

FAR AWAY PLACES WITH STRANGE SOUNDING NAMES



Army of the United States

**An account of the overseas and stateside military duty of
Robert T. Thompson, 1st Lt. US ARMY in WORLD WAR II**

September 22, 2002

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This is an account of my military duty in World War II. It begins with events that effected my life shortly before I entered the Army in the Spring of 1942 and continues until the middle of 1945 when I returned home after almost 2 years overseas.

I am doing this to preserve some history for my children and grandchildren. My brothers and I have attempted to find something about our father and his life as a young man and it is almost impossible. He didn't write anything down and the only records we have to go by are his military and government service.

The first few pages concern my brothers and I. We were 7 boys in one family, which is a little bit unusual. All of us had military service and 6 of us were in the service in World War II.

Three of us were overseas in Europe or were headed for Europe. Two died and I was missing for about 8 months. I think this is about all parents could take and survive the grief. I think some of my parents friends were concerned about their making it when all three of us were gone.

All seven of us were good friends as children and remained good friends all through our lives.

My military service was very common in WWII. There were a lot of young men overseas and a lot of them were in harms way.

Some of the friends that I made during my service years have remained good friends for all these 50 years. Some of them I am in contact with and correspond with occasionally.

I have heard that all soldiers leave some of their soul on the battlefields. I think I left a lot of my soul on a lot of battlefields. I was on almost every front in Europe in WWII. Though not necessarily a participant, I was present at the time of the battles. Not very many men can make that statement.

This article was taken from the local newspaper published at Stigler, Oklahoma.

STIGLER NEWS- SENTINEL

Stigler, Oklahoma, Thursday August 4, 1955

Stigler Physician Proves Truth of Chinese Proverb

(Editor's Note: This is the sixth of a series of articles by M.L. McCrory of the Stigler High School Faculty about prominent residents of Haskell County. Readers are invited to submit names of persons whom they feel merit public recognition.)

There's an old Chinese Proverb which goes something like: "True wealth isn't measured by sums, but by sons." If this is true, then Dr. W.A. Thompson is one of the country's most wealthy men. He is the father of seven sons all of whom have been patriotic and upright citizens.

William Albert Thompson was born in Greenville, Texas on April 16, 1874. He was the only son of William and Harriet Thompson, who both died while he was very young. He was reared by an uncle and aunt, Abe and Martha Lee. Dr. Thompson attended school in Bowie and Pecan Gap, Texas until he was ready for college. He attended North Texas State at Denton one year and then received his M.D. degree, from the University of Arkansas Medical School at Little Rock. This was in 1906, but he had already started a career long before by teaching school in Texas for two years.

In 1908, he joined the Army to fight in the Spanish American War. He joined Troop L of the First Cavalry as a private and was immediately sent to the Phillipines. He was released in 1899 and went to school until 1903 at which time he re-enlisted in the Army Hospital Corps. As he had not yet completed his degree, he was again sent to the Phillipines. At the conclusion of his tour, he came back to Arkansas and received his



Dr. W. A. Thompson degree. The same years he opened his first office in Hermitage, Ark where he met and married Miss Euna Singer. To them was born Paul Singer Thompson in 1907. Mrs. Thompson died in July, 1913 and on March 4, 1914 he married the present Mrs. Thompson, who was Miss Grace Ann Langston.

The Thompsons then started 15 years of jumping from place to place. As Mrs. Thompson says, "Doc just wouldn't stay put. We had six sons, and no two of them were born in the same place." In 1915, they were at Achilles, Okla where Benjamin Albert was born. In 1917, they were at Kusa, Okla, and Jack Pershing was

born. Then Dr. Thompson went back to the Army for another hitch. But this time as a First Lieutenant in the Medical Corps. He served until 1919, at which time he was made a captain in the Reserves and separated from the service. The family then moved to Hanna, Oklahoma where in 1919 William Martin was born. From there they went to Moyers, Albion, Okmulgee, and Dewar, where Robert Taylor was born in 1921. Dr. Thompson then went into civil service as a doctor for the Indian Service of the Department of Interior and was sent to Klamath Falls, Oregon. From there, he went to Fort Duschene, Utah where he was joined by the family. His next assignment was the Colville Indian Agency in Nespelem, Washington and while there Don Colton was born in 1924. He was then transferred to Ft. Washakie, Wyo, and while there was sent to a school in Denver, Colo. While attending the school he received an offer to come to Dayton, Ohio as surgeon for the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Mrs. Thompson accepted for him and told him when he returned home. While they were at Dayton the last of the sons was born, Malcolm Walsh in 1926.

The Thompsons also lived in Hampton, VA and Pine Bluff, Ark before finally returning to Oklahoma to settle in Porum in 1929. In 1931, they came to Stigler, and Dr Thompson opened an office in the Sigmon Bldg, where the Scott Abstract company is today. Later he moved to the Palace Drug building and maintained offices there until his retirement in 1946. In Stigler, he retained some of his practice for the Indian Service and also did most of the physical examining for the draft board during World War II.

Dr. Thompson always had an affection for the U.S. Army and Paul, Pershing and Billy all graduated from the United States Military Academy. Albert and Bobby also had appointments to the Academy but failed to pass their physicals. In fact, Albert was the

appointee the year that Pershing went. Pershing was the first alternate and got the appointment when Albert failed to pass the physical examination. All of the sons except Albert were in the armed forces during World War II. Don and Maxie, the two youngest were in the navy and the rest were in the Army. Albert also did his part toward the war effort by working in a shipyard in San Pedro, Calif.

Lt. Col. Paul Thompson and Major Pershing Thompson both gave their lives in the service of their country during World War II. The other boys are all married and settled in various parts of the country. Albert has his own business in Lakeland, Calif. Billy is now Major William Martin Thompson, on the staff of General Curtis LeMay, at the Omaha headquarters of the Strategic Air Command. Bobby is located at Bartlesville with the Phillips Petroleum Co. Don is a scout with the Carter Oil Co in Vernal, Utah and Maxie has his own company in Tulsa, manufacturing oil separators. Together the boys have presented Dr. and Mrs. Thompson with 10 lovely grandchildren.

Dr. Thompson has been a member of the Masons and Eastern Star since 1906 and a member of the American Medical Association for over 45 years. He also holds a membership in the American Legion and the United Spanish War veterans.

He will be well remembered by the people of Haskell County for his untiring efforts while he was active in medical practice. However, 9 years ago he was himself taken ill and hasn't practiced since then. On the 9th of last month, he has another attack and has been confined to his bed. This reporter joins his many friends in wishing him a speedy recovery and we are looking forward to seeing him on the streets of Stigler, where he has always commanded so much respect from his friends and neighbors.

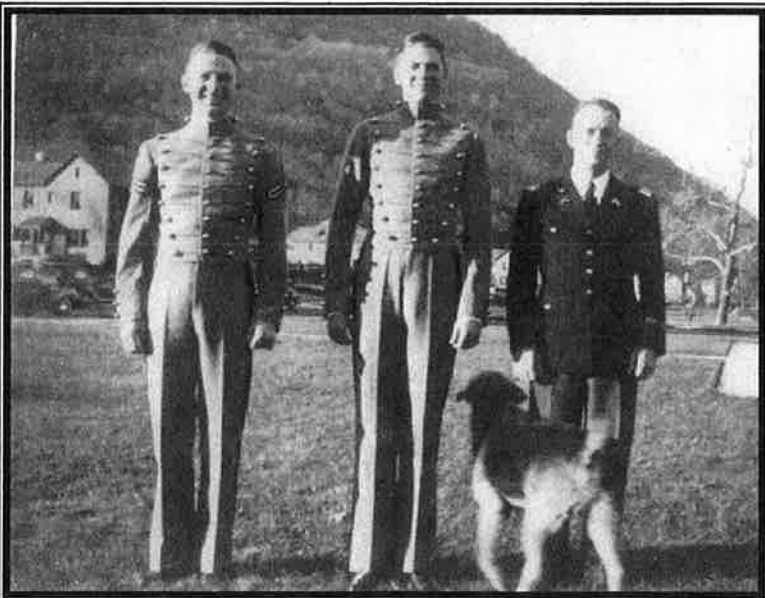
WHILE WE WERE ALL STILL AT HOME



This picture was taken in Dayton, Ohio, about 1927. The big building in the background is the hospital where our father worked. Paul was a cadet at West Point. Pershing is just below Paul, Albert is holding Maxie. Billy has on a plaid coat and I am in the bottom right hand corner. Donnie is at the bottom of the picture.



This picture was taken at Porum, OK about 1930. Albert is the oldest. Pershing is next, Billy is next, I am next, Donnie is next and Maxie is last.



This photo was taken at West Point when all 3 brothers were there at the same time. Paul is an officer, Billy is in the middle and Pershing is on the left. I think that is rare event to have 3 brothers there at the same time.



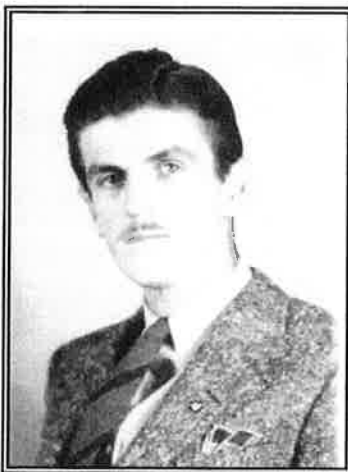
Paul Singer Thompson



William Albert Thompson



William Martin Thompson



Benjamin Albert Thompson



Grace Ann (Langston) Thompson



Robert Taylor Thompson



Jack Pershing Thompson



Malcolm Walsh Thompson



Don Colton Thompson

The photos were all taken when we were all from 18 to 23 years old. Momma and Daddy's picture were taken back at the turn of the century.

CHAPTER 1 – PRE-MILITARY DAYS

Fall 1938- Connors College, Warner, Ok. and Fall 1940-Oklahoma A & M, Stillwater, Ok

As a little bit of pre-war events that occurred to me. I enrolled in college at Warner, Ok. in Sept 1938. As you can see, this was in the depths of the depression years and I think most of the young people at Stigler, enrolled at Warner, due to the cost. I think the board and room was \$24.00 per month. Almost all of my friends enrolled at Warner and two years later they either went to Oklahoma University or Oklahoma A & M. I went to Oklahoma A&M. I was 16 years old when I enrolled at Warner and that fall in Nov, I turned 17.

My two years at Warner were uneventful. I had a good time and made a lot of friends but it was a small school and was isolated so nothing eventful happened. Two of my older brothers went to Warner before I did. They didn't stay the whole two years and so didn't graduate. When we were growing up in Stigler any mention of school after High School meant West Point. Any other college wasn't even mentioned. When we did go to college, we went to prepare us for going to West Point. My classes at Warner were primarily Math, Chemistry, Foreign Languages and History. When I enrolled at Okla A & M, a lot of the courses I transferred from Warner didn't count toward a degree so I ended up having about 180 hours when I finally did graduate from Oklahoma A & M.

I had a job at Stillwater working in a campus shop next to the campus for my board. I figured I made about 11 cents per hour while I worked there. The second semester of my junior year (at Stillwater) I became real tired of going to school and borrowed \$ 20 from my father and went to California to get a job in one of the defense plants around Los Angeles.

Spring 1941-Redondo Beach, El Segundo, Hawthorne, California

Albert was already there so I wasn't going there blind. Getting a job in a defense plant ended up more difficult than I had planned. I took a job at a plant that made tablecloths and napkins to cover my room and board and at one time, I was renting rubber rafts on the beach at Redondo Beach. I was paid \$6/week to rent rafts and my board and room was \$6.50/ week, so I had to do something. The table cloth plant was about 10 miles from where I lived so I would get out on the highway and hitchhike to get to work. After a few weeks I had enough money so I bought a bicycle and rode it back and forth to work. Sometime later, I bought a car for \$35. It was a 1934 Ford V8. The kind where the doors opened backwards.

Albert worked at North American Aircraft and while I was at home the union struck North American. It was a time of national emergency and the US Government took over the plant. The strikers still wouldn't go back to work so the Army set up machine guns at the corners of the plant property and would escort anybody that wanted to go back to work. I think Albert went back to work and he was taken to work in an army half-track. The union had people at the parking lot, at the plant, and were taking license plate numbers and would threaten the people that did go back to work. It got real tense for awhile. I went out to the plant one night where they had a big barrel with a fire in it and the strikers were eating sandwiches and drinking coffee. One of the strikers handed me a picket sign and told me to go get in the picket line. I told him I didn't work there, but was just a spectator. He got mad and said " you are eating our food now go get in the picket line". So, get in the picket line I did. I walked the picket line for awhile and then just faded into the crowd. The Army and the LA Police would throw tear gas into the crowd that was in the plant fence and the union people would throw them back at the police. It lasted for a month or so and then everybody went back to work.

I kept trying to get a job at an airplane plant and finally had to go to school at night to learn something about fabricating aluminum. I finished the school and got a job at Northrup Aircraft at Hawthorne, CA. The backup man on a riveting gun team. I was later promoted and became a rivet gun operator and later as an assemblyman.

They were all low skilled jobs, but at least it was work that paid well. I worked from 4 in the afternoon until 4 in the morning, 7 days a week and made \$75/ week.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor occurred while I was in California. In fact, I was at San Diego visiting a good friend, Jack Hudson, from Stigler. Jack also came to California and got a job at Consolidated Vultee, working on airplanes. Jack later quit his job and enlisted in the Air Corps and became a pilot and flew over the hump from India to China. Jack stayed in the Air Corps and retired as a Lt. Col. He went back to school after the war and became a lawyer.

When I returned to Los Angeles, I told my boss at Northrup that I was going to quit and join the Army. He said you can't do that. You are frozen on your job and will remain here. I told him I would quit whether he wanted me to or not. After several discussions, he said that the Army had taken control of the plant and I would have to go to talk to the army officers that were stationed at the plant. I found the army officers and they questioned me quite a bit and I told them that all my brothers were in the army and I was not going to stay home while they went overseas and fought in the war. The officers agreed with me and let me quit. I sold my car, got on a train, and went home. This all occurred on about Feb, 1942.

Spring 1942- back home in Oklahoma

Upon returning home, I went to Oklahoma City to take the exams to enter the West Point Prep School at Ft Sill. Three of my older brothers had taken this course to enter West Point. The three were Albert, Pershing and Billy. Paul had already graduated from West Point and was a regular army officer. He graduated from West Point in 1929. I had passed all the physical requirements for entrance to the West Point Prep School, I thought, and the Dr that was examining me told me to step into the next room through a door that he pointed to. I opened the door and stepped into a meeting room full of men that were all dressed up and looked like they were attending an important meeting. I was stark naked and very embarrassed, and started to leave but the man behind the big desk told me to sit down on a chair that was in the center of the room. I sat down in the chair and was naturally very uncomfortable. I would turn to one side, then cross my legs, then turn to the other side and etc. The men were watching me to see how I reacted to the situation and I guess I passed because we started the interview. After the interview was concluded the men asked me to step back into the Drs room where I had just been and wait. The Dr returned to the room and asked me to stand still while he looked at me. He asked me what was wrong with my leg and I told him I did not know that anything was wrong with it. He took a cloth tape measure and measured both of my legs and told me I did not pass the physical because one of my legs was 1 1/2 " in dia. less than the other one.

I went back home and then went to Muskogee to take the written and physical exam to join the Air Corps and become an air corps pilot. I passed the written exam and in the process of taking the physical I weighed about 1 1/2 lbs. less than I should have. The Dr. told me to go to town and eat lunch and get a gallon of water and a dozen bananas and eat and drink all of it on the way back to continue the physical. I did this and did not gain an ounce so I did not pass the physical. I then walked into the recruiting office in downtown Muskogee and told the man I wanted to join the Army and the Field Artillery in particular. This was in the spring of 1942. I was now in the US Army as a buck private.

To back track a little, Paul, Pershing and Billy were all at West Point during the year from June 1939 to June 1940. Pershing graduated in 1940 and Paul was an instructor at West Point and Billy was a cadet. They were all at West Point at the same time, which must be some kind of record. Albert and Pershing took the competitive exam at Muskogee to compete for a congressional appointment for West Point. Albert took first place and Pershing took second place. Albert told Pershing to go ahead and take the appointment and he would try for a presidential appointment. Pershing then went to West Point and Albert didn't go because of a physical failing.

CHAPTER 2- STATESIDE DUTY

Spring 1942- Ft Sill, Ok

I showed up at Ft. Sill in a reception center, which is a bunch of barracks for brand new soldiers. At this time Paul was at the Main Post at Ft Sill, taking the refresher course in the school of fire, to prepare to him to be a Battalion Commander of Field Artillery. He came to the reception center to take me to town for dinner and they would not let me go. We were all confined to the barracks area for as long as we were to be there. Paul was then transferred to Camp Atterbury in Indiana and I went to the Field Artillery Training Center at Ft Sill. Pershing in the meantime was transferred to overseas duty and was on bombing missions in SE Asia. Billy was still a cadet at West Point and Don and Max were still at home. Albert in the meantime had gone to California and was still there.

The Field Artillery Training Center (FARTC) was exactly what it sounds like it would be, a school for gunners and cannoneers to fire cannons. They gave everybody anonymous IQ exam upon entering the school, and anybody with an IQ of 110 or better was moved into a barracks by themselves, but we all went through the same training as everybody else. We then took physicals for the OCS (Officers Candidate School) and naturally I didn't pass. Paul found out that I had not passed the physical, and he contacted a friend of his at the Main Post that was the CO of the Artillery Communications School named Col. Mace. Col. Mace then had me transferred to his command. I waited for the paper work to be processed to sign a waiver on my physical failing. It was a small spot on my lung that was 2 cm in diameter. The Army let me sign a waiver and I went to the OCS at Ft. Sill in Jan ,1943, and graduated in March, 1943. I was now a brand new 2nd Lt . I was about 3 mos. past my 21st birthday.

Spring 1943-Camp Blanding at Jacksonville,Fl. & Camp Robinson at Little Rock, Arkansas

Upon graduating from OCS , I tried to join the paratroopers but was too light so then I tried to join the 10th Mountain Division and I was also too light for this division, so I just gave up and went where they sent me ,which was to Camp Blanding, Florida, (near Jacksonville) as part of the cadre for a new division that was being formed. This new division was the 66th Infantry Division. I was assigned to one of the Artillery Battalions as an ammunition officer. There were no enlisted men at the division yet so we had absolutely nothing to do. When the soldiers began to arrive we had to process them and start teaching the basic soldier things, like marching, digging holes for trash, setting up tents, etc. After so long a time we began taking them out to the firing range and teaching them to shoot guns. I began to get bored with this routine, so I took the physical to fly the small airplanes that the field artillery uses for observation over the front lines. It took too long for anything to happen with the airplane thing so I joined a ranger school that was being taught by a major that had just returned from China where he taught Chinese soldiers how to be extra special soldiers. I was relieved of all duties with my artillery Bn and devoted all my time to the ranger school. The ranger school was a lot of hard work but I think we all enjoyed our time spent in the school. When the school was over the major asked me if I would like to help him on the next bunch of soldiers that were coming to the school. I assured him I would like to do this and we went on to the next bunch of soldiers.

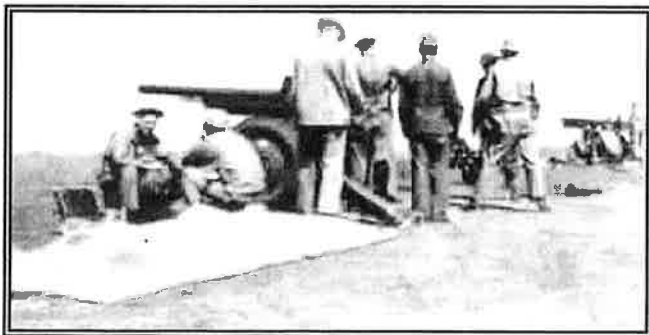
When the ranger school was over our division was transferred to Camp Robinson at Little Rock , Arkansas. When we had been there about a month, our CO told me that me and a Lt O'Connell were being sent overseas. We were both pleased with this news and prepared to leave Camp Robinson. We were sent to Ft Meade, Maryland near Baltimore to a Port of Embarkation. After being at Ft Meade a few weeks, we were loaded on a boat at Camp Patrick Henry and we were on our way overseas.

I called home from Little Rock and told Momma that I was going overseas and she told me that Pershing was missing. **This was the beginning of the tragedy for my parents.**

At Ft. Sill, OK-Summer 1942



As a Private at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma in the summer of 1942



Practice firing with a French 75 mm gun. We used old world war I equipment , because we didn't have any modern equipment.
I am standing next to the gun, with my hands on



As a Private, in a gas mask, at Ft. Sill, in the summer of 1942



FORT SILL
OKLAHOMA

Thursday night.

Dear Jacks.

If you could only see me now. I've spent my first day in a tent and by gosh it rained.

They moved us out of the Reception Center down here to an affair called the Casual Battalion. The mess is a first class ^{out} & we have to eat ^{out} of our mess kits which isn't any fun by a long shot.

That check you sent me isn't so me as much good as a cigarette paper. At least I can get a good smoke out of the cig. paper. I can't cook & check unless I can get ahead of Jane and I couldn't get ahead of him last night on the phone because the lines were busy so I spent my nickel for an ice-cream cone. When we took off this morning I didn't have a penny and I didn't borrow a cent I went with, but I must be living

into my tent this morning to
and behold I found a divine
One - which I left a
message for Paul to get over
I cash my check & the other
of which I purchased a sack
of Bull Durham. I'm waiting
here now in my tent for a
~~call from the cat & I've been~~
waiting an hour. If he doesn't
call or come over I'm going
to be in one mill - I - a - less,
unless I can find another
divine.

I probably won't get
paid until the first of Aug.
So I'll probably be boarding
lots of times between now &
then.

I want you to get
a camera & take a picture
(individual) of everybody &
send them to me.

