chose a route that would lead me as far away from them as possible. When I reached the canal, I was nearer the village than I felt comfortable with. But, I figured I would attract less attention and have a better chance if I followed the water.

A short distance later I could see that a road angled into the right of the canal and paralleled it for about a hundred yards. Before long, I saw two men pedaling bicycles down the road, approaching my rear. There was no place to drop out of sight without getting down in the water. I felt that, in my condition, it would be the worst thing to do.

I decided to continue my present course and brazen it out, like I belonged there, strolling down the bank of the canal. The cyclists rode past me, staring curiously.

Shortly, they stopped altogether and started talking and pointing. One of them yelled something to me several times, as I tried to walk a little faster without noticeably increasing my gait.

They saw that I didn't intend to stop, so they rode on slowly. Pretty soon another man rode up from the opposite direction. The three started talking when they met. Another came from the road in front of me. We reached a crossroad. I kept going. They continued on their road, riding at a speed that matched my walking. Suddenly one of them left the group, turned around, and rode back to the crossroad. Here he turned to the right, zipped across the canal, and, pedaling furiously, rode his bicycle at high speed toward the village. We came to two more crossroads, but my accompanists seemed to be satisfied to follow the parallel road and not make any attempt to join me. The further we went, the more their numbers increased. Now there was quite a gallery watching my stoic walking.

I knew for sure that the guy who had left was summoning soldiers or police. But I could not walk any faster and didn't

think that I could keep up the pace I had set much longer.

The observers on my right were all men, but they didn't seem to want to jump me. I decided that my only chance would be to keep walking and hope that I could reach the mountain before police or people with weapons caught up with me.

I could see up ahead that the road the cyclists were on made a half turn and crossed the canal at an angle. I wondered what my "friends" would do when we met at the crossing. If we all kept our present pace, we would arrive at the crossing at about the same time. I still carried the staff I had cut the first morning out. It helped me when climbing up and down the mountains. This and the knife I had taken from the soldier were the only weapons I had.

Suddenly there was shouting from the last crossroad, 500 feet behind me. Surreptitiously glancing behind, I saw that four uniformed policemen had arrived on their bicycles. Two or three of them had carbines and pistols. A group of people were following at a distance. I merely kept walking like I didn't hear them. Believe me, I sincerely wished I hadn't. We were in an orchard now. I thought there were apple trees. The Carabinieri shouted again. I looked around and saw that they had now laid down their bicycles and were in a half trot, warily approaching me. One of them stopped, drew aim, and fired two shots over my head. But I wasn't about to stop now. Maybe if the trigger happy cop did hit and wound me, they would put me in a nice clean hospital bed, give me a bowl of good, thick, warm soup, and let me sleep. It simply never occurred to me that they might kill me.

I could see a house on the other side of the road, just after it crossed the canal. A sizeable audience was gathered there. Oh well, I thought. They are going to catch me anyway. If the cops were going to beat me up after they captured me, they might as well have some help. The soldier I'd left back in the water on still on my mind. I was positive they would know that I was the one who had left him there.

The cyclists who had accompanied me for the past few miles didn't hesitate now. They rode up, joining the group already gathered where the road bridged the canal at the house.

No more shots were fired. I think he was afraid he might accidentally shoot one of the gathered villagers. The cops slowed to a walk. They were either out of breath or sure of their quarry.

As I drew near, they all started talking at once, drawing closer together, as if in fear of me. The men with bicycles all seemed to be keeping one foot on the pedals and one foot on the ground. This procedure gave them a choice. If the bicycle proved to be too slow, they could abandon it, and use their feet to out

distance me. If I hadn't been the principle actor in this drama, it truly would have been slap stick comedy--Keystone Carabinieri And The Prisoner Frank.

One sight I shall never forget. A heavy-set woman, with a baby in her arms, took off for the house well before I reached the group. I had just arrived when she emerged from the house with a piece of venison between two twisted slices of bread and a tall thin tapering glass of red wine. All the men were talking and gesturing with their hands the way Italians do. She just walked up, pushed them aside and handed me the sandwich and a glass of wine before the police arrived.

The lady started talking to me, then she turned around and shouted in a different tone of voice at some of the men in the group. The baby, crying all the time, added to the general confusion.

I tried to wolf down the sandwich and wine as fast as I could before the police arrived and took it away from me. Never had I been so hungry!

I will always wonder three things. Was she berating the men for turning me in to the police? How did she get to me so fast with the food? Was she preparing it when she saw me coming way down the canal?

When the police arrived, they pushed all the civilians away from me. Then they started searching in all of my pockets. The man in charge was a lieutenant, or of similar rank. Each time he tried to stick his hands in my pockets, I slapped them away. The humiliation of being slapped by a foreigner in front of his countrymen made him very angry.

My friend, the woman, started to yell at him, and the baby, who appeared to be her grandson, cried louder. The confusion increased.

Many Americans thought that the war was unpopular with the average Italians. They had been forced into it through the unholy alliance between Hitler and Mussolini. The woman's reaction certainly bears this out. I finally emptied my pockets and turned them inside out. This satisfied the lieutenant. I was sorry that they took my pocket knife.

Now the police wanted to lead me off, but the lady would have none of it. They listened while she tried to talk to me. I told her that I was an American officer. Her face lit up and she started exclaiming to the other civilians. I am sure she thought I was British before I said, "American."

She pointed to the rips in the fatigue pants I wore. If I

understood her correctly, she thought it was awful that an American officer was dressed like that. They were interested in the little wool cap I had on my head. I don't believe they ever did understand that it was designed to be worn under a steel helmet.

The police grew tired of waiting. The civilians seemed to be arguing with them about the conduct of the war and what they were going to do with me. I wondered, myself. Shortly, my arms were taken by two guards and we marched down the road. The woman fired a few last verbal darts, and after we had gone a short distance, I jerked loose from my captors in order to wave at the courageous woman. With this, the law took a carbine off his shoulder, and I thought he intended to clobber me with it, thinking that I was going to try and make a break.

The officer in charge, who was leading the way, was armed with only a pistol. He stopped and started talking to me. I tried to make him understand by using sign language, that if they would turn my arms loose and let me walk, I would not try to get away. He turned and said something to the cops. They, in turn, freed my arms, and we started toward the village. As we entered the village, it appeared that the entire population had been alerted and was standing along the road. Some of the braver boys walked alongside the police and ask questions.

When we reached the center of the town, we entered what appeared to be the town hall. I was taken to an office and allowed to sit down while they talked among themselves. I suppose they were trying to decide what to do with me. I didn't really care, as long as they gave me something to eat and a place to sleep.

When the lieutenant talked to me, I let him know that I did not understand him. Then I retaliated by pointing to my mouth, putting my palms together, and by laying my head on the back of my hands.

It was almost dark when they took me through the big wooden doors of the town hall and on into a smaller room off to the side. This room contained a desk and a couple of chairs. The town did not have a jail, so this would be my detention room. One of the guards sat with me. Shortly, two others came in bringing a feather mattress and some old quilts, which they spread on the floor. I was so glad to see that bed!

The lieutenant brought me a small glass of wine and more deer meat with bread. I could feel the hostility in the other men and knew they didn't like me, but the officer looked as though he felt sorry for me. I was a pitiful figure.

They stood around while I gulped down the food and drink. As they gathered up the dishes and prepared to leave, I lunged for

the bed.

I didn't bother to watch as they closed and locked the heavy wooden door. I have a faint memory of them checking on me several times during the night, but I never stirred until the next morning.

I was rested but sore. Bruises covered my body where I had stumbled, fallen, and stepped on round stones, skidded and rolled, while traveling in the mountains at night. Daytime climbing is hard enough, but darkness compounds the problems.

Around 7 or 8 A.M. I was taken to the office next door. The lieutenant met me and indicated a small room in back of the office. I went in and found an old-fashioned wash basin and a pitcher of ice cold water. There was also a bar of soap, which would not lather in cold water, and a towel.

I stripped to my waist and washed as best I could. I wanted to wash my feet, but I was afraid he wouldn't let me do that. After I had washed and dressed in my filthy clothes, the lieutenant led me to a small apartment in back of the office and sat me down at a small table in the kitchen. I was sure this was where he lived, for a tall, nice looking blond-haired woman, who probably was his wife, was in this room. She served me with more dried deer meat, slices of twisted bread, and something that tasted like goat's milk. As I ate, the officer and his wife carried on a conversation. She paid no attention to me, and I don't recall that she ever looked directly at me. Ever so often in their conversation they said something which sounded like, "American officer."

When I finished, the officer stood up, and I knew that there was no coffee forthcoming. As I stood and started to walk towards the door, the woman was standing by the sink. I said, "Thank you for the breakfast." The Lieutenant translated and she laughed softly as he followed me out of the door.

We went back to the office where the other three cops were waiting. I sat down while they talked. The lieutenant and the cops rose and the officer appeared to give last minute instructions to the man who was to remain behind.

I stood up and they walked me out the door. There stood a two seated rig with two horses hitched to it. In the days of the American Old Wild West this rig would have been appropriate, but it held no such glamor for me. I was happy about one thing, though. Riding in this meant I wouldn't have to walk.

The rig had a flat top with 5-inch tassels hanging all around the edges. The team looked like good horses, and they had nice harnesses.

One of the policemen got up in front and took hold of the

reins. I was to sit in front with him, and since they had side arms and the carbines, I did so. The officer and the other cop got in the back seat. We were off.

We went in many directions. I knew I was lost, but I wasn't worried because I had guides. Sometimes the driver stepped the horses up to a trot.

After we covered 10 or 12 miles, we came to a small railroad station. Several houses stood nearby.

We were only at the station a short while when a slow passenger train puffed up, headed in the direction of the Brenner Pass. **The driver stayed with the rig and the lieutenant and one cop took me aboard the train.**

Soon the train left the station. We traveled about 20 miles and arrived at a small city called Bolzano. Here we left the train and walked for several blocks to a large three or four-story prison.

CHAPTER FIVE-THE NAME ON THE WALL ... AGAIN

Approaching the prison, the officer talked with a guard. We went through a gate and entered a building. I sat on a bench while the lieutenant talked with several uniformed men. Soon, a uniformed guard came in, and after a short conversation, he came over to me and signaled for me to follow him.

He escorted me down a corridor, turned, and went through barred doors which were manned by a guard with a big set of keys. This guard opened the door and clanged it shut behind us. We went down a stairway. Everything was barred now. Down a corridor to another hallway. My guard stopped for we had picked up several curious guards who kept asking the first one a lot of questions. My guard opened the door on my left, across the corridor. I was favored with a corner room.

I was locked in the cell. A steel bunk with a thin mattress and two short blankets was on the right cell wall. The barred window on the backcell wall was painted black. A keg, like our pickle barrels at home, stood against the wall on the left side.

The cell was entirely closed in. The wooden entrance door was thick and contained a small peep hole about eye level. This peep hole had glass and a shield on the outside. The guard could lift the shield and look in on me, but I couldn't look out.

Before I had time to get a good look at my cell, the guard slammed and locked the door. All the curious guards took turns peeping at me through the little hole.

I was to learn that these "peep holes" were universal in all the jails in which I was detained in Europe.

I went over and lifted the lid of the pickle barrel. The stench nearly knocked me down. I clamped the lid back quickly and could hear the guards snickering and talking. They watched me as I carried the barrel over to the half window which contained black glass, stood on the barrel and opened the window. It was hinged so it would swing in. There was no shortage of bars, but this didn't keep the cold air from rushing in. I closed the window and stepped off the barrel. The guards got tired of watching me and turned off the light. So that's why they have the window painted black I mused. Besides being painted for blackouts, the prisoner is in darkness when it is shut, or with the window open, frozen to death.

Maybe this is a form of primitive torture. I surely hoped the people in this prison had heard of the Geneva Convention.

Most of the cell was below ground level. The bottom of the half window was just above the outside ground, which put most of

my cell in the cellar.

I climbed on the barrel and opened the window praying all the time that the barrel wouldn't spillover, stinking up the cell. **As I stepped off and went over to the wall by my bunk, I took out my stubby pencil and scratched my "Name on the Wall". Then below my name, I added my outfit: Co. A, 701st T.D.Bn. 1st Armored Division.** By now they knew the identification of my unit, so this wouldn't give them any new information.

The second day I was in **Bolzano prison**, they allowed me to take a bath. It was the only one I had while I was there. The guards took me to a bathroom on the floor, where several showers lined one wall. While I took this bath, they ran my clothes through another delousing. I was glad, for it seemed to keep the dirt from getting so slick on the clothes.

The routine was the same every day. About 8 A.M., a couple of convicts with one guard came around and picked up my "pickle barrel", took it out, emptied it, and brought it back. I always hoped they would return with the same one. I think they did ... it had the same vile stench. They brought some old newspapers, too, which helped a lot. A few minutes later they brought a pan of water, set it on the floor and waited while I washed. I had no towel.

About 9 A.M., unless it was raining, I was taken outside to exercise. The place was 10 feet by 50 feet and was surrounded by a high wall. I walked for 30 to 45 minutes. Back in the cell, about 11 A.M., they brought chow around. This was the only meal I got and every morning, I was sure that 11 o'clock would never come. My meal consisted of two buns, about the diameter of a large sized biscuit, and a tin cup filled with two teacups full of soup. Man, there were long hours between meals. The rest of the time was spent in regular routine checks. About every two hours, day and night, the guard turned on the light, looked through the peep hole, and turned off the light. If things didn't seem right to him, he opened the door, came in and looked around. Going out, he closed the door, locked it, and turned off the light.

One of them forgot and left the light on. His boss came by, made a check, and saw it. He came in and looked around. Finding nothing wrong, he backed out, locked the door, then went after the guard. He brought him back and showed him how to turn off the light. From the tone of his voice, I think the boss gave him hell!

The place was full of bedbugs and cockroaches. When the lights were turned on, you see them run for cover. As soon as the lights went off, they all made a run for me.

This same cell was to have another American occupant a month

or two after I left it. Later we were to become good escape buddies. I was always glad that twenty-year-old Bill Higgins was in the cell after the weather had warmed up a bit. He could open the window and keep the bedbugs and cockroaches off him, during the daytime, anyway. They nearly ate me up.

A trustee, who worked in one of the offices, and who spoke some English, came around with the guard and talked to me for a little while. His name was Carlos Strum and he told me that all the people were curious about me because I was the first American who had ever been in that prison. Well now, I thought, that's quite an honor. I hoped that no other American soldier would have to share that honor.

AT LAST... BRENNER PASS!

The trustee, Carlos Strum, told me that he was a political prisoner. He had done something, never telling me what it was, and the people in power didn't like it. They imprisoned him for it. We talked several times. He was a clean, nice looking man, rather effeminate. Whatever his crime, he was not treated badly. His clothing was better than that of the other prisoners, and he was most certainly not underfed. I am certain that he was a big operator within the prison wall.

During one of our talks, he told me that before the war, he had worked for a large millinery firm. He was some sort of super salesman designer, a real lady's man, if you believed him. He looked it, and I believed him! He told me about a "lady friend" in Wisconsin "in the States" as he put it. She came to Europe every year before the war to buy clothing and he always saw her in France or Italy. He said that they really had a good time and that the lady from Milwaukee always went home satisfied with everything she got, whatever that was.

Carlos gave me her name and address and asked if I would write and tell her where he was and how he was doing and that he had not been able to write to her or hear from her for a long, long time.

After I arrived at Oflag 64 in Shubin, Poland, I was allowed to write only three letters per month. I squandered one of my precious letters on this lady and told her all I knew of Carlos. While I was in the POW camp, I received several letters from the woman's niece, in which they told me they were glad to hear about Carlos. I telephoned from Boston when I returned to the States, but I never talked to her, nor did I ever receive a letter from her. I suppose that she and Carlos resumed their buying and selling after the war was over.

The last Saturday I was in Bolzano Prison, a Catholic priest

came to see me. The guards opened my door and let him stand just a little inside while he talked to me, with Carlos acting as interpreter. He had some small, wormy apples about the size of small lemons. They looked so tantalizing. He finally realized that I was paying more attention to the apples than I was to our conversation. He had Carlos ask me if I would like some, and I replied that I surely would appreciate them. He handed four to me. Maybe they were full of worms, but they were the best tasting worms I ever ate!

The padre asked if I'd like to attend Sunday church services the next day. I told him that I'd be very glad to. He reminded me that I would not be able to understand very much, but it would be a chance for me to get out of my cell for a short time. I thanked him graciously for the opportunity, and for the apples. The next morning, a guard came for me. We went through several corridors and up several stairways before we reached the chapel. The altar was behind the low wooden rail in front. The priest and two trustees were awaiting my arrival before starting the services. A long wooden bench had been placed alongside the wall to the right and facing the altar. It was very near a door. My guard and I sat there, probably so we could exit fast if the need arose. I looked over my left shoulder and was aghast at what I saw. The roughest looking congregation I believe any man ever faced. These birds were real criminals if looks meant anything.

No man took his eyes off me during the services. I could feel their hatred boring into my back. I was the first American most of them had ever seen, and as I stated earlier, the first one in that prison. I was the enemy. Now I knew why I had been isolated from the other prisoners. I had been glad to leave my cell. But now, I felt somewhat relieved when my guard led me back to my tiny, rat and vermin infested cubicle.

Several times while being held at Bolzano, I had asked Carlos to tell the prisoner authorities that I demanded they notify the Red Cross or the Swiss Authorities. I hoped they would try and get me moved out of that bug hole. But, I doubt that my demands ever went beyond the prison walls.

On the Monday after the church services, a guard came to my cell and told me to get ready to leave the next morning. What the hell was I supposed to make ready? I had been ready since I arrived two months ago!

I slept fitfully that night. I wondered where my next stop would be. They had not given me any information, and, naturally, I wasn't on the prison grapevine. Finally, at 9 A.M. they fed me early and led me to the office near the entrance where four

policemen and a German civilian were waiting.

The policemen chained me to the German and led me out to an old prison truck. We hustled aboard and drove to the railroad station. A train was already standing on the track. The first car behind the engine was a prison car and the guards shoved us into it.

The guards let us talk very little. I managed to learn that the civilian to whom I was chained was being returned to Germany for execution he thought.

I counted 18 "stand up" cells in the prison car. They placed the German in one about half way down one end of the car, and forced me into another one, half way to the other end. Pretty good, I thought. An entire prison car with 18 cells. Four guards for two prisoners who are ragged, dirty, bedraggled, run down, weak and who can't understand each other's language. Perhaps they are afraid I might leave the moving train, too.

I called the spaces stand-up cells. There were no seats in them and they were so narrow that a man couldn't sit down, anyway. You could not sit on the floor. All you could do was stand up or half bend your knees, putting them against one side and try to "half sit" against the other. This was almost as tiresome as standing and much more uncomfortable.

The train crawled slowly up the mountains about noon, it stopped at the Brenner Pass Station. I knew of meetings held there by Hitler and Mussolini, and when I read of those meetings, I never dreamed I'd be their "guest". The police rushed us off the train and into a small office in the station on the west side of the tracks. It may have been an immigration station. Two of the guards remained with me. The other two shuffled off with the civilian. I never saw him again.

After much talking and a few telephone calls, a runty little German Obergefreiter (corporal) appeared, talked about two minutes, signed some papers, and told me to follow him. I had been carried there under heavy guard and in chains. He was walking in front, wearing only a sidearm. I followed. ***What had happened to cause such a relaxation of security since I cleared the immigration check point? Were Nazis lurking in those shadows, hoping I'd make a break for it? These were my thoughts.***

A number of people went in and out of the office. Several nice looking girls, accompanied by young men, came in. Nearly all wore nice, warm ski clothes and had skis and snow shoes with them. It was always the same. As they came in, they saw me, said something to the Kraut soldier, he answered and they laughed.

I had been sitting there a long time when a large, bald man

in civilian clothes hurried through the door. I thought the soldier would twist himself up in his anxiety to jump up and salute the man. He was important looking. **I was sure at the time that he was a member of the dreaded Gestapo, and still think so. This was my introduction to the German secret police.**

He took me to the back room and ordered me to take off my clothes. He didn't speak English, but I knew what he meant and after stalling him a few times, I saw he meant business and took them off. He examined, minutely, every stitch of my clothing, dirty and filthy as it was. He even pounded the heels of my shoes to see if they were hollow.

Then he looked me over. He had me pull the cheeks of my buttocks apart. This was a more thorough examination than any GI medic had ever given me. Later, I found out that the British had smuggled maps by putting them in rubber condoms and sticking them in their rectums. They could pass any German strip down test except this one.

After the shake down, he ordered me in a gruff voice to dress and sit down in the outer office. A little later, two soldiers came in to report to the big man. He talked to them for a few minutes, they stood around for a while, and then slung their rifles over their shoulders and indicated that I was to follow them. Strange, this following them! Always before, they had herded me in front of the guns. **We climbed aboard a third-class tourist car, and the train moved from the pass. This time I could see the scenery and it was beautiful. Again, I thought, I would really enjoy this under different conditions. Shortly before dusk, I could see the outlines of a small city. It was visible for a long time before we arrived there. As the train groaned into the station, I learned that it was Innsbruck.**

Many soldiers were milling in and around the station. Most of them were walking up to portable lunch counters and getting food from women and girls, who wore blue and white striped uniforms. Their nurse type caps had Red Cross insignia on them. None of the soldiers were paying for the food. This is certainly a switch, I thought. I rarely saw our Red Cross, and when I did, I had to pay for what I got, as did all our soldiers. Here's the German Red Cross, if that's what they are, feeding all of the Fuehrer's boys free gratis, and smiling while they do it. How many smiles did we receive from our Red Cross personnel?

My guards took me to an office on the second floor of the station. One stayed with me, and the other one went into another room to report, after he had talked to the noncommissioned officer who was seated at a desk. The second guard soon came out and motioned for me to go into the inner room.

A German officer, wearing the pips of a Hauptmann (Captain), was seated at a large desk on one side of the big room. His uniform had the red trimmings of the German Field Artillery. He was a tall, medium built, nice looking man. His hair was prematurely gray.

He brusquely told the guard to wait outside, then gave me a start when he addressed me in fluent English. He used the language better than I did. I was invited to have a seat, then offered me a cigarette and his lighter. The captain then asked a few questions. "Where were you captured?" "How did you jump off the train?" "Why?" "Where have they been holding you to get your clothes so torn and dirty?"

After this brief interrogation, he leaned back comfortably in his chair and we talked for about 30 minutes.

He told me that he had traveled extensively in the United States, and that he liked our country very much. He sold multicolored stained glass which was used in church windows and had made a lot of money selling the glass to churches in the United States. "Are you using that money to make ammunition to shoot back at us?" I asked him.

He replied, very softly, that he did not like the war. His family was in Germany when the war started, and he could not get them out. "I had no choice, other than to come back," he said. "Once I was back in Germany, it was necessary for me to get into uniform or go to jail."

He asked what part of the country I came from, and when he learned it was Texas, replied that he had been to San Antonio and had liked this section very much.

"How long has it been since you have eaten?" he asked when it looked as if we had run out of something to talk about. "I haven't had very much to eat for the last two months. I've had nothing since early this morning and I'm hungry as hell." The captain walked to the door, spoke to one of the guards, then told me to go with the guard. He would take me to a place to wash up and would get me something to eat. I thanked the good captain and took off with my escort.

He guided me to the basement. We entered a large room through a swinging door. Bath booths ranged down the right wall, urinals down the left wall, with a double row of booths down the center. The center row contained, on the right, lavatory facilities, and on the left, commodes.

Women were all over the place, walking around performing different tasks. I wanted to urinate, so I pointed toward the urinals. The guard nodded his head. Several women walked up and asked him questions. I could hear him answer that I was an Amerikan

Offizier. Two or three women followed me to the urinal. I got the impression that they were trying to see how I was "built". I am bashful by nature, but "when you gotta go, ya gotta go." I tried to turn away from the women as far as I could. By the time I had finished, an audience of women had assembled. I felt like making a deep bow and trying to obtain the proper blush from them. I decided to look as dignified as I could so the enemy would have no reason to publish cartoons in the Sunday paper showing American officers as clowns.

The guard showed me over the lavatory booths and let me go in and wash up.

This, I thought, is ridiculous. Here you can have privacy, while you strip to your waist and wash. The women cannot see you. But, if you want to use the urinal ... aw nuts! I quit trying to figure their pure Aryan reasoning.

Finished with my half bath, the guard took me to an inside eating place which was similar to those I had seen in the station. These were set up so that soldiers who were between trains could eat.

The guard brought me a bowl of thick soup and a cup of warm ersatz (bean) coffee. He led me to a table off to one side, separating me from the rest of the people.

When I finished eating, he took me back to the upstairs office. Two new soldiers were sitting there. The Obergefreiter (corporal) was armed with a pistol. The other one had a rifle. They both appeared to be good soldiers, possibly fighting men. They wore clean uniforms and were neat in appearance. They exemplified the pictures I had always seen of the German military. They were not the slovenly rear echelon guards I had seen at Capua, Brenner Pass, and here at Innsbruck.

CHAPTER SIX-MY FIRST POW CAMP

The noncommissioned officer rose from his desk, went into the office, and told the Captain that we had returned. The Hauptmann came out, spoke to the two guards for a couple of minutes, then turned to me and said, **"They are taking you to an officer's camp. I cannot tell you where it is, but I am sure you will meet some of your friends there."** He asked me if there was anything I needed. I told him that I would like to shave, since I had been unable to do so since I borrowed a razor from a fellow officer prisoner in Capua over two months before. He told me that it was impossible, since the train was scheduled to depart in a few minutes. He said, however, "I am certain that you will be given a razor to shave with when you reach the camp they are taking you to," indicating my two guards.

He spoke to the guards again, then told me it was time to leave. He snapped one of those German-half-British salutes at me. This caught me by surprise and I had already moved off with the guards when I recovered enough to return it.

The train we boarded was a nice one. Perhaps it was the **Munich Express**. I thought so.

The guards talked with a uniformed trainman, then led me into a roomette on the west side of the train. I sat by the window, thinking they would make us move. But they didn't. It was safe to leave me there. The sliding curtains were down and fastened into position so they couldn't be raised because of the blackout. Even if I had been in good condition, the train would be going too fast for me to bailout.

As I sat there guarded by two of the Nazis elite soldiers, the realization hit me. I was going to make another escape!

The München railway station (two or three hours away) was our destination. This confused me until I realized that München was the way they spelled Munich. "So, this is where it all began. England's umbrella toting Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, tried to appease the appetite of the war mongering little corporal." The station was very busy with people getting off and on trains.

We left the train and my guards guided me to a large room which faced the terminal. Benches, chairs and desks in the room were occupied by soldiers in funny looking black uniforms. These were tailored on the same order as other German uniforms, with the rank indicated on epaulets, which were worn on the shoulders. These birds had on black tin helmets, similar to the ones worn by the Kaiser's soldiers in WWI. Around their neck they wore shiny chains about half an inch wide. These were regular Feldwebel

military police in their official clothing.

Behind the desk sat a large Feldwebel (master sergeant). The corporal guard spoke to him for a moment, then motioned for me to be seated on one of the other benches, as he and the other guard took their seats. The large noncom had a fat, round face, with one of the small, popular Hitler mustaches. He reminded me of pictures I had seen of the typical German bartender. The obvious imitation of his beloved Fuehrer made him a comical sight. He took an immediate interest in me and spoke English. Before I knew it, he was telling me in an argumentative manner what a bad mistake we had made by entering a war which was none of our business. "Your President Roosevelt has gotten you into it and will make money for himself and the 'Wall Street Jews'."

I retaliated by telling him, "Your slant eyed Jap friends forced us into the war by making a sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. Roosevelt is a helluva lot better man than that paperhanger leading you."

He was furious! He cussed in German and put on a big show for the other soldiers around him. He wouldn't talk to me any more until just before the guards took me off, when he said, "I don't think you are an officer. But, if you are, you aren't very smart."

I never did understand whether he said this because of the way I looked, or because I had the audacity to say what I thought of their "great" leader. **One thing I did understand, though. If I kept up this belligerent line, it could get me shot! The British were conducting night bombing raids over Munich and I was caught in one of them, while I was waiting in the station. Air raid warnings sounded and everyone started running. My guards pulled me with them to a bomb shelter which was located between two buildings. Steps led down to the shelter and as I was about to descend the stairs, I was told to stand outside. "If you try to run, we will shoot you!" The door was left open so they could watch me. I was glad the bombs didn't hit the station that night!**

We were in the station for five hours. The guards took shifts watching me. One sat with me while the other wandered around, getting coffee or something to eat. Finally, their motions indicated that it was time to leave. The big one had discouraged me from lying on the bench. I tried to get a little sleep sitting up, but it was so slick I kept sliding off, and I didn't get much rest. Yes, I was ready to leave there.

They marched me out to the tracks and the guards located the train. We walked along it, boarded a commuter type coach, and took possession of one of the wooden seats. Guards posted themselves on either side of me.

It would be daylight soon. This would be a slower train and I was given no opportunity to leave it.

The two guards never tried to talk to me. I don't believe they would have permitted anyone else to. Two or three times civilian passengers spoke to the corporal, but he seemed to give them short answers, indicating that it was none of their business. This always ended the conversation.

