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Since receiving the request from Alan Dunbar and Bill Warthen, I have tried to write my recollections of the Baum raid.

As I stated in Sketches from the Lives of Kriegies, my memory of that raid and, in fact, my entire POW experience has been almost lost. Only a few incidents still vaguely remain of what happened during the time when I first heard that we were being liberated from Hammelburg.

There was much confusion while the Baum attack on Hammelburg was underway. POWs were excitedly running all around the place. I was overjoyed to think that at last I was going to be liberated. We were ordered to stay indoors after some of the barracks had been hit by rifle fire. Soon after the firing stopped, we received the news that the camp guards had surrendered. And we would be taken back to the American lines.

Hugo V. Schoeneman and I rushed up the hill to where the men were congregating around the tanks. On the way up, we passed a disabled tank with a dead soldier beside it. It pained me that no one had taken care of the body.

An excited, hungry, but jubilant, mob of POWs had gathered in the area of the tanks only to be told that just 200 men could join the battle group that was planning to return to the American lines.

Hugo and I were allowed to go and were given M-1s. I was told that they were from the dead or injured from previous battles on the way into Hammelburg. We were assigned to ride with others on a large tank. It felt great to be back with American troops and somehow the danger did not matter.

It seemed an eternity as we waited to move out. Finally at dusk our tank joined the other vehicles and moved out. It went only a short distance when we had to stop and change course because of enemy fire.

Again, it seemed that we had gone only a short distance when we were stopped by an SP gun in a hedgerow. It had fired at the lead tank. Hugo and I were told to fire toward the spot where the gun was located.

It was a great feeling to know that I was firing at the enemy, and for reasons I cannot explain, the joy of my being able to fire at the enemy overcame any fear that I may have had at that time. Meanwhile, the tanks were maneuvering to get out of range, and in the confusion a POW fell under a moving tank and was killed.

Finally the tanks were once again moving and my spirits rose. I really thought we were headed for freedom, but I was disappointed when word came down that we had stopped to set up a defensive position. Hugo and I were near a big shed that held injured soldiers and had other troopers around it. I don't recall that we were a part of any particular unit and did not have anybody who was telling us what was expected of us. I remember that some men were digging foxholes. Hugo and I decided that the situation was hopeless. We decided that we had a better chance of making

it back to the American lines if we left the group. We gave our guns to two other POWs who were not armed and headed off into the woods in the direction of what we hoped were the American lines. After two more days and nights, we were recaptured.

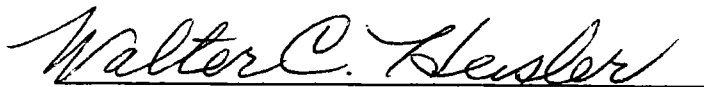
We were placed under guard along with new American POWs and many Russian soldiers who had been liberated by the Baum force on its way into Hammelburg. The Russians had apparently looted the town and countryside because, among other things taken from the Russian POWs, was a three foot pile of candy in the corner of a room. While Hugo engaged the person guarding the candy in conversation, I tried desperately to kick some nearby pieces of candy out of the door. It was especially attractive because we had not eaten for three days. But, alas, I was caught by the guard and we were escorted out of the room. We spent a night in this building without food and (I can't remember how), the next day we were returned to Hammelburg.

As I look back on the experience I had with the Baum force, I am most impressed by the wonderful feeling of being alive and free. Even when I was begging for food, I was unexplainably elated and grateful to the troops who had liberated us. I wanted to join them in fighting our way back to freedom. The exhilarating feeling of freedom while with the Baum troops was more powerful than any fear I had of the German guns.

Because I was disappointed and disheartened by my recapture, I tried to figure out what had happened. Probably from conversations at Mooseburg, I had rationalized that the mission could have succeeded if that task force had not picked so many fights and suffered losses on the way to camp. I also thought the failure to get back to the American line was because the unit had lost its commanding officer in one of these early skirmishes and that a second in command had taken over. I felt that the second in command officer was not aggressive enough. When the tanks were stopped by enemy fire, we should have deployed our troops and POWs to remove the road block rather than "turning tail" and trying to find another route out of our trap. It was not until I read Raid, the Untold Story of Patton's Secret Mission that I realized how little I knew about what was happening around me. For instance, I did not know or had forgotten that Col. Goode left the task force to return to camp with 200 POWs.

I look forward with keen anticipation to my chance to meet and talk with Major Baum.

As a survivor of the Normandy landing, the bitter winter march from OFLAG 64, and the Hammelburg raid, I look back with pride to have been a very, very small part of Capt. Abe Baum's daring career in WW II. The war was won by officers like Capt. Baum and his men. Only the survivors can appreciate the price we paid for victory.

  
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