The Captain Leslie Caplan Story

Leslie Caplan, 1936

My father, Leslie Caplan, was born on March 8, 1908, in Steubenville, Ohio. He was the sixth child in a family of eight. His parents came to the US from Lithuania. His father was a rabbi and cantor, who instilled a love of music in his son. (Dr. Caplan loved all kinds of music from Mozart to Tennessee Ernie Ford.) Leslie became Dr. Caplan after graduating from Ohio State Medical School in 1936. He moved to Detroit where he undertook postgraduate work in public health at the University of Michigan, and went into private practice in Detroit from 1937-1941. His niece Shirley, who lived in Detroit at the time, said that there were several women there who were "anxious to land him", but he remained a bachelor looking for adventure.

Dr. Leslie Caplan in his office, Detroit, July 1940

Always a lover of flying, Dr. Caplan got hooked up with the Army Air Force. He enlisted in July 1941. His first overseas assignment after training was as a Ist Lieutenant, Medical Officer, in Panama where he was assigned to the 14th Flight Squadron of the 6th Air Force.

He described some of his flying experiences in Panama in a letter to his niece Marion, in October 1942:

I fly sometimes, and I can almost fly a small plane myself. I'm not really such a

great pilot. Of course we ground officers are not allowed up in a plane without a pilot and they are very good fliers.

Sometimes I fly over the dense jungle and it is really dense. The other day I was flying a plane (I was at the controls of a dual-control ship) and the pilot signaled for me to look down. There about 500 feet below me was the whole 14th Fighter Squadron flying along in perfect formation. It was a magnificent sight. I have often seen these planes over me, but that was the first time I had seen them under me. They were going so fast that in a flash they were gone and all I could see were their shadows speeding along the ocean.

The soldiers here are very proud of the planes too. They are soldiers in overalls and they try to keep the planes in perfect condition. It takes a lot of men to keep those planes in flying condition and everyone must do his part.

Dr. Caplan's part was medical. Much of his job was to ensure that the base conditions were absolutely sanitary. He also did routine medical work. In Panama, he tended to the locals as well. He was loved everywhere he went, and wrote:

I am a big shot among the natives. It is hard for you to realize what a doctor means to these people. Doctors are taken for granted in American cities, but do you know this? Many of the natives here were never attended by a doctor in their lives. A serious illness here meant death or deformity.

The natives soon found out they could come to the Army dispensary when they were sick or injured and they come in often. I treat their fractures, their cuts and their chills. There are many natives who get bad ax wounds. I have sewed up many of them. Only yesterday there was a girl who had a very badly broken elbow. Without medical attention she would have been a cripple for life. I am learning to speak Spanish so I can talk better to the natives. Sometimes a child is brought in very sick and I cannot ask questions, so I call for an interpreter.

Anyhow, the natives think the army doctor is a wonderful man. They call me "El Medico" with great respect. Whenever I go into the village, everyone wants to feed me or give me something to drink.

Lt. Caplan returned to the United States and underwent advanced training at Randolph Field. He was promoted to Captain and Flight Surgeon in September 1942. He actively sought an overseas assignment and in the summer of 1944, he was eagerly waiting to be shipped overseas. On June 24th he wrote home saying, "Here I am still waiting for my boat to come in and I don't mean dream boat. For reasons unknown to me but probably good reasons, no men are being shipped out of this port. Ships load up all the time but they carry supplies only. The papers say some of these are sunk and rumors around here say many are sunk. There is a ship in the harbor now that has a hole in its side as large as your front porch. Latest word is that we won't leave before early July. When we do go we will be protected by planes and destroyers."

On June 28, he wrote again saying, "I am still in the U.S. and am permitted to say that I am somewhere on the Atlantic Coast. No doubt we will be leaving soon. We are all sick and tired of waiting and everybody wants to get out of this place and get going. There is little to write. I am well but impatient. A fellow sure stands around a lot in the army." Finally, in July 1944 he arrived at "Rapple Dipple", the Replacement Depot in Italy where he eagerly awaited assignment. It came quickly and he was off to the 719th Squadron, of the 15th Air Force, in Grottaglie, Italy.

Insignia of the 719th Squadron, The Flying Horsemen

In August 1944, Leslie wrote home:

> My sightseeing days came to an abrupt end when I was assigned to the 719th Bombardment Squadron as Squadron Flight Surgeon. This was a lucky assignment as the 719th is a well known outfit in these parts. We have already been awarded two Presidential citations for outstanding work and we are still at it. Really we are letting the Krauts have it. In this Squadron, we make the headlines.
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> But we have casualties too, for this is far from being a one-sided war. I now have seen and tended to casualties at the front end of the lines. They can be pretty vicious but courage is routine around here. Usually when we have a casualty or a burn, we give morphine freely to control pain. The army has little "Syrettes" which contain 1/2 grain of morphine already in solution. The "Syrette" is a small tube like a real small toothpaste tube and it has a sterile needle at one end - so it is a simple matter to give M.S. fast. Next we give plasma and give it fast. The army plasma can be mixed by one of our G.I. assistants in a few minutes and it can be given easily anywhere. It is common practice to administer it when and wherever you first see the wounded man. In addition, we often give plasma in the ambulance on the way to the hospital.
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> On one occasion I took care of a causality while flying over enemy territory at a five mile height. Flight Surgeons are now allowed to go on two combat missions if the Commanding Officer oks it. Few of them take advantage of the offer and no Flight Surgeon has to go on a combat mission. I received permission to go on a mission. We knew in advance that our target was one of the best defended in Europe. I went anyhow, although thinking back on it, I am not so sure I was so smart.
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> It was all very surprising to me - for I was hardly afraid at all even though I knew I should have been. I actually enjoyed most of the long, grueling flight. Over the target, the flak was something spectacular. It was officially described as "intense, accurate, and heavy." Those shells were bursting all around us and very near us. You could see bursts all around, above and below. Even in the midst of danger, you look on these explosions in fascination. All the time - right in the middle of the flak - you hear the calm voices of the crew members as they call in instructions over the interphone apparently oblivious of the danger. Then when everything is just right the signal is given for "Bombs Away!" and then the sky is full of falling bombs as the planes release their load. There is great relief after the bombs drop and the lightened planes then fly as fast as possible to escape the ever present flak.
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> I would hate to be on the receiving end of those bombs. The Germans are really catching it - not only here but everywhere. I am even getting optimistic myself and believe the European War will be over soon. I escaped unscathed on the mission. I went on. Getting a "Purple Heart" is no bargain from what I have seen.

The mission he described was to Ploesti. He flew with Mike Mealey and crew, of the 449th Bomb Group. It didn't take Captain Caplan long after his arrival to Grottaglie to make friends with Mealy, who he said was the best pilot in the 719th Squadron. Mealey, who changed his name to O'Malley after the war, wrote of his experiences with Dr. Caplan in an article entitled "Our Flight Surgeon's Endeavors ... Above And Beyond":

I was a B-24 Crew Pilot when Dr. Caplan approached me in August, 1944, and requested that I take him on what was to be the last mission over the Ploesti oil fields. I told him that Ploesti continued to be dangerous, but he was not deterred. I required that he get permission from the Squadron Commander; he did that by asserting that it was important to him to observe the B-24 oxygen system under combat conditions. We lost no planes that day and Dr. Caplan was most appreciative that he had been a professional observer of Ploesti' s demise.

When I met Leslie in Italy, he was in his mid thirties, just some four years after completion of his internship. He was handsome and women loved him without shame. He was charming, a good part of which was related to his practiced ability to listen to others. He was, admittedly, an airplane "junkie" and the leading source of aircraft knowledge in our squadron. He is also remembered for his great sense of humor, including a dry wit that was unsurpassed. He could, and if requested would, do ninety minutes of Henny Youngman's one-liners. Although some 14.5 years older than the average age of me and my crew members, he was very popular with us and with the remainder of our squadron.

On the evening of October 12th, Dr. Caplan again approached me in the tent that we called our "officer's club". He had heard that Vienna was our next day'starget. On that occasion, he was insistent regarding his desire to again observe, butmy refusal was equally firm. I explained to him that Vienna was one of the very few remaining targets that the entire 15th Air Force feared. At 4 a.m. the next morning,the good doctor greeted me at the flight line and served me with his writtenpermission, signed by the Squadron Commander. I suggested that he try one of the other crew pilots, as I personally believed the mission too dangerous to risk for amedical observer. He informed me that he would fly only with me for the followingtwo baseless reasons: (a) I was the best pilot in our Squadron, and (b) many reliable parties had assured him that I was a very, very lucky Irish pilot asevidenced by my 28 missions to that date. (I could not deny that my return frommany missions was miraculous.) My better judgment to the contrary notwithstanding, the good doctor came aboard.

The day before the mission to Vienna, Dr. Caplan seemed oblivious of what was in store for him. Always an animal lover, he described a puppy he had palled up with in a letter home dated October 12, 1944:

The boys at our Dispensary found a nice little pup a few months ago, so they decided to keep it. The dog is as nice as a U.S. dog and it is one of the few things in Italy that compares with its equivalent in the States. This pup is very sweet and spends a lot of time in the Dispensary and will rush into the ambulance when we go

out to the line. At home you have to train a dog not to chase autos. Our dog never chases autos. He chases planes. We had a hard time breaking the pup of the habit.

The next day was Friday the 13th of October, the last flight for Mealey's crew on the B24 Liberator called the Nancy Jane II. From that day on, they called that date "Black Friday".

Tom Sommers was the tail gunner on that fateful flight.

He wrote an account especially for this book about what happened to him and his Flight Surgeon that fateful day and the days after:

Leslie approached my pilot and asked if he could go with us. Mike was a little reluctant because it was a tough one. Leslie told him he had permission from the commander, and was told that Mike was the best in the 719 Sqd. Leslie was a dedicated man and a super guy. He did not have to be on this mission. He wanted to study the oxygen equipment and learn more about the stressful combat conditions that we flew under. He especially wanted to learn more about why the crews were so nervous when they came back from the missions so that he could better help us. I was very glad Dr. Caplan was with us.

