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Forward Observer Party



Photo Taken Spring 1944  
Naples, Italy

On March 27, 1945, I was a prisoner of war of the German Army at Stalag 13b, near Hammelburg, Germany.. I was member of a group of prisoners that had been evacuated from Oflag 64, a prison for American Ground force officers near Warsaw, Poland. This group of men had departed Schubin, Poland on Jan. 21<sup>st</sup> 1945 and walked 355 miles in mid-winter to a town named Parchim, Germany. At Parchim the group was placed in boxcars and sent to Hammelburg, Germany arriving on March 1, 1945.

On March 27, 1945 the Germans told us that we would be leaving the camp at Hammelburg and going to where they did not say. As the men begin making ready to leave, I checked into the aid station that was manned by American Doctor prisoners. They told me that I had a temperature of 102 degrees and I would not leave with the main body, but would remain at the camp with the rest of the sick men. I was told to go to the second floor of the Administration Building and wait, which I did. I had contracted malaria somewhere either in North Africa or Italy and had bouts with the fever and chills at fairly regular intervals for the last year or so.

While waiting on the second floor of the Administration building, one of the men with me came to me and said "I saw a tank on a hill about a mile from us that had a white star on the turret". I thought he was mistaken, but took a look and saw the same tank that he did and it did have a white star on the turret. At that instant the tank fired a round from his tank gun and hit a guard tower. The other tanks then

began to fire their machine guns at the camp buildings. I walked to the other side of the building and could see the MG bullets (tracers) setting fire to some of the barracks buildings. I then saw four men, 3 Americans and 1 German, walking toward the exterior fence with an American Flag and a white flag. They were going to contact the Americans and tell them to stop firing, because the Germans had surrendered the camp to the Americans. I then saw an American tank pull up to the administration building and stop. The prisoners were crowding all over the tank and grabbing for food, I then decided that I would leave the camp and head for the tanker positions. I ran down stairs and out in the street and headed for the hole in the barbed wire that the tank had made. As I was climbing through the hole in the barbed wire that the tank had made I saw two men bringing a wounded man in and laid him on the ground as they tried to figure out how to get him through the tangled up barbed wire. I then pulled back the blanket or whatever cover they had placed over the man and I saw that it was Lt. Col. Waters. His face was gray from shock and I assumed he was dead. I helped the two men get him through the barbed wire and they left with him. I learned later that they had taken him to the Serbian barracks where they could get some medical attention.

I thought the best way to find the tanks would be to follow the tank tracks made by the tank that had come into the camp. As I got near the tanker positions I noticed an American soldier that was lying on the ground, obviously dead. A short distance later I arrived at the tanker positions.

In a very short time, the tanker positions were crowded with prisoners that had followed the same path that I had. I saw a Major and asked him if he was the commander and he told me he was an observer. This was Major Stiller, Gen. Patton's aid. The commander of the tankers, Capt. Baum, and our Senior American Officer, Col. Goode., then told us that we had two choices. Head for the American lines which were 60 miles west of where we were or go back to the camp and wait for the main body of the American Forces. I decided I didn't like either of these choices and hid in the bushes and waited for the tankers to start their engines to make their way back to the American Lines.

When the tankers started their engines and were getting ready to leave, I started looking for a place to ride. The only vehicle with room was a half-track that was the third vehicle in line, The only place to get on was on the hood and hold on to the 75mm gun that was pointed out over the hood.