Got a letter from
J. J. Meyer & he is supposed
to report here at St. Will
sometime in July for
Carisate School. Love will



FORT BILL
OKLAHOMA

be great if he does get
sent here. By the way I'll
be around here for at least
3 months so I want ^{you} to
come & see me. & be sure &
bring Herby.

This sun here is about
to ruin me. My mouth is
chistured & my lips peel off
every 12 hours. So when I
run out of something to do,
instead of twiddling my
thumbs, I pull my lips.

Will write again as
soon as I have a more
permanent address. Don't
write until I do give you
an address, but when I do
give you one I want a
letter.

Don't have a gun or
steel helmet yet & if they
don't hurry up & give me one
I'm going to desert.

I've been leaning out
a barracks bag for 3 weeks.
I'll darned sure be glad
when they give me a foot
locker. Every time you want
something you have to fish
around in the bag for at
least 10 minutes.

~~Get my radio & bag~~
~~Kanachas~~ ready to send to
me. Also send an extension
cord, a double socket & a
plug. They let you have a
radio in a permanent barracks
I sure do want mine. I will
probably have a Jew or two
in our squad room & I want
to keep him drowned out.

The more letters I write
~~the more money I make~~
cause the mail is free so I
think I'll start writing from
every other day.

Since I'll close

Love

BF

Fall 1943- Overseas bound

Our ship was a Liberty ship and was a member of a convoy of 80 ships. A Liberty ship is not the best ship for troops because there are no accommodations for men to live comfortably. We were placed in a hold that could accommodate about 80 men. The crowding was not too bad but the food was terrible. We complained to the Capt of the ship and also to the US Army Capt. that was the army's representative on the ship. We had a meeting on the deck one day and told them we were going to turn them in as being incompetent if they didn't do something about living conditions. They did nothing and we turned them in when we arrived in Africa. The Navy Capt was relieved of his command and I do not know what happened to the Army Capt.

Our sleeping quarters was on the first deck below the main deck. The bunks were the typical navy kind, that swung up out of the way during the day. The rest room was just beside the sleeping quarters and the stools and showers all stopped up and the water was all over the floor. As the ship would roll from side to side, the water would go clear across the room and splash up against the wall then the ship would roll back the other way and the water would change direction and slam up against the other wall. If you wanted to go somewhere, you had to have perfect timing. Thanksgiving Day they fed us canned turkey, but there was something wrong with it and everybody got real sick.

The hold we were in got real hot as we entered the South Atlantic and we complained about that. The Navy finally agreed to remove the hatch cover and we were almost out on the open. I would go up on the main deck and sleep. I could lay up there and watch the water and watch the stars. I could check on our direction by watching 3 stars in a row. If we changed direction, I could tell it by the three stars. During the day, I would watch the big waves and the flying fish. At night, you could see the phosphorus in the water, as it would glow.

The convoy traveled in a lights out condition. We were not allowed to smoke on deck or expose any kind of light. We were not allowed to throw anything overboard.

We had a Navy escort and the Navy ships would pull up beside our ship and the soldiers and the sailors would carry on a loud conversation and we traveled along closely. It seemed that everybody was glad to have somebody to talk to.

When we reached the Straights of Gibraltar, about half of the convoy peeled off and went south to Casablanca, and we continued on east through the Straights of Gibraltar to North Africa.

REPORT OF PHYSICAL EXAMINATION

(See AR 40-100 and 40-105)

Instructions.—Unless otherwise prescribed, this form will be used for all physical examinations of officers, nurses, or warrant officers; applicants for appointment as such in the Regular Army, National Guard, or Officers' Reserve Corps; and enrollment in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. Use typewriter if practicable. Attach plain additional sheets if required.

1. Thompson Robert T. 18129587
 (Last name) (First name) (Middle initial) (Serial number)

2. Pvt. Btry. "D" 29th. Bn. Age 21 Years of service 3/12
 (Grade) (Organization and arm or service) (Nearest birthday) (Whole number only)

3. Nature of examination ¹ OCS Component of Army ² A of U.S.

4. Typhoid vaccination. No. series completed 3 Last series August, 1942

5. Date of last smallpox vaccination June 1942 Type of reaction Vaccinia

6. Other vaccination or immunity tests Tetanus Toxoid 1942

7. Medical history ³ No childhood diseases. No serious illnesses or injuries.
No operations.

8. Eyes Normal
 Distant vision: Right 20/20 correctible to 20/____ by ⁴____
 (Snellen type) Left 20/20 correctible to 20/____ by ⁴____
 Near vision: Right J# 1 correctible to J#____ by ⁴____
 (Jaeger type) Left J# 1 correctible to J#____ by ⁴____
 Refraction ⁵ (under cycloplegic): Right _____ Left _____
 Color perception (red and green) ⁶ Normal

9. Ears Normal
 Hearing (low conversational voice): Right 20 /20. Left 20 /20. Audiometer (percent loss): Right ____ Left ____

10. Nose and throat Normal

11. Teeth: ⁷ Right (Examinee's) Left
8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16
 Remarks, including other defects None Indicate: Restorable carious teeth by O; nonrestorable carious teeth by /; missing natural teeth by X.

Prosthetic dental appliances Serviceable fixed bridge, 21, 2. Classification II

12. Posture Good Figure Slender Frame Light
 (Excellent, good, fair, bad) (Slender, medium, stocky, obese) (Light, medium, heavy)

13. Temperature 98 Height 71 1/2 inches. Weight 137 pounds. Chest: Rest 30 inches; inspiration 33 inches; expiration 29 inches. Abdomen 34 inches.

14. Cardiovascular system: Heart Normal
 Blood pressure: S. 130, D. 82 Pulse: Rate—Sitting 80 Immediately after exercise 114
 Two minutes after exercise 80 Character Full and regular.
 Arteries Normal Varicose veins None

15. Respiratory system Normal

16. X-ray of chest ⁸ Examination of the chest reveals a calcified gland in the right hilus*

17. Skin and lymphatics Normal Endocrine system Normal

18. Bones, joints, and muscles Normal Feet Normal

19. Abdominal viscera Normal

20. Hernia None Hemorrhoids None

¹ Appointment, promotion, retirement, annual, active duty, special.

² Regular Army; National Guard; Officers' Reserve Corps; Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

³ If annual physical examination, record only for past year.

⁴ If annual physical examination, record only distant and near vision, and state whether defect is properly corrected.

⁵ When indicated.

⁶ Not required for annual physical examination.

⁷ If rejected for appointment in Regular Army because of malocclusion, send plaster models to the Surgeon General.

⁸ Required for candidates for commission.

21. Genito-urinary system Normal
22. Nervous system Normal
23. Laboratory procedures: Kahn ¹ Negative Wassermann ¹ -
 Urinalysis: Sp. gr. 1.008 Albumin None Sugar None
 Microscopical (if indicated) ¹ Negative
 Other laboratory procedures None
24. Remarks on defects not sufficiently described which is 2 cm. in the long diameter. The lung fields are essentially negative and the heart and aorta appear normal. The solitary gland in the right hilus is of sufficient size to disqualify the candidate. "Applicant is 6, sounds underweight.
25. Corrective measures, or other action recommended Recommend re-examination in 6 months to determine activity of calcified gland in right hilus.
26. Is the individual permanently incapacitated for active service? -
 If yes, specify defect _____
27. If applicant for appointment: Does he meet physical requirements? No Do you recommend acceptance with minor physical defects? NO If rejection is recommended, specify cause X-ray evidence of calcified gland in right hilus measuring 2 cm. in diameter. (2) Underweight.
28. Examinee states he is not drawing a pension, disability allowance, or compensation or retired pay from the U. S. Government.
 If yes, state disability _____

Ft. Sill, Oklahoma
 (Place)

September 26, 1942
 (Date)

John C. Hubbard, Major, M. C.
 (Name and grade)

Corps.

E. P. Schluer, Major, M. C.
 (Name and grade)

Corps.

H. D. Miller 1st Lt., M. C.
 (Name and grade)
 1st Ind.²

Corps.

/s/

Headquarters _____
 To the Commanding General _____
 Remarks and recommendations _____

(Name)

(Grade)

(Organization and arm or service)

Commanding.

2d Ind.²

19____ To The Adjutant General.

¹ Required for candidates for commission.

² State action taken on recommendations of the board. If incapacitated for active service, state whether action by retiring board is recommended.

Field Artillery School

Fort Sill, Oklahoma



Officers' Candidate School

Certificate of Proficiency

This certifies that

Robert Taylor Thompson

on March 11, 1943, completed satisfactorily the O. C. S. Class No. 55,
Field Artillery School, in the following subjects:

Fire Direction
Firing Battery
Observed Fire
Unobserved Fire

Materiel
Motors
Methods of Instruction
and Training

Artillery Tactics
Reconnaissance
Signal Communication

COLONEL, FIELD ARTILLERY,
ASSISTANT COMMANDANT

BRIGADIER GENERAL, U. S. A.,
COMMANDANT

Recorded as graduated:

MAJOR, FIELD ARTILLERY,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

LT. COLONEL, FIELD ARTILLERY,
COMMANDANT OF CANDIDATES.

Ranger



Certificate of Proficiency

2nd Lt. Robert V. Thompson

having demonstrated proficiency in the particulars hereinafter set forth is designated a ~ ~ ~

Sixty-Sixth Infantry Division Ranger

PRIDE, SMARTNESS, SOLDIERLY
ATTITUDE AND LEADERSHIP
EXEMPLARY CONDUCT
PHYSICAL CONDITIONING
HAND TO HAND COMBAT
BLITZ COURSE
BOOBY TRAPS AND DEMOLITIONS
VILLAGE AND STREET FIGHTING

INDIVIDUAL CAMOUFLAGE
CONSTRUCTION AND PASSAGE OF
WIRE ENTANGLEMENT
SNIPERS AND INFILTRATION
PATROLS AND AMBUSHING
STALKING AND AMBUSHING TANKS
IMPROVISED BRIDGES AND USE
OF TOGGLE ROPE

ISSUED THIS 3RD DAY OF JULY 1943 AT CAMP BLANDING

W. C. Rumburg
MAJ INF
SENIOR INSTRUCTOR

W. J. Talley
LT COL GSC
AC OF S G-3

A. J. Thomas
MAJOR GENERAL
COMMANDING

Print the complete address in plain block letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided. Use typewriter, dark ink, or pencil. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.

No.



(CENSOR'S STAMP)

To
DR. W. A. THOMPSON
STIGLER, OKLAHOMA
U. S. A.

From

LT R. J. THOMPSON 0-1179720
(Sender's name)

C-13, 1st Regt Depot, APO 164
(Sender's address)

7:00 PM, New York, N. Y.

DEC 16, 1948
(Date)

THURSDAY, 10 AM

DEAR DAD & MOM,

I MAILED A LETTER YESTERDAY BUT DIDN'T TELL YOU ANYTHING BUT THE FACT THAT I WAS OK. I'LL TRY TO WRITE YOU AT LEAST ONCE A WK. IF IT IS POSSIBLE.

I HAVE A LIST OF THINGS I'D LIKE FOR YOU TO SEND ME IF YOU CAN GET ANHOLD OF THEM. (1) SMALL STAINLESS STEEL MIRROR, (2) WOOL OD PULLOVER SWEATER (3) SOME V616 CAMERA FILMS. (4) GOOD CIGARETTE LIGHTER AND SOME FLINTS.

CIGARETTES ARE PRETTY SCARCE HERE SO SOME TIME WHEN YOU HAVE A LITTLE TIME YOU CAN SEND A CARTON OF LUCKIES. USUALLY YOU HAVE PLENTY, BUT SOMETIMES YOU DON'T.

IN CASE YOU DON'T GET THAT OTHER LETTER I'M IN N. AFRICA.

V-MAIL FORMS AREN'T ANY TOO PLENTIFUL OVER HERE EITHER.

LET ME KNOW IF YOU HAVE HEARD ANYTHING FROM PERSHING.

As ever
[Signature]

V-MAIL

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1944 10-28542-6

Fill in the complete address in plain block letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided. Use typewriter, dark ink, or pencil. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.



(GROSS STAMP)

To
Mrs S W Thompson
310 Hall St.
Madisonville, Ky. U.S.A.

From
LT R T Thompson, A-11222
(Sender's name)
c/o 12, 1st Regt. Artillery
90 PM, New York, N.Y.
Jan 18, 1946
(Date)

Dear Betty,

I got your v-mail letter yesterday. At the same time I got 4 letters from mom. Every time I get mail I always have a haul from mom. The proudest man in camp around here is the man with the most letters. If you want to send me something that will really be appreciated make it a Zippo Cig. lighter and some very loud films. I have a good camera but no films, and they just don't have any films over here.

I drank my first Champagne Christmas Eve. 3 other guys and I drank 8 qts. last night we had 4 qts. They have an American Officers club here that is really swell. They sell ice cream, sandwiches & coffee. There is also a bar with a good assortment of wines & Amer. beer. Tell Paul & Herb I'll write again soon. Hello to me.

V - MAIL

Do not
fold

No.



(CENSOR'S STAMP)

To
Dr. W. H. Thompson
Stigler, Oklahoma
U.S.A.

From

Lt R.T. Thompson
(Rank and Name)
C/O 1st Field Artillery
(Unit, Address)
to Ft. Monmouth, N.J.
Feb 10, 1944
(Date)

Dear Dad & Mom,

I moved over to a different camp yesterday. We only have four to a tent and it's much more roomier than the other place. We don't eat out of our mess kits, either. The theatre is outdoors, and is sure a good one. We're camped right on the side of a mountain with pretty trees all around. From the door in my tent you can see about 10 miles in 3 directions. The country looks like Northern Texas.

We have a pet now. A little stray cat. Looks kinda like Sen. Warts, but not half as big. We feed him by bringing scraps from the mess hall. His name is Vino.

Clouded up a little today & turned cooler, it may rain before it's over. I guess it's OK if it does rain, because we haven't had any in about a month.

As ever
R.T.

V-MAIL

CHAPTER 3-OVERSEAS DUTY-COMBAT IN ITALY

Winter 1943 –1944- Oran, Arzew, Sidi Bell Abbes, Canastel Algeria, North Africa

Our duty in North Africa was very pleasant. We attended schools on mine fields, attacking machine gun positions and all the things that soldiers need to know that are going into combat.

When the ship pulled up to the dock in Arzew (the port for Oran), a Lt. Col. gathered all the officers to one side and was giving us some advice as to how to act in North Africa. One of his words of advice was to leave the drink "Eau de Vie" alone. Naturally when we got to our camp near a small Arab town we went in to the nearest bar and ordered a glass of "Eau de Vie"

Our camp was tents and was about 6 miles east of the town of Oran. When we went to town we would walk and at night when we were ready to go home we could catch a ride on a truck that was available at the Officers Club and at enlisted men's clubs scattered around town.

The weather was like Southern California and there were large orange groves all over the place. It was so warm in December that we would take open air showers and thoroughly enjoy it.

When we arrived in North Africa, we had gold seal paper money. We exchanged that for blue seal money to prevent spies from having money. We were then issued French paper money, which looked like pretty wall paper. Everything was furnished, so we had no real use for money and it became rather worthless to us. When we were sent to Italy, we exchanged out French money for Italian money!

The Arabs would steal anything they could get their hands on and we had to be real careful of them. We would never go to town alone. We would always go in groups, of 3 or 4, at least, for protection.

Naturally as most soldiers do, we took a lot of long hikes, 25 miles or so, and we always had a bunch of Arab kids following us wanting some gum or candy. They would run up and down the column so by the time we reached home they had walked or ran about 40 miles or so. One day as we were going through an Arab town the man next to me said " do you know what the name of this town is" and I replied "no". He said the name was Sidi Bell Abbes and it was the home of the French Foreign Legion. I was very impressed because I had heard of the French Foreign Legion all my life and now I was standing in the Arab town that was the home base.

We would go down to the Atlas Mountains that are on the northern edge of the Sahara Desert and spend a week going through combat training, Our instructors were officers that had been in combat in North Africa and had the seasoning that goes along with being a good instructor. One night we were going through a mine field disarming mines and a man set off a booby trap that blew off some of his fingers.

We also took a lot of physical training to get us in shape to go into combat. We were in N. Africa until around Jan 1, 1944 when we were loaded onto another boat and went to Italy.

Spring 1944- Naples, Caserta, Avallino, Battapaglia, Italy

The ship to Italy was a French Luxury liner that had been taken by the British and used as a troop transport. We had a stateroom with a porthole that had about 4 bunks and we ate in a big messhall just like on a luxury liner. It took about 4 days to get to Naples Italy where we unloaded. The Bay of Naples was a great big mess. There were big ships that had been sunk ,that were just sitting in the water with their upper decks out of the water and other big ships that had been turned over on their sides and were just sitting there. A small launch came out to our ship and brought us into the docks where we were unloaded and awaited transportation to where-we did not know. We found the railway station and were loaded onto the train and went north of Naples to a place known as the

"racetrack" It was named correctly, because it was a horseracing track that had been taken by the US Army and set up as a tent city for soldiers.

The war was going on Italy at a furious pace. The original landing had taken place in Italy at a town called Salerno, which is south of Naples about 30 miles. By the time we arrived in Italy the war had moved north to a town called Cassino and was a very bitter battle. Both sides were taking serious casualties and we were replacements to bring the depleted units back up to their normal combat strength. We left the racetrack and went up north to a town named Caserta and camped at a place named Count Ciano's dairy farm. It was also correctly named because it was the dairy farm of a man named Count Ciano who was the son-in-law of Mussolini. We were there about 2 weeks when we were assigned to units. The units to receive replacements were the 36th Infantry Division, the 3rd Infantry Division and the 45th Division. The 45th Division was the Oklahoma National Guard Division, the 36th Division was the Texas National Division and the 3rd Division was a regular army division. These three divisions took the brunt of the war in Italy and suffered the most casualties of all the divisions in Europe in WWII. This assignment took place around the first of March, 1944 near a place called Maddaloni, Italy. It is now time to get serious about the war.

Summer 1944- Minturno, Averso, Capua, Maddaloni, Italy

I was assigned to Battery A, 132nd Field Artillery Battalion and later moved to Battery B of the 132nd Field Artillery Battalion. I remained with Battery B for the rest of my time with the 36th Division. My best friend in B Btry was Don Gilpin. It is now the year 2002 and we are still good friends and talk to each other occasionally. He is retired and lives in Florida. Don Gilpin lasted longer than I did, but he also ended up in a German prison Camp.

Our division was being brought up to strength as far as far as manpower and the equipment was being repaired and replaced. Sometime around the first of May 1944 we were being sent back into the front lines. Our bn was to fire in support of another division in the attempt to break through the Cassino front. Our Col. told me I would be left behind while our guns were taken up to the front and he wanted me to take about 50 men and build things that looked like guns so the Germans would think we were still back in our bivouac area. They pulled all our guns out and we got busy building some fake cannons. That night "AXIS SALLY" from Rome came on the radio and said: "we know what you boys from Texas are trying to do. We know you are moving your guns up to the front and are trying to fool us". Our Col. called me and said to bring the rest of the Bn and come on up to the front where they were. I guess that was another of those good ideas that didn't work!

Into Battle!

After the fake guns at Cassino our division moved up to the Anzio Beachhead to reinforce what was already there and prepare to make a breakout of the beachhead. The initial landings had been made in Jan, 1944, and this was in late May, 1944, as we were preparing to go to Anzio. We were near a town known as Averso and all our gear was made ready to load on ships at Bagnolia, a seaport north of Naples. It was a short trip to Anzio. It took us less than a day to reach Anzio from Naples. We were loaded in reverse order as to how we would disembark. The first in would be the last out and the last in would be the first out. We were loaded and were on the way. When we arrived, the Col. told me to stand in the door of the ship on the unloading ramp and be sure there was no pileup of vehicles leaving the ship. We were on a LST (Landing Ship Tanks) that had a big door on the front. This big door opened and a ramp was extended out for unloading. I stood on the ramp and waved my arms telling all vehicles to keep moving and raising my voice for effect. My jeep would be the last to unload and all at once I discovered that he had unloaded and was leaving the beach we were unloading on. I started running after him and caught him and climbed in the jeep and we joined the column that was leaving the beach area. The whole beachhead was under observation by the German Army so we immediately started digging in all the equipment.

Summer 1944- Breakout of the Anzio Beachhead.

The American generals had finished all their planning on who was to do what and we started taking our place in the order of battle. The Col. got me and another new 2nd Lt. and told us that he needed another Forward Observer and the only fair way to make the selection would be to toss a coin. We both agreed and he tossed a coin and I was selected to be the new Forward Observer. I never did figure out, whether, I won or lost. Anyway, I reported in to the Company Commander of a company in the 2nd Bn of the 142nd Infantry. The forward observer always went with the company that was in an assault position. There were 3 companies, so the 2 forward observers in a Bn would rotate between companies depending on whether they were in an assault position or not. Don Gilpin was the other Forward Observer so he and I were the observers for the Bn.

Our regiment moved up closer to the front and behind the regiment that was making the frontal assault on the town of Velletri. We moved into a farmer's house that was a two story house. Our FO crew took the upstairs bedroom as our place. The roof was clay tile and was in a bad state of repair. So we fixed the roof by restacking the tiles that were on the ground back on the roof. An American Col. came into our room and was looking out the window at the attack going on in front of us. I told the Col. that the Germans could see him and we would appreciate it if he would be a little more careful. He said "son, I made it through WWI and I probably won't make it through this one". I told him, I wasn't in WWI and I would like to make it through this war. He smiled and left. He climbed in his jeep and took off down the road toward the front lines and, a German tank fired and hit him dead on and killed him instantly. Then 4 American tanks pulled up in front of us and sat there awhile. We asked them if they would move on because all they were doing was drawing fire. They moved on and sure enough the Germans started firing on us. We ran down into a cellar on the property, but the shelling did tear up the roof we had just fixed.

