

Subj: Re: Hammelburg Raid Date: 4/29/03 10:14:11 AM Central Daylight Time From: abo122@airmail.net To: PDomes@aol.com CC: THO7448@aol.com <i>Sent from the Internet (Details)</i>
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Teuer Herr Oberst:

Ich mochte nur Deutsch sprechen, aber im vorbeigegangenen 60 Jahre, habe ich beinahe alles vergessen. Darum, werde ich auf Englisch schreiben.

Bob Thompson mentioned you in a recent phone call, and I sincerely hope that we can meet some day to discuss my experiences in Germany.

I was wounded and captured on 20 January 1945 by an element of the 111th Panzer Regiment of the 11th Panzer Division near the town of Nennig on the Moselle River. This division was, despite the lateness of the war, still in outstanding shape. Its officers and men were well trained, and morale seemed to be quite high.

I was taken to the battalion command post, where the battalion commander greeted me and indicated that I would be taken to the aide station at regimental headquarters, where my wounds would be treated. The battalion commander then asked to see my steel helmet, at which time he showed the helmet and its liner to members of his staff. I then knew that the 11th Panzer Division must have recently arrived from the eastern front.

At the headquarters of the 111th Regiment, a sergeant came to me and apologized for not having an officer in the unit who spoke English. He was very military in his approach and very courteous. He then took me to the medical aide station, where my wounds were covered with sulphur powder and a paper bandage - - the only medicine available at the station. Then, I was placed in a truck and taken to Division Rear, where a lieutenant colonel (probably the division adjutant general) met me and informed me that I would be billeted temporarily in the room occupied by a master sergeant.

Here the story gets long. Suffice it to say that I managed to escape from the sergeant, but the snow was so deep that it took only an hour for the search party to find me and return me to the lieutenant colonel. Instead of shooting me, this man told me that he had discussed my escape with the division commander, that the CG had said that it was my duty to try to escape, since my serial number indicated that I was a career officer. After failing to promise that I would not try again to escape, the division evacuated me at 0200 hours the next morning - to a transient POW camp at Limburg, north of Koln. After some twelve days in the castle at Diez (an interrogation center for selected prisoners), I travelled by train boxcar to Hammelburg.

My next chance to escape came when the Baum task force arrived at Offlag XIII-B. Four other prisoners joined me as we headed out into the Hitler Youth training center adjacent to the camp. Two of them were too weak to go even 100 yards. Two more got sick after about a mile or two and turned back. Lt. Bob Jonscher and I continued.

We arrived in Gmunden am Main shortly before dawn and were almost found by the hundreds of German soldiers digging entrenchments - - expecting perhaps another armored thrust by General Patton north of the Main River. However, they were all so busy digging that we slowly walked away, crossed over a small bridge and started walking south along a paved road.

As dawn broke, we saw a horse-drawn carriage approaching, and we waved it down. The driver was a young German soldier, and he appeared to be scared to death. We asked for a ride, and he naturally said yes. The road took us south toward (we later learned) Wurzburg. When we noted that traffic was picking up, we thanked the frightened soldier, jumped out of the carriage, and ran into some woods. The soldier was last seen whipping his horse to make it run faster.

That night, we entered Wurzburg, found a vacant building, and got some sleep. Then, the American planes

came over, dropping leaflets telling the citizens to get out of town quickly -- before the bombers came to destroy the city. We believed what we read and walked out of town along with tens of thousands of local citizens. When we were well out of town, we dropped out of the crowd and walked into some woods. We got some more sleep and ate the fish in the can of sardines we had found.

While we were sleeping, some German soldiers in search of escaping American POWs found us and put us with about 100 other prisoners taken so far. We were marched to a large factory and taken up to a large room on the second floor, which conveniently had toilet facilities. After another failed attempt to get away through the bathroom window, we were marched in a column of three prisoners along a road toward the north. When we started to pass through a town that had undoubtedly been a training center for combat in cities, Bob and I, having placed ourselves in the middle of the very long line of prisoners, dropped into an empty house as we were rounding a corner and neither of the two guards could see us.

We found three raw potatoes in the house in which we hid until the line of prisoners finished its march through town. Then, we tried to cook the potatoes inside one of the houses and almost set the town on fire. So, we ate the potatoes raw.

Later, we started walking north along the road. Suddenly, a stranger approached us. He happened to be a British corporal named Shad Shanahan, who had been captured in Tobruk, worked on a local German farm for about two years, and convince the Hausfrau that he should be permitted to escape. She even gave him some German money and a half loaf of Schwarzbrot. Shad asked to join us. So, we then had three on our team. We also had bread to eat.

The next day, we were still working our way north in search of a way to cross the Main River when we heard a noise. It turned out to be a very young American private named "Bullets" Klasarwitz, who had been in the U. S. Army about twenty weeks and had managed to escape from his captors during his first day of combat. He had been in an armored division that was trying to capture Wurzburg. We now had four on the team.

