

## Excerpts from Turner Publishing "Stalag Luft IV"

Francis A. Troy was born May 24, 1915 in Albany, NY ; he grew up in Oakham Mass. After enlisting in the AAF on Oct. 5, 1942. He had basic training in Atlantic City then moved on to Tyndall Field, Fla. Troy became a sergeant gunner and was assigned to the 376<sup>th</sup> BG. Their last mission was Feb. 23, 1944 and the entire crew bailed out over Austria. Troy landed in a tall fir tree, then found a sawmill; he was taken to a farmhouse nearby where they fed him. He fell asleep, but was awakened by three German soldiers who brought him to town. He reunited with 5 of his fellow crewman. The following day, they were put on a train to Graz, Austria. The town was being bombed and the prisoners were afraid they might be hit by their own bombers. Their ride continued through Austria to Frankfurt to be interrogated. Eventually, they were sent to Heydekrug, East Prussia (now Silute Lithuania). In July of 1944, the Russians advanced threatened to overtake the camp. It was evacuated, first to Memel and then by boat across the Baltic. Prisoners were handcuffed and remained in the hold of a coal boat named *the Masuran*. Their final destination was Stalagluft 4 located deep in the forest near Gross Tychow, Pomeria. (now Poland). The camp was forced to close because the Russian advance again threatened to overrun the territory.

### Francis A. Troy (Letter to J.P. Odonnell Feb. 1985)

*On February 6, 1944, I left Lager C with 2503 fellow prisoners. I kept no diary; survival was more important. I know we were doing 25 or more kilometers a day for two or three weeks. We marched 7 consecutive days with no food, what so ever! At the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> day, we got potatoes cooked in a boiler. I took two, not large, but my stomach had shrunk so much that I had difficulty keeping them down. The men were so weak, that I prevailed upon Hauptman Weinert; he did allow us to stay in those barns for 3 days. We got food, but instead of gaining our strength back, we were worse off because of dysentery.*

*Early in the morning we were ordered to march. Men started hiking and I argued in vain with the Captain; my men were unable to continue. When I decided my pleas were useless, I started as fast as I could, to get to the head of the line. I don't know how I ever made it, but I did. Over 2000 men were strung out along that narrow road. It must have been a mile long, but I think I traveled almost two miles to get to the head of the line!*

*I yelled for them to stop hiking. The first 80 or so did. There were many men laying in the dirt, because they couldn't keep up the pace. Hauptman Shtetter, who was the German in charge of the march, was infuriated. His interpreter explained to me, as the Captain took out his sidearm out of its holster, that: "I had no right to stop them, as we Germans are giving the orders, not you! If you do not start them moving again, I'll shoot you!" With that he gave the order: "Column, forward March." The leaders that had stopped for me, having heard the threat, proceeded forward. When*

*they did, I rushed the fifty feet to get out in front. I faced them and said: "I said stop!" and they did.*

*The interpreter called me back to the officer; instead of shooting me, they talked to me in more subdued tones.... and actually made me this deal, that I agreed to. In all honesty, I was helpless to disagree. They informed me that we had to cover so much distance, and if the men would walk for an hour, the line would stop and rest for 10 minutes.... then walk another hour and rest, till we got to a certain barn, where we'd get potatoes and a place to sleep.*

The column was liberated by the British, on May 2, 1945. They were now 50 km from Hanover. Climbing aboard a British tank, Troy went in search of the German commandant. Two SS men were trying to get away, driving a Ford. The tank ran them down. Troy took control of the car followed after the tank searching for the German commander. Driving by the column, the men cheered them on. When he was finally found, the Commandant seemed relieved to surrender to the British rather than to the Russians. A British photographer had accompanied Troy and took photos of the surrender.

Troy was discharged on Oct. 2 1945 and earned an air medal and a bronze star. Troy returned to his home town in Oakham. He passed away on January 13, 2011.

Fitzsimons General Hospital  
Denver 8, Colorado

18 July 1945

SUBJECT: Recommendation for S/Sgt. Francis A. Troy

TO: Adjutant General  
Washington, D.C.

I wish to call attention to the exceptionally meritorious performance of duty by S/Sgt Francis A. Troy an aerial gunner of the A. A. F. whose home address is Barre Road, Oakham, Mass. Sgt. Troy was a PPO.W. at Stalag Luft IV where I was the American Flight Surgeon.

S/Sgt. Troy was the American Man of Confidence for Lager "C" of Stalag Luft IV. He was the leader of the 2400 men of Lager "C" a responsibility far greater than his grade would indicate. In protecting the interests of his men against the Germans Sgt. Troy displayed tact, courage and good judgement. He won the respect of his men and of his German captors and life was more tolerable because of his activities behind the the barbed-wire.

On 6 February 1945 the Russian offensive threatened Stalag Luft IV and the Germans evacuated the camp by foot on a few hours notice. It was a march of hardship. The men suffered from starvation, cold and disease. They slept in crowded barns or in fields. Sanitation was poor and there was not enough drinking water. They lived in filth and were plagued by lice and scabies. In spite of their poor physical condition, the men were often forced to march all day. This continued for 86 days. On 2 May 1945 British forces liberated us after we had marched 600 miles or more.

Sgt. Troy realized the dangers that were confronting his men. Throughout this long ordeal, he was continually fighting with the Germans for better conditions. He worked from dawn until past dark in endless efforts to secure better food, shelter or transportation for his men. In spite of threats, rebuffs and humiliation from German officers, he repeatedly requested better conditions and often was successful. His pleas and efforts at times secured for us extra rations and life giving Red Cross food. He was continually arguing for better conditions of the seriously sick for transfer to hospitals and through his efforts provision was made. This saved many lives and frostbitten limbs.

Sgt. Troy helped to keep up the spirits of his men by cheery words and by courageous example. His spirit and unselfishness reflect credit on himself and on the U. S. Army.

It is recommended that this exceptionally meritorious service to American troops be made a matter of official record and that an appropriate award be made.

LESLIE CAPLAN, O 413 434  
Captain, Medical Corps