

**A GRAND TOUR
OF
RUSSIA TO ODESSA,
WINTER-1945**

By
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INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

To set the stage for the narrative which follows seems appropriate. The author was a paratrooper in the 101st Airborne Division, which had trained at Fort Bragg, N. C., and staged near Newbury, Berks in England. The division jumped into Normandy France in the early hours of June, 6, 1944 and many of its units were widely dispersed miles from the division objectives. After a few days of fighting and marching southward to join the main elements a fire fight broke out and led to his capture.

Almost three months later he had crossed France, Germany and was marched into Oflag 64 at Szubin, Poland. And there the story begins.

As the reader begins to notice why the author holds such deep appreciation and high esteem for the Polish and Russian civilians and soldiers with whom he came in contact. While they were meager in resources, they were great in their generosity and kindness toward all of us who took the eastern route. This was true all the way from Exin, where the joy of freedom was attained, to the end of the long journey to Odessa. An obvious welcome was extended nearly all the way.

Some of that same kind of hospitality is even present today here in my hometown where a Polish Officer, Capt. Francis Longchamp, held in Stalag VIIB for a time, now resides. He has shared his time and vast knowledge of his homeland in my research gladly, much the same way his countrymen treated us newly freed Americans.

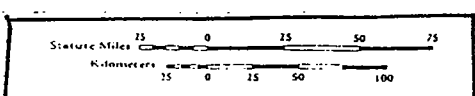
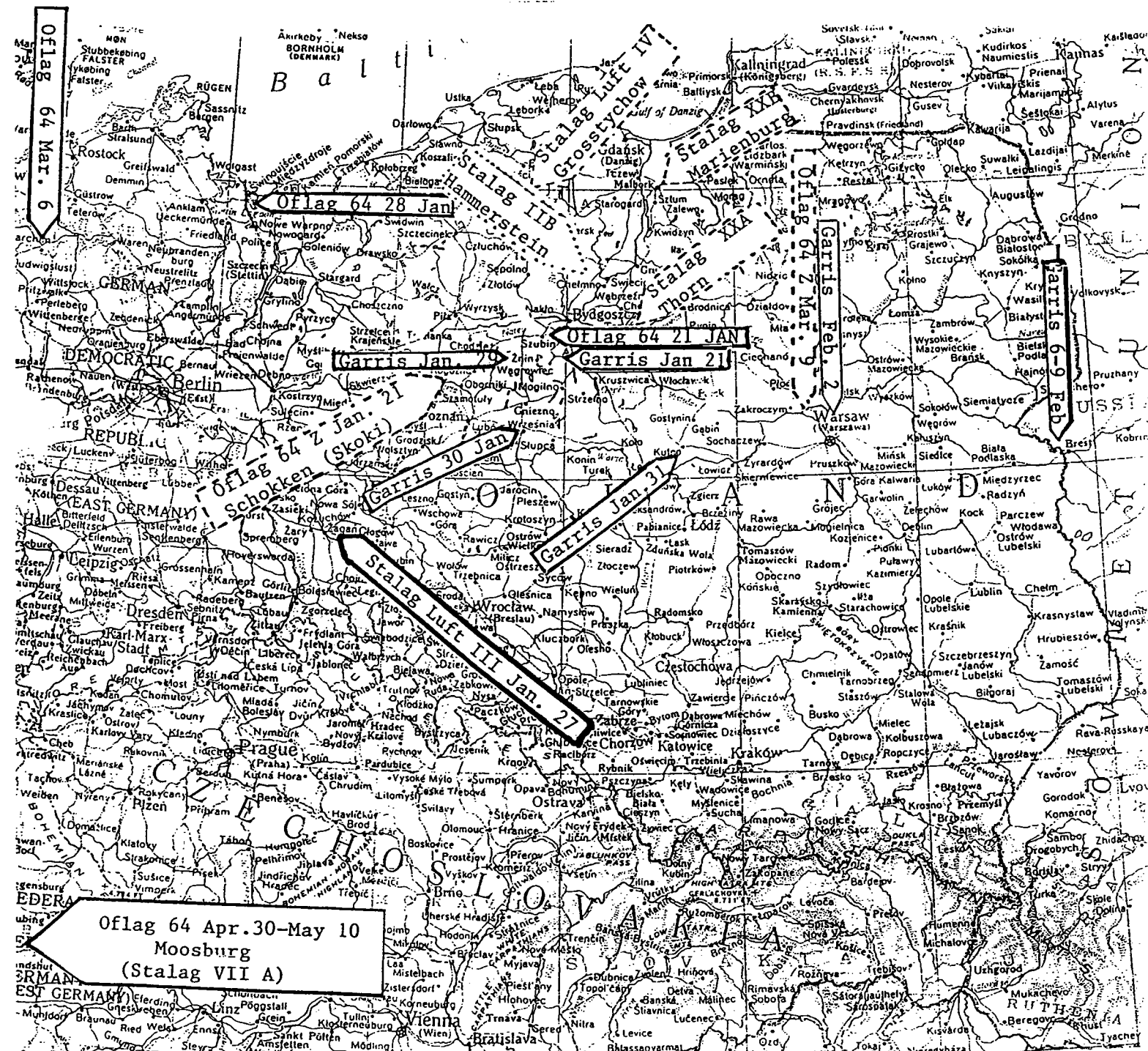
Clarence Meltesen, who lives in San Francisco, is a fairly new acquaintance of mine. Since reviewing his poignant and accurate book The Roads to Liberation from Oflag 64, we have become regular correspondents. Over this period a copy of a rough draft notes written in Naples in the spring of 1945 by the author came to his attention. It was his encouragement and recognition which led to its final form of today. Realizing it was a story of the many travels and observations of events and personalities in a time of great transition and a war rapidly coming to a close. My thanks, Clarence for the long hours of editing and research of places with two names, usually, to the final product which you have here.