We spent probably 2 days at this house when the Col. told everybody there would be a bunch of trucks coming up and for us all to get on the trucks. We loaded in the trucks and started off toward our new positions. We arrived about 2 hours later and were told what we were going to do. Somebody had found a place in the German lines that was lightly defended and we were going to go through that area and climb a mountain in front of us and get in behind the Germans. It was to be a night attack and there would be no rifle or pistol firing. The only weapons we were to use would be hand grenades and bayonets. They brought the kitchen trucks up and fed us a real good meal. After dark we started climbing the mountain. A German airplane came over and dropped a flare that lit up the whole countryside. Our soldiers froze in their positions and the German plane didn't spot us. He dropped his butterfly bomb anyway and it landed on his own troops.

We started our climb up the mountain and were at it all night. Just about daylight we were at the top of the mountain when a German Machine Gun opened up. I immediately hit the ground and rolled over behind a tree when the medics came running over to me and picked me up and put me on a litter. I asked what was wrong and they said those German bullets were kicking up dirt and dust all around me and they thought I had been hit. Just then a Capt. came running through the woods asking "what is holding up this company"? Just about then, he found out. The German fired again and hit the Capt. in the stomach. He recovered from his wounds later. A few minutes later a couple of soldiers ran through the woods and a little later I heard 2 thumps. The soldiers had fired rifle grenades at the German position and hit it with both rounds. We all got up and started walking on down the mountain and walked past the German position. There were 2 dead Germans and a third, that looked like he was dying fast. We continued to walk down the top of the mountain I heard a sound of somebody walking through the woods. There were two German soldiers walking up the mountain toward us. I told our soldiers to be careful and keep their guns pointed at the Germans and we would see what they wanted. The Germans aid they and some friends of theirs were at the foot of the mountain and would give up if we would send somebody down there to get them. I told them I had a better idea. "You go back down there and tell them to come up and we won't shoot them, but they had better be real careful." The German soldier went back down the mountain and came back with 6

German soldiers.

We sent the German prisoners on back to rear and continued walking toward the west. We then heard some more noises coming up the mountain and we waited to see what they were. They were several Italian civilians that were coming to the safety of our positions. The group consisted of a greyhaired man and woman and two young girls about 17 to 20 years old. They came on into our positions and the man and woman hugged me and went to the next soldier and hugged him. Then the two young girls came to me and hugged me. They then went to the next soldier and gave him a big hug. The girls continued going down the line and hugging and kissing the soldiers when I discovered that the soldiers were backing out of line, when the girls kissed and hugged them, and went back to rear of the line and were kissing the girls again. Naturally, I put a stop to that.

We then continued walking west down the top of the mountain and it began to get late in the day. Along about dusk the Germans discovered where we were and began to drop mortar shells on us. The shells were exploding on the treetops and were really creating a dangerous situation for us. A mortar shell exploding in the treetops is the worst thing that can happen to a bunch of soldiers. There is no protection from the shrapnel. Anything you do is wrong. Standing up is bad. Lying down is bad. Everything is bad. We all hit the ground and waited for the next round of shells to come in. I saw Brown (one of our FO crew) lying beside a big rock, so I crawled up beside him and asked him if I could share his rock with him. He said sure and I lay beside him, even though it offered no protection. This was my first time to be subjected to anything like this. The shelling continued and a LT Stout (the FO from A Btry) said " I have taken all this I'm going to " and started crawling over to the edge of the mountain to see if he could find the mortars and return fire on them. He was about 100 ft from me when a mortar shell landed almost on top of him. I called to him and asked him if he was alright, but I received no response. I called to him again and got no response, so I crawled over to where he was and discovered that he was badly wounded. His leg was bleeding badly and he was unconscious, so I called for the medics. The medics came running through the woods to him and put him on a litter and took him away. I learned later that he survived his injuries and was sent home.

We all remained where we were for awhile, how long I do not know. We stayed there at least until we thought it would be safe to get up and walk around. It was getting dark and we all got up and started deciding what we would do. I saw a Capt. standing near me and I said " Capt., you are ranking officer, what do we do? He said, son," I am a Chaplain" and I thought, we have some problems. I was the ranking officer and I was not an Infantry Officer, but I was still the ranking officer. I told the men to look around and gather up everybody that was able to walk and we would continue on the mountain. Along about 10 pm. as we were walking down a path through the woods I heard somebody coming toward us. I told the men to be real still and stop. I waited until the sounds I heard were right on front of me and I said to the man in the front " who are you?" I received no response and said "What unit are you with?" Still ,no response. About that I time I recognized the odor of the German Army leather and then I knew who they were. I have heard that a man's brain releases chemicals that will cause him to forget what happens during a certain period of time. I was carrying a .45 cal pistol that was cocked, but I do not remember anything that happened the next few minutes. There were 2 other times that I was in the front lines that my mind went completely blank and I do not remember what happened for a few minutes of time .

Anyway, we overcame the obstacle of the two Germans and continued on west looking for the rest of the company we were with. Sometime, it must have bee 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning we found some of our men and I asked where the Col. was. They showed me where he was and I went over to talk to him. He was with a Major and a Capt. and they were all in a big foxhole under a raincoat, They had a flashlight looking at a map. I told the Col. who I was and he ate me out for not being where I was supposed to be. Where I was supposed to be, I had no idea, but he chewed me out anyway. I tried to tell him why we were late, but he wanted no excuses. He told me to get out ahead on the crown of the hill and start registering my guns. I told him I couldn't do that at night, but he still wanted no excuses and told me again to go register the guns. I told him again, that I could not do that and he

began to get really mad, when the Major spoke up and said that I was right and could not register the guns at night. The Col. told me to go on out ahead of the rest and be ready to register the guns when daylight came. I said yes sir and left. I went on over to the west end of the mountain and started down the mountain looking for a good place to set up an OP when a German MG opened up on me. Fortunately, he missed me, but he really got my attention. I hunkered down as low as I could get when an American MG opened up on the German MG, so I was caught between them and getting the fire from both of them. I started crawling up to where the American MG was and as I got close enough I told the GI who I was, and to let me come on up to where he was. He said "what is the password" I said I did not know what the password was and that he had better not shoot me. I guess he could tell by my accent that I was not a German soldier. I came on up to where he was and spent the rest of the night with him.

When daylight came, I started looking around for an OP position. I settled on a place on the edge of the hill we were on and we dug a big deep hole and set up the radio to rear where the antenna could not be seen. The sgt. then brought a telephone to my position and we were ready to start firing. I fired on a crossroads just below us and a ravine that crossed a road that was out in front of us and then registered on a house to the front and to the left. After setting up the concentration points we just sat there and waited for something to happen, when it did. We heard a German motorcycle start up and went down the road right in front of us. We told the gunner to shoot them and he said "I will give away my position" and we said "then get out of the hole and let us do it" The motorcycle had a sidecar with a passenger in it and we got down in the position and fired on them and hit them. The motorcycle went crazy and the men were thrown off the motorcycle and just laid there. I assumed the firing killed them.

Sgt. Painter and I were sitting on the edge of our foxhole when a mortar shell landed close to us. There was a bush between us and the explosion, and the explosion removed all the leaves from the bush. It also blew my helmet off and tore the whole front out of my combat jacket. Lucky again, I did not get a scratch!

I was getting daylight now and a German gun with crew and a truck pulled up in front of us and set up near the house I had registered on. I watched them as they unlimbered the big gun and built a fire to cook their breakfast. When they had everything ready I told our battery to "fire" and they did. 4 rounds landed right in the middle of the Germans and I don't think anybody survived that.

Then 3 trucks with German Infantry in the back drove down the road beside us and pulled up and stopped. All the trucks were loaded with German Infantry. When the trucks stopped, the soldiers dismounted and their Lt. lined them up to give them orders. I had already registered close enough to them that I did not have to make correcting fire. When the German Lt. yelled "Achtung" (attention) and I yelled "fire" over the radio. 4 shells landed in their midst and I kept up the firing until I was certain that the men would not cause us any trouble. There must have been 40 or 50 men total.

Note to Nancy- This was the hill that you and I tried to get on when we were in Italy.

The valley out in front of us was some kind of a concentration point for the Germans. It was hidden from view by the mountain we were on. Their problem was that they did not know that we were sitting on the mountain looking right down their throats. That should have been known because we had been firing from our positions. I suppose their units did not talk to each other often enough.

A road ran from our positions and headed north toward another hill mass known as "Mt. Cavo" Down this road came a lot of German on bicycles. They were what is known as school troops. They were good marchers and were handsome young men that performed at military schools for visiting dignitaries. In the meantime, 4 American tanks had pulled up in the valley right below us and were lined up in firing position. We must have all noticed the

school troops at the same time, because the tanks started firing and our artillery started firing at the same time. Needless to say the school troops no longer existed.

I had not noticed any movement of any kind in the valley below us, but the tanks must have seen something that I didn't see, because they started firing their machine guns into the field below us. Then I noticed some German Infantry moving around. They were dug in so it was difficult for the tanks to get at them, so I started firing white phosphorus at them to set the field on fire and make them get up and run.

The Germans all got up and started running toward the edge of the field near a small road that I had already registered on. I would wait till they were very near our registration point and then I would yell "fire".

In the meantime, the tanks were firing their machine guns at them. There must have been 3 or 4 hundred men and I think we got all of them.

All of this firing took most of all the day and dark was beginning to settle in. We had run out of water, food, ammunition, and most everything that we needed. The people in our rear had started trying to get supplies up to us and they did succeed in a minor way. We were drinking water out of the barrels of the water cooled machine guns. When some supplies did reach us they were not sufficient. They brought some k-rations and some water but not near enough. The soldiers had to carry these supplies on their backs and make their way through the German lines to get to us. A k-ration is a box about the size of a cracker jack box and contains one meal for one man. I think our crew had maybe 3 rations for the day, which was not near sufficient. Somebody found a spring on the backside of the hill where we were and I told my crew to stand still and I would go get us some water. I used 3 or 4 helmets and found the spring and filled them and was coming back to our positions when I ran into our Col. who was wounded and was on a litter. He chewed me out for leaving my positions and I tried to tell him my position was in good shape and if we didn't get some water and food everybody was going to be in trouble.

Sometime during the day, Painter and I were sitting on the edge of our foxhole and I was watching an infantry private dig himself a big hole for cover. It was on the forward slope of the hill and he was in a very exposed position. As he was digging a tank shell hit him dead on and he exploded. His helmet and other clothing parts went straight up in the air. He never knew what hit him.

The 4 tanks that drove up and parked in front of us were sitting there waiting and watching when all at once a German tank shell hit one of the tanks and it caught on fire. The tank crew was trying desperately to get out of the burning tank. I think most of them got out of the tank but not all of them.

Another time during the day, a private came up to me and said "that sgt. over there is going to really mess us up" I asked him what he was talking about and he said "there is a spring at the foot of this hill and we have been going down there and getting water. The Germans also come down and get water and we leave them alone and they leave us alone. They are as bad as we are as far as needing water. That sgt. goes down to the spring and hides out and when the Germans come down to get water, he shoots them and drags them back away from the spring and hides the bodies. He said if the Germans catch him, we will no longer be able to get water. I saw the sgt. later and asked him if he was doing that and he said yes. I said you, will have to stop it. He said "I thought that was what we came over here for was to kill Germans". I didn't have an answer for that, so I just walked away and he continued to kill Germans at the spring.

I think that days like the two days I have described will make an experienced soldier out of an inexperienced soldier. It will also cause you to be very casual about people killing people. It will also cause you to have no sympathy for a dead or wounded person, You become so used to it that it does not register on you anymore. I have had other men later on in years, say that it really bothers them that have no pity or sympathy for an injured person or somebody that dies a violent death.

Another day ended and we began to look for a place to lie down and go to sleep. We had been up for two nights without any sleep and we were in for another sleepless night. I dug a foxhole to sleep in for the night and sometime during the night I laid down in the hole, but what I didn't know was that a soldier had dug a machine gun emplacement right in front of my hole. We had a counterattack that night and he fired his gun all night long. The Germans also pulled 11 anti-aircraft guns in the valley below us and fired those guns all night.

My crew had found a bunker the Germans had built while they owned the mountain and they wanted to spend the night in it. I went down and looked at it and it was a very choice place to sleep. They had beds and tables and really had a nice set-up. I told the crew there was one thing that was bad wrong with spending the night there. The Germans knew where the bunker was and might come up there during the night and throw hand grenades in the bunker. That is exactly what they did. They threw grenades in the bunker that night. This bunker contained some German food and some water they left behind. We ate the food and drank the water. Anything we couldn't consume on the premises, we took with us.

I think that after 3 days like we had seen we were all numb. We were completely exhausted, spiritually, mentally and physically. The next morning we prepared to leave this mountain top and go to the next mountain top which was across the valley just north of us. We began to climbing out of our holes and making ready to leave when the mortar shells started exploding all around us. I saw a hole and jumped for it, but a Capt. hit the hole first and a sgt. hit the hole on top of the Capt. and I hit the hole on top of both of them. The sgt. started griping about me getting in the hole on top of him and I asked him if he owned the hole and he said no. So I told him that I had as much right to the hole as he did and that was the end of the conversation. After the shelling stopped we were waiting to leave somebody hollered and asked what casualties we had from the shelling and somebody yelled back that we had 7 dead. There was a 2nd Lt. platoon leader beside me as we were waiting and I swear I could see his beard growing. He had that 1000 mile stare and was almost motionless.

We started leaving the mountain and after we had gone about 1 mile down across the valley I heard a rumbling noise like thunder. I turned around and looked and the point where our column was leaving the woods at the foot of the mountain the Germans were shelling it with big guns. There was a lot of dust and fire and trees were being blown straight into the air. How many men we lost there, I don't know, but it must been quite a few. The tanks that had been in the valley, just below us, were now camped in some woods that we were going through. They had bicycles hanging all, over their tanks. They also had a lot of water, rations and wine that they shared with us. We filled all our canteens with water and wine and loaded up with all the rations we could carry.

We went across the valley north of the mountain we had been on and went up the next mountain. These hills were known as the Alban Hills and were extinct volcanoes, The first mountain was the outer rim of the volcano and the valley we just went across was the center of the volcano. The next mountain was another lip of the volcano. The next mountain looked down what was known as Highway 6 leading out of Rome. This road went down to Cassino and was being used to evacuate the German Army from the Cassino front. When we got on top of the second mountain I could see the Highway 6 to Rome. There was a big convoy of German vehicles heading north as fast as they could go. I immediately set up our radio and called into the fire direction center to start a fire mission on this evacuation route. I started giving them coordinates of where I though the convoy would be in a few minutes. In this process, the fire direction started asking me to identify what kind of trucks they were, then how many armored cars, then how many soldiers in each vehicle, and so on and so forth. After a few minutes I told them to call off the fire mission because the Germans had already left the area and I couldn't get them anymore. The fire direction center then told me that they were running out of ammunition and had to be able to give a high priority to my targets

We then headed west down this mountain until about dusk that day we came upon a big building on top of a hill.

The building was about 4 stories high and maybe 200 ft square. There was a big wall around the building about 7 ft high. The ground was at the level of the top of the wall inside the property, but was 7 ft high on the outside. It was like a retaining wall. The Capt. stopped and tried to figure what to do next and he and I sat down beneath a fairly good sized tree and lit a cigarette. As we were talking he told me to look straight up into the tree. There was a German sniper in the tree. The Capt. raised his tommy gun straight up and pulled the trigger. The German was hit and came down breaking branches and making a lot of noise. We had to move quickly or get hit by him as he came down. He was dead when he hit the ground.

We then went up to the wall and the Capt. said "I need 8 men with tommy guns to climb over this wall and go in there and take this building. Eight men immediately stood up and said "we'll go". We all walked up to the wall and started throwing hand grenades and smoke grenades over the wall. When the Capt. was satisfied he said "GO" and over the wall they went. There was a lot of noise and people yelling and after about 30 minutes one of our men came over to the wall and said "You rear echelon guys can come on in now"! The rest of us climbed over the wall and went into the building area. There were about 20 dead Germans and 30 wounded that were prisoners that were being led away. I went into the building with a soldier and we began to go through all the rooms looking for anybody that might be left. As we went across the grand ballroom off the place, the soldier looked up at a huge chandelier and said "Lt. I just have to do it" I said "go ahead" and he pointed his tommy gun up at the chandelier and pulled the trigger. Broken glass flew all over the place. In this episode the Germans had 100% casualties and we had zero. As we were looking around the place we found an outbuilding where the Germans kept their rations. That night we had German bread and sausage. It really hit the spot as we hadn't had a decent meal in about a week.

We spent the night there expecting some real German Artillery on the place. They knew exactly where we were and probably had all the firing data to fire on us. We dug real deep holes that night and went to bed in our holes. Fortunately, nothing happened, so in the morning we got up and got ready to go another day. I saw some soldiers down the side of the hill and went down to see how they were doing, when a bunch of Italian civilians came walking up the hill to where we were. I told the men to search the people and then we would let them go on up the hill. We took weapons from them and then sent them on up to the top of the hill. I walked up with them and as they were talking to our major the man reached into his coat and pulled out a knife. One of our sgts was looking at him and aimed his rifle at the man and pulled the trigger. The man dropped in his tracks. He must have been the father of the group because the women in the group kept carrying on real bad. Another soldier looking at the man on the ground walked up with a tommy gun and pointed it at the man's head and pulled the trigger. Then the women in the group really went crazy.

The next morning in front of the building there were 8 dead German soldiers laid out like firewood. They had all been killed the day before. Don Gilpin told me later that one of the men had on an expensive ring and he intended to take it, but during the night the man had taken off and left. He played possum and got away!

We could walk around to front of the building and see Rome in the distance. This was the last hill before Rome and it was only about 20 miles away.

On to Rome, June, 1944

We began to again gather all our equipment and prepare to move again. As we were walking down the hill towards Rome Sgt. Painter turned his ankle and had to be left behind. We took his packboard and went on down to the bottom of the hill. A lot of vehicles had been moved up and were preparing to load everybody on the trucks and go to Rome. Our jeep driver was among the vehicles there, so we threw all our equipment on the jeep and crawled in and were ready to go to Rome. We lined up and pulled out on the highway and were on the way. The Italian civilians lined the road all the way to Rome throwing flowers, etc and passing out wine and all kinds of things to

eat. Young girls got in the line of the Infantry and our soldiers let them carry their rifles to Rome.

We arrived at the edge of town and we all stopped to await further orders. There were some tanks at one of the corners of the intersection and they received some artillery fire but it didn't last long.

A 2 ½ ton GI Truck entered a street just ahead of us and a sniper in one the building took a couple of shots at him. The truck was equipped with a .50 cal machine gun in a ring mount on top of the driver's seat. The passenger in the truck manned the machine gun and just obliterated the brickwork around the window where the sniper had been. Then a tank came down the street and somebody ahead fired an anti tank gun at him. He backed up and turned the tank to go into a brick building on the street where he was. The building happened to be an Italian apartment. The man that lived in the apartment came running outside screaming bloody murder. The tank had backed right into his living room!

The order to enter Rome came about midnight and all the trucks and tanks and armored cars started their engines and away we went. The streets were deserted but as we pushed deeper into the city the civilians begin to awaken. They didn't know who we were but they did ask. We told them we were Americans and they hollered "VIVA LA AMERICANS" We kept going on into town and some young boys would jump up on the tanks and trucks and act like liberating heroes. They would stay with for us for awhile then jump off and leave. Pretty soon the streets got so crowded that we had to out soldiers out in front of us with bayonets to make the people clear a way for us. The column was lost for awhile and lost a lot of time wandering around the streets of Rome not knowing where we were. We went by the Arch of Titus and the Colliseum and then on up to the Tiber River. When we got to the Tiber River we were across the river from the Castell of San Angelo and upstream a couple of bridges. We could see the Castell and the bridges. We had soldiers scattered up and down the street lying down behind the bannisters along the sidewalk with their guns pointing at the bridges. They were guarding the bridges so the Germans wouldn't blow them. Somebody across the river in one of the big building kept shooting at us. He was probably a German sniper or an Italian Facisti. Either way they were to be eliminated. I watched and when he fired another round I figured which window he was shooting from. I sent a soldier down the street to get a tank and bring him up to where we were. When the tank arrived I pointed out which window to point his gun at and wait until I told him to fire. He pointed his gun and sat waiting. Soon the German fired and the tanker fired his gun and blew a hole in the side of the building you could drive a pick-up through. The sniper did not fire at us any more! We now had occupied Rome and the town was ours. The news came in over the radio that the landings had taken place at Normandy and the fall of Rome took second page to the Normandy Invasion.

Through Rome and Beyond- Late Summer 1944

We were forming up in Task Force fashion to go get the Germans and I began to feel bad. By the next day I was feeling terrible and told Painter that I could not go any further and get on the radio and get another Lt. up here to replace me. He did that and I went back to the Battery. I think this was my first bout with the recurrent malaria that I had, off and on, for the rest of my time overseas and for sometime after I returned home and was discharged. I returned to the Battery and few days later I was fine and returned to my post as an FO.

We spent all of our time looking for the Germans. They were retreating rather hurriedly and it was tough to find them. We would go into a little town and ask the people "where are the Germans" and they would say "Tedeschi parti" meaning the German has left. We would then ask them "where is all the wine" and they would say "the Tedeschi took it all".

We went through one town named Civitavechia that was the port for the City of Rome. There was a big lake

beside the town and the Germans spray painted big signs on the sides of the buildings that said " we'll be back you greasy Americans"

We were moving pretty fast and as we were on the offensive we never seemed to stop and rest. You can stay on the offensive just so long and then you must stop and give the soldiers a rest and a chance to get caught up on food and sleeping. If we could find a river to camp by that was a plus. We could all strip and go in swimming which would give everybody a bath. Headquarters would bring the kitchen trucks up and start cooking hot meals for everybody.

All US Army units are clustered in groups of three. It is called the triangular system. With three units in a batallion, and three batallions in a regiment, you can have two units on offense and one unit in reserve. Then you rotate the units and try to give everybody a break now and then. When we were in reserve, we stayed close but not in actual contact with the Germans.

