

# **CPT Lumund Fowler Wilcox**

**1912 - 1997**

## **LIFE IN PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS**

**BY**

**LU WILCOX**

**Copyright 1983 by Lu Wilcox**

**Printed by Texian Press**

**Waco, Texas**

### **MILITARY SERVICE**

This is a narrative about my experiences in prison camps. It will not be unlike the experiences of 90% of the prisoners in a German prison camp, and in many other war prison camps not only of this generation, but also of many other generations.

I was induced to tell about my experiences by my brother-in-law, Harley Candish, who gave me a book on German Prison Camps in the United States during World War II. I read the book with interest, and since it had so many similarities with my experiences, I thought I would at least give a little more detail of my life in prison camp to my children and other relatives than I had ever done before.

This writing has no polish, will not be 100% accurate and my English teacher sister will cringe at the English. If it has any interest at all, it will detail in part the amusing experiences and a few agonizing details of life as a Kriegy.

I should start back a little bit before capture. The 168<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the 34<sup>th</sup> Division was a National Guard Company. We were stationed at Camp Clairborne at the time of the declaration of war and found ourselves, in February 1941, on our way to Ireland, as one of the early participants in World War II. Approximately nine months later, we came ashore in North Africa, about 13 miles west of Tunis. This conflict was very bloody in which some 150 Americans lost their lives, but it was only of an approximate two-day duration.

We were ensconced in an old brick factory which was clean, and with stolen lumber, we were all comfortable. For two months after our arrival, we had problems with food. Our primary fare was canned chili. "Chili" is okay for a few meals but horrible as a continuous diet. After awhile my stomach burned

24 hours a day. With Yankee ingenuity, however, our cooks stole flour, yeast, and shortening and soon we had a great supply of bread. From that time, I ate mostly bread and English marmalade along with eggs which we bought from the Arabs.

At this time I found myself Company Commander of an Anti-Tank Company of the 168<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the only Trial Judge Advocate of the Regiment, Division of European Force Headquarters and Allied Force Headquarters. The reason for all this was that the Judge Advocate's Department could not enter North Africa until everything was secured, which happened to be approximately three months later.

Most of my time was spent as Prosecutor for the Attorney General. I had to investigate murders, rapes, desertions and more minor offenses; but when we were ordered to Sebtila to defend the airport in the desert, I was happy to be relieved of my duties as prosecutor and get on with my official duties.

During my six weeks stay in Tunis, I took a convoy with a detachment of soldiers 50 miles south, 50 miles west and back to Tunis. The purpose was to discover the French reaction to our invasion. I found that the people treated us like saviors and in one town gave us six cases of champagne.

From here, my Company, except for the vehicles, was flown to the Sahara Desert, at Bizerte. The date was approximately January 1, 1942. After we arrived, we were assigned an area amongst a group of date palms with each man his own pup tent. As I was organizing the company area, I had a tap on my shoulder by a Captain and when I turned around, he asked me if I was Captain Wilcox; when I said, "Yes", he replied, "There is fellow over there who wants to talk to you." I was in fatigues and do not know whether or not I even had on Captain's bars, but I followed the man over to a vehicle. The only warning I had as I looked at the vehicle was it was a big Buick carrying an American flag. The captain said to me, "Captain Wilcox, this is General Doolittle."

I was flabbergasted. The General wasted no time. He told me that I was the Senior Captain of combat troops and as such I was in charge of the defense of the airport. He stated that there were about 500 ground troops and two companies of heavy weapons. He told me that there would be a meeting the next morning and at that time I would have a plan for defense of the airport.

As a professional soldier, I knew nothing about defense of an airport; but being a lawyer, I had a sneaking suspicion that no one else knew much about it either. I reported the next day as prescribed with all the airport officers and company officers present. I was introduced by General Doolittle who said I would have a plan. My first question was, "What is your present plan for defense of the airport?" The Air Force Captain in charge said that they had fox holes all the way around the airport and they could man the fox holes at any time the enemy appeared. He gave me just the opening I needed. I told

him that this was inadequate because if the Germans came this close with small arms fire, they could destroy everything at the airport. We would have to build strong points out a mile or two from the airport, dig fox holes and have roving patrols about ten or twelve miles at all times to ensure that paratroopers had not dropped small tanks and personnel to take the airport. General Doolittle seemed very surprised and pleased with my recommendation. Actually, we were only here a short time before we were called with our Company to go to the front lines. Up to this time, our only encounters with the Germans were with anti-aircraft in Algeria and dive bombing at the airport.

The trip to Tunisia was over the mountains in blackout conditions. Although we had many blackout sessions on rather level roads, it was the first time we had attempted to go over a mountain in a blackout. Two or three different Jeeps took the lead and each truck could follow the others. If a vehicle had gone over the mountain, I am sure that 90% of the other vehicles would have followed. My driver had excellent eyes, and although we weaved back and forth across the road, he was able to stay in the track at all times. We lost two trucks before we arrived at the front lines but lost only one more by a land mine, with approximately fifteen men in the back. As far as I was concerned, this was a miracle of the century because when it happened, every truck stopped. We checked out the road and took out at least 150 land mines that had been placed in the road and over which my Jeep had traveled the entire distance. What saved us was that it was so black we were moving back and forth, and all the trucks were weaving with us, so luckily, we missed the land mines. After we had eliminated them, we turned around and headed back and found that we had been directed on the wrong road by a French Captain.

So as not to describe the entire world of North Africa, we ended up on one of the hills close to Faid Pass. There were two companies of infantry, two companies of artillery, and my company of anti-tanks on this hill. On another hill there were two more companies of infantry and artillery. Also there were two battalions of tanks of which Colonel Waters was one of the battalion commanders and the son-in-law of General Patton. We were on this hill approximately four days and our only resistance was artillery which rained shells down on us frequently, the 88-millimeter guns occasionally splattering our terrain. We were all aware that there were several divisions of Rommel's forces on the other side of the pass, leaving us absolutely vulnerable and everyone but the high command knew it.

On February 14<sup>th</sup>, Rommel started his drive with his armored force directly through the positions held in Faid Pass. On the hill we occupied, we were surrounded for two days before there was any real attempt to take our position. The German tank forces were in complete command and had destroyed the two tank battalions with at least 150 tanks burning in the desert below. About this time, infantry troops attempted to scale the steep

side of our hill. Fighting was so fierce and the Germans were so close that the infantry was just lobbing grenades over the top of the hill at the Germans on the other side. On the side of the hill which I was defending, we had to have our guns out in front to have a field of fire, with the infantry behind us. There was no frontal attack but there was constant machine gunfire, which was about a level of two or three feet from the ground. You could go anyplace in perfect safety as long as you did not get above three feet, but to stand up was fatal. Luckily no tanks made a frontal assault.

After we had been surrounded for three days, an airplane flew over low and dropped a message that told us to destroy our equipment and attempt to withdraw from the hill. They said that if we could withdraw to a place 20 miles east of Sidi Bou Sid, American carriers would be there to take us the rest of the way and that tank destroyers and infantry would cover our withdrawal. Orders were carried out, equipment was destroyed and removal started about 8:00 P.M. moving silently through the night. Our column was hit by only one small detachment of Germans which attempted to capture the group, but only succeeded in killing two of my men and wounded one other.

To shorten a long story, we ended walking through a German tank park about 2:00 o'clock in the morning in which there were tanks on all sides of us. I actually could have spit on a couple and could have thrown rocks on ten others. While we were walking through, a flare was sent up by the Germans. Everyone was so tired he just dropped to the ground, and when it burned out, we just got up and plodded on. We arrived at the locations where the American troops were to pick us up at dawn. When dawn arrived, however, the Americans were not there and we were surrounded on all sides by German mobile units and tanks. Our only covers were two-or-three-foot-deep wadi and little mounds about two or three feet high.

We had little chance to escape detection and soon my group of approximately 50 or 60 soldiers was confronted with an armored carrier. When it got within 100 yards of us, we all ran like a flock of chickens. They sprayed machine gun bullets around us and although I was the oldest one in the bunch, I probably ran as fast as any of them. Why no one around me was hit while he was running is a puzzle. There may have been soldiers hit but if so, it was remarkably a small number. We could hear machine gun bullets whizzing by. I didn't know I could run a mile and would now like to know what my time was. Anyway, as I went over the hill, I got out of the area and joined up with eight other soldiers in a wadi. We decided that we would try to proceed to the west and then attempt to get back to the Pass.

