

Subj: Fw: Hammelburg POW  
Date: 4/26/02

From: Robert Zawada  
To: bwarthen@cybersouth.com  
Sent: Friday, April 26, 2002 2:16 AM  
Subject: Hammelburg POW  
Mr. W:

Been meaning to write to you since Bob T. put my name on the Hammelburg mailing list, and I read of your interest in a black officer POW.

I was a radio-operator gunner on the 1st plat. half-track of A Co. 10th AIB. managed to survive to the very end, when I was hit, having my leg blown off between the ankle and the knee. After I regained my composure and had done what I could for myself, I began to look around to see what was going on. I was laying on my back on a slight down-hill slope with my head to the high side, facing the German attack. To my left, about 80 to 100 feet away, and slightly further down hill was an individual with his right leg mising, about the same place as mine. I was interested in what he was doing, to see if it could help me. He had man-aged to cut or strip off his pants leg and was lying on his back holding the leg straight up in the air, squeezing it with his hands trying to stop the blood flow. To my surprise, I noticed he was black!

About this time the tanks had arrived and stopped at the tree line. The infantry started coming from behind them and walking into the woods where we were. I watched a German walk up to the black, carrying his rifle in the usual waist high position. He stopped for a few seconds, then lowered the barrel and pulled the trigger, shooting him in the face! This scared the crap out of me, as I thought they were shooting all the wounded. Obviously, they didn't, but it was a very, very, tense few minutes for me!

I was going to tell this story to R. Baron when he interviewed me for the book, but decided against it, as everyone I have ever told the story to invariably says, "what do you suppose a black guy was doing there?", more or less questioning its credibility.

However, when the book came out, there was the story by the tank commander (Nutto) who was mistaken for a black by his captor, and was going to be shot for that reason, until he was able to show his arm and prove he was white. The two incidents taken together bring up some interesting questions. Incidentally: In the hospital, after I got back, I was interviewed a couple of times to see if I had any atrocities to report. I always told them of this, but it never seemed to raise much interest.

As a follow-up: I was taken to the camp hospital, had 2 operations in the next 2 days, finally regained conciousness the 2nd day after my capture. In the bed next to me was an unconcious person. I was told he was in a deep coma. I am a little vague on this, but I remember something was unusual about him, it may (or may not) be because he was black. 2 or 3 days before the 14th AD retook the camp, I woke up and he was gone. I was told he had died during the night. The only connection I am making is that being in a coma would be consistent with a head wound.

A letter in the book dedicated to Baum, from R. Cheatham has the statement "Later that day(28th) I was taken back to the place of the attack. On the side of the road I helped bury the Americans who were killed there". The point is that if the man died on the hill, he would have been buried there on the 28th. if he made it back to the hospital, then died, he would have been in the camp cemetery in early April. In both cases, I am sure, some time after the war, both sites would have been dug up and the bodies identified, then either shipped home, or buried in an American cemetery. The army group who did this would have records buried in some archive, somewhere. Perhaps Major Domes might be able to get some helpful information from the camp archives.

I have been working one day a week at the D-Day museum, in the curators dept. We have one or two "computer whizzes", that seem to be good at finding things, if you need some help, let me know.

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