We got to the target around noon and it was fogged in which meant bad news. We did not drop our bombs. Other groups were hitting targets in the same area. We were afraid of collisions. On this particular day, a Colonel in Administration decided he would go with us and lead our group. After our first try, the Colonel decided we should make a long circle and come back to try again, hoping the fog would lift. The fog had not lifted and we still did not drop! This was not normal procedure. Usually if you did not drop, you would proceed on to a secondary target and we had one to hit on the way back to the base, being Graz, Yugosalvia. Instead, our plane got banged up going around. We lost one engine, had flak holes, and my intercom was shot out. I could not hear what was going on. I was in the tail turret. The worst part was that our gasoline tanks were hit! Our biggest nightmare was fire from damaged tanks. We lost a lot of airplanes that day by going around twice, including ours.

Our crippled plane, Nancy Jane II, had a great pilot and copilot at the controls. They got us into Yugoslavia. We made it to Graz and dropped on the railroad yards. Our bombs knocked some doors off some outhouses and many dropped in an open field. Nobody really cared at this point in time. We were heading for a little island off the coast by he name "Viz". This island was held by the British for a fighter base. It had real short runways. This meant a belly landing if you could make it. But we

couldn't. All our engines were running mostly empty. As we approached the Adriatic Sea, there was a range of mountains to go over and then we would have to "ditch" into the sea. Our very capable pilot knew that our plane could break up because the bomb bay doors would cave in, and if we ditched into the sea there would be serious injuries, and or drownings. So we turned back inland to find a better place to jump.

Of course I knew we were in trouble, but it really did not hit me until someone tapped me on the shoulder and said prepare to bail out when you hear the buzzer. I was shocked, to say the least, at age eighteen. I got out of my turret and joined the others in the tail section. We would jump through the large camera hatch. Some other plane was carrying the camera that day. Leslie was up front on the flight deck and would go out of the bomb bay with the pilot, copilot, radio operator, navigator, bombardier, and engineer gunner. When Mike rings the buzzer, go for it.

We were wearing our flight gear, but the heated suit with slippers was not what you needed. We were told to carry our GI shoes because if you weren't captured and had to walk out you needed footwear that could handle the rugged hiking. I had always tied my "G.I." shoes together and put them on the floor behind my turret. (I also put my ration of a Coca-Cola in my shoe so it would get real cold and icy up there at 20 or so thousand feet. We had no ice at the base. Man, this was a real treat!.)

I thought to myself I'm not going to be the first to go out and I'm sure not going to be last. You squatted facing the rear of the plane and dropped through the hatch. I had no training for jumping. We were told it was like jumping from the top of a car traveling at about 15 mph. There was barely enough room to go through. While we were waiting to jump, our belly gunner asked me if I knew how to pray. He was older than I and this was a surprise to me. I told him "A.J. just talk to God as you are talking to me and ask Him to spare us, if He will, as He has brought us this far." We jumped at 13,000 feet, which was good. You had time to get your wits together. The first guy went OK, but the second guy, Gilbert Luchsinger, thought he should go out headfirst and this was a mistake. He hit his head on the other side and cut a gash in his head. There was a large bandage on your parachute harness. He tied his around his head to stop the bleeding. This may have saved him from bleeding to death. Hitting the extreme cold slipstream of air kept him from passing out.

It came my time. I took my shoes, left my cold, frosty coke and dropped through the hatch. What a scary blast! A cold, two hundred mph blast! When I hit the air stream, it was agonizing. I counted to ten so I would clear the plane, and pulled the ripcord. The chute opened with a tremendous jolt. I had an awful pain in my groin. That pain was taken over by another in my right hand. I had my shoes in this hand and they were gone. I looked down on this clear day, but I could not see them dropping. I looked up and they were hanging in the big snap that held my parachute. How lucky can you be? As I was coming down, I was watching the ground to see how it was coming up. I could see that I was going to hit a rock fence. I was coming straight down. Had I been drifting with a good breeze, the landing would have been easier. I pulled the shroud lines on one side of the chute and missed the fence about five yards, but I hit a rock about the size of a soccer ball and fractured my left foot. After checking to see if I had broken any more bones (I hit that hard), I got my heated slippers off and put my G.I. shoes on before my foot started to swell too much.

The Ustashi captured us. They were the Yugoslavian soldiers fighting for the Germans. I could hear rifle fire as I was nearing the ground. I thought they were shooting at me - I am dead. Our underground partisans saw us in trouble when we turned back from the mountains. They were trying to save us from the Ustashi. That was the rifle fire I heard. We were scattered about a mile apart. Leslie landed in a village among some children playing and scared them very bad. We tried to let them know we would not hurt them. The exact details of his capture I do not know.

Two Ustashi came up the hill for me and stopped at some distance, with their rifles pointed at me. I figured they were very apprehensive so I tried to get them to come up closer by motioning, holding my jacket open and patting my torso. This they did and we headed down a path for about a quarter to half a mile. As we were walking, one soldier kept pointing to my wristwatch. I finally gave it to him. Later I pulled my Air Force ring off and put it in my pocket. We came to a Catholic mission and stopped for a rest and some water. As we were sitting there, a nun found out that I had an injury and got some warm water for me to soak my foot. I did not want to do this because my foot was swelling inside my shoe. I finally relented and it did feel good. As I suspected, I could not get my shoe back on. When we had to move on, I put my foot in as far as it would go and tied my shoestrings around my ankle. After thirty minutes or so, we proceeded down a path about four or five miles. I asked this guard where we were going. He couldn't understand me, so I asked him if he was a friend or foe and he said "friend".

Soon we came to a small paved road and a house with a front porch. We were put in a vacant room. You could tell that they had done this many times before. As we were sitting there, I heard a 1939 Ford truck drive up. Ford built these trucks for the Germans. We heard hob nail boots on the porch. The gig was up and our time as free airmen had come to an end. We were loaded in the truck and taken to a village not far away (Dernisch, Yugoslavia). There was a stockade there where the Ustashi kept their partisan prisoners. It was a three-story brick building that was surrounded by a tall barbed wire fence. We were put in on the third floor in a large room. There was a Partisan POW woman prisoner there who was leader of the Partisans. Her big strapping son was also a POW there and he would bring us our food once a day. The woman had connections and she fed us news at the risk of her life, and also her son's life. Leslie finally arrived and we had a great reunion and many laughs. He could change the mood. Gilbert Luchsinger was brought in still bleeding from the gash on his head when he bailed out. Leslie fixed him up and stopped the bleeding.

The German officers arrived to gloat over our capture. Leslie would be our spokesman. We were concerned about his Jewish dog tag. He stood up, faced them eye to eye, and had some conversation with them. Leslie could understand a little German. He told them he was Jewish and even showed them his dog tags. He immediately reminded them that they had signed the Geneva Convention and he expected them to adhere to it. He said we were human beings and we wanted to be treated that way. The Germans respected him for his rank and being a doctor. The POW camps needed doctors. The Germans told him he would be moving out in about a week and he would be going to an officer's camp. He told them he did not want to go to an officer's camp, but with us instead because they needed doctors in the camps for enlisted men. The German officers were a little surprised, but liked the idea. Leslie and the Germans knew that doctors were needed there more than at an officer's camp. We were delighted.

We were in the stockade for about a week and then were moved out in a truck. Leslie and the other officers were moved out before us, and Leslie got to Luft IV before I did. After traveling by truck to Austria for interrogation, another train to Budapest and then back to Vienna, we enlisted men eventually rode in a World War I boxcar to Stalag Luft IV. These old cars were called "40 and 8", as they could carry 40 horses and eight men. We stopped occasionally and were let out of the car to relieve ourselves, and sometimes we were allowed to look for some grain on the ground left after a harvest. We passed the time picking lice from our clothing. Our scraggly crew would soon arrive at our home away from home. The camp was near the German occupied town of Grosstychow, Poland. The guards took us off the train and proceeded to walk us out of town. As we approached the camp, our escort made

us run or trot as best we could. At this point, we didn't care much what happened; just get somewhere! It was a huge camp, approximately three or four compounds with a thousand to fifteen hundred airmen to each compound. Later on, I met a POW who had spent a week in the same stockade in Yugoslavia that we did. He told me that the Yugos executed the old lady and her son.

In his Testimony before the US War Crimes Commission, Dr. Caplan stated that he was held at Dernisch, Jugo-Slavia from October 13, 1944 to October 20, 1944; Zagreb, Jugo-Slavia, October 27, 1944, to November 1, 1944; Dulag Luft, Frankfurt, Germany, November 15 to November 22, 1994, and he finally arrived at Stalag Luft IV on November 28, 1944.

It took 46 days from his date of capture until he arrived at Stalag Luft IV. There was a 14 day gap from when he departed Zagreb and when he arrived at Dulag Luft in Frankfurt. Some of this time he was in Vienna, where he may have been in solitary confinement along with his friend, pilot Michael Mealey, whose experience is described below. He also surely was in transit for some of the time, but it is striking how long it took to get from one location to another. It took 6 days to go from Frankfurt to Stalag Luft IV. Lengthy and dangerous train trips for POWs in Germany could have occurred for a number of reasons. Former POW Les Schrenk described some of the reasons to me: "Much Hell was caused by our pilots destroying so many bridges and railroad lines. When I was in transit, many times I saw one locomotive pulling 6 or 7 damaged locomotives that had been strafed, and their boilers were so full of holes that they could not hold steam. Germany had a lot of problems with train bridges that had been destroyed. To offset this, trains were re-routed, sometimes taking much longer routes. Also, the transport of POWs was not too high on the priority list. Sometimes that type of train was sidetracked and just sat there while more important trains were given right of way." Transport was a dangerous and grueling mission for Allied POWs. Train marshalling yards were subject to Allied bombing, and sometimes trains carrying POWs were left unmarked in marshalling yards for several days at a time. POWs were packed into train cars for long periods with no food or water. Add this to the terrifying experience of bailing out, being captured and interrogated.

