

FOREWARD

This is a personal history of the events that took place in my becoming a prisoner of war. Also the daily record of what ^{took} place in the German prison camp at Stalag-Luft #4, located at Gnosstichow, Poland.

The story concerns the plight of 7,000 bomber crew men, mainly from the Eighth Air Force and all other air forces that flew over the European Theater of War.

I am indebted to Gerald Ralston who recorded the daily occurrences of our interment.

Please note that there is a continual reference to the amount of food received daily, especially the Red Cross parcels which gave us much needed sustenance. We were supposed to receive one parcel per week per man, this rarely happened.

Our forced hunger march began on Feb, 6, 1945. and ended with our liberation on April 26, 1945. (Starting on page 18) The villages and distances marched are also recorded.

Gerald Ralston was my "nation buddy", most of us paired up and shared nations and slept together for common warmth. Because of the constant hunger, one man could not control his hunger and in a weak moment he would consume his food all at one time. The food had to be rationed out by self discipline until the next nations arrived. So with two men sharing their food-one man could restrain the other to stretch out their nations-and "visa-versa". The average weight loss per man was from 25 to 30 pounds.

As the expression goes "There were no atheists in the fox-holes." By the same token; "There were no atheists in the prison camps." You had to rely on the spiritual powers in a day to day existence. We were apprehensive; not frightened, and we certainly did not want to give the Germans any notion that we were weaklings!

This history is all fact; there was no need to exaggerate the conditions.

Sincerely,

Robert H. Richards, Jr.
Robert H. Richards, Jr.

PERSONAL HISTORY OF ROBERT H. RICHARDS, DURING

THE TIME IN THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE IN WORLD WAR II

Entered service-July 31, 1943.

Basic training at Miami Beach, Florida from July to October.

Gunnery school at Tyndall Field, Florida. from Oct. to Jan.

B-24 Bomber training at Chatham Field, Georgia, from Jan. to Mar.

B-24 Bomber training at Havana, Cuba- three weeks.

Overseas training at Westover Field, Mass.

Embarked for England on the Queen Elizabeth Liner, May 30, 1944.

Landed at Glasgow, Scotland, June 6, 1944.-"D"Day Invasion.

Routed to London, England-to Nelson Hall-to Ireland for three weeks-combat training.

Assigned as replacement crew #52 to 392nd Bomb Group, 577th

Began combat missions July 11, 1944.

1.-Mission #129-Munich-7/11/44.

2.-Mission #130-Munich-7/12/44.

3.- Mission#131-Saarbrücken-7/13/44.

4.-Mission #132-Saarbrücken-7/16/44.

5.-Mission #134-Koblenz-7/19/44.

6.-Mission #137-St. LO., Normandy Beach
1,000 plane raid

7.-Mission #138-St. Lo., Normandy Beach
1,000 plane raid

8.-Mission #139-Bremen

9.-Mission #140-Ludwigshafen 7/31/44.

10.-Mission#144-Kiel-8/4/44.

11.-Mission#146-Brunswick-8/5/44

12.-Mission#149-Sindlefingen-8/9/44-lost in weather returned
over Paris

13.-Mission#150-Pacy-Sur-Armacon-8/11/44.-D-Day front

14.-Mission#153-Lyon-Bron-A.F.1,000plane raid-8/14/44.

15.-Mission#157-Hannover-8/24/44

16.-Mission#158-Schwerin-8/25/44.

17.-Mission#160-Heligoland-8/27/44.

18.-Mission#163-Karlsruhe-9/8/44.

19.-Mission#164-Mainz-9/9/44.

20.-Mission#167-Hannover-Misberg "SHOT DOWN"-9/12/44.

CONCERNING COMBAT MISSIONS

Out of the twenty combat missions that we flew, there were only five that we came back without any holes in the B-24 Liberator. They were considered "Milk-runs". That is the flights were in off the coastline of France, Belgium, Holland, and Denmark.

I don't remember which of the missions we were hit the hardest on except the last one to Hannover, Germany. There were two missions that one engine was hit by flack. No.3 on one flight and No.2 engine on another flight. And on another mission, we got hit on No.1 and No.3 and were still able to return to base.

However on our 20th and last mission, engines No.3 and No.4 were put out of action because an unexploded flack shell went through the supercharger of No.3 engine and tore a 12" hole which damaged the fuel lines and tore holes in the two starboard engine gas tanks.

The most dangerous time on any airplane is takeoff and landing. If there is any power loss on any of the engines half way down the runway the plane cannot take off or land again!

On one of our missions, we started down the runway, however one of our engines lost power. Since we were not quite halfway, the pilot shut off all the throttles, and settled back on the runway, and slammed on the breaks! We were just barely able to stop at the very end of the runway! We burnt out the brakes and the tires!

When you have 36,500 lbs. of B-24 and 8,800 lbs. of bombs plus 1,500 lbs. of crew you got problems! So the command hurriedly took us to a spare airplane so that continue the mission.

During our tour, another plane lost power on takeoff but it was just off the ground when it settled back and crashed and exploded out in the farm field!

Another plane took off in fog and turned into the plane ahead of it and both planes were destroyed!

MISSIONS CONTINUED

Four extra missions were aborted and recalled over enemy territory. Two were briefed for Berlin. One was briefed for Hannover. One was briefed for Normandy Beach.

The list of missions has been verified as to exact dates which are recorded in "THE LIBERATORS FROM WENDLING" by Robert E. Veckers, Jr., Colonel (retired). This is a history of combat missions of the 392nd Heavy Bombardment Group of the Eighth Air Force during World War II.

THE CREW

Lt. John Beuchler--Pilot

Lt. John Wardell--Co-Pilot

Lt. Fiebig-Bombadier

Lt. Luttrell-Navigator

T/Sgt. Ben potts-Engineer

T/Sgt. Joseph Cooper-Radioman-Killed in action

S/Sgt. Robert H. Richards-Right waist gunner-

S/Sgt. Henry Jurgens-Left waist gunner

S/Sgt. Harold Longacre-Tail gunner

B-24 No. 758

Tail marking-D

LAST MISSION
HANNOVER, GERMANY

SHOT DOWN
PRISONER OF WAR

On September 12, 1944, at 11:00 A.M., we were over the target of Misberg-Hannover, Germany. It was a very clear day which enabled the German flak batteries to zero in our formations by visual rather than radar. In formation we were flying "Tail-End-Charlie" in other words, the last and lowest position in our eight plane squadron. So if shells fired at the lead plane fell short, they ended up in our area.

