

## **Interview Excerpts from "Stories My Father Never Told Me" by Greg Hatton**

### **S/Sgt. George Lilja 306BG (Bklyn, NY)**

I was one of the original sixty guys to come into Luft 4. My German Kriegie card says we came into camp on May 13, 1944. I had been shot down back in February and was in the hands of the Gestapo for quite some time. They brought a busload of us down to Dulag, under guard and one of my crewmates was with me. When we joined the other prisoners, they weren't quite sure of us at first, seeing as how we were never interrogated there.

When there were enough of us to ship out, we got on a regular passenger train. We were all in one car, with no civilians, but you could see out of the windows. The train kept moving through Germany, day and night. Time didn't seem to matter to them. As we stopped at the stations along the way, you could look out at the people on the platforms. Sometimes the civilians would come over and peer in at us. I was looking right at this one boy and he spoke up in perfect English: "You're Americans!" I didn't break my gaze, but I didn't say a thing to him. I just watched him as the train pulled out of the station.

There was no station at Kiefeheide...just a railroad crossing, where we disembarked. You can imagine what we found there ...just a path that had been newly cut through the woods. It leads up to a clearing, where the camp was under construction. I imagine it got built up, a little bit each day.

There was only one compound, with ten all new barracks in it. They were prefab deals, and built up on stilts so the floor was off the ground. Later on, the ferrets would crawl in underneath and listen to us.

The Germans shoved us all in the same barracks over in one corner of A compound. We were together for several months and then, for what reason I don't know, we were moved out to start B compound.

At first, we were only sixty guys in the one barracks. It was quite comfortable. Later, we wound up with twenty in a room, sleeping in triple bunks; with guys sleeping on tables and on the floor. The guys who'd been there the longest got the beds and passed them on, when they moved to another compound. (After we absorbed all the guys from Luft 6, they built little "dog huts" in between the barracks and stuffed them with six or seven guys. One night we had a terrible lightning storm, and someone got killed in them.)

All night they had searchlights on us and guards walking around with dogs. I guess it was because they were new to us and we were new to them. There was a field kitchen outside the barracks from which we were fed. The Germans gave us dehydrated cabbage soup, a piece of bread and ersatz tea. That's it! We didn't do any labor (the Russians came in to clean out the latrines); but we had to stand roll

call three times a day, so they could count us...even though we were only one barracks. On that diet, some of the guys had a hard time getting out of their bunks. This went on for weeks, but then eased up. We finally got our Red Cross parcels, months after we first came to camp.

We were on our own; no outsiders to look out for us. We had an election for camp leader and Richard Chapman was the Sergeant in charge. At twenty-five, he was as old man compared to us.

### **S/Sgt. Robert Von Sternberg 96BG (Cleveland, Ohio)**

I was with the 96th Bomb Group and we had the highest losses in the Third Division and the second highest in the Eighth Air Force, so there were a lot of us in camp. I came in on the 16th of May, the second day it opened and my number was 1144... The 144th man they assigned to the camp.

Richard Chapman was our leader. He had been a fireman from Daytona Beach before the war. Dick was much older than the rest of us, or so it seemed at the time. I was 26 and he was older than that. He was probably the oldest ranking Sergeant and became the Man of Confidence by default.

When we came in there, there was a big pile of straw and each one of us had a burlap sack. The Germans said: "fill up the sack" and then they took us down to the barracks and assigned us new numbers. That burlap sack full of straw was all we had and it got packed down and packed down. After they started bringing new guys in, they were sleeping on the floor and outside in tents. I had a bunk in the barracks right next to the kitchen.

We got wagonloads of bread from the Germans and trokengemuse ... which was dried vegetables in huge 50 lb. paper sacks from Rumania. Occasionally we got horsemeat from animals with shrapnel holes in them. Kohlrabi was like a big turnip that we made soup with. The Germans used to feed the cattle and us with that. There were four huge kettles in the kitchen. We'd make soup in one of them, boil potatoes and hot water for coffee.

Hauptman Schliep was the German in charge of Lager A. He'd been a World War 1 officer who was very dignified and very military. If you acted the same way with him, he was a gentleman. Hauptman Schliep was very old and had been wounded so that he could hardly use his arm. He had no control over his subordinates; the other guy was feldwebel Baur. He was a regular Army man and had been in the German Army for over 15 years. I once said to him: "They didn't have a German Army, before the War" and Baur said: "**Oh yes they did!**" He too, observed all the military customs, and wore a miniature .45 Berretta pistol.

