

From Capture to Liberation

The Experiences
of a Prisoner of War
in World War II
Who Was Held
By the Germans



by **Harold W. Sedivy**
and Josephine Knight

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Introduction



Harold Sedivy was born to parents who immigrated to the United States from Bohemia, today the Czech Republic. His father's family came into this country through Canada, and lived a short time in Chicago before traveling across country to Nebraska with a wagon train in 1869. They settled in Boyd County Nebraska, which was originally the Rosebud Indian Reservation. The area was called Niobrara, their house burned and they had to moved to Pishellville, Nebraska where Indians stole

everything they had. They started over again and continued to farm their land. In the 1890's his father was given a land grant for several hundred acres near the town of Lynch, Boyd County and farmed for many years.

His mother came to this country through Ellis Island with her brother, sisters and mother from Bohemia, they settled near Lynch in 1893. His parents met and married July 28th, 1895. To this union there were eight children born, Harold being the last. He spent a



large part of his life on his family's farm, however, during the Depression his father lost his farm and they had to move into the town of Spencer, Nebraska. His father died in 1940, the following year Harold graduated from Spencer High School and enlisted in the Army Air Corps. He had a great sense of patriotism about him, and was proud of being a first generation Czech in America.

For many years he would not discuss his War experiences. As a child I can remember him becoming sullen at various times and having cold sweats. As a

child I did not understand what was happening to him. In later years he began to talk about some things such as his crew, his plane and the various bases he was stationed around the world, but when it came to talking about his imprisonment with the Germans he was silent. With much coaxing we managed to get him to tell us some of his stories and experiences, with age it seemed to become easier. We all called him a hero, but he didn't see it that way, he felt he only did his duty to a country he loved. §

AROUND CAMP P.O. W.'S. AT 514145 6

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A page from Harold Sedivy's notebook that he used in prison camp.

Dedicated to
Harold W. Sedivy and all American
soldiers who have experienced the
ravages of war and imprisonment
during war time.

My Last Bombing Mission and the Events That Followed My Capture in World War II



After breakfast that morning we went to briefing, which took about an hour. From there the crew boarded a truck to the flight line and were advised we would be flying ship Number 125, named *Broad Jumper*, as our ship *Ophelia Bumps* had not been finished being repaired from fragments of flak from the last mission.

As we took off the crew was very jittery because we were not flying our own plane, however we formed in formation and proceeded to our target. The target

was an oil refinery in Klagenfurt near Steyr, Austria. As we approached it, due to the overcast, our group had to make several evasive turns in order to find an opening in the sky to drop our bombs, and thereby we were separated from the lead echelon. As we approached our target we encountered a very heavy pattern of flak, which hit our number two engine and eventually it caught on fire. In the meantime, we were being attacked by fighters from three o'clock and nine o'clock high, but we were able