## **SURRENDER UNDER FIRE**

After going about two miles we were suddenly engaged with two German machine guns. The men were well disciplined. The heaviest guns we had were two B.A.R.'s. One of them succeeded in locating one of the machine guns and put it out of commission. The other one, however, was well concealed and the fire got so heavy that we had to retreat into the wadi. At this time I was carrying an M1 besides my revolver and my M1 had been jammed with sand; I was cleaning it when a German tank appeared. There was no running from a tank. I then asked the men if they thought we should surrender and they left the decision to me. With this, as the tank came within 50 yards, I told the men to throw down their arms and advance towards the tank with their hands up. As we did this, the tank commander unbuttoned the tank as it approached closer, came to me, saluted and said to me in perfect English, **“For you the war is over”**.

He was a tall, good looking, blonde Arian German Captain, undoubtedly one of the creams of Rommel's soldiers. He was polite and asked if any of my men were injured. I told him they were not but had not eaten or had water for three days. Water was then furnished. He replied that the German regular army had no real animosity toward the Americans except as soldiers, but we would probably be ill-treated behind the lines by some of the other Germans who had never seen army combat; however, when we arrived in Germany would be well treated. “I only wish that I were going back instead of you.”

The first night we joined a group of approximately 1000 other captured soldiers huddled together on a hill. During the day in winter time when the sun is out, the weather is about 80 degrees, but at night, the temperature gets close to freezing and all I had was a fatigue jacket. We attempted to keep warm by forming long lines of men huddled against each other. Unfortunately, I was at the end of the line so I could only keep one-half of my body warm. Nevertheless, we were so tired and in such excellent physical condition that I never even caught a cold.

The next day the officers were separated from the men and trucked to Sfax then trucked to an airport at Tunis in Ford Tri-Motor planes, and by the time we took off, the airfield was under attack by American planes. The German planes flew about 20 feet above the water so they would not be vulnerable to attack by American dive bombers.

## **CAMP CAPUA WITH A TRIP PAST THE ALPS**

We arrived outside Rome and trucked through Rome to Naples, and that was our first experience in a prison of war camp. About 1500 officers and men were confined here. It was a tent camp and very crude. For a while, everyone had diarrhea making this a continual process of running to the latrine four or five times every night. Food consisted of a hard roll and soup made from various kinds of greens served two times a day. I learned one important

experience while in this camp—every day there was a head count to determine the number of people. The Italians furnished a roll for each POW based on the count. Men would line up and go through the line, each taking a roll, but at the end we were always 15 or 20 rolls short. This was a serious issue for someone missing out on food. The best we could do was to put him in the front of the line the next time. We investigated but never found out who was guilty. One day, sometime later, a medical officer told me that on several occasions he had taken more than one roll. His hunger had driven him to do it and he was ashamed of himself. I thought of the men in my Company, one or two of them had prison records, yet they never thought of depriving another man of a roll. I determined that you will never know what a man will do until he gets into such a position.

Two weeks later we were taken by boxcars through Italy along the eastern side of the Alps to Munich. These boxcars were typical 40 X 8 type which meant that they would hold 40 men or 8 horses. There were 48 of us in the box car and only one small window about 1 ½ feet in diameter. The fact that it was cold outside and we were going over the mountains did not bother us as the body heat of 48 men was more than sufficient to keep the boxcar warm. The latrine accommodations were the usual—your helmet which could be used with the contents thrown out the window.

I do remember the beauty of the German Alps. We were there during the nighttime and the moon on the snow with the Alps in the distance was something to see, one of the most beautiful sights I had ever seen. Most every one had a few minutes to stand before the window as we took turns sitting or lying down as it could not be done simultaneously. Our first stop was Munich, Germany.

## **INTERROGATIONS**

I should digress here and point out the searches and interrogations of American soldiers. What the German officer who handled our surrender said was certainly true. The Germans were authorized to search for weapons, but what they were primarily searching for were souvenirs, watches, cigarette lighters or anything else they could have for personal use. We learned this when we were searched thoroughly at Sfax. I had a wristwatch with a flexible band and put it high up on my arm; apparently it escaped notice and was never discovered. I had 2200 French Francs worth about \$45.00 which they looked at but did not take. I also had an American \$2.00 bill which they did confiscate. In addition they looked at all the cards in my billfold and questioned me about each card. I specifically remember a Farm Bureau Membership Card which seemed to puzzle them, and which on many occasions during later searches was taken from me. Next, I was escorted to a small room and interrogated by a Colonel and a Captain. They asked me questions. In response I gave them my name, rank and serial number. Their

reply was, "Come now Hauptman, we know all about you; you are the Anti-Tank Commander of the 168<sup>th</sup> Infantry" then proceeded to name all of my Lieutenants and two of the non-coms; he detailed the travels of my Company from North Africa in Algiers to the time we were captured. I was certainly amazed at the accuracy of this information. We had added one new Lieutenant when we were on the hill, information they did not have, nor had they taken off the one that had left, so the information had come from German spies prior to this time. By telling me what he knew, he tried to get me to give more details about myself and other units. I told him that if he knew all of that he didn't need any further information from me, and if he thought the information he repeated was true, then it must be true. I gave him nothing further. He merely smiled and let me go. This was really the only serious interrogation that I had. In Munich we were searched as usual and each time, they found something else to confiscate. It seemed as if they were under orders to do so. Most often it was of little or no value.

## **ROTTENBURG AND THE BRITISH**

While traveling in boxcars from Munich to Rottenburg, a beautiful little German village in a very picturesque little valley with hills on both sides. This, our first real prison camp, had been a girl's school and was presently housing about 500 British officers. Most had been captured at Dunkirk and a great percentage were the cream of the British Officer Corps and the top Civilian Officer Corps which would correspond to our National Guard. They had been prisoners for over two years.

They were extremely cordial and naturally wanted to know everything we knew about the war and England, but until they had fully investigated each one of us and interrogated us about the others, they did not tell us anything about themselves or about this prison lifestyle. After they were satisfied that there were no German sympathizers in the group, they opened up and gave us our first lessons on how to be a prisoner of war and survive.

1. No matter what the effort, keep yourself clean at all times and no matter what the cost, keep your clothes in a presentable condition.
2. Always demand respect from the Germans.
3. Unless it is the simplest order in German, always try to make the German give his command in English. This puts you in a superior position.
4. If any item is confiscated, always make a vigorous protest and always appeal to the authorities to get it back. As an example, after the Farm Bureau Card was confiscated on several occasions, I filed a protest and after several months, it was returned. It had no value and had long expired.
5. Study the Geneva Convention and know your rights, and if your rights are violated, maintain steady protest until the Germans find out they will get

better cooperation from you and their job will be easier if they follow the Geneva Convention.

6. Organize your camp as you would in the military. The Senior Officer will be in command. He will issue orders to you within the camp and it is his duty to protest ill treatment or violation of rights of anyone under his command.

The next thing they taught us was how to be the most comfortable when living in a jail. This was the dull part of prison life.

## **FUN AND GAMES**

The third category I would place under fun and games. The prisoner of war has nothing but time on his hands. He can sit and worry about himself or he can engage in worthwhile endeavors for his own betterment, or if he has lots of ingenuity, he can think of a thousand ways to bedevil his captors to the point of frustration, but never go beyond. For example, any military equipment was confiscated, especially anything useful for an escape. Among these items were field glasses. A way to invoke a search of a room was to take two beer bottles and hold them up as if you were peering out of the room with field glasses. "Goons", our names for Germans, would see the glint of the end of the beer bottles in the position of our hands and would think they were field glasses. This would be reported immediately to headquarters and they would then immediately search your room. All we ever did was set the beer bottles down; they would make a search, find nothing and leave. A certain amount of this type of amusement was necessary for POWs to maintain their sanity and to add a little humor. There was always the POW, however, who did not have the necessary judgement and who tried to carry such pranks too far to the detriment of all.

Our first insight as to the ingenuity of the POW mind was when we received news from the BBC every night. We sat through a German propaganda report every day, but each night at approximately 10 PM we gathered in various places where pertinent parts of the BBC news were read to us. The British, of course, had their radio and maintained their own security to keep the Germans from finding it, especially when it was in operation. Another great source of information was the age-old game of bribery. Even POWs had things highly prized by the Germans. For instance, we had a ration of cigarettes. British or American cigarettes in the Black Market in Germany were worth \$6.00 a packet. One cigarette could produce some items that to the Germans were not very valuable, but to the American POW, something of consequence. The idea at first was to bribe the Germans no matter what you got in return. Once the bribe was started, it got a little larger, and you got some valuable items. Perhaps it was a confiscated book, some food, wire, and later some part for a radio. When you reached this stage with the German guard, you had him almost completely in your power. If the POW was caught, he had the



protection of the Geneva Convention, but if the German soldier was caught, he was either jailed or shot on the spot!

