

Narrative of Capt. Baum
CO – 10th Armored Inf. Bn – 4th Armored Division

Raid on Hammelburg, March 27, 1945

NOTES ON TASK FORCE BAUM

We broke through at SCRWEINHEIM and started to clean out that town at eight o'clock that night. It took us until twelve-thirty before we could pass anything through. From there we went to HAIBACH GRUNMORSBACH where we received our first bazooka fir. I lost a few infantrymen, but no vehicles. We continued on to STRASSBESSENBACH and turned north to KEILBERG. This was somewhere between one-thirty and two-thirty in the morning. At KEILBERG, we got on the main road and went through FROHNHOFEN LAUBACK and HAIN and then went through a stretch of woods. All during this operation, we lost infantrymen in these various towns from small arms and bazooka fir. We kept on going through that stretch of woods and got to RECHTENBACH.

Just outside of the town of LOHR, we lost our first tank. Of course, during our trip, we shot up various vehicles and Krauts in all towns, but the momentum of our column was too fast and too great and so we went straight through. In the town of LOHR itself, we got a Kraut column of twelve vehicles coming toward us. The town was so situated that we just happened to get on the right road and pass through and out of it.

We then got on the road junction and all along the railway from LOHR to NEUENDORF to LANGENPREZELTEN to GEMUNDEN were trains. I estimate that there must have been about twelve trains each consisting of about twenty cars. It was just getting light and it was there that I realized that I was going to run into something. We shot up these trains and a big thirty-car ack-ack train, which was loaded with anti-aircraft weapons and concrete pillboxes. The infantry cleaned that out. We got some 20mm fire from the vicinity of GEMUNDEN and from the other side of the train, but they stopped firing at us as soon as the column really started rolling.

We got into GEMUNDEN and lost three tanks and a bunch of infantry, including a platoon leader and to this day I don't know whether he's dead or alive. They blew a bridge right in our face. This bridge was the only one that would take us to the place we were going to. After further investigation, a PW informed us that the region around LOHR and GEMUNDEN was a marshalling area for two divisions, one division having just unloaded in GEMUNDEN. I believed it as the Krauts were filtering all over the place. After losing three tanks and finding the town loaded, I decided it was best not to go in and seek another route. We backed out of town and went north.

It was about eight-thirty when we got into RIENECK. SHAIPPACH was the town before that. The momentum of the column was quite great and we picked up a couple of Germans in that town and used them to guide us to BURGSINN as there was no bridge in RIENECK. In BURGSINN we captured a Kraut General and his staff. I also picked up a Kraut civilian to guide us to the town of GRAFENDORF. We took off cross-country and went up a mountain trail. In and around GRAFENDORF, the task force freed 700 Russians. These Russians took a magazine and some of them armed themselves and took to the woods in the direction from which we came. We crossed the bridge at GRAFENDORF and followed the river and railroad until we came to WEICKERSGRUBEN.

At this time – two o'clock in the afternoon, I noticed a Kraut liaison plane in the air. I also heard vehicular movement other than my own column when we stopped. I then stopped to orient myself and decide which way to attack this town where the PW camp was located and also find out exactly where the American prisoners were. We left WEICKERSGRUBEN heading northeast and were engaged in a tank fight at OBER. We didn't lose anything nor did the Krauts. The column started moving again, but I knew damn well that we were going to have a tank fight real soon.

From ESCHENBACH to the campsite, we went over two bridges – bypassing the town of HAMMELBURG. We had a tank fight and my platoon of lights, one assault gun, the majority of half-tracks and a platoon of infantry went and started making a move to free the camp.

Meanwhile, my medium trucks, of which I had about six left, engaged these tanks and knocked out three of them, also knocking out three or four ammunition trucks that were in the Kraut column. I kept pushing the task force over the ridge onto this high ground where about two companies of Kraut infantry were dug in. It took us two and one-half hours to clean it up so that the infantry and tanks could move in. In the meantime, the Kraut tanks had knocked out five of my half-tracks and three peeps, one being a medical peep – one of the half-tracks contained gas and one other 105 ammunition.

It was about four-thirty when the first shots were fired on the guards of this military camp. It was about six-thirty or seven-thirty in the evening when the American PW's came out of the camp. I gave them instructions and as many of them as possible road on my vehicles, reorganized and got ready to go back. A great number of PW's were in no shape to go anywhere and they immediately took off in a group carrying a white flag back to the camp.

Starting back, we hadn't gone fifty yards when we lost another tank by bazooka fire. I had to change my direction so took a compass reading and went cross-country. Everything was fine until I crossed the bridge and got into HESSDORF and ran into two roadblocks.