Dawn was creeping over the horizon as we moved out of the station. The train passed through several smaller stations, discharging and taking on passengers. Thirty miles to the north, we came to a small town called Moosburg. The guards escorted me off the train and three of us walked several blocks to the edge of town. There, encircled by barbed wire, was a prisoner of war camp. Capua had been sort of a holdover. This, my first, was the real thing. Was this to be my home for the remainder of the war? I learned that it was Stalag VII-A. My "protectors" talked to the guard at the gate. They took me inside and turned me over to a German officer, then hurried away. I believe, from the way they acted, that they were on leave, or a pass, which would begin as soon as they had delivered me.

The German officer used an interpreter to ask the usual questions. Then he spoke to the interpreter in German, and the latter motioned for me to follow him down a row of buildings inside the camp. About four buildings down the line he turned into a supply room.

There I met a British sergeant. The German told the sergeant to get me something to eat. He left, saying that he would be back later. The sergeant was a real Limey, with a thick, heavy brogue. I could not understand him any better than I understood the Germans. I never did learn his name, rank, or type of sergeant he was, and I didn't want to keep asking him.

He fried a can of salty bacon (the kind that comes wound around in cans) on a wood burning heater inside the building. The bacon, furnished by the Red Cross, really tasted good at first, but the more I ate, the saltier it became. Finally, after I had eaten half, I began to feel sick, and couldn't eat anymore.

The sergeant loaned me a razor and furnished me with a pan of warm water. I shaved for the first time since Capua and it felt wonderful.

"There are Russians, British, and a few American GIs at Moosburg," he said. I looked out the window and identified Russians working around the place. Three were pulling and pushing a cart. I didn't see any Americans or British. The sergeant said told me that they were in a different part of the camp. He was in charge

of a supply room full of tools and equipment.

A few minutes after I finished shaving, the interpreter came for me. Thanking the sergeant, I told him good-bye. **He didn't know what they would do with me; there weren't any other American officers were held at Moosburg.** The interpreter took me to a long building near the fence which ran parallel to the road that went into the village. I was guided into an office and a different German officer was seated behind a desk.

German soldiers were seated on the benches. When we arrived, two of them armed with rifles rose and went over to the officer. The superior, the interpreter and two guards conferred for a few minutes, then, turning to me, the interpreter told me to go with the two guards. **I was being taken to another camp. I won't be spending the war here, I thought.**

By this time, the salty bacon was really getting to me. I told him that before I went anywhere, I needed to go outside, or I would throw up on their floor. He opened the door, and I threw up on the grounds of the compound. I have never cared much for bacon since. The guards followed, and when I finished vomiting, they led me away.

Back to the railroad station. In a few minutes, a local commuter train came along, headed for Munich, from where I had come several hours before. We boarded it and returned to the Munich station. Fortunately, the old bartender looking Kraut wasn't there. I was kinda glad. I didn't want another confrontation.

We caught another commuter train and rode about 40 or 50 miles to the northwest: I was over my sick stomach enough to be hungry again. These guards, like the others, did not talk. I didn't feel like trying to get any information from them anyway, and I did not care where they were taking me, as long as we got there soon.

The people on the trains were either well-disciplined regarding prisoners with armed guards, or the Nazis had insulated them to sights of Army and Gestapo hoods hauling people off to concentration camps. Except for a few curious, surreptitious glances, they seemed to ignore guards and prisoners alike.

When we finally arrived at the little town of Eichstadt, we disembarked. Guards marched me north, down a cobblestone road to the edge of the village, where we saw a large barbed wire enclosed area. It was spread out across the valley floor.

This was Oflag VII-A. Permanent buildings were near the main gate, which faced south. In addition to these, both inside and outside the fence, there were two and three story permanent buildings along the road which traversed the west side of the camp.

In front of these, and to the east for several hundred yards, was an open area where prisoners were lined up and counted for roll calls. This area, which doubled as a recreational area, extended to the fence on the east. About a quarter of a mile outside the fence, there was a track for the local commuter trains. An engine usually pulled three or four cars by the camp. It was as likely to be going backwards as forwards when it came by.

Beyond the Appell parade ground stood temporary, one story barracks, facing east and west and standing end to end. There were several rows of these and they stretched to the fence at the north end of the camp. The guards escorted me into one of the buildings outside the fence. **I was again interrogated about my escape. They did not want to believe that I had jumped from a moving train and preferred to think that I had escaped during a period when the guards were lax.** After they finished talking to me, I was taken to a cell block in the back of the same building and was thrust into a cell.

Later that day, I received some soup, two slices of black German bread, and a tin of ersatz coffee. The cell contained a wooden frame "bunk house" type double deck bunk. German POW regulations allowed each prisoner several boards, or slats, to fit across from one end of the bunk to the other. The trick was to get one board under your head, shoulders, buttocks, and feet, while keeping the others distributed at the right places in between if you could ever find out where that was. The prisoner who could accumulate enough boards to completely fill his bunk from end to end was rich indeed. In addition, there was a mattress of sorts. It had a burlap cover and was filled with excelsior which soon crumbled to saw dust under a nervous sleeper. The guard pitched me a couple of blankets. I slept, but not peacefully. My nightmare was vivid. I took train rides from Munich to all of the little villages nearby. The fat bartending military police sergeant was all of my guards, all of the trainmen, and all of the civilians. Finally, I was tied between the rails and when the train finally ran over me, this same tormentor was the engineer at the throttle, speeding down on me, blowing the whistle, ringing the bell, and screeching at the top of his voice!

I awoke with a start! The corporal of the guard was standing there in the middle of the night with a flashlight in his hands, shaking me. I was making so much noise the German guards at the other end of the barracks couldn't sleep.

The next morning an English-speaking goon came after me and passed me inside the camp. We continued down the line of long buildings along a road on the west side until we came to the third one. We went up second floor steps and knocked on the door.

THE BRITISH QUIZ ME

A British officer answered the knock. The interpreter told him that I was a newly arrived American officer. After being thanked by the officer, the Kraut left.

The Brit and I swapped introductions. He then asked several questions about where I had been. After I answered his queries, he led me across the room, through a door, and into a larger room.

Seven or eight men were sitting around talking. I was introduced to several British officers, whose names I could not catch. Then I met **Colonel T.D. Drake, California, 168th Infantry Regimental Commander.**

I had already heard a lot about this man, who was to play a big part in my prison life. At Capua there had been much talk about a full "bird" colonel the Nazis had captured. Colonel Drake was a real fighter and was destined to be our Senior American Officer until his repatriation in 1944.

Other American officers were Lt. Col. Jim Alger, 2nd Bn., 1st Armored Regiment, and Lt. Col. Louis Gershenow of Easton, Pa. They sat me down and drilled me with questions hard and fast. The door opened and in walked Lt. Col. Jim Waters. Boy, was I glad to see him. Col. Waters told me that this group always grilled new officers coming into the camp for security reasons, unless someone knew them and could vouch for them. The Germans had been known to slip stooges inside British camps in order to get information on the latest tunnels, how things were smuggled in the out of camps, and how certain information was received from England. Everyone coming into the camp had to be pronounced "cleared" by this group. This was done systematically before any of the "older inmates" were allowed to discuss security information such as radio news, tunnels or escape plans. These field grade officers had not been taken to Capua but had been brought directly to Oflag VII A. I picked up the thread of my story at Capua, and told Col. Waters all that had happened to me since we had last seen one another at Tunis. While I was talking, one of the British officers brought me a large cup of tea. It was the type we received in British Compo rations which were issued in lieu of C rations on the front lines in North Africa.

Another officer brought in some clean clothing for me. A pair of wool pants and a battle jacket, similar to the one a great American general had copied when getting one tailored for himself - the famous Eisenhower jacket. There was a suit of long handled woolen underwear and a pair of extra-long wool socks which I kept until long after my return to the states. I fondled these nice, warm clean clothes with a feeling of adoration, almost worship.

After we talked a little more, one of the British officers told a captain to assign me to a Mess and escort me to it, so that I could clean up and put on clean clothing. I took my leave, and as we walked through the busy camp, I found myself feeling much better already.

Long absence from my compatriots had caused me to retreat into a shell of self-sufficiency. Now that I was back among people who spoke my language, I felt the dark shadows of gloom fade into a spirit of buoyancy. No longer were there only enemies surrounding me.

We arrived at one of the single-story barracks in the lower part of the valley and strolled through an aisle in the middle of the building to a partitioned room about half way to the end. There I was introduced to **G. Ray Cowie of Belmont, Lower Hutt, New Zealand**, as a new member of his Mess. Sitting there he appeared to be about 40 years of age and cut quite a figure as a nice looking soldier. The prisoners were divided into small groups called "Messes", to facilitate feeding. The officer who had acted as my guide bid us adieu and departed. Ray Cowie wore the three "Pips" of a Captain and was in the Corps of Royal Engineers. He showed me to the top bunk, one of four lined around the three walls, forming a U shape around the Mess table, which stood in the center of the room. Anticipating my next question, he showed me the wash room two doors down the hall.

As quickly as I could, I discarded all of the filthy clothing. Using Captain Cowie's soap and towel, I took an ice cold bath. As cold as it was, I believe it was the most refreshing bath I ever had. Then I put on the clean clothing and felt like a new man.

The evening routine was explained to me. German orders-- everyone had to be in the barracks at 8 P.M. If you had to use the latrine during the night, you were encouraged to use the ones outside the barracks before curfew, if possible, since the ones inside were small and wouldn't hold much. The following were British prisoners I met at Oflag VII A:

R.W. Snowden, Windlesham Cottage, Windlesham Surrey, England; G.R. Cowie, Belmont, Lower Hut, New Zealand; J.P. Sherbrook, 46 Bedford Square, London; W.C.2; Doug Allison, 2 Spencer Road, Bromley, Kent; R. E. King, "Fairbank", Shoalhaven Street, Kliama, N.S.W. Australia; P.M. Cudmore, Adelaide Club, South Australia; R.A. Higgins, "Sheerlands", New Haw, Weybridge, Surrey, England; J.R. Stewart, Park Cottage, Kingsdon, Taunton, Somerset, England; A.H. Smith, "White Lodge", Thornhill, Llanishen, Cardiff, in care of W.M. Stapledon and Sons, Port Said, Egypt; W.H. Scott, 133-8 Ouellette Avenue, Windsor, Ontario, Canada; Esmond Adams, care of Thomas, Hedley and Co., Ltd., Newcastle-on-Tyne, England; D.L.

Pickard, St. Martin's Rectory, Shorncliffe, Kent, The Buffs whose depot is at Canterbury, Kent, England.

[Note: Photos and notes are located on the next page]

Additional Notations from American Red Cross War Bulletins:

German POW Camps merged graphic from Vol. 2, No. 6 June 1944

Life In A Germany Prison Camp drawing from Vol. 2, No. 2 February 1944



Ten thousand capture parcels have been forwarded from Geneva to camps in Germany for American prisoners of war, and a second shipment of ten thousand (contents as above) is now on its way from the United States to Geneva.

Figure 4-Red Cross Care Package



Christmas Package Content List:

Plum pudding-1 pound
Turkey, boned meat-3/4 pound
Small sausages-1/4 pound
Strawberry jam-6 oz.
Candy, assorted-3/4 pound
Deviled ham-3 oz.
Cheddar cheese-1/4 pound
Nuts, mixed-3/4 pound
Bouillon cubes-12
Fruit bars-2
Dates-14 oz.
Cherries canned-6 oz.
Playing cards-1 pk.
Chewing gum-4 pkgs.
Butter-3 3/4 oz.
Games, assorted-1 box
Cigarettes-3 pkgs.
Smoking tobacco-1 pkg.
Pipe-1
Tea-1 3/8 oz.
Honey-6 oz.
Washcloth-1
Pictures (American scenes) 2

Contents of the 1944 Christmas package for American prisoners of war and civilian internees in Europe. More than 75,000 of these packages were shipped from Philadelphia.

Figure 5-Christmas Package

CHAPTER SEVEN-CANADIAN POWS IN CHAINS

After we returned to the bunk area, Ray introduced me to the other members of the Mess as they drifted in. They were Ray Snowden, who was badly wounded at Dunkirk. He received one of the highest British medals. John P. Sherbrook, a barrister in civilian life and a fine, clean young man. Rollie MacKenzie, a Scotsman right down to the multicolored kilts he wore. Rollie was a Captain in His Majesty's service, had spent considerable time in China and liked to talk about it very much. Doug Allison, was a swell young fellow who liked to wear the uniform of the Air Armed Force. J. R. Stewart was a younger man who spent much time in Egypt and other North African countries. He had searched for valuable relics in the Pyramids and other ancient places of attraction. Arthur H. Smith was now a Captain, but in peace time he was a radio operator on ships for W.M. Stapleton and Sons out of Port Said, Egypt. He had been to the United States several times.

Most of these men had been POWs for nearly three years and knew what it was like to be without clothing and necessary daily items in a prison camp. One of them gave me a razor; another one, a towel; and a third gave me a coveted roll of toilet paper. Next, I was given a cup for tea and some silverware. They found a Red Cross parcel cardboard box and showed me how all Kriegies turned these little boxes into portable cupboards. In it, you kept your silverware, cup, uneaten rations, and any other food you could hang on to, perhaps for a bash. Bashing, they explained, means to save up a little of your food, and then eat all of your carefully hoarded supply at once. This served to make you a little less hungry for a few hours.

These British fellows maintained English eating customs and habits and served their meals differently than we did later in an American camp. We ate at their hours and consumed our pro-rated rations in the British manner.

For breakfast they served hot water to make coffee or tea, if you had the ingredients and most ate a slice of bread from their one sixth loaf allowance. At noon, boiled potatoes and German soup were issued. At 4 P.M., more hot water was available and the British had their biggest meal, eating food from their Red Cross parcels if any was available. Usually, the two or three small potatoes served at noon were heated and eaten. About 6 or 7 P.M., more water was heated. They would have a slice of bread with anything they managed to have and a drink.

At "tea" on my first day, Ray Cowie introduced me to the most famous of all Kriegie inventions, the smokeless heater, or more often called, the "heatless smokers". These little billowing lung cloggers undoubtedly were invented by some designing engineer

intent on destroying the human race. They were made by taking two tin cans of most any size as long as one was larger than the other. The bottom of the larger can was the top of the heater. A hole was cut out of it just large enough to insert the open end of the smaller can through it, leaving the top even with the bottom of the larger can. Slices of tin were cut out of the bottom of the inside can to form the grates. You could punch a hole through one side of both cans and insert a piece of wire to use in shaking the grates down. Or, you could shake the grates by punching a piece of wire in from the top or bottom. A shorter can, for example a salmon tin, was placed on top of the heater to hold the cooking utensil up off the fire. Sometimes another can was added to the bottom to serve as an ash catcher or base.

The principle of these little midget cookers is the same as with gas heaters. Holes were punched at the top of the inside can. After the fire was started and going, air coming through the jacket formed between the inside and outside can was heated enough to burn the oxygen when it rushed from those holes at the top of the inside can. This is the same as when oxygen and gas are mixed and burned in a gas stove. Paper, cardboard, wood, or most any flammable material can be used as fuel. They make a good fire with a small amount of fuel, if you can stand the smoke. They don't smoke much the first couple of times they are used, but after the tin is burned off, they really smoke!

Most of my first two weeks at Eichstadt were spent answering questions put to me by curious British officers. The fellows in my Mess didn't bother me much, but others came from all parts of the camp to see any new arrival. **Some of the questions were humorous. "Do the cowboys in Texas really carry guns?" "Do the Indians still roam the countryside?" "What is the biggest bank in the US?" "How many paved roads are there in America?"**

One man, who had been in the immigration service, asked me what our immigration laws were. When I couldn't tell him, he said, "Certainly you should know something about your country!" When I told him that Texas is a different country from the rest of the United States, he looked at me in total disbelief and took off.

One day, I decided to ask a question and got in trouble with the little Scot Captain. It was the question we always ask about Scotsmen about their kilts. Rollie got mad at me for asking. He wasn't mad for long though, because Arthur Smith told him that I was just a stranger who was curious about his kilt, and he had no reason to be angry. Several of the other men in the Mess scolded him for getting mad.

The final result was that I had to spend nearly two hours listening while he explained the history of the kilt. Each color,

stripe and plaid has a different meaning. I believe he could have gone on all day had not some of the men rescued me. Rollie never did answer my original question, though. One of the other men told me that he only wore something under the kilt when the weather was cold.

One of the first things I noticed when I entered the camp was the presence of some prisoners near the main gate. They wore handcuffs-which were divided by 12-inch chains. Members of my Mess informed me that these were Canadian prisoners.

During the early days of the war, Canadian commandoes had pulled a raid on one of the Guernsey Islands in the English Channel near the coast of France. The island, occupied by Germans, was taken over completely for a short time by the Canadians.

When the Canadians got ready to leave the island, they found themselves with Nazi prisoners they could not take with them. Rather than kill the prisoners, they were tied up with bonds strong enough to hold them until the Canadians were well out to sea.

Ray Cowie told me about a curious kind of punishment. On top of a hill south of the camp sat an old German castle. Until a few months before I arrived at Oflag VII B, the Germans would load the Canadians on trucks and take them to the castle, which was filled with double deck beds.

The Krauts would then tie the Canadians in bunks and leave them there all day. In the late afternoon they were untied and returned to camp. This was done in retaliation.

Finally, the Germans stopped taking them to the castle, but handcuffs were put on the Canadians every morning and taken off every night, instead. On Sundays, they were allowed to go without handcuffs for the entire day!

Walking around the camp one day, I remarked that the Canadians played a doggone good game of softball, even though they wore handcuffs. Ray Snowden asked me if I would like to go over and play with them since softball is an American game. "Yes, I would enjoy that." The next day, a friend of Ray's, W.H. Scott came to our Mess to visit Ray. When he arrived, he took out a small pen knife, took his cuffs off, and put them on me. I wandered down to the diamond where the Canadians were playing. Before long, I was playing third base for one of the teams. It was difficult to throw or run at first, but after throwing several balls away, I discovered that you had to bring your left arm back and around in accompaniment with your throwing arm and try not to throw too hard. When running, you could do better if you raised your hands so the chain was across your stomach. The cuffs did not interfere much with batting. Everyone had the same handicap. Some could conquer

it better than others.

My friends in the Mess seemed to enjoy talking about the United States with me. Our customs, movies, music, night clubs, and many other things held their interest and they were always asking questions.

One day Arthur Smith told me that many of the Americans he had read about, particularly those in baseball and other sports, had nicknames. "Did you have one?"

To avoid disappointing him, I told him that when I was playing Army and semiprofessional baseball around San Antonio and along the Mexican border, my friends called me "Kid Nitro".

From that day on, they all addressed me and referred to me by using the nickname. When I was transferred to an American POW camp, the name followed and stayed with me for the duration of my imprisonment. Occasionally I am reminded of it by former Kriegie buddies when I see them or hear from them.

Five months after I left Oflag VII-B at Eichstatt, my father received a letter from Captain Arthur Smith, who had been repatriated.

28 November 1943

Sir:

I have recently been repatriated from Oflag VII B Germany on medical grounds. I was over there for nearly 2 1/2 years.

I had the pleasure of meeting your son, Frank. He lived in the same room and was in our Mess. He told us about his home town, his wife [Frances] and his daughter. He was pretty fit when I saw him last, and was very, very cheerful and optimistic.

Conditions, food, etc., from Red Cross were good and you may rest assured that Frank will make out O.K.

We were sorry when he had to transfer to a new American camp, as we looked upon him as one of the family, and he was very cheerful and refreshing. Eventually, we had Frank taking his time at cooking and he tried some Mexican recipes on us. **"Deep In The Heart of Texas" was our signature tune.** Please pass this letter on to his wife with all my good wishes. When you write say "Arthur Smith has written saying you are fine, Kid Nitro." He will understand that. It is not advisable to say any more, otherwise the censors will cross it out. I mean the censors in the camp--the less they know, the better. **The following is private and confidential and should not be made public until the war is over.**

Frank escaped from the train whilst being taken to our camp. He jumped out between Naples and Bolzano and made for the Swiss frontier, but unfortunately, he didn't make it and was eventually caught again. Furthermore he made another attempt in few months later but got picked up again. I cannot give you full details. He will tell you when he gets back. However, I merely want to illustrate his splendid courage and spirit.

We called him Kid Nitro at the ball games he played; we were genuinely glad to know Frank, although not exactly under congenial conditions, however that's the test and he proved himself.

My best wishes and hopes that you will have him back in the New Year.

God Bless America.

Yours truly,

A. H. SMITH, Captain
Regt. Royal Engineers

Address:

A. H. Smith,
44 Ryder Street
Cardiff, South Wales, Great Britain

A Kriegie dreamed every night. Good dreams. Bad dreams. Nightmares. Some kind of a dream every night, and many nights, several different kinds of dreams. Some nights he dreamed of steaks because he was hungry. Other nights he dreamed of bare breasted, beautiful women, because he was hungry for love. At Oflag VII B, under the constant companionship of the easy going British, my nightmarish dreams of the soldier burning beside the tank destroyer, and the other "bad for the mind" pictures were beginning to fade. The faraway visions of my wife and family began to swim sharply back into focus. I wondered whether I had been reported "killed in action" or "missing in action". I wanted so badly for them to know that I had been captured so they would not worry needlessly. My friends in the Mess told me that many times the Vatican broadcasted lists of prisoners to the country concerned so that the next of kin would be notified. They also told me the only thing I could do was to wait; my family would understand that I had no way of letting them know.

I had begun to see other American officers at this Oflag. I was surprised to learn that there were about 45, including the colonels. One prisoner, Lieutenant Craig Campbell from Austin, Texas, was one of General Eisenhower's aides in North Africa before he was captured.

Craig was sent to the front to get a good look at the situation. He got too close a look. One he couldn't report. The Krauts never knew they had one of the Supreme Commander's aides.

The Kriegies had built an outside basketball court near the southern side of the camp. I enjoyed going down there to watch them play. The Canadians played on Sundays when they were not forced to wear their cuffs. Their style of play was the same one used by the Americans.

It was really funny to see the boys from England play. They used a different set of rules and would run with the ball, even taking off outside the lines marking off the course.

The Canadians formed a basketball league and invited the Americans who wanted to play to be assigned to teams. Soon a promoter came up with the idea of staging a Sunday spectacular basketball game between the Americans and the Canadians.

Hostile governments, under rules of the Geneva Convention, were supposed to pay captured prisoners, using the same wage scale paid to equal ranks in the armed services of the host government. To meet this requirement, the Germans had come out with money printed in small sizes on cheap paper called Lager Marks. It wasn't worth the paper it was printed on but served as a medium of exchange in gambling and betting and was better than using matches.

Since the Americans were relative "short timers" and had few of these Lager Marks, most of the betting on these games was between the Canadians, wagering on their own teams, and the English, Aussies, New Zealanders and other Empire armed forces prisoners, betting on the Americans.

I had never played much basketball and was flattered when I was asked to be on an American team. That was short lived when I realized they were asking all Americans to play because of a shortage of players.

When the day of the game arrived, members of my Mess insisted that we print my nickname "Kid Nitro" on back of the T-shirt I was to use in the game. Arthur Smith and Ray Cowie found some ink and a pen and helped me do the printing.

When I went to the court before the game, I met Americans I hadn't seen before. Of course, we never got to practice together. **Lt. Col. Waters and Lt. Col. Alger were in charge of the team.**

Some of the other players included Bob Oshlo of Council Bluffs, Iowa, who had been a point maker in the discus, hurdles and quarter mile events at Iowa University; Eddie Berlinsky of Belleville, New Jersey, who made Walter Camp's All-American Football Team when he played at North Carolina and more recently had played in the backfield of Brooklyn Dodger's professional football team; Edwin Ward of Clewiston, Florida; Robert Aschim, Des Moines, Iowa; and William Guest of Savannah, Georgia.

By game time, many Lager Mark had been wagered on the outcome of the game, and some last-minute bets in staggering amounts were placed. The English found out a little too late that the Canadians had an Olympic team player on their team. They jumped off to a quick lead.

Their lead was short lived, though. The Americans played a steady game, and shortly it was a nip-and-tuck battle. Bob Oshlo was a good player, and the two colonels were holding their own.

Eddie Berlinsky, the pro football player, was good enough at basketball to make anyone's pro team in that sport, also. The game was a short one since we were playing eight-minute quarters.

There was a large crowd and lots of excitement. The war was forgotten and seemed far away that afternoon. The only important thing was to win that basketball game.

Food was bet, too. Some of the betters would go hungry that night.

I didn't get to play much in the first half and was glad of it. I couldn't see how some of them stood up under the strain of playing so long.

I was called in the last quarter and felt as though I'd rather be stretched out in the bunk. The game was even right down to the last few seconds.

The score was tied. Eddie Berlinsky had told me to play back, remaining as a sleeper under our goal. I was glad of that, for I don't believe I could have made it to the Canadian's goal and back. Just before time ran out, someone stole the ball from the Canadians and threw it to me. I tossed it up for a lucky ringer, and, I believe, the only score I made in the game.

The whistle blew. We had won and "Kid Nitro" was the hero. I tried to tell Arthur Smith and Ray Cowie that I hadn't won the game, that it was those boys who stole the ball and tossed it to me, but they wouldn't hear of it. So, I relaxed and enjoyed the warm glow of receiving undue and unearned credit. I imagine the Brits, the Canadians, and the Aussies were still repaying that game and arguing over the results when the Americans left Oflag VII B a month later.

I was beginning to learn some of the slang words used by the POWs. **Kriegie**, the abbreviated name of German POWs, was shortened by the British from German word "Kriegsgefangenen", "Krieg" being "war" and "gefangenen" being "prisoner". By adding lager(camp) on the end of it, it is translated into prisoner of war camp. Therefore, an abbreviated name like Kriegie was right down the American slang alley.

The Nazis had issued me a "Gefangenenummer", a prisoner number, 4166 similar to our own dog tags. They were made of aluminum and were perforated so that, in event of death, the bottom portion could be broken off for record purposes and the top part would remain around the neck of a soldier for identification purposes. The Germans were always concerned with record keeping.

One slang word the British coined was to "bash". As I stated before, this meant to save up a portion of your rations each day until you had saved enough to eat all or "bash" at one time.

Regardless of how sorry you began to feel for yourself, you could always look around and find plenty of reasons to be thankful. One of the British prisoners in Oflag VII B had spent 4 years in a prisoner of war camp in Germany in World War I. While I was at Eichstadt, he added three additional years to his record.

In this camp, we heard weekly talks or lectures by different men on various subjects.

Once while attending a session, I heard some of the British Kriegies start griping and talking about how bad the Germans were treating them as prisoners of war. A British Brigadier, A South African, asked for recognition. When the floor was his, he talked

about being a prisoner of the British in the Boer War. Now as a British prisoner of the Germans, he said, "I can't see much difference in the treatment."

One of the British officers had been accused by his compatriots of having told the Germans about a tunnel being dug by the inmates. None of his countrymen would have anything to do with him.

I began to learn a little about security operations and the way the British used them. Members of my Mess told me that some of the Kriegies had received whiskey from England. It was shipped into the camp in cans bearing tomato labels.

CHAPTER EIGHT-THE PRISONERS BUILD ROCK GARDENS

These British had a tunnel project going from one of the large buildings in the upper west side of the camp next to the road. A dummy urinal had been set up in the toilet on the second floor of the building. The urinal could be lifted out when they were working in the tunnel and set back in place when the Germans were inspecting.

They had dug down through the first floor, under the building to the west, and under a 12-or-14-foot-high terrace, which had a double barbed wire fence sitting atop it. **This tunnel emerged in the middle of a hedge outside the fence.**

During the progress of this project, rock gardens sprang up almost daily in the short period from dusk until 8 P.M., when the Krauts forced us to enter the buildings and remain for the night.

There would be a space as level as a ballroom floor one evening. The next morning this area would be a beautiful "rock garden", complete with flowers in full bloom (from other flower gardens inside the camp), standing four or five feet high. This, of course, was the method employed to get rid of the dirt dug from the tunnel. Most of this dirt was hauled out by prisoners carrying cardboard boxes which they made to appear as chow boxes.

One solution, which was the approved method of getting rid of dirt dredged up from one of the tunnels, was to wear two pairs of pants and tie a string around the bottom of the inside pair. The inside pair was filled with dirt. Prisoners walked out to an area in which to scatter it, bent down as if to tie or adjust shoe laces, and untied the strings around the pants. Then they walked along, scattering the dirt slowly as they moved. All POWs took their turn on these dirt details.

One of the favorite stories to originate in the Mess was told about the time John Sherbrook and Rollie MacKenzie tried to escape from the camp. The German camp authorities had set up a visiting day for the local Germans. Prisoners were being used for propaganda purposes. The Krauts wanted to show citizens of Eichstadt how the Kriegies lived. Visiting day was set for a Sunday, and this was announced inside the camp.

POW tailors got busy. Using smuggled cloth and other items, they made John, a tall fellow, a suit of civilian clothing. Then Rollie, the small, short Scotsman, was outfitted with women's clothing, complete with dress, bonnet and wig of hair.

While the German residents were sauntering around inside the camp, John and Rollie started mingling. They were putting on a great act until just before check out time. Then it started

raining.