I made several British friends while in Rottenburg. One was the British correspondent who liked to argue about politics of the day and the position of the British Empire. Another man of interest was Lord Cromwell. He was a descendant of the famous Lord Cromwell. I always expected a person with this name to look like a lion, as he was pictured in the history books. This one looked like “Casper Milktoast” and he was a very neat individual. Highly intelligent, I liked to visit with him about the British Government and its future in world politics. Now that I look back, I am amazed concerning his insight when he judged England to be a declining power. One time we debated with myself and Lord Cromwell on one side versus the British correspondent and another British Colonel on the other side on whether there should be a block of English-speaking nations.

The highlight of our stay in Rottenburg, however, happened one afternoon at 3 PM, when a number of us were out exercising in a little compound. All of a sudden, we heard a roar of planes, and there were about 100 American light bombers, three or four waves of them, flying about 500 feet above the ground to escape radar detection. It was the first time the British had seen any evidence of American support, and almost the first time they had seen any evidence of support from any ally. We all cheered and shouted and I believe it did more for the British than for us. It is hard to maintain your optimism for a long period of time. In fact after we left the camp, we received a report that Lord Cromwell had committed suicide. This was truly sad news.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

About six weeks after we had arrived at Rottenburg, we were again loaded on a train—this time our numbers divided between two passenger cars. It was a typical passenger car with the aisle down one side and cubicles with two seats opposite each other, with eight along the other side. This was the most luxurious trip we ever took. Naturally we were locked inside the cubicle, but we had a view from the train to where we were going. Going east we knew that we had passed through Berlin. Immediately checking the windows, we discovered that they were locked with a wooden block placed on the outside at the two lower corners, so even if the window was unlocked, it would not open. We had already learned from the British that escape was another game played and although your chances of complete escape were small; nevertheless, you dreamed of being the one to succeed. It was a bit like buying a lottery ticket. The long train did not move very fast and when it ascended a hill, the speed dropped to 15 m.p.h.

## **THE ESCAPE LOTTERY**

We determined that if we could break the glass in the corners, we could pry out the two blocks and could open the window. No sooner was the plan conceived than we put two guards on either side of the window door so we could stop work while a guard walked by. One man had a stub of a pocket knife with a heavy blade. We started taking turns as it was about a four-hour procedure before we could break out a small corner of the glass. As the glass was next to the block, it was not discernable from the outside and did not show from the inside. We then made our preparations for escape. We decided that no more than 3 or 4 of us could make the attempts, and I think my name was number 4 in the order of departure. Just about dusk we started experimenting with the blocks. They came out much easier than expected, and our plan was to wait until we hit the next hill with the train slowing down to 15 or 20 m.p.h. to make our escapes.

However, just before it got dark, we stopped at a town and while we were there, German guards went up and down the outside of the train examining the windows. They went past ours about three times and finally stopped in front of us. I do not know whether we betrayed ourselves with our faces, but were very sure they had found the missing blocks, and within five minutes they were in our cubicle and placed us in another one. Later we were told that we were to be charged with destroying property of the Reich which was a serious offense. Our thoughts were that they could only charge us with attempted escape, which under the Geneva Convention called for a short period of confinement. When we arrived at our destination, however, we were placed with other prisoners, and to our great relief this was the last of the episode and no charges were ever brought.

## **THE LIFE AND TIMES OF OFLAG 64**

When we arrived at our destination, we learned that we were in a small village in Poland called Schubin, the German name for Szubin. Our Offizierslager (an officers camp) was also a former school with a number of barracks. We were the first Americans to occupy the camp. Eleven Russians worked in the adjoining compound. Their job was to keep the place clean. Our camp started with this small contingent of 125 officers and by the time we vacated for The Long March, more than 1500 American officers had made it their Kriegy home as well. One gift received from the British, other than our prison education, was a small crystal from which our engineers made the first crystal radio set, our source for the BBC news. Unfortunately, this was not very satisfactory, but shortly thereafter, the Germans showed a propaganda movie in the camp and before the projector was taken out, the power tube had been removed (salvaged by us) then added to our radio. This much improved device gave us the latest news on the war and other important events. We also had our own security and every time the radio was turned on, security members

were stationed inside and outside the building as look-outs in case Germans entered our barracks. This crude radio was a start but by the time we left the camp in 1945, we had three operating radios, one with a storage battery, and two sending sets, capable of communicating with British sets in Great Britain.

Most of the sets or components came from Germans who had been bribed. Other parts were smuggled in from security sources. The bribed guards were more concerned about our security than we were. I shall never forget standing one night outside the building while we were getting the news. A German soldier came up to me and I made a motion to another man standing security to stop operations. Imagine my surprise when the German guard said to me, "Your security is getting too lax—one of these days, if you don't tighten your security, the Germans are going to find that radio!" It was obvious that he was more scared than we were as his punishment could well be death. Two Polish electricians had been executed by the Germans for aiding American prisoners by bringing in confiscated items.

## **ESCAPING WAS A PRIORITY**

The two most important things on the minds of the soldiers were:

1. The state of the war, and
2. The possibility of escape

During the first part of our incarceration, the war news was not very encouraging. Therefore, the idea of escape occupied our minds more than it did at a later time when it appeared very certain that the Allies would free us at some given time. Another time when escapes became more important was during the Battle of the Bulge when the Germans made their famous counter attack, and it appeared from the German news point of view that they were going to drive the Americans and their Allies into the sea.

Shortly after we arrived at Oflag 64, four American soldiers attempted to cut their way out through the fence. They succeeded in getting out of the camp, but were recaptured. The most sophisticated escape plan involved officers who faked a drunk, which resulted in their being placed in the camp's jail with a hand-made key to open their cells. Three of the four did escape but were caught later. The Gestapo made an example of these escapees but Colonel Drake intervened and the men were saved.

Other attempts occurred at Oflag 64 during the time it was a POW camp and some managed to escape during the Long March.

## **TUNNELLING**

Approximately three or four months after we arrived at Szubin, the first tunnel plan was put into effect. The idea to go down through a portion of a latrine

that we were all forbidden to use and start tunneling from there. Our efforts were not organized. I was one of those on the list to escape on the first plan. We had not learned the cunning tactics that we later learned in subsequent tunnels. We had only been on this project about three weeks when the tunnel was discovered. One of the rules of camp was that any group who started a project to escape and did not succeed, such group was put at the bottom of the list for the next escape attempt.

Everyone in the camp participated in different ways. They served as guards, removed the dirt, worked on forged passports, fashioned clothing, built ventilation systems, actually dug and gave up bed boards from his bed. The third and only successful tunnel was started in one of the barracks which housed a large metal unused vat encased in brick. A fire could be placed under it to wash clothes. This pot was carefully removed, so it could be put back at any time. From there, it went straight down through the brick enclosure to about seven feet below the bottom, and about twelve feet below the surface of the ground surroundings.

The tunnel was started from there and headed toward the fence some 275 feet away. The first dirt removed from the tunnel used a unique system. Using old gunny sacks, tubes were built inside with a string on either end and a hook on one end. The tubes were filled with dirt and tied with a string at the bottom. Next a tube was slipped inside either side of a man's pants and hooked to his belt buckle. He would thus walk out of the barracks, down the street, over to the garden, pull the string which had been brought alongside the belt, the dirt would fall and he would return for more tubes. This system was used for several weeks, and I shall never forget an incident that happened. One day about 15 of us who had slipped tubes on the inside of our pants were walking down a cement sidewalk toward the garden. There were three men in front of us when a German guard started walking down the street with us directly behind the three men. The string from one of the men's tubes came open, and the dirt started dribbling down the sidewalk. Fortunately, the German kept his head up and walked straight ahead without ever seeing the dirt. Two of us who saw this take place thought it hysterically funny. This method was slow and cumbersome. When asked why we did not fill the walls of the various buildings with dirt? All the walls had already been filled with dirt by previous prisoners who had built tunnels.

The next idea we had was the use of Red Cross boxes. Each was filled with dirt, taken out of the barracks and placed between the room and barrack ceiling around the various floor joints and posts where our engineers decided it would carry the weight. All of these operations had to be carried out in broad daylight and there were three positions from which a German guard could view our actions. To checkmate this issue, at least seven POW guards were needed for security. When a guard did appear, one of our guards would alert his coming and the operation would stop immediately and continue when the German had passed. A hundred Red Cross boxes could be taken

out and placed above within a matter of ten minutes. This was a slow process but much faster than the previous one. The tunnel itself was shored all the way with bed boards. I started out with them fully lining my bed and by the time I left the camp, only four held up my straw mattress. Those who had been Oflag 64 inmates the longest had the least number, but this went on with just a little grumbling and a lot of laughter.