We received orders from our Artillery General that all artillery officers were to wear ties whether they were in the front lines or not. If you were in a battery of artillery that was not so bad , but if you were with an infantry rifle company like we were, a tie was just a little bit ridiculous....so I did not wear a tie. One day I needed a new battery and I went back to HQ to get a new battery and ran in to a Col. at Division HQ. He chewed me out real good for not having on a tie. Then I found out why we were told to wear a tie. General George Marshall from Washington DC was coming to our division and wanted to see an infantry company in a combat position. I found a tie and put it on but took it back off when I left Division HQ.

No.



[CROOK'S STAMP]

To Dr. W. A. Thompson
Stigler, Oklahoma

From

to RT Thompson 15062

APD #15062

to PM, New York

Mar. 4, 1944

Dear Dad & Mom,

Took another ride & ended up in Sunny Italy. It was raining the day I got here & has been raining ever since.

They sent all our snapshots to be sent from here so I just have to keep them until I get home.

I'm packing my suitcase full of clothing home in the near future. Took my bedding roll with a bunch of stuff in it but that is the best of my worries. Just something I want home to look around.

I have a pair of boots home and want to take 100 for them. Will try to send 100 home in a few days.

V-MAIL

As ever
Bob.

No.



(CENSOR'S STAMP)

To DR. W. A. Thompson
Stigler, Oklahoma

From

W. K. Thompson, 0-179720
(Sender's name)

APD #7411
(Sender's address)

907 M, New York

Mar. 18, 1944
(Date)

Dear Dad & Mom,
Just a line to let you know I'm still OK.
At the moment my feet are a little cold, but when
I go to bed I'll be OK.

I'm sleeping on a canvass cot, now,
with my bedding roll, 6 blankets + a combiter,
so I'm warm as toast at night.

For a light, I have a #10 can cut
half into, nailed on a tent stake with a
candle.

There's six of us sleep in the
same tent + we've just finished a good
bull session.

My address has changed again
so please note.

I have another request. A box
of good cigars. They only issue 2 per wk.
+ I'm beginning to like them more than
Cigarettes.

As ever
Bob

V-MAIL

IN ITALY - SUMMER 1944



This photo was taken by an Italian woman in the Red Cross Club at Naples. It cost me 50 cents! I mailed it home from Naples in the summer of 1944

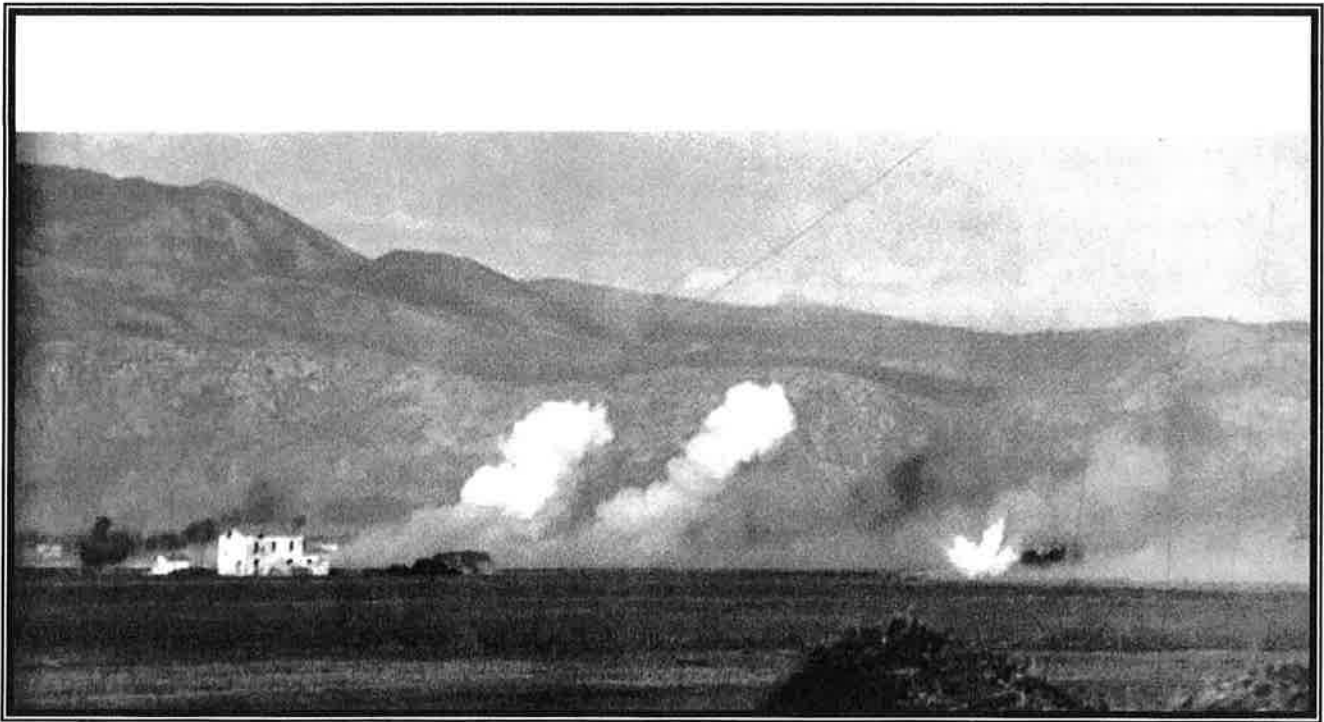


This photo is of me and my friend, Bob Lang. He was the Forward Observer with "A" Btry. I was the forward Observer with "B" Btry. Lt. Lang made it all thru the war with 3 purple hearts and 2 silver stars. This picture was taken at Avallino, which is about 30 miles from Naples. It was spring 1944.



This photo is of Don Gilpin. He was the other forward observer with "B" Battery. He was taken prisoner in December, 1944 and spent the rest of the war in prison. The picture was taken after the after he came home from the war.

Life at the Anzio Beachhead



The hill in the background is a part of the hills known as the Alban Hills. This is the hill that we went up at night to infiltrate behind the German lines.



Everybody at Anzio ran around stooped over thinking it would help to avoid being seen by the Germans

CBS NEWS

A Division of CBS Inc.
2020 M Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20036
(202) 457-4321

Dear Mr. Thompson,

1/17/78

Thanks so much for your very good letter and the maps. Your description and the Fowler piece brought back memories; Wick practically lived with that division so of course he saw more of that action than I did. But I saw enough to last me a while. So, obviously, did you. I don't think Gen. Clark ever forgave me for what I wrote about his strategy shift after the war.

All my best,



Eric Sevareid

Mr. Robert Thompson
9726 East 42nd Street
Tulsa, OK 74145

December 30, 1977

Mr. Eric Sevareid
CBS News
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Sevareid,

I am curious about a couple of paragraphs in the book "Not so Wild a Dream" that you wrote after World War II.

First, let me introduce myself. I was a 1st Lieutenant in "B" battery 132nd FA, 36th infantry division. I joined the division at Cassino and stayed with them thru Anzio, Rome, Southern France and at Remeirmont. France in the Vosges Gap I was captured while trying to make a river crossing across the Mosselle River. I spent the remainder of the war in Germany and Poland with American ground force officers and war correspondents, such as yourself. Ed Beattie of the UPI was captured along about the same time. Wright Bryant was also captured along about the same time.

Anyway, my curiosity concerns pages 408 and page 409 of your book. I was attached to "F" company 142nd infantry as a forward observer for the night infiltration behind Velletri in the Alban Hills at Anzio. After several days we succeeded in securing the hills behind Velletri to a point where the highway from Cisterna passes through Velletri, Mt. Cavo, and on to Rome. At the point where this highway passed through a saddle in the hills, our company stopped and prepared for the inevitable counterattacks.

At this point, the Germans evidently didn't know we were up in these hills, because they brought infantry and artillery into the field below us. In a period of one day with help of five sherman tanks I directed the fire of "B" battery on three trucks loaded with infantry destroying them. One heavy artillery piece with a crew of about eight men, destroying them. At this point the five sherman tanks came from Velletri along this highway and pulled up in firing position in the field below us. The five tanks were firing on dug-in infantry in the field below us but couldn't do any damage because the German infantry was dug in below ground. We then fired smoke shells and set the field on fire making the Germans get out of their holes and start running for cover. We then started shelling them before they could get away. The artillery was firing high explosive shells and the tanks were using their machine guns.

I don't know what the German casualties were on that day but I'm sure it was several hundred. The counterattack they were finally able to put together that night didn't amount to very much. When we left our position to proceed on to Rome we by passed this particular area.

Since the war I have had several people who were there at the same time read your book and tell me that the destruction you described in your book was the same destruction that I have described. I have attempted to draw a map of this particular place in the hope that it will refresh your memory just a little.

I would appreciate your comments.

Kindest personal regards,

Robert T. Thompson

Rome must now fall. Generals Alexander and Clark would soon receive the key to the city, but surely it was General Walker who turned the key. From him they were really receiving it. Perhaps it is true that we love best those to whom we give and dislike those who give to us. We were never told the reason, but a few weeks later General Walker, whose love for his division was returned in his men's respect for him, who was at the height of his brilliant combat career, was relieved of his command and sent back to the States.

5

In the morning again we drove around the eastern slopes of the lovely green hills, past mutilated Valmontone (another old city we had shot up to no purpose in our reckless way, for the bridges and skirting roadway were all that we required), and as we progressed it began to dawn upon us that the German defenses were falling apart so fast that we would be into Rome within hours. The air was charged with excitement, with savage triumph and obscene defeat. German vehicles were smoldering at every bend of the road, and dead Germans lay sprawled beside them, their faces thickening with the dust sprayed over them by the ceaseless wheels that passed within inches of the mortifying flesh. Shells were screaming over in both directions, but in the general frenzy not even the civilians paid them much notice. By wrecked gasoline stations, in the front yards of decapitated homes, flushed Americans were shoving newly taken prisoners into line, jerking out the contents of their pockets and jabbing those who hesitated with the butt ends of their rifles. A child was vigorously kicking a dead German officer, until a young woman shoved the child aside and dragged off the man's boots. Infantry of the Third Division were arriving in trucks, and their general, "Iron Mike" O'Daniel, jumped from his jeep before it had stopped and in stentorian voice shouted the orders for their detrucking and deployment. One of our tank destroyers ahead burst into flames, and shells began falling nearer. American officers, throwing themselves down and clutching their helmets, shouted questions at one another about how the race for Rome was progressing. While Mydans remained with his camera—he spent a frightening night under bombs—I turned back to Anzio, impelled by the realization that things were now moving

faster than anyone had expected and that somehow the press in-stallation, the censors, and the radio transmitters must be uprooted at once and taken to the front lines, or the story of the fall, the whole impact of the "psychological and political victory" that Rome was to be, would surely be delayed and half ruined. In the wrecked villages to the immediate rear, medical aides were pulling our wounded from their ambulances, shabby civilians were pulling in the rubble-strewn public squares, all looking toward the capital city, and standing beside their ruined parents the children, in their innocence of tragedy and death, were clapping their small and grimy hands as we passed them by.

I was black with a thick covering of grime and dust when I reached the press villa on the now silent beach. I was exhausted by the hectic journey and by sheer nervous excitement, and my hands were trembling when I tried to eat at the mess. It appeared that no orders whatsoever had been given for uprooting the trans-mitters—indeed nobody there seemed quite aware of what was happening; and I fear that I transgressed the limits of dignity in urging immediate action. But nothing could move until morn-ing. At midnight I did my last broadcast from Anzio and was up-again with the others before dawn. Nearly all the other corre-spondents had vanished in the night toward the front, and it ap-peared that I would have to guide the slow caravan with Vaughn-Thomas of the BBC, since no others knew the detours. We moved with agonizing slowness, and I was certain that I would miss the entry into the city. Near Valmontone the transmitter van the us hesitated at a crossroads, and I ran back a couple of hundred yards to direct them. Returning to the jeep was one of the most horrible experiences of my life. Perhaps it was that the most shifted or died; I do not know. But I walked into a veritable lake of stench. There was not a body in sight; the bodies must have been dragged into the brush just off the road, but the hot sun was directly on them. I had smelled the sharp, sweet, gaseous odor of death before, but nothing like this. It inflamed the nostrils, and I could even taste it in my mouth. Each breath drew it in deeply. I began to choke, and water streamed from my eyes. I started to run blindly up the road, which made me breathe more heavily. All my insides were convulsed, and I felt vomit in my throat. All almost in a fainting condition when I reached the jeep. I was stayed sick for hours afterwards. The sight of death is nothing like its smell.

Page 409 -
Eric Sevards book
"Not So Wild a Dream"

Somewhere in Mon. eve.
Italy. July 8/10

Dear Mom & Dad,

As you have already figured I am now in a rest area. It is more than pleasant here. A good cool breeze at night really makes for good sleeping, good show & no work to do. Have had all my clothes laundered by the Italians and had a good shower. Every afternoon we go for a swim. There's nothing to do at night but nobody really wants to do anything anyway. We have our old pyramidal tent up with electric lights and a telephone down to the battery.

~~I wrote Paul a letter a couple of weeks ago & intend to write again soon. I know how he must look forward to some mail! Betty wrote a real nice letter the other day. She sure can write an interesting letter. It seems just like she is talking to you.~~
I received the picture of all the 21 M's in the back yard & the thing I noticed most was Mom & that flower garden in front of the garage. I don't believe I'll ever forget those rose bushes we planted there about 4 years ago. The back-end of the garage I

also remember, because I built about half of it. It looks like it's still pretty stout in spite of the curve I built in it. Those were sure the good old days weren't they? Let's hope they'll come again soon someday. Especially soon.

Every body over here seems to think the war will be over by November at the latest, but that is people that haven't been any closer to the front lines than 5 miles. Talk to some guys that have had to face the Germans and you'll hear a different story. Personally, if it's over by November it will surprise the devil out of me. The

I'm just about to get the old letter writing spirit back so for a while I'll be writing pretty regular, regular anyway until I use up all the Red Cross stationary envelopes.

I stuck a splinter in my finger about an hour ago, so I'll pull it out & see if I can borrow a knife to pick it out.

Give every one my regards

Bob



(CENSOR'S STAMP)

Dr W A Thompson
 STIGLER, OKLAHOMA

LET Thompson
 (Sender's name)
 182 MEA Bn. APO-3
 (Sender's address)
 30 PM New York
 June 10, 1944
 (Date)

Dear Dad & Mom,

Rec'd a bunch of letters and the box of candy yesterday. The candy is already gone. The letters were really appreciated, too. The first mail I'd had in almost 2 weeks.

Took a bath in a farmer's water trough yesterday. Boys didn't like the soap very much. They didn't wash a lot. Also washed my clothes & let them dry while I took the bath. The belt of my pants are ripped out again for the 3rd time. If I send them up very many more times I'll look like a patch-work quilt. Incidentally, this water trough was in the farmer's back yard & while we were bathing some women walked by, but it didn't phase them a bit. We're talking now about getting some slacks out of a home looked meal this noon.

You can send me some max ligas anytime now. They really do go fast. If you could pack some hair oil (vaseline) & Titch Thompsons they would come across it would be welcome too. Someday we'll get to go back through some of these places & find our stuff.

Everybody that has room to keep them have picked up Italian bicycles. All the tanks & food pictures have them. So far I don't have one yet, but look out.

V-MAIL

Heaven
Bob

ONLY OFFICE DEPARTMENT FORM NO. 101

CHAPTER 4-COMBAT IN ITALY-ROME AND BEYOND

Through the villages, across the rivers and up the hills

The rest of the war in Italy, at least as far as the 36th Division was concerned, was a mad dash north trying to catch the Germans and destroy them. We would sometimes go 20 or 30 miles and never see any trace of them. They were going north to establish a line of defense that they could hold against another army, meaning us.

The months of June and July and part of August, 1944, was a series of battles that were small and confined to our companies against their companies. The American Army would make sweeping movements and most of the time would by-pass places that held no particular importance to an army.

We were going north along the top of a small mountain and word came that one of the infantry soldiers was to be rotated back home and was to report to HQ for his orders. He turned around and handed his rifle to another soldier and walked off. He was ready to leave and was not going to mess around about it!

One day we were walking along a black top road that had head high bushes along both sides of the road. A German machine gun opened up on us and, naturally, we all hit the ground, in this instance it was the black top pavement. There was a small Italian house along side of the road and a man came out of the house and saw us lying in the road. I guess he was real curious, because he came over to the side of the road and stood there and looked at us a few minutes and then walked off.

Another day, on farther north we were walking along a road and the column stopped and the Capt. was up ahead and called for a FO to come up to where he was. I walked up the road and got to point that a Sgt. Said " Lt. You had better be careful, because a German machine gun is firing right down the middle of this road". I jumped over the borrow ditch and climbed over a fence and was in a plowed field. I started over the field to where the Capt. was and the German fired at me. I hit the ground and fell between the furrows and could hide in the low ground between the furrows. I waited a few minutes and got up and ran and hit the ground again, and waited a few minutes and crawled up ahead maybe 50 ft and waited a little time and got up and ran again. I did this several times, until I got out of site of the German and found the Capt. He pointed out a house on top of a hill just ahead of us and asked if I could take the house out, because there was a German machine gun position somewhere near it. I assured him I could do that and started firing on the house with our 105 howitzers. I hit the house with two shells and the German machine gun shut up. The Capt. then said to me " I will take most of our men and go on up to the hill and when I get to the bottom of the hill, I will turn around and wave at you and you bring the rest of the men up. I said OK. He left with most of the men and got to the bottom of the hill and turned around and waved at us. I told the men with me that when I raised up and stood up I wanted everybody to stand up at the same time. I did not want to stand up alone and be a target for the machine gun,. I would like to have a little better odds by having everybody stand up. When I stood up, all of the men stood up and everything was fine. We got up to a little house at the bottom of the hill and the Italian man that lived there came running up to me and told me that he had shot a German soldier that was in his upstairs bedroom firing at us and he wanted us to take him. I told him " you shot him so he is yours, we don't want him". We then continued our trip to the top of the hill where the rest of the infantry company was digging in.

Our shelling had put a big hole in the upstairs bedroom of the house and blew a big hole in the kitchen wall. It had also wounded an Italian girl that the Germans took with them when they left. It also killed two German soldiers that were lying in the yard of the house. The Italians shared some of their food with us and we spent the night there with them.

The next morning I was looking out the upstairs bedroom window at the valley in front of us and saw two German

tanks. The tank crews were cooking their breakfast. I watched them a few minutes and then registered our guns on them and gave the order to fire battery one round, which meant four rounds would be fired at them. The crews noticed that I had zeroed in on them and made a mad dash for their tanks and jumped in them. Just as they slammed their turret closed one round hit the top of their turret. It did them no harm and they drove off and disappeared.

A little later I was sitting out in the yard drinking a cup of coffee and I noticed somebody coming up the hill in front of me. I waited a few minutes and a German soldier came up to me with his hands up. I told him to go over and sit down and I brought him a cup of coffee. He was a real young man, maybe 17 yrs. old and scared to death. I really felt sorry for him. We were relieved from this position and went into reserve for a few days then back in to the lines again.

The battle for Magliano- a hill town with a great wall in Tuscany

The next time I remember being in the front lines in Italy was at a little town named Magliano. Magliano was a little hill town in the Tuscany region that was surrounded by a big stone wall about 10 ft thick and about 40 ft high. The town and wall were probably 1000 yrs. old. We approached the town from the south and when we got to the town we saw the wall and wondered how to handle it. As we were approaching the town, I saw a soldier's leg lying on the ground beside the road. I was real curious about it and about a half mile on further we saw the dead soldier lying on the ground. There was a gate that was closed and prevented us from entering the town. A sgt. and some soldiers ran up to the wall, found a ladder and climbed the wall by using the ladder. They got to the top of the wall and one of the soldiers climbed down and blew the gate open with explosives. I waited for a couple of infantry soldiers to enter the town through the gate and then I followed them. I wanted to stay close enough to the lead soldiers so that I could catch the Germans as they tried to leave the area and shell them before they could get away. We ran into the town and the small arms fire was ferocious. I started looking for a place for shelter and as I ran across the plaza in front of a little church there was a German soldier that had been hit and was dying, lying on the ground. A couple of Italian women were taking his watch and personal belongings. I ran across the plaza and ran up to a house and jerked the door open so I could get inside and get out of the gunfire. The room I entered was the kitchen of the house. When I jerked the door open and ran inside a German soldier was sitting on the kitchen cabinets firing out the window at our soldiers. He saw me and turned his gun around and pointed it at me and had his finger on the trigger. Somebody outside shot through the window with a tommy gun and hit the German. He was thrown across the room from the impact of the bullets and was dead by the time he hit the floor. I walked over and looked at him and saw that he was a lineman. The kind that climb power poles. He had leather straps and hooks on his legs like lineman wear. I then ran out the door back outside and ran into a little wineshop across the street and saw a friend of mine. We stopped and had a drink of wine and continued on down the street of the little town. I learned later that the infantry had a 10 hour street fight with the Germans for control of the town. I don't remember a thing about it. My mind goes completely blank after the wineshop. Later that day we had backed out of the town and were digging in anticipating the inevitable counter attack when we were relieved. We then went back into reserve for a day or so, and the next thing I remember is being on top of a high mountain at dusk and as I looked out over the Mediterranean Sea. I saw a flash of gunfire from an island off the coast of Italy, I called back for a fire mission, but the Germans were too far away and we didn't have guns with that much range. I later learned the island, was the Island of Elbe, where Napoleon was banished after he misbehaved in France many years ago.

One day as we were going down a country road looking for the Germans Pvt. Gage asked if we could throw our gear on a tank that was with us and I told him it be alright. We all threw our gear on the tank and crawled up on the tank and became riders instead of walkers. A few miles later a German anti-tank shell hit the tank and Pvt. Gage was wounded. We placed him alongside the road and went on ahead. His wound was minor and he made it alright and back to the hospital in Naples.