Bob Levin, another Tar Heel from Seven Lakes nearby has become a great asset as a former Oflag 64 resident over the past two years. He was deeply involved in the cadre sent to Oflag 64 Z to open it and take some of the load from Oflag 64. This relatively small group retained its integrity and with Russian coordination, under the guidance of LTC Doyle R. Yardley, found its way to Warsaw and ultimately to Odessa. Bob has written a nice story on the subject entitled Schokken to Wugarten, which should be released shortly.

In summary and with great humility this work is dedicated to the nearly 1500 of us who persevered with patience and hope for a rough period of time in an exemplary manner.

THE RUSSIAN WINTER OFFENSIVE OF 1945 WITH FORCED MARCH ROUTES OF AMERICAN GROUND FORCES POW COLUMNS AND LT GARRIS ESCAPE MOVEMENTS.

Sources: The Comprehensive World Atlas, Rand McNally & Co. 1988, Longmeadow Press, Stamford, CT.
 Roads to Liberation from Oflag 64, Clarence Meltesen, Oflag 64 Press, 810 Gonzalez Dr., San Francisco, 1987.



Cross Projection
 SCALE 1:4,000,000 1 Inch = 43 Statute Miles

A GRAND TOUR OF RUSSIA TO ODESSA,
WINTER - 1945

Herbert L. Garris
Lt Col USA Ret

On 21 January 1945 the Germans decided, with the Russian winter offensive beginning, to move all the Ground Forces Officers from Oflag 64, Szubin, Poland westward into Germany. (See operations map, Poland 12 January-3 February 1945)

The march began with over 1,200 officers walking through six or eight inches of snow on a frozen road. It was a very undignified group dressed in French, Polish, or American overcoats. There were various assortments of head coverings, packs, and blanket rolls. Food was mainly what was left of the last full Red Cross #10 box. Before I write another word, my gratitude and thanks to the American Red Cross is unlimited, for without the aforementioned boxes we would have died in the recent November-December starvation period.

As the horde on the road (that best describes it) moved along, thousands of loyal pro-Germans moved with us in horse drawn wagons. There were also soldiers; our guards and also stragglers. By evening we had marched eighteen kilometers (11 miles) to a large Polish dairy farm operated by virtue of his good service to Nazi Socialism, by Baron von Rosen, an Oberst (Colonel) in the Wehrmacht (German Army). Imagine a large American dairy farm and then visualize how you would place 1,200 men under cover for the night. It did happen, which is a minor example of the German stubbornness which has proved itself such a thorn to the democratic nations.

Morning came and visions of escape toward our Russian ally and freedom from those stupid Nazi fanatics began vividly. By full darkness the night before, Lt Carl G. Bedient, Lt Clarence H. Brown, and I had made our minds up. The plan was quite brief and foolhardy to say the least. In a U-shaped court yard the right wing was mainly the hay storage, It looked invitingly lengthy and broad with hay piled very high. We climbed a crude ladder to the second floor and began our reconnaissance. We dug down ten feet and into the center ten feet. We took with us food, blankets, canteens and a terrific determination to remain there rather than to march with the column now assembling and making its preliminary checks. We had made our decision. That was final.

We realized the German soldier was never one to slightly question an order. If the order had come down (we hoped it wouldn't) to set fire to the hay or to fire weapons at random into the hay in search of missing prisoners, the German would have done.

The entire Army guard detail had gone with the column excepting three German soldiers staying for a short time. At the Baron's house there were several of our officers now sick. The German plan to return later with a vehicle proved entirely impossible with thousands of civilians cluttering the roads westward and followed by a victory drunk Russian Army under the admirable Marshal Zhukov only a few miles away.

Beneath the straw we saw neither the column move away on a miserable tortuous march nor heard the Russian advance spearhead arrive the following night. Rather than take any chance of being discovered, we spent another night in our hide-out. Incidentally, January in Poland is cold at the best but in a hay loft it is Hell! We slept and rested close to each other depending on whatever blanket and body heat we could find to keep us alive. We thawed our canteens out beneath the blankets to obtain drinking water. Bedient (Bedie) was from York, Nebraska, a graduate of education and a wonderful guy. Brown (Tex), was a handsome artillery observer pilot from Texas. Yes! It was awful cold.

We saw other Americans in the courtyard below when we decided to come out. Very cautiously we walked out to get the "poop from the group". A good friend of mine, Captain Ed Anthony, Charlotte, North Carolina, then told me of the Russian column. The next thing was to move up to the house for some warmth and food. Though our supply was not exhausted, we needed warm food.

In the Baron's house were some 85 officers who had been left here sick, or had escaped along the road. Colonel Edgar A. Gans, assuming command, immediately assembled us all. Chaplain Robert C. Scott, my old division artillery chaplain and close friend, said thanks to God for our liberation, good fortune and blessings. I never felt any happier nor made a more sincere prayer than this time. It is hard to imagine the bitterness, hatred, and arrogant treatment dealt us the previous six months. There my determination started its course that in some way I would have to return to my outfit for redemption and retaliation.

The Polish underground had contact with the leading elements of the Russian drive. There were Sherman tanks, M-10's, Tank destroyers, and Jeeps followed by 2½ ton Studebakers. A Russian tank lieutenant came in, met Colonel Gans and then spoke with Captain Allen T. White and 2d Lieutenant Sid Waldman (both had studied hard on Russian at

the Oflag and were fairly fluent). Ours was the unenviable position of millions of Europeans, for as "displaced persons" we were not beyond suspicion as German spy agents and merited the very lowest travel priority.