Rollie's paint started running! The pants he had rolled up under his dress got wet and started falling down. He had been forced to wear the pants so he would have them when he discarded the dress.

I think this is why Rollie had gotten so mad at me later, when I had asked if he wore anything under his kilt.

Normally he wore nothing under it and had gotten caught trying to escape while wearing a pair of trousers, with legs rolled above his knees, under a dress.

The Germans showed their sense of humor because they got almost as big a kick out of this little escape attempt as did anyone else.

From such happenings grew "escape" from boredom and caused each Kriegie to nurture in his breast the desire to put forth effort, one which might lead to freedom.

I PLAN ANOTHER ESCAPE

Kriegies were well informed about news of the war and the outside world. I wondered how they knew. Shortly after I arrived at Oflag VII B, I found out.

Certain officers were designated to read the news to us each night. Soon after 8 o'clock, "stooges" or lookouts were posted at all doors by the officer in charge of the barracks. All outside windows had to be closed before lights could be turned on.

The officer who was reading the news that night would walk to the central place in the building and announce, "the cricket Scores are in." Later, in the American camp, since Americans don't play cricket, the news was announced as, "the baseball scores are in."

The commentator would give a 15-minute rebroadcast of the BBC news received during the day. This had been heard on a small radio that was kept hidden somewhere inside the camp.

The radio had regular operators who listened to BBC broadcasts at different times during the day. "Stooges" were always posted when the radio was out of its hiding place.

During the afternoon the S2, or Plans and Training officer, and his assistants would go over the news and put it into presentation form. They then would meet with all of the officers who were to read it in each location that night, again under the watchful protection of the stooges.

Two or more officers in each barracks would rotate the job of reading the news. The S2 officer would read the news and give

security announcements to these men, allowing them to take notes. Immediately after the news every night, these notes were burned.

The stooging jobs were run by roster and all below field grade officers were required to pull duty. Nearly everyone hated to "stooge" because it meant missing the news, but it was very necessary to the security inside the camp.

Anytime a German entered the area being "stooged", a signal was given. All personnel and equipment then were quickly dispersed and materials hidden. We didn't want to arouse suspicion.

One of the common practices in Kriegie camps was the "carry spares". "Spares" were our code for several men who would hide inside the camp every time the Krauts held Appell or roll call.

Spares were accumulated after each escape attempt. This always caused the Germans to think more men had escaped than actually had gone over the hill. Even if the ones who actually escaped were caught, the Germans always thought that more had gotten away. They never had an actual count in the camp.

Later, another escape attempt would be made. The number of men to go out would be covered by the spares. When prisoners lined up for head count, German suspicions were not raised. Using this method, the Nazis never knew they lost prisoners by checking their roll calls. If the escapees were not successful, the spares would remain hidden inside the camp for use at a later date.

This was an easy subterfuge because the Germans never called the roll, they only counted heads. They never seemed to have enough guards to give any of the camps I was in a thorough search while holding Appell.

During their long stay in Oflag VII B, the British had cultivated sources among the guards and outside the camp. From these listening posts, we began to hear rumors that the Nazis were going to move the Americans from this camp to one specifically for Americans. This was located in the northern part of Poland. The rumor was, of course, received with mixed emotions. We had friends among the British Empire Officers, but many of us had old friends in the other group of American Officers who had been sent to a camp in another section of Germany.

We were anxious to be reunited with our own, who were accustomed to our way of living. I think the hardest things for us to get used to were the tea times and the different chow times.

Since moving time is escape time for the restless Kriegie, I began to plan my next try for freedom, and the things I would need.

I remembered what Patrick Henry had said. "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of

experience." I ran my experiences through my mind to determine where I had failed, and what I would do this time to be successful.

Details of my previous escape attempt were known by the other Americans in the camp. First Lieutenant Willard Duckworth of Marbledale, Connecticut, and Lieutenant Sid Thal, an ex-professional fighter from Philadelphia, Pa., approached me and asked if I was interested in trying to escape with them. Was I! I could hardly wait to hear their ideas!

We went to work and found that we would have to present the plan to the "scrutiny committee" for approval. It would have to be okayed before we would be allowed to carry it any further.

We were told that if we would allow a British Officer, Second Leftenant Lefty Pearson, to go with us, the British Security Committee would furnish us with escape material. The American committee approved our plan and gave us its blessing.

We were given a map of Poland printed on a large silk handkerchief, and some small luminous compasses, which were about the size of an eraser on a wooden pencil, about a fourth of an inch thick. They gave us some extra food to take along, the kind we could carry easily.

Our plan was to escape from the train as near Posen, Poland, if possible. We were furnished the name of a man in Posen called Cook, who was a connection with the underground. Once we established this connection with Cook, the underground would take over and slip us out to a friendly country.

We spent many leisure hours discussing our plans and getting our clothes and gear in shape. A little of our time was spent in talking about six months' internment in Sweden, with nothing to do but live high on the hog, lolling around on the beach with plenty of the buxom blonde Swedish girls, about which he had heard so much, for company. **An escapee had to be interned for a period of time in the neutral country to which he had escaped, after which he would be sent home.** We were willing to face that.

I hid my compass by cutting a hole near the metal tip of my GI shoe lace, and milking it down to the center, hid it under the leather around the eyelet on one side of the shoe.

The Germans finally notified us officially that we Americans would leave Tuesday morning, 8 June, for Oflag 64, a new camp set up for American officers near Bromberg (Bydgoszcz), Poland.

Our British friends informed us that this had formerly been Oflag XXI B, for Canadian Officers. Approximately 25 tunnels had been dug by the Canadians, found by the Germans, and cemented up. Our security committee had a pretty good map of all of them by the

time we left.

We four were not the only busy ones in the camp. The British were trying to complete their tunnel before the Americans left. They finished in ample time. **Here I learned another useful trick. Two tunnels were dug. The one they intended to use was labeled "most secret". In digging the other one, they would be just careless enough to let the Krauts know that they were digging it. They knew all the time that the Nazis would gleefully watch it until just before it was completed. Then the Germans would find it, cement it up in front of the supposedly disappointed POWs, who were seeing all of their hard work done for nothing. This show was supposed to discourage the digging of another tunnel.**

My British friends told me about a tunnel under construction in another of their Oflags in Germany where the British had been digging through solid rock for nearly three years. They estimated it would take another five years to complete it, were still digging it, and were not sure if the Germans knew it was being dug.

On the night of 7 June, the entire camp had a big going away party for the Americans who were leaving. It lasted from dusk until time for all prisoners to be inside for the night. There was much yelling, whopping and singing. We really had fun.

As these hectic festivities were going on, 75 British were going out through the urinal tunnel.

The next morning we got up at 5 A.M., told our friends good-bye, and headed for the main gate where we were checked off and counted.

The British Lieutenant, Pearson, had swapped complete identities with American Captain Horace Spalding down to and including the Gefangenennummer identification tags. Dressed in an American uniform, he made a funny appearance to us, but he passed the muster of the Germans. They paid little attention to him.

After the Germans were satisfied that we were all there, they lined us up and walked us down to the train station. There, also ready to be loaded aboard the train, were several hundred **Red Cross parcels**. We were issued one each to last for the trip and for ensuing days to round out a week's rations. Also, the Americans POWs were carrying a number of books that our British friends had given us to start a library in our new camp. I could not help wondering where the radios were hidden among those items. The Kriegies would be able to get the "baseball scores" when they arrived at the new camp.

A long, tall German Hauptmann (Captain), whom the British had nicknamed "Quack Quack", had been elected to deliver us to our new camp. He had a complement of 14 enlisted men guards. "Quack" was

so named because of the fuss he created at Appell. The prisoners moved around, causing an inaccurate count. This made the Germans start all over again, amid his shouting and the prisoners mimicking his quacking. He retaliated by making us stand out in the open for several hours at a time.

As we were loaded onto the train, my buddies let the four of us (Thal, Duckworth, Pearson and me) go in first so we could pick the place we wanted to sit. We wanted a place where we could best "unload" out of the window.

We went in the second of the two coaches they had for us and chose the last two seats on the right in the back of the car. Pearson and I sat in the last seat and Thal and Duckworth sat in the next to last one. There was a toilet immediately behind Pearson and me to shield us from the guard who would be stationed there and who, we hoped, would be sitting there when the time came for us to go out.

I ESCAPE A SECOND TIME

Everything was soon loaded, and our train pulled out for the start of a long uneventful ride. My adventure would start when I left it.

The coaches were third class type with hard seats, but we were all so thankful that we were not being forced to travel in the 40 & 8's that no one griped about those hard seats.

Our guards changed every two or three hours, and they got off and posted themselves around the two coaches every time the train stopped. Five of them stayed in our coach most of the time. One was posted at each door, and a noncom and two others sat in seats facing us. We always watched them when they got on and off the train, and it was always the same. None of them bothered to watch outside the windows once the train whistled and started moving. This was good for us.

About dark on the first evening, all of the fellows in the coach went through a dry run for us, practicing what they would do when we got ready to jump from the windows.

On signal, we all got up and started stretching, shaking blankets out, getting ready for bed at the same time. We conditioned our guards to the commotion, so that it didn't look strange the next evening, when we planned to escape. Things went well on this dry run, and we went to sleep that night satisfied with that part of our plans.

The following day was a long one. We rehearsed our plans, trying to think of items we might have forgotten. Each had made a haversack, or bag, to strap on his back. This would carry food,

toilet articles, and other small items of necessity. I milked my compass back out of my shoe lace and put it in my pocket where it would be easily available.

The train went through Berlin about midday. We began to hope it would not arrive at Posen while there was too much light to chance jumping from the train. As the afternoon passed into evening, we spent much of the time with the windows up, looking at the passing scenery. We wanted the guards to become accustomed to the open windows.

The element of night was with us. A little past dusk, our train pulled off on a siding in the countryside to let another pass. The guards seemed to know the train would be there such a short time they did not think it necessary to get off and take up their posts outside.

When the other train passed on our left, we gave our signal. All of our buddies in the coach rose, started shaking out their blankets, chattering, and creating lots of commotion.

The train was gathering speed fast. As Duckworth turned around from where he was standing *in front of his seat, in front of me*, I reached up and grabbed the rod over the window, swinging my feet out. I could see that our *timing* was good, and he was doing the same thing in front of me.

We sat on the window ledge just long enough to get our balance, swung our bodies to the left and caught the window ledge with our armpits. We hung there momentarily then dropped, caught the window ledge with both hands, setting feet in running motion.

I could feel the impatient presence of Pearson at the window, waiting his turn to come through. Willard Duckworth and I let go about the same time. Vaguely I could see him in the dim light as he stumbled and fell in front of me, bumping along on the cross ties, with his left arm flung over the rail. He was desperately trying to get his balance so he could get out of the way of the rear coach wheels which were grinding ominously along three or four feet behind me.

Luckily, I was able to grasp his clothing on my first try and we both were able to rollout to the right, getting away from those terrible, cutting wheels.

As the train moved down the tracks, I could hear violent agitation as someone else left the coach. I was too busy trying to find out how badly Duckworth was hurt to pay much attention. Suddenly, Pearson loomed up out of the darkness, scurrying, bent over. He came up real close and kneeled down where we were huddled on the ground.

He told me that Sid Thal hadn't made it out of the window. I thought, *If he had been caught going from the window, would the train stop and back up, so the guards could search for us?* I heard the train rumbling off into the dark night, and from the sound of it, judged they had not seen us.

It was hard to tell how badly Duckworth was hurt. His face was bleeding profusely from a cut near his nose. He held his left hand and kept repeating that it hurt him a lot. We decided to wait a few minutes for Thal.

The train disappeared. We could hear no other noise along the tracks. The silent shadows kept us listening for a few minutes before we crossed the tracks and walked to the north for several hundred feet to get away from them.

In our planning, we decided to use signals if one of us wanted to talk. If the man in front wanted to talk, he would stop, hold up his hand, and we'd go into huddle. If the man in the rear wanted to talk, he would punch the man in front, this being relayed to the leader and we would stop and huddle. We were never to talk above a whisper.

We stopped and knelt down together. Duckworth said he was all shaken up, but told us to go ahead as planned, he would follow. We decided that Thal hadn't made it for unknown reasons, and there was no point in searching for him. We would go ahead, there was not much choice. I would lead the way. We would walk in single file as planned, with Pearson in the rear and Duckworth in between. Pearson was excited. I cautioned him several times to keep his voice down.

Duckworth managed to hold a handkerchief to the cut under his nose and stopped the bleeding by applying pressure on the sides of the wound. His left hand was beginning to swell and thicken. He seemed to be in much pain from his broken hand and the bruises he had received from bumping across the cross ties. His speech had silent misery in it. He was in a state of shock but determined to go ahead.

I heard a dog barking not far away in the east and thought it was time to go. I took the compass out of my pocket and placed it in my mouth, shifting it over my jaw like a chew of tobacco and growled, "Let's go!" We stood up and took off across the field toward the north. We soon came to a dirt road that ran in our direction for about half a mile, then wound off to our left on its own.

We had planned to walk north for about a mile to get away from the vicinity of the railroad tracks, then turn east and head toward Posen. I flipped the compass out of my mouth to the palm of

my hand, turned, and started toward the east.

After going in this direction for about a mile, I would see water ahead, so I started bearing to the left, since I was certain we did not want to walk back toward the railroad tracks.

Immediately, Pearson caught up with me and asked why I was going back to the north. I told him I was going around the lake. "Can't you see the water out there?" I asked him. "This isn't a lake," he answered. "That's a plowed field!"

We went into huddle. I was certain it was water and I wasn't going to lead in that direction. He was sure it was a plowed field and that he would lead. Duckworth felt so badly he didn't care if we went under it. I told Pearson to go ahead.

He took over and headed for the plowed field. As soon as he reached it--kerplunk--both feet went into the water up to his knees. We pulled him out. After that we had no more trouble with Pearson wanting to take the lead.

We walked for about two hours after the lake incident, then decided we had better start finding a place in which to hide for the day. Light would start appearing about 3 A.M.

We came to a heavily wooded area with underbrush. Inside the woods we found a spot which had low overhanging trees we could use for shelter. We decided to stay here. Duckworth, suffering badly, held on to a tortured decorum. Although we felt sorry for him, there was nothing we could do, since we had no medical supplies. We talked it over and decided to give ourselves up in order for him to receive medical attention, but he said no.

He soon drifted into a fitful sleep, so Pearson and I spent the early part of the morning resting and trying to sleep. The mosquitoes were pretty bad, and soon the flies found us.

These insects were bad enough, but the thing which almost drove me out of my mind was the cuckoo birds. It must have been the mating season, for all day long there was this maddening call--cuckoo, cuckoo!

I scouted the woods and found a house about 300 yards to the west, surrounded by a field of oats which stood about 4 feet high. After reconnoitering, I returned and told the others about it.

Duckworth's condition precipitated a plan. We believed the house to be occupied by a Polish family. We could go to the house and attempt to have the man of the family go into town and contact our man Cook for us.

We waited until dark, then the three of us crossed the oat field and made our way to the house. It was a Polish family--a

husband, his wife, a little boy about 10 years old, and a daughter.

WE ARE RECAPTURED!

Pearson spoke a little German and Polish, and he talked to them. They acted afraid at first, but after the Lieutenant told them we were Americans and British, their fear rapidly turned into real alarm. We could tell their deep sympathetic feeling for Duckworth; they could see his pain.

They seemed willing to give us food and help us along the way, ridding themselves of us. But, when Pearson started asking them to go into Posen to get someone to help us, it was easy to see that they were much afraid of becoming involved and really wanted no part of us.

The stubborn Englishman persisted and asked the man if there was someone nearby he could contact to go into Posen for us. The farmer finally told us to go back into the woods and wait and return to his house the next evening. He said there was a man who lived several miles away, near Posen, that he would summon to his house to see us the next evening.

He indicated this man would either help us or would know someone who could. They gave us water, milk, and cookies. After saying we would be back the next evening, we returned to the woods for another round of battles with the flies and mosquitoes to the accompaniment of the cuckoo bird symphony.

We were placing our fate in the hands of this family who resided deep in the land of our enemies, but there was little else we could do because of Duckworth. My experience thus far had made it necessary for me to learn quickly, and one of the things I learned was to take a gamble.

The weather was mild and it seemed almost a pleasure to lay on the ground and sleep after the cold outing in northern Italy during my first escape attempt.

The night passed fast enough, but the next day dragged. The flies had recruited reinforcements and the daffy cuckoo birds were repeating their song all over the woods.

We were laying around in the wooded shelter about 4 or 5 P.M. when a strange walking noise startled us. It was an animal or a human and was coming directly toward us.

We didn't dare investigate! We held a quick, whispered conference and decided that we must lie there quietly and hope we would remain undiscovered.

A German in farmer's clothing, armed with a double barreled shotgun and followed closely by a little girl and a dog that was

stalking them both, walked right up on us.

He hadn't see us until he almost stumbled over our prone figures. Then he turned into one of the most excited personalities I have ever seen. I know he scared the literal hell out of me.

He pulled the hammers of both barrels of his shotgun back on full cock, held it with both hands and waved it around us. He reminded me of motion pictures I had seen of native Africans fighting off saber-toothed tigers with homemade spears.

We were frightened! Not that he would shoot us because he wanted to kill us, but because in his excited state, reflex action might cause his trigger fingers to exert a small pressure and fire both barrels at us.

I think that we might have made breaks for it if the kraut had been calm. He was too highly agitated for us to risk this.

He used a guttural tone and motions to tell us what to do and marched us to a farm house about three quarters of a mile south. We were almost afraid to glance backwards. To turn around was unthinkable because of the danger of those ever-present fingers tightening on the triggers.

When we reached the farm house, several other people rushed out to look at us. The man forced us to line up against a fence by the house and started shouting instructions to a woman who came out.

She went inside and used the telephone. In about 30 minutes, a truck containing half dozen armed soldiers arrived. They loaded us in the truck and drove us to Posen where we were thrown in an army jail for the night.

In the dull, dreary days that followed, we had lots of opportunity to discuss whether the Pole from whom we had sought help had turned us in. We decided he did not, and our line of reasoning was this. If the Pole had turned us in, he would not have waited so long to do so, and he would not have reported us after having given us food and water, for fear of reprisal from the Nazis.

We concluded that the German was merely out hunting and had stumbled into our hideout. The dog was not fierce but seemed to be more of a bird dog. Further, had this Kraut farmer known that three escaped prisoners of war were hiding in the woods and had he wanted to capture us, he would not have brought the little girl.

It was obvious that Lt. Duckworth needed a doctor immediately. Since we had no medical help, I believe that his recapture was the best thing for him. His hand was badly swollen. He had not recovered from the shock his body received on the railroad ties.

WE REACH OFLAG 64!

The Germans kept us in the Posen jail overnight, preparatory to sending us to our prison home. The next morning they loaded us, under escort, into a train and took us to Schubin, Poland, to Oflag 64. This was our new American home, deep in the heart of Poland.

Our guards turned us over to the German camp authorities at the jail, across the street from the main POW enclosure. The German officer sent Duckworth, under armed guard, into town to see a doctor.

The guard building was in an "L" shape, the main part housing guards on duty, pointed south and ran parallel to the road from town. It ran east and west. On the west end of the building and extending south was the jail. **The jail spread over the entire wing. There were four cells on each side of the building, with a runway down the center. This is where they now took Pearson and me. I was to spend nearly five months of my prison servitude, or one fourth of it, in this cramped place.**

The German sergeant and his crew pushed us in and assigned us to our cells. We discovered one of our escape buddies, Sid Thal, was in one of the cells on the west side, next to the one into which Pearson was thrust. We could hear him yelling and raising old Ned in general.

Approximately eight inches over each door, there was a hole about five inches square in the thick wall. This hole contained a light bulb that shed its light inside the cell and outside in the runway.

The guards finished locking us up, checked for security, and then left. We could stand on a chair, put our mouths close to the holes, and carry on a conversation. Now we could find out what had happened to Sid.

Sid told us that as he started to go through the window, one of the guards looked directly at him. He knew that if he tried it then, the guard would see him and would raise an alarm. When he finally got a chance to go, the train had traveled a mile or so from where we had jumped. He walked back down the tracks, and when he couldn't find us, retraced his steps toward Posen. The next day some Hitler Youths routed him out of the woods where he had been hiding. One of them kept running at him with a horse trying to run him down, while the rest obtained help from the police to bring him in.

CHAPTER NINE-THE KRAUTS GET MAD AT ME!

A short time later, the guards brought Duckworth back from the doctor's office and placed him in the cell next to mine, which was closer to the door of the guard's room. The German doctor had put a splint on his hand, telling him it was broken. A small artery under Duckworth's nose had been cut, and this is why he had bled so freely. He was able to get some rest because the doctor had given him sedatives.

Our cells were small, eight feet long by six feet wide. They were just large enough for a chair, a small table, and one of the standard single deck wooden bunks. The bunks had eight slats across that served as springs. Mattresses were made of material similar to burlap sacking and were filled with excelsior. Luckily, we were provided with mattress covers, for the excelsior stuck through the burlap sacking. Without them, we would not have been able to sleep. As it was, we often got a stray splinter through the covers.

The thick walls were plaster covered tile. The door was of heavy wood, two inches thick. The inevitable glass peep hole was in the center at eye level, with the cover outside. The guard could look in on you, but you couldn't look out.

At the end of each cell was a two-foot square window. Each window had seven bars across it, three inches apart. On the outside of each window, except the one at the end of the runway, was a thick frosted glass pane with a frame built around both sides and the bottom. The frame was constructed so the pane was flush with the building, but slanted out about four inches, at the top of the window. The occupant could look up and see a strip of the sky about four inches wide and two feet long.

One day in 1944, I had the happy privilege of seeing a group of American B17 bombers trailing high altitude crystal fog in my little strip of sky. My morale went up!

One of the first things I found out about my new quarters was that by using a table knife, furnished by the Germans, I could slide the end of it under the frosted glass and carefully work it up. Looking under it, I could see through the four windows in the hallway, leading from the guard rooms and down to the jail section of the building.

On our same side of the road, and about 50 feet from the terminus of the guard end of the building, was the German mess hall. Sometimes, I could raise my outside glass and see two young Polish women who worked in the mess hall. They were sitting out in back, peeling potatoes and other vegetables.

Funny thing about the krauts. As much trouble as I caused

them, and as many times as they put me in jail at Oflag 64, they always put me in the same cell. One small piece of luck.

Our rations were not too bad and every morning and afternoon, the guards came after us, took us outside, and let us walk around, if the weather was reasonable. The exercise area was in back of the building, in a place sheltered from the road by the main part of the building located along the road. The jail formed the end of the "L" on the east end.

At first, they posted two guards on the open sides when we were walking. The area was finally fenced in, so one guard could watch us. Later, we got such a bad reputation they couldn't trust us with one guard. One of the first things I did was to antagonize my captors. I don't believe they ever forgot or forgave me for it. The jailer, or corporal of the guards, was always charged with the duties of feeding us, posting guards over us as we exercised, letting us out of the cells to go to the latrine, and all the other duties concerning our routine. He was also in charge of the keys. Three men usually rotated duties.

The third day we were there, the guard corporal stopped us in the hallway at the door of the guard room, where all the guards slept, while he went inside to order another guard to take us outside to the exercise area. I followed him inside the door, saw that some of the guards were playing cards, reading, and others were sleeping. Just for fun, I yelled "Achtung" at the-top of my drill sergeant's voice. All of the krauts jumped to their feet, hit a brace, and froze. That is, until they glanced around and saw that it was one of their prisoners who had called them to attention.

The Feldwebel (Master Sergeant) was in the room at the time and it made him mad as hell. Some of the others started glaring at me, probably swore in German, and acted as if they would gladly wring my neck.

I tried to tell the Feldwebel that I was an Offitser, but he kept yelling that I was a Gefangenen, and a lot of cuss words I couldn't understand.

Later, some of the guards seemed to regard the incident as funny, but I don't believe the old sergeant ever got over it.

THE NAME ON THE WALL AGAIN!

After we had been in jail for about five days, some of the German officers came around to our cells and told us that we had been tried and sentenced to two weeks confinement in jail. We would start serving our sentences that day. The time we had already spent in the cells was classed as "awaiting trial".

We were waiting for a court martial trial and we did not know when or where it would be held. I was tried by German court-martial five times, and the only time I was allowed to go to my trial was upon an appeal to the Swiss Legation. Four days after our "trial", there was a disturbance out in the runway as a new prisoner was brought in. He was placed in one of the cells across from mine on the west side.

While the guards were opening his door, the guy yelled out, "Anybody here named Frank Aten?" I clambered up to my hole over the door and said, "My name is Frank Aten!"

He said, "I was in a civilian jail down in Bolzano, Italy and I saw your name on the wall." I said, "That was me. Same cell, same jail!"

After the guards had locked him up and left, he told me his name was **Bill Higgins from Boulder, Colorado**. He had jumped from a train in northern Italy, near where I had jumped. When they caught him the next day, he was taken to Bolzano and thrown into the same cell. He was kept there for several weeks.

Our numbers had swollen to five. We were anxious to get out and join our friends in the camp across the road. In addition to the 31 officers from Eichstatt taken there on 6 June, the number in camp had grown by 149 more from Rothenberg brought in 9 June. This was the same group I had been held with in Capua and had been moved on the first train from which I had jumped. I could just see old Joe Seringer shaking his head and giving me the ole "I told you so" routine.

When we were allowed to take our walk in the exercise area on some afternoons, we could hear yelling and cheering coming from back in the middle of the camp. We could tell the fellows had a softball, or some sort of game, going. We were tired of close confinement in which we were watched almost constantly and were anxious to become part of the group across the street.

Part of the time, we could see some of the fellas standing in the yard across the road, watching us. We would stop where our exercise circle came out nearest the road and yell questions at them, but our guards would make us resume our walking, so we could never hear the answers.

While on these walks, we got all of Bill Higgins' history, and of course, he got ours. He expressed the thought that our plan of bringing Pearson along and leaving the American Captain was pretty good and would really foul up the Krauts.

Pearson said he was going to wait awhile before telling them he was a British and was sent back to Eichstatt. He was beginning to get on my nerves, and I was hoping he would tell them.

Bill Higgins confided to us that he was an Air Force pilot, who had been shot down in North Africa in a dog fight with ME 109s. He had been flying a Spit 9 Spitfire, a British plane, and had 3 1/2 planes shot down to his credit when he was shot down.

Bill said he told the Germans, when he was captured, that he was an armored force officer, hoping he would be sent to a ground force camp, where he might be able to use his flying ability to escape. He felt the opportunity would be much smaller from a Luftwaffe prisoner of war camp.

Bill was a small fellow. Apparently, his nerves were shot, for his mouth quivered when he talked. It was awfully hard for him to hold his hands still enough to light a cigarette. I told him that if I ever had the opportunity, I would like to fly with him.

Duckworth progressed nicely, and by the time we had served out our time in the brig, all his cuts and bruises had healed and his hand was getting well.

One day as we were taking our exercise, about 200 Hitler Youths, dressed in their black uniforms, were marching up the road past the camp. We kidded Sid Thal and told him he'd better watch out saying, "One of them might get a horse and run ole Sid down."

WE GO TO OUR CAMP!

The day finally arrived. One of the officers, the old sergeant and a couple of guards came into the cell block and told Duckworth, Pearson, Thal, and me to get our things ready. We were leaving the confinement area and would be going to the camp across the street. Bill Higgins still had several days to serve after we were released. We were looking forward to being in a larger area, with lots of room. We told Bill good-bye and followed our escort across the street for our first good look at **Oflag 64**.

The main gate of the camp was directly across the road from the jail. The camp faced south. Just to the east of the road which ran through the main gate was a rambling three story, white wooden frame building.

This was the main building inside the camp. Because most of the longest term Kriegies were quartered in this building, and because the SAO (Senior American Officer) Colonel T.D. Drake and his camp staff also were quartered there, it was referred to as "The White House". It faced the main street which led into the village.

Completely surrounding the camp was the familiar double barbed wire fence. Can't a war be fought without barbed wire? It consisted of two fences about 12 feet high and three feet apart. More wire was wound around and piled up between the two in a

twisted pattern, making it impossible to crawl through, even with help, unless some of the wires were cut.

On top of every post and slanting in at a 45-degree angle were boards with barbed wire strung on them about four or five inches apart. This made it practically impossible to go over the fence, even if one had a ladder.

To further discourage the restless Kriegie, towers, five to fifteen feet higher than the fence, were strategically placed so that every foot of fence around the camp could be easily seen, except in front of "The White House". This was guarded by men in the little house by the main gate. The towers were manned 24 hours a day and were equipped with machine guns and spotlights. The towers were augmented during hours of darkness by guards who walked their posts, walking back and forth.

On the left side of the main gate was an expansive one story barracks structure. **Forty-five Russian soldiers who worked for the Germans around the camp and in town were housed here. These kinds of barracks were scattered over the camp and were gradually filled as more Americans were brought to the camp.**

Directly behind the "White House" was an open area where we lined up for Appell. When our number grew too great for this area to hold, the area was extended out to the west. The hospital was located to the northwest of the Appell area. It was a two-story permanent building. Behind it were buildings that housed the clothing warehouse, tailor shop, and other necessary operations.

To the west of the hospital was the sports platz, or athletic field, where we had been hearing the softball games.