CHAPTER 5-TO THE FRENCH RIVIERA

We were relieved and were told we were going to back to Southern Italy and go through amphibious training and make an invasion somewhere. Our Col. told me I was entitled to a 10 day leave in Rome and I would take three truckloads of soldiers and go to Rome and 10 days later report back to our unit which would be south of Naples about 30 miles at a town named Salerno. We loaded the trucks and took off. When we got to Rome we pulled up at the place where we would stay and I told the men that they had 10 days, and if they weren't at the proper time and place 10 days from now they would be AWOL and would get in trouble. I didn't see them again until the 10 days were up and they all showed up just like they were supposed to. I think that after a few days they became bored and would have gone back to the unit, if they had a way to go, but they had to wait the 10 days. I had my jeep and driver so I had a ball for the next 10 days. I ran across a friend who was the general's aide and had the general's car, so we had two cars and two drivers. When the ten days were up we loaded all the trucks and started off to the south. It was about 150 miles and in a truck convoy that takes a long time. We would stop along the highway and buy fruit and bread at Italian produce stands. I don't know whether the Italians were glad to see us or not because you can imagine 100 soldiers coming at you all at the same time wanting something! We made it to Salerno in good shape but tired.

We were preparing to make an invasion and the Col. told me I would be the waterproofing Officer and see that all the vehicles would be prepared for the invasion. We would waterproof the vehicles by placing putty or something like that around all the spark plugs and the wiring. We would place snorkels on the air intake and the engine exhaust and hopefully the vehicles could go into water over the top of the engine and it would still run. We went through all the procedures and the day of truth was here. We loaded all the trucks on an LST and went out into the sea about a mile or so and started driving the vehicles out of the ship into the water. Most of the vehicles made it but some didn't. The Navy pulled the ones out that didn't make it and we did them over again until they did make it.

When we thought we had everything ready we loaded all the vehicles and guns that we had and went to sea and were going to unload at a place called Minturno. Minturno was north of us and probably 30 miles south of Rome. This time we were going to do it a little different. We loaded our 105mm howitzers on dukws so we could get the artillery in to action sooner. In fact the dukws with the 105's would go in with the infantry. The Col. told me I would be the officer in charge of the dukws and the 105's and would take them into the battle coming up. The dukws with the 105's were top heavy and you had to be very careful or you would tump one of them over and they would sink. We loaded everything and were on our way to Minturno for the practice invasion. We landed the dukws and were going into a little town when we came upon about 6 tanks (ours) that were going in the opposite direction. Our dukws and the tanks sat there looking at each other and I told the lead driver of our vehicles to lower the tube on his gun and if the tanks didn't move we would blow them out of the way. The tank Lt. told his lead tank to lower the muzzle on his tank gun and he would blow us out the way. About that time a Major showed up and wanted to know what was happening and the tank Lt. and I told him. He almost blew a fuse and he told us to settle this thing or he would turn both us in to the authorities. We all laughed and backed out of the way and opened up the road.

As we were getting ready to go to the invasion port, Pvt. Gage showed up and said he wanted to go with us on the invasion. I told him we would be in the 2nd wave of assault infantry and he said he didn't care, he wanted to go with us. I have always had a soft spot in my heart for Pvt. Gage after that.

After a couple of weeks we had all our equipment ready and we were going to the port of Naples to load on the ships. We still did not know where we were going. We thought, maybe, we would be going to Yugoslavia, and cut the Russians off from Southern Europe. The Italians at the docks assured us that we were going to France, and sure enough they were right.

We formed up our convoy to go to Naples and load on the invasion ships, but as we were going through a little town near Naples a chaplain got in our convoy by mistake and turned off at a crossroad and naturally everybody behind him turned off and followed him. We ended up in another town where we didn't belong and the convoy commander found out we got lost by following that chaplain. We finally got everything straightened out and were on our way again to the invasion port.

When we loaded on the ships Winston Churchill came into our midst in a motor launch waving his hat in the air with his two fingers in the "v" for victory salute. We all responded with the arm signal that is considered obscene in most circles.

Late August, 1944- D-Day in Southern France

The ships were ready and we started moving out to sea. The weather was beautiful and the sea was real calm. It was a very pleasant voyage of about 2 days. We pulled up to the South France coast at a place known as the French Riviera.

There was a huge armada of ships including two battleships with all their guns pointing toward the coast. In the middle of the morning, destroyers began running parallel to the coastline and about a mile offshore and laying down smoke screen. Then the battleships and destroyers began firing toward the beach and about then a bunch of heavy bombers showed up, and started bombing the shoreline. It was time for us to begin loading on the little LcVP's to take us ashore. We would load on the boat and the navy would lift it up, and place it in the water. When we were all loaded and in the water we then began to form up in a circle and go around and around waiting for our time to go ashore. The first wave was ready to go shore and peeled off from the big circle and formed in a straight line that was parallel to the beach. When the first wave had made ready and started to the beach our boats or the second wave peeled off and formed into another line parallel to the beach and went in behind the first wave and headed into the smoke laid down by the navy.

As we approached the smoke screen the first wave was coming out of the smoke and headed out to sea. The navy frogmen had been unable to remove some underwater obstacles that the Germans had placed in the water and the Navy told the first wave to turn around and come back rather than drown a lot of men by having their boats turn over in deep water. We, in the second wave, also turned around and headed back out to sea. All the boats that were due to go in on RED beach were detoured to GREEN beach and landed there.

The Navy had rocket firing ships in their convoy and they were firing rockets as fast as they could. They really made a lot of noise. One of their rockets lost a guiding ring or whatever guided it and it went helter skelter over our heads.

The soldiers began to throw things away as soon as they hit the beach. They were so loaded down with equipment that they couldn't possibly carry it. The Navy gave me a huge pair of field glasses, which I threw overboard as soon as they were not looking and the Army gave me a heavy periscope, which I threw away. It was too heavy and I could not carry that much weight day after day. The soldiers were even throwing away machine gun ammo and flame throwers.

As we were preparing for the invasion at Naples, the Navy sent a naval officer to our battalion to participate in the invasion with us as a naval shore fire control. He was to set up our radios to work with his and in turn his radios were able to talk to the navy ships out at sea. Then, after we were ashore and we found a target suitable for the navy to fire at, they would fire at it. They told me they could drop a shell in a barrel at 10 miles but I never really believed it. I did think it would be great to be able to fire a battleship and I was planning to do that if I had the

opportunity. We were in tents near Naples and frankly were living pretty good. We had a mess tent and 3 hot meals per day and slept in sleeping bags on an army cot. The navy officer was used to living on a ship which provided excellent living conditions especially for the officers. When he checked in with us, he had on a white uniform that was spotless. After a few days with us he began to get a little dirty and he asked me : " do you fellows live like this all the time"? I told him we were living like kings now, you should see us when we were in the front lines!

The invasion was to take place on August 14, 1944, but things were happening that I had no knowledge of. Paul was killed in an attack on the city of St. Lo. on the Normandy peninsula on August 10th, 1944. I didn't hear about it until sometime in late September just a few days before I was reported missing. **This was the second step in the tragic events that were to be handed to my parents.**

When Paul was reported KIA, mama got busy immediately, to get me returned home and put a stop order on Billy to prevent him from being sent overseas. Mama called every general she could think of and wrote letters to everybody that she could think of. She was able to get something done about Billy, and would have got something done about me, but she didn't have enough time. I think the order sending me home arrived at my unit about a week after I was missing.

The invasion took place without a lot of trouble. We climbed over the big rocks and just as we got ashore I turned around to look at a woman that was hanging out her clothes on a clothesline. There was a tank right beside her that was removing the snorkels and other gear that was put on the tank for the invasion, The woman was absolutely unconcerned about anything that was going on about her. There were big fleets of American heavy bombers going overhead to bomb further inland and later the airplanes came in that unloaded the paratroopers. She finished hanging out her clothes and went back to her little house on the beach.

We climbed up to the highway that ran along the beach and waited for instructions as to what to do next. A German airplane came overhead and dropped a bomb that was guided by radio. The bomb went straight for one of our ships and had a direct hit. The ship it hit was the ship that a lot of records were on, including mine. The navy fired a shell at the German airplane and the shell went up and came down about 200 ft from where we were standing. That was the only firing we were exposed to on the day of the invasion.

Our orders came down to continue on the road we were on and go as far as we could or at least until we ran into heavy resistance. We started walking and at nightfall were still walking. We ran into a GI truck that was lost and driving along the road in the dark, The driver asked us if he could stay with us until daylight because he was lost and was afraid to go anywhere alone. We assured him it would be alright and kept walking when up ahead about a mile there was a lot of firing and explosions. We thought we had finally found the Germans and were in for a big fight. When we got close enough we could see that it was a building on fire that contained ammunition and the ammunition was exploding. We then discovered that we were lost and we turned around and headed back the way we came.

After another hour or so we turned off on a small dirt road and headed up toward an estate on a hill ahead of us. All at once a shell came overhead and exploded behind us at the house that we found out later was the regimental Headquarters of our regiment. We all jumped into the ditch beside the road and shells continued to come over our heads. I looked around at one of the men in our crew and he had a kitchen match he was holding up in the air. I asked what he was doing and he said he was going to strike that match on the next shell that came over.

It was still dark so we all stayed in the ditch. An infantry officer sent two men with a machine gun up to a hill about

200 ft from us and told them to watch for Germans and when they saw some to come tell us. After about 15 minutes the two men came running down to where we were and said about 200 Germans were coming over the hill at us and to be ready. I told everybody around me to be sure they had a full clip of ammo, and don't fire until I did. No Germans ever showed up so that turned out to be a false alarm.

As we lay there that night for about 4 or 5 hours, everybody had plenty of time to think. I began to think that what I am, is a combat officer and I am supposed to be here at this time and doing what I am doing! I suppose that when you begin to think that, you are a good officer and know what you are doing.

Things remained very quiet until daylight when I got up and walked on up to where the rest of the company was. There was a big house on the hill. A dead German Lt. was laying out in the front yard, I guess somebody shot him the night before.

Shortly after I arrived on top of the hill the Germans started to really shell us bad. We took cover and wondered what do we do now? Somebody got on the radio and asked for tanks and airplanes to come and help us. Shortly some P-51 fighters came over, but didn't do anything. I guess they thought we were too close to strafe and bomb and so they left. Then I heard a noise behind us and looked around and saw some tanks coming up the road. The lead tank had the turret open and somebody was looking out of the turret with his head about halfway out of the turret. All at once I heard a shot and the man's helmet flew off and he disappeared down into the tank. I learned later that he was the Capt. that was in charge of the tanks coming in to help us.

I found the infantry Capt. and he and I walked over to the front of the hill and were looking out over the valley we had to cross when a young French boy came out of the woods and was walking away from us. The Capt. picked up a rifle and shot the boy. I asked him why he did that and he said. "You can let a stranger come into your lines but never let anybody go from your lines to the enemy lines"

The tanks that came to help us now had pulled up into position and were firing at the Germans big guns that had been dealing us so much misery. The infantry co went out across the valley and assaulted the German gun position and after a fierce battle, what was left of the Germans were taken prisoner.

I noticed something that looked like a storm cellar and together with a couple of soldiers we walked over to it and opened the door. Some Germans in the cellar yelled "kamerad". One of the soldiers with me took the pin out of a grenade and said "I'll fix them kamerads" and started to throw the grenade into the cellar. I told him to wait a minute and told the Germans to come on out. Three German came out of the cellar. One of them had a suitcase and one of our soldiers hit it with his rifle and knocked it out of the Germans hands, The German looked at me and said: "mein frau and kinder" (my wife and my child) as he pointed at some pictures laying on the ground. I told him to pick them up and he keep them. I think I was beginning to tire of all the cruelty that all these young men were inflicting upon each other.

We continued toward some buildings we had seen and as we were walking through some pine trees the tanks that had been helping us saw us and thought we were Germans and started firing at us. We got on the radio and told them to stop it because it was us they were firing on. They stopped and I don't think anybody was wounded.

The beachhead was secure and the Army was beginning to form units called "Task Forces". A task force was a Bn. of Infantry and a Btry. of Field Artillery and other units such as combat engineers, etc. The task forces were to be free standing units that were to go into the front lines and establish breakthroughs in the German lines and throw the Germans into confusion. Our Btry was to be placed in a task force named Task Force Butler. I think the name Butler was after a Colonel or General that was to be the leader. I volunteered for the task force and I think I was assigned to it. We then started the mad dash up the Rhone River Valley to completely destroy the Germans.

Pictures of the hill town of Magliano, Tuscany, Italy



Looking at the town from the west: North is to the left of the viewer. The north gate is to the left and around the corner. The walls are 10' thick and 40' high. A real obstacle to infantry trying to take the town. "F" Co 142nd Infantry took the town after a vicious battle.



This is the north gate of the town. There was a gate here when we arrived and we couldn't get in the town. The infantry soldiers climbed the wall using ladders and went into the town by getting on the roofs of the buildings and shooting Germans from the roof. A 10 hr. battle took place here the next morning, before the town was secured.

CHAPTER 6-THE DASH UP THE RHONE RIVER VALLEY

The Southern France Offensive- August, 1944

The 3 divisions that had formed the base for the 5th Army in Italy were now in France. The three divisions were the best trained with more experience than any other divisions in the US Army. They had all taken severe casualties and had participated in some of the most ferocious fighting in the European Theatre in World War II. The 36th Division was the Texas National Guard, the 45th Division was the Oklahoma National Guard and the 3rd Division was a regular army division. All three divisions were to participate in the drive up the Rhone River Valley.

The next town I remember was named Draguignan. It was a fairly good sized city and seemed to be a prosperous city. When we entered the city there were a few paratroopers already there. Our unit took over a 3 story house to spend the night and naturally we searched the house for any thing suspicious. We went all over the house even up into the attic. This was to be our HQ for the night. The man that lived there with his wife and a teenage son kept trying to get me to go out into his backyard with him and look at his grapes. Every time we would start out the back door some German would fire a mortar at us. It didn't seem to bother him but it sure did me.

The infantry commander told me that there were some soldiers in the next house that were in the basement with a French woman and they had a bottle of whiskey. He told me to go check on them. I went next door and went down in the basement and sure enough there about 5 soldiers and this blonde headed woman and a bottle of whiskey. I told them they would have to break up the party and send the woman on her way. They protested so much that I backed off and they said they would send her on her way in the morning. I didn't agree to anything, but I did leave. The next morning the French people had the woman and treated her the way they treated all collaborators. They stripped off all her clothes, cut her hair, and sent her down the street in the midst of crowds of people.

The next morning the French Family at the house where we stayed invited us to breakfast and naturally we accepted. The lady cooked a great breakfast and we all enjoyed it very much. Then we found out that we had eaten all the food they had in the house and we felt bad about that. We sent a jeep down to the ration dump and told him to load up on a lot of 10 in 1 rations and bring them back to the house. We then repaid the family for their generosity. The lady of the house said to me as we left "you be careful and take care of yourself young man". I always remembered her advice to me.

Across the street from where we were staying I saw some soldiers. One was a paratrooper and they were talking and standing on the sidewalk in front of a big house with a big wall around the house. I walked over to where they were and the paratrooper was messing with a hand grenade and accidentally pulled the pin. He then threw the grenade over the high wall and it exploded. The explosion alerted a German machine gunner and he started firing at us from down the street. I ran around the corner of the wall and another German in a house across the street started firing at me and I ran back around the corner and got down in the curb. Some infantry soldiers ran up the street and took out the German Machine Gun and that episode was over. I don't think anybody was hit.

Late August, 1944- Back to Italy to the Hospital

Several days had passed since the landing and it was probably around August 20, 1944. I do not remember the name of the next town, but the malaria began to grab me again. It was in the middle of the day and I began to feel awful. I told Sgt. Painter to get on the radio and tell our HQ where he last saw me and I laid down on the sidewalk in this town and everybody walked off and left me. Soon I heard a truck and it stopped in the street

besides me and two men came over and put me on a litter. The truck was an ambulance and it contained two wounded German soldiers. The Germans were in bad shape, all covered with blood. They didn't bother me and I didn't bother them.

The ambulance went to an army hospital (tent city) near the beaches and unloaded us. I didn't know where to go so I found an empty cot in a big tent and laid down and went to sleep. How long I slept I don't know but later a Red Cross woman came into the tent and gave me a package of chewing gum. That constituted my medical treatment in this hospital. Later they put us on trucks and we went down to the beaches where we had landed and were told to load on the ships that had pulled up on the beach.

We were loading on an LCI (landing craft infantry). It was built like a submarine. It was long and slender and not very big and had ramps that ran from the deck along the side of the boat down to the sand and we would walk up the ramp onto the deck of the boat. It was used to land infantry when there was no other way to get people to the beaches. We were standing on the deck and the men were walking down into a hold where they would stay for the voyage back to Italy. We were also loading German POWs and a German Officer was standing on deck and told me he wouldn't go down into the hold because German officers didn't associate with the enlisted men like that. I told him to go on down onto the hold or I would kick him down into it. He gave me a dirty look and went on down into the hold.

The sun was beginning to go down and the navy said we had to leave because we had to clear the harbor by sundown. There was a hospital ship about a mile offshore and we headed for that. When we got there the hospital ship was already beginning to move out to sea. Our boat pulled up alongside the big ship and we walked over a ramp from one ship to the other while they were both moving! We all made it from one ship to the other with out any accidents.

The hospital ship was loaded with wounded and we were put down into a hold that was full of wounded. There was one young man(a Lt.) that had a very bad shoulder wound and was out of his head. He kept rolling over and asking for his mother. He had a plaster cast that covered all his shoulder and a big portion of his chest. I was afraid he would roll out of his bunk and went looking for a nurse or somebody to look after him. I found a nurse and told her about the wounded soldier. She said we know what we are doing and for me to go on back to my bunk and let them take care of it. I told her nobody was taking care of anything and I would report when we got to Italy. She did go down to the man and propped him up to where he couldn't roll out of the bed. I then ran in to my good friend Bob Lang. He also had the malaria and was going back to Naples. This hospital ship was a beautiful ship that was spotless and had a lot of things around to make everybody comfortable. Lang and I went up on one of the upper decks and they had lawn chairs and hammocks and was a real fine place. We sat in a couple of chairs and were visiting when a sailor came up and said we didn't belong there and would have to move. He said he would go down and get somebody to come up and make us move. We told him to go on, because we weren't going to move. He disappeared and we didn't move.

We made it back to Naples in a day or so and checked into a hospital that was in the old "racetrack area" where we were when we first came to Italy. We stayed in the hospital for a day or so and were then released to back to our units. We did go see a friend of ours from "C" Btry. that had been wounded in the France invasion. Bob Lang and I thought we would be in Naples several days and we went to Naples and were looking for an apartment to live in while we were there. We didn't find one and it was time to go back to France. We were loaded on a troop transport and we went back to beaches where we landed a few weeks ago. When we walked onto the beach we saw a pile of barracks bags that looked like a small mountain. We decide we would not look for our bags and would get back to our unit by hitchhiking upon the highway. It was about 400 miles to the front we started off.

September, 1944- Back to the front in France

The first time we were picked up, while hitchhiking ,was by a big blonde headed woman in a black limousine with a chauffeur. As we were driving along she told us she lived in Marsielles and invited us to come to her home with her. We declined and after we got out of the car we decided she was a madame from Marsielle.

We went through the town of Draguignan, where I had been before with an infantry co. and I told Lang we could probably stay with those people and we should go see them. We did go by their house and they invited us to stay with them, which we did, for one night.

We would get rides from Army trucks and other military vehicles and once we even hopped on a French freight train and went the Alps as a hobos. We spent one night in Grenoble, one night in Lyon, one night in Bourge and one night in Besancon. Our division was at a place called Vesoul.

I checked back in to my unit and was given my mail. The mail included a letter from my father, which was written on a prescription pad. His letter told me about Paul being killed in Normandy.

When I checked back into my battery our Capt and one of the Lts. told me they were going into town and wanted me to stay with the battery until they got back. I said " fine" and they left. One of our soldiers came up and said "Lt we have something we have been saving for when you got back." They went into a tent and came out with a 5 gallon bottle of champagne. Everybody lined up with their canteen cup and we had a toast. Then another soldier said " We have something else" and brought out a case of champagne bottles in quart bottles, so we had another toast.

Before I had been sent back to the hospital I had been reassigned to be a forward air observer and go over the front lines in a small airplane looking for targets and had been relieved of my old job as a forward observer. I remind the Capt. that I had been reassigned and he said that we had a very mean job coming up of trying to cross the Moselle River and they wanted me to go. I told him that we had a replacement for me. He said they still wanted me to go and if I still didn't want to go, to call the Col. ,which I did. The Col said the crossing was going to very dangerous and they wanted somebody with some experience to make the crossing, so I saluted and said "Yes sir"!

My promotion had arrived while I was gone, but nobody told me about it and I didn't know I had been promoted until the war was over and I had been home for about 6 months. I was paid all the time I was gone, but as a 2nd Lt., and the army paid me for the difference sometime after I had been home for about 9 months.

Our crew gathered up all our equipment and loaded it in our jeep and we went over to the infantry co. They were biovacued near a small lake in the wood on the die of a mountain. The next day we all headed , by truck, for a town named Plombieres where we would all unload and begin walking on toward Remiermont which was the town we were going to assault. There is a string of small hills south of Remiermont and as we approached the hills our crew was still in our jeep. I always stayed in the jeep as long as we could, because our equipment was heavy and he men carrying it would get worn put from the load. We got close enough that I told the driver to stop, and we unloaded all our equipment and begin walking with the infantry. All at once the infantry stopped and I walked up to the head of the column looking for what was stopping everybody and they told me there was a roadblock up ahead and a tank would blow it up as soon as he was ready. We had two tanks with us and driving along the road between the two columns of infantry. The road block consisted of trees that had been cut down and laid across the road. The tank fired one round and destroyed the roadblock . The Col. told one infantry

platoon to go to the right through an open field and get up on the mountain and told another platoon to go the left and get up on the mountain. I told our crew we would go with the platoon that was going to the right and we could flank the German positions.