The Russians assigned a Lieutenant and four soldiers to escort us from now on. He stayed in the house with us while his men stayed next door with the Mankowitz's, the Polish master of the farm for the Baron, who by now had retired to his home in Berlin. In the Oflag, I had studied German and French diligently. It began paying dividends almost immediately. The Poles took a liking to Bedie and me. His five lovely daughters may have been a factor. It was pleasant; though we would have liked to start on to Moscow. The Russians insisted that we wait and transport would take us. The stay included such enjoyment as Mrs. Mankowitz's wonderful cooking, singing Polish, Russian and American songs nightly, teaching the Polish to play "Casino", and the pleasure of being free again.

The Russian sergeant of the detail was a favorite of mine. He had me up to his room, perhaps too frequently, for my initiation to schnapps and vodka as well as a preview of the wonderful hospitality a Russian likes to display for an American. There I learned to spread lard on the "chonia chleb" (black bread) and use it as chaser. The process actually lines the stomach and intestinal walls slowing the immediate effects of the alcohol.

In a very characteristic and restless American way, we decided to leave to go to Moscow. Bedie, Tex, Captain Roy Smith and I then walked four kilometers to the first town with a rail head. Smith, generally called Smitty, a mild mannered Alabama boy wore the DSC with cluster, being a veteran of the Ninth Division attacks near Gabes, Tunisia in 1943 and in Normandy in 1944. The Polish were kind to us again providing a room in a hotel. It was quite a contrast to two weeks prior when the thorough and masterful Germans were in occupation of Kcynia. Now the streets were being patrolled by Polish Partisans. Hundreds of German deserter soldiers and local Quislings had been rounded up with many Russian men and much materiel recovered. Little Exin cum Kcynia in Polish was an awfully busy place.

A word on the complete method Germany used when occupying--excellent is the only adjective. Young boys and girls ten years old spoke fluent German. All signs were written in German, and there was never a word of complaint or grumbling, for fear the dread Gestapo or S.S. would get you. Anyone who had a slight objection was either killed forthwith or taken as a long term political prisoner to a concentration camp.

Polish civilians, when they discovered we were American officers, were wonderful to us. One Partisan saw Bedie, Smitty and me walking around and invited us into his home. We went up to a third story apartment to meet his family. An amusing incident happened. After we had been seated five minutes of more, we heard a peculiar noise in a clothes closet (Europeans most always are obliged to have this instead of a closet room). It turned out to be two very attractive daughters of the man. They had hidden for fear of the Russians and insisted that Americans were gentlemen. Soon wurst and cheese sandwiches were ready and very delectable. Our American cigarettes and their stock of Polish spirits and wine made a friendly tea. The older daughter had taught herself English very well. She was glad too for the practice and association with us. After three bottles of their stock we spoke better German and were really accepted. Strangely enough, German as a language was then to become our medium through all Russia.

The train left for Wrzesnia, 150 kilometers south of Kcynia, about 10:00 PM. By then the total for our group was twenty-nine and we all headed for Moscow. The following day traveling east we reached Kutno and spent the night in a Russian barracks. Early next day three parties went out: one to the railroad Kommandantur, one to the city Kom, and one to the airport which had several C-47's on it, quite a familiar scene to those of us who had entered France that way back in June, parachutists of the 101st Airborne Division.

Trucks were assembled and away twenty seven of us went toward Warsaw. Captain Olefski and I then had to explain our situation to a small Russian woman M.P. She was directing a constant flow of east-west traffic and in a minute we had a ride in a displaced persons convoy led by a Russian Major, Captain, Lieutenants and soldiers. Many of these civilians had been taken by the Germans to form forced labor battalions doing defense work, and anything else the expanding German nation demanded in 1941-42.

They included men and women, young girls and boys, maybe from Minsk, Kiev, or Odessa, and now all were headed to search for their homes and families. Rarely had any of them had any correspondence or other word in four long and anxious years. Now they were elated and gay like American college students going home for the Christmas season. Theirs, however was a far more serious lot for all knew how the "scorched earth" policy leaves an area, not to mention numbers of casualties which mounted to some enormous figures in those days.

By evening we were within ten kilos of Warsaw. One truck needed repair so the Major chose to continue the next day. The Major let his Captain billet us. Three or four

houses were required for all the people and as usual they made room for us. Reluctant at first and equally suspicious as the Russians were, the Polish family took us in. The mother, two daughters, a grand-daughter, and a bombed out refugee from the city made the family. The older daughter cooked the soup. The primary soup dish was potato (kartoffel) with some beef the soldiers furnished. When seasoned well it tasted very good and was warming after the exposed truck ride.

Speaking of the route of march, it was littered with Wehrmacht vehicles and anti-tank guns which the Russian air force and tankers had demolished in the first stages of the winter drive from Warsaw. All bridges were out and were replaced by those built by army engineers. Towns evidenced much bombing as well as street fighting and rear guard resistance. Russian M.P.'s were in every village and at roving check points to counter infiltrating agents.

The supper was followed by a visit of the very dignified Major and some of his men and three of the (arbeit) women. Arbeit is the German word for work and generally the subjected people were referred to as either Kgf (PW) or arbeit. The generous officer brought in some bottles of captured champagne and vodka. Then the gaiety began with songs and fun. Our Captain Olefski, whose father was born in Kiev, spoke excellent German and they liked him a lot. We heard Russian march songs, love songs, and many folk songs. My favorite became "Volga, Volga" a sad but colorful story of the famous Volga river near Moscow. The Sergeant, a short, wiry, black eyed, dark haired typical Ukrainian was especially courteous to us. He had studied engineering and then the war came. One private from Odessa, with a good bass voice, tall and handsome, was my next choice. They all sang well and it was midnight (with a nice glow on all of us) before the Major asked to be excused. That was the signal and soon they left us.