A ventilation system was needed for those who worked in the tunnel and we had no tubing to carry the oxygen to the tunnel's end, but solutions were found. Each week we received a can of liver pate which provided high nutrition and was about the size of a small orange juice can. Each one also contained a small drop of solder which was painstakingly removed and soldered together with hundreds of other cans into a long tube which expanded as the tunnel lengthened. Bellows were inserted at one end of the tube which pumped the needed air. Later a small electric motor was employed to do this job.

Lights were also necessary, so our enterprising group installed a system of lights constructed from stolen wire and light bulbs.

The Germans suspected that we had another tunnel operation, but they were unable to find it. To combat this, they dug a hole around the outside of the fence about every 20 feet and inserted a small charge of dynamite. This was exploded and their theory was that if a tunnel existed, jarring of the earth would expose it. Fortunately, a rock ledge was present in the area where our tunnel ran and although the charge was located close to our tunnel, it was also reenforced with bed boards, so it remained intact and our secret. A couple of old tunnels were found and I suspect they thought perhaps that one of these was "our" tunnel, which gave them a feeling that we were being contained. Ours was finished approximately three or four months before we left the camp.

## **FIRST YEAR CELEBRATIONS WITH THE D-DAY SURPRISE**

There were a number of coincidences that really puzzled the Germans. One was that we planned to celebrate our first year in captivity in Schubin (Szubin). We made great plans. Our dance band was to give a concert. We planned all kinds of games and a few carnival type things, like knocking over a milk bottle for prizes. We made some stands and planned a big variety show for that night. The day of the celebration just got going really well when all of the sudden the Germans came in and started watching us very carefully. We were puzzled and they were puzzled. It seemed to us they couldn't understand what we were doing and we thought we were just having fun. **About noon we got the news from our radio that the Americans had invaded France.** Obviously the Germans thought we had the news in advance. We really did celebrate in full blast after that, but we could in no way indicate to the

Germans that we knew what was going on. We did celebrate hard and made so much noise that finally the Germans shut us off about 10 PM that night. You cannot imagine, however, how the invasion had raised our hopes of getting out of prison camp.

### **STAY ALERT AND LEARN**

One of the common questions put to a POW was “What do you do while you are a prisoner?”

Actually, a POW was probably kept busier than he would have been in his own business. The people who went berserk were the ones who could not forget where they were and work within their own environment. When I was in Schubin, I was at first in charge of all the music. I read a 2,000-page book on international law, 25 pages at a time. The YMCA gave me a violin and I practiced on this violin an hour a day and played in an orchestra and in a violin trio. I was head of the Schubin College Department, taught a course in business law and later taught one on Torts. I studied French and participated in a play. I wrote about 30 pages of a novel, and after re-reading it, I found it so dull that I threw it away. The mere job of living was not easy. We had to wash our own clothes by hand. It took half a day to wash a pair of wool trousers because we had no soap, so we washed them in water and sand. We had to sew our own buttons on. If a patch came loose, we had to re sew the patch. It's strange but I cannot remember what bedclothing we had outside of a couple of GI blankets. We had no sheets or pillows. I do know that we had a straw tick which became hard and lumpy set on solid bed boards; as they disappeared into the tunnel for reinforcement, the mattress became lumpier and pretty soon I was sleeping on only four bed boards. I hardly remember being too uncomfortable, however, and although we would often wake at night and smoke a cigarette, (you could usually see a cigarette going someplace) no one seemed to complain about this condition. Our latrines were all outside. We had a common washroom and a cold shower. For this we had soap from Red Cross boxes.

### **DINING IN**

In the main building where I originally lived, we had a makeshift dining room where we ate our midday meal which consisted of soup made of greens and sometimes some meat stock and a chunk of bread. I can well remember the Germans walking into the camp with fresh meat, holding it with two hands. This meat was supposed to be soup for some 125 prisoners. Sometimes they furnished some green vegetable like turnip tops and other times we had cow peas. They were actually very nutritious, especially when they contained weevils. We learned to eat them, but it was best to have a good conversation going on with somebody else and not look down at what you were eating.

Occasionally we would find an eyeball from a cow in our soup. This I could not eat although it was also supposed to be very nutritious. Now and then they would give us some cheese. This cheese was the first cousin to Limburger and was very delicious. Bernie Bolton just couldn't stand to eat it or see anyone else eat it. I always got his ration on the promise that I would keep it outside the window and would never eat it in his presence, a big bonus for me. The German bread that we got would have scored high with the high percentage of cellulose; when it was freshly cut, a slice was almost like glue. We had a pot belly stove in one room and when a fire was lit, we slapped the bread on the stove and when it was toasted, it would drop off. Then we would turn it over and repeat. If we had some margarine to eat with it, the bread became a lot more palatable.

### **RED CROSS BOXES AND INGENUITY**

Red Cross boxes were our salvation. I remember getting them each week. They varied somewhat, but one of the contents was a tin of powdered milk. Most had never seen powdered milk before, but Kriegies would sit around and reminisce and dream about starting a powdered milk factory when they got back home. Generally, there was also a can of Spam, a box of raisins, a chocolate bar, three or four packs of cigarettes, some canned margarine and occasionally canned biscuits.

The first boxes were like manna from heaven and we knew they were our true lifeline. On several occasions for a period of six weeks, we received no Red Cross boxes, especially toward the end of the war when boxcars were used for other human transportation—perhaps German troops. During these periods, we lost about three pounds of weight a week and the bigger, heavier guys lost more than this. My weight dropped below 120 pounds. Moreover, when we had the boxes, we bartered with our cigarettes. A pack of cigarettes was always worth another loaf of German bread, some kind of meat or cheese, and anything else we thought worthwhile. Of course, all of this was verboten but it still went on.

Red Cross boxes and contents enabled us to be a little more experimental. Using potatoes given to us by the Germans, for example, these were cooked, mashed, mixed with margarine and a little salt, rolled out into a kind of pie tin and when baked over a fire, tasted rather like a pie crust. Occasionally we used chocolate pudding from our boxes to create a chocolate pie. There were no cooking utensils or cooking units in the camps, but something created by former POWs was used and improved with each session. We had no source of fuel for our fires except tree twigs and paper from Red Cross boxes and those sent from home. The ingenious device (nicknamed "Smokey Joes") consisted of a large can such as a one-pound coffee can in which nail holes were inserted all around the bottom. Inside that can was placed a smaller can with nail holes placed about an eighth of an inch below the top of

the can with the two cans sealed at the top. Different types of things were used to hold a pot on top of the can. Some used wire or bricks. This cooking utensil was then placed approximately two or three inches above the top of this can. Pieces of cardboard, paper, etc. were then placed into this small can and lit. This produced a blue flame which emitted from the small can and could heat a quart of water in about 10 minutes for tea or soup. Food furnished by the Germans generally consisted of either potatoes, cow peas, turnip tops, black German bread, sometimes with margarine, Ersatz coffee, cheese and normally enough meat to flavor the soup or on rare occasions a small piece of bologna. This was the same diet furnished to the Russians, and it was not sufficient enough to keep a person alive for more than two or three years (unless supplemented).

### **DAILY LIFE ROUTINE THROUGHOUT THE CAMP**

When you are in the Army, you are organized. The Germans, I believe, were even more organized than the Americans, but we had our own organization.

On a typical day we were up and in line at 8 AM. We were counted by the Germans and given any orders they had for us that day. We were then dismissed and proceeded with our breakfast which usually consisted of a couple of slices of German bread placed on the side of the pot belly stove when it was hot enough to toast, some Ersatz coffee and powdered milk if we had it. I have already described our noon lunch.

The morning was taken up mostly with rehearsals or schools of all kinds; we were usually able to get some textbooks through the Swedish Red Cross. Originally, books were furnished to the Swedish by the Americans. Some officers who had not finished college were actually given credit for courses they took in the camp.

We had a record player and were furnished a number of records and instruments also by the Swedish Red Cross through their representative, Henry Soederberg. I was in charge of all music and disposition of the records and instruments. The records and record player were loaned to other buildings for an afternoon or evening and this worked well when there were only 125 of us, but when our numbers grew to 1500, this became a complicated process.

Physical activities took place in the afternoons. Walking around the camp was a must. Games included ring toss (similar to volley ball), softball and touch football. Physical activity efforts depended on our food supply. We again cooked our own food in the evenings, and this was often followed by a play, an orchestra concert, a chorus, or practice for one of these.

“Lights out” was supposed to occur at 9 PM but before we took to our bunks, our security officers brought in news from the BBC and read it to us. News in



the first few months was discouraging but later became more palatable. Sleeping and smoking occurred throughout the night. This was a typical day.

