

Joseph H. Harrison
810 Meadow Lark Lane
Glenview, Ill. 60025-4145
April 30, 1993

Mr. Greg Hatton
2133 60th Street
Brooklyn, New York 11204

Dear Greg:

Thank you for sending the reports written by different fellows in our camps. I stopped everything the moment the mail came and read them all. It was like reliving many of my experiences. I also learned many things of which I had not been aware. I am sorry I do not think that I knew your father. I won't make any copies of the information you sent me, don't be concerned that I would use these reports in any way other than keep them for the interest they have for me and my family..

I remember when Walker was shot, I was standing at our window with Krebs I think it was with him, and watched two men running across the field between our quarters and the outhouse and saw guards shoot at them and saw one fall. I lived with Krebs, Paules, Lansford in a small barrack, two rooms, Krebs and I slept in one room. In that room I had a small French Typewriter to make lists for the Red Cross of POWs who were in our camp. I also made lists of all arriving POWs for the Red Cross and kept track of number of beds available in our camp. These lists were given to the guard who was supposed to see that they were sent to the Red Cross.

I got married a month and one half after I got home and for a long time would not talk about my experiences but I remember them all. In fact it was only six years ago that I began to write them down because my children wanted to know about them. and it was only last year that I gave Leonard Rose the information to join in his collection of names and finally be part of his reports.

The fellow who fell or jumped into the sea from the boat was mentally disturbed and the fellows with whom he lived in Stalag Luft VI tried to help him. He was quite good with a violin and would every day be taken by his friends to an empty incinerator where he stayed playing his violin. In the evening the same guys brought him back to their barracks and must have taken care of feeding him.

I was the navigator on our fifth mission having just transferred from the Royal Canadian Air Force. I was supposed to get a rank of Lieutenant but had the misfortune of being shot down before the advancement in my career came

through. When I got back to the States I was advised that because I had failed to appear at the hearing the commission was canceled. I parachuted down to the French Belgium border and got picked up by the Belgium underground and they helped me as much as they could but were unable to do very much so I had to go off on my own for a couple of weeks. Then the French underground picked me up and I stayed a few of weeks with a French family. The Gestapo finally burst into the house and arrested all of us including the French family. We ended up in jail, five of us in the same very small cell, three from my crew and two other guys they captured some where else. We were there for a month After that we were taken to other places some of which I couldn't place. In some places we were subject to bomb attacks both day and night. In the last place I was advised I was to be shot and I believed them when they finally marched me out alone with the advice they considered me a spy, but it wasn't to be. At the end of the long walk I joined my crew member, the engineer, the bombardier we didn't see again. We were put on a passenger train, and were a subject of curiosity to the passengers on the train. We were taken to Berlin where we were crowded into a freight train and taken to Stalag luft VI.

I remember very well when two men escaped from Stalag Luft VI, Our barracks stood next to the barracks who needed the help when we were being counted and I was one of the guys who moved over to their group to help conceal the missing men. No one wrote about the punishment count the Germans devised in which all POWs had to march past the guards one by one and be counted. Paules and his staff were ordered to help with the count. Our guys devised a plan, in which I helped, of suddenly during the count turn to the guards doing the count and try to confuse them by asking if they had the same number as we had. This did cause them to start the count over several times. We worked at this for a long time, the plan was to cause the Germans a problem and keep them busy. I never knew what good it did.

The run to Stalag Luft IV was bad, I never looked at the guy I was handcuffed to and I guess he never looked at me. After jumping over stuff dropped by fellows ahead of us and the fear of the bayonets and dogs and the people on the side throwing things at us, both of us finally had to throw our cases away, I always hoped I hit someone on the side. The Red Cross representative I talked to in the camp afterwards told me the Germans said we had very little because we were too lazy to carry our own things into the camp. When we arrived at the vorlager my friend Rudy Wild was there and he too had lost his case but he had a deck of cards in his pocket and we started a game of bridge there on the ground with two other guys. One of the guards who finally got us into the camp after a long time, said we looked so calm that they let us in almost the last and without the roughness the others suffered, I don't know how true this was.