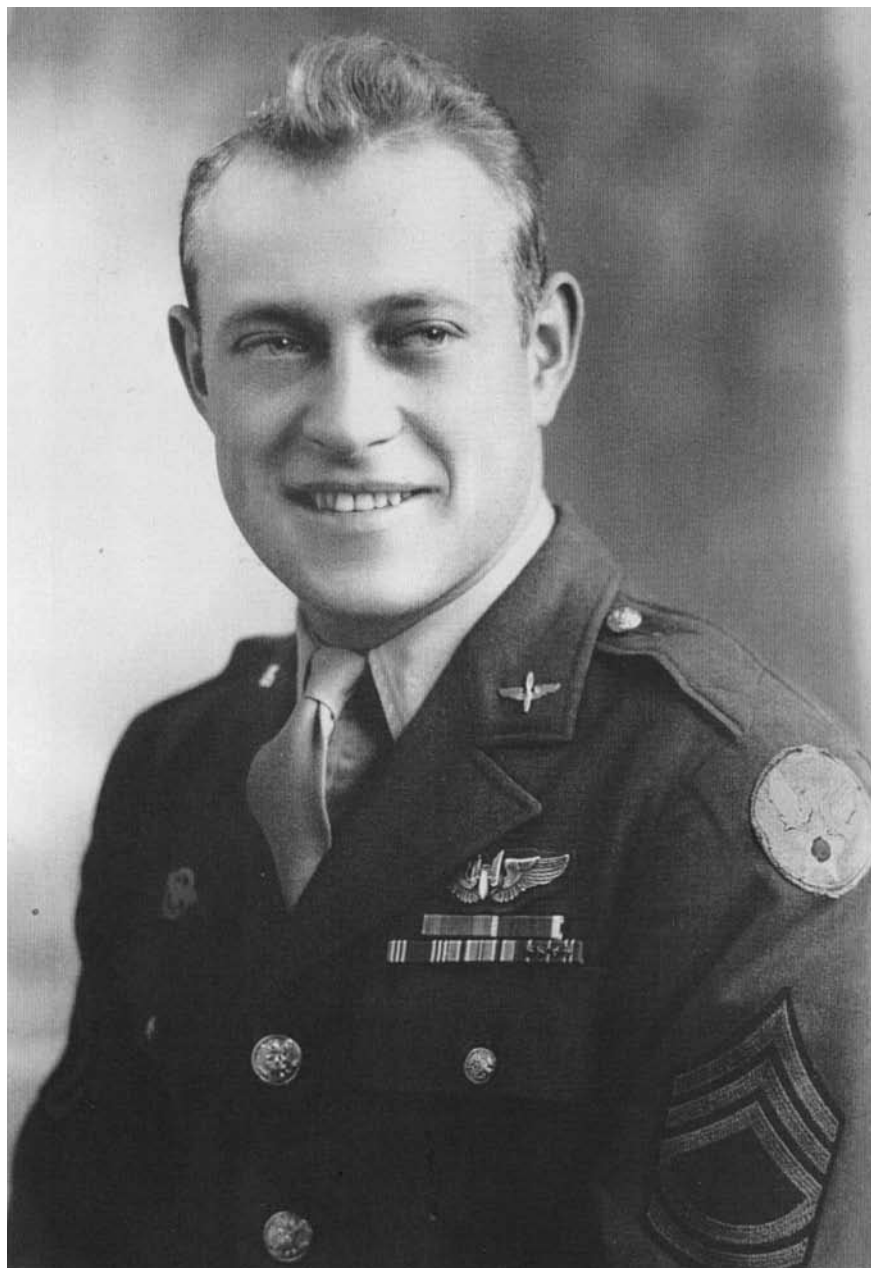


to sustain and get to target to drop our bombs. After that we headed back to our base in Italy. During this time the engine was smoking severely and eventually caught on fire. Simultaneously we were hit in the belly, the tail, and the nose by fighters. At this point Forney, the pilot, gave the order to bail out. The ship had dropped down from 23,000 feet to between 17,000 and 19,000 feet and was diving rapidly.

I was the first one to leave the plane, the rest of the crew followed. I bailed out in a parachute and one of the gunners was loose, causing my back to be injured. I passed out urinating and vomiting all over myself. I came to when I hit the atmosphere below in time to see where I was going to land. I landed in some mountains in Yugoslavia near a small village close to Zagreb. I was wounded in my left ankle, left knee, had scattered shrapnel over my body, and dis-

placed my left hip when I landed because I was favoring my wounded left leg. Immediately as I hit the ground, I threw my 45 pistol away because they would have shot me if found with a weapon. I was met by civilians as I lay on the ground and one of the ladies offered me a drink of vodka, which I accepted graciously. Within minutes, two German soldiers arrived. I could walk some, however they carried me down the mountain on a stretcher to the German Headquarters.

As I was taken inside, the first thing I saw was a huge picture of Adolph Hitler, covering the whole wall, this was very scary. I did not receive any medical attention at this station, however they did take all of my possessions at this time. My possessions were returned some time later when I was taken to a stockade where other airmen were that had been shot down. Here we received watery wormy



soup, ersatz coffee,* brown bread, and some margarine.

The following day we were loaded on a truck and taken to a railroad station to be shipped to Dulag Luft**, at Frankfurt, Germany. While waiting on the platform for the arrival of the train, our bombers were heard in the distance, at which time a large group of civilians congregated on the other end of the platform yelling obscenities at us, and calling us “Chicago Gangsters,” “murderers” and many other names. A German Captain came to our guards and advised them to put us in an empty passenger car, which was on the siding where we stayed for over an hour waiting for the train. From here we were taken to Dulag Luft.