Sleeping two male guests in this single room cottage was no problem to these down to earth, simple folks. They gave us a bed and took to theirs. We all undressed and went to sleep. They liked us by then, the more expressive one being the elderly lady refugee, whom I helped peel potatoes. The little baby was even playing with us. We had by now broken the barrier and were most welcome. It was their first time to see Americans and of course we were quite a curiosity.

Morning came and it was time for the convoy to depart. We had some Nescafe and the hot coffee made a good breakfast. After a serious farewell, they hated to see us leave, we left. An hour later we were in the suburbs of the former million population city of Warsaw. Destruction and demolition had left the city in the worst possible way.

It's indescribable the way the city was so severely subjected to such methodical treatment. Nothing was intact. What few people were left had homes in cellars. Every city block was an armed bastion. Shop windows were sealed and pill boxes were every 20 feet. Three months later I went through Aachen, Germany which presented a similar sight. We said goodbye as the Major took his now empty trucks to depots for supplies.

All traffic through Warsaw had to clear through the Polish and Russian Kom offices. We visited the Polish first, manned by strong and pretty women soldiers equipped with pistols and tommy-guns. They served us some tea and sandwiches, and after a lengthy discussion as to what to do with their American officer customers, they gave us an escort to another Polish headquarters. There we were served lunch and then escorted to Prava where the Russian Kom had an office.

While there, it was pleasant to see the first Americans in days: Captain George H. Dunkelberg, another 101st Airborne; Captain James W. Coles, 3rd Infantry Division; and 1st Lieutenant Gustav H. Olson, 95th Infantry Division. They put us into a "jeep American" and took us to a refugee and displaced persons point at Rembertow on the outskirts.

We had no idea what this would be like, but one look convinced us it was not what we wanted. In we went and out we came. Capt Dunkelberg, a good friend of mine and from my Division Artillery, Capt Coles, and I talked up moving on. Back toward the gate we saw a Russian lieutenant and his wife hauling their household belongings to the city. He had no objection to us leaving the place. We helped him unload and gave the smiling, round faced Russian soldier driver three American cigarettes and away we went to the rail head which headed toward Moscow.

Motor vehicles were plentiful and much traffic was there, but a young man from the railyards came and told us about a train leaving for (Russian) Minsk in a few minutes. In darkness we climbed aboard another freight car. We noticed the first wide gauge track contrasting to the standard gauge west of Warsaw. We debated whether this was a good strategy or not. They were protected in that no invading nation's supplies could rush up the Russian inner lines until either rails or axles were changed. By the same token, Russia now had to transfer all rail freight between the systems at Prava.

With us in the box car were refugees, soldiers, and one captain. He proved to be a good friend and guide. A casual from his medical post on the front going home to Moscow, he spoke German fluently and was more like a father to us. I traded a 1st lieutenant's insignia for the Russian star

from his "chapka". Their uniform is very simple: a blouse which they slip into, a belt which is worn over it, boots, trousers tucked in, and the familiar "chapka" or sheepskin hat.

During the night our journey began toward the large city of Brest-Litovsk, on the old Russian-Polish border. We each had two American quartermaster issue blankets so the ride with snow outside was not so cold. Nothing was spectacular about the trip through Siedlice and on with our priority group of returning casualties. A little about the car ride, Russian box cars are as large as American ones. Quite a contrast to the small "40 and 8s" of France and "DRs" of Germany. There were fourteen, young, Russian soldiers who had been held as prisoners of war somewhere in Germany. They would have touched the heart of anyone, for all had had their legs amputated between the knee and foot. Reason: the camp barracks where they had been held had been so severely cold that it led to frozen feet, gangrene, and finally amputation. It was not a new story for I have seen American officers who have lost their toe-nails for the same reason.

There was one "little girl" soldier who ate, slept, and cooked with us. A most touching scene of comradeship happened late one night when we were all tired and sleepy. We had picked up a handsome, young Russian pilot who had never seen an American. Very tired, he went over to the corner in which the girl slept, crawled under her overcoat with her and fell asleep. Russian soldiers have a great respect for their women comrades in arms. Also we were never hungry for they always provided for us.

By the fourth night we reached Brest, which is on the Bug River, a tributary of the Vistula. We held high hopes and spirits of maybe seeing Moscow. That night we spent in the hands of the equivalent of our M.P.s until we were passed to the "Punt". The "Punt" was a quick fix. We stayed three days in a hospital where we were waited on courteously by nurses and soldiers. Capt Olefski was able to get most anything but our release. Realizing our position was odd, to say the least, no Kom cared to give us a document to travel in Russia as it was too much of a chance to take. So we waited.

After three days we were escorted across town where the twenty seven American officers and the two we had attached in Kutno were gathered. In this group were three Norwegian, two French, and four enlisted men. I regained contact with Bedie, Brown, and Smitty. I was glad to see them again. They had gone to Prava, then to Minsk, and finally Brest.

Capt Dunkelberg, whom we called "Dunk" and Capt Coles, "Chief", and I set out after this reunion, on the Minsk main

highway. We walked outside town and caught a ride on a 2½ ton Studebaker to 100 kilometers away. Reaching there in darkness and knowing if we checked in with local authorities they would return us, we evaded the Kom and very nonchalantly walked through town. Outside the city we stopped at a peasant's house and knocked on the door. Two women were there and took us in with the most suspicion I have ever received. We offered to sleep on the floor by the kitchen stove and finally laid down. Realizing that something was not quite right, we didn't sleep. In a few minutes the mother and another daughter came in. They heard our story, being quite surprised and much afraid, for the Russians would have shot the entire household for shielding German espionage agents. The daughter had worked in some job with the occupying Germans and had learned to speak it well. Satisfied that we were sincere, the mother graciously gave us two single beds and some of them, I am sure, slept that night on the floor. Next day we arose early and said good-bye and thanks to some wonderful people. No men were left in the family. All had been killed in the war.