At HOLLRICH, three more tanks were bazooked. I lost a tank company commander there and a large group of infantrymen. Knowing that I couldn't mess around there, I backed out of the area into assembly for reorganization on Hill 427 – coordinates 495652. It was about three-thirty in the morning when I got back on this hill. I immediately got the people together and found out how much gas we had. We siphoned gas out of eight of the half-tracks and destroyed eight to give us some zone of radius for the vehicles. At this particular time, I had three mediums and three lights, plus one command truck.

It was then that I sent my last message to the battalion that the mission was accomplished and we were on our way back for the second time. I oriented the people and informed them to use half-tracks for bridging equipment if necessary to cross streams so as to avoid towns. The real seriously wounded were left in a building marked with a big Red Cross just before daylight.

I got the men together here on top of this hill and gave them a pep talk and, upon finishing, got into my peep when the Krauts attacked. They had an unknown number of SP's to my south, six tanks and the equivalent of two infantry companies advancing on the position from the southeast, backed by SP's which were stationery. To the northwest were six Tiger tanks that were in position firing. A column of tanks came in from the direction of WEICKERSGRUBEN when the attack commenced and stayed in the northwest. At the time they opened up, everybody was just ready to move out. In fact, I had pulled my peep out to form the column when they hit us with the fastest automatic tank fire I had ever seen. My tanks returned the fire as best they could and jockeyed for position. All the vehicles were knocked out and burning and the infantry was being blown to bits by this direct tank fire.

The Kraut tanks and infantry advanced under this assault. They practically destroyed the building which the wounded were in that was marked with the Red Cross. We moved out into the woods and assembled. We then tried to get back to see what we could salvage out of the mess, but each time we showed our faces, the infantry opened up with small arms and the advancing tanks started firing again. We went back into the woods and the two platoon leaders who had taken over told the men to split up in groups of four and take off in the general direction from which we had come. The entire fight lasted twenty-five minutes, but that was the fight.

At this time, the Krauts had the situation well in hand and they continued blowing more bridges in preparation for a larger force. The infantry started mopping up the area with the aid of bloodhounds from the HAMMELBURG PW camp and captured quite a number of the men. In overrunning the positions, they also evacuated our wounded to the hospital in the prison camp that we had just set free. Major Stiller, myself and a lieutenant-anonymous took off in the woods. They ran us down – it got too close for comfort. I could barely walk and had been shot in the knee and in the leg with a thirty-eight which convinced me I had enough for a while. After being captured, we were evacuated to the town of HUNDSFELD. The confusion was so great at that town

nobody even bothered to search us and from there we were marched back to the prison camp.

I was being partially carried-one man assisting me. Being wounded, I managed to get in the building that night while the other prisoners were being taken away. Some of these ex-prisoners who knew the ropes told the Krauts I was one of the group who had escaped and should be sent to a hospital as I couldn't walk. Before I knew it, a Kraut woke me up and sent me by truck to a Serbian hospital at the PW camp – and I still had on my equipment with the exception of the pistol – map, compass and everything else. When I got to the hospital, I found some thirty-five of the men who were wounded in my operation and recaptured. A German surgeon gave an American and Serbian complete control over all the wounded and left us alone. The American doctor, Capt. BRUBACKER, put me in a room off in a corner and I was just a patient. The Germans didn't know who I was or anything about me.

The following day, the General of the camp came back with more guards after marching some 500 to 600 prisoners to NURNBERG. As these American prisoners were recaptured, they were marched back to NURNBERG. They started to evacuate American wounded to BAD KISSINGEN which was declared an open city due to the fact that it had some thirty to forty Kraut hospitals. They had no Americans in the town and wanted to put up an American flag because they were afraid of trouble when the Americans came. In this town was either Goebbel's or Goering's family – I couldn't swear to which. Within the next four days, German ambulances came and evacuated some sixteen or eighteen Americans to this town. All during the days spent in the hospital, the Serbs had hid American PW's that came back in their barracks. The enlisted men's camp had no guards whatsoever, but we gave them instructions they were to stay in camp and not wander out. Only the French and Russians took off for the villages to get food. A batch had taken to the woods in the vicinity of the camp and they were in such a position the Krauts couldn't handle them to evacuate them – that's the way we wanted to keep them.

On April 6th, the 14th Armored Division rolled in with a combat command reinforced and freed the place. Immediate evacuation of our medical patients was made. The enlisted men and sixty-five or seventy officers that remained at that camp were taken care of through proper channels. These officers I refer to are ex-prisoners who had sneaked into the Serbian hospital – they knew the ropes. When we saw the difficulty we were going to have, these sixty-five remained and the balance went back to stockade. Quite a few of those sixty-five were killed or wounded, but they were fighters.

Regarding operations, that's what transpired going from the beginning to the end.