While at Dulag Luft I was placed in solitary confinement for nine days. During this time I was



A model of a typical German Prisoner of War Camp.

interrogated at least once every day; sometimes as many as three times a day, this is a very eerie and scary feeling, not knowing what to expect next - fear is hell. I was placed in solitary because of my last name and my ability to speak Czech***. An individual with the name Sedivy was leading a group of airmen against the Germans. The Germans thought I was the individual they were looking for. They would not accept the fact that I was an American, not the person they were looking for. It took them the nine days while I stayed in soli-

* *made mostly of chicory, an imitation or a substitute coffee, usually an inferior one.*

** *Durchgangslager der Luftwaffe (transit camp of the Luftwaffe)-camps for Airforce POWs. *** See Introduction.*





Harold Sedivy's Crewmembers. Top row left to right: Lt. Severson, Lt. Logan, Lt. Allen, S/Sgt J. Bradley, S/Sgt Carpenter, S/Sgt Parsons, S/Sgt Sedivy. Bottom row: Lt. Forney, S/Sgt Rurrer, S/Sgt Frantz.

tary confinement to find out the truth, that I was an American.

At Dulag Luft we had to notify the guards when we had to go to the bathroom and of course they took their time escorting us there and back. Our food consisted of soup, dark bread, white cheese, and ersatz coffee. After being released from solitary confinement I was taken to a compound where there were about one hundred other prisoners. We were then taken to the railroad station and put on 40/8 box cars* or 40/8 cattle cars to be shipped to Stalag Luft VI** at Hydekrug, East Prussia, which took several days. The trip was interrupted on several occasions by raids of U. S. bombers.

Upon arrival at Stalag Luft VI we were again searched and interrogated at which time the interro-

gator spoke to me in Czech, which I answered in Czech. My ancestry is one hundred percent Bohemian Czech, so I was able to communicate fluently in the language. I realized that this was a mistake, when I was taken aside and questioned as to *IF* I was really an American. This incident scared me as they continued to query me between 20 to 30 minutes. I began giving only my name, rank, and serial number. Much to my relief I was released with the rest and placed in a barracks. While at Stalag Luft VI, Hydekrug, we shared our Red Cross items with the kitchen, such as corned beef, prunes, raisins, etc. so the cooks could make up different foods in bulk for all to share.

At Hydekrug the treatment was not so bad, except when the Gestapo came through to inspect.

*The French called their troop-carrying boxcars "forty-and-eight" (*quarante et huit*, often written 40/8) because they were rated by the army as capable of carrying forty soldiers or eight horses. The Germans and the allies also used boxcars for troop transport.

***Luftwaffe-Stammlager* (*Luftwaffe base camp*)- POW camps for Allied aircrews.

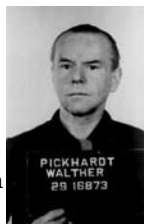
They would search us as we came out of the door single file and left us to stand in the cold and the snow for over an hour as they searched. However, we managed to pull through.

On July 14, 1944, French Bastille Day, they evacuated us by train to the port of Memel, to be boarded on a boat called the *Masuren*. We boarded the *Masuren* and were packed in the hold of the ship like sardines in a can. Our toilet facilities consisted of a bucket with a rope that lifted to the top of the ship to dump. As it was lifted it splashed on the prisoners. Here we had no food and no water. We left Memel and arrived at Swinamunde, Germany on July 16, 1944, here we disembarked. Each prisoner was handcuffed to another prisoner and placed in cattle cars forty men

to a car, here we waited several hours for an eighteen hour trip to Keifheide. There we were unloaded, still each chained to another man and each carrying all of his belongings in shirts that were made into backpacks. About this time a redheaded German Captain Pickhardt and another officer urged the Hitler Youth Marines, ages 13 to 19, with bayonets on their guns and police dogs on leash to force us to run four kilometers

down the road. The route was posted with machine gun emplacements.

As we proceeded we were bayoneted, beaten with gun butts, and bitten by police dogs, nearly all of the prisoners lost their belongings and several hundred



Above: Captain Pickhardt after the war. Below: A Hitler Youth Marine Pin.



suffered severe wounds from the attacks. As our belongings fell the civilians hurriedly seized everything they could find. Because if we attempted to reclaim our belongings it would have meant certain punishment or even death. I was handcuffed to Joe Richards from Havenhill, Massachusetts, who was a tailgunner on a B-17, we both lost our packs and were hit by gun butts several times.

Upon arrival at camp we were again searched and were again without food or shelter for three days. The brutality and beatings by the guards continued, until we were placed in barracks. I was assigned to Barracks Three in "D" Lager where we elected T/Sgt Frank Pales as our Confident for the compound. Here I contracted a slight case of diphtheria and spent four days in the dispensary with three other airmen. At this camp two men were shot, one going to

the latrine (nobody knows why), and the second had crawled out the window to visit another area and was crawling back in the window when he was shot. From this point on, the dogs were turned loose in the camp at night.