Pilot Michael Mealey described his experience of the last flight of the Nancy Jane II and what happened to his Doc when they were both captured:

We lost more than half of our planes over Vienna that day, Black Friday. That Colonel should have been court martialed for his order to circle back. Our plane was fatally damaged, but we managed to glide with minimal power some 50 miles into Yugoslavia before all eleven of us parachuted. (We all lived through it and two crew members were taken back to Italy by friendly partisans.)

We had the most unusual guest with us that day and he was on old man. That was our flight surgeon! He was 36 years old. Most of were 20. Some fifteen minutes after hitting the ground after I had bailed out that day, and while still rubbing both of my legs, a menacing looking German approached me. He pointed his rifle at me, with its long bayonet two inches from my chin. In guttural English, he said: "For you the war is over". About one hour later, I reviewed that conversation for Doctor Caplan, adding that my response was: "You have got that right, Hans". Doctor Caplan refused to let my wise-ass remark go unchallenged. With a straight face, the good doctor opined that my correct response was: "I have only begun to fight".

When we were captured, the Germans could not understand what he was doing on the flight. They knew he was Jewish because he had the H for Hebrew on his dogtags. He told them he was Jewish. He didn't hide it at all. In fact, he kept telling them he was Jewish because he was proud of it. They thought he was some type of spy or secret weapon sent in on our plane by President "Rosenfeld". They did not believe he was a doctor.

One day early in our confinement, two German soldiers took me out of my solitary confinement cell in Vienna and transported me across town. My total confusion ended when we found Dr. Caplan in medical garb at one of the local hospitals. The Germans wanted confirmation from me that his ability to do routine medical procedures was the result of professional training, not para-medical experience. I gave them many detailed examples of his work at our squadron and, later after cross-examining Dr. Caplan on those cases described by me, they finally accepted that he was a flight surgeon. Their suspicions about him were magnified by the spelling of his surname. They insisted that he was Kaplan, not Caplan. They said all the Jews spelled the name with a K, not a C. Until our liberation in May, our SS captors officially designated him as Kaplan. Those chaps were something else.

Captain. Caplan echoed Michael Mealey's story in his article "Death March Medic" when he wrote: "For you the war is over. The first German officer I ever saw told me that, only a few minutes after I had bailed out of a B-24. But like many of his countrymen, this superman was wrong. For me, the toughest part of the war was just beginning." Dr. Caplan was entering into a great battle, which he fought fearlessly with nerves of steel. At Stalag Luft IV, he was assigned to care for the 2,500 men of Lager C. He wrote home through the few Kriegsgefangenenposts that he was allowed that:

> The fortunes of war vary. I consider myself a very lucky man. I received minor injuries from parachuting. My comrades were not so fortunate and they were very grateful to have a doctor take care of them on the spot. Things were not good at first but everything is fine now. At present I am at a Prisoner of War camp working at the camp hospital and dispensary. It keeps me busy and it is medical work. I make ward rounds several times a day and hold a large sick call every morning. I live in a nice room with another doctor and we do pretty well. There is no need to feel sorry for me. Most of the men feel that they are learning some of the lessons of life here behind barbed wire. Some of the lessons are not pleasant, but they are valuable. I have no time to brood and less inclination to. All around me are patients and fellow prisoners who were less fortunate than I, so I am very thankful to be alive, intact and in good health.

He added, possibly for the sake of the German censors: "I feel fine, and am gaining weight. The Red Cross parcels are distributed frequently. They contain generous amounts of good American food and cigarettes. The Geneva Convention provides some special treatment for medics so I enjoy some special privileges." Some good news could assure that his letters made it out of Germany and home.

Technical Sergeant Julius Karp assisted Dr. Caplan as a medic at the hospital in Stalag Luft IV. He described a different scenario to me:

When I bailed out from my plane, I was attacked with pitchforks by a group of kids. I still had wounds when I got to Stalag Luft IV, so I went to the hospital there. Dr. Caplan took care of me. He asked me to assist him in the hospital because I had a medical background. I was studying to be a mortician before the war and he thought my background would make me a good medic. So I stayed on at the hospital. Dr. Caplan really inspired me when I met him. He told me about how he flew the mission and was shot down, and his courage just inspired me to get through it all. I mean - to get in that plane when he didn't have to! He did something that no other doctor wanted to do in order to find out what we went through when we were flying. A lot of doctors didn't care one way or another about us. He was different. He volunteered for Stalag Luft IV when he could have gone to an officers camp. He had no consideration for himself.

There were two other British flight surgeons at the hospital and an Australian doctor, serving 10,000 people in the camp. There were some small rooms in a little barracks at the hospital. I stayed there at night, along with Dr. Caplan. I helped him remove shrapnel and helped him hold guys down with shrapnel wounds. I administered medications and assisted in surgery, among other things. Although we were working in the hospital, we suffered the same as the other prisoners in the camp. I lost a lot of weight in Stalag Luft IV. The meals were sometimes so bad you couldn't even eat them. The black bread was like eating sand.

I had an H on my dog tags for Hebrew, but I smashed the H with a pliers before I went over seas. I had heard rumors that they were killing Jews. They didn't know I was Jewish. They asked me what religion I was at Dulag Luft in Frankfurt. I told them I was Protestant. They didn't know I was Jewish at Stalag Luft IV. When the Germans came to the hospital, I just played dumb. If they had known I was Jewish, they wouldn't have let me work in the hospital. At Stalag Luft IV, they knew Dr. Caplan was Jewish, but somehow they didn't dare harm him. There was a German doctor there, Hauptman Sommers, who took care of the German guards. He did nothing for the prisoners except steal medical supplies given by the Red Cross. 75% of the time, the Red Cross parcels were not distributed to the prisoners. The guards took the Red Cross parcels, and broke open the ones that were given to the prisoners. Many men got very sick from eating from the cans that had been opened by the guards. Dr. Caplan argued continuously with the German doctor and the camp commander, at great risk to himself. He often shouted at the German officials and let them know that he knew they were stealing our medical supplies and food.

Despite the harsh conditions and short supplies, Dr. Caplan was able to save lives at Stalag Luft IV by practicing medicine by the seat of his pants, as pilot Michael O'Malley described his particular style of doctoring. S/Sgt. Leonard Deranleau contracted diphtheria at Stalag Luft IV and was treated by Dr. Caplan there. He described this experience in his brilliant memoir Memories Of An Aerial Gunner and Former POW # 2272:

A couple of days after Christmas I was stricken with a sore throat, and as a last resort asked for help since I could hardly swallow. I was having trouble breathing, along with a high fever. I was taken to sick call by one of my comrades since I was weak and unstable. This is where I came into contact with Captain Leslie Caplan. Only the sickest patients were put in this extremely small hospital located just outside the main gates of the lager. Dr. Caplan took one look at my throat and along with my temperature, diagnosed my symptoms as diphtheria. There had been an outbreak and several prisoners had been afflicted with it before me. I was immediately put in the hospital and attended by a couple of British doctors who confirmed Dr. Caplan's diagnosis. The cots were jammed closely together with only walking distance between

them. Medical equipment and drugs were barley ample, and were supplied by the Red Cross. One of these British doctors returned in a few minutes with a huge hypodermic syringe and thrust it into my buttock. He was cursing the outdated instrument as he worked the needle back and forth in an effort to release the serum. My throat was so raw and sore that the needle was only minimal to all my other miseries as I laid there in a delirious state.

I can recall going into violent tremors as my body would exchange from a high temperature and revert to a cold sweat periodically. I remember the medics who had been trained on the spot, as they would try to stir me from this delirious state of mind and gain my attention long enough for them to try and get some food and water into me to give me nourishment to maintain my strength, which I was rapidly losing. I recall the morning my fever must have ceased. My body felt cool and damp from my previous sweating and there was a sense of calmness as I felt myself relaxing. The British doctor was standing over me with a long pair of tweezers which seemed extra wide on one end. As I looked into his eyes he said, "Oh I see you have finally come around. We thought we might loose you." My throat felt like it was closed and my breathing was difficult. "We are going to have to remove some of the dead tissue from your throat," he said as he proceeded to remove small pieces of dead looking flesh a little at a time. After a couple of days of special care, I was released back to my barracks to make room for another patient who was in more dire need than myself. I asked one of the medics how long I had been there as I was leaving. He answered about eight or nine days. Man I must have been out of it. My roommates were glad to see me and took special care of me as I gained my strength back. Some who had saved a candy bar or raisins for an emergency would share with me in hopes the extra nutrition would speed my recovery.

The fact that Dr. Caplan was able to gain some level of respect from his German captors and practice medicine under the auspices of Stalag Luft IV is remarkable considering the German attitude towards Jews at the time. He worried often that harm could come to him because he was Jewish, but it did not. This is particularly unusual because he stood up to the Germans on a regular basis and challenged them continuously in order to obtain medicines, supplies and better conditions for his patients. One possible explanation is that Germany had agreed to abide by the Geneva Convention, at least on paper, and they desperately needed doctors at Stalag Luft IV. Another possibility is that airmen were already despised by Hitler and the Germans because of their bombings, and were held in a hated category all their own. In some cases, the Nazi captors did try to separate Jews from the rest of the captured airmen. Several airmen who provided their stories for this book encountered anti-Semitism in various forms while in Germany. The most notable case is Howard Sabin, who was sent to Dachau concentration camp from Dulag Luft at Frankfurt. Howard Sabin was shot down in September 1944. He said that the Germans never looked at his dogtags, which had an H on them, but two of his crewmates told the Germans he was Jewish at the Frankfurt interrogation center. These two crewmates had demonstrated their anti-Semitism towards Sabin ever since they began their training together. Howard Sabin was sent to Dachau where he was held with about 30 other Jewish fliers from the US and Britain. Reich Marshall Goering, second in command to Hitler and Commander of the German Luftwaffe, heard of this and set out to verify it. He was afraid that if the Allies found out that their POWs were suffering in concentration camps, then the Allies could respond by treating German POWs in a similar fashion. So Goering sent one of his Colonels to Dachau to check out the situation. Howard Sabin said he was visited by this Colonel who asked in a perfect British accent: "How many of you are American or British?" They responded and the Colonel told them there was a truck waiting outside to take them out of Dachau.