The mess hall was on the second floor of the "White House", with the kitchen underneath. At first, we all ate in the mess hall at one time, but as our number grew, we ate in shifts. Later, the number of shifts increased.

We were taken to the adjutants' room in the "White House" and were welcomed by Colonel Drake. Bunks were assigned, each of us in a room in different parts of the main building. I was assigned an upper bunk in a large second floor room on the northeast corner.

Once we were inside the camp, we were busy getting accustomed to our new surroundings and the men around us in the Zimmer (room) we slept in. Since we were separated, Duckworth, Thal and I seldom saw each other. Pearson found new friends and was sent to a British camp two months later. Duckworth became engaged in writing a book and later directed and acted in plays in the camp theatre.

Sid Thal went to work and organized a monthly night of fun and gambling with Lager Marks. With the exception of cards, most

of the equipment was of Kriegie makeshift ingenuity. Everyone looked forward to the rousing night at **Sid Thal's Bloody Gut Saloon**. Everyone, that is, with the possible exception of Colonel Drake. I don't think the colonel appreciated all of the noise we made. He threatened to close the saloon down at least once.

Later, **Lou Otterbein of Bloomfield, New Jersey**, with the aid of a few YMCA tools and many hours of patience, actually made a roulette wheel we thought was as good as any in Reno.

I looked up the "Name on the Wall" that I had seen in the school house in Tunis. Roy Chappell turned out to be a five foot nine stocky built Texan. He was a Texas A. & M. "Aggie" graduate who could and did talk the horns off a brass billy goat.

Roy seemed to be escape minded, so I told him about Bill Higgins, still in the jail, and about Bill being a fighter pilot. When Bill got out of jail, he and Roy became acquainted and later, fast buddies.

I was assigned as a member of Mess No. 22. The seven other members were Robert Aschim of Des Moines, Iowa; Carlos Burrows of Detroit, Michigan; Captain Stephen Kane, in combat, the famous "45 totin'" Chaplain of the 168th Infantry Regiment from Des Moines, Iowa; William Guest of Savannah, Georgia; Henry Perry of Miami, Florida; Sid "Mouse" Waldman of Cleveland, Ohio; and Edwin Ward of Clewiston, Florida. A ninth member, Harold Talman, of Middle River, Maryland, was added at a later date.

ATHLETICS IN CAMP

Fortunately, I had held on to my glove and ball--two cherish possessions as they connected me to my other life, especially when I was in jail inside the prison. I often placed them inside my jacket for warmth and protection. I joined one of the softball teams and began catching for Eddie Berlinsky's team. Only six teams in the league, so we were able to get plenty of exercise. We all had the same handicap--not enough to eat! There were many good players in camp. One of the most outstanding, Big Bill Luttrell, was a mainstay in the football line at Tennessee in 1938, '39, and '40. He played in three national bowl games; in '39 against Oklahoma in the Orange Bowl; in '40 against Calif. in the Rose Bowl, and in '41 against Boston College in the Sugar Bowl.

Out in left field was a brick outdoor latrine which was Big Bill's particular target when he came to bat. Over the latrine was a home run, and I think he hit more balls over it than anyone else in camp.

The library was in the attic of the "White House" and it contained many good books, including those given to us by our British friends when we left Eichstatt. Books from the Swedish

YMCA later supplemented our supply. I read a few books, but as long as the weather was warm, I was restless. I wanted to try and get out of the camp. Intoxicating thoughts of freedom coursed through my brains, erasing doubts, and leaving a brand of courage.

The radio that brought in our "baseball scores" was also located in the attic. Many anxious hours were spent "stooling" the stairways leading up to the attic of the old house. Every night we would gather in a corner of our respective rooms to hear the news.

Even though it was usually good news, most of us were disheartened by it. We would try and predict that the war would be over by Christmas, when we knew in our hearts that it would last much longer.

Bill Higgins, Roy Chappell, Lieutenant Colonel John Van Vliet of Red Bank, New Jersey, and I began to assemble our escape plan.

We suffered one heartbreaking set back to our plans before we were able to complete them. One night, we took the door facing off a north side entrance to the "White House" and hid some escape food in the opening. We were very careful to put the nails back without leaving any marks.

Later, when we went back for the food, it was gone. Any food saved out of a starvation diet is very valuable to the owner. To us, this food was irreplaceable. We could only surmise that the Germans found it and took it. We were certain that none of our Kriegies would be low enough to take the food. But it did leave a hollow feeling.

We finally completed our preparations and got a "go ahead" from the Security Committee.

We picked a date in the first few days of September 1943, when there would be no moon to give us away during the hours of darkness.

Roy Chappell and the colonel were going together. They planned to walk to the coast of the Baltic Sea, 110 miles away, as the crow flies. There they would beg, borrow or steal a boat to cover another 135 miles to Sweden. Bill Higgins and I were going to fly over. We obtained complete information regarding ME 109 fighter planes, from a British GI the Germans had brought in to work in the Mess. These planes were gassed and on-the-line ready to go at a field seven miles to the northeast at the town of Bromberg (Bydgoszcz, Poland). The soldier had worked on this field. The information he gave us included drawings, which showed where the guard posts were; how to get on the field with the least chance of being seen; and the advice to make our try about dawn when the krauts were scurrying around, preparing for early patrols. At that time, the flight line would be a hectic, busy place. If we were

unable to snare a plane, our alternate plan was to follow Colonel Van Vliet and Roy Chappell's plan of making it to the coast while trying to boat over.

By cutting the pages of a book, we determined who would go first. Roy and Bill cut the pages. Roy won, so they would be the first to go through the wire. By much study and scouting, we had picked a blind spot in the German Security Officer's fence guard. Next to the "White House" on the east side nearest the village was the house of the German Kommandant, Oberst (Colonel) Schneider. He was a fat, bald German who liked to strut around, wearing his little play sword, shouting, and turning red faced when he got mad or was crossed. A strutting imitator of his beloved Fuhrer!

ANOTHER ESCAPE!

The Obrest's house was made of red brick and the front of it was about even with the front of the "White House". There was a cement walk from the front door to the sidewalk in front of the house. Also, a wood picket fence and a gate. Next to the Kommandant's house was a Polish cemetery that had a high masonry fence which bounded opposite sides for about 250 feet and across the 200-foot front with a wide passageway in the middle. Across the back boundary of the cemetery was some shrubbery, six or seven feet high, with a passageway in the center.

Some 40 feet back from the front side of the White House and the Kommandant's house was one of the guard towers, complete with guard, machine gun and spotlight.

There was one spot about 10 feet from the front of the houses where an evergreen tree in the Kommandant's yard hid the guards' view of the fence. Or at least we hoped it did.

Most of the risk involved going the distance from the "White House" to where the tree hid the fence from view of the tower; and, after the fence was out, the distance from safety of the tree's foliage to the front of Oberst Schneider's house. It wouldn't take a machine gun long to cut down four men in the short distance from the tower.

Our plan, in general, was to use our bed boards slats. Once the inside of the fence was cut, we could lay these boards across the twisted, piled up barbed wire between the two fences, crushing it down so we could crawl across the boards. Then we would cut the outside fence, make it to safety in front of the Kommandant's house, walk down his front walk as if we belonged there, out the front gate, and down the sidewalk to the gate of the cemetery. Once inside the cemetery, we hoped we could make it through the hedge in back, without permanently joining the people already there. Safely through the hedge, we planned to separate.

Timing was crucial. It must be dusk enough so that it would be difficult for the guard in the tower to see us, yet not dark enough so the guards on the ground would be posted.

If the Unteroffizier (Sergeant) came with his guard relief to post the new guards, he could catch us in the middle of the fence. If it was too light, the guard in the tower would have no trouble seeing us and cutting loose with his machine gun.

Everything we needed was inside the camp except an instrument to cut the barbed wire. Finally, after much bickering, and with misgivings on his part as to the future safety of his family, a pair of electrician's pliers was obtained from a Polish electrician, who had been working inside the camp for the Germans.

On a mid-September day, deciding to make the escape try, we shoved four bed boards through the lower front window and behind some low bushes where they would be hidden from view until we needed them.

The entire personnel of the camp were alerted to stay away from the front of the "White House", where the fellows sometimes went out after the evening meal to watch the villagers walk by. There would be only four "watchers" this evening. As planned, there was a little more than the usual noise in the area back of the "White House". Grabbing our gear, we strolled around to the front of the building by way of the west side nearest the front gate. This was our path because we were not allowed to walk on the side of the building nearest the Kommandant's house.

If the guards in the little house by the main gate had looked closely, they would have thought these four watchers were hump backed from the packs of food (provided by the Escape Committee) we carried on our backs.

After standing in front long enough to give any curious guard the idea we were watching the street, we edged over to the far end of the "White House" where Roy Chappell and Col Van Vliet stepped quickly across the opening to the shelter of the tree.

As soon as they had reached the fence, Bill Higgins and I picked up the boards from behind the shrubbery, then stepped across the opening to their side.

The Colonel pulled pliers from his pocket while Roy held each side of the wire where Van Vliet intended to cut. Heavy gloves were worn by Roy to muffle the sound and keep the wire from curling back and making a noise when it snapped.

In spite of all the precautions they took, each wire snapped with a "twang", and we feared the sound was loud enough to attract the attention of anyone within one hundred yards.

While standing there, impatiently waiting, I thought of my old mess buddy, whom I was always "goosing" and jabbing with my thumb when he sat down to eat, if I got there first. Father Kane, the Catholic Chaplain, had told me, "I'll say a prayer for you." We'll need it! I thought.

The Colonel finally cut enough wires on the inside fence for us to crawl through. Next, we took the four bed boards and laid them across the curled wire, in between the fences, and crushed it down so Roy and Van Vliet could crawl on top of it to reach the outer fence and start cutting there. The volume of the crunching noise as we crushed the wire seemed to magnify many times before it reached our ears, but apparently, no one else heard it. We were hoping there was no one at home in the Oberst's house.

I kept watching up and down the road. There was no guard patrol nor anyone else in sight. We couldn't see over to the little house by the main gate very well because of the shrubbery, and we hoped that their view of us was much worse. Finally, after some long minutes, the Colonel cut the last of the barbed wire strands necessary for us to crawl through.

We handed the pliers back to Bill, who took them and slung them to the far side of the front yard. Roy Chappell had made arrangements with a friend of his to give us ample time to get away, or, in the event of any commotion, to get the pliers immediately and hide them so the Germans would be unable to find them. This would also make them available for someone else to use.

Van Vliet and Roy crawled through the hole and made a safety check of the Kommandant's house. Then they waited until Bill and I crawled through the fence and stepped quickly across the open view afforded the tower guards. Our luck held. He must have been watching our buddies cutting up in back of the house, trying to cause a distraction or looking in the other direction.

The Colonel and Roy started walking down Oberst Schneider's walk with Bill and I following closely behind. I took one last look at the hole in the fence. It was big enough to drive a truck through. No guard patrol was going to pass that hole without seeing it. I, for one, had visions of being a mile away when it was discovered.

When we reached the front gate, Roy or the Colonel flipped the latch and opened it. He and Roy walked out and quickly turned to the left. We were right behind them. I stopped and latched the gate. To leave it open might arouse suspicion. I turned quickly and walked away, trying to catch up with my buddies.

CAUGHT AGAIN!

When we got 40 or 50 yards from the gate, we began to hear

running and shouting behind us. "Halt! Halt!"

From the direction of the guard house came the Feldwebel, leading a bunch of guards. They were at a dead run. The four of us took one look backwards. Then we took off, running as fast as our weakened conditions would take us.

We reached the entrance to the cemetery and turned in there about the time the Germans started firing their rifles at us. There was a small brick chapel in the center of the cemetery. The Colonel, Roy, and Bill were all in front of me until we reached the chapel. They fell out and started hiding behind the building and grave markers around it.

I kept running past the building and down the path leading to the rear entrance. The Germans fired a few more times after they turned into the cemetery, and then quit firing.

By then, they were confident we were trapped inside the graveyard. When I got to the rear entrance, I could see that it was uphill for a short distance, and I would make a perfect target if I tried to go through it.

I circled to the right, keeping as low as possible. I found one of the heavy cement covers, used in cemeteries to put over graves. It was empty and lying on its side. I laid down beside it and tried to turn it over me, but it was so heavy I couldn't budge it. I laid as close to it as I could and covered my face and arms.

I dug into my shirt pocket, found the thin paper map, placed it in my mouth, and started to chew and swallow it. I could hear the guards when they found the other men near the chapel. Roy Chappell kept trying to tell the Feldwebel in his broken German: "Nein, nein, drei is alles". (No, no, three is all!)

They ignored him and continued searching. I could hear them coming up through the cemetery. Nearer. Searching. Looking everywhere. Still nearer.

The closer they came, the more I wished I had kept right on going through the back entrance. If the cement shell hadn't been so heavy, I could have pulled it over me! Still nearer they came. One of them was getting very close. I laid as still as I could. Suddenly, he stopped. He must have looked at me for a few seconds. Then he kicked my foot and I looked up at the longest rifle I had ever seen. It was pointed right at my head, with the end about 12 inches from my face. I had no trouble swallowing the paper map.

The guard motioned with his rifle for me to stand up. I did, and started walking back in the direction of the chapel without his having to make any more motions with that rifle.

My captor started yelling to the other guards that he had

found me. They started assembling at the chapel. When the old Feldwebel saw me coming, he started in on Chappell. "Ah so, Ah so! Drei ist alles, ja!" (Three is all, yes!)

Surrounding us they started guiding us back to the guard house. Colonel Van Vliet was still chewing on his map, but he had the normal look of chewing gum and finished it off.

We were then taken to jail in the guard building and after shaking us down, were put in our various cells. Bill and I were assigned to our old cells. Roy was placed in the one next to Bill on the west side. Colonel Van Vliet was put in the corner south end, and on the same side as my cell.

We served "before trial" waiting time until a German officer came by and told us that we would be tried, and then came back later and told us what sentence we had been given. This waiting time was never counted as part of your sentence.

After 10 days of waiting, Hauptmann Menner came around once more and told us that we were to be tried that day. Later in the day, he told us that our sentence by the Kommandant was "three weeks stueben arrest" (Close confinement). With this sentence, the prisoner was given bread and water for two days, soup every third day.

WHY WE WERE CAUGHT!

Roy Chappell began to use his "Sprechen Deutsch" on the guards. He had a way of talking to them, asking them small personal things and getting them to talk to him.

We were all curious about how they had seen us and recaptured us so soon after we had cut through the fence, when apparently to us, no one had seen it.

Finally, Roy found out from one of the guards, that a short, fat, German quartermaster sergeant, who issued clothing and other supplies to the prisoners in the camp, had been sitting in the German mess hall across the street. He watched us before we walked calmly out of the Kommandant's front gate and ran shouting to the guard house, raising the alarm. He had been the only one in the mess hall at that time and wasn't even supposed to be there. We were that close to getting away.

Our attitude toward him changed completely. Before our escape attempt, he was considered to be a friend of the Americans. Now we looked upon the little squat bastard with contempt. He may have been doing his duty, but so were we. I doubt the little sergeant ever realized it, but he had four enemies. **"Hope springs eternal in the human breast", became our motto. While we were out taking our exercise walks, we began to talk about the "next time".** Any

time we found a rusty nail or a piece of stiff wire, we stopped and pretended to tie our shoe string while picking it up. The area where they allowed us to walk in had either been a lumber pile or a junk pile. There were plenty of old nails lying around on the ground.

We began to work on the door locks to our cells. By taking the nails or stiff wire and bending them, we were able to unlock all of our cell doors. This took care of the lock, but what about the large sliding bar on the outside of the doors, and the bars in the window at the end of the runway?

This jail was one of the places from which the Germans would least expect an escape. It would be impossible to see the bars in each cell window, especially when those bars on the east side could be so easily seen from the guard house and mess hall.

The ones on the west side were in open view from a machine gun tower across the street that guarded the camp fence. Anyone who broke out the bars and crawled out of a window on that side would surely get his head shot off.

The solution was to see the bars in the window in the end of the jail runway. The problem was: How would we get back in jail, bring a hacksaw blade, slide the bar back on the doors, and carry out other details? But, the plan did have good possibilities.

Why worry now? Everyone in Oflag 64 knew the war would be over by Christmas, 1943. Then there would be no worries about trying to escape. We tried to stay positive, especially in our hearts.

Augusta, Georgia, December 14, 1944

Dear Friends,

I have just returned after being a Prisoner of War for 19 months, seven months of this in Oflag 64. When I was exchanged, I promised the boys to tell the folks at home about the “dope on the dump”.

As I have over 300 addresses, I’m sure that you will forgive the mimeograph form.

I have tried to answer every question I think you would ask as if you could talk to me. If I have omitted anything you would like to know more about, write me:

1st Lt. Leo W. Fisher

Ward 8, Oliver General Hospital

Augusta, Georgia

and I will be happy to give you more details. Best wishes to you.

Oflag is about 90 miles due south of DANZIG and about 120 miles due west of WARSAW. The nearest town, 40 miles northwest of camp, is POSEN. The camp is in a town called SCHUBIN by the Polish and ALTBURGUND by the Germans. Before the war the camp was an academy for teenagers. The town is on one of the most used Roman routes to the Baltic Sea. It is mentioned in history as early as 1055: Fire destroyed the town in 1940. With the growth of America, many of its inhabitants migrated to this country. The population is now about 3000 Polish and German. There is a Nazi Youth Camp one-half mile from Oflag 64.

The Camp area is about five acres with fifteen buildings inside the wire. When I left the Camp on July 26, 1944, there were about 600 officers and 36 enlisted inside the camp. Colonel T.D. Drake, who was the Commanding Officer, was exchanged with us and now Colonel Millett (pronounced Millay) is the Commanding Officer.

The physical treatment by the Germans has not been bad. There is no brutality or pushing around. Their only harsh treatment comes by the constant searches of personnel and property by the Gestapo and by the severe ration of food and fuel. The German food ration per day for one man is hot water for breakfast, barley and potato soup at noon, and at night, 1/7 of a loaf of black bread (about 2 slices) is issued. A weekly ration of ¼ of a pound of beet sugar, small portions of spam, and some VERY valuable cheese (to judge by its smell, it must be antique!).

The ration is supplemented by a food parcel from the American Red Cross, and it is this parcel which really feeds the men. It contains about 17 articles—sugar, margarine, biscuits, bully beef, spam, salmon, sardines, cheese, chocolates, and powdered milk. All this combined makes an adequate if monotonous diet. On Thanksgiving last year, the food for the day was: Breakfast, oatmeal; Dinner, meat and vegetable hash; Supper, Prem and mashed potatoes, with peas and carrots from British Red Cross parcel, which we got sometimes in lieu of American.

The food is prepared in a main kitchen by officers and men and served in a mess hall, eight and ten officers to a table. The cooking facilities are meager, but the boys have made their own utensils from tin cans from the food parcels.

Speaking of parcels, the next-of-kin parcels were coming through in fine shape and fairly regularly. Two months best time, and 19 months (my own) was the worst. The boys have no complaints of the things you folks are putting into them. Banana flakes make pies and cakes. Raisins, too, are versatile—and can be distilled to make a “paint remover” called, “Oflog Gin.”

[Note: their version of bathtub gin]

In the summer, the diet is helped by carrots, peas, radishes, onions, etc., grown in the Camp Garden. The winter is the time when food becomes a problem, but not too serious—no one starves—but everyone is very hungry most of the time.

The winter also presents the cold. The climate in that part of Poland is about like Illinois. With adequate indoor heat, it would be all right. But the Germans issue one-half of a coal brick per man per day. The bricks are smaller than a regular house brick. They used a peculiar type of stove, which gets VERY hot on the coal rations, but only throws the heat about six inches away. We take turns hugging this big pile of tile, but at least it gives us SOMETHING to hug.

On each bed are two German and two American blankets. The mattress is straw, with straw pillows. The bunks are double and run from four to a room (for Colonels) to about 72 to a ward for other officers. The enlisted men have a separate building.

The water is good—and cold. We get one hot shower of seven minutes’ duration a week—The Germans furnish towels, sheets and pillow cases changed every two weeks—maybe. Laundry is done mainly by the men, although it can be sent out. It returns after a month—more or less. It’s a great surprise when it comes back.

The prisoners are dressed in American soldiers’ uniforms, brought by the YMCA and the Red Cross. In most cases it is adequate.

Sports include handball, basketball, baseball, ping-pong, badminton, volley ball, horse shoes and various indoor games, all supplied by the YMCA.

For a while there were walks once a week—five miles outside the wire, with guards, of course. Also for three weeks we were taken into Schubin to the local movie. These were all discontinued sometime ago. They MAY be in effect again.

Mail was coming through fairly well. It took an average of 90 days to arrive. The men beg for photos, and especially COLORED ones, those made with colored films. Also they want longer letters and never mind what the Red Cross bulletin says.

WE have a small theater built by the ingenuity of the officers. Also an excellent band, which gives us light and heavy music of good choice. Each Friday is play night and once a month we have a three-act play. The costumes are home-made. We have put on “Three Men on a Horse,” “Brother Orchid” Variety Shows, “Petrified Forest” and “The Man Who Came To Dinner.”

We also have a newspaper, THE ITEM, which is run by Frank Diggs, ex-city editor of THE WASHINGTON POST. The paper is published once a month and will be a valuable file of camp events for the future.

Another news agency for news of the day is our OFLAG BULLETIN—published also by Frank Diggs and his staff. This is published daily and converts German papers and radio to the

American way of seeing things. We keep up with current events fairly well. **[Note: No mention is made of radios which were secreted throughout POW camps.]**

There is a good Hospital inside the Camp and we have nine American Doctors in charge. Over the period of the first year, less than 1 percent of the Camp population was hospitalized, and then only for colds and minor injuries from playing games.

When your man comes home again (be he brother, husband, father or sweetheart), he'll have a few words in his vocabulary which you won't understand. Here are a few examples:

Bash--meaning in American—"to eat"

Kriegie—Prisoner of War

Big Operator—"Big Shot" i.e. Amon Carter

Kriegitis—industrial diseases caused by confinement in a POW camp

Barless—not dry behind the listening posts

Bashomaniac—one who "Bashes" with frenzy

Gefangers—German for Prisoner of War

Rumor Bird—one who lays bad eggs "the war is over" type

Bash Hound—the "don" who has food left on Friday

Firebug—one who hugs the stove like a lover

"Smokeless Heater"—stove made of tin cans, makes fog like burning building

And these are not all, but you'll know the rest soon, when the boys come home.

Many of you wonder if the Camp will be rescued by the Russians. My personal opinion is that the **Germans will move the Camp further into Germany before this happens. They cannot afford to lose all these officers in one group.**

[Note: This last comment infers that the Germans wanted to keep and use these officer prisoners as human bargaining chips when the war collapsed.]

NOW IN CLOSING: I must BEG that this information be ONLY FOR YOU. DO NOT WRITE of this to the boys over there. THIS IS IMPORTANT! I tell you all this in order that you may know and understand better how your loved one lives. Tell the boys you have heard from me—but do not discuss this letter.

My prayers are added to yours that your loved ones will soon be back in this, the best country in the world, and in the arms of those he loves and longs for every minute of the day and night.

A Merry Christmas and a hopeful, happier New Year, and may God bless you all.

Figure 8-Fisher Letter

CHAPTER TEN-WE MEET THE FERRET!

While we were still in jail, The Ferret came to look us over. He was a warrant officer, charged with the security of keeping the POWs inside the wire. He was a mean looking devil and we finally gave him the nickname The Ferret because he was always digging into anything that had to do with escape. We could have called him Napoleon because when he stuck his right hand in the front of his coat and struck a pose, he resembled the little Frenchman.

The Ferret learned our faces well, especially Bill Higgins and mine, since we had earned a bad reputation for giving the Krauts trouble.

The Ferret told us, "Stay in the camp and don't cause any more trouble. The war is over for you. Take it easy until the end of the war so that you can go back to your families, healthy and well." This veiled threat wasn't lost on us. We knew what it meant. However, I think it served to further our resolves to attempt to escape again, and still again, if necessary.

He told us it would be useless to try and escape. "You are away from your Allies," and pointed out that it would be impossible for us to travel far without being caught.

We assured him the attempt we were being jailed for had taught us a lesson. We were going back to the camp and be good little soldiers and not cause any more trouble. While feeding him this line, I had one eye cocked on the hiding place of the nail I was using to unlock my cell door, wondering if was hidden well enough to escape his searching eyes.

"The war will be over by Christmas," we told him. "The Americans are going to land on the Continent and will be in Berlin before Christmas."

The old Ferret scoffed at this. He knew as well as we did that the war would not be settled by then. I don't believe he swallowed any of our promises, either, because his surveillance of us increased, along with more threats ... "If you try to escape, you will be shot. Your families will never see you again." Believe me when I say at times we thought he might be right. Then he'd walk off shrugging his shoulders.

He had a mean looking boss, too, whose name was Hauptmann Zimmerman. He didn't bother us much in jail, but he raised hell sometimes at Appell when things didn't suit him.

After the endless hours and days in cramped little cells, we were released. For someone who'd been imprisoned in a small cell,

the first few days back in camp were sheer freedom! You could walk from one end of the camp to the other (300 to 400 yards), before you had to turn around.

When I returned to eat with my old mess mates, I suddenly realized how nice it was to be able to sit and talk to someone without having to stand up to a hole over a door and shout to each other.

My old friend, Chaplain Kane, told me that he had been very afraid for us when he heard all of the shooting after we had gone through the fence, and that he was praying for us. He wrote the following entry in my POW War Log Book:

"It took every U.S. soldier in Africa to stop and ultimately defeat Rommel's Afrika Corps, which has held up and defied for several days by a handful of doughboys and a few officers; military annals will honor the valor of the heroic stand at Faid Pass, but its memories will recall for some, the faces of good friends.

Frankie shared the fate of all who lived to tell the story, but the strict surveillance of armed guards and barbed wire could never restrain "Kid Nitro" to prison confines. Frankie spent much time on the loose, a share of time in the 'Boob' while the intervals had an honored guest at Mess 22.

Frankie, we are all better for knowing you, may your days and years ahead be filled with the blessings of a deserved happiness. God bless you and yours always."

Figure 9-POW War Book Log

Mail call was our lifeline to the outside, especially any from wives, children, parents, family and friends. I cannot adequately describe the feelings we felt when we opened letters from people we knew. Mail from home spelled hope and a sense of belonging to someone, somewhere outside the monitored walls of our Oflag. Being able to write to those we loved was equally important. Our mail was heavily restricted and censored, and we prayed, as we closed our letters, that ours would be delivered. News, especially in the beginning of the war, was sometimes sketchy, and we had no way of knowing if our families even knew we were alive, much less prisoners. I was lucky. My family was very supportive and cared that I was a prisoner. My sister, Alice, kept two of the letters I wrote.

April 10, 1943

Dearest Alice,

I suppose all of you have wondered more or less what had happened to me and I am very glad to be able to write to you and assure you that I am safe and sound. I suppose I was reported missing but I hope you were told I was safe soon after then. I hope all of you at home are well and happy, honey, and is Floyd in the army yet? Please write and tell everyone to write, for I haven't heard from any of you since I left. Honey, I wish you would get in touch with dad. The following is a list of things which I should like for you to send me if possible thru the Red Cross. You can only send ten pounds every three months so send things I'll need worst. I've already written some things. Toilet articles, razor and blades, tooth powder, Icelandic sleeping bag or something warm to sleep in, pajamas, socks and handkerchiefs, sweater or sweatshirt, underwear, tennis shoes size 6 and juice.

You can send tobacco and cigars separate. If dad will let you have some money, I will gladly repay him later. Please tell dad I could have written sooner but I escaped in Italy, was recaptured and kept in a civilian prison for a month. Now I am in camp with 2000 British officers. Sorry I can't write more. Give my love to all.

Your own,
Frank N.

Vor und Surname: 2nd Lt. F.N. Aten
Gefangenenummer: 4166 No 5 Company

Figure 10-Letter Home (April 10, 1943)

May 31, 1943

Dear Darling Sister,

I suppose you wonder why I don't write you more often but I can assure you that it's no fault of mine honey. I hope that you and all the rest are well and happy and that all of you will have time to drop me a line every now and then. From what I hear, they won't allow you to send me tobacco from the states so will you please get some money from Dad for me and see if you can send to Canada and have me some Prince Albert pipe smoking tobacco sent here. You and dad can send me a clothing parcel every three months and please, whatever you do send me either an Icelandic sleeping bag or a good blanket for I dread going thru another winter being as cold as I was this one.

I sure dread this being a prisoner honey and don't believe I would be if I hadn't tried to save two of my men who were all shot up right down from an overlooking hill with enemy tanks all over it. I could see them from where I was, I but was so busy trying to lead these two men on a jeep, two of them slipped up on me. Both the men died and I buried them behind enemy lines late that afternoon, which was on St. Valentine's Day. Please tell dad this. I would have had a good chance to get away but I couldn't leave them while I thought they had a chance. Please tell everyone to send my mail all Air Mail. I sure hope that mother is well by now and dad is getting along fine. I hope the money I've had sent to him is helping him out as much as I hoped it would. Please tell Jane, Floyd and all to write and give my love to all.

All my kisses-your very own
Frank N.