We had a German doctor who came every morning with his orderly, and we would have sick call. A lot of men resented the doctor in, as much as he expected to be saluted at the time a man came before him. Many of our men did not wish to observe military courtesy. When someone came up before him with hands in their pockets and slouched, he would demand: "Get your hands out of your pockets" He was an officer and let's face it; you had to play the game in order to get your care. He was entitled to the salute whether or not the patient thought he was. A lot of people resented the fact that he maintained military protocol. I don't think he was hostile, but he wanted respect.

He brought in a whole quantity of medical supplies. It was pretty primitive, before the American medics (who were non-combatants) arrived... technically they were allowed to be in the lager. When we finally got this medical detachment, it was a Godsend. They maintained a ward facility in the Vorlager so it wasn't necessary to have sick call in each lager. We took over the front half of one of the barracks. We had three barracks, altogether. The doctor performed surgery, lancing boils things like that. Luckily we didn't have any serious medical procedures at that time. We did have diphtheria (I remember one of the American doctors said he'd never seen it before).

**Dr. McKee** was a medical Captain, who came to us in July, 1944. He was beginning to suffer from being captured so long... quite jumpy. You can imagine the frustration at having no medication. There was no ether...we used paper bandages and things like that.

### **Albert Kadler, Swiss Protecting Powers Rep.**

The run (July 18) finished at the camp gates, a distance of approximately three kilometers from the station of Kiefeheide, and took place under a very hot sun. Only a few of the POW's had succeeded in retaining any of their equipment.

The worst cases of bayonet wounds, dog bites and rifle-clubbing were attended to by the German Medical Officer, assisted by the British Medical Officer...

During the run, at least one of the medical orderlies wearing a Red Cross armband was savagely attacked whilst attempting to assist an injured man who had collapsed. His medical equipment, which he was carrying in a white satchel marked with a Red Cross, was smashed with blows from a rifle butt. He himself suffered slight bayonet wounds. Before entering the camp, each prisoner underwent a search in the Vorlager. During this search, all personal valuables such as watches and cigarette cases were confiscated...Many of the prisoners wearing religious emblems had these roughly torn from them and... destroyed... prisoners also had personal photographs taken from them and confiscated. After the search ... prisoners complained of having been struck and insulted by the guards, many ... with rifle butts and heavy leather belts...

Two further transports of prisoners of war coming from Dulag Luft, Wetzlar received the same treatment...the last ... being on Aug.4, 1944. One of the German officers accompanying the prisoners ...protested very strongly against this treatment, with the result that the head of the prisoner of war section of the OKW, Oberst Westhoff, made an inspection of Luft IV, Gross Tychow. Since then, treatment ...received between the station ... and the camp ...can be considered satisfactory.

### **S/Sgt. Donald Kirby 452<sup>nd</sup> BG (Columbus, Ohio)**

All along that run, we had our own guard giving us a real workout on the back. The stock of a gun has a big old piece of metal on it. When you hit somebody with that, it hurts. I mean wham! Now I didn't know if he stuck me or the metal broke - but I wound up with some kind of mean slice. I didn't find out until about two weeks later - that's the first time I took off my shirt. The thing was all caked with blood, but I didn't want to tell anybody.

The guards at the camp were all worked up to begin with. But the ones that brought us up here were all madder then get out - about some guard getting splattered back down on the road. They wanted us to line up and see who was who. They were looking for the P.O.W. who knocked over a guard - but they must have described Hy Hatton's hair. They were looking for a darker complected fellow with black hair. "Black Hair", they shouted out. The Feldwebel wanted to know who caused such a commotion, so we all said "keep quiet!". The guards came up with the dogs, sniffed around and looked us over pretty good.

Many of us had these knit caps someone had made in camp. They looked like a Swiss hat. Well, I took that off, and my hair wasn't too long - but they were looking for a curly, black haired guy! Now, Hatton had that kind of hair, but they weren't worried about him. They wanted the guy who turned the guard, bottoms up. Boy, one Kraut came over and looked me over. You could tell he was almost positive. But, he couldn't be quite sure. He came up and looked and looked while I just stayed stone still. That lasted for quite a while. But they finally let up on it and continued with the rest of their nasty business. "You're not going into the regular camp", is what they told us.