Howard Sabin was transported to Berlin to await transport to Stalag Luft IV. While at

the Berlin train station, he looked down Unter Den Linden Boulevard and saw "an airman hanging from every lamppost". He told me about his entry into Stalag Luft and how he met my father ther this way:

> I came in with 600 prisoners and was the last one to be interrogated. I was kept out in the Vorlager for 9 hours and I could not use the latrine. I couldn't hold it so Big Stoop beat me. I was not in good condition to begin with. I had snapped my back when I parachuted and broke some vertebrae, cracked some ribs, twisted my arm out of the socket, and smashed my left knee. I had passed out after landing and woke up hanging 10 feet off the side of a mountain. I cut the harness, then passed out again. I woke up throwing up blood. I didn't get any medical care until I got to Stalag Luft IV at the end of October. I was passing out in the barracks 3 or 4 times a day ever since Big Stoop beat me when I came in to the camp. I went to the lager hospital and Dr. Caplan and a British doctor thought at first that maybe I had appendicitis. Dr. Caplan saw the H on my dogtags Dr. Caplan looked at my dog tags, saw the H for Hebrew and told the British doctor to help him get me into his own room at the hospital. He told me that the German doctor at the camp hospital was unsympathetic to POW suffering, and he did not want this German doctor to see my dogtags. Dr. Caplan said that the German doctor punished sick POWs who were Jewish and told the guards to beat Jews whenever they could. So he put me in his own private quarters at the hospital and told me, "Don't go out of the room". He cared for me personally for about three days in his room. He came in and out of the room and brought me oatmeal. The room had a single cot, a desk and a lamp. He was very busy at the hospital and I did not see him a lot. I slept on his bed. I don't know where he slept while I was there. I never had a real conversation with him. He just came in and out, and gave me something to get rid of the gas and pain. He told me I had severe gastritis. The Germans used to puncture the cans in the Red Cross parcels. I had bought a can of salmon with cigarettes and I got food poisoning. Dr. Caplan saved my life twice - first in the hospital at Stalag Luft IV, and later on again during the march.

Herb Gold also encountered anti-Semitism as an airman POW in Germany:

> I had an H on my dogtags and I didn't know whether I should keep my tags on or off. I was hit over the Ruhr Valley. When I bailed out, I was caught by the Wehrmacht, but turned over to the SS. They took me to a town and that's where the trouble started. I was taken into the town hall, and the townspeople cried "Juden, Juden, Juden". I was the only POW there. They put me into solitary there for 6 days. Then I went to Frankfurt and on to Stalag Luft IV. When we were brought in to Luft IV, I was pushed into a room by myself. Then they took me out and stripped me. They rapped me across the neck and shouted: "We don't' have Jews here". They were big guys and they punched and kicked me.My gunner told them to leave me alone and they put a gun to his head. Once I got into the barracks, there were no problems, but I always thought I would be killed.

Norman Bussel was another airman who had fears about being Jewish in Stalag Luft IV. He tore his dogtags off in the air when he jumped because he did not want the Germans to see the H on them. He arrived at Stalag Luft IV just after it opened. As he had no dogtags, the Germans were not aware that he was Jewish, but he was torn about what he would do if the Germans tried to separate the Jews from the other prisoners. Should he volunteer himself as Jewish, or watch as the Jews with H on their tags were taken away? He discussed this with the Christian Chaplain at the camp. The Chaplain advised him not to risk his life. One day,

Bussel's fears were manifested when the Germans asked the Jews to step forward at roll call. As Bussel sweated and thought what should I do, suddenly all of the American airmen bravely stepped forward and said they were all Jewish. No Jews were separated that day, and after that, nothing like this ever occurred again.

Edwin Herzig's story echoes the stories above:

> There was a lot of anti-Semitism before and during WWII, and even some among Americans. I was told to throw my dog tags away by a Colonel at my base. I had a mezuzah [a scroll with biblical passages and the name of God inserted into a small case] I wore that my mother gave me. When I was captured in Italy, I was beat up a few times and thrown across the room. When I woke after bailing, there was a Catholic priest sitting next to me in a brown monk's robe. He protected me and told me they were about to shoot me because I had secret writing on me. At Luft IV there was a Catholic Chaplain from Britain, Father Lynch, who had been captured at Dunkirk in 1940. One day he told me that near the end of the war the German command at Luft IV had gotten an order from Hitler via the Gestapo and SS to separate all the Jews into one barrack. Father Lynch told them firmly that they would be war criminals after the war and talked them out of it!

George Guderley told me of an experience he had that mirrors Norman Bussel's story: "We got a secret warning one day through channels within the camp to protect the identity of those who had an H on their dogtags. One man in my room had an H, so every person in my room threw their dogtags in the latrine immediately. We worried at times about how the Germans might treat the Jews among us, but I never saw any anti-Semetic incidents myself."

Carl Moss was not Jewish, but his story of entering Stalag Luft IV illustrates the hatred the Germans had for airmen. He arrived about a week after the prisoners from Luft IV had their infamous run down the road as a welcome. Moss described a similar experience:

> There was a little red headed captain (Pickhardt) who was yelling and firing up the guards. He was screaming, "These are the guys who are blowing up cities and killing civilians". They lined us up 4 abreast and made us run. The line was like an accordion. I was on the right outside. A guard was right next to me with a 30 caliber machine gun. When I fell back, he started beating me in the back with the gun. Other guys were getting jabbed with bayonets. Dogs were barking. I thought they were going to kill us all. A lot of guys were injured. A guy in front of me went down and I tried to help him, but the guard threatened to shoot me. I was one of the first to get into the camp. Then two wagon loads were brought in with men who were bloodstained from bayonets. They didn't have barracks ready so they put us in a big circus tent. The next day, another group was run up the road. Subsequently, the Red Cross came and after that I never saw any more men being run up the road.

Dr. Caplan arrived at Stalag Luft IV after these brutal runs, but he saw and treated men who were wounded from them. He described what he saw in his Testimony before the US War Crimes Commission:

> The camp was opened about April 1944 and was an Air Force Camp. It was located at Gross Tychow about two miles from the Kiefheide railroad station. In the summer of 1944 the Russian offensive threatened Stalag Luft #6, so approximately 1000 Americans were placed on a ship for evacuation to Stalag Luft #4. Upon arrival at the railroad station, certain groups were forced to run the two miles to Stalag Luft #4 at the points of bayonets. Those who dropped behind were either bayoneted or

were bitten on the legs by police dogs. All were flesh wounds and no deaths were caused by the bayoneting. I personally saw the healed wounds on the legs of a fellow named Smith or Jones (I am not certain as to the name) who had been severely bitten. There were approximately fifty bites on each leg. It looked as though his legs had been hit with small buck shot. This man remained an invalid confined to his bed all the time I was at Luft #4.

Dr. Caplan continued to practice his medicine in the camp, and wrote home on 8 December: "Life runs along pretty smoothly in a prison camp and things have become routine. Being a doctor here is a unique and valuable medical experience. The Geneva Convention requires special treatment for medical men. One provision is that medical men be permitted to take a three hour walk twice a week. I usually go along on these walks. There is lots of beautiful country around here to see. These walks make you feel pretty good." He practiced his own Leslie Caplan style of doctoring, making sick calls at C Lager and also in the camp hospital. Edwin Herzig consulted him at sick call one day about a bad tooth: "He looked at it and I didn't know it but he had a pliers behind his back. Before I knew it, it was out!"

Leslie met up with his is old crewmate, Tom Sommers, who visited the hospital as a patient near the end of December. Tom described his visit to the camp hospital and his subsequent departure by train from Stalag Luft IV. Undoubtedly, Dr. Caplan could have ridden the train out, but he chose to march. Here is Tom's story:

Christmas Eve, Nineteen Hundred Forty Four, I got sick with severe pains in my chest. One of my roommates let me have his bunk and reported to our barrack leader that I was sick and needed a doctor. There was a small clinic with two doctors, which was fenced off and gated near our compound. One of the doctors was my flight surgeon, Captain Leslie Caplan. The other was a British doctor. Leslie checked me out and would get me over to the clinic. I thought I had died and gone to heaven. A warm cot, clean sheets and some medicine! I don't remember how long I was there, maybe a week or so. Shortly after that, our hosts decided they should evacuate the camp.

I missed the terrible march and went by train to Stalag Luft I at Barth. We were put in "40 and 8" boxcars, and there was just enough room to sit side by side. We had to leave space for the very sick so they could function properly. At night when it was time to sleep, each one lay down on their sides and when it was time to turn on to the other side, everyone had to turn at the same time. This was a chore we could handle. Our main concern was being in rail yards when our bombers came over. We were lucky. After a few days, we arrived at Barth, on the Baltic Sea, in Poland. It was an officer's camp where some of our ranking commissioned officers were interned. We were trucked out to the camp and put into a large room. We had a charcoal stove and straw mattresses on the floor, and blankets. In our Red Cross parcels, when we got them, were good old American cigarettes that were just like gold. You could trade them for anything. Some of the airmen traded the guards these precious weeds for a radio, or parts to make a radio. We were really living. We could get the hit parade from the US through the BBC. We could also get the latest war news. A lookout was posted on the door and if some guards were headed for our room, the lookout would shout "goons up". The guards would enter the room, look around and we would exchange pleasantries. God bless them. They did not want to be in this war any more than we did, but they had a job to do. Now, the SS, that was a different ball game. By the later part of February, we knew the war was ending. Our guards also knew this, and I was sad for them in a way that's difficult to describe. There was no place for them to go; this was the end for them. The Russian front was nearest us. They would be our liberators. The Germans had ravaged Russia and the guards were very concerned for their safety. One day there was a lot of activity and the Germans started

leaving rather quickly. The next morning, May 1, there were no Germans there when we woke up. About an hour later, a Russian soldier rode in on a horse and we were liberated.