Kriegsgefangenenpost
Luftpost

Nach Nord America
Mrs. Gerald Jones
Charge 40 pfennig

Figure 11-Letter Home (May 31, 1943)

Back in the camp, the four of us went back to our separate quarters. The cold winter had set in, and we spent most of the time trying to keep warm on the small coal ration.

Colonel Van Vliet gave a few lectures, some of them on "Organization of the Army." Roy Chappell got a trombone and started playing in Bob Rankin's Kriegie band. Bill Higgins started reading a little and making things with his nervous hands.

OTHER CAMP ACTIVITIES

Amon Carter, Jr. trained a crow for a pet and named him Rodey-Dougal. The crow developed typical "old crow stealing habits" and got Amon in hot water several times with his antics. He was tossed out of Barracks 8-A on his tail feathers and exiled to the green house!

The camp had a representative of the YMCA in Sweden visiting it. He had shipped in lumber for a theater stage, material for props, cloth for making costumes, and instruments for the band.

I went down to the theater and started working with **Lou Otterbein and Jim Cockrell from Tulsa, Oklahoma**, making floor lights, props and other equipment for the stage. We took the powdered milk cans that came in the food parcels and made footlights of them. Cockrell took a few pieces of wood, some metal and string, added water, and made a rheostat for lighting. He also sewed pieces of burlap together for a curtain. Some of the shows put on in the "Little Theater" were "Brother Orchid", "Russ Ford's Minstrel Show", and "The Man Who Came To Dinner". The men who did the acting and the staging for the plays were very good. Many of the productions would have been hits in the states; especially those with impersonators doing the female roles.

In November 1943, the camp monthly paper put in its first appearance. The Oflag 64 Item was a newsy little paper that advertised on its masthead such humorous claims as "Largest Circulation Inside the Wire", "All The News That's Been Gepruft (Censored)", "Enjoy Christmas While You Wait", and "Home In '44 Or Bust!"

The first issue had the following masthead on the editorial page:

The Oflag 64 Item, published monthly by and for American Officers temporarily detained in Offizerlager 64, Altneugund (Schubin-Szubin, Poland), Germany_[Old New Land]

Editor: Captain George Juskalian

Assistant Editor: Second Lieutenant Frank Diggs
Staff:

Captain Charlie Dunn, First Lieutenant Willard Duckworth, First

Lieutenant Jim Bickers, First Lieutenant Bob Wick, Second Lieutenant Frank Maxwell, Second Lieutenant Frank Hancock, Second Lieutenant Larry Phelan, and **Larry Allen (Associated Press Correspondent who won the Pulitzer Prize for stories he wrote in 1937-38 about Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia and the other Balkan states)**

Willard Duckworth was my old escape buddy.

The menu for the Thanksgiving dinner, listed on the front page of the first issue was as follows:

Breakfast: American Oatmeal

Dinner: Meat and Vegetable Hash a la Oakes (Lieut. Col. W. M. Oakes, Mess Officer)

Supper: Prem, Mashed Potatoes, Peas, Carrots, and maybe dessert, depending what shows up

With the approval of the American authorities, I moved down to Barracks 3 A, near the theater, so I would be close to my work. It was also near the fence alongside the road.

One day the Ferret came looking for me, and unable to find me at my old address, instituted a camp wide search. When he found me, I was moved back to my old quarters in the "White House". German orders.

CHRISTMAS 1943

In December 1943, it began to get so cold that the "Little Theater" had to be closed down. No coal was available for heating, and it was impossible to put on any kind of a show. We found something else to occupy our time--keeping warm by burning poor grade coal and peat.

At evening Appell, while the "Super Race" had us lined up, a group of civilian clothed Gestapos came into the camp. They went through all of the building, tearing all of the clothing out of lockers, pulling up bunks, and generally making a mess of the place. They tore out part of the flooring in the attic of the "White House" but were unable to find anything of importance. The "baseball scores" radio was safe.

By 6 December, six months after the arrival of Colonel Drake with the first 35 officers, Oflag 64 was the temporary residence of more than 300 American officers, about 40 American and British enlisted men and about 45 Russian enlisted men.

Issue #2 of The Of lag Item advertised "only 21 more shopping days until Christmas". Most of the foodstuffs such as meat(prem) and vegetables were removed from the food parcels and used in the kitchen to supplement the poor German ration. The

balance of the items were issued for us to eat at breakfast and for hunger snacks.

The edition published immediately before Christmas told us what we could look forward to in the way of food treats for the holidays:

Prem Tops Holiday Menus

The following menu is planned for Christmas and New Year:

Breakfast: English Oatmeal

Dinner: Meat and Vegetable Stew, Cocoa
Supper: Breaded Prem, Peas and Carrots, Eggs (powdered), Bacon, Mashed Potatoes, Tea

The New Year's evening meal will include Schubin pudding (named for Schubin, Poland)

Everyone was in good spirits for Christmas, in spite of the sudden realization that we would not be home for Christmas. There were special religious services in the chapel on Christmas, and Christmas carols sung on Christmas Eve by the Oflag choir under the direction of a very gifted singer, Russell Ford of Fayetteville, North Carolina. There were solos by Frank Maxwell, Tom Holt and Wilbur Sharpe, carols by the Glee Club, and a Remember Poem (remember when we had enough to eat, etc.) by Ken Goddard. Ken was also the Oflag's number one musician - a fantastic drum player.

After the first of the year, the doldrums set in. The Russians on the Eastern Front and the Americans on the Italian Front seemed to be bogged down. A poll by the staff and published in the February edition, indicated the majority of the Kriegies in Oflag 64 picked the Invasion to be in March, and peace by September. Very few of us really believed this.

OUR FOOD SITUATION WAS BAD!

Beginning early in the year, Colonel Drake had heard so many complaints about the food that he posted this memorandum on the camp bulletin board.

Oflag

64

Altneugund

3 Feb. 1944

Memorandum: Rations

1. Many officers have requested clarification on certain points which I shall try to give, impartially, so all may have a clear understanding.

2. The German ration furnished prisoners of war is fixed in kind and quantity by the German High Command. It is definitely inferior to that given their third class, or non-fighting troops.

3. Fresh cabbage and other fresh or green vegetables are prescribed in the German ration but in lieu thereof, The High Command prescribes turnips, which are called "cow turnips" in America, for prisoners of war.

4. P.O.W.s are allowed 1/6 to 1/7 loaf of bread per day while the German soldier at this Oflag receives 1/3 loaf daily.

5. The amount of meat prescribed for P.O.W.S amounts to slightly over 8 ounces per week, at least one-fourth of the weight must be bone. As a matter of fact, it principally consists of the more undesirable parts of the hog carcass, never omitting those choice morsels of eyeballs and ears.

6. The dried vegetables furnished us on the ration alternate with dried cabbage, peas, noodles and barley. The noodles are never enough in quantity, except to flavor the soup, they can't be saved, as nothing is issued in lieu thereof for that day's soup.

7. The Kommandant of this Oflag, in carrying out that part of the International Agreement which prescribes officers may buy food stuffs in the market for their mess, has made it possible to buy fresh cabbage, carrots and beets from time to time.

8. The garden, which we started shortly after our arrival here, has been the means of greatly increasing our mess, and some items, such as onions, kohlrabi and "good" turnips are still being used from our storage saved from our parcels last summer while we lived on the garden.

9. It should be known that the soup served at noon is principally made up from vegetables purchased or grown by the officers of this Oflag. In fact, the dehydrated brick vegetables, mostly cabbage, have not been used for the past 1 1/2 months.

10. The evening meal, outside of the potatoes which are intended for the noon meal, is composed of food furnished by the U.S. Department thru the Red Cross. The ersatz coffee and tea are not used and the noon meal of soup is the only one furnished by the German Authorities.

11. It should be further realized that no provision is made for fuel to cook the evening meal except two days each week. The fact that three meals are now served is due to the ingenuity of those persons concerned with the feeding of the Prisoners of War.

Thomas D. Drake
Colonel, U.S. Army
Camp Senior

Many of us had begun to feel much better about the Red Cross. We were ready to admit that we might have been wrong about the organization. But, Colonel Drake's memo on rations, that the Red Cross parcels we were receiving were paid for by our War Department, convinced us that our negative opinions were well founded.

On 16 February, an American officer arrived whose race extraction gave the Axis hoodlums some uneasy moments.

A JAPANESE-AMERICAN SURPRISE FOR THE GERMANS

Hisae (Joe) Shimatsu was of Japanese extraction. In civilian life, he was a plantation overseer on the island of Oahu in the Hawaiians. Joe was a member of the National Guard, and when the war started, he became a second lieutenant and platoon commander in the hard fighting 100th Nisei "Go For Broke" Battalion", fighting on the Italian front. This battalion was made up almost entirely of Japanese-Americans, and they had made a reputation for themselves of fighting till the last. One day the Germans came in and wanted to take Joe to Berlin. Colonel Drake refused, but the Germans finally convinced him that no harm would come to Joe. Col. Drake gave his permission, but he made the Krauts furnish him with a signed hand receipt for "One GI American Officer".

When Joe returned several days later, he told us that he had been treated well. "They don't trust each other. The Japanese Ambassador wanted to prove to Himmler that the Japanese WERE fighting the Americans in the Pacific and were NOT fighting WITH the Americans against the Axis troops in Italy. The Germans could not believe that all of the men in the 100th battalion were American."

Joe was a good farmer, too, and shared his knowledge" with me. He showed me how to put tomato plants in our mess garden plot so I would get a good, strong stalk and large tomatoes. He said to work the ground real well and deep. Then scoop out the soil and make a bowl in the ground, plant the tomato in the center of the earthen bowl so the wind would not bend the tender plant and break the skin. Never step close to the plant and pack the earth on the roots. Keep sucker leaves pruned from the plant. It worked, too. Mess 22 had some nice tomatoes from the garden plot that year, which helped our food supply considerably.

CHAPTER ELEVEN-MY RUSSIAN FRIEND!

Of the 45 Russians in Oflag 64, I cultivated the friendship of one, **Rockimonico Ceperon Alexandrovich**. He was a heavy set, jolly old fellow, weighing 200 lbs., about 60 years old, and strong as an ox. His laugh, actions and antics reminded me very much of one of the old and loved movie stars, Wallace Berry.

Rockimonico came to see me often, and we tried to talk.

Though neither of us spoke the other's language, we enjoyed one another's company, all the same. Often, **a friend of mine named Seymour Bolton, would interpret for us. Bolton was Jewish, well-educated and, in later years, became an expert on Russia for the CIA.**

The old Russian was a real clown. He worked for the Germans and stole potatoes from them. Many times, when I was still in my bunk early in the morning, I could hear the old Russian's wooden clogs, cloppity clopping up the stairs to the third floor, and to Zimmer 28 over the mess hall. He would clomp over to my bunk, peep under the cover, and yell "Tovarich!" (Friend!), set a pan of steaming potatoes on a table or chair, and leave.

Room Commander Lee and some of the fellas got a kick out of hearing the old fellow come in. Some griped about it, but they never said a word to him.

Rockimonico said that one of the Russians in their compound was an officer in the Russian Army, but they didn't tell the Germans, since **Russian officers who were captured by the Germans were always shot.**

As spring appeared, and the snow melted, we knew that predictions about the war being over by Christmas '44 were all wet. **Many Kriegies began to talk about escape.**

Some made ruck sacks and saved food, which was eaten two weeks later when the escape urge died. Some talked of going east and meeting up with the Russians or south into Balkan countries. Others thought it would be simple to walk to the coast and get a boat to Sweden, enjoying the scenery along the way. The consensus was that any Poles encountered would be glad to help.

An incident changed this line of reasoning. **An American sergeant worked on the German supply truck which hauled rations and other items to and from the camp. One day he jumped from the truck while it was on a trip and was gone for about two months. The sergeant was put in jail across the street and we later heard that he had escaped and was hidden by a Polish family. When the**

Germans recaptured him, the entire family was beheaded.

ANOTHER ESCAPE PLAN!

The weather grew warmer and escaping filled our thoughts. Our first consideration had to be the Ferret. He continued to monitor our daily routines and movements, but when we showed no outward signs of escaping, even he began to think that we had decided to stay in the camp for the duration of the war.

NOT IF WE COULD HELP IT!

Chappell, Higgins, Van Vliet and I began to work on our plan to escape from the jail across the street. We decided to add a fifth member to our group, preferably one who had never been in trouble with the Krauts. This might help to divert suspicion, if that were possible.

Dick Secor of Des Moines, Iowa, was anxious to go too. Through my Russian friend, Rockimonico Ceperon Alexandrovich of Gorky City, Gordo Semyonov, Russia, I learned that some of the Russian prisoners had dug out a place under their barracks and had erected a home-made still.

By stealing yeast, potatoes, and other ingredients, they were "running off" potato whiskey.

That was it! If we could procure some Russian "lighting", we could pull a fake drunk outside the barracks, after curfew. The Krauts would throw us in jail for sure. Then all we needed was long enough sentences to enable us to saw the bars in the window at the end of the jail runway. Providing, of course, we were not shot for running around in the compound after lock up, instead of being thrown in jail. It was a chance we would have to take.

I, for one, was afraid that one of the Kraut guards in the tower would start firing first and ask questions later.

Bill Higgins and I felt that the German Kommandant and his staff had had enough of us. This might be our last chance to stay alive.

In the event of recapture, we decided to change our identities and try to be sent to another camp if we made it out of the immediate area.

By talking to two GIs in camp, who worked in the kitchen, we persuaded them to swap ID cards, GI tags, German POW identification tags, and other items of identification. One of us was to be a sergeant.

We finally convinced the Security Committee to approve our

plan, thanks to Col. Van Vliet.

We completed our plans and arranged for clothing and other articles to be delivered once we were inside the cells. My old friend, the Padre, Father Kane would bring them to us. Almost everything we would need for the escape would have to be brought to us, because drunks wouldn't have extra food, etc. This would raise suspicion.

Besides, the four of us had made enough breaks to be suspicious enough.

We estimated that we would need two weeks from the date we pulled the fake drunk, sawed the bars and were ready to go. If only the German Kommandant cooperated by giving us a long enough sentence.

The night of 19 May was to have little moon, so we picked a date two weeks earlier, the fifth of May, for our fake drunk. We would serve several days waiting for our trial and expected a 10 day to 2-week sentence.

At the end of the "ball scores" on 5 May, the Kriegies were notified and warned to stay away from the windows.

WE START OUR PLANS!

The next day, I picked up our kerfuffle schnapps (potato whiskey) from my Ruskie friend. I kept it safely hidden, so some thirsty Kriegie would not spoil the effort by drinking it.

Late in the afternoon, we five gathered in the little canteen building next to the hospital. If we were discovered by the guards, as they made their curfew check of the camp, they would have locked us in the barracks.

Dick Secor had the hacksaw blade taped securely to the bottom of his foot and had pulled his sock on over it. Naturally, we picked Dick to carry the blade, since he hadn't been in trouble with the Krauts before.

As it began to get dark outside, the noise of the camp gradually died down. All of the good Kriegies were in their quarters for the night as the guards went around securing the compound for the gathering darkness. We began to get restless, and time passed slowly for us.

There it was! The bell finally sounded at 9 P.M. Time for lights out. We waited for 20 minutes, drank some of the foul-tasting stuff, poured part in our hair, rubbed it on our faces and on the front of our clothing. We looked and smelled the risky parts we were playing.

Then we began to yell and raise hell. After a few minutes of

this, we went out the front door to find the spotlight from the guard tower along the fence to the east on the main gate, shining on us.

OK, I thought. If he doesn't fire on us now, then we have a pretty good chance.

An old wheelbarrow was sitting there. Secor, Chappell and Van Vliet began to push each other around in it, dumping the occupant, yelling and raising hell.

We could hear some of the guards at the main gate, and the guard in the tower shouting back and forth.

Soon, the gate opened and the Unteroffizier, accompanied by two guards, came to the front of the canteen. The guard on duty tried to talk us into returning to the barracks and sleeping it off. This way, he wouldn't have to call the German officer on duty and get us in trouble.

I don't know about the others, but it was hard for me to go on raising hell and refusing to go inside after the guy had been so decent about it. But, to stop now would have made all our plans futile, and we were not going to let that happen.

The guards stood around for a while, watching us make fools of ourselves. We were supposed to be officers!

The Unteroffizier kept telling us that Hauptmann Zimmerman was the officer on duty, and that he would surely lock us up.

Finally, the "good ole Joe" stood all of it he could and he left us in the care of two guards, while he went to report the incident to the officer on duty. Soon, we could hear the old Hauptmann coming across the street, with 8 more guards following him. He walked up to us, made a few disgusting remarks in German and gave the guards half shouted orders to take us by the arms and lead us to the guard, house. "I don't care if one of you is an Oberst Leutnant (lieutenant colonel)", he admonished us.

We all put on a pretty good show and were "so drunk" that we were half carried to the guard room across the street.

Inside the guard house, Dick Secor started heaving, and this made the guards nervous, because we were in their off-duty room, and they didn't want drunken gefangenen vomiting on the floor and stinking up the place. None of the Polish help or Russian prisoners were around to clean--they would have to clean it up themselves.

IN JAIL AGAIN!

Secor was taken back to the jail and put in a cell. They placed him in a cell next to the one Bill Higgins had been in and nearer the door on the west side.

After Dick was taken away, the rest of us faced a strip down search, but we didn't mind, because Secor had the saw, and he hadn't been searched.

The rest of us wound up in the same cells we had occupied before. It was home for me, as I had been in this cell twice before.

We were a sad looking lot the next day. It was a shamed faced five the camp officer, Hauptmann Menner talked to. "The German Kommandant, Oberst Schneider, thinks this is about what you could expect of two gangsters like Higgins and Aten, but why would a man like Colonel Van Vliet want to get mixed up in anything so degrading? You officers should be ashamed of yourselves. Colonel Drake, the Senior American Officer, has said that he is ashamed that American officers would degrade themselves by acting like children. He has no sympathy for you."

Colonel Drake had put on a good show. Everything was going fine.

Several days later, while we were walking in the exercise area, Hauptmann Menner came by to tell five officers, with hanging heads and low morale, that we had been sentenced to 10 days "stueben arrest" (close room confinement).

Including the work we had already done on the bars, this would give us just time enough to finish and make the break before our sentences were up.

Our method of getting out of the cells was really very simple but split-second timing (literally) had to be letter perfect to keep us from getting caught in the act.

EACH ONE HAD A JOB

Each one of us had a job to do, and one was as important as the other. We felt it best for Dick to keep the hacksaw blade. If the cells were searched, his might not be searched as thoroughly, so he would do the sawing.

Bill Higgins, on the east side, had a Jews' harp which he used to create noise. He and Chappell were to raise the frosted glass on the outside of the window and watch for anyone on that side of the building. There were no buildings in their range of vision, but they were to watch anyone coming down the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street. We hoped that pedestrians would not cut across and come close enough to the building to hear the noise while Dick was sawing.

Colonel Van Vliet had a harmonica he had brought to the jail in his pocket, and the Germans let him keep it. He was to raise his glass enough to watch through the windows in the hallway

coming from the guard room, until after I slid back the sliding on the door to Dick Secor's cell. As soon as I had done that, he would start playing his harmonica and make as much noise as possible to cover the noise of the sawing.

In order to avert suspicion by playing the instruments only in the daytime, they were played at night, too. How they ever continued to put up with the noises they called "music", I'll never know. Because of the thickness of the walls and doors, the noise did not carry well from one cell to another, so the rest of us didn't have to live with it as much as they did.

When we were to start sawing, I had to make sure Van Vliet knew when to start watching the hallway. I had a bed board from my bed that I had split down the middle with my eating knife, and had cut a notch in one end of it. With a shoe lace from one of my shoes, I would tie it together and take the light bulb out of the square opening before we were to start.

As we started a "cutting operation", I would unlock the door to my cell, using a bent nail I had learned to use to pick the lock. Then I took the bed board and ran the notched end through the hole over the door, bringing the end of it down to the outside of the cell door. I'd then push the metal sliding bar on the outside back and walk out to push the sliding bar back on Dick's cell door.

I found that by tying my other shoe lace to the handle of the board, I could tie it around the electric outlet the bulb screwed in, put the notch in the other end over the end of the sliding bar, and, after closing my door, slide the bar back to closed position. I'd then pull the board back in, screw the bulb back in, and lock the door faster than if I had had it tied.

After sliding the bolt back on Secor's door, I would go to the window of my cell and watch the hallway to the guard room through the slit under the frosted glass.

When anyone started down the hallway, I would run to the door and signal Dick. He'd smear margarine, brought along for that purpose, in the cut where he had been sawing, run to his cell and hide the blade in the excelsior immediately. Then he would lock

his door with a bent piece of wire.

I had to slide the bar forward on his cell, run inside and close the door to my cell, climb on the table and reach out through the hole to slide my bar forward with the board. I'd then pull it inside, screw in the light bulb, then lock the door.

After this was done, I would untie the boards and place them under my excelsior mattress. If we were not scheduled to do any more cutting soon, I'd put the shoe laces back in my shoes.

The guards would walk down the hallway and stop in front of the door. Most of the time they seemed to fumble around with the larger key ring, until they found the right key.

They were not long in finding it several times and opened the door just as I was drawing the board back through the hole. I would be holding my breath, afraid they had seen it. Many times, I would have to lock the door while they were walking down the runway and would put the boards back in my bunk just before they stopped in front of my door.

When we were caught short like this, Chappell, Higgins or Van Vliet, and sometimes all of them at once, would start yelling "Abort! Abort!" (Toilet! Toilet!) to try and get the guard to come to their cell first and open the door.

Dick was careful not to saw the bars all of the way through.

He left just enough to hold them together so when the time came, two or three licks on each and they would break out. He kept the margarine mixed with the rust in the cracks. This made them hardly noticeable unless someone took the trouble to examine the bars closely.

He was sawing only one end of the bars. The other end would be broken out of the brick by using the long end of the bar for leverage when we were ready to go. Chappell decided that Dick was sawing too slowly, so he took over and sawed awhile.

We found it funny that the goons examined the bars in our cells but missed the ones at the end of the cell runway (the ones we were working on). Our guards probably would have won a medal or commendation if these had been discovered.

Father Kane paid us a visit several days after we were confined. He brought the clothing, food from our parcels, books to read and other things.

We hadn't been too confident the Germans would allow this, but after he convinced them, "Even prisoners need their chaplain," he was allowed to visit our cells.

We saved all of the food from the parcels to take with us, and ate only the bread and food furnished by the Germans. Self-discipline is hard, especially when you are very hungry.

Since Father Kane brought the supplies, and when we didn't have a cutting operation going on, I would rip apart the old wool shirt, take out the map, compass, and other items, then use the needle and thread thrown in with the clothing and make a ruck sack.

We were worried about completing our sawing operation before the sentences were up, but by noon on the last day of our confinement, the last one was finished. We were ready to go!

SOMETHING WE HADN'T COUNTED ON!

The road coming from town by the camp forked about a hundred yards past the jail. The road, turning to the left, went over an irrigation ditch which ran back of the jail about 50 yards. There was a Hitler Youth Camp about 500 yards from the jail on the road that ran by the camp. About 400 of the little devils had moved into the camp. They came goose stepping by the jail while we were out in the exercise area.

Directly behind the jail was a fenced in lumber yard. The fence was about four feet from the jail wall and ran out to the west side of the jail. It then turned south at the corner of the jail and ran south about 75 feet toward the irrigation ditch which was about a hundred feet from the corner of the jail.

Our plan, when we got out of the window, was to go to the southwest corner of the jail. It was impossible to go the other way because of the German garages, and the German mess hall. Also, the population was in that direction.

When we got to the corner of the jail, we would turn to the left, walk down to the irrigation ditch, get down into it, and while bending low, head down it to the west.

Trees. Unfortunately, they were right in front of the Hitler Youth Camp.

This still seemed to be the best plan. We hoped the Hitler Youths would be out somewhere playing soldier or inside watching a movie. If not, we would just have to stay in the water until we were well passed the camp.

All was set since we had been able to pick the locks on all the doors. Each one of us had a bent nail or stiff wire to pick them, except Van Vliet and Higgins, who used the same bent wire to open theirs.

Due to the regularity with which the guards inspected our

cells every hour, we picked 8:15 P.M. as the time to go. It was still very light at that time, but we could not wait until after the next inspection.

By then, the guards patrolling the fence would be posted, and, after things had quieted down for the night, the noise we were going to have to make tearing out the bars from the window could be heard at the Kommandant's house.

I couldn't help but think about the goon in the gun tower across the street. He wasn't more than 50 to 60 feet from the corner of the jail where we were going to enter the irrigation ditch, keeping our backs to the tower. We couldn't afford to turn around to see if he was looking, for fear of stumbling and making a noise that he would be sure to hear.

And, if he did turn around! It surely was not going to produce the same effect as the one produced when he saw the "drunks" inside the fence, when he turned the spotlight on us.

That machine gun would swing all the way around. Just to think about walking all the way down that fence line and not looking to see if the gun was swinging made my mouth dry.

I was beginning to believe I was turning yellow. I had jumped from moving trains, risked getting shot by arguing with the Krauts, and walked through the Kommandant's front yard. But, here I was, afraid to walk down that fence because of the machine gun in the tower. The more I thought about it, the more convinced I was that the others were feeling the same way. Anyway, when the time came to go, I would be there. No one would have to drag me.

Since Chappell and Van Vliet had won the right to go through the fence first, it was now our time--Bill Higgins and mine--to go through the window first.

Our plans, once we got away from the camp, were still the same as the escape before.

Chappell, Van Vliet and Secor were going to walk to the coast near Danzig and try and get to Sweden by boat. Bill Higgins and I were going to Bromberg, 7 miles to the northeast, steal a Messerschmitt (ME) 109 from the fighter field there and fly across the border.

Once in the air, we would have to "hit the deck" (fly real low) in order to make it harder for pursuing aircraft to see us.

When we arrived on the coast of Sweden, Bill was going to crash land on the beach, with the wheels up. We were going to get out and go over to the nearest American Ambassador and say: "Well, here we are! How about six months' interment and money to spend!"

Every time I began thinking pleasant thoughts, the ugly machine gun in the tower across the street would crowd in and chase them out.

Several minutes after 8 o'clock, the guard came in and checked our cells through the little peep holes.

WE BREAK OUT!

As soon as he left, we started pulling our ruck sacks out from under the bunks where they had been hidden for the past few minutes after we had packed them. I looked under the crack in my window and watched the guard until he opened the door and went into the guard room. I then got up to the hole over the door and gave the word to the others that the way was clear.

Taking my bed board, I reached through the door and pushed the sliding bar back on my door for the last time, unlocked the door, then went to the other doors and pushed the bars back on them. All the other fellows had to do was to unlock the door and walk out.

I went back to my cell, got my shoe lace and put it back in my shoe, put the boards back in the bunk, and grabbed my gear. As soon as Bill Higgins got his door opened, he pushed the make shift key under the door to Colonel Van Vliet and reached for his pack. Getting the hacksaw blade from Dick Secor, he got up to the window and started giving the bars the last few strokes. By then, Bill and I started breaking the bars out of the brick, using the long end for leverage.

It seemed to me that any goon within 200 yards who could not hear the noise of the squeaking and grinding of the bars against the mortar and bricks must be stone deaf.

We were all busy. Just as Bill and I were getting the last bar from the cell, Chappell said, "The Colonel can't get his door open! Bill, he says that you filed the nail down too much to open your door after he used it to open his!"

We all went over to the Colonel's door, but none of us could get it open. "Go on! Go on! It's too late now, you may get caught trying to get me out of here! Take off and I'll try to stall them when they come in. Good luck now!"

There was nothing we could do. Bill and I went through the window. I held his pack while he hoisted himself through the window and jumped to the ground outside. Then I handed him our two packs and climbed through myself. When I was on the ground, we put our sacks under our arms and walked to the southwest corner of the building.

I was in front, so when I got to the corner, I took a big

swallow at the ball of cotton beginning to form in my mouth, and turned south, to the left down the fence.

It was only a short walk to the irrigation ditch, but the machine gun tower in back of us made it seem as if we took half a lifetime to walk that far. Before we got to the ditch, my mouth was so full of cotton, I couldn't swallow.

We kept walking. If the guard in the tower saw us, it might be too late to turn back. He would let us know--probably the hard way.

When I arrived at the bank of the irrigation ditch, I walked down the bank and into the water, going to the middle of the stream. We bent over and started running as fast as we could. Looking towards the machine gun tower, we could see a wagon going along the street under the tower. The road that turned off to the left of the one he was on, went over a bridge, and crossed the irrigation ditch straight ahead of us.

He turned, and the closer we got to the bridge, the closer he got to us. There was no place to hide now, and we were certain he had seen us. His clothing was not good enough to be German, so we were sure he was a Pole. Had he been a German, he would already have given the alarm and the machine gun in the tower would be "barking" at us. We just beat him to the bridge by 20 yards and stayed under it until he was well past.

My last glimpse of the river as we dived under the bridge told me he was curious, but not serious enough to get involved. He kept on going and whipped his horses into a faster gait, if anything.

