

Bob Thompson's account of the Raid at Oflag XIIIIB

On March 27, 1945, I was in a German Prisoner of War Camp for American Ground Force Officers at Hammelburg, Germany. Some of the officers at Hammelburg were men that had made their way from a Prison Camp by foot and by train from Schubin, Poland, a town near Warsaw, Poland. The trip from Schubin to Hammelburg consisted of a forced march of 355 miles in the middle of winter across Northern Poland and Germany, to near Berlin, then, the remainder of the trip by railroad box car. We had been at Hammelburg approximately one month when the Germans decided to evacuate us to Southern Germany, due to the closeness of the American front lines near the Rhine River. We knew that they would go off and leave any sick men at the Camp. I had contracted malaria in Italy, and had fever off and on every since my capture in September, 1944. When we were ready to depart, I checked with the American Medical Doctor, and had a fever of approximately 102 degrees, so he put me in a two story building that was called the Hospital.

About 3:00 p.m. that day, one of the sick men with me came back to my room and stated that he saw a Tank with a white star on the turret, on the crest of the hill about one fourth mile from our camp. I didn't believe him, so I went to take a look, and sure enough, there was one. Just as I turned to go back to my room, the tank fired his cannon at one of the guard towers, and more tanks started firing their fifty caliber machine guns at the camp. From where I was could see the tracer bullet hitting the roofs of the buildings and setting fire to some of them. In a few minutes I saw two American Officers and a German with a white flag and an American Flag, prepare to leave the camp and go to where the American tanks were and inform the Americans that the Germans had surrendered the camp and quit shooting.

I ran down from the third floor of the Hospital and was going to leave the camp and go to where the tanks were. As I ran out the front door of the building, I saw an American tank that had broken through the barbed wire and was in the camp. I yelled my thanks, and headed out the hole in the wire the tank had made, when a couple of men were bringing back one of the American officers who had been shot. It was LTC Waters. I helped them get LTC Waters through the wire, and when they headed back into the camp with him, I ran on out of the camp to where the main body of the armored column was waiting.

After about an hour almost all of the prisoners were gathered around the armored column, and our Senior American Officer informed us that the armored column had come to get us out of the camp and take us back to the American Lines. The armored column had expected to find about 500 men and had transportation for that many, but there were 1500 of us, so they couldn't take us all. We were told that we either go back to the camp, or take off on foot and march our way back to the front lines, which were 60 miles from where we were.

I decided that I would go back with the armored column, so I hid in some bushes, and late that night when the tanks started their engines to start their trip back to the American Lines, I climbed out of the bushes and tried to crawl up on one of the tanks, but so many of the prisoners had the same idea that the only place for me was on the hood of a halftrack. I held on to the cannon on the halftrack to keep from falling off, and the armored column started on their way. There were two Sherman Tanks at the head of the column, followed by about nine halftracks. We drove through one little town about midnight and passed a couple of German Soldiers on the Street. They thought we were Germans, so they yelled their greetings, and we yelled "hello" to them. A little while later there was a loud explosion, followed by another. I knew that the two lead tanks had been hit, so we turned around and headed back in the direction that we had just come from. By then, the Germans had moved elements of two armored divisions in in the area, and we had lost all chances of ever getting away, but we just didn't realize it. The Germans fired at us the rest of the night and the next morning all that was left of the armored column was 9 halftracks. The Commander of the armored column decided to drain the gas from the gas tanks of one half of the halftracks and fill the gas tanks of the other one half, so we could at least start off again

with enough gas to go the 60 miles back to the lines.

I had armed myself with an M1 Rifle and two bandoleers of ammunition, and was sitting on the back of one of the halftracks waiting to move out again, when an armor piercing shell hit the vehicle I was on. The shell tore up the halftrack and threw me off on the ground. I jumped up and ran and hid behind a stone building about the size of a twocar garage, when the Germans really opened up on us with cannon and machine gun fire. We finally found a soldier who was wearing white underwear, so he tore his tee shirt off and put it on a bayonet and stuck it around the corner of the building where the Germans could see it. When the Germans saw the white rag they knew we were trying to surrender. They ceased firing and come around to the rear of the building. We were prisoners again along with all the armored column soldiers that wore still left.