The rest of that afternoon was spent sorting things out and trying to set up a big tent. That fell down, and we ended up just sleeping under the big canvas. We just pulled it up over us and slept on the ground. I never went to see anybody about my back. I figured they might have been saying: "If anybody shows up here hurting, why just ask him how and where he got hit". I would say, in my life, there were no episodes to compare with that Run Up the Road.

### **Sgt. Roy Kennett (Dayton, Ohio) 392<sup>nd</sup> BG**

We finally got to Stalag Luft IV. Somebody carried **Hy Hatton** on the march into Luft IV. I remember the guy was about six feet, four and a ball player from our compound at Heydekrug. He was a very great person and picked Hatton up and carried him into camp. After that, Hy was in bad shape, really hurting because he got a rifle butt to the back.

After Hatton and I went up that road, we all ended up in an open field for several days; you weren't allowed to stand up. If you did, they'd open fire; and they did it a couple of times. They shot over our heads, so we just had to lay out there. You could move if you stayed on your hands and knees, but we just weren't allowed to stand up - AND BABY, I DIDN'T STAND UP!

### **T/Sgt. Lloyd Nordstrom 388BG**

After we got to Luft 4, there wasn't much of anything as far as escape is concerned; no tunnels, no nothing. Things were really tough there. We did maintain our intelligence and security organization. **Frank Paules** and **Bill Krebs** had an office in D lager and we worked out of there. As I recall, word got to me that someone in the next lager was working with the Germans. Shortly afterwards, I went down to work with the parcel detail. It worked the same way it had up at Luft 6, where the PW's went out to the Vorlager and then came back to their compounds. I took someone's place and sneaked over to the other compound to talk with the guy in question. I told him: "You keep this up and you're a dead man!" Well, that was a lot of crap, because how in the Sam Hill could we kill him? He didn't say why he helped them out, but the Germans probably had worked on him. If he'd been down a long time, things could be plenty rough; maybe he was frightened and wasn't thinking straight. He said: "From now on, I'll give you whatever I can find out from them." There were plenty of times when we were all half scared to death.

### **S/Sgt. Carter Lunsford (Portsmouth, NH) 390<sup>th</sup> BG**

Our treatment at Luft 4 was very bad, from the first day to the last. After the Run Up the Road, they kept us outside the camp itself for several nights. Then we all went into A compound. Some of us were able to find room in the barracks, but others had to sleep out in tents on the ground. Later, they put most of us from Luft 6 into compound D, along with the British who were led by Warrant Officers **Godfrey** and **Clarke**.

**Richard Chapman** was in charge of Luft 4 when we got there. The camp had opened in May and most of the PW's were new. The Germans were new to us, but

it seems that Bombach knew about us. With 2000 men coming in, they had to have some forwarding information. At first they tried to break our leadership, but we quickly set up at the new camp. We had to have a little set-to with Chapman and do some reorganizing, but they realized that Frank knew what he was talking about. It was like the British, when we first got up to Six, telling us how to run things. To my knowledge, there wasn't a lot of commotion between us. In fact, the Germans soon decided Frank Paules was the guy they wanted to deal with. We knew that we'd all be in separate compounds before too long, so we didn't waste a lot of time bickering. With so many guys coming in, there was enough work to go around.

### **Sgt. Robert Longo (Westerly, R.I.) 392<sup>nd</sup> BG**

A funny thing happened, not long after the Run. A guy came into the compound, all dressed up in clean, new uniform. After about a week, we say: "Who's this guy?" We figured something must be wrong here, because everybody else, when they come up the hill into camp... they're all ragged. So we started complaining and pretty soon they took him out of there. One of our barracks leaders was pretty friendly with the Krauts, also. There were times when we thought he might be in cahoots with them, but nothing ever came of it.

The compound leader of Lager B, was **Willard Miller** and he was one of the original guys at Luft IV. He was a little older than I was at the time, which was 20. That would make him about 24. He could interpret from the Germans and had been given the job by **Richard Chapman**, the original camp leader.

