



National Archives and Records Administration

8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, Maryland 20740-6001

July 8, 2003

NWCTM-0309013-TKN

Robert Thompson
7448 E. 68th Place
Tulsa OK 74133

Dear Mr. Thompson:

This is in response to your recent inquiry to the National Archives concerning the name of two black GIs (officers) killed during a "tank battle" in the attempted liberation of Stalag XIIIIB.

Enclosed is a copy of an account of the attempted liberation of Hammelburg. As we indicated previously, we are unable to identify by name casualties that were incurred during this action, but we hope you will find this information of value.

Sincerely,

TIMOTHY K. NENNINGER
Chief, Modern Military Records
Textual Archives Services Division

601-0-3,0

Notes on Park Force Baum - 14th Army Div

10 Apr 45

B. 15735

This appeared in Sab. Evening Post in Spring 9/1948

SECRET
HEADQUARTERS 4TH ARMORED DIVISION
APO 254, U. S. Army

SECRET
AUTH:CG41A.DIV
Initials
Date: 2/11/45

CLASSIFICATION Changed
Cancelled
by Authority of 7. K. Heath
by F. K. Heath
AN 1949 Date.....

F. K. HEATH
CWO USA
Assistant Adjutant General
NOTES ON TASK FORCE BAUM

10 April 1945.

We broke through at SCHWEINHEIM 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 HAIIBACH GRUMMORSBACH where we received our first bazooka fire. 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 LAUBACH 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 fire. 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 towards us. The town was so situated that we just happened to get on the right road and pass on 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 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 antiaircraft 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 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 was 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 BURGSIINN as there was no bridge in RIENECK. In BURGSIINN 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 camp site 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 halftracks and a platoon of infantry went on and started making a move to free the camp. Meanwhile, my medium tanks 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

SECRET

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 halftracks and three peeps, one being a medical peep - one of the halftracks 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 rode on my vehicles, reorganized and got ready to go back. A great number of the 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 road blocks. At HOLLRICH three more tanks were bazookaed. 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 halftracks 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 tank. 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 halftracks 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 northeast 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 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 in 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 of 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.

SECRET

A German surgeon gave an American and Serbian complete control over all these 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 some guards after marching some 500 or 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 an American flag up 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 these 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 these sixty-five were killed or wounded, but they were fighters.

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

Mr. Lake: What percentage of your force had become casualties up to the time you were about to return?

Capt. Baum: Of course, I lost men in each town I passed through. When I burned the halftracks, all that I could barely scrape together were two platoons, which must have been about 110 men. The halftracks were full of non-serious casualties and the infantry were on the tanks.

Mr. Lake: Would you have had enough gas to return?

Capt. Baum: I had enough gas for a thirty-eight to forty mile trip, and heading up I covered forty-nine miles. I wasn't heading back in the same direction from which I had come, but started for the north with hopes of meeting up with the column. When we moved out, they told me they were going in a northeasterly direction and I was to head for that direction.

Mr. Lake: Did you send any radio messages?

Capt. Baum: I sent back three messages, all CW, but didn't have a chance to send any personal ones. Right after I asked for air mission at GEMUNDEN, I got it that day.

Mr. Lake: Did you see any of the air force?

Capt. Baum: I didn't have time to see any air as I was elsewhere. The P-47's sort of hindered the Krauts around the marshalling area.

Mr. Lake: What was Major Stiller's status?

Capt. Baum: He came along for the ride. He was in a light tank and his only direction in command was in immediate happenings. At one particular time when we dismounted, he did go up with a couple of men to get hold of a jeep that had two dead men in it. He cleaned that area himself. He took part in the fighting. I really never knew his mission. He came along for the ride looking for a thrill and got it. The point I want to bring out is that the men who were with me should get the publicity from the personal angle. As soon as more men come back, I'll write up the decorations and you'll be able to get that. My enlisted men and officer personnel were tops. Considering the condition of the troops when we left that night, I got result I never expected. During the fighting and at the time the Kraut liaison plane came around, even the wounded in the halftracks manned the machine guns in the vehicles - I can't bring up any specific example, but I do know it transpired because I passed up and down the column and saw them on the guns.

Mr. Lake: Can you give some information on the camp?

Capt. Baum: It was immense and heavily guarded. There was no resistance from the towers as the guards took off. About an hour after we arrived the prisoners came out. Only enough personnel to inform the people went into the camp and informed them to go into the woods. I don't think the fence was electrically charged. I went through it a couple of times myself.

Mr. Lake: How did you operate going into towns?

Capt. Baum: When we entered a town if we got any fire, I commanded cease fire or fire. I was right behind the lead tanks. All weapons were fired at suspicious places. No HE was fired at night when passing through town because the column would have to stop.

Mr. Lake: Did you have complete control of direction even when a bridge was blown? Did you have any alternate routes?