We never received a full ration of Red Cross provisions until the day we were evacuated, February 2, 1945, beginning the infamous "Black March." (Note: this was the most severe winter Europe had suffered in many years.) As we marched we occasionally stayed in barns, pig styes, or other farm shelters. However, on many nights we slept on the open ground under open skies as we marched on this trek. There were several incidents that happened along the way that proved to be interesting. In a farmyard, Carl Fitzhugh from Florida, Ken Harper from Nebraska, and I were walking around the barnyard where the milk cows were

stanchioned. I went in and milked three klim cans* full of milk, which we shared with three other friends. On another occasion we were put up in a glass factory for the night, three P-51's and one P-38 flew over the factory firing their guns. We did not know they were aiming their guns at the Marshalling Yard, which was about four hundred yards away from us. We continued our march across Germany, fleeing the Russians which were rapidly approaching from the east. Our march took a total of eighty-six days marching by foot under much duress and little food.

About a week before we were liberated the Germans set up a hot soup kitchen serving soup and bread. While waiting in line with my bunk partner Joe Richards, and others, I managed to sneak up on a chicken in a farmer's yard, I put

it under my jacket choking it to death, while Joe got my rations of soup and bread for me. We stayed in a pig sty that night, which held six men. At night we were allowed to build fires and this gave us the opportunity to cook the chicken I caught, which was done in four separate klim cans. Since we had not been given food with any substance this chicken was a rare delicacy.

The march really took the toll as many fell by the wayside, with diarrhea, mental anguish, and some just gave up. The only food along the way was small portions of Red Cross parcels, hot soup and bread, which we only had a couple of times on the march. However, during the march we were often housed in farmyards. At one particular farmyard we took a chance and several of us managed to steal

**Klim (milk spelled backwards) cans were round tin cans that formerly contained powdered milk and were approximately four inches in diameter and about three inches deep. They were supplied by the Red Cross for the prisoners.*

rutabagas and potatoes from the storage mounds, which helped us survive.

As the end came near we could sense the fear the Germans had of being captured by the Russians, if they were to be captured they preferred the Americans or the British.

On April 26, 1945, we were liberated by the 104th Timberwolf Division at Halle, Germany. In this division was one of my high school classmates, Thomas (Midge) Clinton. Upon liberation we were taken to a delousing station, given a shower, and issued new military clothing. We were then taken to the mess hall and stuffed ourselves, but could not keep the food down because our stomachs had shrunk. It took about a week before we could eat small portions of food without vomiting. At Halle we spent about twelve days being interrogated or debriefed by our military. From Halle we were

transported by C-57 to LaHarve, France, Camp Lucky Strike. Somewhere around the 2nd or 3rd of June, we boarded a ship for home. We landed at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, from there I went to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, then to Fort Crook, Nebraska and on to home. Spencer, Nebraska with my brother Vac who met me. No one will ever know what a wonderful feeling it is to be alive and to see my mother, brothers, and sisters again, and to be greeted by a host of friends that were there at my arrival in Spencer.

In the aftermath of the war it was a vast change to civilian life for I had lived in fear for fourteen months: that took time to conquer. I had a noticeable difference in my health, I lost my teeth and hair from malnutrition. I still have constant pain in my back from my jump when the parachute caught, in my ankle and knee which were hit with shrapnel, and my dislo-

cated hip which never was reset. Further, I have never been able to eat normally and have never regained my full weight I had when I entered the military. My wounds and mental anguish have had a great affect on me over the years because I have not been able to go full capacity.

POW Log of Poems made by Harold W. Sedivy while incarcerated by the Germans in World War II.

Personal: SSgt. Harold W. Sedivy 17123318 – POW 3346

Shot down March 19, 1944, was captured; approximately 3:00 at Yugoslavia, was taken to Zagreb, and then to Graz, Austria from there to Frankfurt, Germany, where I was interrogated and from there sent to Hydekrug, East Prussia through Poland, then Czechoslovakia from there I was transferred to Tychow, Germany on July 14, 1944.