After we thought the wagon has passed a safe distance up the road, we bent low and started down the ditch, running as fast as we could in the water. I was beginning to accumulate enough saliva in my mouth to swallow. When we had gone 400 yards we came to the trees nearest the ditch on the south side and could see the Hitler camp to the north. It looked deserted, so we decided to climb out of the ditch on the south side and head through the scattered trees, walking now in order not to attract attention. Our shoes were so full of water that the sloshing noise was deafening. When we couldn't see the camp anymore, we stopped and emptied our shoes of water. Wringing our socks as well, we put both back on, replaced our packs, and started walking to the southeast, hence, east, to circle the village.

Soon, we encountered another irrigation ditch, which was much larger and wider than the previous one. To get across, we took off our pack, held them over our heads, and waded through water up to our armpits. I had visions of another movie, a prison picture ...

where convicts break out of jail, and wade through the swamps to get away from the guards and the bloodhounds.

This was no movie! This was the real thing for us! Dogs and guards would not be the only ones looking for us; the whole countryside would be alerted to our escape.

After we crossed the ditch, we sat down, again emptied the water out of our shoes, then started walking. It was dusk now, and we had to pick our way across the countryside as fast as we could, while there was still enough light to travel speedily.

Soon after dark, we approached a road, and as a precaution before crossing it, we laid down in a field to rest and listen. Men with lights were coming down the road from both directions. They met and started talking just opposite where we were laying.

By raising our heads a little and looking closely, we could see that they wore white arm bands around their left arms and were armed with rifles. If only we had something white to put around our arms, we might escape detection at a distance. We thought of tearing a strip from an undershirt, but it might make too much noise, and it was impossible to tell how close the searchers might be.

We circled the town and now it lay to the east or southeast of us. Lights flashing in the sky indicated that the search was intense--every available man plus the Hitler Youth were out searching for us.

We waited a while after the searchers on the road parted and left, then we crossed the road.

For several hours we dodged lights and hid while two men patrols passed, then walked on as quickly and as quietly as we could in the direction of Bromberg.

CHAPTER TWELVE-THWARTED AGAIN!

A dark stretch of trees laid across our path. After stopping temporarily to listen, afraid that a road followed the tree line, we moved on.

There was no visible way to go around, so we started forward to cross the dark line. **Suddenly, as we arrived in the edge of the dark shadows, two lights flashed on us from 20 feet away.**

"Hands up! Hands up!" Rifles, gleaming in the light from that short distance, discouraged any escape thoughts we might have had under the cover of darkness. Our dreams of landing on the coast of Sweden faded and joined memories of our other disappointments.

With shouting and demonstrations, they finally convinced us to put our hands behind our heads

We tried to get the farmers to let us lower our arms and rest them, but they punched us with the rifles, and made threatening gestures.

After walking this way for two miles, we came to a farm complex. The large house had a high brick wall around it, with barns and other accompanying buildings.

A German woman emerged from the farmhouse, and in a few minutes, several men materialized out of the dark. The woman and a man went into the house, apparently to call the police and report our recapture. They'd probably get a reward.

Every time I was in some German's house, they were calling the cops.

Since we had arrived at the farmhouse, we thought they would allow us to lower our now "broken" arms. Instead, we held them up for another two hours, facing the wall, until the police came.

They were so afraid we would try to escape. We weren't even allowed to lower our arms for a drink of water. When I asked, "Habben sie drink Wasser?"

They answered, "Kind wasser." No water.

Finally, three civilian police accompanied by German police dog walked up. It was a strange feeling to welcome their arrival, but we did. After searching us, we lowered our arms so our hands could be chained. The chains had a steel ring near one end, and after the chain was placed around one wrist, the end was passed through the ring. Both ends were pulled tight around the other wrist, where a padlock was passed through the links, thus locking the wrists together.

These police seemed very much to resent their long walk to

retrieve us. They pulled on the chains until the lock was in the tightest link possible.

Ready now for the return trip, we trudged down a dirt road, picking our way by lantern light. Several farmers, along for the show, tagged along in the rear.

The dog walked directly behind us. Every time one of us stumbled or got too close to the edge of the road, he growled.

The chains were so tight our wrists soon began to swell and hurt. Several times, we indicated to our captors that they were too tight and hurting us but they ignored it and told us "Nicht Sprechen!" Don't talk. We tried to ignore the pain.

After stumbling along for 2 1/2 miles, we came to a small village. Directed to enter a small office in one of the buildings, we found a Gestapo in civilian clothes and a creepo officer in uniform.

After shaking us down, the Gestapo talked to us in English, asking our names and where we were from.

I started giving him my spiel about being an American enlisted man who had jumped from a train while being transferred from one camp to another. After looking at me real hard and tracing the long scar on the right side of my face with his finger, he said, **"There is no use pretending you are someone else. We know that you are Lt. Aten. With your bad record, I don't blame you for changing identities so you could go to another camp."**

Rearranging our chains, they took one chain and locked Bill's right wrist to my left one.

We were then taken outside to a black sedan and put into the back seat with one of the policemen. One Gestapo agent drove and the other sat in front, holding his pistol in readiness.

Driving down the roads for several miles, we came to the village of Schubin and to Oflag 64.

The agent pulled the car off the road, parking it between the German guard building and the mess building, where the German Kommandant was in his office.

German soldiers came out of the guard house, and forming a cordon around the car, guarded us while the Gestapo and civilian police went into the office to talk to the Kommandant.

Forty-five minutes later, around 5:30 A.M., they returned with several noncommissioned officers from the Oflag and ordered us out of the car. After we emerged, the policeman used his key to unlock the padlock and take the chain off our wrists.

Another black sedan drove up. The civilian policeman put the chain around Bill's wrist. **The creepo officer produced a chain and put it around my wrist. In the process, he twisted it around both my wrists, but neglected to pass the chain through the steel ring. I had only to twist my wrists in opposite directions to free my hands. Of course, I didn't say anything about this!** They pushed me in the back seat of one sedan, as they had loaded Bill in the back seat of the other one. Evidently, they didn't dare trust us enough to leave us together.

The car with Bill contained the German civilian policeman, a soldier driver, and two guards from the Oflag. It backed out, headed through the village and followed a road to the east. The car I was in was driven by the Gestapo and the creepo, who was in the front seat, fingering his pistol. On my left in the back seat, was a guard from the Oflag, and on my right was a sergeant, noncommissioned officer interpreter from the camp. We took off following the other car.

The moment we started, the interpreter started asking: "You were getting along so well, why did you not stay in jail with your Colonel Van Vliet? You would have gotten out tomorrow and could have joined your fellow officers in the camp. The other two officers, Lieutenants Chappell and Secor, were caught within 15 minutes after you left jail. They did not get over 500 meters from the jail. Where did you and Lt. Higgins go? You had no place to go and it is too far for you to walk to the coast."

I thought, If Col. Van Vliet could only hear this. This bird thinks Van Vliet's a fine fellow now because he stayed behind when we left. I wonder what he'd think if he knew the only reason the Colonel wasn't with us was because we couldn't get his door unlocked at the last minute?

THE KOMMANDANT IS FURIOUS

"**The German Kommandant, Oberst Schneider, is very mad at you and Lt. Higgins for breaking out of his guard house, sawing out the bars, and making him look bad. You are in some real bad trouble now. Why did you not stay in jail?**" the interpreter asked. "**The war will be over soon, and then you could have gone home to your family safe. Now you may not be able to go home!**" There it was, I thought, spelled out plain and simple. Wonder what was cooked up in the seclusion of Oberst Schneider's office? He certainly had enough help and advisors to sift out a good plan to get rid of two such troublemakers as Bill and me.

"We thought we would just get out and get a look at the countryside," I said. "We were tired of being cooped up, so we decided to get out and be free for a while. We knew we couldn't get away, but we thought we would like to have a little fun."

"We would have been able to stay out too, if you hadn't alerted the countryside and enlisted the help of the civilians to find us."

While all this banter was taking place, the creepo officer was sitting in the front seat, holding up his pistol, and looking like the head of the Nazi regime. **I don't have much chance of getting out of this alive, I thought, so I may as well make that goon feel silly while I have the chance. Maybe they will start fighting among themselves.**

Twisting my wrists in opposite directions, I let the chain slip into my lap and folded my arms across my chest. Seeing a bird fly across in front of the speeding car, I pointed at it and said, "That sure is a pretty bird. What kind is it?"

"That bird is a native of Poland and I am sure you have seen very many of them around the Oflag," the interpreter said. "I believe you call them swallows in your language." Suddenly he twisted around in his seat and straightened up. Looking at me he said, "Lt. Aten, how did you get your hands loose from the chain?"

"Oh, I am a magician just like Houdini," I said. "You people can't keep me locked up or chained up so I can't get loose if I want to."

The Gestapo agent took one quick look around at me, started pulling the car off on the side of the road and stopped it.

Pulling the brake up, he turned around in his seat to get a better look at me. Handing him the chain I said, "I don't need this. With that officer sitting up there with his pistol out, I'm not going anywhere."

The Gestapo agent turned red in the face and started shouting at the other officer with such vehemence, I thought he was going to explode. His shouts were all in German, but I could catch such names as "Dummkopf, Holtzenkopf (hard head)" and "Gott im Himmel". The creepo officer sunk down in his corner of the seat and cowed.

The Gestapo trusted no one else to put the chains on me this time and he put them on very tight. Perhaps he wanted to find out for himself if I could pull another Houdini. Wish I could have--right out of the car.

Everyone was upset now, and there was no talking for the rest of the trip except for the agent's grumblings.

After traveling for 35 or 40 miles, we came to a fair-sized city. Perhaps the last one I would see. Why else would they take us away in separate cars in the early hours of the morning?

The agent pulled up in front of a cement wall about twelve

feet high with four more feet of barbed wire on top, slanted to the inside at an angle of 45 degrees. The wall surrounded the entire block and the familiar machine gun towers mounted on each corner covered all the area inside.

I made my captors angry again. They all got out of the car and thought, I guess, that I would follow without having to be told to do so. Either that or each had left it up to someone else to get me out of the car and inside the walls. They were all standing at the gate, waiting for the guard inside to open up. When the Gestapo agent looked around and realized that the object of their flying trip was still in the car, he went berserk. "Why did you not get out of the car and follow us?"

"I thought you fellas were going inside to make reservations for me."

He replied "Raus!" The tone of his voice said it all---Get the hell out of here!!

IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP

Struggling out of the car and ambling over to the now open gate, I was pushed inside and into a room where I was ordered to strip off all my clothing. I managed to infuriate the agent all over again. Turning my back to my audience, I unbuttoned my shirt, wriggled the shirt over my head and down my arms on the chain, before the agent realized that I was trying to remove my shirt with the chains still on my wrist.

Jerking me around and swearing "*Doesn't the damned American know he can't get it off that way!*" he pulled the key out of the creepo officer's hand and took the chain from my wrist, tossing it and the key to the creepo.

After I removed the rest of my clothing, the Gestapo felt through all my clothing. He took the laces out of my shoes and pounded the heels and soles on the corner of a chair, trying to see if he would find a hollow hiding place. POWs had been known to hide maps and other escape materials in the bottoms of their shoes.

Since I had taken off my socks, I was afraid he was going to tell me to raise my foot so he could inspect the bottom. I had folded a US Gold Seal twenty-dollar bill and stuck it up under the middle toe on my right foot and two toes next to it. We carried money in order to bribe the Poles, in exchange for help. I could feel my toes squeezing and had to concentrate to make them relax.

When the agent told me, "If you have anything hidden on you, you'd better tell us. If we find it, it will be too bad for you." I was tempted to tell him about the money. It wasn't important now, but I didn't want to give him the satisfaction of making me

volunteer ANYTHING. Besides he would get just as mad now as later. Whatever they were going to do, they would carry out, regardless of what they found on me.

Bill and his accompanying group came in, and the agent shifted his attentions from me to Bill's shakedown.

After the search was completed, the agent left the room. **In a few minutes, he returned with an officer and two guards who were wearing the dreaded, infamous skull and crossbones insignia on their caps. I realized then who they were. We were turned over to them and the others left.**

The officer talked to the guards for a moment, then turning, told Bill to follow one, and me, the other. As we stepped out, some men were carrying one of the cheap European style black coffins by our door. As if by prearrangement, our guards did not hurry us along, but, allowed us to stop and watch this cortege. Considering our situation, it was a foul, low blow to our morale. **Would I ever leave this place?**

The guards jolted us back to reality. Bill followed his off east, to the right side of the rectangle formed by the walls of the **concentration camp**. Mine led to the left, until we reached a walk that ran along the west wall. About a fourth of the way down, was a small, isolated, one room brick building. The guard stopped at the only door, unlocked it, told me to enter, then turned the key behind me.

They sure don't trust us very much, I thought. They locked Bill up all the way across the compound from me. I wonder why they took our shoe laces and belts--afraid we would commit suicide before they shoot us, I guess.

My cell had the familiar thick wooden door, complete with peep hole, but these fellas were big hearted. This place had a small window with bars on it, beside the door facing the west. There was nothing but bars--no window glass to lower at night to ward off the cold wind that whistled in off the North Sea.

Along the back of the cell was a sleeping platform about six inches off the floor. I hoped for a mattress or something to sleep on but I was only given two blankets.

About nine o'clock, two guards came around with a bowl of soup and a cup of weak tea, which I was grateful for. This was repeated at five o'clock and set the pattern for food during our stay. From my cell window, I could see a line of smooth gravel about a foot wide and straight as a string which ran about three feet from the wall. No one was to step over this line, unless of course they were working on it. Laying this line and keeping it in perfect shape was the job given to some of the men prisoners in

the camp. Once in a while, a guard would come around and drag his foot through the gravel to give the prisoners something to do. Prisoners, on their hands and knees, replaced the tiny pebbles one by one until the line down each side was sight straight and the inside completely filled.

Before the afternoon was gone, several women slipped around to the north side of the cell out of sight of the tower and tried to talk to me. From what I could understand, there were 38 women and about 250 men in the camp. They were Poles and Germans, some of them being "Jude". This, I finally understood, meant Jews.

Each woman wore a scarf because her head had been shaved by prison authorities.

A Polish man who could speak passable English, came to stand around the corner from my window and talked to me. He told me that the women's heads had been shaved under the pretense that they had head lice. The coffin we had seen being carried out held the body of someone who had committed suicide. He had sharpened his spoon on the cement or a rock, and when it reached razor edge keenness, he had slashed his wrists.

"Most of the prisoners here are political prisoners," he said. "It is sometimes necessary for us to change our views to some extent or be shot. At least, we must tell them that we have changed our views. Then, if we bow and scrape enough, they may shorten our sentences, somewhat."

"See the three-story building across the street in front of the concentration camp? Every Sunday my wife and little boy go to a room on the third floor where I can see them. They wave to me. I will be able to be with them in six more months."

"Where is the other American lieutenant?" I asked.

"He is in a cell on the other side of the camp. His cell is very much like yours. We cannot talk to him as easily as we can to you since the guards from the tower can see us better there."

"What do you think they will do with us? Do you think they will keep us here for long, or keep us here for a short time, then take us back to our old camp, or another one, or what?" I asked.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN-POWS BROUGHT HERE TO BE SHOT

"I do not know what they will do with you. Russian and American prisoners have been brought here several times. They stayed for a few days, then they were taken out, and we never saw them again."

"Some of the prisoners who work on the trucks that haul the garbage and trash for the German people in the town have heard that the prisoners had been shot. This I do not know, but I hope it does not happen to you and your friend." "Me too!!"

"What did you and your friend do to make them put you in here?" he asked. When I told him that we had tried to escape and that this was the fourth time each of us had tried it, he said, "That's too bad! I'm afraid for you and your friend! They would not have brought you here if they were going to take you back to the camp you escaped from. This does not sound good for you."

I felt an involuntary chill as he was talking because I knew he was right.

I was so cold in that cell. Two blankets on the floor were not enough to keep me warm. I tried tying one of the blankets to the top of the bars, thus covering the window in an effort to keep the wind out. But, I got colder that way, so I took it down and wrapped up in both of them.

Every night was a cold, shivering nightmare. It was too cold to sleep and I was unable to stop thinking about what might happen that next morning. I remember hoping, *If I'm going to be shot, at least let me get by a warm fire before you do it. I certainly do not want to be standing in front of a firing squad shaking like a dog.*

I PRAY!

Being a professional soldier, or, rather using that as an excuse, I had not prayed very much in my lifetime. Now, in the solitude of my cold, lonely cell, I could unashamedly ask Him for forgiveness and the courage to face what I had to face.

From the return of my usually jaunty attitude toward my captors, and from the flow of moral and physical strength I felt encompassing my body, I know He was with me.

After several days, I began to needle the German guards, telling them that I wanted strings for my shoes, so I could walk and my belt to hold my pants up.

"Ich habe kein Wasser getrunken, seit ich hier bin. (I have not had a drink of water since I have been here)" I told one of them.

"Kind Wasser" and a shrug of the shoulders was all I could get out of him. No water! We were there for ten days and were never allowed a drink of water. Only the weak tea they brought around in the morning.

The slow passage of time was easier to bear now that I was talking to Him and HIS company helped me to accept the uncertainty of a firing squad.

One of the women who came to talk with me through the window gave me a very highly valued and much appreciated face towel. On a piece of paper she furnished me, I wrote my name, my father's name and his address.

Her name was Nowak Tadeusz, Zabrze, ul.Rozy Lukseinburg 2, Poland. This woman later corresponded with my father, and Dad made a practice of sending her coffee, which really was a luxury item. She could use it for bartering, if necessary. When the Iron Curtain closed around Poland, my father wasn't able to send coffee to her any more. I've often wondered what happened to her.

City of Zabrze dated 8th January, 1960

Dear Sir,

I'm writing to you in Polish since I cannot do it otherwise. I think you will accept it anyway from someone close to you from the time of our occupation when you were in Oflag in the place of Schubin, Poland. It's been a long time since you left to go to your homeland.

I hope you are still alive because when we were saying goodbye we promised each other that we would let each other know about our lives in the future. I wonder if you are at home and still alive. It would be great if you were alive and kicking; it would be great to know that you survived the war and that now you are happy with your family. I hope you will get this letter and remind yourself of the past because I know how difficult the circumstances were that you went through during the war. When you get this letter, please accept it as a letter from your sister. If the letter is received by another member of the family, please let me know about Frank's life.

I know that everyone else that was with us during the war is still alive and doing well. Whoever receives this letter, please let me know, even in one word, about your fate because this is so important to me. When I remember our times together especially when we were sharing a piece of chocolate or a cigarette, it fills my heart with great happiness that American and Polish "brothers" were so close to one another, even though it was only for a short period of time.

Now we are separated by a great distance between America and Poland, I still remember our time spent together. It's important to me Sir (*Frank*) that you get this letter. I'm finishing this letter, hopefully not the last one, hoping that we will get to know each other even better and we will be as close again as we were before. I wish all the best to you and your family, your friends, and the person who is reading and translating this letter.

Goodbye,

Nowak Tadeusz

Zabrze

Ul. Rozy Lukseinburg 2

Poland

[Notes: This letter was first sent to Frank's father, Mr. Floyd Aten, at Box 908, Tyler, Texas. It was then forwarded to the Shreiner Institute in Kerrville, Texas, where Frank worked. Unfortunately, Frank was never able to have it translated. Years later, his great nephew, Wes Rogers, and his wife, Robin, located a native speaker and had it translated.]

Figure 12-Letter from Poland

Some of the women who snuck around the wall to talk with me showed me their hands--hands that were chapped with red, broken skin. Many of the nails and cuticles were split open. With these frail hands, they were required by the Germans, while down on their hands and knees, to scrub the streets, curbs and walks inside the camp. They were made to do this even on the coldest days and were issued only a rag and a pail of cold water.

Shaven heads. Hands with broken skin. Anything to degrade these women and men, to show them who the Master Race was--to impress upon all prisoners of the Germans who their masters were.

Another favorite job assigned to the women by the guards was to pick pieces of coal from cinders spread out in the area used for counting the prisoners, and in other locations within the camp. "These pieces of coal," the women said, "range from 'seeing size'. If we can see it, we are required to pick it out."

Many of the men worked in the town, Hohenzaltza, Germany, or Inowroclaw, Poland. They worked under a heavy guard, hauling garbage and doing other filthy work.

Through the English-speaking women and the man, who snuck around to my cell to talk with me, I managed to keep informed that my friend on the other side of the prison was getting along as well as I was.

REPRIEVED!

One day when we were quite unprepared, we received a most welcomed surprise. The Ferret, and several of the enlisted guards from Oflag 64, showed up in one of the old trucks used around the camp. They were there to take us "home", Home being our old cells in the now, repaired jail. On such short notice, we were unable to say goodbyes to any of the new friends we had made among the other prisoners in the concentration camp. Little did I realize that I would be back.

The trip back to Schubin was pleasant enough in the open truck, even though our guards flourished their firearms in warning.

When we arrived at the jail, we suffered the usual shakedown, then were ushered back into the cell block. The Ferret pointed out the fine job of repair work done to the bars and the brick in the window we had torn out in our escape. "Nicht mere!" he said, shaking his finger, and we knew what he meant. We would not be given the opportunity to get out of his jail. At least, not alive!

Our old friends, Chappell and Secor, were in their respective cells. We had quite a gab session through the little square holes over the cell door as soon as the guards left us alone. At least the guards hadn't cemented up these openings.

They were anxious to find out what had happened to us. We told them everything, then we learned what their fate had been. When they followed us out, they had gone down the irrigation ditch where we had left it. The guards caught up with them when they turned south from the ditch and had started moving away. Chappell and Secor were herded back. They were told that Aten and Higgins escaped and could not be found; that the clothing and personal items we left in the cells had been taken across the street and turned over to the Americans. A convenient cover up!

Model prisoner Van Vliet had gotten out the next day, but before he left, he told them this story: "When the corporal of the guard unlocked the cell block door, I could hear him walk to each cell door that was standing open, and I figured he was looking. Then he came to my door. When he unlocked it, I walked right over to the commode, slipped down my pants, and sat on it. The poor guy kept walking to each door and looking in to see if he could see anyone. Finally, he walked over to me and said, "Vo ist der andre?" I shrugged my shoulders and said, "Ich vishnicht." (I don't know). Then he rushed me up, locked me in my cell, and ran out of here to give the alarm."

The German officers had beamed at Col. Van Vliet and told him what a fine officer he was; how wise to remain in his cell when the others had sawed the bars and escaped. They would have felt differently if they had known that the only thing which kept him in was about 1/32nd of an inch on the rusty nail we hadn't sanded off. The next day after our return from Hohenzaltza, the Ferret and some guards came around, opened our cell doors, and tacked a poster on the inside of each door. The title of the poster:

To all Prisoners of War!

The escape from prison camps is no longer a sport! Germany has always kept to the Hague Convention and only punished recaptured prisoners of war with minor disciplinary punishment. Germany will still maintain these principles of international law.

But England has besides fighting at the front in an honest manner instituted an illegal warfare in non-combat zones in the form of gangster commandos, terror bandits and sabotage troops even up to the frontiers of Germany.

The following is stated in a captured secret and confidential English military pamphlet:

THE HANDBOOK OF MODERN IRREGULAR WARFARE:

" ... the days when we could practice the rules of sportsmanship are over. For the time being, every soldier must be a potential gangster and must be prepared to adopt their methods whenever necessary.

The sphere of operations should always include the enemy's own country, any occupied territory, and in certain circumstances, such neutral countries as he is using as a source of supply.

England has with these instructions opened up a non-military form of gangster war!

Germany is determined to safeguard her homeland, and especially her war industry and provisional centers for the fighting fronts. Therefore, it has become necessary to create strictly forbidden zones, called death zones, in which all unauthorized trespassers will be immediately shot on sight.

Escaping prisoners of war, entering such death zones will certainly lose their lives. They are therefore in constant danger of being mistaken for enemy agents or sabotage groups.

Urgent warning is given against making future escapes!

In plain English: Stay in the camp where you will be safe! Breaking out of it is now a damned dangerous act. The chances of preserving your life are almost nil! All police and military guards have been given the most strict orders to shoot on sight all suspected persons.

ESCAPING FROM PRISON CAMPS HAS CEASED TO BE A SPORT!"

This were words of warning to the prisoners of war of Oflag 64, by the German Gestapo. In addition to being hung in our cells, it was placed on the administration bulletin board at the top of the steps in the "White House".

Posted in December 1944, the Americans in Oflag 64 interpreted this as contrary to the Hague Convention because it violated the right to escape. An assistant adjutant, Lt. George Greene, was ordered to stand in front of the notice, because it was wrongful propaganda. The Ferret tried to remove him and when Lt. Green refused, he was forcibly removed. The next day, the Germans sent for Lt. Greene and threw him in jail, awaiting trial.

We Kriegies underestimated the seriousness of this situation.

We believed that he would be given a 10-day sentence, which he could do standing on his head. We were not even concerned when he was sent to Posen for trial.

Imagine our shock when the small party returned from Posen and reported that Lt. Green had been given the death penalty. The whole Kriegie community was stunned! Dumbfounded!

As the days, Christmas included, became part of our history, I used to look into the exercise area to see Lt. Green walking around, slowly in a small circle in the snow. My heart went out to him.

Under international law, prisoners of war had a right to escape, with no more than minor, disciplinary punishment if recaptured.

The posting of this notice and the sentencing of Lt. Green had a sobering effect upon all of Oflag 64, with emphasis for those of us in jail and for the Escape Committee.

POWs were NOW under the Death Threat, with appeal only to Adolf Hitler himself, if this notice was disturbed in any way.

Several days later, we were notified by the Camp Officer, Hauptmann Menner, that we had been tried and sentenced to six weeks "Stueben Arrest." The sentence was six weeks of solitary confinement, with soup one out of every three day, and rations of bread and water on the other two days. "The Kommandant cannot give us six weeks punishment for what we have done!" I exclaimed. "He can't give us more than 30 days confinement for any offense!"

"Oh yes! I'm afraid he can. He is punishing you for two offenses--one for escaping, and one for destroying people's property, by sawing through the bars."

"That's the same thing. How could we have escaped had we not cut through the bars?"

"You should have found some other way, for that is what the Kommandant is punishing you for. You and Lt. Higgins are lucky to be back here at all! In a few minutes I will return, and I will bring you, written out, the article the Kommandant is punishing you under. "

He returned and handing me a piece of paper. "This is a written copy of Article 2, Paragraph 54, of the Geneva Convention for you to read." "2. Disciplinary Punishment 54. The duration of any single punishment shall not exceed 30 days. When during the course, or after the termination of a period of imprisonment, a prisoner is sentenced to a fresh disciplinary penalty, a period of at least three days intervene between each of the periods of imprisonment, if one of such periods is of 10 days or more."

"When are we to get out these three days to rest up?" I knew it would be useless to argue about the harsh 6 weeks punishment.

"Tomorrow will be June the fifth. You will be taken to the camp in the morning where you will be allowed to remain for three days before you must return here to the jail to start serving your sentences. I will have the guard come for you in the morning."

"Have him come real early, will you please. I'd like to get the three full days over there before I have to come back to this place."

"If you had not lowered yourself to get drunk on the potato whiskey in the camp, you would not have been back over here this time where you could get into all of this trouble," he said disgustedly as he left.

What could I say?

The next morning, the guards came and took us back across the street to the camp. On the way over, the little German who was the quartermaster officer of the camp walked along with us part of the way. **"The war will soon be over. The Americans have landed in France,"** he said. Sweet music to our ears! **"You may not have to go back to jail and serve out your time."**

Several weeks later, after the first V1 rocket landed on Britain, I was to hear this same officer say, **"The Americans are kaput! With these new weapons, the Germans will soon win the war. Then you can go home to your family."**

Shortly after Bill and I arrived in the camp, we reported to the Senior American Officer, Col. T.D. Drake. **"About the only thing that saved you two fellows was that Lt. Tom Rogers drank some tea the night before that caused him to get up early to go to the toilet. When he got up, he looked out the window just as they were unchaining you from each other and putting separate chains on you. Then he saw them drive off down the street with you fellows in the cars and came and told me about it. I knew I had to do something about it soon. They were going to execute you. I told him to go over immediately and tell Oberst Schneider that I knew you had been caught; that I was going to write the Swiss Legation right away and tell them that I wanted you two officers brought back to Oflag 64 immediately."**

"Colonel, Hauptmann Menner says we have been tried and sentenced to six weeks stueben arrest," I said. "That seems to be a pretty long time to give us. They are sentencing us for two offenses--one for escaping, and one for destroying the people's property by cutting through the bars. Seems to me they are both the same thing. We could not have escaped through that particular window, or any other window in the jail, without cutting the bars."

"Well," said the Col. "under the Geneva Convention, we can appeal to higher German authorities. I don't know how much good it will do, but we have plenty of lawyers here in the Oflag. You two write a letter to the Swiss Legation in complaint of the treatment received after you were caught and bring it to my office so it can be typed up. Talk to Chappell and Secor, and all of you decide if you wish to submit an appeal. Let me know right away so I can notify Oberst Schneider, so you won't have to go back to jail, pending the outcome. I am due to be leaving to be repatriated in a few days, but I will brief the new Senior American Officer the

situation before I leave. I suppose this had better be the last time for you to try. I don't believe anyone could stop them from shooting you the next time." We informed the Colonel immediately of our desire to appeal. We submitted the following letter for typing and forwarding through channels.