My German was paying a great dividend, but we agreed that it was the wrong language for now, besides our being always treated as suspects anyway. So we each got a notebook and began a Russian phonetic vocabulary. Day after day we found new words we were forced to learn, until our total reached maybe 200 words. Unlike guttural German, it has the more pleasant tone of the Slav language. It was amazing how speedily we learned enough to speak fairly well.

We walked forty kilometers the next day along the Brest-Minsk military road. It was cold with snow on the ground, but walking kept us warm. We became hungry about noon and stopped in at a farm house where we had some of the best milk, cabbage, and potato soup ever plus dark bread, very tasty indeed. Here was another typical family, wife and three children and grandmother. The husband was on arbeit in Germany since 1941. The house was immaculate; a large stove with a baking oven and simple but neat furniture. Incidentally, there we learned that little boys and girls were fond of the large area on top of the stove. It was warm there and consequently good sleeping at nights.

One lone C-47 with the distinctive red star passed overhead on the Brest-Moscow run. Before dark we had grown tired of walking so we stopped at some small hamlet. Realizing that if we met a too suspicious soldier or civilian partisan, we could be sent back, we stopped in an area that looked comparatively free of soldiers. In a few minutes we were found by both signal corps and military police. Their suspicion was mild compared to the village mayor who insisted we were not Americans and, if we were, why were we walking to Moscow? They took us next day to another village for questioning. A memorable day it was.

Our transportation was three horse-drawn sleighs, hay in the bottom, and blankets around us. Snow was three feet deep in places. It was beautiful country, rural as could be, firs, birches, and pines silhouetted on the fresh snow. Once the horses on my sleigh slowed down, and the soldier, driver fired a couple of rounds to speed them up.

We visited several small places, and actually were searched at one Kom. It was amazing the number of Russians we encountered who spoke English. Maybe not King's English, but as much as they learned in Detroit, Milwaukee, or Chicago. The officer was very courteous, and somewhat embarrassed over our coolness and evident reluctance during his investigation.

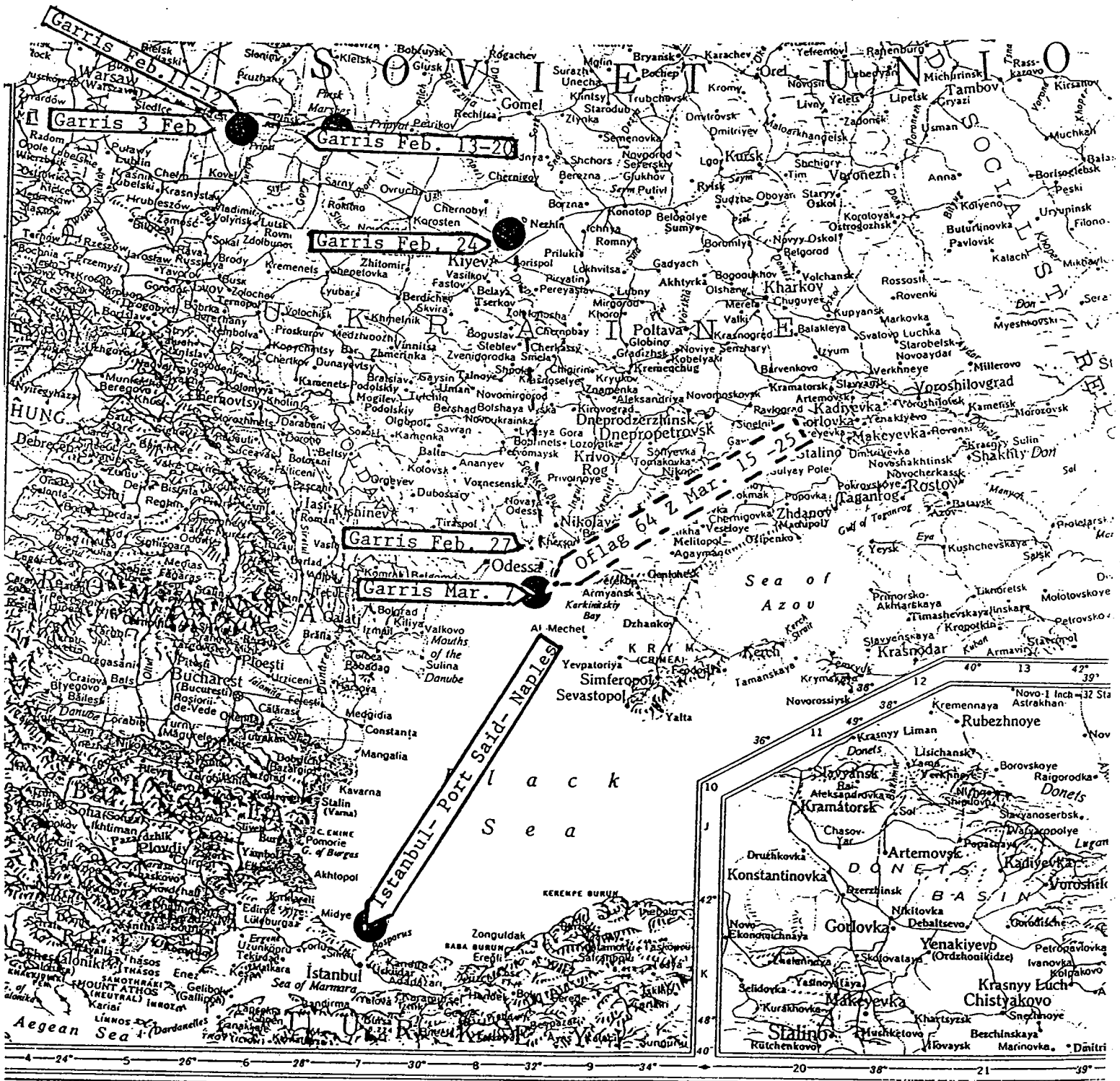
Late in the afternoon, after a splendid dinner cooked for us by some nice lady we boarded our sleigh and began another step back to Brest. We rode a couple of hours, then pulled into a farm-house a mile off the main road. It was the same touching story: a lady and four sweet kids and no dad, German arbeit. They gave us "chai", Russian tea, some delicious dill pickles, and black bread. I showed one little school girl, lovely kid with blond hair and brown eyes, how the ABCs looked in English; she then did them in Russian. These were strong, sturdy people I'll never forget. Again we were out into the night on our sleigh and away. We made it to a larger place where the three of us slept on a large divan.