Initially, each cubicle (a small space generally holding 8 to 10 men) was given a small plot of ground about 10 x 15 feet for a garden. The American head of our gardens, John Creech, was a man highly educated in gardening and very creative. What we raised on that small plot was unbelievable. He taught us how to raise tomatoes so that there were no vines; the tomatoes grew right off the stalk, taking very little room. We picked them before the frost and wrapped them carefully, allowing them to ripen as we ate them. Lt. Creech later became Dr. Creech with an international reputation as Director of the National Arboretum in Washington, D.C.

At first, Church was non-denominational. Father Murphy conducted a Catholic service and then he had one of the officers from a Protestant church conduct a service in which he assisted. One of those conducting services later became a very high figure in the Episcopal church back East. In the prison camp we were all religious. The denomination, however, was mostly immaterial. I shall never forget a discussion I encountered in the infirmary. Here were men from all denominations and the discussion was not why they could not belong to another church, but rather why theirs practiced pointless dogmas. All of our chaplains rendered support and encouragement to all men, regardless of their faith, and all of those I encountered ministered to those who came to them without regard to their religion. Father Brock came to our camp and was very beloved and maintained his interest in us until his death a year or two ago.

When we first arrived at the camp, we were permitted to take supervised walks out into the countryside. I enjoyed these walks as we could see what life was like on the outside. We could see a group of buxom women working on the railroad or in the field and get an occasional glimpse of a little Polish girl. The men we saw were generally old or had some form of disability. We watched them harvest the crops by hand, put bundles in the barn and thrash the grain with a little thrasher as additional food was needed. However, this lasted only a few weeks. The Germans insisted that we sign a statement that we would not try to escape during these walks. Our commanding officer decided that we should not sign this, as it was contrary to the Geneva Convention. As a consequence, we were not allowed outside the prison camp. In this instance, better judgment seemed to me that although it was a violation of the Geneva Convention, they were giving us a privilege they did not have to give us under the Convention and therefore, it should have been acceptable to sign such a statement to get the benefit of the walk.

POWs were ingenious with food as with other matters. Some had snares to catch rabbits in the wintertime. There was continuous trade with the Germans using cigarettes for food. Fake German passports, maps, ID's and civilian clothes were made by those whose talents ran in these areas. With

nothing but time, a lot of imagination, and a group of officers from all walks of life and with every imaginable educational talent, almost anything could be made from the things we either had or could smuggle in or bribe the Germans to get for us. None of these talents, however, were mine.

### **UNITY WAS OUR STRENGTH**

I was able, however, to counsel younger officers who were disturbed or because of confinement could not cope with their environment. Many times I could help; in a few instances I could not help, and on rare occasions I sought the counsel of others myself. The thing that made life almost bearable to us was the fact that we were all in this situation together. If we had been isolated, our problems as prisoners would have been many times greater. Together, however, the weaknesses of some at times were bolstered by the strength of others.

Another thing which aided us was the fact that we had many deprivations and many life-threatening encounters prior to prison camp and moreover, we were physically fit. Some, however, who could not adjust, developed mental problems with the result that they were scared for life. Fortunately, with a little psychological help after their release, they could resume normal lives.

About this time, Captain Ferguson and I, both lawyers, went to Posen with four prisoners who were being charged with disobeying German guards as they were being taken to a hospital for treatment. As I recall, the POWs refused to walk in the street as opposed to the sidewalk, even given a command by the guards to do so. Still refusing, the guards decided to let it go but reported this incident to the camp Kommandant. The four men were taken to an old nunnery in Posen after Hitler, in a rage, demanded they be tried. The nunnery, built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century now housed a German Military Command and we were confined in one of the rooms. To our surprise, it was completely infested with blood-sucking bedbugs. We slept on the floor with a light on so the bugs could not attack us.

The next day we tried the case. Although we tried several cases in which we defended American prisoners, this was the only one we ever won, and we never knew why. That day, however, a man who introduced himself as Mr. Franz, the Swiss authority who had the duty of seeing that the Germans followed the Geneva Convention, asked for permission to speak to Captain Ferguson and me. He had come to observe the trial and I think this is why the German Court officer acquitted the men we were defending.

This was not the real reason he wanted to talk to us, however. He told us the war was rapidly drawing to a close and that the Allied Army was obviously winning. He also warned us that the German Army had lost control over the American and British POWs and that control now rested with the Gestapo and SS troops. Even more alarming, he had learned that orders had been

issued to shoot every American who escaped. He told us that although escape was our pastime, to go home and tell our camp commander not to permit any escapes as we would be liberated in a few months. Franz gave us this information at great risk to himself because he could be shot if the Germans learned of this conversation. I am not sure in my own mind, however, that the German Army did not give him the original information because they hated the Gestapo even more than we did. Returning to camp, we immediately informed Colonel Goode and he issued the order to halt escape attempts.

About the time of our last Christmas in Oflag 64, we were in better spirits and planned a real Christmas holiday with church services, a chorus and an orchestra. In fact, we played our “almost” national anthem “My Country Tis of Thee” which was prohibited but since the music doubles for the British anthem, “God Save the King” it appeared on the program. Fortunately, the German officers offered no objections. During the middle of the ceremony, however, a totally unexpected event occurred which forecasted great concerns for the camp and all personnel within it. Two American officers, Lt. Colonel William Scheafer and Lieutenant James Schmidt were to be tried before a German court for failing to comply with a German direct order.

The following summations are taken from Captain Clarence Ferguson’s book, *Kriegsgefangener 3074 (Prisoner of War)* because Captain Wilcox, Ferguson’s friend and professional colleague, was refused permission to accompany the prisoners and their lawyer, Captain Ferguson, to their trial.

The war in Europe was going badly for the Nazi regime which induced those in power to upgrade the propaganda machine.

*The Germans commenced a series of statements defaming and attacking the integrity of both governments and citizens of the United States and England. All the newspapers carried news items that we were murders, thieves, liars and sub-human in our treatment of people of German ancestry found within our country. It was further asserted that such conduct was the policy of our governments. During the latter part of July, placards were brought into camp on which these assertions were written and taken to the office of the Senior American Officer. Both Scheafer and Schmidt were present. Colonel Goode was away from camp. Upon his arrival the Nazi exhibited the placards and announced they would be placed just outside the headquarters door and at other prominent points inside the camp. Both American officers refused to comply as the placards were untrue and in direct violation of the Geneva Convention. (p. 225)*

*There is nothing quite like the helplessness a lawyer feels when he appears in court, having been unable to prepare his case properly. We had faced this difficulty before. Wilcox and I appeared before a number of German courts and had always*

*faced the same problems. In the jurisdictions where we were trained, any complaint against a person had to be described in sufficient detail to inform the defendant of the nature of the defense, and the circumstances under which the violation occurred. Not so under German law; the defendant is simply charged with violation of Section 7, Article 185 or some similar description. This probably would have been adequate if we had been given a copy of the code. When these defendants were notified of the charges, our requests for a copy of the Penal Code were denied. Prisoners-of-war were not permitted to have such a copy. When we appealed for a transcript of the section, we received the same answer.*

*The Germans never deviated from this policy. (p. 227)*

Captain Ferguson was not allowed to present any evidence or adequate questioning of the German accusers, nor were the American Officer defendants allowed to speak during this kangaroo court. The sentence delivered by six German officers was immediate and unanimous—the death sentence for both.

## **THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING**

When these two men were brought back to camp, the Christmas spirit of the POW officers was broken even though we had news that the Russians were driving into Poland. Fortunately, both Lt. Col. Scheafer and Lt. Schmidt outlived their death sentences as the Russians entered Pozen and we assumed all records were destroyed.

By the middle of January, however, it was very evident that the Russians were sustaining long drives through Poland and shortly we in the eastern edge could be liberated, so we were making all sorts of continent plans for such a time. The German Kommandant, however, had different plans. In the first place, they did not want to be caught by the Russians and in the second, the German High Command thought American officers were a very valuable negotiating tool, so the decision was made that the American Ground Officers of Oflag 64 would be taken out of camp ahead of the fall of Schubin by the Russians. This news was delivered to us two days before we left on January 21, 1945, during one of the coldest winters in many years.

The tunnel I described previously was never used until just before the Russian troops came near our camp as the Germans were taking us out on the march. This was obvious a week to ten days ahead of the Russian invasion and it would happen very soon. In fact, it was determined that those who could not make the march would be left behind. At this juncture any one who had a bad knee or any disability went to the military authority and explained that he was unable to leave the camp. One of my closest friends, Bernard Bolton,

had a trick hip which could go out of place although he seemed to have a certain amount of control over it. Through this issue he was one of those who was retained in camp when the Americans left. In addition, when it was very imminent that we were about to leave, about 40 American POWs hid in the tunnel until after the marchers left. These escapees were released by the Russians and went back through Poland, Russia, down to the Black Sea and finally came into United States control. They arrived home approximately three months ahead of the rest of the Americans.