The Germans then put us in our own halftracks under guard, and started back To the prison camp with us. As we were going back to the camp I began rummaging around in the halftrack for food or anything else I could find, when I picked up a metal box that was about the size of a package of cigarettes. I opened the box and saw some diamond rings and diamond stickpins for men's neckties. I closed the box quickly, and stuffed it into my shirt before the German guard saw me.

We were taken back to a building at the camp that had a sawdust floor, and had been used to train German soldiers to ride horses. I didn't want the Germans to search me and find the diamonds, so I dug a hole in the sawdust and dirt floor, and buried the box of diamonds. We were then all searched, and later moved on to a prison camp at Nurenburg, then on further south to another camp near Munich, where we were liberated permanently about a month or so later.

I had never forgotten the box of diamonds I had buried in 1945, and 22 years later in August of 1967, a friend of mine and myself decided to go back to Germany and dig up the box of diamonds.

We flew to Paris, where we rented a car and drove to the old prison camp at Hammelburg. The building where the diamonds were buried was still standing, and the windows still had bullet holes in them that were put there in 1945.

With the aid of Col Tony DeSanto and LTC Jack Armstrong at the U. S. Embassy in Bonn, Germany, we were given permission by the Germans to enter the building and dig for our diamonds. The Germans now occupy the old prison camp and use it as an Infantry School. They were using the building as a coal storage shed, so it was necessary to move about twenty tons of coal before we could get to the spot where we wanted to dig. The Germans furnished a truck and three laborers, and after four days of moving coal, we dug in the sawdust for the box of diamonds, but they were gone. We then went to the Embassy at Bonn, Germany, and thanked the two men for their help and returned home.

About four days after returning home, I received a letter from the Col DeSanto at the Embassy in Bonn, Germany, that a civilian living in the town of Hammelburg had heard about the Americans digging at the old prison camp, and reported that in 1945, he had a friend that was working for the Americans that had been cleaning out the building with the sawdust floor and had found the box with the diamonds. The friend had since emigrated to the United States and is now living in Chicago. He further stated that he corresponded with his friend regularly and would write and give him my name and address and tell him that I had been back looking for the box of diamonds.

I have not yet heard from the man in Chicago, but after twentytwo years of waiting, I can always wait a little longer. In any event, we are still trying to locate the man and see if he will at least let me look at the box the diamonds were in.

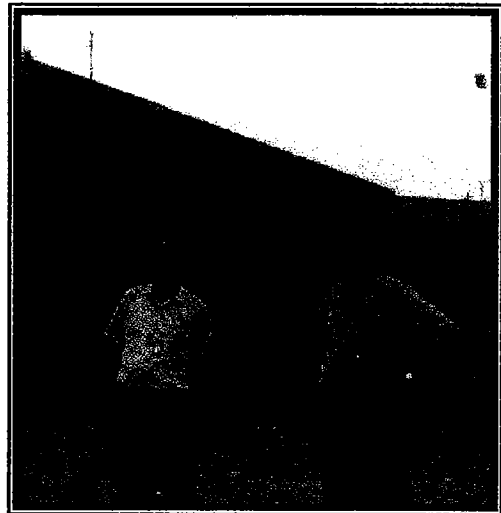
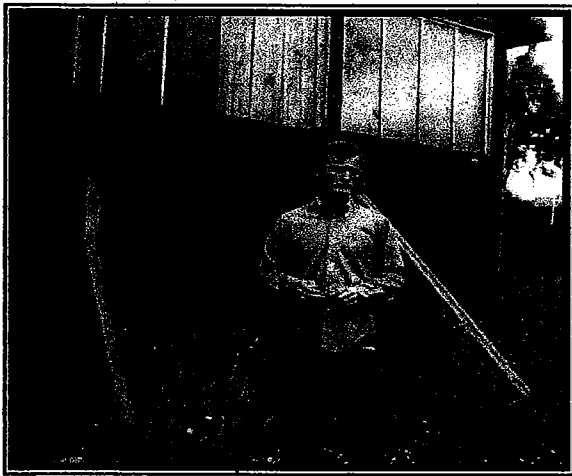


This is a photo of digging for the diamonds at the horse barn at Hammelburg. The man in the hat is the foreman of maintenance at the camp and was very helpful in removing the coal so we could dig. The man kneeling is Bob Thompson watching very carefully for the diamonds if they were really there!



