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SUBJECT: Reminiscences of the Raid on Hammelburg

TO : Major Abe Baum

The Raid on Hammelburg was over fifty years ago, so memories are "hazy", but this is what I recall.

I was in one of the barracks building, and suddenly we heard firing. Some shells came through the walls of the building. The firing came from both sides. The German Camp complement was small, and we were told that the Camp Commandant decided to abandon the camp. Of course the American invading force did not know this, and we were told that LTC Waters and the German Lieutenant marched down the road toward the Americans, Waters with an American flag and the German with a white flag. They soon encountered a German hidden behind some bushes who was either a zealot, was ignorant of the fact that the camp was being abandoned, or both, but took a shot at Waters and injured him badly. We later learned that after we evacuated the camp some American troops came through, found Waters, and flew him to the States.

The American vehicles swept through the American compound and many prisoners climbed onto the vehicles. I was on the outside of a tracked vehicle but could hear the radio clearly, despite static. As we probed various possibilities, and each message warned us of blocked X-Roads, we became a tighter and tighter group, Col Goode called us together.

His talk, paraphrased, described the situation. The American troops had run into opposition several times on the way in and were now low on fuel and ammunition. If we left them alone, they had a chance of pooling the fuel and ammunition, and perhaps break out. Because of their losses and bravery, we owed them that chance. Anyone who wants to take off on foot, O.K. but he felt and recommended that we stay together, and he led the way back to the compound.

Here my memory fails me. I don't know where we went. I do know that within the camp compound I slept on the ground and woke up to find Baum sleeping next to me, so it became obvious that there had been no "break out". Also in the group was Bill Guest (roommate of Red Bancker and Hank Perry in Barracks 3A in Oflag 64) who was beside himself. He could not become reconciled to the fact that people lost their lives to liberate him, and he could not make good in escapeing. Bill never did fully recover and died recently.

I think it was the next day when we moved (by train, I think) to Nuremburg, where we slept in the woods on the outskirts and witnessed a 1,000 bomber raid on the city. Then we started our walk to Moosburg.

It was not often that a Task Force without a back-up supply train operated so far from the main body, and Major Baum and his crew should be congratulated. Though the release of the prisoners was not accomplished, thousands of American, Yugoslavs, and British prisoners were roaming behind the German lines, and rumor has it that three German Divisions were diverted to round them up while Patton's troops made major gains with minor casualties while the German troops were thus diverted.