Another thing I remember was when the British came over at night and bombed for a week steady. You could feel our barracks shake, and even though you had to keep the shutters closed, you could see the flames off in the distance. We felt that somehow the Allies had found out about the Run and it was a warning. That's the thing...They could never break our morale!

### **T/Sgt. Frank Paules (Lansdale, Pa.) RCAF/8th AF**

When we arrived at Stalag Luft 4, there were already 2000 American NCOs, who had been recently shot down (within six weeks). They had very little knowledge of the rules of a POW camp. Within the camp a reign of terror existed. We were told to fall in line with the system at Stalag Luft 4. Our arrival made it 4400 Americans in one lager. Food and clothing were in great shortage. A **Sgt. Teague** had been

shot and killed while standing in an open window of one of the barracks, by a guard outside the wire. The German excuse for the shooting was that Teague had spit in the direction of the guard.

### **T./Sgt. Richard Chapman (Daytona, Fla.) 96BG**

On June 22, 1944, **Aubrey Teague** was shot and killed in Compound A, by a guard walking his post outside the compound (between Barracks 6 and 7). Teague had jumped out the window and went over to some chairs in the lager where he was cutting the hair of one of the POW's. The guard said something to Teague, in German, which he did not understand.

The Sergeant walked back to the window, laid his elbows on the window sills, and at that time the guard shot him.

I heard the shot fired. I ran out of the barracks and found Teague lying on the ground, by the window. He was taken to barracks 4 compound hospital and he lived approximately two hours after he was shot. This was reported to Col. Bombach immediately that same afternoon. The guard was removed to another prison camp and the Colonel refused to divulge the identity of the guard or the action taken against him for this crime.

### **S/Sgt. Robert Von Sternberg**

My barracks was right across from the kitchen. In June of 1944, a fellow from my barracks, **Teague**, was shot by a guard. He died right in front of me. I had volunteered to be a medic, because I was acquainted with medicine. (I had worked in a drug store before I went into the Army). Nobody else came forward, so I said "I'll help". This was before **Capt. McKee** came up from North Africa, in August. I was in charge of Lager A dispensary.

They were going to take Teague out and I said: "Don't do it! Wait until it gets dark or they'll be a riot!" So instead of carrying this kid out, they left him in the dispensary. We put up the shutters in the room and waited.

### **T/Sgt. Frank Paules**

**Lt. Col. Bombach** was about 38 years old, 5 feet, 6 inches tall. He had very thin features with black hair, combed straight back... somewhat of a dandy, nervous fidgety type, and a Nazi Party man. I believe he was an espionage agent in France, speaks good English (but not openly) and understands English very well. He was in command of Luft 4 and had been deputy Commandant of Luft 6 under **Col. Von Hoermann**. Bombach was in charge of the camp and sanctioned and

supported the violations of the Geneva Convention. The run we made was protested to him, but he stated that he knew nothing about it. At least three large groups, including ourselves, had to make this run.

The Abwehr officer was **Capt. Lindemann**, who was very weak and passive; not a forceful officer. Under him was Sgt. **Fahnard**. Fahnard ran the Abwehr activities in the camp, although Capt. Lindemann was apparently in charge. Fahnard was the power behind the throne, and he was present on the Run Up the Road. The Germans who beat the men, were under his orders at all times. It was reported to me that Fahnard had struck men on numerous occasions, and had kicked me.

Fahnard was in charge of the German Security system with Luft IV and considering his rank, was on extremely intimate terms with both **Captain Walter Pickhardt** and Lt. Colonel Otto Bombach. His authority in the camp was a great deal more than his rank would have called for. Within the camp, he had a record of persecution, and violence and personally led all searches of the camp area. It was always believed by me that these three men, Bombach, Pickhardt and Fahnard were ardent Nazis. I was so informed on many occasions by friendly German personnel. The last thing I recall about Sgt. Fahnard was being threatened by him with shooting, for interfering with the distribution of Red Cross Parcels (on the occasion of leaving Stalag Luft IV, to begin the march back to the western front).

The rumor among the German personnel was that Lt. Col. Bombach was an espionage agent in France in 1940; and that in some fashion, Sgt. Fahnard was also connected with him at that time. Fahnard always impressed me to either be a high member of the Nazi party or an undercover Gestapo agent (or holding some other high office or position). Since he had a great deal more authority than is generally given to Sergeants or other Non-Coms. It seemed almost as though Sgt. Fahnard, in matters of camp security, exerted a great deal of pressure on the camp commandant.