I am surprised that no mention of the cold in Stalag Luft 1 was noted. We suffered from the cold, we only burned our lumps of coal on week ends and during the week we climbed up in the attic of our barracks and stripped any wood we could get without making the roof collapse. No one mentioned the hungry times in this camp nor the time we tried to dig trenches for our protection during the times we could hear the battles noises. When the Russians arrived they got me and another fellow to sit up all night and type out the names of all the men in our camp. They told me I was the camp secretary, of which I had not been aware. Also no one mentioned the show we were invited to by the Russians, It was all in Russian we had no way of understanding it. When we tried to leave, the Russians forcibly made us stay. No one mentioned that it was the plan of the Russians to march us to Odessa. Very few of us would have lived through that.

The room I lived in in this last camp was almost at the end of the barracks, we had a room next to us with four American officers in it. They got the same rations as we did only there were about twenty men in our room, I'm not sure of this number. They never offered to share anything and we were hungry and cold as were all of us. .

Enclosed is a copy of a picture one of the guards took of us, I'm the guy on the left with his hand in his pocket. Maybe your father is in this picture.

Cordially

Joe Harrison

Joseph H. Harrison
810 Meadow Lark Lane
Glenview, Ill. 60025-4145

December 15 , 1993

Mr. Gregory Hatton
2133 60th Street
Brooklyn, N. Y. 11205

Dear Greg:

I have been unable to tend to my correspondence all summer as I was in the hospital for two operations and only now getting around to doing the things I want to do. I want to thank you very much for the book you sent to me. You are assured that I will go by your instructions and not use it for anything but my own interests. From it I have been able to find out what happened to so many of the people I knew. Believe me I won't use it any way other than for my information.

After the run up the hill, handcuffed and chased by dogs and soldiers with bayonets, I met my food partner, he was looking for me and he had lost everything he had carried as I had except for a deck of cards that he always carried. We sat down on the ground with two other guys and played bridge for several hours. We were the last into Stagluft IV. The guards who let us in told us that we were so calm sitting there they would let us in without any rough treatment. We didn't know anything about the rough treatment the fellows ahead of us got, but now I find out with your help what happened to the guys I knew and I never saw again.

You want to know something about Stagluft 1, Barth, well I will try to tell you something about it.. We had a rough trip in getting there, packed into freight cars, which stood in some places for hours in the cold rain, we could see German refugees in open freight cars through the cracks of the freight car. We kept quiet because we thought if they became aware of us we might be in trouble. We arrived in Barth and marched to the camp, in an orderly fashion. We weren't in uniforms, we wore the only clothes we had. We were as clean as possible and walked in an orderly way and in no way could we be called ragtag, we were tired and hungry. I was the navigator of my crew, I had transferred from the Royal Canadian Air Force, they didn't make navigators officers right away and the American Air Force asked me to start flying as a navigator before my commission came through. When I inquired about the commission after the war, I was told I failed to appear before the commission so it was canceled. Barth was the first camp where we had any contact with any officer who wasn't a German. The little contact I had with some of the officers was unpleasant.

All officers there weren't like the one who called us a ragtag bunch. There were some bad ones. In this camp we were assigned to a room and there were about 20 of us with many bunk beds, double deck ones. We weren't allowed any organization in this camp. Food was scarce, coal briquettes were very scarce and it was winter. Next to our room there were three officers who got the same rations as we got except ours were for twenty men, they never offered to share. When your mind is set on food and means of keeping from freezing you do lose track of some of the things around you. We got the

usual bread every day but only once during the day did we get the stew and we took turns going to get it. We looked forward to our turn because the ones who went to get it could scrap the sides of the container. A food partner was very important in this camp so that one of you could go out while the other guarded the food. My food partner, Rudy Wild, had in the very cold spell, very sore feet from frost bite. Because of this I went out more often than he did, and carried a box looking for things that might have value for us. There was a garbage dump where I found potatoes peelings and brought them back. One of the guys made a little stove out of small cans. We used soap for the fuel, soap burns very well. Our room decided that we would only burn our fuel on Sundays and at least have one warm day. In search of fuel we found, I think, at about the same time that we could get into the attic. It was decided that it was fair for the room to take any wood that did not cause the barracks to collapse but only the wood directly above their room. In windy days the barracks did sway some. There was no organization in the camp of which I was aware. With the arrival of spring we were marched to a barracks where we were directed to take a shower, it was in very large groups, if you dropped your soap you could hardly safely bend down to get it.