Tom Sommers' story provides a contrast with those who marched out of Stalag Luft IV with Dr. Caplan. It was an extremely cold winter that year; one of the worst Europe had seen in many years. Dr. Caplan took a limited supply of medications with him. He carried some penicillin hidden under his belt. He had no stethoscope, and scraped the lice off many a chest so he could listen with his ear. Dr. Caplan marched the same as all the other men. Bill Conner told me his experience and how he met my father along the road:

I left Stalag Luft IV with a British battle jacket on. That was all I had. It was the same as an Eisenhower jacket. It was cold. They say it was the coldest winter in a hundred years. I'll tell you how cold it was. One time we went through a little town and we passed a house. A guy was up on the second floor. He had a balcony and he took about a two-gallon pail of water that he was going to throw on us. It froze from there to the ground. I wrapped my hands up in the blankets. We had two thin blankets we took with us. Sometimes I wrapped the blanket up around my head. We didn't have any hats. My shoes must have been about a size too big, because my feet swelled. Some of the guys slit their shoes. That was the wrong thing to do because they walked in the slush and the stuff would get in there and freeze. Some of the guys lost their feet. I don't know what happened to them.

We hit the road in the morning. They had these bayonets. Anyone who wasn't able to go, they just didn't make it. That was a hard thing because you got to know some of the guys, and you knew what was going to happen to them. There wasn't a single thing in the world you could do about it. We had a German Captain who rode in the wagon. I never saw him out of the wagon. Most of the time he stood up by himself. I think he was the same one from back at the camp. He went to Stanford University in the United States. He was a part of the German Luftwaffe and he got injured. He got assigned to the prison camp since he spoke English. We had a guard who walked close with us and he got the potatoes or the rutabagas. We didn't get any water. After it got warmer we took water from the ditch and that's when the dysentery got real, real bad. We couldn't boil water. We had no fires. We had no matches. We walked all day and stopped at night. They didn't allow us much of anything. Sometimes they put us in a position where they hoped we wouldn't last long.

I first met Dr. Caplan on the road. After about the first ten days we went real hard and some of the men started lagging back. They had knee problems and different things. He was back there. He had some medication to start out with, but he ran out. He did everything in the world he could. Three or four us started to help him. We helped carry guys along the road when their knees went bad, or they got pneumonia. We just tried to help them along. When you fell out, well, all the guards carried pistols. And if you didn't keep going, that was the end. I heard some shots.

When we started out, you could hear the Russians in the distance. So we went pretty fast for about the first ten days. After that we couldn't go very fast. Guys got blisters on their feet, and they got infected. They got pretty big sores. I made it pretty good. My heels were sore as heck in the morning, but after we walked about a mile, they started to loosen up. I kept my shoes on all the time. I knew if I pulled them off I wouldn't get them back on. I'd seen some men take them off, and that is when they slit them so they could get them back on. I had a beard down to my chest, and had lice crawling all over.

Dr. Caplan got the wagon later on in the march. I saw him talk to the German officials sometimes. I think it took him several sessions to get the wagon. There were

around 35 guys in the wagon each day, some of them very near death. All of them were in very bad shape. The last time I saw the Doctor he took off to another camp or to a hospital.

Howard Sabin may have been one of the men helped along by Bill Conner or his comrades. Howard told me:

On the ninth or tenth of February '45, I was staggering along the road, coughing and spitting yellow phlegm. Dr. Caplan came alongside and said he would examine me when the column stopped for a latrine break. He opened my coat and shirt and put his ear against my lice covered chest. He told me, "You have walking pneumonia but stay off the sick wagon." He told me this because Big Stoop was around and he sometimes came along and hit the men on the sick wagon, or threw people off the wagon. Big Stoop threw my march companion Donald Wagner into a snow bank. He was later picked up and sent to a hospital. He lived and had eight kids.The Doctor told me to stay around the big guys. I did and they carried me across their shoulders. Soon after, I slept in a cow barn. During the night a guy trying to get to the latrine stepped on my left knee. The pain was severe and my leg froze up. This knee had been injured by flak and hitting a large rock on the side of the mountain after bailout. Before dawn on February 14, the guards started screaming to move faster out of the barn. I could not stand and crawled out of the barn. Dr. Caplan saw my condition and had two large POWs carry me to a sawed off tree trunk. I sat there but when the column started marching, I couldn't stand. Dr. Caplan helped me up and asked two POWs to carry me across their shoulders until my knee was able to bend. Those large POWs carried and helped me for 4-5 kilometers until I could march.

That day I felt I couldn't go on. I laid down in a snow drift and begged a German corporal to shoot me. It was during a snowstorm. He laughed and started to bayonet me in the leg. Suddenly I had a vision of some kids who were running in a beautiful field in bright sunshine. God spoke to me and I suddenly had a strong feeling there was something good further on. I pushed the bayonet away and gave the corporal a pack of cigarettes to stop harming me. I walked away and from that point on, I felt I could go on. Our daughter was born exactly fourteen years later on February 14, 1959. Dr. Caplan came along and saw that my left leg was bleeding and tied it up with the sleeve of a shirt. He kept looking at my wound whenever he could. He cleaned my wound with water and rebandaged it, and told me to wash the wound and bandage whenever I found clean water or snow.

The first case of diphtheria came on the fifth day of the march. It was Donald Wagner, whose name and diagnosis "Diphtheria with definite thick membrane" is noted in Dr. Caplan's Journal on 11 February 1945. The entry stated that 22 men, including Wagner, "were placed on a German truck and taken to Greissenburg. Most had been supported the previous day. We were promised that Smith [who had large external thrombotic hemorrhoids] and Wagner would be hospitalized." Dr. Caplan later reported Wagner's name to the Adjutant General. (Wagner was taken to a hospital and he did make it through the march. He was one of the men who returned the medical questionnaire sent to him by Dr. Caplan.)

Stratton Beasley came down with diphtheria and was listed in Dr. Caplan's Journal on 19 February. Beasley described his experience: "After weeks of sleeping in barns, I became ill and could no longer walk, so I was hospitalized in a large barn with several others. I was visited by Capt. Leslie Caplan. He told me that I had diphtheria and that he would treat me as best he could. Capt. Caplan put me in his slow party, and I continued the march on my back in a horse drawn wagon. After a number of days had passed riding in wagons and resting in barns under the care of Capt. Caplan and his dedicated crew, I miraculously became

ambulatory again. Had it not been for this man I would not be alive today." Recently, I showed Stratton Beasley the two entries my father had made about him in his Journal. He replied: "That was me. I forgive him for misspelling "Beesley". He didn't write in his first entry about slipping the can of tuna under my blanket when he visited me the first time. This was a Godsend and was instrumental in saving my life. The second entry was the date that I joined his slow party. Had I not done that, I would probably have died."

It didn't take long for the men to come down with dysentery. Dr. Caplan came up with a unique approach to this problem. At night, he burnt wood and ground it into charcoal powder, which he distributed to the various columns along with a strong lecture not to drink anything unless it was boiled. He carried the charcoal in a can. It worked by adhering to the bacteria in the gut and carrying them out. This simple remedy provided relief for many men and saved lives. Herb Gold was one of the countless me who had dysentery, and he was on the sick wagon for about 6 days with charcoal as his medication. He said, "Dr. Caplan put the spoon in my mouth himself. "

George Guderley traveled witht he sick group for a while due to a "roaring case of dysentery". He was able to provide some assistance to the Doctor one day and described his experience this way:

> When I was traveling with the sick group because of pellegra and a roaring case of dysentery, I was able to help Dr. Caplan by devising a rudimentary scalpel for him to use to excise infected and ulcerated blisters. We were on a rest day at one of the barn hospitals. I saw him using a hand held razor blade, which is a clumsy tool for that kind of work. I broke the razor blade in half and then broke an end off at a 45 degree angle to make what would now be called an "Exacto Blade". I made several of these blades and attached them to pencil sized twigs for handles and gave them to Dr. Caplan. He would cut open the blisters and cut out the puss. The doctor had a few sparse supplies to work with. He had alcohol. He asked me if would assist him by dousing the resultant operated areas with alcohol after the pustule was removed. Needless to say, the application of alcohol was not a fun situation and required some restraining effort.
>
> One of the few drugs he had available was a small bottle of paregoric (tincture of opium), which was effective in treating dysentery. The bottle was about 3 ounces in size and he gave out small doses with an eyedropper. The paregoric was in such short supply that he only used it for severe cases when the charcoal failed to work. He also had some aspirin and some brown crepe paper that the Germans had given him to use as bandages. He had three or four assistants helping him at the barn hospital, and there were about four or five guards assigned to the sick group. I saw him get angry at the guards about getting things he needed. He survived by sheer guts and chutzpah. He seemed to have a secret source of energy. The guards were kind of simple folk and not too smart. Throughout the entire ordeal, I met only one who showed any kindness or friendship at all. He was an older fellow from the Sudetenland and had been drafted into the Luftwaffe. Two of his sons had been killed on the Russian front. A couple of us commiserated with him while on the march. We called him "Pop".