### **THE LONG MARCH IS ON**

Feverish activity accompanied the decision to march. Anything taken had to be either carried on our backs or on a sled of some kind. Some devised a two-wheel cart. Any extra clothing had to be carried or worn together with a blanket or food kept from Red Cross boxes. One lieutenant had squirreled his food and placed the 70 pounds on a small sled. I had little food but took all of my cigarettes because they were light and were good trading items. I was mostly worried about shoes. I had a brand-new pair that did not fit too well and a comfortable old pair. Much to my regret, I decided to take the old comfortable pair. I was also a little apprehensive because I had developed a real cold and wondered if I would survive the five-degree temperature on the road.

We were a motley crew when we trailed out of the camp, walking about 15 miles the first day. The Russians were close enough that we could hear sporadic gun fire and occasionally the boom of big guns. Thousands of refugees were also on the road. Some had wagons with a team of horses, others with a single horse, and still others a horse pulling a cart. Untold numbers of people were trying, as we were, to stay upright on the dangerous icy roads. The first night we stayed in a large cow barn that held lots of cows and steers. Many tried to milk the cows and one New York officer tried to milk a bull, much to the milker's regret. The temperature in the barn was not too bad because of the heat from the animals and our group.

One day's journey out we noticed that there were no guards about. They had taken off and it appeared that the Russians were only a few miles away. It was decided that we should stay put thinking we would be free in a few hours when the Russians overtook us. This was not to be. Apparently, the Russian drive stopped and a company of Latvian SS troops picked us up again, placing us in the hands of the Germans. These troops were made up of 15 – 20-year-old boys who had been taken out of Latvia and retrained. We really had no trouble with them, but they were young and unpredictable. This worried us far more than the German guards.

## **CONDITIONS WORSEN**

Each day as we walked our situation became worse rather than better—the memories indelibly planted in my mind. We took to country roads as the Russian drive had prongs ahead and on either side of us. The numbers of refugees clogged the roads and were worse off than we were. Many were old and many children were seen. They had less food and less protection from the cold with no place to stay at night. After several days we saw bodies along the road who had either died of exhaustion or the cold. The teams of horses that were pulling wagons became exhausted and died, enabling refugees to cut meat from their bodies as they walked along. Roadsides became strewn with discarded items as people made decisions on what to keep and what to throw away—life or death choices. Very soon it was apparent that pulling or pushing a sled or cart for 15 or 20 miles a day in the snow was not possible. And now, the snow was falling every day.

Actually, the soldiers guarding us were in far worse shape than we were. All of the able-bodied men had been sent out to fight and what remained of our guards (except a few officers) were crippled or old men. They struggled harder to keep up with us and eventually, we were all one mass of humanity traveling in one direction.

About the third day I walked a hole through the outer sole of my shoe. In dry weather this would not have mattered but after I walked some distance, my feet were warm and the snow worked its way in between this sole and the inner sole which built up into a real hard lump of ice, making walking very painful. That night I went through the line to see if anyone had extra shoes. One officer did and although they were one size larger, I was grateful even though the slippery snow made my feet slide around in the shoes.

Each night our numbers grew smaller as more POWs escaped and no one cared. I felt more secure with us being guided by the Germans than attempting to break out and run the dangers of the front line from both the Germans and the Russians.

Another night we stayed in a huge barn filled with hay—enough room for 500-600 POWs. I remember that night I had taken my shoes off to put between my legs to keep them warm so I could put them on the next morning, and for the further reason that I couldn't touch my knees together because they were so sore. Nevertheless, I managed to sleep but woke up about 4 AM practically suffocating under approximately 4 inches of snow on top of all in the hay barn. This had been caused by the condensation from the breaths of the POWs which had gone up through the roof and then came back down in the form of snow.

I made my way outside about 5 AM because I couldn't sleep anymore. I found a shed which had been used as a milk parlor in which there was a fireplace. This is another scene I will never forget. The day before we had picked up a

wounded Russian soldier lying across the road. We had insisted he be put on the wagon and be brought in with us. He had been placed along-side this fire to give him some warmth but he had died during the night. When I walked into this parlor, a number of officers were heating cans of water or beans or something over this fire. The deceased Russian was beside the fireplace, yet they were stepping over or around him as though he were a stick of wood.

A short time later, we were all called to order and a German officer gave us a long harangue that if we would join them and fight the Russians, they would let us be free. He said that the Germans did not want to fight the Americans, that we were alike and the real enemy was the Russians. Colonel Goode the SAO (Senior American Officer) told him that we would have no part of it and that ended the conversation.

Throughout the march the officers in charge of American communications had pulled a radio with a storage battery and a sending set with a hand crank generator; these had all been stolen or made in the camp and used each night for news of the war. Another memory concerns walking and talking with Lt. Hayes as we shared food and cigarettes. He said to me, "Look at those German guards. They have nothing to look forward to and at least we can look forward to getting out and back to a normal situation." Cigarettes continued to be useful as barter for a loaf of bread or sometimes an extra piece of cheese or a little meat. I mentioned the cold I had when we left camp and was concerned about catching pneumonia. After three days, I had no sign of a cold. On the other hand, my knees continued to hurt and the tendons in my heels began to squeak. In fact, they became so loud that I could hear them as I walked along.

## **CROSSING THE POLISH BORDER INTO GERMANY**

Around noon, just inside Germany, we took a rest stop in a small town and were treated with gallons of Ersatz coffee by a German lady. Viewing this activity, a German officer told her she could not do this. I don't know what she said to him, but she continued serving us until everyone had a cup. This kindness by civilians occurred in several places through which we passed.

When we had been walking for about ten days, I finally admitted that I could walk no further and was picked up by German wagon carrying equipment of the German guards. The driver offered me a drink from a bottle of schnapps, and I want to say it was the best drink I ever had. That night our group of disabled men, including Lt. Hayes, grew to 66. We were billeted in a town and transported to another prison camp the next day by boxcar. This one called "40 x 8" held eight horses or 40 men. It was so crowded that we followed a routine of making four lines in which each one would sit down and then the next person would sit down and put his legs around the other and so on back for about two-thirds of the men. The last one-third would then stand. This

procedure was followed for about four hours and then the ones who had been standing would sit down. We usually entered a marshalling yard in some town every night or during the day. This was the only time we could exit the boxcars to use the bathrooms or stretch our legs.

Our train was considered low priority. It was long and filled with many boxcars of refugees, mostly women and children, and a number of boxcars with broken guns, vehicles and tanks which had been damaged and were being taken back for repair. Surprisingly, it was quite a cosmopolitan train with German soldiers who accompanied the tanks, refugees, and us American POWs. We were all in the same boat and there did not seem to be any animosity among us.

I recall being summoned up to one of the boxcars to meet some German officers accompanying the tanks. They could speak some English and the whole tenor of their conversation was that they had no quarrel with us. They felt that the Germans and Americans had always gotten along and they thought we both were the same kind of people. In their words, the real enemy was the Russians and some day we were going to have to fight them. When I left, they gave me half a loaf of bread which I really appreciated.

Henry Haynes still had cigarettes and we used them to the greatest advantage in trading for food which we shared. When parked in the marshalling yards, the Germans tried to find some food for us, but several days occurred before this happened. We actually did better at scrounging food than they did.

## **DESTINATION BERLIN**

I shall never forget the train ride through Berlin. The boxcar door was open as none of us had thoughts of escape. One of the German guards had been with us all the way. He had been an organist in one of the big churches in Berlin. He was a gullible little soul who believed all the German propaganda that the "Allies had not been able to inflict a great amount of damage to Berlin." The train was probably traveling only 10 miles an hour and we could look down the streets where the tall buildings had been standing and see the rubble extending to the middle of the street, leaving only a path for walking. The destruction was incredible. This little German organist had tears in his eyes. He cried out, "Why did they destroy Berlin?" I told him I had seen London where the major part of the city had been similarly destroyed by German bombs. I remember his reply: "I don't care who did it. Civilized people should never let it happen."

## **A CAMP OF MANY NATIONALITIES**

After spending the night in a marshalling yard, our train headed toward Luckenwalde, 20 miles away from Berlin. After arriving and unloading



ourselves and our baggage, we walked the three miles to our new camp. This one was large with a diverse population. This included 3000 Russians; 1000 English, Canadians, and Australians; several hundred French; some Italians; all of the Norwegian National Guard; and a few assorted other nationalities.