We continued our way northeast, until after a day or so, we saw a German farm house that was completely isolated -- at least two or three kilometers from the nearest Dorf. We went to the house and knocked on the door. When the owner opened the door, we told him we were escaping prisoners, that we planned to tell the Americans when we found them just which Germans had been good to us. The owner immediately said, "Mein Name is Karl Bohn, und mein Nummer ist ---". He also said he was poor, but he would give us some bread and white butter, plus his last bottle of schnaps. We insisted on giving him some of the German money that Shad Shanahan had received from the Frau he worked for. "Bullets", who still weighed in at almost 200 pounds, drank the entire bottle of Schnaps, and immediately became quite drunk. So we ate our slices of bread and margarine and headed for some woods about a kilometer away.

That night, we reached Schweinfurt, not knowing that we were really quite close to Hammelburg after all these days. We managed to get across the bridge crossing the Main, using some quick "Heil Hitlers" as we passed the one guard.

We left Schweinfurt quickly and decided to follow the river to the south but to remain on the ridgeline formed by the hills along the Main. It took a couple of days following such a rough route, but we saw no Germans, and we got some sleep in ancient castles, despite the cold and the rain.

Then Bob and Shad became sick, so we decided to look for a small town and try to get some food and some sleep in one of the town's barns. Before long, we spotted what we wanted, and there was a barn on the edge of town. After dark, we walked down to the barn, entered, did what we could to quiet the cattle therein, and climbed up to the loft for a night of dry sleep. It wasn't hay in the loft. It was grape vines, but we slept so long that the entire town was active when we awoke. We started to rush out of the barn, only to stop quickly and watch an entire German company, complete with hand-towed kitchen, in the process of evacuating the town because of the threat of the advancing Americans.

We decided to look for another isolated farm house. We walked to the top of a small hill, and there below us was just what we were looking for. We walked to the window of the house, tapped, told the occupants who we were and that we wanted to buy some food. The occupants were so frightened that they immediately handed us a two-kilo loaf of schwarzbrot. We were delighted.

Just then, around the corner came three burly men. They recognized us, with our beards and dirty clothes, as

prisoners, and introduced themselves as French prisoners. They told us that the Americans would be there (a town on the main River named Obervolkach) probably that day. They suggested that we go into the local woods, build a fire, eat what we had, and wait for them. Then they gave us each a pack of American cigarettes and some chocolate bars.

We spent the day eating and sleeping -- and listening to the sound of the approaching artillery fires. That night, Hubert (the most alert of the three Frenchmen) came by and said, "Vous etes livre". We jumped up, thinking the Americans had taken Obervolkach and entered the town with the three French prisoners. The German Burgermeister was standing there with a white flag in his hand, ready to surrender his town to us. I asked him how many Frenchmen he had in town, and when he said forty, I assembled them and made Hubert the platoon leader, told them to collect all the guns in town, asked where the forty men slept at night, and suggested that Hubert and his men stand guard until the Americans arrived.

We then went up to the second floor of the Rathaus, found forty well-blanketed beds, made a milk shake from the contents of the many Red Cross parcels in the room, and passed out cold, lice and all.

Early the next morning, the Frenchmen, plus the one Polish prisoner we had not yet uncovered, all rode out on confiscated bicycles. One of them returned with a motorized patrol from the U. S. 42nd Infantry Division. That was the 8th of April, twelve days after we left Hammelburg. The first thing we were offered by one of the soldiers was a piece of Fanny Farmer candy sent to him by his mother. We all declined -- but we were free. After the patrol gave Hubert a large box of kitchen matches, we were on our way to regimental headquarters.

I hope this story will give you an idea of how we made it to the American lines. Some day, I would like to tell you about how I was able to return the kindness of the 11th Panzer Division -- after I had joined another unit, become a company commander, and was charged with the responsibility of screening the Soldbuchs of German soldiers trying to get back home after the war.

More importantly, I hope that we shall have an opportunity to meet some day soon. I ended up with thirty-three years in the service of my country. My final combat experience was as commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division in Vietnam. I was not a Fallschirmjager when in Germany.

Regards,

A. R. (Bud) Bolling, Jr.
Major General, USA (Ret)

----- Original Message -----

From: PDomes@aol.com
To: abo122@airmail.net
Cc: THO7448@aol.com
Sent: Monday, April 28, 2003 11:19 PM
Subject: Hammelburg Raid

Sir,

my name is LTC Peter Domes, I'm officer in the German Army and I'm researching the so called Hammelburg Raid.

My friend Bob Thompson told me that you were also a POW in OFLAG XIII-B and you made it back to the American lines. It would be most interested to learn from your experiences.

We run a homepage, which can be found under this URL:

Tuesday, April 29, 2003 America Online: THO7448

<http://www.taskforcebaum.de>

Best regards

Peter Domes