Early on in the march, Carl Moss became very sick and would have died without the aid of Doc Caplan. The food from his Red Cross parcel almost did him in. He told me his account of this experience:

Before we marched out we got to go to the warehouse and it was full of Red Cross parcels. I couldn't believe it! We never got more than one parcel for eight men. They stretched on Geneva Convention quite a bit. I paired up with my waistgunner Edmund Boyce. I had a shirt pack with a parcel. On the first night out, I ate liver pate from the parcel and I got food poisoning from it. Edmund Boyce got it too. All the cans were punctured when they came in to the camp. They thought they put something in them to aid us in escaping. I got really ill and had to be dragged. Doc Caplan came up with a couple of medics and he told me it was the liver pate. Two guys dragged me into a barn and gave me some medicine. I was very sick and have no recollection of the next five days or so. The next time I could recollect was when we slept in a field. If it weren't for Doc and his medics, I would have been left behind. After about three weeks, I recovered pretty well, but I had frostbitten feet.

The first 30 days were gruesome and we didn't get any food. It was cold, snowy and no food. We didn't shave for sure. Doc was always walking every time I saw him. We broke into groups of about 200, and he went around. He would come by and give pep talks telling us, "The war is almost over. Don't drink the water, don't drink the milk, you're young, you can take anything, and we're going to be all right." The way I have him pictured: he was pretty vigorous and he was a very positive person. He didn't have a beard. We crossed the Elbe three times and I saw him there, and also a couple of times earlier.

After I recovered, I pulled the sick wagon about two times. There were eight guys pulling and pushing. The guys in the sick wagon were bad off. In early March, we laid over and I took my shirt off for the first time. We all had lice and when you laid down they started running around. We got our first shower right around Easter. They ran us through. We weren't sure we would be gassed. My friend John Kocon took off his shirt and I couldn't believe how skinny he was. I ended up 96 lbs. I was 150 lbs. before my capture. I had a touchy stomach for the rest of my life.

Countless men on the march feel they owe their lives to Dr. Leslie Caplan even if they were not in the sick group or specifically treated by him. John R. Lantz perfectly captured this sentiment in a letter he wrote to me:

During the long 86 day Death March, every one of thousands had problems. Dr. Caplan's words of wisdom and advice were so important to all of us. When he diagnosed and made recommendations for troubles with diarrhea, flu blisters, cold or other health problems, the "word" was relayed down the column for miles. Everyone listened for his advice on what to do. We heeded his advice as best we could under the dire circumstances. We were all losing so much weight, with little food and diarrhea, making us weaker as the miles added up. He would tend to the most serious cases and get men in the horse drawn wagons when they collapsed, giving them time and rest to recover somewhat, and survive. Even though he never treated me personally, his words of wisdom were heard and I feel his advice uplifted my morale and was a big factor in my survival. I feel he helped more POWs during WWII than any other one person. He did it with compassion and knowledge and with hardly any medications.

Les Shrenk told me it always brings tears to his eyes when he remembers my father. He gave me this description of meeting him along the road:

During the march, he was everywhere. We were scattered over a wide area, and somehow he managed to get around to everyone. He showed us how to make a mixture of charcoal from our bonfires, mix it with a small amount of water, and we

would have a good remedy for dysentery. It did help to a good degree. He gave us pep talks, which helped build our morale a great deal. Having a leader to look up to, and his kindness and willingness to help, made a huge difference to us.

Dr. Caplan had on what we call the A-2 flight jacket. It comes to about your hips. It's light tan in color. It's not a heavy jacket by any means. It would be like a fall jacket. I never ever remember him with an overcoat on. He had what we called the helmet liner on his head. It was a little knit cap meant to keep your head away from a helmet and protect it from the helmet so it wouldn't be against the cold metal. I don't remember him having a Red Cross armband on. He had a medical bag, but I don't think he had much in it. I never remember him with a beard. We had a good three months beard growth.

When he came up to us, he would see a very bedraggled looking bunch of guys that hadn't been able to comb their hair, brush their teeth, shave, take a bath, not even wash their hands. We would have anywhere from at least three or four cans hanging around our necks with hooks on them that you would hook on to different button holes. One of the cans was used for drinking; one of them was used for preparing food, and maybe the other one for eating your food out of. You had a make shift pack on your back to carry your meager belongings. It could have been made out of anything. We had various head coverings. Some of the guys got varying types of hats from the Red Cross. Nobody had a complete American outfit on. The jacket I had was British. The shoes I had were British. The pants I had were American. My shirt was American. So it was a mish mash of everything. I would say my beard was maybe three inches long, and red. I hated it. I myself hate beards. My hair wasn't red, but my beard was. My hair was three inches longer than what it would be normally.

We were spread out on a long, long column over the road. It went as far as you could see. The column could be a mile long or more. We moved very slowly. We weren't marching, we were staggering. We were so far gone that we could barley put one foot in front of the other. Marching is very much of a misnomer. Sometimes people were crawling, but usually somebody would try to help them. About half way through the march, I became aware that a sick wagon was available. One man from my group once went on it but I never did. It was Dr. Caplan's sick wagon. If they couldn't get a horse or oxen, some of the guys pulled the wagon. Can you imagine being in a starved condition and hardly being able to walk, and volunteering to pull somebody else? Most of the time the men pulled the sick wagon. I can remember only one time that it was pulled by horses. If someone was sick, they had to go and find the doctor. I have no idea how they did that because I never did it. You couldn't just go up to a German guard and say I'm sick; I want to see a doctor. So you would have to wait for Dr. Caplan to come, or for him to hear that there was somebody sick. I have no idea how he would get to hear about it, because there were various groups scattered ten to fifteen miles apart. I have no idea how he got from one group to the next. The column could stretch up to a mile long.

During the day, Dr. Caplan walked up and down the columns. I really don't know how he got from one group to another. That is really very much of a mystery to me. It is also a mystery where he spent his evenings because he was never in any of the barns with us, at least not in our barn. The barns we slept in were scattered over miles, and at night he went from one to another. I saw him maybe four or five times. He was just as weak and tired as any of us, but somehow he managed. He must not have had much rest. He would just show up and he'd give us a nice pep talk. He would tell us that we were young and very resilient, and that we would spring right back again to what we used to be with just a few meals. And he was right. He was very right. He told us that we had the advantage of being in top physical shape when we were captured, and that just as soon as we were again free, that we would bounce right

back in no time. He told us never to give up hope. And of course, if the Germans weren't around, he would tell us that the war was almost over. Just hang in there for a little while longer. You will make it. You're young. You are in the absolute prime of your life; you will be surprised at just how fast you will recover. A hot shower and just a few good meals and your body will spring back to what it was. The pep talks would really boost us. You have no idea. You bet it boosted our morale. It was not always just what he said that inspired us. Experiencing his leadership and seeing just how hard he worked, just for us; that made him so special.

There is a very good reason that everyone respects him so much. Simply put, HE EARNED IT. Dr. Caplan could have opted to go to the POW Officers camp at Luft I. He would have been treated so much better there. He chose to attend the needs of the enlisted men. Later on, he could have stayed at Fallingbostel where he was offered good quarters. But he chose to stay marching with his men. I wish that someone would award him for the Congressional Medal of Honor. This man so deserves it. It makes my heart feel so good just to think of him. We all felt the same way for this wonderful man.

We knew he was a Captain, but you didn't dare salute him. He didn't want you to. He made no bones about the fact that he wanted to be treated just like everybody else. There was no doubt in your mind that he did not want to be saluted. His rank was Captain at that time. He asked us to forget his rank, and not to salute him. He placed himself at our level. He was a born leader. He was constantly asking the Germans for better treatment, but was constantly ignored. Yet he just kept on trying.

Les so beautifully describes the effect a visit from Dr. Caplan had on the morale of the men. This explains why so many feel they owe their life to the Doctor, even though they never rode on the sick wagon. He restored their hope and enabled the men to go on. He gave them back their dignity just by the fact that he cared so deeply for them. One truly interesting fact is that no man I have spoken with ever reported seeing Dr. Caplan with a beard. He somehow managed to shave every day, even in sub-zero temperatures, and undoubtedly did so to enhance his efforts to raise morale.

One of the best and most cherished medicines the Doc had was the gift of laughter, which he colorfully recounted in his article "Death March Medic":

The technique of listening to a chest was unorthodox since I had no stethoscope. First I would kneel by the patient, expose his chest, scrape off the lice, and then place my ear directly on his chest and listen. After that I would usually remark to the men that if anyone present felt sorry for himself, first let him think of my sad case. After all, at one time I used to have lady patients with chest trouble. This was always good for a laugh, and a laugh is good therapy.

It is impossible to measure the tremendous effect this laugh therapy had on the men. Tom Sommers put it this way: "The way he scraped the lice off those men without a hope in the world, and then made them laugh! I mean, can you imagine laughing in a situation like that? He could change the mood! And that made all the difference in the world. The man was a saint!" Dr. Caplan utilized every means at his disposal and then some to keep his comrades from breaking down or going berserk. He had soul and he saved the lives of countless men by caring for their spirits and inspiring them to go on. He even organized religious services against the wishes of the German command. He wrote about this in a section of his article "Death March Medic" that was somehow edited out prior to its publication:

One night I asked the sick men if they would like to have religious services. The reply was a loud "Yes". Again the Air Forces came through. Gunner Lee Wyatt had

had some experience as an Evangelist and thereby became the "Hospital Chaplain". His non-sectarian services were simple but impressive, even though they were conducted in a crowded, pitch-dark barn. Sgt. Wyatt would speak a few minutes in a low voice and would end up by having the men recite the Lord's Prayer. There was not much to it, but for many American boys living in danger and semi-barbarism far from home, it was a return to civilization. And if tears streamed down the faces of some of the men, no one noticed in the dark.

The morning after our first religious service, Frank Troy, who was the elected leader of Section "C" was called before the German Officer in charge and required to explain the subversive activities of his men. The guards had reported that someone had addressed the men in the hospital barn - something that was strictly verboten. Thereafter, our services were even briefer and quieter.

