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To: Major Abe Baum- Commander Task Force Baum

On December 15, 1944, I was assigned S-3 3rd Bn. 422 Infantry Regt. 106 Infantry division when the Battle of the Bulge began about 5 A.M.. Our division was thinly spread over an area of about 20 miles front and east of the town of St. Vith in the Schnee Eifel area near the Luxemburg-German border.

On December 18, 1944, after vainly trying to escape the enemy encirclement, I was captured by German troops from the German 5th Panzer Army and marched into Germany with a large group of American troops. After a short stay at Stalag IV Bad Orb, we were moved by rail to Oflag XIII B Hammelburg, Germany, and I remained there until March 27, when Task Force Baum arrived at Oflag XIII B.

The morning of March 27, I had crossed the stockade fence between the Allied and Serbian compound, to visit with a Serbian friend. I had often visited the Serbian compound, but usually at night, crossing the fence when the guards' attention was directed in another direction. It was on such an "unauthorized visit", along with Lt. George Vaream, who bunked next to me in the POW barracks, that we misjudged the floodlights along the fence during an allied air raid fly over. The guards began shooting at us with machine guns and Lt. Vaream was killed (page 88., "RAID").

During my mid-morning visit on March 27, my Serbian friend and I could hear gun fire in the distance to the west on the Oflag. This gun fire could be heard off and on during the morning and into the early afternoon. We were on the second floor on the building and had a good view of the west. We both commented that the fighting was getting close to us.

In the early afternoon (I had no watch) we saw tanks approaching the outer stockade fence of the compound and the German guards were seemingly in a panic, fleeing their guard towers. On the first tank we saw an American flag flying. We were elated as we just knew the allied forces had reached us and we would soon be free.

I immediately bid farewell to my friend and again scaling the fence returned to the American side of the compound where all the POWs were gathering around the vehicles of the task force. Captain Baum (I learned his identity later), task force commander, mounted one of the vehicles and appraised us of the situation,, "that they did not have enough vehicles to carry all of us back and those who could not get on a vehicle would be forced to walk or stay behind".

After the task force was reorganized and prepared to move out, Lt. Colonel Joe Matthews, who was on one of the vehicles, motioned me to join him. Although the half-track was fully loaded with all who could find space, Col. Matthews made room for me to join him on the hood of the half-track.

Lt. Col. Joe Matthews was executive officer of 422nd Regt, and we had become friends, as we both were graduates of NC State College (now NC State University) in Raleigh, NC. He was also a native of Raleigh as was my father's family.

After waiting for a Recon unit report on road conditions and enemy dispositions, the main body of the task force began to move. By that time I had moved to the outside of a tank and was "holding on for dear life" as it bounced and churned along.

Several probes and attempts were made to find roads for the main body to travel on back to the east. It was then after midnight and the task force was still close to the Oflag. Many of the POWs had decided to go back to the camp. Word came down that the task force was moving to an assembly area near a stone building on Hill 427.

After task force commander Baum arrived at the assembly area 427, he had a conference with Col. Goode, POW ranking officer. Goode then announced to us that we POWs would be a burden to the task force when it would try to fight its way back the next morning. Goode said to us that any of us POWs able and willing to fight with the task force could stay with the column. The remaining POWs could either go back to the Oflag or try to get back on foot.

There were only a few of us POWs who volunteered to stay with the task force—maybe 12 or 15. A friend whom I had been closely associated with at Ft. Benning Infantry School, Captain Walton B. "Whitey" McMullen, and I agreed to join the task force. Another officer we knew, Captain Carl Hayden, joined us along with another captain whose name I cannot remember. When Baum asked if we were in good enough condition to fight, we again assured him that we were. We were assigned to assist the task force infantry on the half-tracks.

About half of the remaining vehicles were readied for fighting by stripping down the others. Fuel and ammunition were distributed. All remaining men, including POWs, were reorganized into a combat force to move out the next morning.

There were many wounded in the barn, both from the task force and POWs. Among those was a good friend from my unit, Captain "Perk" Perkins, the CO of Company M of the 3rd Bn. 422 Infantry. Perkins lost a leg during the night and died in the barn on 427.

At about daylight on the morning on the 28th of March, we started to mount-up to move out. All hell broke loose. The krauts had us zeroed in. In just a few minutes the task force ceased to exist. The half-track I was preparing to load on took a direct hit. I was knocked to the ground and took a small piece of shell fragment in my leg.