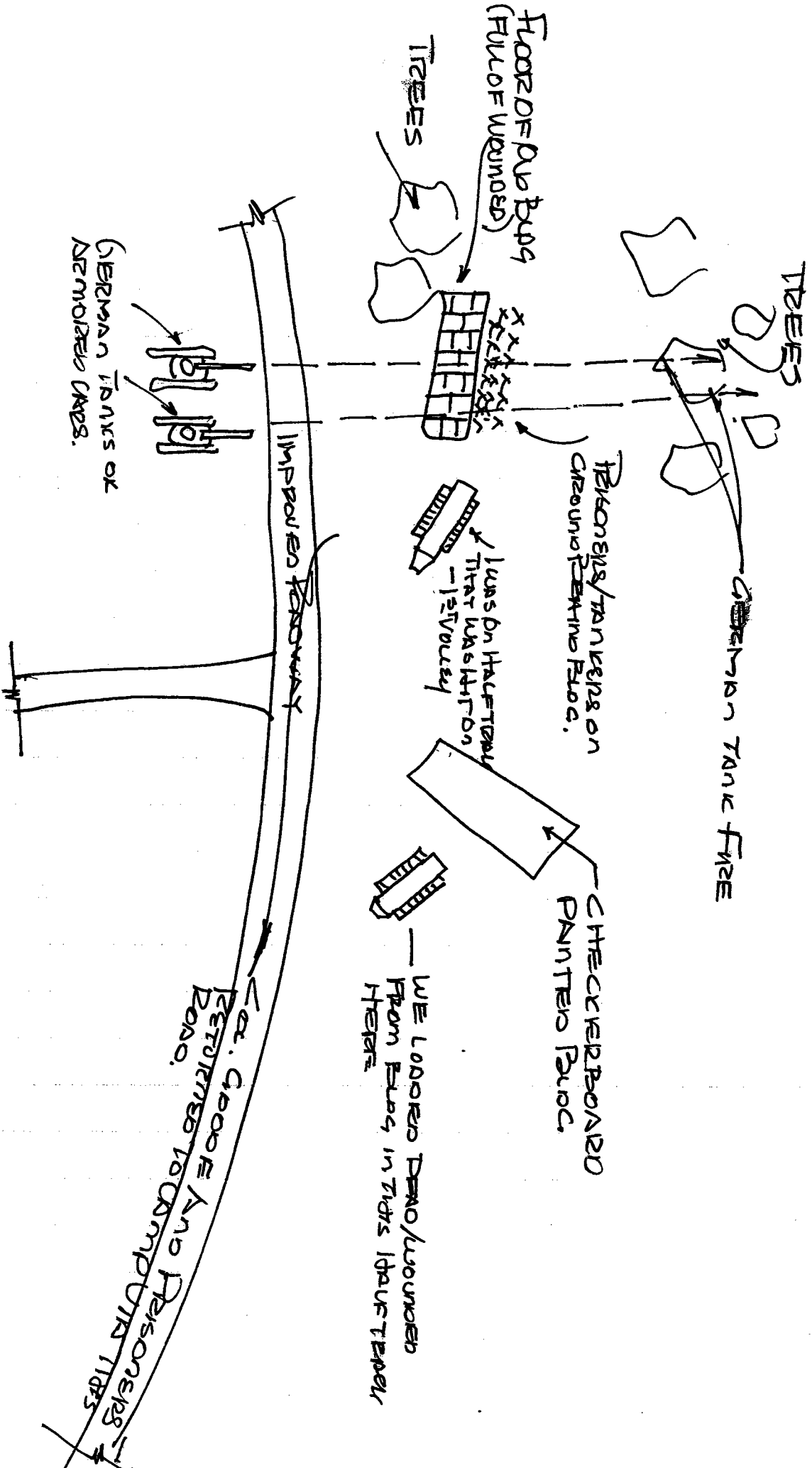
This is a photo of the town of Hammelburg , taken from the hill where the Oflag is located.

These photos are of the horse barn at Hammelburg where we were gathered after being captured after the raid.