This column of vehicles was a recon patrol that was going to look for a way to get back to the American Lines. We went through one small town and saw a bread truck that had been turned over. Another time we passed some German soldiers on the street that thought we were a German Armored Column and waved at us as we went by. A little later a loud explosion just ahead and the whole sky turned white. A

German Panzerfaust had hit the first tank. A few minutes later another loud explosion and the sky turned white again. We knew the first two vehicles had been hit and the driver of the halftrack we were on was trying to get the vehicle turned around before we were hit. He made it and we started back in the direction we had come from. Sometime later the sides of the halftrack were being hit with MG bullets and everybody jumped off and into the ditch beside the road. My best friend, Lt. John Goode was in the half track with me, but I couldn't find him as were lying in the ditch. I called out loud "John Goode, where are you"? He replied "I'm in this half track". I yelled back "you had better get out of that thing or you will be killed". He replied "this half track is full of food and I am not about to bail out of it". Lt. Goode made it back home and died in the fall of 1997. After a few minutes we all got back on the halftrack and proceeded to the place where we were to meet with the main body of the task force.

When we reached the point where we joined the main body of the task force, we were told that we had only enough gas to go halfway back, but we would empty the gas tanks on one half of the vehicles and fill the other half of the vehicles to full and maybe we could make it back. We did this and when we were finished I found an M-1 rifle and two bandoliers of ammo and climbed into one of the halftracks and was ready to try again to make it back. In what couldn't have been more than 3 minutes a shell hit the halftrack I was on, blowing me off and into the side of the building nearby. The gunfire continued and was joined by German MG fire. I crawled around to the rear of the nearby building and joined probably 25 or 30 more soldiers. We all lay as flat as we could while the gunfire continued. A soldier lying next to me asked if I thought we should pray. I said yes, but to not stop digging. The ground rose behind the building such that a shell would go through both walls of the building and explode into the ground just above us and probably 10 feet from us. We knew something had to happen and fast or none of us would survive this shellfire. We took somebody's t-shirt that was white, placed it on the end of a bayonet of a rifle and waved it around the corner of the building so the Germans could see it. They did see it and ceased firing.

A German officer came around the corner of the building and told us to get up. We were separated into two groups, the tankers and the prisoners. We were then told to go into the building that had taken all the gunfire and retrieve all the wounded and the bodies. I remember helping one wounded man to a halftrack and helping him into the halftrack when I spotted some food in the halftrack. I reached for the food and a German soldier put his gun in my ribs and told me to get back to getting the building emptied. My mind goes completely blank from this point time until we were put in our own vehicles and taken back to the camp. Some Hitler Jugend "Hitler Youths" were lined along the road as we approached the camp. They began to spit at us and throw rocks at us as we passed by them. On the trip back to the camp. I found a box of diamonds in the back of the halftrack I was in, but had to bury them

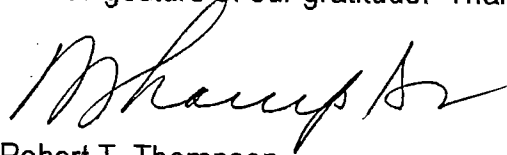
before the Germans found them on me. I didn't want to be accused of looting and be shot. I went back to Hammelburg in 1967 to retrieve the diamonds, but was unsuccessful. I also found a mussette bag and a sweater. The bag contained shaving articles and toothpaste and a toothbrush. They belonged to Major Stiller. I used his razor and toothbrush for the rest of the war. I gave the bag and sweater to the Patton Museum at Louisville, Ky.

We spent the night in the camp and the next morning we were put on a train to go to Nurenburg. We were strafed by American fighters at Nurenburg and the only casualty I know of was an Englishman that was hit in the arm by shrapnel. He was getting some hot water out of the engine to make some coffee. We spent a few days in Nurenburg and went on to Mooseburg by train where about a month later we were liberated by the 14<sup>th</sup> Armored Division and the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

General Patton entered the camp with a tank and visited with us briefly. We were flown to Rheims, France and then onto Le Havre, France by train where we were put on boats and went home.

I am amazed at the bravery of all the men in the 10<sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Batallion. It was men like them who took on the best trained and equipped army in the world and beat them to their knees and then beat them some more. I am proud to have served with them, even if it was only for a few hours.

I wish it were possible to shake each mans hand and thank him for what he did in March 1945. Maybe shaking Maj. Baum's hand and thanking him will help serve as a small gesture of our gratitude. Thank you, each one of you.



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