Capt. Pickhardt was the captain of the guards, although they were not part of the Abwehr. On the run up the road, it was he who kept exhorting the German guards to use their bayonets; along the roadside, machine guns were set up in the woods and German soldiers were observed in the trees with cameras. Pickhardt kept yelling at the prisoners to escape, presumably to enhance a mass break, and subsequently give them a reason to kill us all. According to the testimony given to me by friendly German guards, Pickhardt had chosen men to supervise the run, whose homes had been bombed by the Allies. Many times, as prisoners were being counted by the guards inside the camp, he would strut up and down the ranks screaming: "Schweinhund" and "Luftgangsters".

It was reported by friendly German personnel that during his many speeches to guards, he stated it would be better if the POW's were all shot, and then they would not have to feed them; that POW's were swine and not to be treated as men.

He was always extremely abusive verbally. Pickhardt was one of the most fanatical Nazis I ever encountered in Germany. He had the complete confidence of the camp Commander, and the regime of terror seemed to be part of a plan carefully mapped out by both Bombach and Pickhardt.

The lager officer at Lager A was **Major Gruber** (who had been with us on the boat ride). He had taken over from **Capt. Schliep**. Schliep was in charge of searches where they beat our men.

The lager officer for Lager B was **Capt. Wolf**. He had been a collector of Junkers patents in the US before the war. He spoke "American" English. Wolf appeared friendly towards the Americans and worked for their benefit; but his activities were such that there is no way of knowing. He would leave camp for a week at a time and apparently had influential connections. He opposed Fahrnard and Pickhardt and sided with the Americans; his action verified that. He told me that he wanted to see the Americans safe and sound after the war and was willing to risk a lot to do so.

The Lager officer of C compound was **Capt. Weinart**, who was a negative character. The lager officer of lager D was **Major Zallman**, who was an elderly Prussian and a strict military officer. Inside the lager he would allow no rough treatment, if he could stop it. He was very much afraid of the Abwehr and the Commandant, and therefore, a weak officer. On the road, he had a column and I held him responsible for the deaths of the men who died of pneumonia, due to neglect.

### **S/Sgt. Roy Kennett (Dayton, Ohio) 392<sup>nd</sup> BG**

One time they took us over and let us get a shower. It crossed my mind that maybe this was it, (something was up) but I didn't know any orders had gone out (to kill us). It never crossed my mind that they could really do that. I knew that if you did something you weren't supposed to do, they would shoot you because they did that to a few people. But as long as you behaved yourself you were OK. About September, I went over to B Compound and got separated from my crewmate, **Hy Hatton**. He was still over in A compound. Sometimes we'd meet at the fence and talk. One afternoon, we were just parting. A German soldier was up working on the power lines and got electrocuted. A bunch of G.I.'s were standing out there shouting: "Yay!...that's the way to go baby! Kill another one", and yelling all that kind of stuff. The German officer in charge told the guards to open fire... I thought we'd had it.

I remember a boy from camp got a letter from his Mom. It said they had a German prisoner, who was working on their farm. They gave him the guys' room and hoped the German people were being as nice to him, as they were being to the

German boy! They'd take the kid to the movies on Friday night and take good care of him.

Well, our boy reads the letter, goes over to the wall in the barracks and starts beating his head on it! We said: "Wait a minute, what are you doing? "... Read that goddamn letter! That friggin' kraut! Yah know? "

**Hymie Hatton** was with me up at Luft VI, and **Smitty (Arthur Smith)** was there in Kiefeheide. That Smitty was something else; always ready to mix it up. We used to play a lot of bridge to kill time. One day I was playing with Verdie, and Smitty was partners with some other guy. Smitty's sitting there and he puts up the Ace of Clubs; the King is gone. I've got the Queen in my hand and a couple of little Clubs. I reach into my hand to take out the Deuce of Clubs, and throw it down.

Instead, it's the Queen, so I say: "Whoa... I didn't mean to play the Queen." Well, Smitty comes back with: "A card laid is a card played!" I said: "Oh... I've got the Three and the Deuce here, why would I play the Queen? I just grabbed the wrong card out of my hand!" So he says: "A card laid is a card played!" I say: "Like hell!" and I pick up the Queen.