Next day after lunch we began a seven kilometer march to a station at which we could board a train for Brest. Three nights later we got on the train. The Russian soldier and the partisan escort now realized our value to them. Here was their method. Knock, knock on a door; then they would usher us in with "Amerikanische officers"; and then they demanded food, vodka, and a place to sleep. The people who were anxious to treat us then had the other two as well. Our escorts were disinterested in us and very interested in consuming large quantities of spirits at each stop. I was provoked, but for us there was no hurry. We studied hard on our Russian and by now did quite well. I must mention the large wooden spoons used for our soup. It was the custom to put the large bowl of soup in the center of the table, then issue five spoons, and command "Eat".

At the "payest Stanza", which is Russian for railroad station, I met an unusual soldier. His mother and father were Jewish living in Smolensk. When the German's came, their being Jews was revealed and the parents were killed outright. He fled and later joined the Army. He was very interested in how Americans treated the Jews. The ride to Brest was a four hour trip in another box car, crowded as usual with civilian and military passengers. Our guards always called us "Tavarich Lt or Kapitan". It is the common

**EVACUATION AND REPATRIATION ROUTES FROM POLAND
THRU SOVIET UNION SOTHWARD TO ODESSA.**

SOURCES: The Comprehensive Atlas, Rand McNally & Co. 1988, Longmeadow Press, Stamford, CT.
Roads to Liberation from Oflag 64, Clarence Meltesen, Oflag 64 Press, San Francisco, 1987



prefix meaning comrade or friend and is the equivalent of "Sir" in the American Army. As for their Army, the average soldier seemed very courteous and respectful both to us and to their own officers.

We reached Brest and became an integral part of one of the largest crowds I was ever a part. There were thousands of refugees from Germany and wounded soldiers of every conceivable nationality heading for Lublin, Minsk, Smolensk, Moscow, and Leningrad. The station was so crowded that mothers held their babies in their arms to avoid their being trampled upon or crushed in the unruly horde. As always when our very proud escorts revealed us as American officers, a crowd collected around us. Curiosity, interest, and appreciation are the motives that prompted, I am sure. One Russian "Stachi Lt" or 1st Lt, took us aside and made us a sandwich which I'll never forget, "salo and chleb" white fat meat and black bread. We were hungry so it was good.

This exemplifies the most startling factor Americans found in Russian treatment. They live simple and offer you hospitality of the same simplicity. It is all they know. Our ways are complex to them. I like being able to adapt myself to most any level, especially to that of a host, who perhaps had so little to offer me. Consequently, my experience with the Russians was not a disappointment although I did not eat any caviar or see the Kremlin.

I slept a rather restless night with my head near two Russian soldiers and my feet near returning civilians. I'll never forget that scene. Pathetic, determined, yet a smile now and then. A deep marked hatred for Jerry (German soldiers) was typical of the expressions prevalent in the huge depot.

Next day we actually led our bewildered escorts back to the "Punt". We were greeted there by the medical Major who was glad to see us but not at all surprised. In a few minutes we had walked through war-torn Brest, and that is putting it mildly, to our friends once more. Bedie thought we had it made. They had enjoyed themselves thoroughly during five days with such luxuries as a lovely, little, blonde woman medical Lieutenant and numerous women soldier orderlies. I am sure this was the best gesture of courtesy and hospitality they could make toward each other, and the American officers showed full respect for these able women.

All along through Europe, since France, my impressions have been memorable of the churches one sees passing through. There is a distinct difference in these and American ones. Most all of the older ones have hundreds of years of age and tradition behind them. "Bela Russe" is White Russia and orthodox, the name of the religion most prominent in that country. Though the ritual is akin to

Catholicism, its churches are not at all like the Gothic, Renaissance, and Norman structures. They show instead a positive influence of the Byzantine East. I went to an afternoon mass with Bedie, Tex, and Smitty. All the reputed vividness of color which the Russians are credited to possess is reflected in their churches. Lots of gold, an abundance of crosses, beautiful mosaics and inlay, with banners, icons and staffs would sum it up briefly. All of which is so far from our conservative American taste that most of us would call the interior gaudy or perhaps "loud". The exterior was most attractive, invariably white colored with a dome or steeple, round and onion shaped, inverted with a tapering spire. The color is usually red and green as copper turns in the weather. People in Russia worship like anyone else: mass was beautiful, the priest had a good voice and the chants were of the plaintive musical type. I noticed one peasant (boots are invariably part of their dress) who was in town selling at the bazaar and stopped for mass enroute home.

