

June 20, 1998

Bob Thompson
Editor Oflag 64 Item
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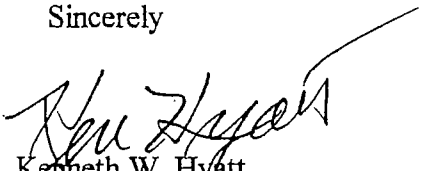
Dear Bob:

In response to a letter I received from Bill Warthen I have assembled some recollections of the night of March 27th, 1995. Although memories tend to diminish over time these particular ones were easy to come by. After I returned to my civilian job in 1945 I was asked to recount the events of being "behind the wire" as a POW for the company newsletter. I wrote of my experiences as truthfully as I could without any embellishments. The enclosed memories are as I recorded them in the newsletter.

Since I won't be able to be at the reunion - - again for the umpteenth time - - I want to extend my best wishes to one and all. I'm sure no one remembers me since I was a "short-timer" at Oflag 64. I arrived at the compound on New Years Eve, 1944, just in time to settle in and "rest" before the march to Hammelburg. I still have vivid memories of Stalag XIIIIC, it being the filthiest camp I had been in. What with the bedbugs, lice and fleas and, above all, the starvation diet and no Red Cross parcels it's amazing anyone survived!

And finally, to your guest speaker Major Abe Baum: You, sir, will always be a hero to me for the extreme bravery you showed in your dash behind the enemy lines to attempt a rescue. You and your men never received the recognition you deserved. I only wish I could have met you in person to shake your hand, and perhaps to reminisce a bit

Sincerely


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Subject: Hammelburg, Germany - March 27, 1945

When Capt. Baums' Task Force arrived at the compound many of us attempted to climb aboard the tanks and halftracks. Unfortunately, (or perhaps fortunately for some of us) there wasn't room to accommodate everyone who wanted to leave. There were approximately four hundred of us kriegies from Oflag 64 of the some fourteen hundred who left Poland, and added to that was about a thousand more already at Hammelburg who were captured in the Battle of the Bulge. Upon the advice of Capt. Baum, or one of his officers, we were told that our best chance of escape was to strike out on foot heading west toward the American lines. Three other POWs and I struck out on foot. To this day I wish I had the names of those guys. We traveled by night and hid out during the daylight hours in wooded areas.

We succeeded in avoiding capture for about a week. During that time we happened upon an area near a river where apparently some German troops had been resupplied with rations. About all that was left of some "throw-away" items were some crackers (similar to our K-Ration crackers) and some kaffee (coffee) balls that looked like malted milk candies, but had the taste of ersatz coffee. But when you are starving

you can't be selective! Everything seemed to be working in our favor until about the fourth night. We were tired and weak from lack of food and we got careless selecting a hiding place. We found a small wooded patch on the side of a hill above a small village. It seemed fine to us until daylight came. The woods were not only small and sparse, but were surrounded by plowed fields where farmers were sowing seeds and cultivating for early spring crops. Along about mid-morning some young men came into the edge of the woods picking up scraps of firewood. Soon they spotted us and quickly left. No one came in after us, so we stayed put until evening. We finally decided to leave the woods and got maybe a hundred feet out into a field and were immediately surrounded by farmers armed with clubs and pitchforks. We were taken into the village and turned over to a couple of soldiers. They marched us to another village a few kilometers away and we were taken to a schoolhouse and kept overnight. We couldn't have been too far from the allied lines because you could hear the rumble of artillery fire coming closer. The krauts were extremely nervous that night and kept offering us candles, bread and cheese. A senior noncom was concerned that the Americans would "rape his wife" when they arrived. We

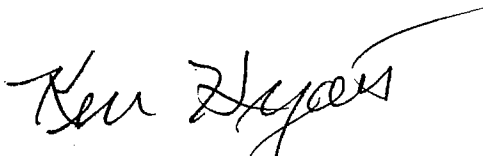
assured him he had nothing to worry about.

The following morning some soldiers came and took us out of the schoolhouse and started us on the march back to Stalag XIIIIC. Along the way back we came upon several sites where the task force had been in firefights. At a couple of them there were signs of someone being buried and their dogtags were hung on a wooden stake. We tried to get the dogtags for the American authorities, But the krauts wouldn't allow it.

When we arrived back at the stalag we found the camp empty except for the Serbs who occupied the other half of the camp and were pretty much free to come and go as they pleased. Soon after we arrived a young Serbian soldier came over from his compound and offered to hide us from any Germans, civilians or soldiers, that might be around. He even gave us some articles of clothing to wear. On or about the 15th of April the 14th Armored Division arrived in force and we were finally free.

To Capt. Abe Baum and his heroic group that fought their way so far behind the enemy lines to liberate a group of prisoners, and to have to retrace the route in the face of overwhelming odds, what can one say?

"Thank you" is not enough. I have relived that experience over and over again and again over the years. During my military service in WWII and Korea I had the opportunity to meet many good men who were brave, some who were fearless, but none were of the caliber of Capt. Abe Baum. I read the book, *48 Hours To Hammelburg*, and it gave me quite an insight into what constitutes a hero!



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