The platoon we were with approached the foot of the mountain and from what I have been told later we ran into a real bad problem. The Germans were all over the foot of the mountain and were cutting us to pieces. I remember some of the action but not all of it. One of our crew told me about 50 years later that we lost a lot of men and they were screaming for help and nobody could get to them. I remember getting behind a tree and sucking my belly in and getting as slender as I possibly could. I guess when you are 6' tall and weigh 150 lbs. you don't need to get much more slender. I do remember one of the infantry soldiers standing behind a tree and when he used his canteen to get a drink of water a bullet hit him right in the throat and dropped him in his tracks. How long this went on, I do not know. The next thing I remember was that we had crossed over the top of the mountain and were walking along the edge of the hill and we were getting machine gun fire from the bottom of the hill. The trees were so tall and thick and the underbrush was so thick that we couldn't see anything and I decided we had better go back to the company and try another place and see if we could find something to fire on. **That was a big mistake!**

I learned later, that the company that went to the left when we split up, lost almost half of their men in an ambush. There were a lot of them that ended up in prison, just like we did.

We wandered around on the side of the mountain for I guess maybe an hour or so and I began to become real concerned about our circumstances. We stopped and I told Painter to check me on the map that we carried with us. I laid the map down on the ground and told Painter where I thought we were and he said he thought he agreed with me. The trees were so high and thick and the sky was cloudy so that it made it difficult to determine north on the ground or the map. You couldn't see the sun and it may not have helped if we had been able to see the sun. We were in the northern latitudes and we were all from the southern latitudes and it would probably have been confusing to us, I think. Along about this time we got on the radio and told our HQ that we were lost and would try to make it back to our lines. I gave them the coordinates of where I thought we were. I later looked at the coordinates that I gave them over the radio and they were not correct. I also later learned that our HQ sent search parties out looking for us for about two days and found no trace of us.

We continued walking toward what we thought were our front lines and we had accepted the fact that we had a problem, but we were all experienced combat soldiers and we didn't let it bother us. After about another hour we came upon a logging road that ran up the side of the mountain. We jumped down off of the high ground and down into the road and started walking down the road to the foot of the mountain. I then saw a man standing in the shade of a tree and I turned and asked Painter "Is that a German?" Painter said "He sure is!" I had a carbine and pulled it on the German and he put his hands up. I then thought "Now what do I do?" We had no way of handling a prisoner. I then noticed a German machine gun at his feet. In the German Army, the machine gun is the basic weapon for the infantry. It is protected by rifleman. I then noticed some more German soldiers coming out into the open area where the German was standing with his hands up. The Germans coming into the open were armed with machine pistols and we were armed with a radio. I considered jumping down off the road then considered climbing back up the way we came and then thought of turning around and running. None of these ideas were practical. Our crew was loaded down with equipment on packboards and could not run or climb. I then thought of shooting the German I had in my sights, but if I had done that the other Germans would have started firing and we would all been killed. We could have taken one German and they would have taken all 4 of us. Those were bad odds. All of this thinking and planning must have taken all of 5 seconds. I then made the decision to surrender rather than committing suicide and taking 3 men with me.

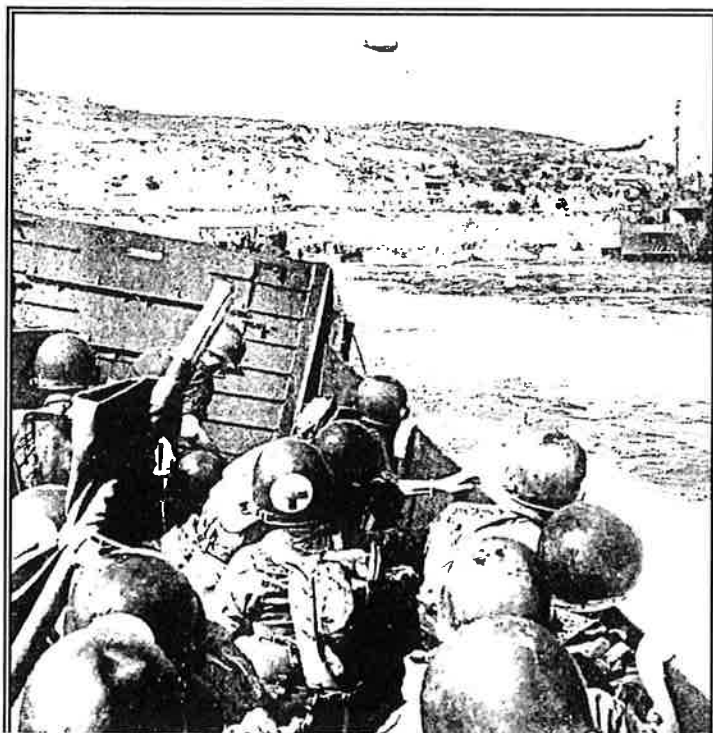
SOUTHERN FRANCE INVASION- SUMMER 1944



This is Red Beach, on the French Riviera, where we were supposed to land. Underwater obstacles prevented us from landing so we went over to Green Beach and landed there. D-Day was Aug 14, 1944



This is Green Beach where we eventually landed. The landing was unopposed, but we ran into trouble that night and the next day.



This is an LCVP (landing craft vehicle and personnel). I was the only officer on the boat and when we hit the rocks on the beach and the ramp dropped, I said " let's go! " We didn't run into any trouble, but you never know ahead of time what is going to happen and you prepare for the worst!

CHAPTER SEVEN- INTO THE ABYSS

The incident at the side of the mountain- September 22, 1944

When I decided that we had better surrender than commit suicide I laid my carbine on the ground and the German soldiers came walking up the hill to where we were. I think they were new soldiers, because they seemed to be real curious about us. They couldn't figure out what we were doing behind their lines and wandering around. I think they thought we were some kind of spies. They were especially curious about the big radio we had.

We all then walked down the road about 100 or feet to a small crossroads and stopped. They went through our pockets and searched us for any hidden weapons and they then had a conference amongst themselves as to what they would do.

There was a small embankment behind us and we were lined up in front of the embankment. A German soldier picked up the machine gun and placed it on the ground in front of us and aimed it at us and then laid down behind the gun and put his finger on the trigger. It then dawned on me what was about to happen!

I suppose that there are times, when you are not sure as to what to do, but you must do something even if it is wrong. That is the situation that we were in now. I had heard about people having an out of the body experience and that is what happened to me now. All at once, I was in the air, above where we were, and I could look down on us and could see machine gun bullets tearing into all of us. I then decided to do something and I did it. I lowered my hands and walked straight up to the German behind the machine gun and shaking my finger at him. The German corporal behind the machine gun looked over to his Lt. and a brief conversation took place. The German corporal then picked up his machine gun and placed it back in the position that it had been previously. Pvt. De La Rosa told me about 4 years ago about his same experience at that time. He also rose above the ground and saw the same thing I did.

After a few more minutes, the Germans decided to take us down to mountain into the town of Remiermont, where their headquarters was located and was the town we were going to assault. As we were going down the mountain, it occurred to me, that I had a piece of paper that had all the call radio signs of everybody in the 132nd Field Artillery Bn.. I somehow managed to get it out of my pocket and slowly, at one small piece at a time, I ate the piece of paper. I got Painter's attention and told him to eat the piece of paper he had that was identical to the one that I had. He also managed to eat his piece of paper. Robert Hetherington, one of the men in our group could speak German but the Germans didn't know that he could speak German. I asked him if the Germans were really going to shoot us and he said "yes, they were" I then asked "why didn't they?" and he said that because I didn't shoot their man they wouldn't shoot us.

At Remiermont

It was beginning to get late in the afternoon and as we entered the town of Remiermont, they locked us up in a room in a house. A little later, they took me into a room in the house that was being used as HQ. A German Captain was seated behind a big desk and he told me to sit down, which I did. He asked me to empty my pockets, which I did. He was a nice looking man with very good manners and was very polite to me. He told me went to school in Scotland and was very familiar with Americans and the English language. He sorted through my personal belongings and shoved them all back to me. I then walked out the door to the hallway where Painter and the others in our crew were. Painter said the Germans wanted him to show them how to work the big radio that we had. I told him to go ahead and show them. The Germans didn't know that the radio had a switch on it that if you turned it on the wires in the radio would all burn up. Painter then turned the magic switch

and the radio started smoking, The wires were burned up!

We were then put in a pickup truck with a camper type shell on the back and a guard was placed in the camper with us. It was now dark and by using signs I indicated to Painter that we could jump the guard with us and bail out the back of the truck and the Germans in the passenger compartment would never know we were gone. I then turned to look in the passenger compartment and the German in the passenger side of the compartment had a pistol pointed at my head. I told Painter to forget it, we couldn't get anywhere.

I was then separated from the rest of the crew and placed in a garage that was attached to a French house and spent the night there. The next morning a German 2nd Lt came in the garage and asked me where the rest of the papers were and I said " what papers?" He then showed me some papers with a lot of names on them and I recognized them, When we loaded on the boats in Naples harbor the Infantry gave me a list of names that I was to supervise the exchanging money from Italian to French. I should never have gone into the front lines with these papers, but I did and got caught with them. I told the Lt. that I had no more papers and he left.

It was early in the morning and a German came into the garage and told me to follow him, which I did. We went into the kitchen of the house where we were where the Germans Officers had set the table for breakfast and had a place for me to eat with them. The French woman of the house had prepared the meal and it was a fine looking meal. The table had a white tablecloth and silverware was at each plate. I looked out the window and saw about 50 or so American soldiers in the backyard. I then decided that I was not going to eat with the Germans and picked up my plate and went outside and started talking to the American soldiers. The Germans were a little puzzled at my response to their invitation to eat with them. They didn't associate with their enlisted men the way the Americans did .

There were a lot of things happening back home that I did not know about. Mama had contacted the War Department and orders had been prepared to have me sent home as the surviving son in a family. Pershing and Paul had already been lost and I was to be sent home. I learned later that the orders to send me home had been received at our Hq. about a week after I was gone. I had also been promoted to 1st Lt. but I never knew it until after the war was over and I was home.

At Gerardmare

Later that day we were all transferred to a nearby town named Gerardmare and we were placed in a building downtown that was a social type place like a fitness center in the USA. The big room had a mezzanine, which I suppose was a track to run in. There were some British soldiers there and also some Pakistanis from India. There was also an unusual man that I watched very closely, He was dressed in an American Officers uniform but seemed to have the run of the place and would stand around talking to the Germans. We had picked up some more American soldiers and they now totaled about 75 or so. I cautioned the soldiers to not talk around the strange man until we knew who he was.

This strange man came to me and introduced himself. He was Edward Beattie of the United Press International. In other words, he was a war correspondent and had been captured just a few days ago near where we were. Also captured with him were two other newspaper men. Wright Bryan who was editor of the Atlanta Constitution (he ended up in Oflag 64 with the rest of us.) The other man I do not remember who he was. A day or so later some more enlisted men and a major were brought in as prisoners. The officer with them was Major Kermit Hansen of Omaha , Nebraska who had been caught trying to get across the Moselle River. Major Hansen and a Sgt. made it across the river and were looking for a place for the main body of men to cross when they were discovered by the German and were fired at buy a machine gun. The machine gun killed the Sgt. and Major Hansen escaped any injuries. Our group now consisted of Ed Beattie, Kermit Hansen and myself and about 30

enlisted men.

The Germans finally discovered that we had to eat to survive and they brought some soup in for us to eat. The soup had a meat broth and the Pakistani soldiers(or Sieks?) wouldn't eat anything that had meat or meat products in it and they gave it to us. It was the first we had to eat in about 3 days so we devoured it. The Pakistani soldiers were very impressive people. They had long black hair and a white turban around their head. In the evening they would remove the turban and comb their hair which would reach to their waist. They would also look toward Mecca and get down on their hands and knees and pray.

We stayed at this place about 3 days and then were put on a train and went to Strasbourg. The train was passenger train and we were put in a coach car and rode with the civilians. They were real curious about us. They didn't know who we were, but they knew we were soldiers from somewhere. During the ride, the train was strafed by American fighter planes, and the engineer of the train pulled the engine into a tunnel and left the train out in the open. They would protect the engine first then the cars. That made sense.

At Strasbourg-September 1944

When we arrived in Strasbourg, we were taken to an abandoned hospital. As we walked through the town little kids would run at us and spit on us and one kid had a hatchet with which he hacked at me a couple of times, but did no damage. We were now in the Alsace- Lorraine region which was populated by French speaking Germans.

This abandoned hospital was a group of about 3 or 4 buildings, 3 stories high. There were other prisoners already here. Some were British, some were South African, some were French and some were Indian (India). The Indians didn't like the British and they gave all their cigarettes to us rather than to the British. Air raids by the Americans became rather common. The air raid sirens would sound and we would leave the building and go across the yard and down into the basement. There was one man, a US Officer that had been wounded by a machine gun and his shirt was bloody and torn across his back. He had been trying to get across the Moselle River and was shot while wandering around on the wrong side of the river. There was also a private that had lost a leg and his friends would carry him down into the basement.

The air raids were being carried out in an attempt to destroy a bridge across the Rhine River. We could see the bridge from our window. The fighter bombers would come over and drop bombs and hit the buildings on both sides of the river, but not the bridge. Finally, the French people got tired of having their houses destroyed and went out and destroyed the bridge to stop the bombing.

The US fighters destroyed the air raid siren that was used to alert everybody and the Germans started firing an anti-aircraft shell in the air and exploded it at about 500 or so feet. That was our signal to go to the air raid shelters. The only problem was that the shells exploding in the air would rain shrapnel all over the place and we had to run through it to get to the shelter. We could hear it hitting the ground as we ran through it.

The date was somewhere in the middle of October and the weather was great. The food was getting rather thin and we didn't get enough to eat. We were all beginning to lose weight. By this time we had about 20 officers and maybe a hundred or so enlisted men. We were separated from the enlisted men and really didn't know how many there were.

I think most of us had some college education and were used to reading in our previous life. We were desperate for something to read until a man was brought in that had a new testament with him. He would read it and then pass it along to somebody else. That man would read it and then pass it on. I think most of us read it several times in the few weeks we were there. Another man had some chewing gum with him. He unwrapped the gum and

started reading the label. He would then pass it on and the next man would read it and pass it on. We all read that gum wrapper probably 10 times while we were there.

Nobody had any toilet articles with him so nobody brushed their teeth, shaved or combed their hair. There was a shower but no soap so we just rinsed off occasionally. We were beginning to look rather ragged.

We were all interrogated again and anything we had that was of any value the Germans took it. We protested but they said we would get a receipt.

One day it was real cloudy and the air raid sirens begin to sound. Ed Beattie and I were looking out the window and a trail of smoke came down through the clouds and hit the ground about a block from where we were. I asked him what that was and he said the bombers overhead were marking the target and we were it. The bombs began to fall and the building shook and all the glass blew out of the windows. We turned and dove under a bed and soon it was over and we had not been hit. The only problem was that the bombers had killed the German cook's wife that was at the railroad station and had come to visit him. He refused to do any more cooking for us and we went without food for about 3 days.

Ed Beattie was not only a good writer, but he was a good cartoonist. He wrote a book about his experiences after the war and drew a bunch of cartoons about where he was and what was happening. I obtained a copy and will pit some of his cartoons in this narration.

As we were preparing to leave Strasbourg and go somewhere else, where we did not know, the Germans locked us up in an underground jailhouse in the Seigfried Line. It had bars and everything just like a real jail. The next morning as we were preparing to leave this place the Germans lined us up and a German one-armed Corporal stood out in front of us and bawled us out for looking so ragged. Major Hansen told Ed Beattie to tell the German to shut up and address us as officers in the US Army. We were beginning to look rather ragged. We ate out of a tin can that was hanging on a button on our shirt and we had no silverware at all. Ed Beattie told Major Hansen he had better not say that to the German Corporal, but Major Hansen told him to tell the German anyway. Ed Beattie then told the German what Major Hansen said and the German just shut up and walked off. We all learned as time went on that you do not have to take any lip from them. You just stand your ground and they will back off.

We were then taken to the railroad station and loaded onto boxcars for a ride to somewhere. The Indian soldiers were put in the same boxcars as we were because the Germans thought we did not get along with people of dark skin and they would teach us a lesson. Frankly, we all liked the Indian soldiers and we got along fine. The train stopped once and the Indian soldiers jumped off and went into a rutabaga patch and got some rutabagas and shared them with us. We were on the way to a place called Limburg, but we didn't know it. Limburg was a real bad place. It was several one story buildings placed in the freight yards and subject to air raids by both the English and American Air Corps. It was not a regular prison camp but was a way station that was used as a holding pen for prisoners on their way to a POW camp.

At Limburg-October 1944

Limburg was filthy place. We were beginning to get real hungry and the food was almost non-existent. What there was was hardly fit to eat. The weather was beginning to turn bad and it was snowing every day or so. We began to get lice and a lot of the men were wounded and had no medical care at all. It began to turn cold and we had no clothing for cold weather. We just wrapped up in anything we could find and tried to stay warm.

When we first arrived at Limburg, we were lined up and counted and searched. All our belongings were placed in a pile in front of us and a German Capt. found some papers that looked to him like some kind of codes. He wanted to know who they belonged to and we all just stared at him. He became furious and threatened us with some dire consequences if we didn't tell who they belonged to and what they were. Major Hansen they told the Berman that he would have the man that they belonged to if he would shut up and listen and believe the man. The German agreed to this and Major Hansen said, "the man that they belong to should now step forward". The papers were mine and they were the papers that a friend of mine and I were playing a game of battleship on. I stepped forward and said I was keeping the papers for toilet paper because the Germans didn't give us anything to use for toilet paper. The German looked a little sheepish and shut up.

About that time, a German airplane flew over and the German called everybody to attention. The Germans all came to attention but we didn't. The German was mad again. He told us that anytime a German airplane flew over all ground troops came to attention. We told him we didn't do that in the US Army and we were still in the US Army.

Normally the food ration would be a slice of bread in the morning and a boiled potato later that day. The potato would be about the size of a hen egg. Every once in a while they would bring in something called beet butter that looked like some kind of jam. It was wrapped in paper and as we would unwrap it, bugs would start crawling out of it. We would eat it anyway and if you were lucky, you would get to eat the paper.

While we were at Limburg, the US Army made an airborne attack on the Germans called the "Market Garden" attack and was written up in books and known as "One Bridge Too Far". A lot of Paratroopers were brought into our barracks, as a result of this attack. One paratrooper was a Sgt. and we became friends. One day he was showing me an escape map that was issued to all aircrews and paratroopers that would help them if they could escape. It was a silk map of Germany that showed all the roads and towns and was about 3' x 2' in size. He was showing me his map when we noticed a German Guard standing outside by the window. He took his map and folded it up and shoved it into his short real quickly. That night, about 2 or 3 in the morning, I felt something on my neck. As I opened my eyes, I could see a German SS Lt. standing beside me with a knife at my throat. He asked where the map was and I said "what map?" He seemed to be irritated at my response and asked me again and I answered him again the same way. He then made me get up and with the help with a couple of guards they stripped and searched me and naturally found nothing. He then left and made no more trouble.

The Germans had a policy of dressing one of their men up to look and act like an American and place him in an American barracks. He was known as a "ferret". The object was to listen to the conversations between the Americans and try to get intelligence information to pass on to the front line troops. I think they had a ferret in our barracks because nobody else remembered the incident I have just described.

The Limburg barracks were placed in a railroad yard and was subject to bombing raids by the American and British Air Forces. At night, you could hear the big bomber formations go over. The roar of the engines kept up for an hour or so as they went over. Naturally, the air raid sirens blew all night long. On Christmas eve, the bombers dropped bombs on the barracks and a direct hit was made on the officers barracks. It killed everybody in the barracks and the total dead was estimated to be around 100 men. The bombs also hit a boxcar in the freight yard and killed everybody in the boxcar. The raid was known as the "Christmas Eve Bombing".

The area where the Germans kept the rockets they fired at Britain was near us and we could see the rockets go over as they were on their way to England.

I became acquainted with several men and we were friends the rest of the time in prison that we were together. They were, John Goode, Harry Woods, R.C Sullivan, Rod Rodriegus, McCartney. We were what was known as

cubicle mates. We shared a common table and our bunks were clustered around each other so it was natural that we became friends. John Goode and I remained in contact until his death about 5 years ago and Harry Woods and I remained in contact until about 10 years ago.

We were interrogated at Limburg by the professionals. Some of our men were downright nasty to the Germans and they were placed in solitary confinement for a week or so. The German that interrogated me was a German Capt. spoke English very well. He asked me a few questions that I didn't answer and then showed me a book from Ft. Sill about the 105 mm cannons that we used. He tried to act superior and I told him he probably knew more about the guns than I did. He then asked me about the new American 50 ton tank and I assured him I knew nothing about it. There was a package of cigarettes on the table between us and I was invited to take one, which I did. Then I took another, then another, then another, and put them all in my pocket. He also had a bottle of wine that he invited me to have some but I refused. He acted like that offended him, but I still didn't take a glass of wine. After about an hour he dismissed me and I went back to my barracks.

Prison train trip to Oflag 64- Late November ,1944

When became time for us to be sent to Oflag 64 in Poland we didn't know where it was and absolutely nothing about it. We left our barracks and walked over to the trains in the railroad yard. There were bombholes everywhere and we walked in and out of them as we went. The German boxcars are quite a bit smaller than the American ones and we were stacked into one of them until there was no room to sit down, only room to stand up.

A wire fence was placed across the inside of the boxcar that would fence off about 1/3 of the car and we were placed in this small space. The remainder of the car was occupied by several guards that were to remain there for the entire trip. Bathroom facilities was a 5 gallon can placed in the corner of our space. There was a Lt. that was badly wounded trying to cross the Moselle river and he was placed on the floor beside the 5 gallon can. He spent the entire trip in that place. You can imagine about 30 men cooped up in a place that and having to go to the bathroom! The can ran over very soon and it was a real mess.