We were flying at 22,000 feet so the Germans had to use 105 millimeter guns instead of the famous 88 millimeter anti-aircraft guns which could only reach 20,000 feet.

The flak was intense and accurate. About one minute after bombs away, we felt a sudden lurch upward in the right side of the plane and an uncontrolled sharp left bank, which pinned us to the side of the ship due to centrifugal force. I was flying right waist gunner position, and looking out the window, I saw an approximate one foot hole behind engine No. 3. The engine's super-charger was gone. The right aileron controls were damaged. At that location, No. 3 and 4 gas tanks were punctured and the fuel lines were cut off.

I immediately notified Lt. Buechler, the pilot, to feather No. 3 engine. Great quantities of gasoline were draining from the tanks and although No. 3 engine was operative, its exhaust could very easily have ignited the leaking gasoline. The gas also back drafted into the rear of the ship so we were saturated in gasoline and there was about six inches of gasoline in the bottom ball turret hole. The danger now existed that if there were just one spark from damaged wiring or an electric motor, the plane would have exploded.

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LAST CONTINUED
MISSION

We fell out of control from 22,000 ft. to 11,000ft. and the pilot put the ship on automatic pilot which fortunately leveled us out. The bombay doors were then opened to ventilate the incoming gasoline. We were ordered to try and lighten the plane. I opened the rear hatch and the left waist gunner and I proceeded to throw out any loose objects.

We were flying a southwest course away from Hannover to try and get across the allied lines in France. However, about twenty miles south-west, the pilot called back and told us that we were running out of fuel on the remaining No.4 engine on the right side and that we couldn't transfer fuel from No.1 or No.2 engine tanks because the lines were severed. So the order to "Bail Out" was given before No.4 ran out of gas.

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BECOMING-A-PRISONER-OF-WAR

First the tail gunner jumped; then the left waist gunner; then myself, the right waist gunner. Jumping out of a plane at 210 miles an hour feels like jumping into the rapids.

I delayed opening my parachute for approximately three minutes in free fall to get closer to the ground in case of ground fire.

Approaching the ground I saw that I was directly over high-tension lines, so I steered the chute to the right. Then about 100 feet off the ground I noticed a team of horses with a wagon directly under me. I pulled the chute hard to the right and landed with most of the weight on the left leg, then falling backwards landed with a hard jolt to my back. I received a back injury which never fully corrected itself.

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PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

I was laying on the ground when an old farmer and two young boys stood over me with pitch forks ready to strike! They allowed me to stand up; then as I reached down to remove my harness, they became excited, thinking that I was reaching for a weapon. Then one of the boys took my harness off as I stool there.

Then I was started towarded their village. We were met by the local Burgermeister; a combination mayor and one man police force.

I was then taken to his private home where his office was. While all of these events were taking place, the local people were looking on in curiosity. In a small community about the size of Abbotstown, this was the first direct contact the people had with an American Airman. You could tell thay all they believed in, was the propaganda in their newspapers and radio.

At first they were sure I was a Jew. Then they asked me if I was from Chicago, because all Chicago gangsters were supposed to make up the entire American Air Force!

They were surprised to find out that I was of English-German decent and that my home was Hanover, Pa., also that the girl I was engaged to was named Fritz!

So to justify themselves as to why a "nice" young German was fighting them for?; they concluded that I was a victim of the "Rosenfeld"-Roosevelt Administration!

I was talking to the Burgermeister's wife who showed me pictures of her two sons who were in the German Navy and that they were both killed in action. I told her that it was a sorry situation and that war was bad for all sides. you might say, that here was a mother of two slain boys, looking upon me, not as an enemy, but as another young boy at war; with my mother being concerned about me; the waste of lives, time and hardship.

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PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

About one half hour later; two burley Gestapo came from the town of Wunstorf to this town Neustadt to pick me up. They already had the tail gunner in the back seat and I went in the back too. After a long winding ride down the side of a mountain we came into Wunstorf and were taken to Gestapo Headquarters where we met the other members of our crew. We stood at attention for an hour, then the Luftwaffe M.P.'s came for us.

When we went out on the main street we were surprised to find that a parade was assembling; what's more!, we were the "center of attraction!" There was a uniformed marching band up front; we came afterward with the men who aided in our capture. The local home guard unit followed; then two cars with the local "wheels" taking a little credit. The schools were let out and the stores were closed and it seems that everybody in town came to see the "Victory Parade"! (not ours)!

We boarded a train which we rode for several miles and then we were left off in the middle of nowhere. We crossed a small river on a raft ferry boat, run by a woman who pulled the ferry across by a rope fixed to both shore lines.

It was getting dark by this time and carrying our bulky parachutes, we started up a long mountain side. I had two chutes to carry, one belonged to Joseph Cooper; Radioman, who we found out later, was killed when he landed. I had to stop in exhaustion mainly due to inhaling an over-dose of gasoline when the fuel drained back into the plane.

We finally reached the Luftwaffe base and we all breathed a sigh of relief knowing that the German Air Force took charge of all air force prisoners rather than the Gestapo or the S.S. troops. We had an informal; somewhat friendly discussion with Luftwaffe pursuit pilots. Then we were fed and went to sleep.

The next day; Sept. 13, our full crew(minus Cooper) were put on a truck and taken to the train station in Hannover. We noticed several groups of Polish and French civilian prisoners herded together and put on box cars. Much to our surprise we

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

Much to our surprise we got a private stateroom on a first class Crack streamliner diesel; as good as our country had!

As we rode the train, we saw new 1942 design Ford automobiles being hauled on passing freight trains. We saw billboard signs; "Trink Coca-Cola"! and "Shell Gasoline"!

We were taken to Weslar; "Dulag Luft" a transient air force prison camp, near Frankfort on the Rhine River. We were interrogated and given a box of Red Cross clothing.