On the back of the above statement he wrote the following:

- 2 slices of bread)
- 1 cracker) H₂O
- 1 spoon of butter
- 1 cube chocolate
- 1 spoon p. milk
- 2 spoons raisins

First mail September 21, 1944 at Tychow, Germany:

- two letters from Betty Jo dated June 29 and July 1st:
- Cigarette parcel October 2, 1944
- Two letters October 7, 1944 from Betty O dated July 6th & 16th.
- One letter from Henrietta Oct. 11, 1944
- One letter from Betty Jo Oct 17, 1944
- Two letters from Betty Jo & one from Sis Oct 20, 1944
- Three letters – one from Mike and two from Betty Nov. 4, 1944
- Eight letters six from Betty one from Mother and one from Sis Nov 16, 1944
- Six letters from Adolf & Mary five from Betty Nov 17, 1944
- Seven letters from Betty Jo Nov 20, 1944
- Two letters from Betty Jo Nov 24, 1944
- A personal parcel from Mother Dec 28, 1944

Crew 109:

•2nd Lt. Robert C. Forney	Pilot	Mound, IA
•2nd Lt. Eldon E. Allen	Co Pilot	Kentucky
•2nd Lt. Howard J. Severson	Navigator	Boston, MA
•2nd James H. Logan	Bombardier	Ft. Worth, TX
•S/Sgt Beamount Carpenter	Engineer	Hollywood, CA
•S/Sgt John W. Bradley	Radio Operator	Ivid, NY
•S/Sgt Harold W. Sedivy	A. Engineer	Spencer, NE
•S/Sgt Maurice Gene Frantz	Armacer	Oklahoma, OK
•S/Sgt Thomas D. Parsons	A. Radio Operator	Fairfield, IA
•S/Sgt Donald R. Faurrer	A. Armacer	Forest Lake, MN

My Buddy

They say he died in glory
Whatever that may be
If dying in a burst of flames is glory
Then it's not for me

In the briefing room that morning
He sat with clear eyes and strong heart
Just one of many "Gunners"
Determined to do this part

My Buddy had the guts, alright
He sought not glory or fame
He knew he had a job to do
And his crew all felt the same

But death had the final word
For in its log, it wrote his name
And my Buddy died that morning
In glory and in a burst of flame.

§

OUT ON THE BLUE

The city throbs with the pulse of life
With commerce and industry ever at strife
With bustle and bristle and traffic's roar
Far from the distance the sound of war

The parks are all draped in the usual floral
And peace prevails in the old hometown
The bombers roar and the sirens scream
Are things thank God quite unknown

But way out there in the distant blue
There's a living hell which men go through
As day by day and nite by nite
They locked in the grip of the world's worst flight

As courageously striving they stagger and reel
To ward off the enemies heel
To spare all the loved ones they left behind
From the rapes and the bandage the foe has in mind
And yet down in the cities if you seek you will find

Those who have chosen to stay home behind
Watching the fight on the silver screen
Sipping the whisky calm and serene
Reading the paper and discussing the news

Laughing and joking and airing their views
Sleeping each nite in a warm cozy bed
While their fellow man fall to the earth stone dead
But on a mission, with a target in mind

Death wings his scythe with a sure hand
Reaping the harvest so awful and grim
While Satan long ago had promised him
That harvest of youth on the threshold of life

All trapped in the hell of titanic strife
Your husbands, your sweethearts and also your sons
Gallantly fighting and mounting the guns
While here on the crest of a ghastly tide

Death moves around with arrogant pride
Whispering the name of someone you love
As Stukas scream down from the sky above
To shower the bombers with murderous aim

On men they're sent out to kill and to maim
Leaving them dying in a dark pall of scum
To bleed and to cry to die and to shake

Still in the city should you seek you will find
Those men who have chosen to stay home behind
Stout hearted fellows with hearts full of gold
Gold that is yellow some are told
Eager to share in the peace, victory brings
Claiming their right to the life's precious things
Proud of the fact they had nothing to lose
Theirs was the choice and thus did they choose

When the battle is over and victory's seen soon
When the hell and the bombing and gun fire done
When homeward they march those fortunate few
To pick up the threads of the life they once knew
How well they'll know, as they march down the street
What echo's the tramp of their military feet
That the value they placed on their homeland and you
Was settled and paid for out on the blue

Settled and paid for beyond any doubt
By them and their comrades who proudly set out
 To suffer the agony, torture and pain
 Of hunger and thirst and blistering sun
Who gamely and doggedly stuck it out and won
 To prove to the world and God high above
That it's you above all on earth that they love
 But still down in the city seek and you find
Those who have chose to stay home behind

So when you're back home where peace
Prevails and begged by all for thrilling times
 Tales of things you have seen and met
 And incidents that you'll never forget
 Tales of things which soldiers do
 And prices they pay in winning thru
 Refer them, to out on the Blue

