

VETERANS

Kriegsgefangenen-Offz.-Lager 64
(Ofilag 64)

Datum: 19.8.1944

Ungültig

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als Legitimation für den öffentlichen Verkehr.
Gültig NUR im Kriegsgefangenen-Lager.



Fingerabdruck
u. z. F.

Der Kgf. hat diese
Erkennungskarte
und die Erkennungs-
marke des
Lagers stets bei
sich zu führen.
Bei Kontrolle sind
beide vorzuzeigen.
Verlust ist sofort
zu melden.

The P. o. W. has
always to carry
with him this in-
dentity card and
his tag. On con-
trol both have to be
presented. The loss
of the card or tag
has to be reported
immediately.

Name Rahal, Nicholas St.

Dienstgrad Oberleutnant

Erkennungs-Nr. 3179/CA

The identity papers issued to Nicholas Rahal by the Germans in 1944.

Surviving Nazi prison camp, GI nearly arrested by allies

By Nicholas Rahal

On or about Feb. 7, 1944, five months after we had made the initial landings at Salerno, Italy, I was sitting at lunch under the field artillery battalion mess tent, a mile or two behind the enemy lines, comfortable with my duties as communications officer.

The colonel said, "We have lost another forward observer — I don't know who we have left to send up?" And I violated one of the most sacred rules of soldiering. I said, "Why don't you send me, Colonel?" On Feb. 10, I started up the mountain slopes behind the Abbey Del Monte Cassino with Company E of the 142nd Infantry. On the morning of the



A continuing series on living World War II veterans

Please turn to 7A, SOLDIER

This portrait of Nicholas Rahal was taken just after he graduated from Officer Candidates School and was a new second lieutenant.



SOLDIER: Volunteer closed in on by Germans

Continued from Page One

11th at about 11 a.m. the battalion started out to attack a small flat top hill held by the Germans. Captain Hearn, the artillery liaison officer, was to maintain an observation post overlooking the objective while I went with Company E with the mission of establishing an observation post at the objective. When we started out, no one but the Company C.O., Lt. Brown had seen the objective and he only saw it from a distance. As far as I could tell, Company E had only about 60 men left.

On our way to the objective we had to pass in direct view of an enemy machine gun position across a draw from us and we had several casualties, which included one of my men wounded and one separated from me, leaving me with only one man to help carry our radio equipment. I tried to get the company commander to hold up while I called for artillery fire on the machine guns but he would not, so we continued to move forward while machine gun fire from across the draw continued to put additional men out of action.

By the time we gained sight of the objective all contact had been lost between the platoons, and the men who were left were spread out all over the hillside. I found myself alone with the one remaining member of my crew and one of the infantrymen, with many Germans in the brush around us. We tried hiding in the brush and when two Germans approached, we shot them. At that time I made the decision to destroy our radio and try to get out of our position. We smashed as much of the radio as possible and started back through the brush. When we came to an opening in the brush, I jumped across first and just as I jumped a concealed machine gun opened up, killing (I believe) Laugel, the one remaining member of my crew.

Several Germans closed in on us, taking me and one infantryman as prisoners. They moved us along a trail down the mountainside, with one German soldier, carrying a machine pistol, in front of the other prisoner and myself, and several Germans behind us. At one point along the path as we rounded a curve in the mountain path, an American GI came around the corner carrying his M1 rifle at port arms. All the German soldier had to do was level his machine pistol — the American started to swing his rifle into firing position but by time that he was no more than halfway done, it was obvious he didn't have a chance. The two of them stood there for what seemed like an eternity before the American dropped his rifle and raised his arms in the gesture of surrender. We continued down the mountainside path where we joined some 25 other prisoners from E company, including one of the platoon leaders, Lt. Bucholtz.

Some 15 months later, the Russians overran the German prison camp in Poland where I was being held, and I managed to make my way to American held territory along the



Name: Nicholas Rahal

Branch: Army

Rank: Captain

Military Duty: Communications officer

Post-War Occupation: called to duty for two years during the Korean War; studied electrical engineering at Columbia University, got a B.S. and later an MBA

Family: wife, Gail, of 31 years; had two children, both have died; maintains close ties with nieces, a nephew and their children

Age: 83

Elbe River. I was flown to Nancy France on VE day, the day the war with the Germans was declared ended.

I was still wearing the miscellaneous assortment of clothing I had acquired while I was a prisoner, the only American part of my uniform being an American officers cap; but I decided the war was over and went into Nancy to celebrate. I met an attractive young French girl and we proceeded to make the rounds of the bars to celebrate the end of the war. As we walked along the crowded street, I was stopped by an American officer who demanded to know why I was wearing an American officer's cap. I told him I was an American officer and he demanded to see my ID. The only ID I had was one printed in German, identifying me as a POW. Obviously he could not read it and decided I was a German in disguise. As a quartermaster officer he had not had a chance to see any action, but to make a long story short he decided this was his last chance to kill a German soldier.

It was as frightening as anything that had happened to me during the war, but fortunately he decided to go back to his camp area to get his friend to join the fun. His friend luckily was sober and I was able to convince him I was an American. It was dawn when I got back to the barracks I was assigned to, and a few days later I was on a ship headed for home.

After the war I studied electrical engineering at Columbia University, got a BS degree and later an MBA. Today, after a happy successful career, I am retired and living happily and comfortably with my wife, Gail, in Woodbury. Even in retirement, I keep busy, maintaining, among other things, two Web sites: one for my eastern rite Catholic church and one for the Disabled Veterans of Connecticut.