One week later, we were separated from our Officers and entrained with a large group air force prisoner non-coms, on a good passenger day coach. We went to Oberrussel; a suburb of Frankfort on the Main River, another Dulag-Luft. After being there another week, we entrained again on two car day coaches marked "P.O.W." on the sides and the roofs to go to our permanent camp. This was known as Stalag-Luft #4 at Kievheide in what was considered to be Poland before the war.

During our four day trip north; we delayed in the Berlin railroad marshaling yard over night. The British night bombers came over the city and dropped two-thousand pounders. What a delightful place to spend the night!

Upon reaching the main camp, I met several men from other crews. Among which were John "Pike" Miller, Clare Miller, Bill Murphy and Roland Reese, all from Hanover, Pa.

Our crew was placed in "C"-Lager, Barracks #3, Room #5. There were twenty-two men in a room 20'x 20' foot and we all slept on the floor. There was a small round upright stove and we only had an allotment of one bucket of coal per day no matter how cold it was.

I teamed up with Gerald Ralston who was shot down the day before we were, also from the 392nd B.G. In the following eight months, "Rally" and I slept together for common warmth and shared our rations together. One man cannot discipline his hunger; in order to stretch out his sparse rations until new rations were issued.

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

) THE FOLLOWING REPORT IS TAKEN FROM Gerald Ralston's diary
ALONG WITH MY OWN PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

NOV.5,1944: Today was the usual Sunday. Our Kreigies journeyed off to their respective church services in the morning. Frank baked a cake and treated each of us to a slice of it. We received jam and margarine from the Red Cross. The problem was we never got enough German bread to use it all up. We spent a good deal of time playing bridge to keep our minds off the current problems.

NOV.6,1944: Gloomy Monday, the weather continued to be cloudy and damp. We recieved chocolate, cheese, raisins and prunes from the Red Cross. There was a considerable amount of baking done and toasted cheese sandwiches were being made by everyone. In the evening quite a few fellows were playing chess and bridge.

The Jerries would shutter the windows on the outside and lock us in for the night. The camp was escape proof, machine-guns in the towers, lights all night, and guards with police-dogs roamed the compound. The barracks were built three feet off the ground, ((no tunneling)). So it wasn't much like the movies showing escapes, nor the television series; "Hogans Heros". One similarity to "Hogans Heros" was that one of our guards was like "Shultz", in that he had a low I.Q. and he was happy-go-lucky"

NOV.7,1944: Election day back in the states. We also elected a new barracks leader today. Still raining today; no Red-Cross. Our fellow Kriegy "Les" Ward was savagely attacked by one of the guards through no fault of his own. It was decided that the tops should be completely removed from our canned food before we received them. This idea was the Jerry's.

NOV.8,1944: Today was Wednesday and everyone was in rather low spirits due to weather, and conditions about the lager. Mainly due to the ten percent cut in spuds and the fact that we received no Red Cross. One man in lager "A" was shot four times while attempting to scale the barbed wire fence.

PRISONER OF WAR
CONTINUED

NOV.9,1944: Spirits of the boys were exceedingly low today. the guards pulled an inspection of our barracks today. A program was presented in the Red Cross room. Late in the evening we received liver pate (minus the lids) and we had our usual short bucket of spuds. We became aware of the fact; Roosevelt had been re-elected as President

NOV.10, 1944: It rained today as usual. Red Cross consisted of butts,milk and coffee (minus the lids). We had quite a treat for supper CORNED BEEF AND CABBAGE!

NOV.11,1944: NO celebration over here bur it was Armistice Day back in the states. No RedCross today. We had roll call because of the rain.

NOV.12,1944: Sunday-we attended church. All star football game was played; score: Whites-6, Greens-0. Themen agreed to share their rations so that those who played football would have enough strength to practise and play the game. The Jerry guards were bewildered in watching a football game,they thought they were fighting! We were really cut in spuds today from 36-baskets to 21. Charlie Summers honored us with a few vocals.

NOV.13,1944: Today we had the first snow of the year. The Red Cross didn't come through today. It was an exceptionally cold day and the main part of the day was spent around the stove.

NOV.14,1944: Today we had snow again. The Red Cross came in and we received cheese, butter, and cigarettes. We were fortunate to have the phonograph for two hours today. We had sauer kraut corned beef and spuds for evening chow.

NOV.15,1944: It was rather cold again today. We received Red Crosswhich consisted of: raisins, butts, salmon.We had Communion. Most of the fellows spent the say reading library books.

NOV.16,1944: We received some big news and the morale was very good.Another showin the Red Cross room. We received jam, pate and crackers from the Red Cross. Still quite cold. Bridge games.

NOV.17,1944: The Kreigie bowl game was played and the All-stars emerged victorious. Three car loads of Red Cross came into the vor-lager today,so we eat for another week. The first three

PRISONER OF WAR

CONTINUED

NOV.18,1944: We received chocolate and butts from Red Cross. More rumors on the progress of the war. More snow today, and weather remained quite cold. New shoes came into the lager.

NOV.19,1944: Today is Sunday so everyone attended church services. We are now on one-quarter rations so the men are quite hungry.

NOV.20,1944: Plenty of rumors about going on full Red Cross parcels. The weather remained cold. The Infantry now has charge of the camp. but up until now there hasn't been any changes in operation. We received butts, coffee and suga from the Red Cross. We has a general hounds cleaning in the room. The bucket of spuds was very low.

NOV.21,1944: The weather remained warm and damp. More mail was received. We received butter and cheese from the Red Cross. The bridge games continued per usual.

NOV.22,1944: A rather dreary day. Plenty of rumors around the compound about the Russians advancing toward us. Received salmon, prunes and butts from R.C. A big surprise! Jerry jam!

NOV.23, Snowed again today but gradually turned to rain. R.C. gave us jam, crackers and pate. The boys went berserk playing bridge due to a new deck of cards. More mail received. Coal ration was good, as Hans was handing it out.

NOV.24,1944: One month until Christmass! everyone in rather high spirits as the full Red Cross parcel starts for Thanksgiving. It rained again. Football season is evidently at an end because the poles for soccer field were erected today.

NOV.25, 1944: Rained again. Received butts, candy and spam from R.C. Moral was rather low today.