Those men that were able, took off in all directions. McMullen, Hayden, and I, along with an Air Force Lt. who joined us, ran as long as we were able. Then we hid out in a patch of woods. As we lay hidden in a rather small patch of woods, some of the German cadets from a nearby school armed with bazookas (panzerfausts) began randomly firing into the woods. We could hear them laugh as they fired.

After each round, the Air Force Lt. with us, became very frightened and hysterical.

He jumped up, threw up his hands and said "I surrender" in English. The young Germans moved up and quickly spotted the rest of us. Once again we became krieges.

They marched us to a village, probably Hollrich, and kept us in a barn overnight. There were a mixture of officers and enlisted men who had been captured or recaptured. The next morning I was given a detail, under heavy guard, to help bury several bodies lying close to the road on the side of the hill. One of the bodies was that of Joe Geer. The

one dog tag had been removed. I found a ring and some identification to correspond with the remaining dog tag.

I kept the items from the body of Joe Geer, but there was nothing to identify the other bodies that I could find. On returning to the states I located Joe Geer's father, a Colonel in the U.S. Army. I wrote Colonel Geer and offered to meet with him. He wrote back in a brief note that he was not interested in learning any more about his son. The implications in his letter was that to be captured by the enemy was a disgrace. This letter, from a Colonel in the regular army, had a profound effect on me and I put the letter and items away or discarded them, I do not remember which. I will keep looking and trying to remember.

From Hollrich we were taken to join a marching column of POWs being herded towards Mooseburg Stalog VII. Just before arriving in Nuremberg, we were joined with another group of POWs coming down from Hammelburg by rail. On the outskirts of Nuremberg, we were taking a break on the side of the road when sirens announced an air raid. As we lay there watching, bombers by the hundreds appeared. When a large group got right over us, we could see the bombs leave the aircraft. We found out later that we were just a short distance from an ammunition factory. The bombs hit the factory, us, and everything else in the vicinity. I said to Mac, "let's get the hell away from here" and we did.

As the raid continued, we ran across Nuremberg for as long as we could. Then with the raid still continuing, we jumped into a large ditch behind a fence-right on top of some kraut soldiers. POWs again!

After the Nuremberg experience, POWs that could be rounded up were again put on the road marching east, not toward Mooseburg. One of the guards said that the war would soon be over and we were being taken to Austria to be held as hostages.

On Easter Sunday we were allowed a day of rest. We were out in a pasture with a small creek running through it, enabling us to wash. We were allowed to have fires and were cooking what we had "liberated" along the march route. Our luck held-bad! About noon a group of U.S. fighter planes spotted us. We became instant targets. I also believe it was announced to us on this day that President Roosevelt had died (I am not sure about the date).

At night, during our march across Germany, we were quartered in farm barns and sheds. Usually there was hay to sleep on or in. Several days after the Easter strafing (about April 25), Mac, Carl, and I decided we had walked far enough to the east. We asked the group to cover for us at count-off the next morning. We always moved out in the dark and the guards counted us in fours. Every morning we would arrange to stagger some of the fours into three or five to alter the total count each day, in preparation for escape attempts.

On this particular morning the three of us with another Captain (name unknown), dug deep in the hay, below the reach of the pitch forks from the guards checking for stragglers, and waited until the column had gone. At this time we were getting close to the Inne River between Germany and Austria.

When we came out of the hay, we encountered a French laborer who volunteered to help us if we would take him along. He fired up a wood-burning truck and we started west. Along the way, in a small town, we learned of a large wine cellar and bank. We

raided both, got bags of money and arms full of wine. We had the money and wine, and were heading home in our streamer truck.

When we got to Nuremberg, intelligence had heard about the bank robbery. We were relieved of the money but not the wine. Instead of turning in, we caught a ride at the Nuremberg airport on a C47 that was delivering fuel to Patton's army from a supply base in France. When we got back to France, we went to the military and registered as escapees. We were taken to Camp Lucky Strike. Even though it was knee deep in mud in the streets at that time, it was a most welcome assignment. The mess halls and day rooms stayed open 24 hours a day. We began to put on weight. Next stop-U.S.A.

Though it was only for a brief time, I consider it a high privilege to have served with Task Force Baum. The fact that the high command blundered on the size of the task force and failed to provide air support during the raid, in no way diminishes the extraordinary success against very great odds accomplished by Abe Baum and all the courageous officers and men. The big brass erred and for that the heroic deeds of Task Force Baum have never been properly recognized. Maybe someday!!

Lest we forget, Sincerely

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