Subject: Mistreatment of American Officers

To. S.A.O. (Senior American Officer)

1. After escaping from the guardhouse outside the camp about 8:30 on the night of 15 May, 1944, we were recaptured by armed civilians around 4 A.M. on the same night.

2. We were forced to walk some two miles with our hands over our heads. Upon reaching a farmhouse, we were forced to stand facing a wall for two hours with our hands over our heads. We were refused a drink of water.

3. Upon arrival of the civilian police, we were chained together so tight as to cause our wrists to swell and to be very painful. We asked several times to have the chains loosened and were told to keep quiet.

4. We were walked this way about two and one half miles where we were turned over to the Gestapo and a Creepo officer. He brought us in a car back to this Oflag. We were left in the car for about 40 minutes while they were discussing with the camp officers what to do with us.

5. We were then separately chained and taken away by the Gestapo and Creepo officers in separate cars. We were taken to the city of Hohenzaltza, arriving there about 8 o'clock in the morning, where we were unchained and allowed to take our chains off for the first time. We were then searched and I, Lt. Aten, was told that "If I had anything concealed, I had better hand it over or it would be bad for me if they found it."

6. We were wet and muddy and no provisions were made for us to dry or change our clothing.

7. We were placed in solitary confinement in a civilian concentration camp where even our toilet articles were confiscated. We were never allowed to see or talk to anyone.

8. While there, we were not treated with the respect due American officers. We were not allowed drinking water during our entire stay there. We were allowed only two blankets with which to sleep on the bare floor. Our rations consisted of 300 grams of bread and a bowl of soup per day which was very inadequate. We were very dirty and though we asked several times, we were never allowed a bath. We were filthy and were infested with bugs.

9. On 26 May, a German officer and three guards from this Oflag came after us. We were returned to camp in a truck. We were given no explanation for this treatment. A few days previous to our escape, I, Lt. Higgins, was told by Oberst Schneider that "If we caused any more trouble, it would be too bad for us." We were then placed in the guardhouse for 10 days without being sentenced. We have now been sentenced to 21 days close confinement (bread and water for two days and soup every day).

At least we'd received a temporary reprieve from solitary confinement. There was, however, hanging over us, the knowledge that sooner or later we would have to go back to jail to serve some sort of sentence. But, we made the best of it.

Naturally, since D Day, the "baseball scores" were perking up. Many small French towns we had never heard of were becoming prominent objects of conquest in front of, and fallen prizes in back of, the onslaught of the advancing Allied armies in the West. Names like Aachen, Ruhr River Bridge were on our tongues whenever two or more Kriegies met and talked.

Also, our "friends" in the East were on the prowl. The Russian offensive was beginning to gather momentum. All of the more optimistic prisoners were beginning to predict end of the war dates ... July 4th, Labor Day, November 11, or Christmas. Many predictions were dated after Christmas 1945.

The method used by the German High Command in reporting losses of supply lines, strategic towns, and other vital defenses was interesting to observe. Generally, we heard of German losses over the BBC the night of the loss. Three days later we would read in the German newspapers, or hear over the German radio, that these same losses were "evacuated according to plan." This was one of the Krauts' favorite expressions, right up to the waning days of the war, when they had practically nothing to "evacuate according to plan."

The losses in lives and materiel by the Allies, as reported by the German High Command, were increased many times, while their own losses always decreased to unbelievably low figures. Losses of bombers and fighter planes followed the same trend.

In August, 1944, War Correspondent Larry Allen, Col. Drake, and other officers left for a repatriation swap, bound for the good ole USA. I feel safe in saying that every man in the camp would liked to have gone with them.

New prisoners in ever increasing numbers began to come to Oflag 64 from the new Western Front. Among them, came a paratrooper, **Col. George V. Millet, who assumed command as SAO when Col. Drake departed.**

The German Kommandant notified Col. Millet, who had been fully briefed on our case by Col. Drake, that we were to be taken to Posen for our court martial, granted us to on appeal grounds. **Col. Millett notified them that there would be seven in our party: the four defendants, Captain Ferguson, another Texan lawyer, and him. He was going along to be certain we got a fair shake.** On the day before the trial, our party was gathered and was ushered through the main gate under a full composition of guards. They escorted us to a small train station down the street, where we boarded one of the small local commuter trains.

Arriving in Posen, we were taken to a building where we spent the early part of the night, playing bridge, and puffing horded cigars and cigarettes, like a convention of big city bankers. We even had **alcohol free beer that Col. Millet, in his blustery, charming paratrooper manner, had talked the guards into getting for us.**

The next morning, we were marched to the courtroom to meet the German lawyer the Swiss Legation had hired to defend us. The courtroom was filled with civilians, awaiting their own relatives' trials. The German lawyer conferred with our lawyers for a few moments only, preparing our defense, before the German Officer members of the Military Tribunal filed in. A most decorative bunch they were, wearing full dress uniforms that bore different colored stripes down their pants' legs.

Our trial, first on the docket, was soon underway. **The proceedings were all in German (we were not furnished an interpreter), and lasted only a short while, when we were told that our sentences had been increased from six weeks to two months. By adding an extra two weeks to our sentence, they were showing the decadent Americans that it was not profitable to appeal the sentence metered out by a camp Kommandant.**

A strangely silent and shocked group trooped back to the station under heavy guard and took the commuter train back to Schubin and Oflag 64. We were allowed to spend the night in the camp.

We were told we would be taken to the jail the next morning to begin our sentences and were given a stern warning that no foolishness would be tolerated. To warn all that the German Kommandant would not allow his jail to be defaced, an enlisted man, who was serving time on a minor charge, was given an additional 10 days for writing his name on the wall.

The length of this sentence made us dread it more than all the others. We missed the "baseball scores". The lack of news is a bitter pill to swallow when there are things of vital interest to you, going on in the outer world.

Roy Chappell, with his Deutsch sprechen, started buttering up one of the German enlisted guards, who was a native of Alsace-Lorraine. Through conversation with this night guard, and passing remarks of other guards, we managed to hear scraps of news. Most of the guards now seemed to be men who had been wounded on the Eastern or Western Fronts and were sent back for guard duty because they were unfit for active duty on the front line.

The Krauts were generous ... they allowed us to take a bath every two weeks. As we arrived for ours, we tagged on the tail end as the camp prisoners were finishing their weekly bath. The guards escorted us to the dressing room as the Kriegies were leaving. These were all new prisoners, just arrived from the Western Front.

One short, chubby fellow looked familiar to me. But, I could not place him. When our guard wandered over to stand in the hallway door, I eased over from the shower and said, "Don't I know you?"

"You ought to, you used to drive a motorcycle for me when the old 12th Field Artillery was on maneuvers in Louisiana."

"Hoppy Hopkins, what in the world are you doing here?"

"I went from the 12th to the 37th Field Artillery Battalion, and later took it over. On D DAY plus 4, I got caught in an enemy cross fire in my jeep. My driver was killed, and here I am. What rank are you now?"

"Second lieutenant."

"I believe you were a corporal last time I saw you."

"Yeah, and you are a lieutenant?"

"I am a lieutenant colonel now."

When the guard turned around and saw us talking, he walked over between us and said, "Nich sprechen mit der gefangenen."

"What did he say?"

"He said for us to quit talking I'll look you up when I get back inside the camp in about a month. We can talk over old times in the 12th."

"Ok" Hoppy said, gathering up his dirty clothing, and taking off under the menacing looks of the guard.

Our endless days of confinement were almost over! And we had one beautiful sight to ease the pains of solitary in our last days. **By straining and peering out the window, we could see our B17 bombers en-route to and from their bombing missions. Oh, what a beautiful sight those huge birds were to us!**

We were a lean, gaunt foursome that managed to struggle back

through the gates of Oflag 64 to set up housekeeping once again. We had lost weight on the starvation diet. I doubt if any of us could have jogged more than a few steps.

Bill Higgins finally told the German authorities that he was an Air Force flier and was transferred to Saggan, a German Air Force prison. They were supposed to get better treatment than we did, but Bill, did this in order to "lose" his identity as an escapee with a long record of escapes. He figured if he could lose his record, he might get another chance to run for it. That was the last time I saw Bill Higgins, but in 1958 I heard through Roy Chappell that he was a First Sergeant in the US Air Force.

Our old friend, the Padre, Chaplain Kane, was transferred to an American enlisted men's camp near Vienna, Austria. He had held both Catholic and Protestant services in the camp. Father Stanley Brook was now in the camp and he was holding services for men of the Catholic faith. He had been a prisoner of war in Italy for a long time.

Conducting the Protestant services was a young Infantry Lieutenant, Paul Carner. He wasn't a member of the Chaplains' corps, but he did an outstanding job inspiring those who heard him. When you listened to him you knew he'd rather preach than carry an M-1 rifle.

By now, **I'd been a prisoner for eighteen months** and did not have one good friend. Sure, I enjoyed spending time with a lot of different people playing sports and sharing escape plans, but I didn't have a real buddy, till Hoppy came.

When I returned to the Oflag, I found Hoppy and we spent many hours together, attending church, recounting the times in our old Army unit and talking of our families back home. Hoppy, a man from Oklahoma, had married a young woman from San Antonio. I had seen her with him on the post at Fort Sam Houston many times when I was an enlisted man. We had things in common because we had soldiered together for a number of years, on an officer-enlisted man status. Now he was field grade and I was a junior officer, stuck in the same POW camp. What a small world it really is.

We now had a new Senior American Officer. Colonel Goode, Infantry, had been captured on the Western Front. Since he ranked Colonel Millet, he took over as SAO. Colonel Millet stepped down to second-in-command, the spot of Executive Officer.

Mainly through the efforts of Colonel Drake, the Germans had built up a large reserve supply of Red Cross food parcels to be used in case of emergency. Colonel Drake, a good planner, was farsighted, and it was a very good thing for us that he was.

Suddenly our food parcels were cut off "due to the bombings by Allied planes." This is what we were told when they cut us down to a half package a week. Later, when no more parcels arrived, our rations were cut even further. Suddenly, there were no parcels at all.

The American doctors started weighing all Kriegies in the camp on the same day of every week. During the six weeks the camp was entirely without parcels, the average weight loss per man was six pounds per week. A lot of the heavier men were really shedding pounds. Those of us who were smaller, lost less, but a heavier man could stand to lose more.

In about 6 weeks, parcels began arriving again. They were larger in quantities and once again, we could look forward to half a parcel nearly every week. Boy were we grateful. Especially after eating ersatz soup, soggy potatoes, and wood pulp yellow turnips. Ugh!

New Year's Day, 1945, slipped by.

Through the "baseball scores", we surmised that the new Russian offensive, started when they jumped off from the Vistula River, was gaining momentum. The Germans would be wise to make preparations for moving us, if they wanted to keep the Ruskie from freeing us.

We did not want to move. But we were fairly certain the Krauts would not let a prize like 1400 American officers be liberated by the Russians.

Gradually, traffic increased on the road in front of the camp, gradually. Then suddenly, by 16 January, the thoroughfare was filled with a continuous line of refugees. They were in wagons, carts, buggies; walking and carrying everything they could. Many were driving cattle, goats, sheep, chickens ... anything that could be led, driven or carried.

I felt sorry for these victims of war, in spite of what they had done to many Polish and Russian people. They had taken over the homes and lands of those other people, simply because der Fuhrer had said, "Take it!" Now, retribution was on the way, and they were fleeing for their lives.

Most of the Kriegies in the camp were making small departure preparations in a halfhearted manner. We'd all rather stay and wait for Ivan.

One day a cavalry troop passed by. Mounted on their horses, they looked like Mongols. Their troop was moving fast and most were leading from three to five horses.

Sometime during the night off 19 January, the traffic stopped

altogether. **Early on the morning of the 20th, I walked out to the front of the "White House" and scanned the road in both directions. Nothing was moving.** There were countless tracks in the snow. At Appell that morning, we were told to be ready to line up and march out on very short notice. This announcement touched off a large bash by many Kriegies, as most had saved food for this occasion. Eating a good meal now would give us stamina for the forced march.

There was a jubilant atmosphere, and countless rumors. "The Ruskies are coming! Maybe they'll be here before the Krauts can move us. Everyone had an observation. "They are at Bromberg!"

"They are just down the road!" That accounted for the unearthly quiet. Not even the local Poles were venturing into the streets.

German soldiers, singly, or in small groups, came by the camp heading both directions, walking, riding bikes, or in vehicles.

Our news, even the "baseball scores" was vague or not forthcoming at all. Communications had broken down.

Word was circulated at a news briefing that no one was to try to escape before we marched out of the camp. Four spares had been chosen to hide in one of the incomplete tunnel projects when the rest of us were lined up. The tunnel was well hidden, under an old brick oven.

This project had been kept very secret. I usually managed to locate all the escape projects by one means or another, but I hadn't known about this one.

Their mission, once the Germans evacuated the camp, was to find the Russians as quickly as possible, give them details on the route the column was to take, the number of Americans in the march, etc.

Anyone who disregarded this "escape" order, would be court-martialed upon return to the States.

Not everyone was going. Some of the prisoners in the hospital, who were too sick to travel, had been given permission by the German doctors to be left behind, along with several "protected personnel" doctors, who would care for the sick and wounded.

Many of our thoughts were for Lt. Green. Due for execution the latter part of January, we prayed for him, and kept saying, "Come on Ivan." Noon Appell, January the 20th, and we thought, "This is it."

But, it wasn't. It was only the regular head count. Someone probably had been tipping off the SAO, for all the prisoners were there for the count. Hauptmann Heiner was still there, buttering

up the Americans, so he could emerge from this war alive. He had known for a long time who would win.

Evening Appell was the same ... just the normal head count.

After a cold, fitful night, the rumors multiplied. We were to be marched out early in the morning. Sure enough, about 8:30 A.M. the Appell rang. Word was shouted for us to fall in with our traveling gear. The assignment I had drawn for the march was to be in charge of a platoon of 50 enlisted men. We lined up in front of, and adjacent to, the area where the officers were lined up, on the east side of the hospital. Hauptmann Schneider and the German guards carefully counted us. After the count, they huddled. This was repeated twice more; then the American adjutant was told to dismiss us. Schneider, after telling Col. Goode we were three men short, left the camp through the main gate, to report to the Oberst. He was back in a few minutes, and we repeated the process three more times.

While this was going on, the Ferret, with every enlisted guard available, was busily searching every nook and possible hiding place in the camp. How can we be only three men short when there are four in the tunnel? I thought, and then I knew. This fourth man is the spare they've been hiding at every Appell, finally coming out of hiding. After a studied, careful count, the Captain left us standing in ranks and again went through the gate. When he returned, they went through the count very carefully once more. He then walked up to Colonel Goode and said, "You have hidden the three men very well. We cannot find them, so we will have to leave without them."

The long platoon rows of 50 officers each, lined up in front of and facing the hospital, were given orders to move out. The first platoon consisting of field officers were given, "Right face, forward march!" The camp was now on the move. Then the next platoon, the next, and so on down the line.

By now it was 11 A.M. While standing in front of my platoon, awaiting my turn, I spotted Colonel Millett, the XO (Executive Officer), standing with his arms folded, watching the proceedings as the platoons executed a "column right" and moved out the main gate. Since I knew it would be some time yet before my platoon moved out, I casually sauntered down to where he was standing. "Colonel Millett, you know my record. I have tried to escape from these Krauts four times, and I have spent a lot of time in solitary for my troubles. I believe if I had one more chance, before my platoon moves out that gate, I could make it."

"Go ahead and good luck!"

That was all I needed to hear the good colonel say! I hurried

back to my platoon and asked for the sergeant. When he met me out in front of the formation, I said, "Sergeant, take charge of the platoon. If I'm not here when it comes time to march out, don't look for me. Just march the platoon right out," and with these words, I walked toward the hospital.

In the center of the south side of this building was an entrance to the shower rooms, which were located on the ground floor. The doors to the rooms were locked, but on the left wall of the hallway, about 10 feet inside the door, was a water spigot, where Kriegies had been filling their canteens, if they were lucky enough to have one, or water bottles, or anything else that would hold water for the march.

As I approached the front of the building, I reached into my pack and pulled out my trusty old vinegar bottle, with the porcelain stopper. I took several big swigs so it was about half empty. The German guard, who was posted at the door to see that we went no further than the water spigot, had walked to the other end of the porch and was looking toward the far end of the parade grounds where the last platoons were started toward the gate.

Moving faster, and as quietly as I could, I aimed for the door. I could see no one else from the corner of my eye and when I slid through the door the guard had not turned around. Walking past the water tap, I proceeded straight to the end of the hallway, where there was a recess under the stairway that led up to the main floor. Under this was a stairwell which led down into a basement storeroom.

The door to the storeroom was locked, but this did not matter. It was nice and dark, the quiet was appealing. Looking back up to the head of the stairs, I judged that if the guard did not look down the stairwell, I could see him much better than he could see me. Of course, he had a rifle, but with my third base throwing arm and my trusty bottle, I'd be willing to bet I could pop him before he would pop me with the gun.

The stakes, I realized, would be my life against his. If I hit him, I couldn't let him wake up. If he shoots me first, I've had it.

My feelings of suspense were needless. The sounds gradually died down, until there were no sounds at all.

When I couldn't stand the suspense any longer, I had been in the stairwell about two hours. Long enough for the camp to be cleared of all straggling guards.

If the Russians were really as close as they were supposed to be, I believed all guards would have left. They knew what was happening and would be more apt to take off first and leave the

prisoners unguarded.

Waiting in the eerie, silent darkness, I decided, it must be night. I shifted my pack and crept slowly up the stairs.

Sticking my head around a corner, I couldn't see or hear any signs of life.

"Well, here goes. If he's here, I'll soon find out."

Crouched low, I made my way to the door. Still no sounds. "How can I find out if a guard is still there?" I decided to throw my pocket knife out the door. It clattered about, sounding like a grenade exploding.

I was poised with my vinegar bottle. After an age of waiting, no one came.

Still, I wasn't satisfied. I removed one of my battered GI shoes. I was really taking a chance here. I lobbed it thinking, if he's coming, here it is. But no one came.

Cautiously, I made myself into as small a target as possible and moved out the door. "Which is more important, my knife, or the shoe." Luckily, they both lay together. I put the knife in my pocket, picked up the shoe and moved into the shadows, to put it on. I stayed in the shadows as much as possible until I moved toward the back fence.

The footprints of my prison mates were still in the snow, but there were no other signs of people. I cut through the fence, easier now since the guard towers were empty.

Shifting my tattered pack to make it as comfortable as possible, I headed towards the east.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN-FREEDOM IS A LONG ROAD HOME

I felt it would be much better to stay away from the main roads so I cut across country and headed east. This way, there would be much less chance of being recaptured by evacuating German troops. As I walked for the next couple of hours, I detoured around any houses or farm buildings, if I thought someone might be in or around them.

It began to get dark, and I had to find some safe place to spend the night. Locating an isolated barn, I cautiously opened the door, and finding no one inside, went in. A portion of the barn's floor was covered with hay, which I managed to arrange into a passable bed. **Freedom "felt" good, but my first night as a free man was very cold and restless.**

By early morning, I could hear the dull booms of artillery fire; they were much louder and nearer by daylight. The loft had doors on both the north and the south ends. I used them to survey the countryside. Nothing was moving in any direction, but the artillery fire was getting nearer. The barn, which offered some protection from the cold, had no food in it, and as the day dragged on, I had to make a decision. I was too cold and too hungry to stay here for any length of time.

I had two choices. One, walk towards the east and try to get through the German lines to the Russians without getting shot. Two, go back to Oflag 64 and wait for the Russians. Hopefully, they would by-pass the camp, but their rear echelon troops would be in the area.

By mid-afternoon I had made my decision. I would go back to Schubin and hide in the camp. I waited until dark to enter the camp. The hole in the fence was still there. Again I stayed in the shadows and walked slowly towards the front of the camp. There were lights on in the hospital and I could tell by the noises coming from the inside that the sick, lame, and lazy were still there.

They were protected personnel and I didn't want to endanger them in case German troops came by. **I went to the "White House" where I had spent many lonely days and slipped in through one of the back doors. Lights were on in two of the back rooms and to my surprise, Bill Fabian from Kansas City and Bill Murphy from Georgia were there. Three men from the tunnel were in another room. I didn't know them well so I don't remember their names.**

One thing for sure we had in common. We were all waiting for Ivan to come through.

The next morning, I was *in* a downstairs corner room next to

where the camp Kommandant's office and the jail were just across the street. In the middle of the *morning*, a 3/4-ton truck with three Russian soldiers came along the street slowly and stopped opposite the window I was looking out of.

They looked around for movement, then went off down the road, still moving slowly. Two more small trucks and a half-track followed, also moving slowly. Within half an hour, the traffic increased with 2 1/2-ton trucks loaded with infantry, then artillery and rocket launchers. The traffic became heavier and included a battalion of tanks, all painted white. Their camouflage was effective because everything was covered with two feet of snow.

That afternoon I could see soldiers looting the Kommandant's house, but for some reason, they stayed away from the prison camp. I suppose they had orders to leave it alone.

Kriegies began returning to the Oflag. It became a rallying point, possibly because this was the only place they knew how to get to. Our group included twenty who had been left in the hospital, and the three who emerged from the tunnel.

We found out later that around the 26th of January, a Russian tank column was advancing west about 15 or 20 miles on each side of the Americans, but they never made contact.

Colonel Millett, the Executive Officer, and Jake Winton from New Jersey were among the returnees. They teamed up with Bill Fabian and me to make our travels back to the USA. Bill and I found out that there were many sick and wounded in the local Schubin hospital, in addition to all of the Americans in the Oflag hospital, and they all had one thing in common--supplies and food were in short supply, everywhere, and they all needed help. The answer seemed to be 15 to 20 miles away in a large church. It had been taken over by the Germans and was used as a warehouse. If only we could get the supplies! Bill and I scoured the town for some kind of transport.

We located wagons drawn by cows but decided that they might not make a 30-mile round trip. The Russians were taking everything edible, and if they didn't eat it on the spot, they took it or "drove" it along with them.

We finally found an old farmer outside of town who had an old tractor and a trailer. He didn't want us to use it, but we tried to explain to him that if we didn't use it, the Russians would likely take it from him. This knowledge, along with the American Invasion Flags we had pinned to the backs of our jackets, and the fact that we were trying to find food for the hospital, convinced him. He filled it with petrol, showed us how to start it, and we

were on our way.

Going through the village was no problem, but about a mile from the town, we came upon a Russian outpost and this was a different tune altogether. Americans are fast learners as a rule, and we found out quickly that the last thing you wanted to do was to try and talk German to a Russian. The first thing he would do after he shot you would be to take any clothing he could use, then throw your body out in the middle of the road so the tanks and other vehicles could run over you and no one would have to bury you later.

The best way to identify yourself to them as an American was to use words like: Ford, Chevrolet, Pontiac, Studebaker, Chrysler, Dodge.

"Da, da, da " (yes, yes, yes) "Amerikanski, tovarich (friend), tovarich."

Every time we approached one of their outpost, roadblocks or guard posts we went through this same routine. It may sound silly, but it was a lot better than getting shot. A Polish man who spoke English told us that the Russians had broken into a bank run by the Germans. They were tearing up the interior and throwing Gold Seal American currency all over the place without knowing what it was. He also told us than a man who obviously knew what American money looked like was following the Russians and was collecting the money.

We finally located the Catholic Church. It was a beautiful building! The Polish had opened the doors and were guarding all the entrances. We obtained a guided tour and found that the church housed an enormous inventory of food, clothing, ammunition and other things. In one corner of the sanctuary, thousands of Red Cross parcels were stacked, almost to the ceiling. Most, if not all of them, had been diverted from their intended destination (Oflag 64) to this church. Bill and I felt anger and frustration when we thought of the weeks we spent hungry and miserable because of this black deed. The Nazis were criminal in many ways--to deny available help to imprisoned people is something that many service people would spend years remembering.

We convinced the local people that the sick and wounded in Schubin were desperately in need of the parcels and they helped us load all the parcels our trailer would carry. One of them even gave each of us a rabbit skin cap to wear in this very cold weather. Sometimes terrible times bring out the best in people. The Polish people in Wagrowiec are certainly a good example of this.

Returning to Schubin, we found that the people in the hospitals and the Kriegies were certainly happy to receive the

parcels. Bill and I were glad that the trip was made without mishaps.

Later, I walked over to the guardhouse and the jail where I had spent so many lonely days. The Russians had taken over the guardhouse offices and bunk rooms. The jail now held Russians who were accused of collaboration. One of the Russian officers told me that the prisoners were only given German bread and water to eat while they were being investigated and interrogated. If they were innocent, they would be released and returned to Russia. If they were found guilty, they would be shot.

Bill Murphy said that he had gone over to the German Kommandant's office, which was occupied by some higher ranking Russian officers and talked to them. While he was there, guards brought in a soldier who had raped a Polish woman. The Russian colonel asked Murphy what the American Army would do with such a man.

Murphy told the officer, "We would shoot him." The colonel told the Russian sergeant to take the man out back and shoot him, which the sergeant promptly did.

One morning Bill, Jake and I were sitting in our room in the "White House" when a young Polish fellow about fifteen years old walked in. In each hand, he held up a large white rabbit which had been gutted and left outside to freeze. It was evident from the mixture of German and Polish he spoke he spoke that these were being offered as food gifts, along with vodka if we wanted it. He was a little comedian and reminded me of Mickey Rooney. We gave him some chocolate and cigarettes from one of the parcels. After that he was a regular visitor to Oflag 64 as long as we were there.

Late that afternoon, a lot of new Russian ground troops arrived in the area and it was easy to see they were going into bivouac (temporary settlement). Many of them were infantry, about 30 men and 2 women in each truck, and several truck loads were making their camp in a field across the street from the camp.

Later on that evening, a short small Russian captain who was commanding one of the infantry bivouacking companies appeared with one of the tallest and biggest Russians I have ever seen! He was the captain's orderly and was carrying a five-gallon gasoline can and several canteens. The canteens contained 100 Russian vodka (we later found out why he brought the petrol can along).

The captain could speak a little English mixed in with a lot of Russian. We put lighted candles on a table and rounded up chairs for eight or nine people. I don't know where the glasses came from, but they were the size of the old Coca Cola glasses. Russians drink their vodka straight--they never dilute it. We drank a lot of

"straight" that night, because the captain took delight in having his orderly circle the table, keeping our glasses full. With each round, he picked up his glass and said, "Prost (Toast) Stalin", "Prost Roosevelt", "Prost Zhukov", "Prost Eisenhower".

After toasting the world leaders several times, the canteens ran dry. The captain gave orders to the orderly, who took off carrying the petrol can and the canteens. A few minutes later, he returned with a new supply. Somehow it tasted different. Must have been the mixture of gasoline and vodka (I remembered the five gallon gas can).

Murphy got so drunk he went into the nearby latrine, couldn't find the door because it was so dark, and spent the night there. The next morning my lips and tongue felt like all the skin had been removed. Was it the vodka or the gas? Either way my head felt like it'd been on the front lines all night.

The next night **Bill Fabian** and I were invited to a party given by a Polish woman who had worked for the Germans in the kitchen of the enlisted guards' mess.

I had seen her and another woman from the window of my cell when I was in jail. They sat on the porch in back of the kitchen and peeled vegetables. **When I was delivering food to the Polish hospital, she remembered me and invited me to her celebration.**

She and her husband lived with eight children in a two-story house down the street from the Kommandant's house. It was also next to the cemetery I had tried to make my escape through. When Bill and I arrived, the party was in full swing. Neighbors had joined the couple, and all were drinking schnapps and wine. These had been buried and kept for just such an occasion.

The husband was a carpenter and furniture maker and he presented me with a beautiful inlaid jewelry box I protected and carried all the way back to the states, only to have it stolen.

We had been there for an hour and a half when we heard someone frantically knocking on the front door. The door was opened and a young Polish girl burst into the room. She was hysterical and it was evident that someone had terrified her. Her stockings were torn and her knees were skinned.

Tearfully she told us that Russian soldiers had raped her mother and were trying to rape her when she broke away and ran to this house. "The soldier is still trying to catch me!" she shrieked.

Just then, there was a beating on the door. Someone grabbed the girl and all the Poles left, leaving Bill and me alone in the living room. When I opened the door, the Russian sergeant staggered

in, waving an automatic pistol that looked very much like one of our GI Issue 45 caliber. It was on full cock with the hammer all the way back.

We understood nothing he was saying, but soon it was apparent that he had forgotten about the girl and was concentrating instead on red headed, good looking Bill Murphy. The next thing I knew, he grabbed Bill and started kissing him and waving the gun close to his head. The only weapon I could find was a heavy brazier near the fireplace, so I picked it up and hit the soldier on the head as hard as I could. He slid to the floor and as a precautionary measure, I hit him again just to be sure he wouldn't use that gun on us. We were lucky it didn't go off when I hit him!

When we were sure he was dead, we drug his body out the back door, covered him with snow, and returned to the house.

Needless to say, this scarred the hell out of everyone and had a very sobering effect on the party.

This was their home and they didn't want to leave it. What would the Russians do to them if the body was found? They had survived the war to face THIS!!