Sgt. Troy was another airman who was doing a big job that he had not been trained for in Gunnery School. He had a staff of interpreters, cooks, section leaders and others, all of whom helped the Hospital staff as much as possible Sgt. Troy realized his grave responsibilities and worked from dawn until past dark - pleading, arguing and fighting with the Germans for better food, shelter or transportation. In spite of threats, rebuffs and humiliation, he repeatedly requested better conditions and was often successful. His pleas and efforts at times secured for us extra rations and life giving Red Cross food.

Sgt. Frank Troy was awarded the Bronze Star for his exceptionally meritorious service on the march, based on the recommendation of Dr. Leslie Caplan. Leonard Deranleau spelled out in his memoir how Sgt. Troy, the Doc and their brave volunteers worked together to save lives:

Hunger pangs were constant and along with dysentery the body never had a chance to absorb all the nutritional value from the food intake, which was minimal to say the least. Sick call was held every evening, after we were settled in the barn, or wherever. The volunteer medics would make a special place in the barn where they would spread straw if available, and here the sick and weakest were attended to. Sometimes they were given extra rations acquired by the pleading of Capt. Caplan, Francis Troy and others in charge.

Captain Leslie Caplan was a Godsend. He was a man of compassion, and I'm sure he was responsible for preserving many lives. I can still see him sitting beside the fire pit burning wood in a controlled smoldering manner to create charcoal residue, which he would crunch into a fine ash form and store in a special container. At sick call, or wherever necessary, he would give you a portion of this charcoal and you would chew it up. This was his made on the spot medication for the treatment of the uncontrolled spasms caused by dysentery. It seemed to work and prevented many degrading and discomforting accidents of defecating in your shorts. I can still picture many prisoners with black rings around their mouths as they were chewing this charcoal.

During the night, the guards would let two or three of outside at a time to relieve ourselves, especially for the uncontrollable urge caused from the dysentery. Many times you could feel some poor soul stumbling over you, since we were crammed side by side at night. He would suddenly burst out cussing in frustration at the loss of his bowel control. This was a common occupance every night. The hardest time for bowel control was while we were marching. The threat of being shot or the butt of a rifle in your back, for breaking rank, prompted you to hold your urge. This was impossible for the unfortunate. I recall walking down the cobblestone streets of a small village one day when one of our comrades hastily broke rank and dropped his drawers, just barely in time to prevent this dreaded accident. As he sat squatted there exposing his

buttock, he was being harassed by one of the guards to hurry back into the column. He was oblivious to the civilians who were observing the incident. Some of the civilians would turn their heads as in disgust while others were shameful of the way we were being treated by their own soldiers.

Day after day of exhausting marching our comrades could be seen along side of the road relieving themselves of dysenteric condition. Others lay prostrate on the ground as they writhed in pain from the unbearable cramps caused from dysentery. The stragglers caused the guards to become impatient and irritable as the column was slowed down and perhaps their destination for the day would not be met. It was under these conditions that Francis Troy, our Man Of Confidence, demanded the pace be slowed and a ten minute rest be permitted at regular intervals. Also through his interpreter, he convinced the German captain in charge that the transportation of the sick by horse and wagon would proceed more efficiently. This was granted, Troy stood his ground even though he was threatened to be shot. There would be many times Troy would call their bluff.

One of the main concerns for Capt. Caplan was the danger of typhoid fever. He constantly warned us to be cautious of our drinking water supply. Water was boiled when possible and distributed for drinking purpose. It was a common practice where no cooking facilities were available to let the prisoners start an open fire where several comrades would sit around while their water would come to a boil in their klim cans, which we drank as it cooled down. This same method was used to boil our potato rations many times.

When the men were at their fires, Dr. Caplan would often show up and give his famous pep talks. He advised the men about lice, the dreaded carrier of typhus, and told them to open their clothes whenever they could and kill all the lice they could see to keep the population down. He instructed them not to take off their shoes at night because they wouldn't be able to get them back on. This advice saved many a foot. He constantly begged and pleaded that they not drink contaminated water or milk. He inspired them to stay strong and convinced them that they could make it. For many of the men he was the only thing that kept them going.

In turn, the Death March Doctor drew inspiration back from his remarkable comrades. He was extremely proud of all the men he worked with and their joint efforts brought some level of sanity and structure to an insane situation. He wrote:

> We were pretty proud of our hospital as crude as it was. The peak load occurred when 240 sick were in bed at the same time besides the numerous half sick. The attitude of the men towards the Hospital was gratifying. We repeatedly had to turn down the many men who volunteered to work for us. At times I would walk to some of our units isolated from the main column for several days, and I would be delighted to find some unknown gunner, often a former patient, who had set up a Barn Hospital just like ours.

Another amazing achievement of Dr. Caplan and Company was the trade syndicate organized to obtain food for the hospitalized men. He and the medics who assisted him in this operation all risked their lives to help others. Julius Karp was one of those medics and he told me of his experience working with Dr. Caplan:

> When we were evacuated from Stalag Luft IV, I left with Dr. Caplan and worked with him though out the march. He had very little medication besides the charcoal for dysentery. He had some disinfection powder that he used for blistered or infected feet. He organized a system of barn hospitals for the many men who were very sick. We had seven or eight barns that had hospitals each night. He assigned medics to each

field hospital and I ran one of them. I also traded things we had to get food for the sick. Sometimes we would find a guard that had a heart who would help us. Dr. Caplan walked from one barn hospital to another to make sick calls. They were from half a mile to a mile apart. He had absolutely no consideration for himself. During the day, he walked behind the wagon. Sometimes he was so tired he had to hold on to the wagon. I never saw him sleep. I myself got maybe an hour's sleep a night. I got some frostbite on my fingers and toes, and had dysentery. Dr. Caplan was sick at times himself too. Somehow we just had the willpower that we were going to get out of there. He would often tell me, "You have to have patience. Stay strong."

I saw a lot of arguments between Dr. Caplan and the Germans. He urged them to slow down and give the men a rest. He fought to get the sick wagon. He fought to get us fresh water for drinking. He was in danger every single time he stood up to them. Nobody else in the world would dare do what he did.

This past year, Julius Karp sent me a copy of my father's article "Death March Medic". I had read the article many times, but this time I was astounded when I saw the note he wrote in the margin about the Sergeants Wagner, the famous hospital traders, saying simply: "The names are fake. It was myself and another airman."

Julius Karp was awarded the Bronze Star for his work as a medic, based upon the commendation written by Dr. Leslie Caplan on 23 July 1945, while he himself was recuperating at Fitzsimmons General Hospital:

TO: Adjutant General

1. I wish to call attention to the meritorious services rendered to U.S. Army personnel by T. Sgt. Julius Karp, an Aerial Gunner In the A.A.F, whose home address is 1343 Findlay Avenue, Bronx, New York. Sgt. Karp was a P.O.W. at Stalag Luft IV where I was the American Flight Surgeon. He was a patient at the prison hospital and during his convalescence he showed such initiative and intelligence that he was put in charge of & hospital ward where he served cheerfully and efficiently.

2. On 6 February 1945 the Russian offensive threatened Stalag Luft IV and the Germans evacuated the camp by foot on a few hours notice. It was a march of hardship, the men suffered from starvation, cold and disease. They slept in crowded barns or in fields. Sanitation was poor and there was not enough safe drinking water. The men lived in filth and were plagued by lice and scabies. In spite of their poor physical condition, the men were often forced to march all day. This continued for 86 days. On 2 May 1945 British forces liberated us after we bad marched over 600 miles.

3. Throughout this entire ordeal, Sgt. Karp performed his medical duties in a most commendable manner. During rest periods, he sacrificed his rest to tend to the footsore, the weak or the discouraged.

4. The 2600 men in our column were often scattered over a wide area. Frequently, it would be impossible for one doctor to get to all the scattered units. Sgt. Karp was usually assigned to a distant group of several hundred of our men and he rendered
intelligent medical care to these men. When a soldier was very sick, Sgt. Karp would persuade the guards to send for the doctor. Guard

persuasion was a complicated and often dangerous job in Germany.

5. Soon after the start of the march so many ill had accumulated that it was necessary to organize some sort of a field hospital. Every night some portion of a barn was converted into a so-called "Field Hospital" where the sick were collected. Sgt. Karp often worked in the "Field Hospital" where he ministered to hundreds of sick men. At other times when be was with an isolated unit, he operated his own "Field Hospital" very effectively,

6. In the course of his many duties, Sgt. Karp was exposed freely to aerial strafing and to contagious diseases as diphtheria, erysipelas, tuberculosis, dysentery, pneumonia and pus infections. Because of crowding he often slept near contagious cases. He himself suffered from dysentery and malnutrition, but he kept on the job, just the same.

7. Sgt. Karp helped to keep up the spirits of the men. Many a youngster on this cruel march thought he would never see his homeland again and was ready to give up. Sgt. Karp encouraged these men, both by cheery words and by courageous example. His services aided in keeping the loss of life and limb of American personnel at a minimum. His spirit and unselfishness reflect credit on himself and the U.S. Army.

8. It is recommended that this meritorious performance of duty; be made a matter of official record and that an appropriate award by made.

Captain Leslie Caplan's Armband

The words Captain Caplan used to commend Julius Karp could just as easily be used to describe his own merit. He brilliantly described the effect he and his medics had on the morale and spirits of the men whose lives they touched. The march took a huge toll on Captain Caplan's own morale, although no one around him would have known it. He wrote home about the march on 8 May 1945, saying: "I never worked so hard or felt so discouraged in my whole life".