NOV.26,1944: Rained again, Received dehydrated cheese and cereal. All of us went to church. Rather cold again.

NOV.27,1944: Received Red Cross again, chocolate, butt, coffee.

NOV.28,1944: It was a cold and cloudy day. Everyone was baking cakes for Thanksgiving. We had the organ last night and kept everyone awake until one o'clock or later.

PRISONER OF WARcontinued

Nov.29; Everyone was complaining about being kept awake last night. WE had a jam session tonight. Charley Summers sang and room #5 rendered a special song.

NOV.30: Today was Thanksgiving Day. The all stars won the football game. We had a band on the field before the game. We had three meals for a change. We received our rather late and we received salmon from the R.C.

Dec.1: The weather was fine today. WE received milk, sugar and coffee from R.C. The boys checked out a few instruments and we had a little jive!

DEC.2; The Jerries pulled another search. Helmke lost a pair of pants as a result of the search. Received pants and caps from the Red Cross.

Dec.3: Sunday again; we went to church. Received spam from R.C. We also received sweaters. We were given three meals today, also honey from the Jerries. (WE began to suspect that the war was not going too well for the Germans as little by little we weren't pushed around as much and the food seemed to be getting more plentiful.) We had very little confirming news about the war.

Dec.4: It snowed again last night. Butts, chocolate and milk were put out by the R.C. We had a few arguments however they were never serious. First and foremost we were American Airmen and not inclined to show any weakness in moral!

Dec,5: We had rain and snow. We received a group of new Kreiges in the lager today. They came from eastern stalags as the Russians were advancing into their area. The Jerries gave us matches, cigarette papers and tooth powder, also razor blades and jam. We received cheese and butter from R.C. Bad rumors from the new fellows

Dec.6,: We had rain and snow today. One fellow passed out at roll call. We had dehydrated spinach for lunch (Green Hell) Not very much of it was eaten. We were given soap and vitamin pills.

Dec.7; We were in the war three years today. Weather was cold and damp. We had bowl, cup, knife, fork and spoon inspection at roll call. A big R.C. day-Jam K-2 crackers, pate, raisins, prunes, butts and salmon.

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

Dec.8,1944: No Red Cross today. Cold and rainy weather continues. The boys have been doing quite a bit of reading. Not very much bridge has been played of late. Another low day in spuds. One letter was received in our room.

Dec.9,: Red Cross made it today; milk, coffee, butts, spam chocolate and sugar. Full rations again this week. Jerry's gave us more jam. No mail today. The Jerry's pulled a photo check tonight

Dec.10,: Sunday again. All the boys attended their respective services. We had a big day of sunshine, but it's still cool. Had another poor meal of spinach (green hell) for lunch. Some of the boys received O.D. pants. We had "C"ration stew for evening chow, pretty good stuff.

Dec.11,:Today was cloudy and cold. Again we had one of those meals not fit to feed the hogs let alone men. Of course one can guess where the most of it went. (Whenever we got dehydrated spinach or sourcrout, we took the buckets of slop and threw it down on hole of the latrine, and everyone used that hole to cover it up. If the Jerry's ever found out we were throwing food away our rations would cut.) The Jerry's broke loose and gave us an increase in spuds. We are now back to 30 baskets. to feed 2,000 men! R.C.came in and was given out.

Dec.12: The morning greeted us with one and one-half inches of snow. Plenty of snow balls resulted. R.C. came in and was given out. six letters came into our room, Those lucky boys.

Dec.13: We enjoyed seeing the sun for a change . No R.C.except for salmon. The Jerry's gave us a bit of jam and as usual it's already ate.

Dec.14: Again we had a little snow, but it turned plenty cold late today. R.C. came out and the fellows are really feeding up. We had a show in the R.C. room, and it was very good considering what they have to work with.

Dec.15: Today was the coldest day we had so far. The room doesn't seem to warm up at all. The Jerry's gave us a raise in our coal ration, from one bucket to one and a half buckets. No R.C. today.

Prisoner of war

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Continued

Dec.16: We awoke this morning to find newly fallen snow. Snow balls a plenty at roll call. R.C. came into the lager and was given out. We received a new addition to our family tonight, Foster is the fellow's name. We really gave him the third degree on how the war was going. Unknown to us at the time the "Battle of the Bulge", began.

Dec.17: It was Sunday, Bob Richards returned from the lager hospital. He looks better. We received R.C. today. We pulled a house cleaning, to try and make a bit more room, and to hold down the lice! The Jerries gave us jam in place of butter.

Dec.18: The Jerry's gave us a lot of news papers, why? because the German Army started a large offensive in Belgium and had our troops cut off. Which is now known as "THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE" The guards wanted to boost our moral!?!? Today has been a bit warmer and with sunshine for a change. The blues seems to be slowly decending on the boys as Christman nears.

Dec.19: Today was a bit warmer than usual with some sunshine. One Christmas card came in the room from the States.

Dec.20,1944: Some new men came into the lager, these men were from the hospital, somewhere in Germany. Five letters came into the room tonight and everyone has read them. No R.C. today.

Dec.21: The shortest day of the year, so now maybe the days soon won't seem so short. The day has been cold but with sunshine R.C. came in. Five more letters came tonight. We got a few pine branches from the Russians and made a star from a prune box and put them up over our door. Just before lights out we had an air raid.

Dec.22: Today has been cold and clear, but we just grin and bear it. We received part of a British parcel from the Red Cross.

Dec.23: Another cold clear day. We made a white cross out of soap bars and put it up as more Christmass spirit. The Jerry's pulled three roll calls today for some unknown reason.

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

Dec.24:1944: The day before Christmas and we are still Kreigies! We were given our Christmas Red Cross parcels this morning. The contents were really enjoyed by all. Church services were held in the fornoon. The Jerry's surprised us and gave us some novelties, namely three table bombs that contained paper hats whistles and flags and other little pins. The Jerry's also gave us parole to roam the compound until one o'clock in the morning. In the evening we had a Christmas play in the R.C. room, and following that, a Y.M.C.A. representative gave a short talk. things quieted down until midnight, when a large number of Kreigie's gathered in the center of our lager and sang Christmas Carols. Thus we ended Christmas Eve, a little sad because of memories of past Christmases at home.