There was only enough room for everybody to stand up so nobody could sit down or lie down unless we made some plans. We decided to have 1/3 of the men lie down for 8 hours and the rest would stand up. Then the first 1/3 would stand up, and the next 1/3 would lie down. And so on, so that everybody would stand up for 16 hours then lie down for 8 hours. Even lying down it was a problem. We would have to interlock our legs with the man lying opposite you because of the lack of room.

There was no provision made for any food or any heat so we went the whole trip without anything to eat. Lt. Roderigues had a soda cracker and on Thanksgiving Day he broke the cracker into 6 pieces and shared it with all his cubicle mates. I will always remember him for that. We spent about 7 days on the trip and it was very trying for everybody. To stand up for 7 days in the dark and be so crowded you don't know who is standing beside you can be very mind boggling. Then to have nothing to eat also preys on your mind. I think the train rides are the thing that most men that were POWs remember the most.

I don't remember making any stops to let us get out of the boxcar, but I assume that we did. I do remember stopping in Berlin and getting out and finding rotten potatoes all along the ROW of the railroad. There were some German workers along the railroad tracks and one of them said he was a POW in England in WWI and he knew just how we felt, and that we were welcome to anything we found along the tracks to eat. We did see a strange looking airplane go overhead and we finally decided it was a jet plane in the German Air Force. Berlin was a real mess as we went through. The bombers had just about destroyed everything.

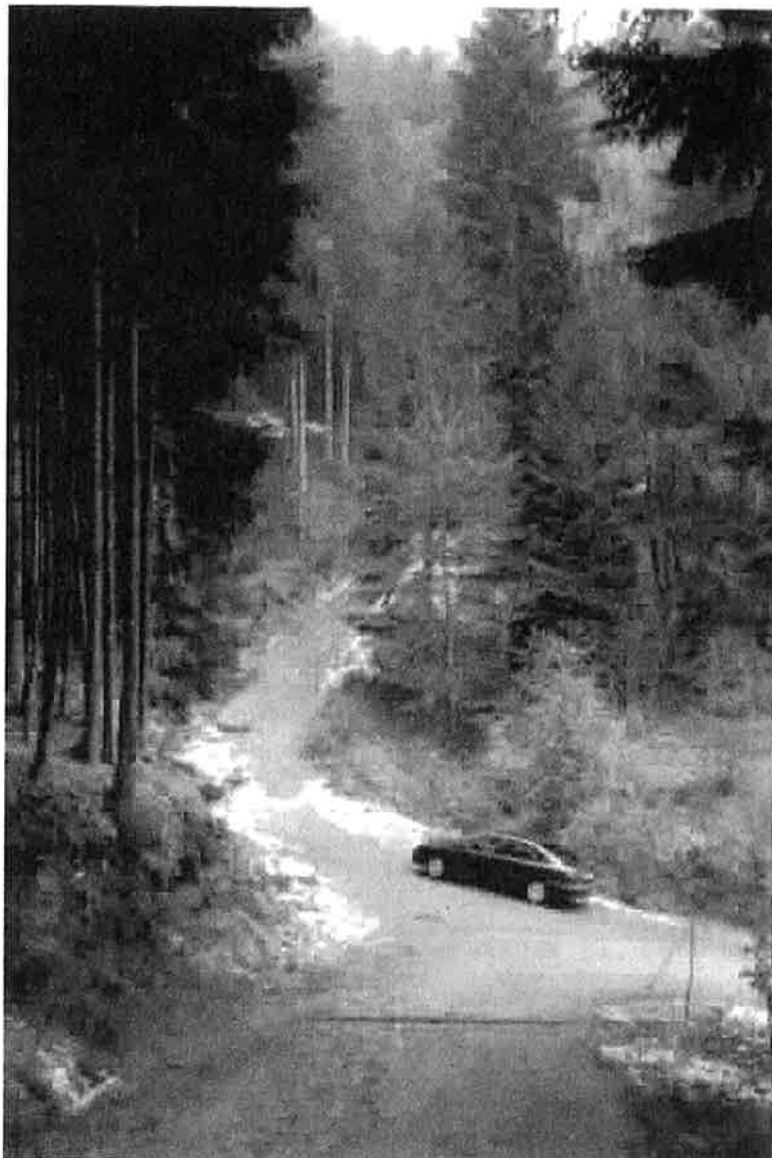
The next stop I remember was a town named Posa, Poland. It was a large city and had a lot of buildings along the railroad in town. It was night when we stopped and we saw steam coming from some cooking vessels along

the siding. The vessels were attended by German women and they thought we were German soldiers on the way to the Russian Front and came to the cars where we were and brought some hot food. We thought we were in for a real treat until the women found out who we were and took the food back where it came from. Naturally, we were very disappointed.

Each day and each night was exactly like the one before it. Nothing to do nothing to eat absolutely boredom and standing up all day was very exhausting. The snow along the right of ways began to get deep and the temperature was dropping fast. We were also beginning to get real cold and frost bitten hands and feet was becoming very common.

The next stop that I remember and it also was the last stop. It was at Schubin, Poland the town where Oflag 64 is located. The boxcar doors were opened and we jumped out into knee deep snow. We had been cramped so long that we could not stand up and most could not walk. We just fell in the snow and lay down as long as we could. We were then roused by Germans with rifles and we staggered to our feet and helped each other to stand and walk. We then walked the mile or so into the town and into the camp known as Oflag 64.

INTO THE ABYSS



We were wandering around on top of this mountain when we jumped down from the hill onto the road on the photo. When we were about 150 ft. up the logging road, we saw the German at the crossroad in the foreground. I pulled a gun on him, when I noticed more Germans coming into play from the woods in the foreground. I didn't think 4 men with a radio could take on 10 Germans with automatic weapons, so we surrendered rather than be massacred!

This is part of a report made by the HQ 132nd FA Bn. and is known as an "After Action Report". All combat units make a report after a battle explaining what happened, etc. This is a part of the report of Sept 1944. The after action report of the 36th Division is on file at the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas and this report is part of the main report at the Alamo.

BATTERY "B"

MISSING IN ACTION

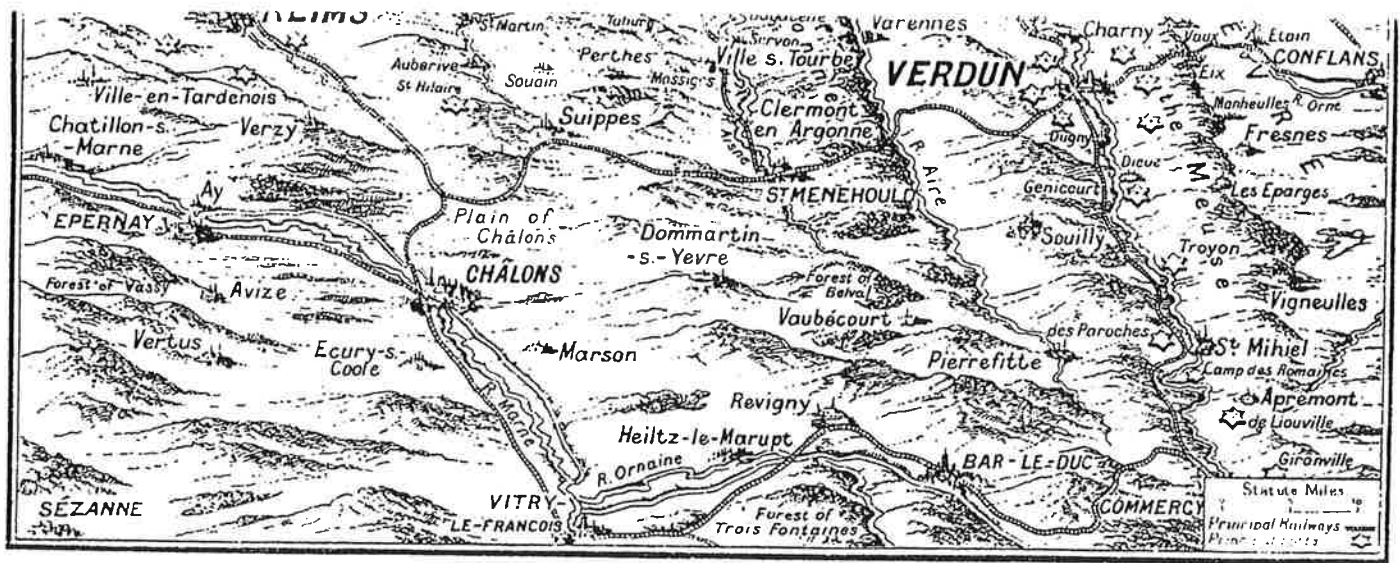
ROBERT A. THOMPSON

ROBERT A. THOMPSON, ASN O-1179720, 1st Lt., Battery "B", 132nd Field Artillery Battalion, missing in action, since Friday 22 September 1944, last reported in position at coordinates: 17.5 - 42.9, sheet 15-H, 1:1pp,000 map, France.

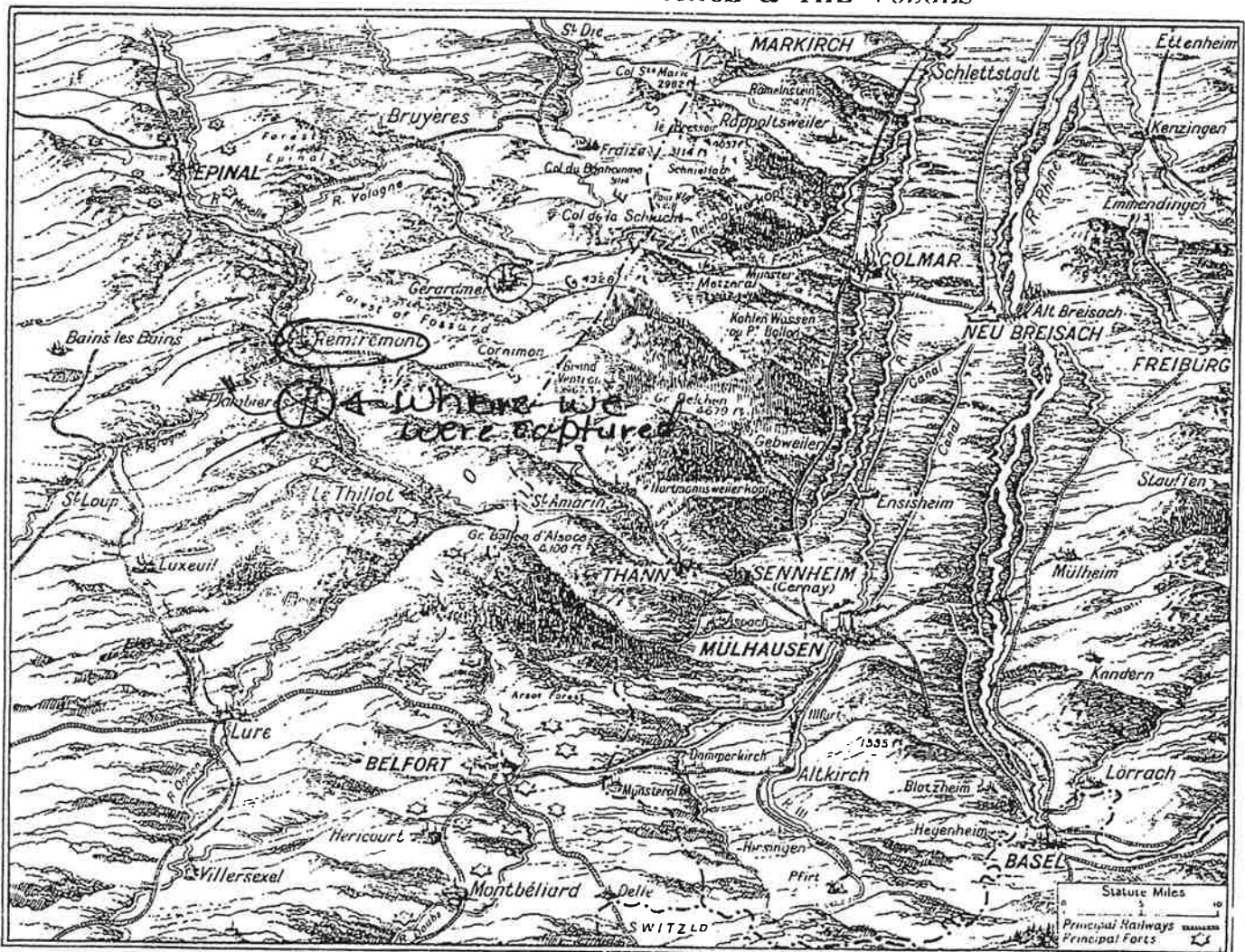
1st Lt. Robert A. Thompson, artillery forward observer, from Battery "B" and Tec 4 James O. Painter, ASN 20814965, Private Rafael De La Rosa, ASN 38052428, and Private Robert C. Hetherington, ASN 35487798, were last heard from when Lt. Thompson reported his position as being at coordinates: 17.5 - 42.9. This was about 1500 hours and at that time the party was approximately a thousand yards from the infantry. When the 2nd Battalion was in the process of securing the high ground in that area Lt. Thompson and his party were accompanying "G" Company, 2nd Battalion, 142nd Infantry Regiment. It is believed that in trying to locate a suitable observation point the party wandered away too far to the Northeast and was surrounded. Later on, when our infantry occupied the position from which Lt. Thompson last reported they found no traces of the lost artillery party. Saturday 23rd the 1st Battalion, 142nd Infantry took a German captive who claimed his outfit had taken an artillery observer and three men the day before.

1st Lt. Thompson was 23 years of age. Born 29 November 1921. He was commissioned 2nd Lt. 11 May 1943 and 1st Lt. 30 September 1944.

Next of Kin: Mr. W. A. Thompson, (Father) General Delivery, Stigler, Oklahoma.



THE WESTERN FRONT: ALSACE & THE VOSGES



Kriegsgefangenenlager

Datum:

OCT 8 1944

DEAR DAD & MOM

I HAVE BEEN CAPTURED
BUT AM NOT WOUNDED OR HURT
IN ANY WAY. EVERYTHING WILL
BE OKAY SO DON'T WORRY ANY
MORE THAN I AM.

BOB

MIT LUFTPOST
Kriegsgefangenenpost
Luftpost
Postkarte

An:
De W. H. ...

Geheimhaltend

Abgeben:
Vor- und Zuname:
Robert, Thomas ...

Geheimhaltend

Lager-Bezeichnung:
Kriegsgefangenenlager 64

Deutschland (Ruhrgebiet)

11877



Ed Beattie was a Correspondent for the United Press and was taken POW about the same time as I was. We were on the train from Strasbourg to Limburg and he was a tour guide for me. He had spent a lot of time in Europe before the war and was familiar with everything. On the train from Strasbourg we stood and looked out the hole in the wall and he explained to me what we were looking at as we traveled along the Rhine River. The hole in the wall was great for awhile. In the boxcar the only sanitary facilities we had was our helmets. We went to the bathroom in the helmets and then threw it out the window covered with barbed wire. After a day or so of that, nobody wanted to get up close enough to the window to look out! Ed Beattie gave me his business card and asked me to check when I got home and see if he got home OK. He had said a lot of nasty things about Hitler and he was concerned for his welfare. I did check when I got home and he made it OK. He wrote a book named "Diary of a Kriegie". It was not a best seller but it did describe POW life very well!

CHAPTER 8-OFLAG 64- SCHUBIN, POLAND

At Oflag 64- Dec, 1944 and Jan 1945

The population of Oflag 64 was increasing rapidly since the invasion at Normandy and the invasion of Southern France. There was plenty of room for everybody but food began to be very critical. The temperature now was beginning to drop rapidly. We were very far north in fact we were on a latitude that was similar to 500 miles north of New York, which would put it way up into Canada.

The barracks were single story and could hold about 200 men. Coal for heat was rationed to 8 bricks per building per day. A brick is about the size of a brick at home. With the temperature beginning to drop to around zero or below the buildings were like an ice house. There was no way to get warm except by staying in bed all day and covering up with anything you could find. We saw our first Red Cross food parcel. It contained about 10 lbs. of food and was very welcome. We would get ½ parcel per man per week, which was very welcome.

Oflag 64 was operated with very strict discipline by Col. Paul Goode and Lt. Col. John Waters. They were both West Point Officers and were both excellent combat officers. There were other senior officers but Col Goode and LTC Waters were closer to us than the others and also lasted longer in our group. They were both greatly admired by all of us.

One of the men at Oflag 64 made a radio that was tuned into the BBC and each night the men at HQ would listen to the BBC and get the up to date news about the war. There would then be a man that would come to each barracks and pass the news along about the progress of the war. They called the radio the "bird" and hid it in a window sill in the main bldg. of the camp.

There are a lot of good books that have been written about this camp. I will not go into great detail about the camp except something that concerned me or something unusual that wouldn't be in one of the books.

We attended "appelle" twice each day. This is the time when we were counted by the Germans. It would take a long time to do this and with the temperature down around zero it became difficult. There were about 1500 of us by this time and the counting took about 30 to 40 minutes. We would put on all the clothing we had and then stomp our feet on the ground the whole time to keep our feet from freezing.

There was a library in the camp that contained about 3 or 4 thousand books. These books had been supplied by the YMCA. R. C. Sullivan, one of our cubicle mates loved to read cowboy books and would check out about 3 or 4 books at a time and come over to our area and sit and read a book without ever getting up. He would then read another book and another until he had read all his books and go get some more. He did this the whole time we were at Oflag 64.

The men at Oflag 64 put on plays, had orchestra concerts, had choral clubs, etc. The YMCA furnished all the instruments. A man by the name of Henry Sodeberg, from Sweden, came to the camp on occasion and asked what the men wanted. He brought a phonograph into the camp and recorded some of the orchestra pieces, some of the singing, and some of the messages to their homes by some of the men.

The camp was originally occupied by the British and in June 1943 the Americans began to arrive. A lot of the original men were from the tank battles in North Africa and the battle for Sicily. A lot of the men were from the paratroopers and the rangers that had been taken POW in some of the bitter battles in Italy. The invasion of Italy brought a big influx into the camp. Most of the POWs were from the 45th (Oklahoma) Division, the 36th (Texas)

Division and the 3rd (Regular Army) Division. The battle for Italy started in Sept. 1943 and 8 months later in May, 1945 the battle for Italy was still going on. LTC Waters was the commander of an Armored Infantry Bn. in Africa and Col. Goode was the commander of one of the regiments that landed in Normandy. His regiment landed the day after D-Day and he refused to send his men into a situation that was almost suicidal. He told the General he would send the men in only if he went with them. He sent them in and went with them and was taken prisoner.

When our group first arrived at Oflag 64 we were given a shower and our clothes were put into a real hot steam bath that would kill all the lice. That was a real relief to get rid of the lice. There was a barber and we all got a haircut.

When we first arrived, we were put into quarantine until we could be identified as being Americans and not some ferrets. Until somebody could positively identify you, you were separated from everybody in the camp and were not allowed to associate with anybody. We slept in a separate building and did not eat with anybody else. One day after I had been there several days, I was told to go to HQ and wait until somebody told me what to do. I went to the HQ bldg. and sat down at a table and waited. After a few minutes, Major Hansen came into the room and recognized me and I was cleared to be assigned to regular barracks.

A system of values of various products was established and published and was abided by in all transactions in the camp. For instance, a package of cigarettes was worth a certain number of points. A can of spam was worth a certain number of points, etc. These values were abided by and were used in trading among the prisoners. There was an abundance of cigarettes so cigarettes had no value as far as trading was concerned.

At night, I could hear loud muffled explosions in the camp. It was caused by the Germans drilling holes in the ground and setting off explosives to collapse tunnels that may have been dug by the prisoners. There was some tunnel digging, but I was never involved in it because it was done by the older prisoners. The newer prisoners, like me, never thought much about escaping because we did not know where we were and if we got loose we would not know where to go. We could not speak any of the languages in the area and would have had a lot of trouble trying to communicate anybody.

The only meal I remember was the Christmas dinner in the HQ bldg. The officers in charge of the camp managed to save a little bit of food each day for several weeks until they had enough to have a dinner on Christmas Day. We would go to the main dining room by barracks and eat our dinner. I think it consisted of a bowl of potato soup, a slice of bread and a small amount of jelly. There were several men that formed a glee club and they sang Christmas Carols. I think that was the only time that I ever really got homesick.

One day Col. Goode called us all in to a bldg. known as the theatre and told us that some Englishmen had escaped, been caught and were executed. He also said that from now on the only escapes allowed would be approved by an escape committee formed by several of the senior officers. He also cautioned us that we were in a very bad situation. The German Gestapo had assumed control of the POW camps and were not very happy about all the prisoners in Germany.

In the end of our barracks there was a room that was used for cooking and washing clothing, etc. I think it was called the smoke hole because of all the smoke in the room from the cooking. Each or group of men started a little fire and cooked their food over the little fire. Naturally, the fires made a lot of smoke. I was beginning to come down with the malaria again and I constantly had a severe headache. I could relieve the headache a little by wrapping a towel around the chimney that was used by our stove in the barracks. The allowance for fuel was 8 brickettes per day per barracks, which amounted to almost nothing. Our barracks commander (a Lt. Col.) put out the order that no man was allowed to get within 10 feet of the stove and pause for more than 1 minute. This was

to prevent somebody from crowding around the stove and keeping all the warmth from going out into the room. One day I was standing at the stove with the towel wrapped around the chimney and the Lt. Col. told me to move. My friends walked up to the Lt. Col. and told him to back off and leave me alone. The Lt. Col. got a little irritated and they repeated for him to back off or they would make him back off. I learned here that respect is not given it is earned. We had no respect for this Lt. Col. and he had not earned it. That wasn't the last time that we had a run in with this Lt. Col.