About that time the table went flying and Smitty hit me, so I hit him; and we went round and round. We had a hell of a fight! There was a heavy little pot bellied stove with Klim cans tied together to make a pipe, and that whole thing came crashing down. All 26 guys in the room were trying to grab us before we could get at each other!

It's a funny thing, but the Germans gave us stoves without stove pipes. We took Klim cans and cut slices in them on the edges. Then we'd save those metal strips you get when you open the can with a key; they would be clinched all around the outside of the joints. You would stack them up on top of the stove and put it out through the chimney. That way we could use our stoves. The next day we apologized ... But isn't that terrible. I was closer to him than anyone in the compound. (Just he and I were together, out of our crew). That Smitty was always ready to fight and he didn't care who you were or what you were - he was ready! He was a tough little rascal; just like a guard dog that comes at you and growls at anybody.

### **S/Sgt. Don Kirby (Columbus, Ohio)**

When we got settled inside the wire, they kept us in a kind of tent thing in between the barracks. That was from August until almost October. Then they shipped us over into a regular barracks, in D compound. There was no more free visiting and a lot of our sports organization broke up. We got split up into different compounds and the ground wasn't fit for any real activities.

Our area was the last one completed and the assembly area, the center of the compound, was just sand and rough gravel. It was like arctic tundra and wasn't

even level. I think the other compounds were set up a little better, at least you could run without sinking up to your boots. It was harder to keep in shape at IV and we were pretty spent after that evacuation.

In order to keep our morale up, me and **Sandy Cerniglia** started to work on an escape plan. At one time we figured to hide in this cellar where they kept the kohlrabies. We were going to make a break for it after dark (of course, we kept that plan on ice).

Now, we had a "**Big Stoop**" with us and he was something else. He was a big goon who was maybe seven feet tall; looked like Primo Carnera and was all mean. He had hurt my friend (**Clyde**)**Tinker** and one time we came close to a confrontation. One of "Stoop's" favorite things was to grab a hold of your hand, and play like he was just joking... then twists up your thumb or something.

One time on Christmas, when we had just what little stuff we could put together all set out, he walked in our barracks and turned over the whole dinner table. Some guy had a couple of little cans of jam and some special food we'd been saving. Then he turned out the lights and left us in the dark.

There's times in your life when you just say: "Now, I'm not going along with this anymore... I'm not putting up with this shit any more!" We were in the barracks and I was lying up on my bunk... Just simmering about something. Tinker was below me and the word had just spread: "Big Stoop is coming!". I was on my back with my forearm on my face and one arm just dangling over the side of the bunk. Tink said to me: "Kirby, get your hand up or Stoop will grab it."

I don't know what was in me that day, but I felt ornery. I said to myself: "If he does grab it, I'm gonna hit the S.O.B. with everything in this place." There was no doubt in my mind that I was going to do it. Tinker whispered: "Come on, get it up." But I let that thing hang down there.

Now here comes that goon. He's sitting around with a couple of Kriegies over there and the time is just passing. I felt his glance sweep over towards me a couple of times, but I just lay there. Whether he just didn't care or he said: "Leave him be, he's got a right to just hang around", I don't know. Maybe the Good Lord was on my side that day. At any rate, he just walked on by. But if he'd made a move on me, so help me God, I would have done him in. Of course, I'd have gotten shot.

We did have some funerals at Luft IV. One fellow just kept walking towards the warning wire and everybody was yelling at him. The closer he got, the louder we yelled... Until boom! The guards blew him out of his saddle. There was another fellow, before we got into 4. You weren't supposed to go out the window; but he went out that window and did something, so they shot him too.

We had another situation up there at IV, where they had guys sleeping in "Dog Houses". They were small units built like oversized huts. I think there was

Canadians in them and lightning struck and killed one of them. They were right next to the barbed wire. Whenever there was an electrical storm, St. Elmo's fire was just hopping all up and down that wire.

### **S/Sgt. George Lilja**

Any time you're in the service, no matter where you are, there's always clicks. You sort of migrate to the guys who thought like you. Back in the States, there was another guy who liked the same music as I did; so we got a little radio together and we didn't have to listen to country music all the time. The only camaraderie you didn't make up, was with your air crew.