Capt. Baum: There were none picked in advance and it delayed us for a while until we reorganized as it took a little time to get the infantry out of town.

Mr. Lake: When were you wounded?

Capt. Baum: At GEMUNDEN I was first wounded by bazooka. The tank company and infantry company commanders and myself were standing next to a medium tank when a bazooka shell exploded and particles hit us. The tank company commander was pretty well hit in the leg so I ordered him to the halftracks. I was hit in the knee and hand, touching the bone in both places. I would venture to say that during the whole operation we had sixty-five to seventy bazookas firing at the column. Most of these near misses were the ones that got the infantrymen.

Mr. Lake: How many German troops did you capture?

Capt. Baum: I must have had close to 200 PW's of which I turned a good portion over to the Russians.

SECRET

Mr. Lake: During this operation how many prisoners would you say your task force created?

Capt. Baum: I can relatively say that an area with a twenty mile radius was in the most confused state I saw the Kraut. They didn't know what direction we were coming from or what we were doing there. They sure threw enough stuff in there to stop me.

Mr. Lake: When did the German General get away from you?

Capt. Baum: He was with us in the halftrack all the time until we were attacked when the vehicle he was in got hit and that's why the men let him go. He got away in that tussle. Send for Sgt. Graham as he can give you more on the personal side as he was with the men.

Mr. Lake: How were you captured?

Capt. Baum: It was around 1930 when a German Sergeant took me. Krauts were all around, but he was the only one near me and shot me with a P38 when I ran from him. I received a grazing wound in the thigh which was just enough to tell me the fellow could shoot a gun. He had a rifle on his shoulder but pulled his pistol instead as I was only twenty-five feet away. He picked up his rifle and motioned us to come out. About fifteen men who had been captured were lined up a short distance away and if I had shot him, they would have killed them. The Major also persuaded me to go and the lieutenant helped me along.

Mr. Lake: What day did this task force start out?

Capt. Baum: The night of the 26th.

Mr. Lake: Sgt. Graham, just bring up the special cases of heroism of different individuals. What was your job in this particular mission.

Sgt. Graham: I was platoon leader of the assault gun section.

Mr. Lake: What was the hottest spot during the whole operation?

Sgt. Graham: I think the hottest spot was around the stockade at one time for the infantry guys. We were receiving machine gun and sniper fire from there.

Mr. Lake: Did you knock them out?

Sgt. Graham: We knocked out all we could, but when we got in the stockade, they quieted down as it was getting dark.

Capt. Baum: I had two AG's on the hill supporting the tanks and infantry and these 105's are rough on direct fire so they quit. We lost one AG below the hill just before we came up to the stockade.

Mr. Lake: Was the camp in a hollow?

Sgt. Graham: It was on a hill - a saucer shaped piece of ground and the hill was on an angle of thirty-five degrees from the valley. There was a double row of barbed wire through which we stormed through with tanks. Dismounted men went all through the buildings releasing prisoners.

Mr. Lake: Were there any lights?

Sgt. Graham: No, they just went off before we got there.

Mr. Lake: What sort of greetings did you get?

Sgt. Graham: All the guys began climbing on the tanks and kissing and hugging you. We had to push them off.

Mr. Lake: What kind of clothing did they wear?

Capt. Baum: They were in scattered uniform and that in which they were captured - some even had blouses and pinks.

Mr. Lake: How many of these got back?

Capt. Baum: They know of about fifteen or sixteen right now, but expect there will be more. None of them had compasses and there was too much enemy territory to cover.

Mr. Lake: Did they treat the men rough when they were recaptured?

Capt. Baum: Upon recapture, the treatment of the prisoners was excellent. Everybody was surprised.

Mr. Lake: Were you interrogated at all?

Capt. Baum: No, when I got in the town of HUNDSFELD these PW's with me told the German lieutenant that I had been wounded trying to escape from the camp and they immediately threw me on the side and left me lay.

Mr. Lake: They didn't know who the leader was?

Capt. Baum: Major Stiller was their prize catch. After they got him, they knew he wasn't from the camp. He also tried to get in, but the guard with him wouldn't be bribed and took him. He was still alive and well when I left him.

~~SECRET~~

Mr. Lake: Did you identify any divisions in the area?

Capt. Baum: Yes, one SS Division, Panzer, and one Infantry Division. I didn't get any prisoners except those at LOHR and didn't go for identification when I learned how many there were. I got out.

Mr. Lake: Were liaison planes over you at any time?

Capt. Baum: A liaison plane got up for communication, but couldn't go over me as they couldn't go out forty or fifty miles with those things.

Mr. Lake: How far away from HAMMELBURG was the military stockade?

Capt. Baum: This place was two and a half kilometers south of HAMMELBURG. The camp had everything, there including artillery, bazooka ranges and even pillboxes from which they observed the burats. That's where they stayed. I was parked right in the middle of the area on that hill when daylight came. I would have never got to the camp had I gone east. My move made it successful.