§

SILVER WINGS

Our country is at war, as you are all aware
I received my clothing free, also my Bill of Fare
I've attended G. I. schools, greatly increased my knowledge
And many things I learned, could not be learned in college

I'll leave you with my stripes and flying things
But what I treasure most, is my little silver wings
I am sending one pair to the one I loved best
I know she'll wear them faithfully upon her tender breast
So I'll close now dearest till our wings come tip to tip
And thanks for the prayers you offer
I'll need them every trip

§



GODS MINUTE

I have only just a minute;

Only sixty seconds in it

Forced upon me – can't refuse it;

Didn't seek it, didn't choose it

But it's up to me to use it;

Give account if I abuse it

Suffer if I lose it,

Just a tiny little minute;

But eternity is in it.

§

THAT FATAL BOAT RIDE

It's a most unpleasant story that I'm about to tell
About that fatal boat ride, we all remember well
The day we loaded up, words cannot express
The agonies we suffered, you can never guess

Although we're not complaining and well, take it like a man
But we'll all ways remember, when we're back home again
When they shoved us in that hole, we thought our time had come
But not a sound was uttered, and everything was mum

That sea of stricken faces that we saw down below
We can't express our feelings, but we won't forget I know
We climbed down the ladder below the water line
And the "Huns" were riding up on top, where everything is fine
A prayer was on our lips, I knew no hypocrites were there
The sweat rolled off our bodies, all were stripped down bare
A little drink of water, doesn't mean much to you
And a ray of fresh sunshine or a velvet sky of blue

But take them all away folks, and their value is very high
That's what happened on the boat, we were all prepared to die
For 48 hours of stormy hell, we rode the stormy sea
Ten men were crowded in a space where one man ought to be

We suffered torture and hunger but we didn't hear a sigh
The stronger prayed for courage, the weaker prayed to die
One prisoner weaker than the rest, who just couldn't stand no more
Jumped over board that storm night and tried to swim ashore

But wait a minute, what was that
The silence broken, by a shot
A watery grave in the Baltic Sea
It was that poor prisoner's lot

So when you start complaining
And your pleasures seem so few
Just think of the Boy's from Stalag 6
And what we all went thru

So back up, that's the spirit
And when the war is done
We all come marching home again
Without our pack and gun

§

A BURST O' FLAK

You're flying in the sky so blue
The flak it comes so straight and true
It hits the plane it drives you back
And the cause of it all was a burst o' flak

You grab your chute and head for the door
Cause your plane's going down, you are wounded of sort
As you hit the silk, the sky goes black
And the cause of it all was a burst o' flak

You fall thru the air and all is quiet
The ship goes down, that faithful kite
Then you hit the ground with a sounding smack
And the cause of it all was a burst o' flak

The farmers and soldiers come over the hill
With blood in their eyes, they're ready to kill
They lift you up and give you a crack
And the cause of it all was a burst o' flak

They gather the crew and march thru town
So people can watch, with a dirty frown
Then they put you in a jail a filthy old shack
And the cause of it all was a burst o' flak

You then go to a barbed wire encircled camp
Where you're only friend is a Red Cross Stamp
You sleep on the floor, it hurts your back
And the cause of it all was a burst o' flak

We sit here and think of our girls so true
And the boy's still flying in the blue
Of the pillows and sheets of nice sack
Where we'd never hear of a "Burst o' Flak"

§



**FLAK AT SIX,
AND FLAK AT TWELVE**

Look out boys, they're giving us hell
Here come the fighters, coming in low
Maybe they're ours, don't shoot till you know

P-51's and P38's

Our escort is here, they're never late
They're fighting fools each man and his ship
There isn't a Jerry that they can't whip

The air is gold, just 50 degrees below
Turn up the heat, so you don't freeze a toe
A sharp look out boys, there's enemy ships
Aim true boys we still have more trips

There goes one down, another one too
Our fighters are busy to see none gets through
There are flames in the sky as another goes down
The pilot bails out; he makes it safe to the ground

Then in our tail the guns start to roar
There's blood on our guns, you shoot as before
Your ship is hit but still flies thru the air
You think of your loved one's and whisper a prayer

Smoke from the target leaps high in the air
We'll show those damned Jerry's we know how to fly
The fighters have left us, the few that were left
Our fighters got some, we got the rest

We've been up six hours, two hours to go
Though we're doing 200 it seems very slow
Italy at last, the nose gunner learns
We think of our Buddies who will not return

We're over the field, the crew gives a sigh
We've finished another to do or to die
Wheels touch the ground with a screech and a bump
Our ship brought us back over the hump