The officer's mess was arranged for us, but was not exceptional and our menu, except for the soup courses, included "Kasha", a grain cereal something like wheat and usually boiled, tea, and black bread. Sweets are never eaten and they thrive upon this heavily over-starched diet. Their teeth are clean and white, far better than the French or English. The black bread must be the solution, for including officers, I never saw one yet with a tooth brush. For troops on the move the Russian food experts and dietitians have designed a hard black bread, sliced 3/4" thick which is put into bags for shipment to the troops. No amount of handling seems to break it up. This bread is too hard for the teeth, so they dunk it in their tea. I guess they taught us what we do at the Toddle House with our doughnuts and coffee.

Before our departure from Brest they gave us a show comparable to our USO. All in Russian, and though we had come a long way in recent weeks, it was still over our heads. It included some good dances, songs, and skits with a background of pictures, flags, and various propaganda posters. Their bulletins and pictures are simple in design, even crude, compared to our neat and attractive posters.

Lt Col Harmon A. Kelsey, our commanding officer, had wangled a passenger car (Believe it or not!) and the plans were on deck to take us to Odessa. Lt Schiefierken was the Russian escort and without exception one of the best officers we contacted. He was from the Transportation Corps and spoke excellent German. 1st Lt Samuel Friedman, Omaha, Nebraska was our official interpreter and did a splendid job. We loaded into a 2½ ton truck and went to the depot and waited for an engine. Late that night the train pulled out and we were on our way toward Kiev which we had heard

much about and which we were anxious to see. A little about the car itself: it was long with an aisle on one side somewhat like an English or continental coach. In the compartment were three deck seats. During the day we sat on the lower seats and at night opened the overhead ones Pullman style. A stove running full blast was at the end. The Sergeant and a soldier along with two volunteer civilians had the first compartment and the officers had the rest. Each officer had issued to him three or four loaves of bread, much wholesale kasha, and a can of American luncheon meat.

The terrain we crossed to reach into the heart of the Ukraine was much like western Russia. There were tremendous snow drifts, wide prairies and some large forests with towns widely separated. As we studied the scenery we could visualize morale-high, victory drunk Panzer hordes taking everything in 1940-41. Then their long supply lines weakened the thrust and denied the victory. Geography saved Russia and defeated Germany. The trip was a couple of days long.

Kiev is in a rolling sort of country. The city is on some twelve or more hills. Its very pretty railroad station was intact with huge murals, one in particular of Stalin was fairly modern. We were guests of the Russian transient officers mess which was very nice with linen on the table and silverware instead of wooden spoons. We had a layover until 7:00 before leaving. We were taken to a hospital for a rest and mainly to keep us together.

Brownie and I got restless and decided to go to the bazaar to try to get some sweets. It had been seven or eight months since I had anything like an éclair or a piece of pie. With packs of American cigarettes left from our Red Cross boxes, I began bartering. They seemed so excited at seeing an American that they gave me more than I deserved. I'll admit my timidity at first, but they are a confident group of individuals. I found it amounted to this, whoever can talk the loudest wins. Reasoning and volume go together in Europe in place of our moderate ways. I filled up and Brown did too; then we bought some more to take to Bedie and Smitty.

Back in the station we mixed into the mass of people until we left. Crowded by these folks, with their anxious and curious eyes, who were seeing their first Americans, questions by the dozen were asked. We more often spoke German than Russian. They had a healthy respect for Bedie and me being parachutists. Their parachutist units are perhaps the real pioneers in the business and have had some very successful missions. We were always asked why we wore French, Polish, and Czech overcoats, and answered "they were issued to us by the Germans".

Soon our train to Odessa had been made up and we climbed into a slightly better coach. All of us had tasted of the sweet and dainty eclairs and cakes, so during the trip to Odessa we did big trading at every town we stopped in. As I recall, we had each been given three or four dried herrings and bread. We sold them for rubles to buy other things. It was not a very dignified activity for a group of officers, but it was fun. In fact I never saw anything like this before or since.

Boxcars, open flat cars, and all the coaches were loaded even to the extent of people hanging out. Some riding in between and on the couplings and buffers. People without enough clothes, no gloves, and mothers with babies. My God they were rugged! That determination was getting them back home, so it was truly commendable. The scenery was very pretty as we went through innumerable hills, never mountainous. Russians employ strong snow drift fences to shield their highways and railroads. Wind velocity gets up well over 100 miles an hour on these barren plains. Snow falling a few minutes might cover all traces of a train track or road. Then we reached Odessa.

Our advance party went out for several minutes and returned with good news. A Russian Colonel had made arrangements for us, and we were the first Americans to reach Odessa since the opening of the winter offensive. They were very proud and anxious to see us and help us. Our destination was a sanatorium area only 500 yards from the Black Sea on the outskirts of Odessa. We then had a hot bath, delousing, clean underwear, and clean sheets which made us very comfortable and happy at the time.

Our next priority was to find ways to leave Russia, to return to our old outfits, and to retaliate somewhat for months of unpleasant living as a guest of the Reich. We found Russia as hard to depart from as it was to get into. I must point out that although we were guests of the Russians, they insisted on us staying behind a barbed wire fence with Russian soldiers walking guard, and they also insisted on escorts. However, in the morning we registered with Major Hall of the American Military Mission to Moscow, who then sent our names to Moscow for notification to our people at home. Three of our group had gone to the harbor and through the Naval Attache had a pass to go aboard a Liberty ship. Three others of us did the same thing. In a few minutes we were talking to our first Americans in months, merchant mariners.