DEC.25: Christmas Day! WE all went to our respective church services this mirning. The boys are eating like mad from their Xmas parcels. Many got sick because our systems were no longer use to rich foods, such as plumb pudding etc;. This afternoon, part of our lager band came into our bks. and gave out with a jam session. The R.C. room also was busy, two song fests were held, also a play. We were given the run of the compound until midnight. The Jerry's aldo surprised us, they never had a roll call, and gave us another parole. We have had a fair Christmas considering where we are, but none would trade it for the slimest Christmas in the U.S.A. We now live in great hopes of being with our loved ones next Xmas.

Dec.26: Things are returning ro normal kreigie life again. Everyone is trying their new games, chess, checkers, rummy, cribbage and what have you.

Dec.27: No news today. Everyone is quiet and playing cards. This has been a warm and cloudy day and feels like rain.

Dec.28: No R.C. today. We were supposed to receive one-half parcel yet this week, but it's rumoured its to be added to next weeks ration to make a full parcel. Its cloudy and cold.

Dec.29: It snowed again last night, one and one-half inches. Its still cloudy and a bit warmer. Our bks. was treated to one of the lager shows The jerry's broke loose and gave us jam, cheese and honey. Red Cross

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

Dec.30,1944: Three letters came into our room today. It also started to snow again. Red Cross came out so mabey New Years will seem just a bit better.

Dec.31: "New Years Eve"! Today was a big day of snow ball fights. Barracks against Barracks. It was fun while it lasted. We were to be paroled but some Jerry guard lost his pass so the whole camp was denied the privilege of roaming the lager at night. We did welcome the New Years in our Bks. by candle light. We sang, banged, and made plenty of noise.

Jan.1,1945: Well 1945 has arrived and we are still Kreigies. We started the new year by making an ice rink in the center of the compound.(We decided that diary repeats itself day after day, so during this year we shall only record the important happenings.)

Jan.9: We sewed sacks for our matressess of straw to put on our beds when they come in. Four months and better for the most of the boys sleeping on the ground or floor.

Jan.10: Surprise!, the Jerry's brought in our three man double decker beds. We sure made a short job of setting them up. There was plenty of confusion and mess, but we now have wooden beds at last and no more sleeping on the floor.

Jan.13: We have done a lot of kidding about the third cross in the past, but its ceased being a joke. One of the boys died today, in the camp hospital. We heard that the cause of his death was hardening of the arteries. It really was a tough break,as the poor fellow had been a kreigie for about three years.

Jan:14: More news! Six boys in the "Limey" lager were shot last night. There was an air raid, we heard the planes. During the black out, a British barracks was fired into because of a light.

Jan.24: We were marched out to the forlaged to ta,e hot showers and plenty of hot water for all. WE sure enjoyed it to the fullest extent. We also received bad news; the news being the possibility of moving to a new location.

(LITTLE DID WE KNOW AT THE TIME OF HOW MUCH MISSERY WOULD FOLLOW UNTIL WE WERE LIBERATED)

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

Jan.25,1945: Our barracks was treated to a minstrel show. The show was very good, considering what the boys have to work with. Many jokes, songs, and music comprised the show. Our lager orchestra is getting better. The Jerry's hit a new low. We were not given any bread the last couple of days. Today they gave us one tenth of a loaf per man.

Jan.30: The crippled moved out for a new camp. It is rumored they are going to stalag one. We all hope they make the trip O.K. The last few days we have had plenty of snow and cold weather. The Jerry's seem to be hauling by air as we have noted several JU-52's flying. Our bread ration is still bad.

Jan.31 Again some men leave our camp for parts unknown. 1,500 men left "B" lager. As far as we can tell they are going by train. We have had no R.C. since Monday this week. The bread situation remains rough. The Jerry's must be in bad shape. (we hope) WE have hearing something like the sound of guns lately.

Feb.2,1945: The remainder of "B" lager was split up between the rest of the lagers. Our room received four of them, bringing our total up to 26 men in our small room. "B" lager was not empty long. The Jerry's brought some prisoners that had been evacuated from other prisoner of war camps. French, Polish and English were supposed to be the nationalities. The prisoners looked pretty bad and worse for wear. It's rumored that they were on the march for twenty one days.

Feb.3: More men were added to the number located here at Stalag Luft #4, both last night and this evening. Things seem to be happening, Jerry's on the move, both civilians and soldiers. All we can seem to do is sit here and sweat it out. We are now getting our spuds cooked with jacket on, dirt, straw and all.

Feb.4: Moving continues! The Poles, Checks, French and have you moved out this morning. More men were moved into "B" lager this afternoon. They and the Jerry's seem to be on the move also. Something must be in the wind!

P.O.W. FORCED HUNGER MARCH

At that time we could only guess what was taking place. But after the march was over we naturally found out.

The Russian Army was making a concentrated drive through Poland west toward Germany, and the German Army could not hold

The different Polish and French prisoners were in a camp further to the east in Poland than we were. They just used our stalag as an overnight stop and continued their forced march west into Germany to stay ahead of the Russian Army because the Germans didn't want any of their prisoners overtaken for fear that they would take-up arms and further help the Russian Army.

Then came our turn, we too were put on the march for 80-days in the dead of winter; sleeping in barns full of lice, and sometimes sleeping out in the open!

We carried everything we owned; Red Cross food, extra clothing all wrapped up in our blankets in a make-shift pack. In our weakend condition; the first week of push marching was the worsted, especially our feet. We learned how to keep our feet dry by putting a pair of wet socks under our belts, against our bodies to dry them out for the next days march. Since we had a lot of butter, because we didn't get enough bread to put it on. We waterproofed our shoes by smearing butter all over them.

All told, we marched over 750 kilometers and about 100 Kilo. by box car. That was 80 days on the road from Feb. 6, to April 26, until we were liberated.

The Diary now continues pointing out towns and distances marched. And more daily excitement in watching the war going on around us.

PRISONER OF WARcontinued

Feb.5,1945: We were treated to another shower today, a real treat! We seen a French soldier moving out today with wooden shoes, no socks and hardly able to walk. The courage those fellows have, its something to admire, and a good example of how the Jerry treats its prisoners of war.