We're tired and dirty, thirsty and sore
The sun has gone down an hour before
First clean your guns and do it good boys
For that gun is life; his, mine and yours

A sandwich and coffee, your suit to turn in
Down to the briefing room, turn in your gin
Two meals a day, both in the night
Gets on your nerves, which are ready to fight

The mess hall is warm in the cold of the night

You sit down to eat, talk between bites

You talk of fighters, theirs and ours too

And of the boys that didn't get through

Of ships going down, exploding in mid-air

The bullets that missed your head by a hair

Your ship's full of holes, guess Joe's in bed

He has a flak fragment lodged in his head

Then head for your sack at nine of ten

A letter from home, another from her

"I love you," she wrote, then you know you've won

But a gunner's day is never done

§



FROM THE TAIL OF A B-24

Oh! I'm just a lad
Who got fighting mad
When the Axis got treating folks mean
So I figured I'm the one
To shoot down the Hun
From the tail of a B-24

Oh! It is a far cry
From the earth to the sky
Where the blue of the sea is serene
And I often times wish
I were going to fish
From the tail of a B-24

It is often times said that a gunner's life is read
In a minute or somewhere in between
The only death battle
That I heard was a rattle
From the tail of a B-24

§

A LOVER'S DREAM

Last night I held a lovely hand

A hand so soft and neat

I thought my heart would burst with joy

So wildly did it beat

No other hand unto my heart

Could greater solace bring

Than the hand I held last nite

Four ace's and a king – Stalag II

§

MY FUTURE WITH HER

It was just a year or so ago
We said “so long” short and sweet you know
She said she’d wait for me
No matter how long this war would be

Soon the time will come for me to go home
And I’d be like a king on a throne
I’ll have her always by my side
For then she’ll be my sweet bride

We’ll have a car and a little ground
Just for two kids to run around
I know how happy we will be
just us four, my wife, two kids and me

These are my future dreams, you see
This is the way I’d like to be
Things won’t run smooth all the time
I’ll be happy with her love, and she with mine

§

AIR FEVER

I must take to the air again, to the lonely sky and clouds
And all I ask is a small plane to fly from the madding crowds,
 And the gentle kick of the vibrant stick,
 And the powerful engines roaring;
And the sudden flips of the round wing tips
 And the throbs of an aircraft soaring

I must take to the air again; for the call of the Milky Way,
 Is a wild call and a clear call that airmen must obey
 And all I ask is a blue sky and a horizon afar
 And the hissing scream of the cold slip stream
 And the feel of the rudder bar

I must take to the air again to the glorious freedom of flight
To the Bull's way and the eagles way and the way of spirit of light
And all I need is the airman's creed and the blessing of the brave
And a cool nerve that will not swerve from an airman's lonely grave

§

THE BARBED WIRE HOTEL

In Hydekrug Germany
There is a beautiful spot
It's a barbed wire hotel
Where you get your meals quite hot

A seventh of a loaf per day
A bowl of fresh German stew
A small chunk of fresh horse meat
A cup of weak English brew

All of this will come free
It won't cost a cent
The meals and lodging
Will both go with the rent

If you want to visit it
This hotel with its sweets
Fly a mission to Germany
Where the flak is so neat

Here you will meet Oberleutenant Voltz
You should know him quite well
For he's the assistant manager
Of this barbed wire hotel

§

GOOD OLD U.S.A.

How well I do remember
As a boy my thoughts would stray
Far into the distant lands
Far from the U.S.A.

I grew up with one ambition
That perhaps there'll come a day
When I could see that outside world
Far from the U. S. A.

Then a war came upon us
And think what'er you may
But t'was my ever wanted chance
To leave the U. S. A.

So I joined the Army Air Corps
And I flew far away
Soon to fill my heart's desire
Apart from the U. S. A.

Since that time I've see a lot
But all seemed dull and gray
Nothing anywhere could compare
With that of the U. S. A.

And even though my hearts content
I've met with some delay
I'm stranded in a prison camp
To Dream of the U. S. A.

But each and every blessed night
To my dear land I pray
That very soon I may return
To the good old U. S. A.

And when my prayer is answered
Life for me will be more gay
All because I've learned my lesson
There's only one Great U. S. A.