The merchant men insisted that we join them for a good old party. We agreed to that. Lt. Donald R. Hunker, Lt. William W. Heritage and I went into some hotel with them and started ordering three or four champagnes. By eleven thirty we were three happy and care free Lieutenants. One

of the Liberty crew had dashed back to the ship and brought out three passports and visas, our pass to go on ship. They had accepted us. Music was being played by a lively, brassy band, but I recall little music when they said, "Let's go to the ship." At the dock they told us to hold our passes up and put on that staggering and drunken scene. So we did and in the midst of our friends were passed through easily. Another treat was in store for us, hot cakes and syrup with hot coffee. Oh! It was delicious after eight months of soups and stuff. I ate nine cakes to tell you truthfully how anxious I was to satisfy a long desire, and then I slept so soundly on the white sheets. Next morning I awoke in time for breakfast and had fried eggs, toast, jam, sausage and coffee. Nothing could be more American than such a menu and the ship's officers enjoyed watching our enjoyment while eating their breakfast.

This was one of three, the first ships to go through the Dardanelles, Bosphorus, and the Black Sea since early in the war with the duty of hauling in American motors, vehicles and equipment and returning iron ore from the Crimea. We met the ship's Captain and he was very kind to us. Commander G.G. Breed, was his name, and not only did he command superb respect, he ran the smoothest coordination of Navy and Merchant Marine I ever saw. That night we dressed as civilians with a touch of naval uniform and went to town to hear "La Traviata" sung in Russian. Reportedly the Odessa Opera House was the second largest and prettiest in all Europe, exceeded only by the one in Vienna. Beautiful in an ornate sort of way, it was eight tiers high and splendidly decorated. We took a seat on the lower floor and created a sensation. Most Merchant Mariners had passes into town, but were not attending an opera. We did not understand the opera entirely, but most of us knew the story, and we fully appreciated the wonderful musical scores, voices, setting, acting and above all the colorful costumes and lighting. Encores were numerous and the audience was very receptive. Then we admired the striking Russian uniforms worn by soldiers and officers. The Russian is handsome when he takes off his overcoat and you see his blazing medals on the left side of his blouse. No ribbons are used, they always wear the medal itself. We went back to the ship after a pleasant and enjoyable evening. A fine part of the return was the big old American electric refrigerator filled with things for a late snack like cheese and jam, an institution most American boys appreciate.

We had a chance to go with the crew around the "Jacob Mansfield" in the daytime, always managing to be out of sight when the Russians and the attache boarded. A credit to the sturdy Russian women stevedore/lookouts. They were friendly and efficient. That night Bill Kabele, the 2d Radioman, "Sparks" Susman, the Chief Radioman, and others went ashore to see the Ballet Russe production of

"Alanova". The leading lady was beautiful and the dances were executed superbly. Alanova's hero was quite a handsome young man and a splendid dancer too. We stayed on ship a last night and cleaned up in preparation for disembarking next day. Captain Green wanted us to stay, but decided without proper permission we had better return. Their generous hospitality remains a memory with Don, Woody, and me that we'll never forget.

It was a matter of returning to the camp and making final preparations for embarking to sail. The English transport, "Moreton Bay" had come in with a couple of thousand repatriated Russian prisoners of war from the West Front. This would be our ship and we were all set to embark on 7 March 1945 in a short time. The Russian "papal colonic", Lt. Colonel, in charge of all the thousand or so of American and English soldiers and officers assembled in Odessa, marched us down the street led by a military band to the ship. When they weren't playing, we were singing and whistling in step. The formation was in units of platoons and companies and must have been some scene for the happy but bewildered Russians, who crowded the sidewalks to see Americans, the people who had given endlessly so that the Nazi threat could be stopped. After red tape, which the Russians seem to have a share of, we were on board and by evening we were glimpsing our last of Odessa and Russia.

PORT SAID, EGYPT, 1945



L-R, F-R Herb Garris, Carl Bedient
Ed Anthony, Bill Paty, Roy Smith

EPILOGUE

To leave the reader arbitrarily without "the rest of the story" would be a discourtesy, that now follows.

The diary notes conclude with the short stay in Naples with physical exams and preparations for embarking an awaiting ship in the harbor for United States. This was altered when permission was granted to allow a small group of us a return to our respective units on the line near Dusseldorf, Germany. A C-47 scheduled for Marseille took us aboard and there we met some of the 101st enjoying an R. and R. in the Riviera, and they kindly made room for us to return with them.

Occupation soon followed the V-E Day on May 7, 1945 and our stay was extended into the late fall in a small hamlet just south of Berchtesgaten, Unken. The division was branched out over a large area even as far south as Badgastein in the Alps. Our next move was to the west and into the Yonne Valley of Burgundy in southern France about 100 miles south of Paris. Soon after V-J Day the draw down began to reflect in our donning the new patch of Maj. Gen. Jim Gavin's famed All American 82d Airborne Division. Under his aegis we sailed in early January on the Queen Mary for New York and the Victory Parade down Fifth Avenue. Shortly after the parade the division entrained for Fort Bragg, N.C., which has been its home since.

Good fortune came the author's way a bit later when he was tendered a Regular Army Commission, which then led to a full career from that of a Reservist until retirement in 1967. As a Field Artillery Officer many worldwide assignments followed in command, staff and service school instructor, all of which were rewarding and challenging. Operation Bootstrap provided the fine opportunity to complete the baccalaureate with the University of Omaha. In the final tour in the Pentagon with the OJCS the Masters was awarded by the University of Maryland.

The transition from military to civilian life was done in academia with the University of Maryland's University College and the chance to begin teaching at the undergraduate level. That soon was modified with the completion of the Ph. D. and the offer to teach with Central Michigan University in its Extended Degree Program, which was all graduate work in a fast developing system for not only domestic but international classes for the military on bases. Eleven classes were taught at Lajes, Azores and a number along the Atlantic Seaboard.

In 1981 he returned with his family from Arlington, Va., to Pinehurst, N.C., and home. Retirement with his wife, Ethelene, is a pretty laid back and enjoyable life, with lots of reading, reviewing books and yet time for gardening and flowers.