Feb.6: We received notice to move last night, and we packed our make-shift packs and off to parts unknown. We made 14 Kilo's to the outskirts of Belgrad. We had the supposed honor of sleeping in a huge barn. The boys did a big lighteding job on their packs. There was also plenty of blisters on the feet, and sore shoulders.

Feb.7: Another say on the march. So far the weather has been fairly werm, but the roads are sloppy and muddy and also icy inspots. We moved to a small village called Stalzenberd 28 K. where we were split up in various size groups and put in small barns all over town. The German people love to trade for our things. Bread for soap and butts which helps us since we can't eat soap. More boisters, sore muscles and the fellows were really worn out when we stopped. March is really torture!

Feb.8: Again we move on some 18-20kilo's over some pretty rough roads. Refugees, us(7,000)strong and Jerry soldiers all on the move. We have seen all kinds of transportation. We were surprised to see a covered wagon train just like the old wild west movies! Also many on foot with wheel barrows, carts and even wagons drawn by men, rather than horses! The fellows are really in rough shape. Badly blistered feet, sore muscles, stiff shoulders and hips, but still they shuffel on and on, We stopped at another village named Roman where again sleep in barns, and are we tired, believe us!

Feb.9: What a treat, today we rest! NO one objects to this, not even the Jerry guards their feet hurt them too. Hot water is hard to get, but the rest is what we really need and a chance to fix our feet. One has to really be here to get a picture of what it's really like. Men everywhere sprawled out on straw, eating and rubbing sore muscles and fixing blisters.

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

Feb.10: Back on the road again, sore feet, stiff muscles, aching backs and all. These Jerry's are truly a bunch of*--7%?? Marching went fair until mid-afternoon, when we had to detour around a town because of German refugee's laying over there. We marched over fields, mud, water and all the worst damn roads in Jerryland. We finally stoppes at Alt Stettin, and as usual barns for hotels. They brought out some food, but near enough to go around. The march wassome 25 Kilo's.

Feb.11: On and On we shuffle, over back roads and cow trails. These back roads and trails are really bad, mud ankle deep, cobble stone roads at times and other hazards. We traveled some 20-23 Kilo's to Kambz. We slept in stables and barns again. We had plenty of hot water here for a change. Several fellows have to have help, they are putting them on a hay wagon which has to voluntarely pulled by men. Things are getting worse, our food is gëttng low and no signs of getting much more.

Feb.12: Surprise! We didn't march today. A chance to rest is always welcome. The boys are cleaning up as good as possible, fixing their packs and resting ingeneral. We all hope this march soon ends, it's rugged!

Feb.13-19: Due to the Jerry's keeping us moveng so steadey, until today, we have been unable to keep a complete record, so these six days will be just summerised. Our first two days were rain and snow. Thesecond day was a forty Kilo. march in a heavy drizzle rain to a place near Swinemunde, where we were herded into a bowl type valley that had once been wooded. Here we were supposed to rest for the night. We were wet, tired and hungry. Regardless of our ill comfort we spread our wet blankets on the ground and tried to rest. At this point most of the fellows have been out of R.C.food, which we were issued just before we started on the march. Its really remarkable how one can strech so little food to go so far. When we woke up we were surprised to four inches of snow on top of us! We moved on and on with no food or water, just plane guts! On the16Th the group had to again sleep in the open! We moved some fifteen Kilo's, the Jerry's

Prisoner of warContinued

finally put a few spuds out. Today the 19th, 25 more Kilo's more marching. We received, rations, ten men per loaf of bread, one lb. of butter, and a can of beef. They promised we would rest here. WE have stopped at these places along the road. Feb.13,-Dobberphul-18K's, Feb.14,-Pritter-40 K's, Feb.15,-Dargen-22K's

Feb.16,-Marchin-23K's Feb.17,-Postlow-15K's, Feb.18,-Meltz-28K's
Feb.19,-Schossow-8K's.

Feb.20,1945: We rested here for today and a welcome rest it is. The fellows shaved and cleaned up a bit, also filled up on spuds. The trading has now began in earnest, watches, rings, soap, anything they have that the Germans want that the boys have to trade for "Brot", or other food stuff's.

Feb.21: We left our barn for another, "What a tour of barns". Along the way we stopped in a small village where we were given a Red Cross parcel for each three men. Oh! happy day. Our destination was another village, Tarnow 15Kilo's on very poor roads.

Feb.22: We rested again, what do you know? It's rumoured we are close to a camp. We have plenty of spuds, also they gave some soup for one meal. There was plenty of trading again between the Jerry civilians and the Poles.

Feb.23-Mar.1: We started out again, we moved some six or eight Kilo's, then back tracked some 3-4 Kilo's, then at the last part of the day it started to rain, then we made a mad dash to a barn six Kilo's distant in Gr. Helle. So far we have spent two days here, and no rumors of moving just yet. A lot of men have bad cases of the G.I.'s and plenty sick. Today the Jerry's really got beligerent. Some of the men strayed over the hill to a nearby village to trade for food and were caught. Some of the men were beaten with rifle butt,, canes and clubs, also shot at, but no one was seriously hurt. Some of our men are still sick, passing blood through their bowles, coughing and spitting up blood and still have the G.I.'s. Food is really a serious thing Spuds and more spuds isn't such a good diet.

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

Feb.28,1945: Big surprise! the Jerry's finally got a big heart and hauled on some Red Cross parcels and believe ot or not, one parcel per man. Which it is the way that it should be always according to the Geneva Convention! They also put out 2/5 of a loaf of bread per man and butter and cheese. Are we happy? We still go on sweating out the war in a barn,as another month ends.

March 2-7: We started pit pn the move again. The wind is blowing very hard making the walking difficult. The move was some 28Kilo's to Kargow. Mar.3: On we go, the wind wasn't quite so bad, but the walk was a long one. Lebbin 25Kilo's. Feb4:-Still moving along, this time in rain and snow. Our walk was to Zarchlin,23Kilo's. Mar.5: We had a fair day, refering to the weather and marching. We did only 15Kilo's.