For some unknown reason to us, the Americans were placed in charge of the kitchen. This one fed the needs of the whole camp. There were eight 100-gallon pots which served as the basis for a soup which was distributed throughout the camp. At noon, each nationality would bring a big wooden tub with long handles which supported its weight as the men carried it to their camp. On their way out they would receive other rations such as portions of German bread and possibly a little cheese.

We were billeted with the English, Australians and Canadians. We also visited with the Norwegians even though we were separated by a barbed wire fence. We soon learned, however, a way in which we could circumvent this issue. When the Norwegians came to pick up their food, several exchanged uniforms with the Americans, sending them to the American compound and the Americans to the Norwegian compound.

I became well acquainted with two Norwegians and also later General Rooga, the Senior Officer of the entire camp, as he commanded the Norwegian Army. I have difficulty remembering names, but one of the Norwegians was city solicitor for the city of Oslo. Both being lawyers, we had a great number of discussions about the variances of law in Norway and in the United States. He had learned his English in grammar school, and we were able to converse quite well. I heard from the solicitor only once after the war. He wrote that he had been appointed by the Parliament to defend Quisling, the most famous Norwegian traitor. He performed this duty without regret that Quisling had been found guilty and executed. He wanted to ensure me that he had not volunteered for this traitor's defense.

Two other persons I became acquainted with were the Petersons. One of them was a representative for IBM in Norway and was with the National Guard. He told me how they smuggled children into Sweden. They had developed an underground system in which they took the women and children up into the mountains and gave them a pair of skis which they used to ski into Sweden. He and his sweetheart were working together when they were caught attempting to take more children to safety. She was put into one prison and he in another. Because he was a member of the National Guard, however, he was transferred in with the other officers so he was never tried. She, however, was to be tried, but a Norwegian doctor said that she was pregnant, kept her in the hospital and reported on the stages of her pregnancy even though she was not pregnant. Close to her supposed delivery date, she escaped from the hospital, was taken in by the underground and skied her way to Sweden across the mountain. He showed me several letters he received from her which were written in code to disguise her identity.

In the camp it was evident that the Allies were winning the war. The guards were old, often handicapped and their prayer was that the war would be over soon. Most nights the British Mosquito Bomber flew over Berlin with 2000-pound bombs, accompanied by the American B-17s, flying in formation and dropping their bombs as well. We stood outside, saw the planes and cheered as they came over. Occasionally aircraft guns would bring a bomber down. The boom of the bombs shook the buildings in Luckenwalde.

It was here that we saw the plight of the Russians. Their numbers had been reduced from 10,000 to below 3000, as many had died of hard labor or starved to death. We were absolutely forbidden to feed them, but we still walked along the fence, threw over cans of food or items we could spare along with cigarettes. They were well disciplined and when a pack appeared, they casually walked over, picked it up, broke it into two pieces (one pack for 30 Russians) and shared the smokes. We Americans thought it was only fitting that they have a taste of what it was like from the other end of a gun.

About two months before the war ended, the Red Cross parcels came more infrequently. Part of the problem was lack of transportations as much of the German rolling equipment had been destroyed, the other part being the Germans helping themselves. You could hardly blame them as their diets mirrored ours. The lack of food, however, did not dampen our spirits as it was obvious that the war was coming to a close. We were more concerned about the fact that we might be in the cross-fire if we found ourselves in the middle of the front lines.

### **THE AMERICANS ARE COMING**

As the American Army grew closer, however, the Germans were more determined to make a last effort to move us out of the camp and down to another remote camp, south and east of Berlin. They lined up the boxcars to move us but American planes kept knocking them out of commission as fast as they were replaced. Furthermore, we had no desire to move again, and our American Commander told us to drag our feet as much as possible. When 20 of us were told to appear to be searched and placed in a confinement area, only 5 or 6 of us would show up, the rest staggering in over periods of several hours. They finally escorted about 300 officers down to the train station, but in the meantime, the boxcars were strafed by American planes, so we were returned to camp. At the time of the search, the storage battery radio we had was confiscated by the Germans, but was retaken by us. One morning we received the radio message that President Roosevelt had died. This was a very sad day in the camp and we held a memorial service to honor him. The Norwegians and the English attended as well.

## **THE RUSSIANS CAME INSTEAD**

At this juncture, the only question left was whether the Russians or the Americans would get to us first. Obviously, we hoped it would be the Americans as did the German guards. They told us that they would gladly surrender to the Americans but it was not to be. One day the Germans brought in some American prisoners. They had been captured about five or six miles from the camp and very shortly the American Army would be there. This was as close as our Army got, however, because although they had little or no opposition, in accordance with the Potsdam Agreement, they were ordered to withdraw behind the first river.

About a week later, amid a lot of gunfire, the Russians entered the camp with a big tank brigade, having encountered little opposition. The soldiers were sitting on top of the tanks, some of them playing harmonicas and one or two playing a squeezebox, like a small version of an accordion. Of course, we were delighted to see them. They were friendly and seemed to have plenty of vodka which they insisted we drink bottoms up.

The next few days were very hectic. The Russians were busy mopping up pockets of resistance and incidentally looting and undoubtedly raping German women, prompting many Germans to seek protection at our camp. One of the most fortunate things which involved us was that the Russians appointed one of the Russian POWs to be the camp commandant. Fortunately, he had been a kitchen helper to whom we had fed extra rations and as a Major in the Russian Army, did a fair job of running the camp. The most and important function he served was to increase our food stores by sending out a Russian contingent to round up cows and grain and return them to camp. We slaughtered the livestock and placed their meat in stew pots with cow peas of better quality than we had seen before. All of these items had undoubtedly been confiscated by the Germans.

Interpreters arrived giving me the opportunity to talk to the major about the pillaging and raping of women. His face was very stony when he replied, "I do not like this and am not in favor of it and would not indulge in it myself. However, when the Germans overran my hometown, they raped my mother and sisters then bayoneted them. For this reason, I would not stop those who retaliate against the Germans."

Three days later, an American convoy appeared with four or five trucks and two jeeps. When they arrived, our hopes went sky-high thinking that we would truly be liberated within a few days. However, they were able to take only soldiers who were ill, wounded or American intelligence personnel—but they promised to return. Americans were certainly present in the area as we learned that an additional 3000 American soldiers were in an adjoining camp. Among these were POWs from the 168<sup>th</sup> of which I was a part. American trucks continued to appear and took a great number of these men—many in very poor physical condition. These actions by the Americans became a

source of irritation among the Russians, so they forbid the entry of American vehicles. Plan B went into effect: Our vehicles parked within a mile of the camp, making space for Americans who wandered out of the camp and climbed on board. A few days later, the American officer in charge of the kitchens left as well, and I was recruited to handle the kitchen and found that supervising this operation was not difficult. Soups continued to be made and served.

### **THE RUSSIAN EXCHANGE**

The Russians were insistent that we be returned to the Americans and at the same time, an official exchange of Russian prisoners would occur. To prepare for this they recruited several pretty blond Russian interpreters and started processing all of the American officers. There was nothing wrong with the idea but their method was absolutely ridiculous. The Russian interpreters asked for the name, rank, serial number and the branch of each officer's unit. This was then typed out in Russian. The process was very slow—only 100 were processed per day. I was most fearful of the situation in which they would translate Lumund Wilcox into Russian and then imagine what it would sound like when it was translated from Russian into American English. We tried to negotiate with the Russians on other procedures or a method whereby we would process them while they watched and have this list handed over to the Americans. This they would not agree to.

### **THE WALK-AWAY**

Bob Milligan was our American camp adjutant; he had access to all orders given to the Americans by the Russians. One morning he told me that a Russian order being made available at noon forbidding POWs from leaving the camp and if they did, they would be arrested and brought back. He had asked to be relieved of his duties as adjutant and if I wanted to leave with him, he would try to get permission for me to do so and we would take off before noon. I instantly agreed which sent him off to headquarters. Returning shortly, he announced that we could disappear. I left everything behind and about 10 AM we took off, covering ground along the fields parallel to the road, heading toward the river where we thought the Americans would be some 30 miles away. After we had walked about 10 miles, we accessed the highway. This gravel road was filled with refugees including French, Belgian, and Hollanders, all headed west toward their homes, although some Polish people were heading east. We traveled another ten miles before it started to get dark.

Our rest stop that night was a barn filled with hay, also occupied by some Hollanders. They offered to share their chicken-in-a-pot stew for which we were grateful. That night while we were trying to sleep, I remember hearing a baby cry and thought about how worse a family's problems were than mine.