The long awaited Liberation Day came on 2 May 1945. James Kelley was with Dr. Caplan's group. He described what he saw that day:

> On the morning of May 2, 1945, when we went outside there were no German guards in the area. The whole group was milling around wondering what had and was going to happen. A short time later a group was approaching our barn. We didn't know who or what was in the group. Soon we saw a white sheet being hoisted with a pole at each end. Then we saw a small group leave the area following the two that were holding the sheet. About noon we saw a British troop carrier approaching and we soon found that this was the day we all had been looking for. Later that afternoon, the group returned with a British half-track troop carrier. It was then that we realized we were free. They told us to remain at the barn for that night and gave us instructions for the next day.

James Kelley's friend, Mike Pesta, wrote in his diary that day:

> May 2, 1945, Wednesday 86th day. TODAY IS THE HAPPIEST DAY OF MY LIFE, BAR NONE. On the road from Zarrentin to Gudow. Frank Troy told us that he, Capt. Caplan and John Kohl were going ahead to find Allied Forces and surrender the entire column. Now to have a telegram get home for Mother's Day. Half crying while writing this.

Leslie described his own experience of that momentous day in a letter to his niece Janet written on July 7, 1945:

> On May 2nd we were still prisoners and were staying in a barn on a large farm. A guard came along and told me the German Hauptman (Captain) wanted to see me. I supposed it was about our marching instructions for the day.
>
> The Hauptman looked very serious as I saluted him in his comfortable room. (The German officers and men lived well.) He said bluntly that he considered his position hopeless. The Russians were coming from the East and the English from the West. He wished to surrender. He asked if Sergeant Troy (our camp leader) and myself would go out and try to locate an American or British unit and bring them in so that he could surrender to them. In this way there would be no fighting thus safeguarding his men and ours. We were glad to cooperate for a change.
>
> Sgt. Troy put on a white shirt over his overcoat. I wore a large Red Cross arm band. There was an unarmed German non-com with us and carried a large white flag. You see we didn't want to be fired on when we would go thru the lines. We started down the road and after walking only a mile we entered a village. Every house in the village had a white flag hanging and when we reached the village center we saw why. Three British Reconnaissance cars were there. We reported to them. They asked for instructions over their radio and were told to go down and accept the surrender of our guards. The British gave us some white bread which tasted like cake to us and then they gave us corned beef and of course tea.
>
> Then we climbed on the Reconnaissance car (it is a semi armored car) and drove back to the farm. The men saw us coming and we could see them jumping with joy and cheering us as we approached in our great moment of triumph. I remember hollering out: "This is no rumor, men. We are liberated!" There were only two English soldiers in the car but about 100 Germans started piling their arms on the ground when we stopped. The English soldier then told the Hauptman to march his men to a POW center at Lauenberg and in a short time the unarmed Germans marched on to a prison camp without even one guard. All this took place in the country. The next day

we reached a main road and there we saw an amazing and pleasing spectacle. The Germans had been surrendering everywhere and they were marching or driving to the prison center. So complete was their defeat that they marched voluntarily without guards. We found out later over 50,000 "Supermen" had surrendered in this area including three entire armored divisions. As we approached the main road we saw thousands of Germans marching and hundreds of vehicles. All was confusion. As far as the eye could see in either direction men and equipment were piling up in the mad rush to the prison camp. I cannot properly describe the scene - it was a stupendous, unbelievable event - Hollywood couldn't approach it.

The traffic jammed the road and we moved slowly. There were so many Germans it took several hours to pass through. Suddenly a few Hurricanes flew over and our men cheered them wildly. Only a few days before we would have jumped into a ditch in terror. We were subject to air attacks often while on the march. We ducked planes every day. I have been bombed or strafed by Russian, British and American planes - never by German planes. Towards the end of the war Allied planes were shooting up all the roads and many a POW was killed by friendly planes.

I had little time to secure souvenirs when we were liberated. I was tied down with 40 sick men and I had to get them to a British Hospital. If it hadn't been for that duty I could have collected a car load of souvenirs. I still had the 40 sick men with me. They were in two captured trucks and were crowded. Here were hundreds of cars for the asking. I waited until a nice German scout car came along. I signaled the driver to stop. "Heraus" (get out), I said. "Take what you need and start walking." We then put our sick in the car and drove on in style. Other soldiers quickly got the idea and many an ex P.W. went joy riding. I could have had a thousand cars or a tank as a souvenir. All I took was two vehicles for the sick, and kept heading for the British hospital at Lauenberg.

On 30 May, Leslie wrote home saying he was still waiting for a boat to take him back to the U.S., adding:

I did not come through the hardships of POW life as unscathed as I had thought. I am now an official casualty and have been in various hospitals for about two weeks. The diagnosis is: 1) Malnutrition moderate, and 2) Observation for pulmonary tuberculosis.

I am not ill at all and I feel fine. One day while I was at the XPW camp I felt feverish and ached. The next day I was worse and went to a field hospital with a temperature of 102. The next day I hit 104 and felt pretty sick. I had a course of penicillin but my fever kept going up. Next day my routine Xray came back with a report "diffuse patchy infiltration of right apex. Probable acid -fast infection" and I was shipped off at once to a general hospital with a diagnosis of minimal but active TB. At the general hospital I improved rapidly and was temperature free in three days and I have stayed that way ever since (9 days). I only coughed a few days and that was mild. I could not even produce a sputum specimen for the lab and for over a week now I haven't even coughed. I have a splendid appetite, just as I always had in Germany. (In my seven months captivity I can scarcely remember a time that I wasn't hungry.)

I had a recheck Xray when my fever went down and it showed no change over the previous Xray. I appeared before a medical disposition board and they classified me as a case which will require over 60 days hospitalization and recommend immediate evacuation to the States. I am still waiting for a hospital ship. Chest cases are not evacuated by air ordinarily. Regardless of what the diagnosis is, I will be a patient for some time. When I return to the U.S. U will not go home, but will be kept in an army

hospital, probably in Denver. At worst I have a minimal lesion which means 6 to 8 months in a hospital and I can stand that. Rest assured that I feel fine and am in good spirits.

When I have time I will tell you of the 86 days I spent on the road, in Germany with 2500 airmen. We froze, starved and picked off our lice, but we marched daily just the same. Our sanitary safeguards were almost nil and we paid the price like armies of old. As a medical officer, I had a heartbreaking job, the most important and difficult job I ever had. I did what I could and I know the men appreciated my efforts. Without proper food or medical supplies, what can you do? Regardless, the medics did plenty and before the march was very old, we had a filed hospital set up in a barn every night and the sick received the best that was available. I usually slept with the sick, beside the many half sick. We were overwhelmed with dysentery but we had (and slept with) many cases of frostbite, pneumonia, tuberculosis, erysipelas, diphtheria, besides routine abscesses and skin excoriations from scratching. From Feb. 6th until the end, May 2nd for us, we lived in filth, sleeping in barns and fields, rarely washing. I stood these hardships very well. I had every chance to get TB. By the end of the trip I had accumulated many cases of pleurisy and chronic coughs and now doubt I was repeatedly and generously exposed to TB. That coupled with a 25 pound weight loss accounts for my present illness. No doubt I have much natural immunity to TB and will recover rapidly with decent living. I must have gained 10 pounds already.

I am enclosing a certificate which some of our sick PW's (early releases) turned in. I was told when I reached the XPW camp on May 7 that I had been mentioned repeatedly by released PW's who reported me as having done an outstanding medical job.

Captain Leslie Caplan arrived back in the States on 27 June 1945, and did go to Fitzsimmons General Hospital in Denver, where he remained under treatment for about ten months until mid-April 1946. He was awarded the Legion of Merit by General Quade, while at Fitzsimmons in March 1946, and was promoted to Major at that time. Major Leslie Caplan was relieved of active duty due to disability and separated from service on 8 July 1946.

Dr. Leslie Caplan was becoming a psychiatrist during his years as a flight surgeon. You can see this in his decision to fly on Black Friday so he could learn more about the stressful conditions the men were under on those dangerous missions. He had seen that the men were in a nervous state when they came back and he wanted to help them. At Stalag Luft IV, he saw the numerous casualties ranging from irritability to outright insanity, which he noted in his article "Death March Medic". Former Kriegie Morton Warnow told me about a chat he had with my father one day while on the march. Morton asked the Doc what he was going to do when he got home, and he replied instantly, "I'm going to become a psychiatrist!"

Upon his release from Fitzsimmons General Hospital, Dr. Leslie Caplan went to Minneapolis, Minnesota to embark upon his residency in psychiatry at the University of Minnesota and Veterans Administration Hospital in Minneapolis. He met my mother, Arline Steiner Caplan at the U of M while he was doing his residency. She was studying for her Masters degree in psychology at the time. The story goes that he spotted Arline, who was enrobed in a white coat several sizes too big (my mom was 5 feet tall and white coats weren't made to fit her in those days), found her drop dead gorgeous, and was staring at her. She

thought he was so impressive looking that he must be the head of the psychiatry department, and asked him, "Can I help you sir?" He replied, "No, I was just checking you out." And thus began one of the world's great romances. The much sought after Doc had held out for the best, and he had at last found her. Theirs was a real everlasting love. They were married in October 1947. My sister Carol was born in 1950. I came along in 1953.

Dr. Caplan commenced his own private practice in psychiatry in Minneapolis in 1948. He stayed on at the Veterans Hospital as a part-time attending physician and consultant, while he was in private practice. He was an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Minnesota, and he oversaw residents at the VA. He also devoted himself to working on behalf of his fellow POWs for the rest of his life. He was undoubtedly the greatest advocate ever for automatic 100% service connection for all POWs. He wrote numerous letters to support Kriegies from Stalag Luft IV in their efforts to obtain service connection, some of which are included in this book. He continued to practice his unusual style of heroic medicine until his death in 1969. After his passing, my mother continued to carry his torch for him. She obtained her Ph.D. in clinical psychology, and worked at the Veterans Administration Hospital serving vets and former POWs until her retirement in 1997. She carried on his advocacy for ex-POWs, and remained devoted to him and their legacy until the end of her days in 2002. Drs. Arline and Leslie Caplan are buried at Arlington National Cemetery.