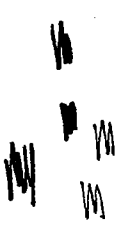


These pictures were taken by Bob Thompson and friend, in 1970, when they went back to Hammelburg to dig up the diamonds he buried in March 27, 1945

The holes in the glass windows were probably made by Abe Baum's men firing machine guns during the raid. At least that's what it looked like



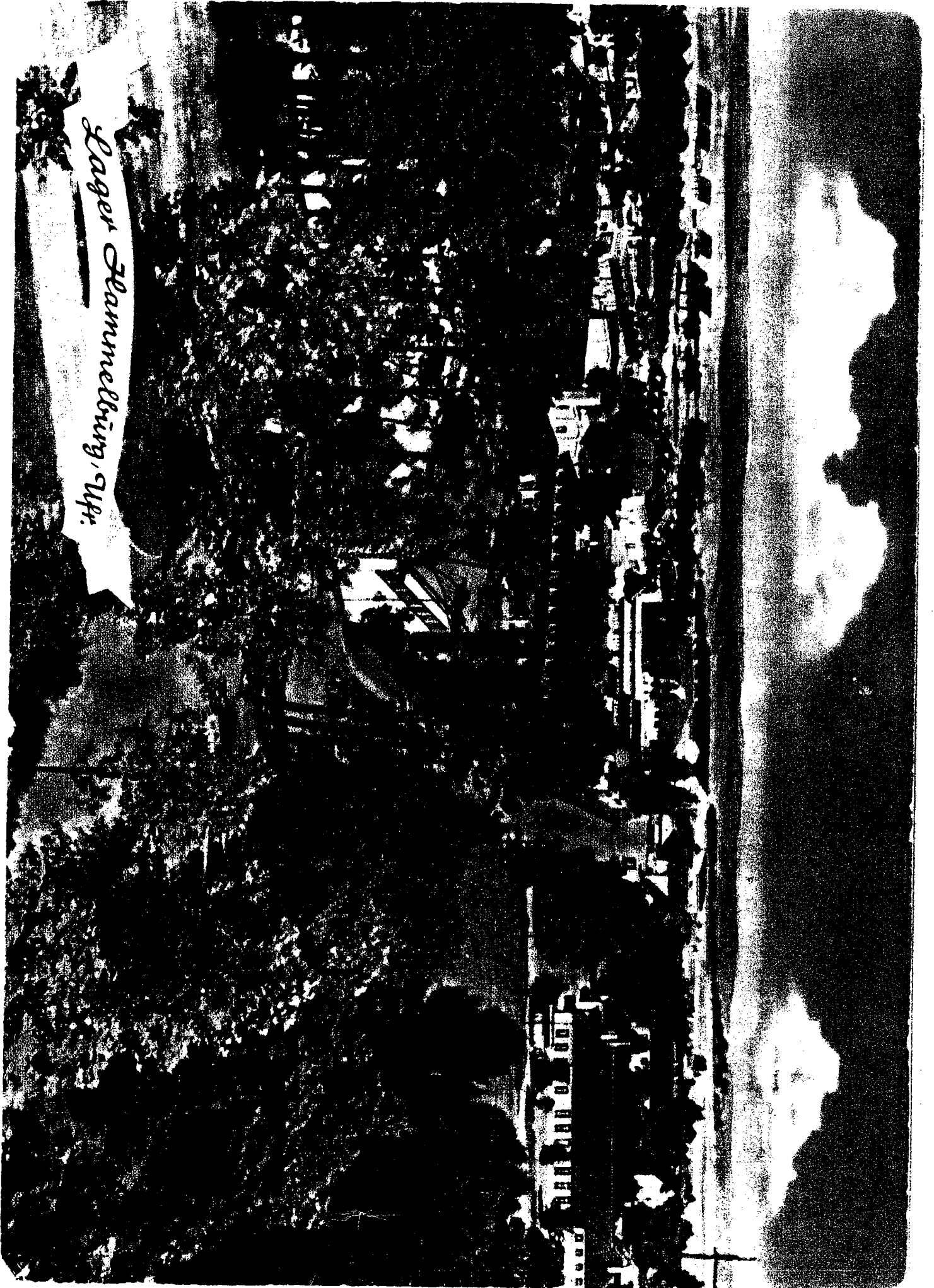
SITE OF CAPT. BAUM'S LAST STAND
 BETHLEHEM ENCLAVE - MAR 28, 1945
 DRAWN BY BOB THOMPSON
 MARCH, 2004





SITE OF LAST STAY OF TASIC FORCE FROM ON APRIL 427

Lager Steamelbing, W.P.







ABOUT THE KALD,
PW HEADQUARTERS 1st FLOOR
THE LAZARETTE 2nd FLOOR