We also learned that the Americans had pulled back another 30 miles across the second river, but in order to cross the first river, one had to cross between Noon and 1 PM., the only time refugees were allowed to move on the bridge. The rest of the time it was under Russian control. The next morning I was stiff, but by placing one foot in front of the other, we reached and crossed the bridge by noon, then continued down the road headed west. We stopped about dusk at a small town, found a hotel with a vacant room and parked ourselves in it. The hotel was full of Russian soldiers who were also full of vodka. A fellow walker we named Canada was able to locate several loaves of bread so we had something to eat.

### **MILES TO GO WITH A MISSION**

The next morning we still had 10 to 15 miles to go. The walking became more difficult but we kept our routine by walking 50 minutes and resting 10. Time was passing more quickly in the anticipation of getting back under American control. After discussing the conditions we might face concerning Russian control of the area, we were determined to keep walking toward another bridge (partly damaged but passable) we had to cross. When we arrived, a Russian soldier asked the question, "Amerikanski?" and when our reply was "Amerikanski" he let us pass. At this point the Americans apparently knew that there were two American soldiers coming up this stairway and by the time we arrived, they had backed a jeep up to that position of the bridge. We shook hands with the soldier, got in the back seat, and knew that we were back in American jurisdiction.

I don't suppose anyone could convey the exhilaration, the sense of gratitude and relaxation felt knowing we were once more within American control. I have never been a person to worry unnecessarily. There were times of crisis in my life when things were awfully low, but even in those times, I always seemed to have the feeling that somehow, I would come out of it all right. Nevertheless, riding in that jeep to the American Command Post seemed to melt away all of the problems of the past, and my thoughts immediately turned to getting back to the United States and home.

I well remember that first noon when we arrived at the command post. It was lunchtime and we were taken into the mess hall. The thing I remember was the canned peaches and the white bread and butter. It seemed to me like manna from heaven. The next morning we were flown to Le Havre which was a concentration camp of POWs and officers, some of whom who had been there for several weeks. Here I was given a uniform which I made a little big because I only weighed 120 pounds. We were also given a pair of slacks, a shirt, and some shoes to replace the ones I had been wearing. I also remember being processed which seemed interminable!

After being there only five or six days, however, I found that one group of Americans was being transferred to another camp in Le Havre, in the harbor, preparing to board a ship. The adjunct of this troop told me that he would smuggle my name on the “go” list if I wanted to take the chance. I had about 15 minutes to make up my mind and I decided to jump on this opportunity, so when they moved out, I moved with them.

### **ANCHORS AWAY!**

Surprisingly, by the end of the day I found myself on a Liberty Ship, headed towards the U.S.A. with 3000 officers onboard, all POWs like myself. I didn't rate a cabin, assigned instead to the large hole of the ship which was stacked with bunks, a luxury from the standpoint of having been a POW. Unfortunately, I became the security officer of the ship and had no idea I would be assigned another command position. Why I was selected I have no idea. During the war, I was on three ships and on every one, I had a major assignment. My duties were to see that every opening or door which led to the outside decks was guarded 24 hours a day. This meant that 30 or 40 men (all under the rank of major) had to be standing guard at all times. Each would stand a four-hour shift which I rotated so that no one during his passage had more than one four-hour shift. His duty was to ensure that no one accessed the deck unless he followed certain prescribed rules. The most important one concerned the no-smoking rule on deck at night. The war was still going on with the Japanese, so blackout rules were still enforced.

Officers were not used to standing guard which encouraged a lot of grumbling. Fortunately, infantry officers complied with little difficulty. There were, however, a preponderance of Air Force Captains and they would on occasion defy me. Generally, I tried to reason with them by stating that I hated this duty just as they did if not more, and all they had to do was to stand one shift. Sometimes their excuse was that they were not on duty unless they were with their ship. I told them where the Army regulations were posted and if they checked and found that Air Force Captains were excepted, then they were excused. Finally, their choice was to serve the shift or be a guest in the Army brig. I never let one bluff me; to do otherwise would have caused chaos.

My assignment still left me time to eat good food, go out on deck, stand there, reminisce, and look back on all of my experiences. Captain Clyde Herring was also on the ship. He had served with me during the war and was looking forward to seeing his father, Senator Herring, who had sent him a wire on the ship. As I recall, the ocean was as calm as I had ever seen it and this ship, although slow, was very commodious to me. I gained 15 pounds during the voyage and when we saw the Statue of Liberty once more, I could understand the feeling of emigrants who saw it for the first time. When we arrived at the harbor and docked, the first American civilian I saw was Clyde's father—in line to greet his son home again.

**As we walked off the boat and touched American soil, I knew I was home.**

## **IN RETROSPECT**

The experiences I had were indelibly printed on my mind. After a few years, however, I forgot all of the disagreeable parts of prison life and remembered the comradeships, the many kindnesses of fellow prisoners, German officers and other German civilians, and all of the funny things that happened. I learned how people react to certain situations and that education and background are not necessarily a qualification for honesty and bravery. It was an experience I would not want to forget but one I would not recommend.

## **REFLECTIONS OF AN ARTIST**

Personal writings are often enriched by information gained from additional sources. Such was the case in the life of Lu Wilcox. Clarence Ferguson's book (cited earlier) offers dimensions of Wilcox's personality, talent, and professional goals which placed him on a different journey from the one he might have chosen. The setting was a concert given at Oflag 64.

*The night was extremely cold, but we wrapped ourselves in whatever we had and were packed in the improvised theater to hear a violin concert by Captain Lumund Wilcox. We were so crowded that our body heat warmed the chilly building slightly, but I kept wondering if Wilcox's bare hands would freeze. His fingers looked blue, but they moved with precision. He was an accomplished musician, and as he stood on the stage, it was hard to visualize him as a tough company commander of an anti-tank unit, which had fought so courageously in the North African campaign against insurmountable odds against Rommel's experienced and numerically superior forces.*

*As we listened to this accomplished man in his recreation of the moods of Schubert, we, at least, were anesthetized momentarily from the discomforts of hunger, loneliness, cold, and self-incrimination. His theme and tones were so consummate that within moments one was lost in reveries exclusively personal to each listener. The ease of his movements complimented the sounds of the instrument, giving to each of us, levitation that we desperately needed.*

*These programs were given for more than the enjoyment they portended, and were better attended than they would have been under normal situations. The music played was far beyond my musical comprehensions. Even though it was captivating and enjoyable, it went far beyond me, and I am sure for many others*

*it provided an escape from the realities of time. With full knowledge of the precariousness of our situation, we studiously designed activities of escapism. We were much like a prisoner on death row with the exception that he knows the projected day of his execution. Any preoccupation or diversion of the mind was welcomed, even though we covertly nominated it as entertainment.*

*Wilcox played with the ease and confidence of a gymnast in his warm-up exercises. The beauty of his music was like a thoroughbred in a Kentucky blue-grass meadow. The ecstasy of his theme had accomplished its purpose, and when he concluded his program, I noticed that his hands were blue. I did not realize how cold they were until I shook hands with him. They were like ice, but to the many who greeted him, he never gave any expression of discomfort.*

*Later I talked with him about how everyone had been impressed with his music. In college he had difficulty in choosing between music and law. He liked both so well that he divided his time equally between them, and evidently, he was outstanding in both. He was an honor student in the law school; and in addition to his participation in orchestral combinations, he gave individual concerts much like the one we had heard. He could not decide which profession to pursue and had about decided to devote his time to both.*

*One night before graduation, he gave a performance which had been well publicized and was well attended. Even his uncle from Chicago, who was chief counsel for AT&T, was there. After the performance, he and his uncle walked alone to his apartment. During their conversation, Wilcox indicated that he thought he would practice law, but at time would do public performances with his violin. As they arrived at the apartment, his uncle addressed him as if he were his son.*

*“Lumund, we have a lawyer in Chicago who divided his time between law and music. All the lawyers there think he is a better musician than a lawyer, while all the musicians think he is a better lawyer.”*

*That was Wilcox’s last public performance and although he did not tell me, I knew that in his town, the lawyers knew he was a good attorney. (pp. 146, 147)*

[Note: Wilcox’s musical pursuits at Oflag 64 were considered private messages of encouragement for fellow Kriegies, who, like himself, were surviving each day in the hands of the enemy.]



## **LIFE AFTER MILITARY SERVICE**

Counselor Lumund Wilcox returned to his native Iowa and resumed his practice of law in Jefferson, Iowa. He has been very successful both as an attorney and civic leader of that state.

The majority of this writing comes from Lumund Wilcox's autobiography but commentary beginning with REFLECTIONS OF AN ARTIST on page 31 has been added by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers