

Sam Carlick

The following information on Sam is an excerpt from an unpublished manuscript of A History of the Jewish Community in Paducah, Kentucky, written by his wife Jeannie Carlick. All material in quotation marks are Sam's own words.

When their duties at Sicily were completed, the Ninth set sail from Palermo. Sam Carlick's unit boarded the USS Santa Rosa--"destination unknown." No sooner had Sam arrived at his cramped quarters--a cabin so small that six double bunks consumed every inch of floor space--than he found a note from a fellow Paducahan, Captain Ted Rosenberg. Rosenberg had been in Sicily at the same time as Carlick, although neither man knew it. The doctor had seen Sam's name on a Santa Rosa passenger list and invited the young lieutenant to his quarters for a drink. Carlick accepted the invitation with alacrity. Rosenberg concocted drinks--"canned grapefruit juice and [grain] alcohol used for medicinal purposes." Being a military physician had its advantages. Lieutenant Carlick especially appreciated Captain Rosenberg's hospitality, since alcohol was ordinarily forbidden on troop ships. Their one meeting was brief, since Carlick had to return to the infantry section of the ship, to remain segregated there for the duration of the crossing. Ordinarily, infantry personnel were not allowed in the medical section of the ship, since Rosenberg's field hospital unit included Army nurses. As Sam Carlick would recall years later, "Needless to say, I was delighted to see [Ted], however short the meeting."

On Thanksgiving Day, Sam Carlick learned his destination--Winchester, England, where he continued training for what the world would remember as D-Day. In April 1944, his regiment took another step toward making history, moving south to

Bournemouth. Here, as noted above, his path crossed his brother Ed's a second time. Neither of the Lieutenants Carlick was aware of all that would happen before they met again.

A day or two before D-Day, the Ninth Division was placed on six-hour alert, later whittled to one hour, for immediate transfer to a marshalling area. Sam Carlick's division landed on Utah Beach on D-Day Plus Four, replacing the original landing units and fighting on to secure the entire Contentin Peninsula.

"This is one date I will never forget." On June 15, 1944, as Carlick's company was threading its way through the hedgerows, they ran smack into a German barrage of heavy mortar and artillery fire. As second in command of his company, Sam Carlick set out in the direction of the front line, when he met up with a five-man patrol with orders to reconnoiter the enemy. As the men sought protection behind a hedgerow, a German tank fired at them, missing only because it had come too close to lower its guns enough to hit the crouching targets. As the tank continued to roll toward him, Carlick was in more danger of being flattened than of being shot. To avoid being "squashed" under tons of Nazi metal, he and one other soldier made a dash to the left of the oncoming tank. "[O]ur luck ran out." The two Americans ran "right into the arms of an infantry platoon" backing up the tanks. The Germans were apparently too stunned to shoot the Americans. Perhaps their surprise was the reason Sam Carlick lived to tell his story--the story of an incredible year as a prisoner-of-war of the Nazis.

Captured near Tessy Sur Vire, Sam Carlick spent his first night of captivity in a

hay loft in a French barn. The Germans gave the prisoners no food; French farmers, however, gave them bread, which they in turn had to share with their captors. The next morning, the Germans drove home to Carlick and his fellow prisoners the gravity of their plight. As they moved out of the barn, the Nazis, lest someone escape by hiding beneath the straw, sprayed the loft with bullets. Then, Carlick and other Americans, primarily from the Eighty-Second and 101st Airborne Divisions, set out on an eight-day march to Rennes, temporary quarters until July 4.

On July 4, the day that Paducahans were reading Ted Rosenberg's invasion diary, Sam Carlick--with other Americans, as well as British and Canadians--were herded onto a train of the infamous forty-and-eight cars, for a twenty-three day trip across France to another way station at Chalon-Sur-Marne. As this leg of their journey to nowhere occurred in high summer, the heat would have been intense at best. As it was, it was indescribably brutal: the Americans were still clad in the woolen, olive-drab uniforms, chemically impregnated against enemy gas attacks.

The infernal boxcars were so jammed that the captives had to sit or sleep in shifts. Exacerbating already intolerable physical distress were hunger and thirst: food and water were meager to non-existent. Sam Carlick's daily allotment on the train was a three-inch chunk of bread--"mostly sawdust." Whatever bodily eliminations their scanty intake necessitated, the prisoners deposited in an open oil can at one end of the car. When the train stopped, the Nazis did allow them to empty their body waste.

It should come as no surprise that inmates of these subhuman conditions devised

a plan for two-by-two escapes, the order of which they decided by lots. As the train strained uphill, two would jump off. In all, six slipped away in this manner. Every time the train stopped, the Nazi guards would leap off and surround the train to thwart escapes. Because of the guards' procedure, the escape of Sam Carlick and his partner was foiled by an unanticipated stop. The Nazis had discovered the escape plot and sent in Storm Troopers. Flaunting their authority with trademark Nazi sadism, they ordered six prisoners to dig six graves beside the tracks. Carlick and the other onlookers could only imagine the purpose of the grisly exercise. After what must have seemed a lifetime, the POWs were ordered back on the train. The Nazis had enjoyed their little joke. The hellish ride ended at Chalon on July 28.

After about a week in Chalon, Sam Carlick again was loaded onto a train for another temporary camp at Limburg, Germany, where they awaited assignment to a permanent camp. On September 10, Carlick and the other prisoners were yet again packed into boxcars bound for their final destination, an American officers' camp, Oflag 64, in Szubin, Poland. There were 1,300 American officers interned there; those captured in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy were "old kriegies"; those seized during the invasion of France were dubbed "new kriegies."

Like his brother Ed in Belgium, Sam Carlick remembers that "[t]he winter of 1944-45 was an extremely cold one." Since prison quarters had virtually no heat, Carlick and his fellows, during waking hours, sat around their barracks bundled in all the clothing available to them. Their caloric intake barely fended off starvation; the prisoners did not

derive enough energy from their food to allow exercise. They did, however, strive to maintain the best physical condition possible under the circumstances; they took daily walks in anticipation of "any unforeseen events."

During confinement, Sam Carlick and the other officers found ways to maintain their sanity. They assembled a radio, the parts to which had been smuggled to them, one at a time, by Polish partisans. Through this clandestine lifeline, known to only a handful of officers, Carlick heard General Eisenhower's orders not to attempt escape, since the end of the war was near. Another piece of contraband was a Christian Bible, which also rotated among the prisoners. Sam read it from cover to cover--Old Testament and New.

In January 1945, the grueling routine was interrupted by "the sound of cannon and mortar fire from the east." The Russians were on their way. The Germans, terrified of a Russian onslaught, evacuated Oflag 64, marching the prisoners eastward. Sam Carlick enveloped himself in all his clothing, "including a Russian or Polish soldier's wool overcoat that had been given to me on arrival at [Oflag] 64 by the Red Cross, to ward off the cold, Polish winter weather." Swathed in heavy winter gear, Sam Carlick and others trudged over "lonely Polish roads" and through snowdrifts, some knee-deep, until they came to Jastrow, "where we were to be honored with another train ride."

This time, the prisoners headed to a prison camp in Luckenwalde, Germany. En route, their train was sidetracked in Berlin, where they waited "for what seemed like an eternity, [as] the wail of sirens and the shouts of our guards announced another [Allied] air attack." With their usual fiendishness, the Nazi guards would not let their prisoners

leave the boxcars. Clearly targets for "friendly fire," the prisoners huddled in the cars, while "bombs fell all around us and the concussions caused our car to rock and dance on the tracks." Sam would later learn that what had blasted their ears and jarred the train was the Allies' "largest daylight bombing raid ever on Berlin." A day or so later, they rolled into Luckenwalde.

In April 1945, the Russian Army liberated the POWs from Luckenwalde. "German guards who had not fled were taken prisoners by the Russians to suffer a fate that the Nazis deserved." The Russians counseled the Allied prisoners to wait for the American forces, expected in a couple of hours. After waiting two days for the two-hour arrival, Sam Carlick and others to make their own way "through the shambles of war," avoiding the main arteries clogged with refugees, Nazi troops, and broken-down vehicles. Following a railroad line, they walked "in a westerly direction" to American troops, who gave them a lift in a jeep back to the American lines.

The day after V-E Day, Sam Carlick, now ex-POW, returned to American control. Shortly afterward, he was on a ship, homeward bound at last. The year's hunger had taken its toll: his weight had fallen from its normal 160 to an emaciated 118 pounds. For the hardships he endured and the valor with which he withstood them, Sam Carlick was awarded several decorations: the Bronze Star with oak leaf cluster, the EAME Medal with four battle stars, the American Campaign Medal, the Prisoner-of-War Medal, the World War II Victory Medal, and a Letter of Commendation from Manton S. Eddy, commanding general of the Ninth Infantry.

Of all the horrors that befell Sam Carlick, the hunger pangs are among his most vivid memories. To this day, he tends to snap at someone who complains about his food: "You've never been really hungry. If you had, everything would taste good."^[i]

The eldest Carlick brother, Harry, was the last to enter the military. Harry's induction was deferred for a time, since, as the last male in the family, he was supporting their mother, Helen Carlick. It had been the general policy of the draft board to spare the head of a household with several sons already in service.

However, because of an urgent need for more manpower, Harry Carlick was inducted and assigned to the Coast Artillery. After basic training at Camp Pendleton, West Virginia, he served with a Coast Artillery battery near Miami, Florida, where his years of experience in the family business qualified him to serve as supply sergeant. His brothers never let Harry Carlick live down his "hardship duty" in Miami.

The United States also acknowledged the bravery of Helen Carlick, who sent all her sons to defend her adopted country. For her sacrifice, Helen Carlick was named a "Blue Star Mother," receiving a flag with three blue stars: one for Harry, another for Ed, and a third for Sam.^[ii]