Mr. Lake: Did you see any men that fired guns while wounded?

Sgt. Graham: Yes, I saw that. When we stormed the stockade I saw a man get hit by machine gun fire, fall down and race up and fire at the machine gun that hit him. He was on foot and got hit quite bad. He raised to his knees and fired until they mowed him down.

Capt. Baum: That was typical of the whole operation. My medics were operating the best they ever did. When evacuating wounded, they'd take Krauts too and make an encirclement of the area so the Krauts wouldn't fire at them. There was never an order questioned throughout the whole trip, and not a peep or skwack out of any of them.

Mr. Lake: How did you get in with the Serbs?

Capt. Baum: The officer's place was vacated and so they formed the Serbian hospital. That's where I got in with them. There were no German nurses in the Kraut hospital.

Mr. Lake: Did the 14th know you were in the vicinity?

Capt. Baum: I assume they ran into a couple of PW's and some sort of direction of attack must have been made. They knew of me.

Mr. Lake: Were they any Serbs in your ward?

Capt. Baum: They were separated. There were so many wounded they opened up a new ward. My men and a group of officers were in my ward - about thirty five men. A few were evacuated to BAD KISSINGEN.

Mr. Lake: How were they selected?

Capt. Baum: This Major made the selection. A lot of the cases in the hospital were just in there and were considered litter cases to the Krauts. The German doctor never questioned anything about the patients. Major Burn was in charge of the American patients and he leisurely selected them.

Mr. Lake: How did you get back, Sgt. Graham?

Sgt. Graham: I walked back all the way from where we got knocked out to the 45th Division line. With a group of four I took off from the hill into the woods. Two miles out we ran into a German patrol and the others got captured.

Mr. Lake: How come you didn't get captured?

Sgt. Graham: I told them to go up a draw and that they would be safe. I had quite a bit of cover and they went up on the other side of the hill and the Germans fired at them. I took off up the draw and was covered by the woods. The fourth day out I ran into a German corporal who had a P38 all cocked and aimed at me. I also had my .45 pointed at him but it happened that he spoke good English and told me it was no use. I told him to put his down and I would mine. I told him I was heading for the front lines but didn't say how many days I'd been out. He then asked me to take his P38 and shoot a hole through his arm so that he could then go back to town and get evacuated. He said he had a wife and children. I knew that if I fired then I would draw the attention of troops in the vicinity so I took his pistol and told him to head out. He told me to avoid all towns as there was home guard in each town and that it was best to travel through the woods. The fifth day I was quite hungry as I hadn't had any food so I went up to a farmhouse and decided I'd go in and ask for food. I got halfway up the twelve concrete steps when I met the German farmer with three soldiers going down. I wasn't hungry any more. It was dark so they passed me and went into the barn. I didn't have any food for six days. I had plenty of water out of the creeks and when I got tired I took a nap in the woods. The sixth day the 45th Division was attacking five kilometers from where I was so I was going in that

SECRET

direction. I met three German officers in the woods - a Major, Lieutenant and a rank officer higher than Major. I drew my .45 on them and motioned them on down. One with field glasses spoke good English and told me he'd surrender and I told him there was nothing else to do. I asked him what troops were attacking in this vicinity and he told me he couldn't understand English. I asked him for his pistol, maps and dispatch case and he handed them to me. I then told him that if he understood this far he would continue understanding. I pulled the hammer back on the pistol and told him to tell me what troops were attacking. He then told me that Americans were here with some panzer and quite a bit of infantry. He said there were no German troops around so I then told the three officers to beat it. I spotted a tank firing so I figured if I came to the front of it I'd get mowed down. When I came nearer I discovered it was a German tank and that a TD was firing at it. Two guys got out of the tank and twenty-five infantrymen took off too so I got away too and we raced for the top of the hill. When I got to the top, I got weak and couldn't move any farther. Just then a German motorcyclist came by and killed his motor right by me. A couple of Germans came to him there only twenty-five feet from me and I really got scared then. In that woods the 180th Infantry had a company in there searching. I spotted them and skirmished the lines as I thought they were Krauts. They saw my pistol and started yelling in German to me. One called me a Kraut son of a bitch and yelled for me to come out. I told them I was American and they told me not to hand them that crap and to throw my pistol away. I walked on down towards them and showed them my dogtags, but they weren't convinced and that's when I got to feel uneasy. They asked me who was my division commander, army commander, battalion commander, platoon leader and really gave me a workout - about maneuvers, where I sailed from, where I landed in France, and the different towns we had taken. I finally convinced them I was an American soldier and they sent me to battalion headquarters after which I was sent to XV Corps.

Mr. Lake: What was your first meal?

Sgt. Graham: I had a cup of coffee and a cup of pineapple. The captain told me not to eat too much and so when I ate that it gave me the cramps. I feel fine now.