Once you were assigned to that crew, you stuck with it, and that's where your loyalties were. You socialized together, ate together, got drunk or laid... you looked out for each other. In prison camp, there were clicks too. When the other guys came in from Six, it got crowded pretty fast. But they didn't "take over"; we just accepted what the Germans threw at us. No matter how crowded my room was, I had my own click of friends. Three- quarters of the guys in the room, I didn't even know. I just stuck to these three or four fellows that were my buddies.

The funny thing was, I had come into camp with a gunner from my own crew, but I let go of him pretty fast. Everything was "an experience" to him! All during the time we were captured and held by the Gestapo, he'd tell me: "I wouldn't give this up for the world! What an experience!" Until the time they threw us into a truck and took us out to a spot in the woods. We had to pile out and these SS troops surrounded us with their burp guns. Some women from the nearby town were in tears; they thought we were about to get massacred. I guess that shut my buddy up pretty good.

One fellow that stands out in my mind, was a guy from a B-24 crew, named **Grimes**. He was much older than the rest of us, and an actor by trade. There was a great thing he used to do. At night, he'd read a play or poem. Grimes did such a beautiful job that you'd lay there and just close your eyes. It was unbelievable; you'd just be out of there, for a while. I think Grimes was a little bit off, though. He'd slice his bread extra thin, and leave it on the window sill, until it got hard. Then he'd make believe it was toast.

It was unbelievable how all this stuff changed you. Not long after the guys came in from Six, we had a German up on the light pole and somebody turned on the switch. He was electrocuted. I was near the window in the middle of the barracks and the pole was right there, on the other side of the wire. I was eating my meager ration and he was just hanging there, held on by a strap. His body was arched and his long straight hair, stuck out behind him. The colors in his face were just turning, as he was burning; the power was still on. I just kept eating and looking right at him.

A German Major came through the compound, shortly after this incident. His family had just been killed in a raid on one of the northern cities. We just turned away from him...didn't want anything to do with him.

### **T/Sgt. Carter Lunsford**

That summer, the camp authorities told us we had some bad characters coming into camp. They were in an officer's camp and the officers didn't want any part of them. Can you imagine that! They told the Germans: "Get them out of here and put them somewhere else!" So they ended up in our camp. One turned out later to have been a gangster, and how he ever got into the service, I don't know.

The Germans told us: "You have some undesirable on their way. Do you want us to put them in irons?" Frank said: "NO! They are American prisoners and they are not to be isolated or put in prison." As soon as they got into camp they wanted to do all kinds of disruptive things. For instance, in order to take a shower, you had to appoint a man to work the pump. No pump, no shower. Our people said: "OK. We'll go down in relays and work the pump." Do you think these guys would do that? "Oh No! That's helping the Germans. Why should we do a thing like that? Make them do it!" Now how are you going to tell the Germans something like that?

Colonel Bombach was very mean and very strict. He felt that tight security would prevent any escapes and that was his whole purpose. He knew that in the past that we would concoct all kinds of escape materials from the food and tins of our Red Cross parcels. The British made compressed food bars and what not; we used the tin cans for ventilation of tunnels and tools.

He made a rule that for every tin of food that went in, an empty tin had to come out. They punched holes in all the food so that you had to eat it before it spoiled. We'd line them all up and he'd count them. If we came up one can short, then we had one less Klim can coming back in.

This kind of thing went on and on. They'd invade the barracks in the middle of the night and tear the place apart. Big Stoop and his Abwehr characters were supposedly looking for escape materials or radios, but they made a great sport of it. It kept you on edge, because we couldn't be sure when they'd raid us.

The truth is that we never tried to escape from Luft 4. We knew that the War was drawing to a close. What was the point of taking chances? By the end of 1944, Germany was in turmoil, the Russians were never very far off and the guards were trigger happy. Frank turned down every plan that came to him. We could have done something if we wanted to, and there were certainly guys who were ready to dig their way out of there. If I'm not mistaken, we were warned through our code communications with the U.S. Government, not to take any unnecessary risks.

Around December, during the Battle of the Bulge, things were getting very nasty between the Germans and us.