March 2-7: Our destination was a village named Zahran. Mar.6:- ON we move, this timeto Stralendorf-15Kilo's The whole trip has been along roads filled with refugees in covered wagons, on foot and bikes. The roads are being barricaded, and fox holes being dug. Along the road we have noted several dead horses, and stalled German trucks. Many of our men are still sick, and many have unstopable G.I.'s but the fillows still hang on.

Mar.7: We have a welcome day of rest. This is another chance to rest aching muscles,doctor the G.I.'s and other ailments. During our six days of travel, we received on 1/6th of a loaf of bread per man, also a small piece of meat and butter.

Mar.8: We stay on here another day. The Jerry's came through with 2/5ths of a loaf of bread per man and 1/5th lb. of butter which helps out a lot along the ration lines.

Mar.9-11: We seem to be moving in circles, at least it seems that way to us. We made a march to Zieslubbe 15 Kilo's.

Mar.10: We movedto Domane-Dutschow 22Kilo's. Poor place to stop.

Mar.11: Our group moved on to a little farm village Balow 16Kilo's

Mar.12; Its another rest and no objections. We received "brot" again, a six day ration, also 1/6 Lb. of butter. We are all sweating out a camp where we can clean up and get R.C. parcels.

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

Mar.13,1945: If the rumours are true we are going to stay here for a couple of days. We are hoping some of the R.C. parcels will catch up to us, as we are very low on butts, and all kinds of food, in fact we don't have such a thing as food.

Mar.15: A group of us moved to another barn here in the same area. The good old Eighth went over today. The Jerry's used the kitchen today, so we get no soups.

Mar.16: The air seems to have plenty of action around here. We have heard planes and bombs all day. We are really getting hungry and food is very scarce. The men are digging in the garbage for spuds or onions, or maybe even a carrot, just anything at all to eat.

Mar.17: Another day at Barlow. We got spuds and soup, but dam little of each. The men are really hungry, It's rough in the E.T.O.

Mar.18: Some Red Cross came in, but the rumor is it's going to be given out tomorrow.

Mar.19: Our group moved out to a little village by the name of Beckentin 10Kilo's distance. On our way out we were issued one R.C. parcel per each five men. Tonight we got Jerry bread, 2/5 loaf per man, and 1/5Lb. of butter. Spud were few and poor.

Mar.20: We went to Briesegard 16Kilo's. We were split up in small groups and put in barns.

Mar.21: Today is the first day of spring and a truly windy day, which makes it very difficult marching. We moved to Landslatz 24Kilo's: We made it across the Elbe river. WE noted several flack guns mounted on the bridges.

Mar.22: It was a beautiful day for a change. We went to- Brendenbock (Tollendorf) 18Kilo's We saw American fighter planes.

Mar.23: Another chance to rest, and its a beautiful day, nice and warm. WE have a chance to shave and clean up a bit, which always helps. Food here isn't too bad. Its the first decent spud ration we have had in weeks. We also got 1/5 loaf of bread.

Mar.24: The resting is over and the Jerry's have us on the move again. We marched to Himderger 19Kilo's. We were on pretty fair roads all day, even the weather was nice. one thing with this days march is that we are so very hungry.

Prisoner of war
Continued

Mar.25: On and on we move. Today is Palm Sunday, and it sure is a beautiful day These kind of days make one think of home. We marched to Hohenbunftorf 17Kilo's. By the way the good old Eighth was on the prowl again.

Mar.26-27,1945: Another stop on our tour of Germany, and no one cares how long we stay here if food is present. The sun deserted us for most of the day but its fairly warm. We stayed another day The food was a little better today, we had spuds twice, and one soup A little secret, we stoled part of the stuff. They say God helps those who help themselves, and we do when ever possible.

Mar.28: Easter is not so far off is it? We were suddenly notified about 4 o'clock, thatwe were to start on the move. This move was to board a train, which we did in darkness. The name of the town is Uelezen,12 KILO's: from our barn. The town, what we could see of it in the dark looks pretty bad. Bombers no doubt.

Mar.29: AAH! first class accomodations! 50of us ina 40&8 box car! We have no water or ventilation and disentary was running high! WE took turns digging a 6" hole in the floor to relieve ourselves. The only tools we had was our table knives to cut through 2" of oak! Just before we boarded the train the Jerry's gave is an issue of bread and some butter, which is all we have with the wxception of some dehydrated dugar beets, Our express train took two nights and two days to go about 150 Kilometers. perhaps due to the bombed out rail lines. We finally got to a lager at Grabow, a suburb of Magdaburg. Before going into the newly developed compound, We were searched. The compound had only a couple of tents when we arrived so it was up to us to erect the tents, about the size of a carnival tent, holding about 200 of us. In this camp ther were nearly every of soldier one can think of;-Serbs,French, English, Americans British-Indian Seiksand Gurkes. These first few days wern't so good; No food! and we are hungry. The war news we received via rumor sure sounds good. Our 52 days on the road so far are really going to be a memory for most of us. There was a lot of air war going on; The Eighth came over every day, and several persuit plane dog fights. A F.W.190 came down in pieces near us. We also saw several Tiger Tanks out side the compound.

PRISONER OF WARcontinued

April 1, 1945. During roll call, I passed out! Due to weakness, standing too long in the hot sun. They carried me to the medical tent and all they could give me were a few vitamin pills and let me rest. Easter Sunday was here, and things began to look up. Red Cross parcels finally came into the lager for our group. Two parcels for every eleven men and soup from the other compounds. A fellow in our tent last night played some music and sang for our enjoyment. We regained a little of our "go-power!"

April 2: The month is under way for sure, as you might know it rained, but in spite of the rain we did get some soup. WE traded with the Indian troops. We had plenty of margarine and they had canned meat which they would eat because of their religion.

April 3: Our Jerry rations started today, soup, brot, butter and jam. We no longer have to "mooch" from the other compounds. It rained again and wind. We also have plenty of air raid alerts. Two and three every day and some at night. The men have a chance to battle with their LICE! Some of the French Morrocans left for parts unknown.