Spring also brought sounds of armies fighting, one day the sounds of fighting was so close we tried to dig a trench in front of our barracks with our cans or anything we had for our protection. We were going to lie in the trench, but we only had cans and we didn't make much of a dent in the hard ground. One day while I was walking around the camp a guard Rudy and I had known in Stalag Luft VI called down to us from his position in one of the towers and told us we were lucky, while he didn't know if he would ever get home, we would be going home. It was the next day when we woke up all the guards were gone, we went into the guard barracks where we could listen to the radio and heard "this is Czechoslovakia calling the allies for help" and they repeated this all day. The Russians arrived that day. Some organization came to life before they arrived, when it was decided not to let the people from Barth into our camp. During that day I thought very seriously of going out on my own, I even started to walk away but changed my mind when I saw women and children and old people out on the Baltic in small boats hoping that they would be left alone. I saw an old couple standing in front of a small barn where they had hidden their cow, both crying and clinging to each other. I couldn't speak German and I wasn't in very good shape so I went back.

Some of our men went out into the town and came back with jewelry and other things they had forced people to give them, they didn't seem to understand the evil of all of this. The surprise to me was that I was singled out by the Russians and told I was the camp secretary, all this time I had not even thought of this. I was made to type out the names of all the POWs in our camp. I have no idea where they got the information and I worked all night at this. The Russians did bring into the camp a herd of cattle that they slaughtered, cut up and passed out to everyone. We ate it gladly and didn't have any bad effects from it. They invited us the next day to come to see a show in a large building on the base, when some of us tried to leave, armed soldiers forced us to remain seated.

This was the day we were told that we were to be force marched to Odessa Russia in a day or two, I knew that if this happened many of us would be dead on this march and thought all my plans of getting home and getting back to the people I loved, I

should have gone before they came into the camp. But the next day our American planes came in and we were marched out to get into them. It was wonderful, even though we saw civilian prisoners in terrible conditions being marched out of a building in the far distance.

We were flown to camp Lucky Strike in France, we made two stops, the first one was manned by Red Cross personnel who had refreshments for us, carefully chosen as they told us "that we should be careful what we ate because of poor diets while we were prisoners." The second stop we were served by civilians with a good heart but poor choice of food, and many of us were sick from it.

We arrived at the camp, we were welcomed and taken in bunches to a large tent where we were told we were to give them all our clothes, we would all get a shower and then new fresh clothes would be ours. Well we showered went back to the tent and then we were advised they had run out of clothes but would shortly have a new bunch of stuff. There we stood naked for quite some time before any clothes arrived. We were there only a couple of days, each day they seemed to give me more things, I was not feeling very well and when I left I left most of the things on the cot in the tent where I had stayed. I did leave when I was told I could or maybe they said I should make my own way back to England and advised where to go when the Queen Elizabeth was ready for us to board her. I gladly got everything I could carry together went to the airfield and went from plane to plane that was getting ready to fly to England and asked if they had room for me. Finally I get a "YES" answer and I was off. There was a strike in England which made it necessary for us to go to Scotland to board the Queen. I was off to HOME.

Cordially

Joe

Merry Christmas

DEPARTMENT HEADS
Stalag Luft VI Heydekrug Germany

Camp Leader	T/Sgt. F.S. Paules	Office
Deputy Camp Leader	T/Sgt. C.J. Lunsford	Office
Interpreter	S/Sgt. W.A. Krebs	Office
Secretary	T/Sgt. J.H. Harrison	Office
Red Cross Food Vorlager	S/Sgt. P.H. Sanders	E- 3
Red Cross Clothing	Sgt. V.P. Brubaker	E-11
Entertainment	S/Sgt. C.W. Galloway	E-11
School	S/Sgt. H. Romaneic	E- 2
Library	S/Sgt. H.L James	E- 2
Sports	S/Sgt. W.W. Beach	E- 3
Mail	Sgt. C.E. Henderson	G-14
German stores	S/Sgt. J.J Wilhoit	G- 3
Canteen	S/Sgt. J. Stemmerman	F-11
Barber Shop	S/Sgt. J.J. Simoncelli	G-14
Carperter	Sgt. A.P Petix	G-14
Works	Sgt. J.J. Alexander	G-15
Cook	S/Sgt O. Anderson	C-H
Barbwire News	T/Sgt. T.J. McHale	F-11