Some of the German non-commissioned officers at the camp came from families that were well connected politically, and were there to keep out of the conflict. Two or three of them spoke excellent English and they came to Frank. They realized the War was going against them and that the better they handled us, the better the results they would get at the end: "Look, we feel that the Commandant is being too strict with you. What we would like to do is prove to him that you can get a man out any time you want to; and all this tight security is a waste. It's not preventing any escapes at all. We'll help you do that. Do you have anyone who can speak German?" Of course, Bill Krebs did! They brought in 2 German Luftwaffe uniforms with a pass all prepared.

The Colonel knew in advance that we were going to try to get a man out. He was lined up outside his headquarters with his staff, waiting to see if we could do it. He had agreed that if we succeeded, he would relax these midnight raids. To my mind, it was a brave thing for **Bill Krebs** to attempt. It's quite possible that they could have shot him.

We were lined up for the evening roll call, and he slipped away to put on the Luftwaffe uniform with the pass. After the count, he went out of the compound and through the gates of the Vorlager with the other guards. As he went out we could see him chatting away with his new buddies. They let him pass outside of the Vorlager and no one questioned him what so ever. There's this Colonel with all his staff, just waiting to nab us in our escape attempt. Bill gave him the Heil Hitler salute and continued walking about a dozen paces, before he turned on his heels and came back. Standing in front of Bombach, he gave a snappy salute and said: "William Krebs, United States Air Corps!" Isn't that something! When he got back into the compound, we asked him, "Bill, what did you say to those guards?" He said: " Oh, well... This day's over! I'm going home now to get a cup of coffee and a bit of sausage!"

At Six, we could walk around the barracks freely, although we couldn't pass into the British compound. At Four, communication between the leaders was limited, although from time to time we did have meetings up in the headquarters building in the Vorlager. Another chance to pass information from compound to compound occurred when the work teams would go out to load the wagons with Red Cross Parcels and so forth. Men from all four compounds would mingle and it was a natural thing to offer a guy a cigarette. Well, inside that cigarette might be a radio message or a request for information about someone.

**S.Sgt. Donald Kremper**

I had come into Luft 4 from Heydekrug and was put into one of the tents located between barracks 9 and 10. They gave us straw to place on the ground and one blanket. Thank God, it was summertime! Waiting for our lager to be completed was one long bore, to all of us. We walked the perimeter for exercise, played some touch football and softball. Those that had brought cards from our other camp, had games that went on daily. All of this helped to pass the time.

Roll call took place twice a day, or more if the Germans felt the need to check. The count never came out right the first time, because someone in the back row would duck down, or move to another group. Anything to keep the guards off balance!

One evening before we moved to C compound, in early September, a flight of three German Me-109's buzzed our camp. On the last pass, one of the fighters flying upside down, nose-dived into the ground, causing a terrific explosion. We were lucky he did not crash into the compound.

I was assigned to Barracks 5, room 11 with 22 others. We stayed there until our evacuation on February 6, 1945. The place wasn't even complete when we moved in. It was weeks before they installed bunks. The rooms filled up in no time, due to the all out effort of our Allied Air forces. Four lagers (A, B, C, D) were finally constructed and close to 10,000 allied airmen called Luft 4, "Home".

Our lager chief was **Francis Troy** and the doctor was Capt. Leslie Caplan. Things were always in a fluid state, but we did our best to stay on an even keel. We formed a small band, as we had up at Luft 6, using instruments sent by the YMCA. Talent always seemed to be available, so we put on a small musical review. No chairs for this one, everybody had to sit on the floor. In time, 3 chaplains, all captured English Army personnel, were brought to our camp. They performed religious services in each lager's community room. The Rev. T.T. Lynch, from South Hampton, England, is the one I'm most familiar with.

Christmas Eve, 1944, the German Camp Commander allowed us to go from barracks to barracks. A small musical combo played and Christmas carols were sung. Lock-up was at 10pm instead of the usual 9pm, with lights out and all windows shuttered. Ventilation at night was a problem, with so many POW's jammed into each room.

### **T./Sgt. Frank Paules**

At the end of January, as the Russians drew near, we got word to prepare for evacuation. Those who the doctors felt would not survive a march, along with some security men, were sent by boxcar up to Stalag Luft 1. The rest of us packed our belongings and got ready to march. It was a cold and snowy winter in East Prussia; after a year behind barbed wire, we were going out on the road.