April 4-11: Red cross came in today, one half parcel per man, and it boosted our moral 100%. More air raids are sounded we were herded inside our tents until an all clear is sounded, we could hear the planes. The weather is rain, wind and cold. Life here in this camp is very much the same from day to day. This is Sunday a Padre came into our lager, so we were able to have church services out in the open. Lately, we have had two groups of prisoners join our compound, one group French, the other English. The biggest worry is R.C., the men are very hungry again. A big Tiger tank outfit came by our lager again last night. Speaking of tanks, there seems to be plenty of them around here. WE all hope this mess soon ends and we are back in the good old U.S.A. the land of food and freedom. The last couple of days we have been hearing artillery in the distance.

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

April 12, 1945: We received notice to move again today! We received 2/5 of a parcel per man, and parts of other parcels left over. The Jerry's put out 3/4Lb. of butter and a loaf of bread. AHA! Confusion all over the place, mostly the Jerry's and they are really nervous! We finally got under way about 4 Pm. The Jerry's marched us to Benken 14 Kilos, where slept in the open field, while others were on a wooded area nearby.

April 14: Again we move, this time to Schonefeild, 20 Kilos.

April 15: Our group of Americans were split up, and separated from other nationalities". We stopped at Leipa, 21 Kilos worth of marching.

April 16: Today we saw plenty of air shows. P-38's and P-47's were out in force strafing and bombing. One German JU-88 tried to fly low to the ground to hide by a P-47 spotted him and the JU-88 splattered across the field right in front of us. There was a train about a mile away with a flack battery car in the middle. Two P-47's dove after it. They got through the flack fire and blew up the boiler of the steam engine. Another steam-engine was sitting on a siding and a P-38 made on pass and blew up its boiler! OUR BEST THRILL WAS AS WE WERE MARCHING ALONG AN OPEN ROAD, TWO P-51's FLEW DOWN ON EITHER SIDE OF US AND WAGGLED THEIR WINGS! AT LAST WE THAT OUR AIR FORCE KNEW WHO WE WERE! All of this action that I described above took place in less than one hours time. The Jerry's were in retreat, men and equipment all moving back. WE finally stopped at Annaberg 15 Kilo's; Here we stayed at an old factory, which looked as if they were putting together parts to make ME-109's. The other part of the factory was making pottery. I beleive that Buchenwald, the Jewish concentration camp was here at Annaberg?

April 17: We stay here. American Fighters seem to like this area. The sound of guns seems to be getting nearer. The men are battling LICE, making brews and stews.

April 18: We hear that R.C. has caught up with us but it wasn't given out, also there is a rumor that more is on the road. Our factory is still our shelter.

PRISONER OF WARCONTINUED

April 19, 1945: We were issued a full parcel per man, food at last. Rumors are sure flying thick and fast.

April 20: We really sweat out a bombing raid today. A group of A-20's bombed something notover a half mile distance. Their bombs really shook this old factory which glass skylights plus large side windows. We got out of there in a big hurry and went over to a nearby cemetary and laid down behind the toimestones.

ON there third pass a couple of bombs landed close by. The concussion was more than we could handle. We became nauseated, deaf and bleary eyed! Fortunately that condition cleared up the next day. But it left us pretty shaky with ringing in the ears.

April 21: We are going to move, but just before we moved out we were given the remainder of the R.C. which amounred to just a very small part of a parcel per man. What surprised us was that the Jerry's opened a building that contained leather straps, harness, packs and of all things "BAYONETS". You can be sure we were all armed to the teeth! We then had a lecture from the German commandant. "Conditions are now critical for us all, we are in the middle of both sides. (meaning the Russians from the west and the Americans from the east)" You men can easily leave the group, or you could over take us. But in doing so you could mistaken for an enemy by all three Armies and be killed at the last part of the war!" However I suggest that there is safety in staying together as a group with us still in charge until we reach the American side". We marched in the rain all day. WE crossed the Elbe river again this time on a pontoon bridge and on to a woods on the outskirts of Dahlenberg 18 Kilo's. We spent the night in these woods, on the ground with wet blankets&clothing.

April 22: We left the woods this morning and walked to Kisson 4Kilo. to a barn, We sure can really hear the Russian guns here. The Germans seem very uneasy. There were some S.S.troopers here and they acted as if they had all they wanted of the war. These hard-boiled S.S. troopers did give us some German cigars.

PRISONER OF WARcontinued

April 23, 1945: We move again, along with civilians, army and other prisoners of war. The Germans are scared to death of the Russians and are trying to get to the American side to the west. We moved to Prima 30 Kilo's. All along the way we have noted soldiers going and coming, some going to the front with arms of various kinds, others seemingly retreating. Several places along the road, the Jerry's had positions set up in the woods and fox holes dug all over.

The Americans and Germans must have agreed to a cease-fire that night because we walked for about 15 Kilo's down a small mountain road. As we were passing along this road we saw silent artillery positions all along. And the war continued to the left and right with constant noise and flashes of guns from both sides. We passed through two villages with white flags flying from every home, The Villagers were lining the streets and telling us "Frñh Du heim gehen, der Krieg ist vorbei". "You will go home soon, the war is over". We walked until three o'clock that night.









April 24: We stay here in Prima today in what looks like a small dance hall with a stage. The Jerry's gave us an issue of dry rations, and trading is good. So for the first time in a long time we have eaten all we want.

April 25: Rumors are that the Jerry's are trying to use us to bargain with. An American liason plane has circled over us all day long and dropping leaflets to the German people. Several of the men still have bad cases of the G.I.'s. Lets hope the Americans soon come our way.

April 26. 1945: TODAY IS OUR RED LETTER DAY! We were marched through our lines across a bombed out bridge to our own troops! Men upon seeing our own troops, marched along with tears of joy. Upon reaching Bittersfeld 15 Kilo's from Prima, the Americans put us in a high school and issued us "K" rations. The 104th anti tank division really treated us well. AT LAST WE ARE FREE!

Later we were moved back behind the lines to Halle by truck this time. A few days later on back by planes. A real crowded airfield. To Rhien, France and then to LaHarve, France and HOME!

LEGEND

86 DAY MARCH  RR
 TO BARTH  TO BARTH 
 SOUTH  OFFICERS 
 RUSSIAN FRONT LINE FEB 1, 1945 
 ALLIED FRONT LINE MAY 7, 1945 
 TO BITTERFELD  WALKING