Bill and I convinced them that the best thing to do was to bury him in the snow. The cemetery next to the house was surrounded by a ten-foot high hedge. Deep snow had made drifts almost as high as the hedge--the perfect place to bury him, temporarily. Later on, a grave would be dug for the soldier in a nearby field, they would bury him deep, and no one would ever know.

Bill, the husband, and I buried the body. Returning to the POW camp, we decided to leave the next day.

LEAVING OFLAG 64 FOR THE LAST TIME

The next morning, we found out that the Russians were going to load a 2 1/2-ton 6 X 6 truck with Kriegies. Destination Warsaw. Considering what had happened the evening before, we were very fortunate to be included as passengers. Believe me, we felt great relief when the truck left around noon.

What a ride! The country roads were almost impassable and the truck slid all over the roads most of the afternoon. A little before dark, we arrived in the town of Hohenzaltza, where Bill Higgins and I had previously spent ten days in the concentration camp. The temperature was 30 degrees below zero. Even breathing was difficult!

Kriegies were told to find their own place to spend the night, so Bill, **Jake Winton** and I decided to stay together. We walked down the street until we came to a house that looked large enough to take the three of us in.

We were lucky because there were two Polish couples sitting in the kitchen when we knocked on the door and were allowed to enter. Another drinking party was in progress and they invited us to join in. This time we were offered Polish schnapps (homemade whiskey), and it had also been buried and hidden from the Germans. These Poles certainly liked their celebrations!

I finished my drink and excused myself to find the privy in the backyard, which I found, about 30 feet from the back of the house. Sub-zero weather in Poland made using a privy even more uncomfortable. Icicles and cold air blowing through the holes is enough to make you want to "hold it" for hours! No wonder the Poles are such a sturdy people!

These people knew that we were Americans and were as glad as we were that the war would be over. Their lives had been in jeopardy every day and their lands occupied. Language between us was limited but thankfulness and a sense of camaraderie was very present in the room.

The lady who lived in the house made sandwiches for us using coarse brown bread and meat that tasted like roast beef. The ersatz coffees, like the sandwiches were much appreciated.

Before we finished eating, two homely looking young Polish women, around twenty-two years old, came in the front door and on back to the kitchen. They were the daughters of the couples and had been visiting in the village.

After more drinks, a lot of "Prosts" and some "Jenculies" (thanks), we asked our hosts for a place to sleep. Discussion between the couples followed and we were led to a large front bedroom with a large bed in one corner and a smaller regular sized bed in the opposite corner. The large bed had a feather mattress and a feather comforter. We were offered this bed, accepted gratefully and undressed quickly. Boy did it feel good and warm!

As we were falling asleep, the door opened and the two young women came and got in the other bed. This was a strange situation--two young women were in bed in the same bedroom as three young men who hadn't even been around a woman in two to three years, and no one seemed concerned! We could hear the older couples in the kitchen laughing and having a good time.

The two women giggled and whispered in their corner while we were trying to convince one another in ours. "Jake, go over and get in bed with them." "No, you go."

I finally dropped off to sleep and dreamed of a big thick juicy steak. The favorite dream of most Kriegies--well, one of the favorite dreams.

The next morning, we were given a bowl of gruel and more ersatz coffee. We left, expressing our thanks for their hospitality and their bed. I think the couples stayed up all night partying. "Was it their bed we slept in?" we asked among ourselves.

When we arrived at our Russian truck, most of the other Kriegies were there and ready to leave. In a few minutes, we all were assembled, the driver started the truck and drove to the other side of town. To my surprise, **the truck stopped at the concentration camp.**

The place had undergone a number of changes. Prisoners and the guards had changed rolls and places. Germans were now inside the cells and one of the Polish women prisoners was now running the place. The new warden said that she remembered seeing me there, but she was not one of the women who had slipped up to my cell to talk to me. "Most of the other women and other prisoners who were here when I was are scattered throughout the area and I do not know the whereabouts of the lady who gave you the face towel."

On the east side of the camp, the Russians had about three hundred German soldiers lined up and standing out in the cold. They were going through quite an ordeal.

Our Russian truck was parked in that area, and we were walking towards it when a young soldier, who was near the truck, spoke up in English and asked me if he could speak to me. I told him to go ahead, "If the Russians don't care, I don't care."

"Lieutenant, I didn't want to be a soldier and fight in the war. The Germans made me do it. Won't you help me and tell the Russians so I won't have to go to Russia."

"There's nothing I can do. They will not even listen to me on things I'd like to do, such as get home. I know they would never listen to me plead for you not to have to go to Russia. I'm sorry, there is nothing I can do."

"Please Lieutenant, try to do something for me."

About that time, the Russians in charge called the prisoners to attention, faced them to the left and marched them off through the falling snow, which was already quite deep. They had not gone thirty or forty yards when the Russians gave the command to increase the pace to double time, and in no time at all, they were out of sight.

I thought, *Boy those men have discouraging outlooks. Most of them were made to fight for their country." I don't believe the young soldier who spoke to me was German. From his appearance and speech, he might have been from one of the small countries west of Germany, perhaps the Netherlands. If the Russians find out that*

he's from another country and fought for the Germans he'll be treated worse still. I felt sorry for him.

A few minutes later, our Russian driver showed up and we were on our way, again.

The Russians had only three main supply lines to supply their fighting men. Gasoline, ammunition and vodka had priority. Vodka appeared to be the most important, because when they drank a lot of it, they were ready to take on anything or anybody. Our driver's main job was hauling these supplies. We had been included because he was returning empty to Warsaw for another load.

Before this latest cold spell, the Russians looked like ants going across the countryside; there were so many of them. You could see them carrying chickens or other fowl and driving cows or other animals. I suppose they would slaughter these somewhere down the line. They were living off the land like armies had been doing for thousands of years.

We traveled into the night and it was very cold. I was afraid my frozen feet would be permanently damaged. The truck slid off the roads several times and we had to get out and help push it back on the road, which was hard to find under all the snow.

We began to fear the driver was lost, and we hadn't passed or seen any other vehicles since before dark.

Finally, we came to a fair-sized town. From the looks of the number of anti-aircraft guns, other equipment and guns, we were certain that this was a Russian Army Headquarters, and we were right.

We were unloaded at a building which fed and quartered soldiers around the clock. For food, we were given a bowl of greasy maize gruel, greasy meat long and the ever-present course, Russian brown bread. This bread acted like a potent laxative--quickly and totally!

They also gave each of us two blankets and showed us to a large room. It was warm enough and we fell asleep on the floor.

The next morning, we were treated to more of the thick soup along with the brown bread and their version of ersatz coffee. After a steady diet of this, we were glad that we had brought some of our own parcel food.

A little later, we were taken over to the town theatre and shown a propaganda film about the Russian Army. I had seen more impressive Russian units in the field.

After the film, a troupe of entertainers, similar to ours put on a program for us. The only thing I could understand was a yellow

haired girl singing "Ahm puttin awl ma aigs en one basket," and she couldn't speak English. This was something we hadn't counted on. We were glad when it was over and we could continue our journey through the frozen countryside.

Late in the afternoon, we started passing bombed-out buildings on the edge of Warsaw. The driver stopped twice and asked directions from Russian soldiers.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN--WARSAW--ONE STEP CLOSER

The next stop was made in front of a large four-story building. On the west was a large athletic field. A lot of lot of open ground was on the other three sides except for several small buildings on the back side. We left the truck and tried to express our appreciation to the driver. He drove off, headed I'm sure, for a vodka refill. We headed for the front door looked for a place to sleep.

There were thirty Americans already quartered in the building on the first floor. This floor was for Americans and a few Russian soldiers. The other three floors were crowded with displaced persons from other countries: Russian, French, Polish and other nationalities whom the Germans had enslaved. Three wide shelves were built in each room, taking up most of the space. Lighting was nonexistent in most of the building, and if you had a flash light, as Bill Fabian did, you could walk to the door of some of the rooms when it was dark and see all kinds of activities going on.

Bill, Jake and I spread our blankets on the floor in one corner of a large front room and slept well the first couple of nights. The weather had warmed up and sleeping was easier.

A large latrine was located on the ground floor, but it was out of order part of the time from misuse and overwork. Your best bet was to use a flashlight and go outside. The ground around the two sides and the back of the building was well covered with piles of defecation and some of them were beginning to appear in the front yard. We called it the "turd field".

The Russians frowned on our leaving the area and walking into Warsaw, but we did it anyway. Their excuse was that they expected transportation for us at any time to Odessa, a seaport on the Black Sea. Days passed and transportation became a big joke with us.

Jake met a nice young Polish girl who lived in the east side of Warsaw across the Vistula River. He went to see her and the family often. Bill and I were invited to the noon meal a couple of times and we were thankful for the change in menu. Jake became attached to the family and hated to leave it.

Bill Fabian was good at copying colored pictures. He used oils the YMCA had sent him and kitchen towels stretched on wooden frames to create his pictures. His best ones were of people. The first was of Lana Turner and the second, of Rommel, the "Desert Fox", that a member of The Item staff had given him from a German Sunday newspaper. The thing that makes this significant is that one day, as we were walking in the business district in Warsaw, Bill said, "Look at the pretty green coat that girl across the street has on." The coat was red!

Bill was a color-blind paratrooper artist.

"How do you do it?"

"I just mix the paints and paint the picture," he said. Observing Russian soldiers and people was interesting, sometimes funny. **They would trade almost anything for a Mickey Mouse watch.** Soldiers carried loose Russian tobacco in their pockets.

Their tobacco looked like ground up alfalfa and when they mentioned it, it sounded like they were saying "mohawka". When they wanted a cigarette, they pulled folded newspaper out of their pocket, tore off a piece, filled it with "mohwaka", rolled it and fired it up. I tried it once but it was very strong and smelled terrible. I would never complain about American cigarettes again!

General Kukov, Commander of the First White Russian Army, sent some cigars to the American officers while we were in Warsaw. They were strong, but milder than the "mohawka".

Lying was an art with the Russians. The officers lied to our faces. They knew they were lying and knew that we knew it too. In spite of this, when they lied, they would smile. I just smiled back as if to say "I can beat you at your own game, you SOB."

A couple more things about the Russians. When the Germans evacuated an area, and they wanted to make the railroad tracks unusable, they hooked a large plow on to the last car of the last train, and as it pulled away, the plow broke all crossties in the middle and threw them and the rails to each side of the track. To repair the damage, the Russians had women who were 5X2 (5 ft. tall by 2 ft. Wide). These women came along behind their troops and built the tracks back as fast as the Russians needed them. They did this in all kinds of weather and it seemed to me that the Russian women did most of the hard work.

Speaking of railroads, all of the engines had a large star on the front of them. I had a fur cap and it had a red star on the front of it--I sure was glad.

They say that all things, good or bad, eventually come to an end and so did our stay in Warsaw, Poland.

After Bill, Jake and I had been there for 10 days and the number of Americans had increased to 150, the Russians finally quit lying about "leaving tomorrow" and told us we were leaving today.

ON TO MOTHER RUSSIA

We gathered our belongings and walked down to the railroad siding where we boarded boxcars for a cold five-day ride south, to the Black Sea port of Odessa.

Two hundred miles from Odessa, the snow stopped, as if an imaginary line was drawn on the land. The people on the no-snow side were different from the ones we had been with. The natives dressed with some fashion and the women wore makeup.

On our arrival in Odessa, we were quartered in buildings formerly used by the American Consulate. That's what we were told, anyway.

After two days there, we were transported to the port in Odessa and we boarded a British ship.

I was to find humor in two more incidents before I left the USSR.

The first one involved a Russian bear. A Russian submarine was tied up at the dock next to the ship we were on. The crew had a bear and it had "free run" of the deck. One of the crew members gave a large bottle of vodka to the bear. He put the neck in his mouth and turned it bottoms up. Sometimes the men would playfully try to take the bottle away from bear and he would chase and wrestle them. Finally, when the submarine cast off, the bear was very drunk and was rolling all over the deck. I wonder if they pulled him in before they submerged?

The second incident involved brown bread (Russia's answer to laxative). Before our ship sailed that evening, Russian officials unloaded a small truckload of this brown bread on the dock next to the ship for the "Amerikanski". I suppose the Captain of the ship knew of its magical effect and refused to load it. When we pulled away from the dock, the bread was still sitting there. Who got the last laugh? I think we did!

NEXT STOP -- EGYPT

Being an outdoors man, I was walking around the deck for exercise on the morning after we left Odessa, when I ran into an old friend of mine from the old horse drawn 12th Field Artillery in the Second Infantry Division. Clويد Ray and I were stationed together at Fort Sam Houston, in San Antonio, Texas. As a First Sergeant who had been captured in France, he had been an enlisted men's' POW camp (Stalag) in the southern part of Poland and had also been liberated by the Russians. Talking over old times with Clويد helped to make the boat trip to Egypt seem shorter.

I remember that the food on the ship was terrible (even considering what I had been eating for the last two years!). We were hungry, though and didn't complain. I still remember the breakfast herring with their eyes wide open.

On the fifth day, we pulled into Port Said, Egypt and tied up to the dock. Once we were unloaded, we boarded ferries and were

taken to an island in the middle of the Suez Canal. We were sprayed with delousing powder, given clean government issue uniforms and assigned to pyramidal tents equipped with canvas folding cots.

The Red Cross was there, again, and nothing was free, again. They had a snack bar that SOLD sandwiches and drinks. If you were willing to put up a DEPOSIT for lost equipment, they would even loan softball and Ping-Pong equipment. I kept remembering the free food in the German train station. At least the krauts did one thing right.

In order to pay for these and other things, we were given partial pay of four British pounds (equivalent to about sixteen dollars).

With money in our pockets, we went to a barber shop for a haircut. All of the barbers were women and liquor was sold in the same shop.

Lots of things were for sale, if you were interested. We were walking down the street and were approached by a small, black boy about eight or nine years old. He said, "Hey Yank, you want to buy some Spanish fly, a knife or some brass knucks?" This surprised us because we were walking in a better part of town. We had been warned about venturing into the old part. Some of the people who went in never came out. We began to wonder, "What makes the old part worse than this and what's for sale there?"

One night, Jake and I went to The Eastern Exchange Hotel. It was a nice hotel and had a pretty good floor show. Afterwards, we met two sailors off a Liberty Ship and they invited us to go to a nearby bar called The Sailors and Soldiers Club.

After an hour or so and a few drinks, we decided to return to the hotel and see the floor show again.

Walking through a park, we passed five Limey soldiers who were going the other way. As we passed, one of them turned around and yelled, "You Yankee SOB's want to fight!" and started back towards us.

His buddies caught him and told him to, "Cut it out. You're drunk." While we were standing in a circle, the drunk walked over to one of the sailors and slammed him on the side of the head.

Noting the looks on our faces, one of the Limeys pulled him to the side and tried to quiet him down. This lead to more discussions and the next thing I knew, the drunk hit me and I was seeing stars. "Ole 'Kid Nitro' has had enough!" I hit him in the midsection. The footwork wasn't fancy, but my fists hit their target and he was on the ground in no time.

Limeys came from everywhere, and we had a running, slugging

war back to the hotel. By the time we got there, men from our Navy Shore Patrol and some MPs were there and took us in the lobby. Someone must have yelled, "Americans, FIGHT" because more American sailors joined the throngs of those already there. There were many American ships in port and most of the sailors were on liberty. If we needed help, it was all around us!

British Shore Patrol arrived and with the ever increasing number of Limeys and Americans, this was sure to be an international incident. One which wouldn't look pretty in the papers!

The situation was getting out of hand. The lieutenant in charge of our shore patrol told the officer in charge of the British patrol that transportation for the four of us would be brought to the side door of the lobby. If the crowd tried to grab us, the patrol had orders to shoot. Between the two patrols, we finally made it to the vehicle.

The last thing I saw as we left was an American sailor taking a long swing at the drunk who had started it all. His face looked like raw beefsteak. I'm sure he felt like hell for a week! He certainly deserved it.

Jake and I spent the night on the Liberty Ship on bunks in one of the staterooms. This was much better than the canvass cots! The next morning, we compared cuts and bruises with the sailors over an excellent breakfast of eggs, bacon, ham, hot cakes and good coffee. Best breakfast I'd had in ages. The fight was worth it. I wondered if we should go out looking for more Limeys?

After five days at Port Said, we boarded another British ship bound for Naples, Italy. The worst part of the trip was the sleeping arrangements. Some of us had to sleep in the dining room. This area had stand up sideboard tables and we had to sleep in hammocks which were swung over these high tables. Hammocks are tricky devils and tend to flip you out when you least expect it.

The hours weren't great either. The dining area wasn't cleared until 2200 hours (10:00 p.m.), and breakfast preparations started again at 0230 (2:30 in the morning).

The passenger list on this ship included the oddest group I have ever seen, anywhere. There were many American GIs and officers, and many of these were naturally rowdy after long confinement. There were many other different European nationalities along with a few from Africa.

The list also included quite a few French men and women. The men told us that they had been German prisoners, not volunteer labor. Not so for the women. "The women left France to live with the German military. As soon as they are on French soil, their

heads will be shaved as punishment."

The crossing was not without violence. Clويد Ray saw an act of vigilantism. A group of Frenchmen threw a man overboard. This man, they said, had collaborated with the Germans. If the Captain of the ship had seen the incident, he would not have turned the ship around, for the waters were still "infested" with submarines.

Many of the passengers paid little attention to common sense rules. Blackouts were supposed to be observed on deck. No smoking on deck after dark. These rules were posted for passenger safety, and yet they continued to smoke outside for the whole trip. You also had to be careful where you stepped. It sounds incredible, but unless you watched your feet, you might put them the middle of someone's back who was having sex with one of the French woman. One of the GIs told me that the women were only asking for a pack of cigarettes or a bar of soap. **Human dignity sometimes gets lost in the shuffle of war.**

On the third day, we passed between land on the left, Sicily, and land on the right, the so called "toe of the boot of Italy". One of the members of the crew said that this is the only place in the world where you could see two active volcanoes from the same place. Vesuvius, on the right near Naples, and Etna, on the left in Sicily.

NAPLES, AGAIN

The next day we docked in Naples and were transported to a Roman health resort called Thermae Baths and another place nearby called The Race Track. There were thirty-one different mineral baths, with temperatures that ranged from hot to cold. This was said to be one of Benito Mussolini's favorite places to stay.

The people in Naples had mistreated us when we were prisoners of war and, as we walked the streets, we remembered the spitting and the jeering and the rocks thrown. The Stars and Stripes printed a story about the city of Naples being invaded by American officers and enlisted men, all ex-POWS, wearing the same GI uniforms with a few wearing homemade rank insignia made of tin cans, etc. According to the article, they were bent on punishing any military aged Italian male who happened to be unlucky enough to be around them. I must admit, I found a few myself.

An old First Sergeant that I had soldiered with in F Battery, Twelfth Field Artillery, was a Captain now in command of an MP company in Naples. When I located him, his outfit had taken over the palace of the Queen of Naples. It was a beautiful place, high on a hill, overlooking the harbor of Naples. I enjoyed several days and nights there visiting with old "String", as we called him.

One night while I was there, an air raid alarm sounded. I went with Captain Stringfellow and two of his MPs to a nearby air raid shelter. They stood outside and kept all of the Italian men away from the entrance until all the women and children were inside. String said that as soon as an alarm sounded, men would run for the shelter, leaving women and children to fend for themselves. Fortunately, our only visitor that night was "Photo Freddie", a photo reconnaissance plane, and soon the "all clear" was sounded.

One morning, String took me on **a tour of the Naples jail and we saw the hardest bunch of humanity I have ever seen, with one exception. I wonder if they have any relatives in the Bolzano prison? I thought to myself.** There were no bunks in the cells, and the prisoners had to sleep on cement shelves arranged along the back side of the cells. Hard lives for hard men. I wasn't through with jails just yet. **That afternoon, String and I rode out to Naples Stockade #1.**

This was an outdoor military prison. where each prisoner lived in a small "pup" tent. A "shelter half" is half a small tent issued to each soldier in the field. Two soldiers can button their two half tents together, ditch around it, put hay on the ground when available, a slicker(raincoat) over the opening, and sleep pretty dry.

There are three kinds of court-martials: general, special and summary. Prisoners who are tried under a general court-martial are charged with crimes such as rape, murder, robbery, etc. and their sentences are usually more severe.

Captain Stringfellow had been detailed as hangman in carrying out sentences meted to four soldiers, all of them black. Three of them had been found guilty of murder, one of rape. While I was waiting for Stringfellow, one of the duty officers in the headquarters asked if I would be an official eyewitness at the hangings. They needed three. I agreed to be the third.

The gallows were set up in an opening, surrounded by trees.

Standing at parade rest in front of the gallows, were about a hundred inmates. It seemed to me that the largest and the meanest were in the front row. The "message" was clear.

A Negro chaplain walked the thirteen steps to the gallows with each of the soldiers, praying with and talking to them as they walked. At the top, a black hood was placed over their heads and a noose around their necks.

On the side of the gallows were three handles with an officer holding each one. On signal, all three handles were pulled, causing three trap doors to open and the men fell through to a large hole.

The hole had been dug deep enough to keep the body from hitting the ground, yet high enough so that the doctor and the ones releasing the body could reach it easily.

After five minutes, the doctor checked the heart beat and pulse of each prisoner with a stethoscope. Finally, he approached us, the official eyewitnesses, and pronounced each man dead, along with his time of death. These facts were entered on the death certificate and was signed by the doctor and by the three of us.

I had been a soldier for much of my lifetime, and as such, had witnessed many horrible and disturbing things, but none affected me as deeply as these hangings. Death is so final--whatever the reason.

On the sixth day in Naples, we were transported to the dock for a big surprise and the prettiest thing we'd ever seen--an American ship to take us home. When I looked at that ship and what she represented, my nightmares of war disappeared. I was going HOME. To my family. To my friends. To my country--The United States of America. My God had never left me and he was taking me HOME, today!

No more bug infested cells or filthy uniforms. No more tasteless food, or hunger, or disease. No more jumping from trains into hostile countryside. No more prisoner of war camps, or jails. I had come to Naples twice, and left it twice. This time I was much happier. "I am an American and I am going home. I am an American fighting man and I have paid my debts."

HOMEWARD BOUND

On board, at last. Jake and I were assigned hammocks to sleep in again, but they were on the outside decks, which were better. Besides, I would have been willing to sleep in one of the life boats from Italy to Boston, if necessary.

We probably didn't get such a bad deal after all, because Bill Fabian was assigned a stateroom on E deck, right over the propeller shaft and he had to put up with a lot of noise and motion. This was only one of his problems. He had come on board drunk in Naples, and after three days of being sick and not eating, he was as white as a sheet. Jake and I took him on deck for some fresh air. He started feeling better.

I located one of Clويد Ray's friends and he told me that the First Sergeant had drunk so much in Port Said and Naples he was unable to "make the boat" and had been hospitalized. Poor ole Clويد. Maybe it was better if he didn't remember much.

The ship's crew started a rumor as we were going through the Straits of Gibraltar that we were being tailed by a German

submarine. Blackouts were observed. No one smoked on the deck after dark.

A member of the crew told me that our ship was a luxury liner, built for the passenger trade in the Pacific and that she stood higher in the water than ones built for Atlantic storms. I believed him later when we ran into a storm. I was afraid the darn thing was going to rollover! I remember thinking, I went through a war and survived it to sink in the ocean! Where's the justice!

Our decks and hammocks soon became soggy with rain and Jake and I found ourselves competing with other hammock dwellers for places to sleep in lounges, stairways, floors---anyplace that was dry. "Is the inside of a lifeboat dry?"

As I've said before, "Nothing lasts forever," The storm passed and we returned to the decks.

The PA system was a source of information and sometimes, music. I really started getting homesick-when I heard Bing Crosby singing "In Your Easter Bonnet". Another popular tune was played and someone near me said the singer was Frank Sinatra. I said, "Who the hell is Frank Sinatra?"

THE GOOD OLE USA

Boston. We tied up to the dock and were welcomed home by an all-girl Army band. We were all concentrating more on the ALL GIRL than on the music! Our fantasies were snapped back to reality when the PA system announced, "Some of you fellows go to the other side. The ship is listing and is in danger of rolling over." Maybe the ship really did sit high in the water.

As we disembarked, we walked over to a rail siding where we boarded coaches for a thirty miles trip to Camp Miles Standish.

American looked the same, yet somehow different. There were no bombed out buildings. No dazed, shell shocked refugees. No smoking smelling decaying scorched countryside. And no guns, no tanks, no artillery pieces--no weapons of destruction, anywhere.

God it was good to be home!!!

Arriving at the camp, we walked over to the theatre for a talk by the camp commander. The main theme of his talk was, "Fellows, the only people we have here at the camp who do any work are some Italian POWs." For my money, he could have skipped the talk.

We were at the camp for six days. During that time our identity was verified (was I who I said I was?), back pay was calculated, along with transportation home, and leaves or furloughs. We were also assigned to redistribution center. I could

not receive all of my 2 1/2 years of back pay because my records had been lost, but money was not a problem. I could draw partial payment anytime.

[Note: As an American Soldier held prisoner in a German Prison Camp, Lt. Aten later received a check for \$1,062 as "subsistence pay for time spent in the hands of the enemy".]

In the afternoon, after they were through with us for the day, we were free to go into Boston, or any place we could get a ride to. It was on one of those trips to Boston that I heard a news hawk yelling, "EXTRA EXTRA President Roosevelt is dead. Read all about it!" I bought a paper and as I read about his death, I was very saddened. This great man, our Commander-In-Chief had given his life for his country the same as any of our soldiers who had died in battle.

That Saturday about six o'clock in the evening, we were all on a special train headed west. As we arrived in cities along the way, cars containing Kriegies were separated from the train and routed to their particular home area.

There were two whole cars of Texans and we stayed on this train all the way to San Antonio, thus ending my escape attempts and any need for me to write my name on any foreign prison walls.

STARVED YANKS RETURN HOME by Associated Press

BOSTON Port of Embarkation, April 9, 1945

Fifteen hundred American soldiers came back to their homeland Monday night with tales of hungry months in German prison camps.

Advancing Russian troops liberated them as the Nazi fell back to Poland last January too rapidly to move the prisoners.

The returning men were the first large group of liberated American troops to come home from the European theater.

GIVEN LITTLE FOOD

They told of meagre meals in Nazi prison camps. They talked of their escapes.

Soldier after soldier enthused about "those Red Cross packages that kept us alive."

They said of the Poles: "they didn't have much, but they shared with us what they had."

They were ready with questions too.

"Got a paper?" many asked. "What's this curfew all about?"

many others wanted to know. And, there were a couple who were interested in when the circus was coming up this way.

An Army Transport brought them into port just after dark Sunday night.

GLAD TO GET HOME

There was a bit of a chill in the air and the waterfront was deserted. An army band stood on the dock. There were a few port officials around and a gathering of newspapermen.

The band whooped it up with the air of about every state that the bandsmen would think of and were almost drowned out by the cheering, yelling soldiers.

A soldier's head stuck out of every porthole. They jammed the decks. They crowded the superstructure. There were heads and shoulders even popping through the narrow spaces that divided suspended life rafts from the deck railings.

Glad to be home? The question was too silly to be answered.

Some had been prisoners for two years.

Some of the boys had been at Limburg, Germany prisoner camp recently taken by 1st Army in their earlier days as prisoners of war.

Limburg was a transient camp at the time, they said, and the fare was as near a starvation diet even then as it was in recent weeks.

Pfc. Paul Thompson of Maryaville, Ohio, was one of those who spent some time at Limburg. The diet while he was there was soup made of sugar beet tops, some greens, a loaf of bread for six meals. His normal weight of 198 had been reduced to 110 when he exited the ship.

There would be many others ships like one during the coming months, but this first one has earned its place in history.

Frank N. Aten retired after 20 years of service with the rank of Captain, US Army and died June 26, 1987 after serving his country as a "enthusiastic recruit" and an experienced officer. He was designated by the German military as an "escape artist" because of his five escapes and was threatened on several occasions that his life would be in jeopardy if his attempts continued. A memorable Kriegie, his name, exploits, and those of many others are noted and discussed in multiple sites both on-line, in books and articles and in the movie, *The Great Escape*.

He was buried with full US Army Military Honors at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery.

Captain Frank Aten's Award Record is extensive. The following information was stated in his obituary:

"He received the Silver Star for gallantry in action in Tunisia in North Africa during World War II which led to his capture by the enemy and internment as a German Prisoner of War for 26 months. He also received the Ex-Prisoner of War Medal, the European-African-Middle-Eastern Campaign Medal for Humanitarian Action in the Berlin Air Lift, Korean Service Medal with two Bronze Stars, the WW II Victory Medal (United States), Army of Occupation Medal, the United Nations Medal, and the YMCA Sports Badge for helping to establish and participate in sports activities among American Prisoners of War. "Aten's experiences as a former semi-professional baseball player have enhanced the quality of this game and other sports, all raising the morale of players and fans alike—important diversions for men in forced imprisonment."

Perhaps the most noted of diversions concerned the celebration which commemorated the anniversary of those who had been "initiated" at Oflag64 its first year. Following a well-attended ball game, the evening ended with actors in a revue holding high a letter which formed the phrase, "LET'S GO IKE." The date was 6 June, 1944 and D-Day had begun: a day of judgement for the captors and a day of hope for Kriegies everywhere.