



A Sad Day in My Life
By S/Sgt. John R. Crawbuck
381 BG Stalag Lufts 6, 4 and 1
sketch by Sgt. Calvin Brend 306BG

January 11, 1944, flying out of England, we were shot down and so were my dreams of becoming a pilot. I was one guy who was sure, that I would finish my 25 missions and then be sent home for pilot training.

This day our target was Oschersleben, in the center of Germany. This was my 20th mission and I was flying with a new crew. My original crew had finished their required missions and I was a fill in for a gunner for the crew. I had been hospitalized for nearly two months with a flak wound in my hip and was unable to fly. On this day, I was flying

as the left waist gunner. The other gunner, **Ross N. Defenbaugh** was killed. Ross saved my life and died in doing so, but that's another story.

I managed to bail out and was captured. Thanks to the German soldiers, I was protected from the civilians, who would have killed me. I was sent to Frankfurt and confined to solitary confinement for 30 days. We were then sent to Stalag Luft VI. The camp had two compounds; one British and one American.

Sometime in early summer, we were sent to Stalag Luft IV. (*July 14, 1944*) We were placed on a ship and forced to go down along vertical ladder; our few belongings were just thrown down the hold. Water was sent down to us by a bucket on a long rope, but no food. The only toilet facilities were up the long metal ladder and only a few of us were allowed up at one time. My turn finally came and I made it up to the deck. One of the men ahead of me went berserk and jumped over the railing. The German soldiers gunned him down in the water (*Walter Getsey 91BG*). I stood there, needing to go to the bathroom but couldn't, and was ordered back down the ladder. We finally docked at a port called Swinemunde and were placed on trains; it seemed a short distance to a railroad station.

(*July 18, 1944*) Because the group I was with were the last ones on the train, we ended up being the first one's off. They chained us by the ankles to another man and then proceeded down the road in the direction of the camp. My partners name was Hughes and he came from Kansas. I don't remember his first name. We were chained together and doing reasonably well, until we were forced to run. It was then that our weakness became apparent. We tried hard, but it was difficult to run. We were lucky to be able to keep up... much more so than some who received numerous bayonet wounds; one man had 67.

About half way to the camp, the fellow in front of me passed out. We all tried to help him, but were unable to do so. The fellow he was chained to picked him up, laid him over his shoulders and ran with him the rest of the way to the camp. To me, this was a physical feat unsurpassed to anything I had ever witnessed.

As for me, I could hardly make it at all by myself. We were all in bad shape after our ordeal on the ship. We finally made it into camp and also to bathroom facilities. As far as I remember, we were the first ones into compound A. We stayed there until early 1945, when the Russians got too close and we were again forced to move.

The only thing I can remember about the man who carried his partner into camp was that he was a stocky fellow and I can vision him and what he looked like., but I cannot remember his name. If by chance he might read this little story, I can only say to him: Thank You. It was people like him that helped make our country what it is: great.

For fifty years I have wanted to tell this story, but never got around to it. I hope you can use it in your book. If anyone knows who this fellow was I would live to write to him or hope someday to see him in person.

The Cake

John (Rudy) Crawbuck

Excerpted from AXPOW.org

This is just a short story of a time in my life. Several years ago, a friend of mine sent me the names of some of the fellows that we were interned with in Stalag Luft VI and IV. One of the guys was Bill Hughes. Bill and I were close buddies and were in the same barracks. As soon as I could, I phoned Bill in Kansas City, MO. It had been fifty or more years since we had last seen each other.

The conversation went something like this. "Hello Bill. This is Rudy Crawbuck, do you remember me?" His answer was no. I told him we were in the same barracks in VI and IV together and we were chained at the ankles together when they moved us from Stalag Luft VI to IV. There was some hesitation in his trying to remember. Then he asked, "Are you the guy who made the cake?"

This was the question that brought about the writing of this little story called The Cake.

I had been one of the lucky ones in camp to have received a food package from home. It had all kinds of goodies in it. Nineteen pair of eyes all watched me as I opened it. (There were 20 of us in a room 12x12).

We had a pan used for washing, etc. I cleaned this pan and coated it with some oleo. Then commenced to mix all the goodies I had -- nuts, raisins, candy bars, cut up black bread, crumbs, powdered milk and anything else I could find to fill up the pan. A small amount of water and my cake was ready to cook. I placed it on top of our pot-bellied stove and it took a while to cook. Guys from the other rooms came in to admire Rudy's cake. One guy wanted to know what I was going to do with it.

The table was cleaned and the finished cake was placed upside down on it. It looked just perfect. Twenty young and hungry men just looked and admired it. At this time, the Germans were feeding us approximately 900 calories a day, and food was the main topic of conversation for sure.

Now came the big question -- what to do with it. After all, it was all my stuff that went into the making of the cake, including my bread ration. It was cut in half by our room Captain and divided among all the men.

We all enjoyed this unusual feast and I felt like a hero and was thanked by all.



Photo of B-17 #42-3118 / Daisy June aka Shack Rabbit aka The Green Hornet

The Green Hornet

B-17F 42-3118

381st BG, 534th Squadron.

Delivered: Cheyenne 27/2/43; Presque Is 8/4/43;

Assigned: 339BS/96BG [QJ-A] Thurleigh 16/4/43 "DAISY JUNE";

Transferred: 413th Bomb Squadron "SHACK RABBIT";

Transferred 534BS/381BG [GD-N] Ridgewell 6/7/43.

Reported MIA near Oschersleben on January 11th 1944. Numbers 3 and 4 engines set on fire by enemy aircraft & flak shortly before target area. Pilot Austin Larson took evasive action and departed the formation on a southern course.

Left Waist gunner John Crawford engaged 7 or 8 enemy aircraft until Ross Defenbaugh alerted him to the fact that the pilot and co pilot had already abandoned the aircraft. Ross Defenbaugh helped Crawford put his parachute (chest pack).

Ross Defenbaugh insisted Crawford jump out first, and he would jump out second. Crawford departed the aircraft which was on fire the side he jumped out, and it was the last John saw fellow waist gunner Ross Defenbaugh.

The Green Hornet crashed out of control at Goslar near Bernburg, 20 miles SW of Oschersleben at 1145 hours. Possible claim of Hauptmann Hugo Frey of 7./JG 11 who shot down two B-17s on this day over Goslar-Oschersleben. Frey was killed in action on May 4th 1944, his career includes shooting down 19 B-17's between 1/27/43- 3/6/44, and 5 B-24's.

Pilot: Austin Larson, (POW)

Co-Pilot: Francis Wilson, (POW)

Navigator: Horace Neff, (POW)

Bombardier: George Regan, (POW)

Engineer / Top Turret Gunner: Edwin Nix, (POW)

Radio Operator: Mike Trainer, (POW)

Ball Turret Gunner: Milt Copeland, (POW)

Waist Gunner: John Crawbuck, (POW) ASN 12184210

Air medal 3 oak leaf clusters, purple heart (POW medal?)

Tail Gunner: Alex Williams (POW)

Waist gunner: Ross Defenbaugh (1916-1944), Independence, Montgomery, Kansas was buried at the American War Cemetery Ardennes, Plot B, Row 33, Grave 30.

Crawbuck Photos of Barth Evacuation (possibly from Ken Wilcox)