§



UNFINISHED MISSION

Early in the morning
Before the sun did rise
We were awakened for a mission
That contained a great surprise
After a healthy breakfast
And a briefing of our flight
We took-off in our airplane
But didn't return that night

High in the heavens
We climbed right on our course
Soon to pound the enemy
With all our mighty force
But deep in enemy territory
We endeavored quite a shock
A direct hit with a burst of flak
And our plane began to rock

With our wings full of holes
Plus an engine out of commission
We were forced from formation
To a less favorable position

Then came the fighters
From nowhere in the sky
It was one against many
But we fought without a cry

We all did our very best
But T'was only in vain
A fighter got in a luck shot
And we started down in flames
The pilot gave the warning
And we all bailed-out
Only to be captured by a couple of German Scouts

§



In March, 2003, when the news of United States involvement in Iraq was dominating the headlines, a Charleston Post and Courier reporter, Michael Gartland, interviewed Harold Sedivy about his experiences:

Watching the war on the evening news makes a Summerville man's skin crawl. It summons memories he'd rather forget, memories that flood back when he's in a windowless room or a tight place.

Many years ago, during his youth and through the chaos of World War II, Harold Sedivy fell prisoner to German troops. His B-24 was shot down over Zagreb, Yugoslavia, and he suffered shrapnel wounds all over his body. For nearly 14 months, the Germans held him, and in that time, he helplessly watched his weight drop from 174 to 129.

Now, as captured American soldiers appear on television and computer screens across the country, the memory of imprisonment has become even more vivid for Sedivy. Seeing their images, he said, is no easy chore.

"The anxiety of what they're going through is nerve-racking," said Sedivy, 80. "I feel sorry for them. I really feel for the whole bunch of them not knowing what's going to happen next."

For him and other former POWs, the images evoke memories many of them would rather forget. Doctors and professors contend that while there is no "correct" way to act in these situations, prisoners who suffered in past wars are bound to relive their more traumatic experiences.

Harold Segrest, 88, of Mount Pleasant, tries not to think about it. He avoids watching the news now and is reticent when asked about his time as a captive of the Nazis.

His capture came after trying to liberate a French

village. He and six other men stormed it, and in the raid, Segrest fell into German hands. He doesn't remember the date, but recalls being bound with rope and having a hood placed over his head.

"I was really scared to death," said Segrest.

All of it comes back to him in dreams. Segrest said he tries not to discuss it, and avoids thinking about what the men in Iraq are now going through.

"I just hope they don't treat them like they treated us," he said.

Treatment, Sedivy said, varied from soldier to soldier during his captivity.

The more compassionate captors were those who had been captives themselves during World War I, he said.

The SS, the Nazi brown shirts, and the Hitler Youth conducted themselves with more brutality.

Upon first being captured, Sedivy said, he was dragged into a nearby building where he was interrogated. On the walls hung pictures of Hitler and swastikas. The worst part of that first encounter was not knowing what would happen next, and Sedivy had more reasons than other prisoners to be scared.

The Bohemian name, Sedivy, would not ingratiate him with Germans whose forces occupied his Czech parents' homeland. During one interrogation when he slipped into his parents native tongue, he couldn't help but feel he'd made a fatal mistake.

For nearly a year, second-guessing and a paralyzing fear of the unknown pervaded his life.

He and other prisoners knew of the concentration camps that held Jews, Slavs and homosexuals. As the Germans transferred him from stalag to stalag, the fear of being sent to one increased with each move.

Often there were no toilets and food was always

scarce. At one point, the Germans placed Sedivy in solitary confinement for nine days. Now, nearly 60 years later, he avoids rooms without windows.

“The linkage is as simple as it seems,” said Dr. C. Scott Saunders, the director of the Trauma Psychiatry Service at UCLA. “People who were POWs have all kinds of triggers depending on their experiences in those camps.”

Many former prisoners suffer from post traumatic stress disorders that they’re not even aware of, Saunders said. In most cases, they have received no treatment. While some have developed their own coping mechanisms, others can be more susceptible to further trauma when exposed to images of war, especially images of POWs.

“Anyone who has unresolved issues who was a POW is going to hark back to the events that happened to them,” said Saunders.

From The Post and Courier, Friday, March 28, 2003.



Allied prisoners released from a German POW camp.

Harold Sedivy spent 14 months in a German POW camp after being shot down after a bombing run. How he coped with his captivity and the creative outlet he discovered in his poetry is revealed in this book for the first time. An honest, sincere man who felt and cared deeply, but would not allow his humanity to be taken away when the world was in flames.



*"But death had the final word
For in its log, it wrote his name
And my Buddy died that morning
In glory and in a burst of flame."*

- Harold Sedivy

