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Major Baum,

I was filled with awe and pride for the U.S. Army as your tanks came through the barbed wire into our compound. Many years later when I read the detailed account of the progress of your task force from American lines through enemy territory to Hammelburg, I was filled with admiration regarding your decisions made so quickly with so little information as you met every obstacle. After the Wehrmacht woke up and saturated the area with offensive forces, you still were able to make quick decisions to meet each obstacle as it became apparent. Your ability to remain organized and decisive under such life-threatening pressure is incredible, and I have told your story many times.

On January 21, 1945, I was one of the 1400 kriegies who left Oflag 64 on a forced march towards the West. Our German captors intended to make certain that we stayed just ahead of the Russian Army. We arrived at Parchim after about six weeks of marching. On March 6th approximately 400 of us were loaded into 40 & 8 box cars. We arrived at Hammelburg on March 9th, where we were unloaded from the box cars and marched up to Oflag XIII B.

We Oflag 64 kriegies could not believe the low morale and general conditions we found in Oflag XIII B. We were so relieved to get into a situation where we had barracks and beds that we were elated. Col. Goode immediately took charge and established U.S. Army standards in all categories, placing officers of Oflag 64 in control of all camp functions.

As part of the Colonel requiring all officers to shape up and look the part of American officers, he ordered uniforms to be washed and repaired. I was assigned to take officers' clothing to the Serbian compound where there were sewing machines and make alterations and repairs. This assignment filled my days from that point on. The whole camp brightened up and looked to the future. Col. Goode had sessions with the general commanding the camp, and right away the guards stopped being so miserable. There was never again incidents of guards firing at officers who were out of the barracks during an air raid alert.

On March 27, 1945, I went off to work in the Serbian compound as usual. When I arrived, the Serbs rushed me and asked "When are the American troops arriving?" They were very excited about a rumor that the Americans were very near. Even a German guard took me aside and told me that all the German civilians and his own comrades had it on good authority that the Americans were very near. I could not add to the information, but it was a very exciting experience. Serbians and German guards were running in and out with the latest update. About 11:00 a.m., I got a message from our staff to gather all the American clothing and

return with it at noon. The guys working in the shoe repair got the same orders! Talk about excitement!

After I got back to the barracks, I witnessed out the back window American and German planes in a dogfight. Our guys won! We also could hear both small arms and artillery fire not too far from us. We were ordered to remain in our barracks, as the German guards and local Wehrmacht units were preparing to defend the Oflag. We could hear the battle, but the surrounding woods prevented our seeing anything. Some of the incoming rounds set fire to barracks in the Serbian compound and smoke was drifting through our area. Suddenly we saw Lt. Col. John Waters carrying an American flag along with Hauptman Fuchs, who carried a white flag marching with three other American officers toward the front gate to contact the American force and surrender the camp. Out of our sight and on the road a German soldier not knowing of the Commandant's surrender fired and seriously wounded Waters and forced the others to stand against a wall. Fuchs explained to the soldier that General von Goeckel had surrendered the camp, but the soldier forced them to return to camp. As this scenario was taking place, a tank came through the fence. French prisoners came running from some place shouting "Liberty, Liberty." The tank was followed by half-tracks, tanks and jeeps. The task force leader explained that they had not enough space to take us all with them and it would turn out to be dangerous. Somehow I managed to get on a half-track, seating myself on the back edge, and

managed to hang on only because I could brace my feet on the jerrican of extra gasoline which was in a bracket on the rear of the half-track. It was late afternoon by the time we could get started.

The column of tanks and half-tracks moved through the woods and trails seeking our way down from the hills to a road that would lead us to a highway moving us westward to the American lines. We proceeded very slowly as the Task Force Commander had to scout out ahead for an area free of enemy forces. Because of the commotion his group caused on the way in, every German command was alerted and on their way to the Hammelburg area.

We would wait and then move ahead a ways and then stop while the scout group picked out another way forward. It was nerve-wracking and scary. At one point as darkness fell we began to move forward at a fast pace which was a relief. Suddenly I saw rockets coming toward the lead vehicle and the tanks ahead halted. We nearly ran into the tank ahead. The tank had halted so quickly that the driver had to swerve to one side to avoid rear-ending the vehicle ahead. The POWs riding the outside of that tank were hurled off like ants off a popsicle. Meanwhile, the tank following our half-track was coming up fast behind us in the dark, and I thought it was going to crash us! I just sat there trying to get it together when the order was passed back to dismount. We were informed that a sizable group of Tiger panzers was blocking our way and the commander said he had no choice but to try to fight his way out. He told the kriegies

that he had no weapons or shovels for us. All he could offer was those who wanted could stay with him and pick up weapons as his men were wounded. I know that some ex-tanker kriegies joined him. Some kriegies decided that now that they were outside the wire they would try to get through to the American lines and began to melt into the woods. Of the many who tried, only 15 made it safely back and the rest were killed or captured. Col. Goode organized the rest of us into a column of threes and said we should return to the oflag.

Col. Goode led our column of approximately 300 kriegies back toward Oflag XIII B. The entire area surrounding the oflag was completely alert, but did not know what was going on. As we marched through a village, the inhabitants did not know we were a group of POWs and harmless. The houses all had white sheets hanging out the second story windows as a sign of surrender. Col. Goode removed one of those sheets and fixed it to a 10-foot pole that was in the vegetable garden of a house making a large white flag. He had it carried beside him at the head of the column. A German soldier at home on leave came out of his home and surrendered to us. We were marching in a column of threes and moving at a decent pace when we came to a clearing which opened on to open fields beyond, and from there we could see the oflag. Col. Goode turned the column toward the camp and suddenly we were fired upon from the camp. It was rifle fire and, at that great distance, not effective. At the first sound of fire the column was gone! After all, we were nearly all infantrymen and acted

instinctively. Our column instantly melted into ground cover. All were under cover except the Colonel. He stood there and called out—"Every man back in a column of threes," and called to the person carrying the white flag, "you there, wave that white flag." We all jumped back into a column and continued marching. Suddenly the firing stopped. Shortly we could see a jeep coming toward us from the camp. It stirred up a line of dust. As it arrived, Gen. von Goeckel stood up in the jeep with the impressive red lapels on his great coat and saluted Col. Goode, saying, "That was the finest display of military discipline I have ever witnessed."

We marched back into camp and were very shortly marched down to the railroad yards and loaded into 40 & 8 box cars. In our great exodus and haste to climb onto half-tracks, we had left all our belongings in our barracks, except that sliver of bone I found in my soup. That included our extra clothing, blankets, overcoats, etc. Upon our return to the camp, I managed to get a badly worn French army overcoat with no buttons. It helped keep me warm on the three day ride to Nürnberg.



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