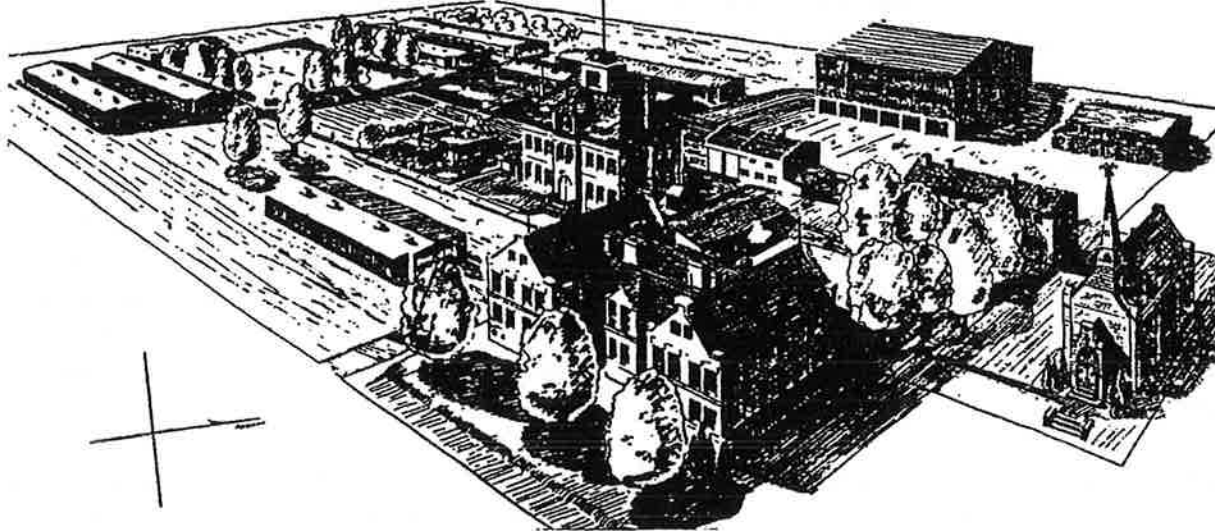
I arrived at Oflag 64 about the first of December, 1944 and we left on Jan 21, 1945. The 2 months I was there was complete boredom. I felt bad most of the time and had no desire to read anything. There was a bldg. known as the theater that was as a place to have stage plays. I never went to one of them, but the men that did go said they were very good. There were some men in our group that were from NY, and had been in the entertainment business before the war. They were able to arrange the plays and stage rehearsals and otherwise did an excellent job of putting on the plays.

Oflag 64 as a prison was not really a bad place. We were kept clean and had a good ration of food as long as the Red Cross Parcels held out. I think we were given ½ of a parcel once a week to supplement our diet and we got along fairly well on this.

We were allowed to send a letter home about once a month and a post card about once a week. Everybody took advantage of this privilege and wrote each time they had the chance. My mother saved all the letters I wrote home and I still have them. Some of them I will put in this story but there are too many of them to put all of them in the story. Most of the men that had been there a long time had received letters and parcels from home, but the newcomers like me never heard from home all the time we were in prison. I knew that my mother was just about out of her mind by losing three of her sons and I tried to use mental telepathy to contact her. It never worked, but I did try several times.

A lot of books and diaries have been published about the POW Camps in Europe and the Far East, so I will not try to get into any more detail about life in the camp. It was boring, cold, hungry, lonesome, etc.

**OFLAG-64 A GERMAN POW CAMP FOR AMERICAN GROUND FORCE OFFICERS
SCHUBIN, POLAND JUNE 1943 to JANUARY 1945**



Artist's drawing of Oflag 64 without barbed wire, towers and guards.
drawn by Jim Bickers

This drawing was by a man named Jim Bickers, who drew it while in prison there. He gave it to a man named Col. Drake who was repatriated and brought the picture home. The picture has been used by all the editors of the Post Oflag 64 Item, for all these 60 odd years the item has been published.

The building in the foreground is the White House and was used as HQ for the camp. It was also the barracks for the senior officers and the officers who were on the staff of the camp.

The other large building that is on the far corner of the White House is the Hospital. There were quite a few doctors in the camp. They were in parachute, infantry or armored units and were captured on days when their unit was surrounded. The medicine and equipment was very short, but they did the best they could.

The single story buildings to the left of the White House were barracks. The barracks would generally hold about 200 men.

The "Appelle" area where we would line up to counted is in front of the hospital. We would be counted twice a day and in the winter it was miserable, due to the below zero weather.

The camp started out with about 100 men in June, 1943, and by Jan 1945 there were about 1700 men. The big increase came after the Normandy Invasion and some of the big battles in Italy.

SENIOR OFFICERS AT OFLAG 64



Col. Goode was the senior officer at Oflag 64. This is a photo of Col. Goode after the war. He died in 1952 from a heart attack at Washington D.C. Col Goode was the Regt. commander of the 3rd Infantry Regiment to land on Omaha Beach. He refused to send his men into a suicide mission unless he went with them, The General said "do what you think you must do". Col Goode went with them and the result was a disaster.



This is a picture of LTC Waters. He retired from the Army as a 4-star General. He was respected by all the men that served under him and he never forgot the men he served with in prison in Poland and Germany.

400

10



Nov 12, 1944

DEAR DAD AND MOM,

EVERYTHING IS STILL FINE.

I'M IN THE BEST OF HEALTH AND
CAN'T COMPLAIN ABOUT ANYTHING.

IT GETS A LITTLE TIRESOME DOING
NOTHING BUT I'VE DONE NOTHING
FOR 2 MONTHS NOW SO I CAN
HOLD OUT FOR AWHILE LONGER
ANYWAY.

TELLING YOU NOT TO WORRY
IS A RATHER FOOLISH THING TO
SAY I KNOW, BUT I CAN TELL
YOU TRUTHFULLY THAT YOU HAVE
ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO WORRY
OVER.

NATURALLY, I CAN'T SAY MUCH

BUT THE LEAST I CAN SAY IS THAT
I'M O.K. AND I SINCERELY HOPE
YOU ARE THE SAME.

I-S ever

J. L.

Kriegsgefangenenlager

Datum: Nov 24, 1944

DEAR MOM & DAD

WISHING YOU A MERRY XMAS
AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

BOB

Kriegsgefangenenlager

Datum: DEC 6, 1944

DEAR DAD & MOM,

I AM WELL AND HAPPY. SEND CIGARS,
CIGARETTES AND FOOD. DON'T SEND CLO-
THING. MET ANNA LEE WEBB'S HUSBAND,
SHE CAN TELL YOU WHAT TO SEND. WRITE
AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. AM GETTING ANXIOUS
TO HEAR FROM YOU. BOB

Nov 12, 1944

DEAR DAD AND MOM,

EVERYTHING IS STILL FINE.

I'M IN THE BEST OF HEALTH AND
CAN'T COMPLAIN ABOUT ANYTHING.

IT GETS A LITTLE TIRESOME DOING
NOTHING BUT I'VE DONE NOTHING
FOR 2 MONTHS NOW SO I CAN
HOLD OUT FOR AWHILE LONGER
ANYWAY.

TELLING YOU NOT TO WORRY
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ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO WORRY
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NATURALLY, I CAN'T SAY MUCH

BUT THE LEAST I CAN SAY IS THAT
I'M O.K. AND I SINCERELY HOPE
YOU ARE THE SAME.

I's ever

J. L.

CHAPTER 9- EVACUATING OFLAG 64

The long, cold march- Jan, Feb & March, 1945

During the time of this march, I and others would write down things that seemed to be important to us at the time. At Mooseburg, after we were liberated for the last time, a lot of us sat down and started comparing notes and filling in our diaries. I kept the notes I had and brought them home with me.

I am using my notes as to the dates and the names of the towns and some of the things that happened. I am taking from my notes. A lot of the things I recall were better described by others and I am using some of their notes to better explain what happened on some days.

The long, cold, march was the most memorable experience for all of us. We all remember it with a lot of bad memories.

Jan 21, 1945 - Begin 355 mile march

On a Sunday morning Jan 21, 1945 word was received that we would be leaving the camp and everybody was to gather all their personal belongings and make ready to leave. Our barracks was the new men and so we did not get word until the last minute. I think the other barracks knew we were leaving the day before and had been getting ready. The older men had more personal items than we did and so we did not require much time to get ready.

When we left Oflag 64 we had 1282 O's and 109 EM. This 1282 men were split into three groups as times passed. About 300 escaped and made their way home through Russia, about 400 were transferred in bunches to Luckenwald (south of Berlin and the remaining 450 went all the way to Hammelburg and eventually to Nurenburg and Mooseburg.

The weather was atrocious. The temperature was about 10 degrees below zero and there was about a foot of snow on the ground. The new men did not have winter clothing so we started grabbing anything we could get our hands on. I knew my feet would be a real problem so, I ran through the other barracks looking for some big shoes to wear and that I could put on several pairs of socks to make them fit. I was able to find a pair of big ones and several pairs of socks. I also found some wool pants and a wool shirt and a sweater and some extra socks. Everybody had on all the clothes they could find and we all looked like a bunch of monsters. Some of the men had suitcases built out of tin cans to carry things in, but the new ones had to wrap their belongings in a pillow case and throw it over their shoulders.

We were divided up into platoons of about 50 men in each platoon. I was in platoon 22 and our leader was Lt. Col. Lockett. He was the man in our barracks that nobody had any respect for. We were known as Lockett's rockets.

Our platoon was the last platoon to leave the front gate and the Germans were handing out a loaf of bread to each man as they left the front gate. As we were the last platoon, when we arrived at the gate there was no more bread so we missed the bread ration.

This march lasted about 6 weeks and was extremely difficult for everybody. We walked 355 miles in atrocious weather. Almost everybody kept a diary including me and I will put my diary in this story. My diary is limited, but some of the men kept very detailed diaries and were able to get home with them.

I will put parts of some diaries in this story but will not try to put anybody's complete diary, because of the length of them. I will also not try to explain each and every day of the march, because it would take too long and too many details are fuzzy.

The first day was very cold. When we left the camp, it was about 20 degrees below zero. Later day German official records bear out this temperature. There was a long column of refugees on the road and we shared the road with them. They were mostly old men, women, and children. They were mostly Germans trying to keep ahead of the Russians. They knew the Russians would have no pity on them as the Germans had no pity on the Russians when they came through Poland in 1939. Most of the people were on wagons pulled by horses and loaded down with personal and household belongings. Most of us felt especially sorry for the children, because they did not know what was going on. They were all bundled up and motionless.

We would trade what we had with the refugees for something that they had that we could use. Mostly the bartering was for bread from them and soap and cigarettes from us. I think we all felt sorry for each other. Sometimes we even felt sorry for the guards that were with us. They were older men than us and could not take the punishment that we could.

The first day we walked about 15 miles. At one time, we could hear machine gun fire between the Germans and the Russians. We knew the Russians were close but we did not know what direction nor how far. I think our leaders were tempted to overpower the guards and make a break for the Russian lines. Even if we had taken control from the Germans, the task of getting to the Russians and talking to them before they shot you was a real problem. Everybody is a little goosey in the front lines and they are tempted to shoot first and ask questions later. Anyway, the attempt wasn't made and we kept walking.

The roads were covered with ice and snow and walking was very difficult. One time a wagon slid off the road and the one of the horses was killed. The people that were on the wagon were gathered around the horses with big knives carving up the carcass for something to eat.

Our senior officer was Col Goode. He was middle aged man, about 55, and was sick. He had a set of Scottish bagpipes and was fascinated by them to the extent that he carried them all during the whole march. He even saved them and brought them home to the USA after the war was over. He was a big man from the waist up and how he made this march was a mystery to all the rest of us. Our next in command was Lt. Col. John Waters. He was the one that lined us up each morning and got us started on the days march. He was a very remarkable man.

He seemed to be not bothered by the difficult conditions he set an example for all rest of us. LTC Waters was a West Point graduate and was a good friend of my older brother Paul. They were instructors at West Point at the same time and played on the US Army polo team together. I didn't know at this time that were friends, but found it out later in San Antonio at a reunion in about 1980.

At the end of a day we would get off the road and enter a farmyard of some civilian farmer. The houses and barns were very big and could accommodate a lot of men. When we left camp there were about 1500 of us. The Germans did not make any provisions for us to be fed and when we arrived at our destination, there was nothing to eat. We ate what we had on our persons for the first several days. If you didn't have anything to eat on your person, you just didn't eat. We were all getting used to not eating and for awhile it was not a great big problem. Our senior officers raised a big stink about not looking ahead for sleeping accommodations and eating, the Germans appointed a German Officer and an American officer and they were now the advance party for us .

The first night we stopped at an estate near the town of Exin. We immediately began looking for firewood. We found some and built a big fire and crowded around it pretty closely. The Germans would try to get in near the fire

to get warm and we would crowd up closer and keep them out. We did find a big farm wagon and pulled it up directly over the fire and burned it to the ground.

The loft of the barn was full of loose hay so we all bedded down for the night by burrowing down into the hay and going to sleep. There were so many of and we were so close to each other in the loft that we all stayed warm for the night and got a good nights sleep.

Jan 22, 1945 - On the march

The next morning when we began to wake up, I thought that I could bury myself down in the hay and the Germans would go off and leave me. After everybody was up and meandering around outside of the barn, I went back into the barn and began to bury myself in the loose hay. There was a problem. About a hundred or so men, had the same idea and had buried themselves in the hay. I crawled back out of the hay thinking that that many men would be missed and an execution might start. The Germans did miss the men, but the Russians were so close that they did not want to stay any longer looking for the missing men. So we left and began another day of walking. The men that buried themselves in the hay almost all returned home after working their way across Russia to Odessa on the Black Sea. Their stories of getting through Russia is another amazing story!

This day we walked 27km to Polanowo, (Eichfield), without anything to eat. As we crossed the Bomberg Canal, we heard Russian Machine Gun fire in the distance. That night I received two pieces of bread and some butter from a Polish girl that she gave me for 4 cigarettes.

We could tell that we were crossing the German front lines and beginning to enter their rear area. There were signs all over the place directing military traffic. One sign said "Nur fur Wehrmacht" meaning for the German Army only" As we crossed a small creek, I saw a young German soldier in a white camoufluge uniform manning a machine gun in the creek bed. He really looked pitiful. The chances of him coming out of this alive were pretty slim. The Russians were cruel to the Germans just as the German were cruel to the Russians.

The weather was turning colder. It is almost impossible to describe how cold it was. Being from the south of the USA , I had never experienced anything like this. I could see the air it was so cold. I felt like I could take a knife and cut a cube of air out of the sky in front of me. I talked to a man that was raised in Montana and he said I was exactly right. The air got so cold it froze the vapor in the air and you could actually see the air! We heard at the time that the temperature was 30 degrees below zero and after the war, we saw German Army data that also said the temperature was 30 degrees below zero. We had on so many clothes that we could hardly move. Our feet would sweat as we walked and our shoes would freeze solid. Everybody in our group had their feet frozen.

Water was a real problem. Carrying water in a canteen was impossible. It would freeze and break the container. Our only way of getting water was to fill a can with snow and pound it in tight with our fist and then pile some more snow in on top of that and pound it in. After doing this a few times we would melt the snow with a match and drink the melted snow. There would probably be two or three spoonfuls in the bottom of the can and it was filthy.

At one place we stayed was a huge estate owned by some people named Spee. They had big house and barns and were just wealthy. LTC Waters and Col. Goode made friends with the lady of the house and she prepared a huge vat of barley soup. There was a German ship that was scuttled at Montivideo, Uruguay, rather than be captured by the British Navy. The name of the ship was the "GRAF SPEE" and the people that owned the big house had the ship named after them.

Toilet paper was a big problem. We just had nothing! At this big house, I had to go and I used the book "The Robe" by Loyd Douglas as toilet paper. I would read as fast as I could and when I thought I had enough paper I

would stop and take care of the problem! Life as a prisoner of war is very primitive!

We continued walking the rest of that day and came to a town named Eichfields. We walked 17 to 18 miles this day. As we entered the town we were herded into barns for the night. These barns were usually big buildings and could accommodate a lot of men. We slept in the loft, in the mangers and in the pig stalls or anywhere else we could find a place to lie down. We would crowd around the animals to get warm. A cow was great. You could hug her up and get real warm. We hugged horses, cows and anything else that would stand still.

Jan 22, 1945- Eichfields- We are free- temporarily

About daylight on the 22 of Jan, somebody crawled up into the hayloft where I was and poked me and said " don't make a sound, but listen to me! The Germans have taken off and we are free". Start waking everybody up and tell them, what I told you. I did what he asked and then crawled down out of the hayloft and looked around and everybody (the Americans) were doing the same thing! We really were free! I walked over to the fence along the sidewalk and a Polish woman and some children had brought some cookies and cakes and gave them to me. I then started wondering what I should do. There were several options. 1. Get a Polish family to hide me. 2. Go hide somewhere. 3. Take off across country. 4. Do nothing. I rolled up my blanket and walked over to the fence at the back of the barnyard and looked out across the frozen landscape and started off across the countryside. I went about a ½ mile and then begin to wonder what I would do if a Russian Patrol saw me. I couldn't speak Russian, German, French or Polish. I looked behind me and saw my footprints in the snow and thought " How easy it would be to follow me through the snow". I then turned around and came back to the barnyard. The rest of the men had built a bonfire and the Polish farmer that lived in the house where we were, had killed a hog and he hung it up on a tripod and was beginning to slaughter it to give us something to eat. I was still wondering how I could get away when Harry Woods, from Hotchkiss, CO, came up to me and asked what I was going to do and I told him what I had already done and backed out and that I didn't know what to do. A little later I found a beet cellar (very similar to our storm cellars) and went down into the cellar. It was full of potatoes and beets and turnips. So, I decide to hide in the cellar. At least, I would have something to eat for a few days if I got away with it. I went down into the cellar and waited until I thought it might be safe to come out. After an hour or so, I heard a lot of talking outside and opened the door to see who it was. It was the Germans- they had come back. It wasn't our old guard company, but a company of SS troops from Latvia! They began to round everybody up and one of them walked over to the back fence of the barnyard and saw footprints leading right up to a shock of straw out in the snow field. He walked over to the shock of straw and filled it full of machine gun bullets. I don't know who was in the straw, but he didn't live long after the bullets started. He was one of the men that never came home and his family never knew what happened to him! I heard later that that there was a lot of shooting went on in the Polish town and quite a few Americans died in the gunfire.

The time when we were waiting for something to happen, I began to wonder...there are 3 million Germans down the road about 2 miles that way and 5 million Russians down the road that way and they are trying to kill each other and I am right in the middle of them..... **How in the world did I get into a mess like this?**

We were all put in trucks and taken to the HQ of a German combat unit that was down the road a mile or so. We were fed and the rest of the day was uneventful.

The remainder of the long march was just one day after another of cold, hunger and exhaustion. We would walk all day long and go into a barn at night. Maybe we would eat and maybe we would not. Occasionally, something would happen that everybody would remember for years after. One day, in the woods along the road there was a man that had frozen to death that was laying beside the road. He was dressed in a Polish Army uniform and he had his hand in the air as if he were asking for somebody to help him.

At another barnyard, there was a Russian soldier that had been helped along the road by somebody in our group. He was brought along with us into the barnyard and our senior officers were going to try to help him. They took him inside a barn and called for our medics. The Germans came over and said to throw the Russian out side and leave him. Our officers had no choice but to do what the Germans said and he was taken outside where that night he froze to death. The place he was laying was what was know as the "schiezzen area". Scheizzen is the German word for BM. I looked at him and thought " what a terrible way to die". He had a family somewhere back in Russia and I guess, it was better that they didn't know how and where died.

After a day or so, we came into a town that was very friendly to Americans. As we walked through the town a woman signaled for me to follow her and she took off running down a side street. I went after her and a couple more men followed me. A German guard also took after all of us. We ran about four houses and ran into her house where she had a big cake on a coffee table. We cleaned off the table in record time and went back out side to the column with the German guard cussing up a blue streak! On the way back to the column, another woman gave me a big chunk of liverwurst. It was about the size of a loaf of bread. Another of our men had obtained a big loaf of bread, so with the bread, liverwurst and cake we had had a real feast!

On one of the days, as we were coming into a little town, I noticed some steam coming from a big vat near the road. I looked closer and discovered that some men were scalding a hog and were using boiling hot water. I left the column and ran to the vat of hot water and dipped me a cupful of water. I then stirred some powdered coffee in it and had a cup of hot coffee! I still remember that it tasted like pork sausage!

About the second day of the march, the temperature must have dropped quite a bit, because everything was frozen solid and not a sound was heard. Generally, you can hear a dog bark or a leaf rattle, but on this day, there was absolute silence. Several of our men have remarked about this day and their impression of it.

On about the third or fourth day as we were walking one of our men started yelling and left the column and went out into the field beside the road. The German guard in front of me raised his rifle to shoot the man and I reached up and took his rifle by the barrel and pointed it to the ground. The German guard looked at me and didn't say a word, but did leave his rifle pointing at the ground, Several of our men then went out into the field and brought our man back into the column. The man had lost his composure and started to go a little crazy. I don't know who he was or what ever happened to him.

Jan 27, 1945- on the march

In the town of Jastrow, the Poles turned out in masse to watch us come through town. We were quite a novelty in Poland. They had never seen any Americans and we were a real attraction. There were a lot of Russian, British and French prisoners in the town and they stood aside as we passed through. As we passed a bunch of Russians one of them asked me for some cigarettes and I reached in my pocket and handed him some. The German guard beside me saw it happen, and he hit the Russian in the mouth with the butt of his rifle. The Russians face was covered with blood in a matter of seconds.

This streets and sidewalks in this town were very narrow. The sidewalk was the only space between the street and the houses. At one house, the woman that lived there opened her front door and hollered something and a few of us ran into her house. She had a big vat of hot oatmeal and a barrel of apples and started handing this out to us. One of the guards noticed what was happening and started to run onto the house and the woman slammed the door in his face.

At one town, we stopped at a camp that was used by the Polish Army before the war. There lots of single story barracks and each one of the squad rooms had a small stove. We built a fire in the stove and started looking

around for something to eat. We found some potatoes and began to cook them by placing them on the radiator fins of the small stove. Our platoon leader came in late and started to take somebody's potatoes off the stove to make room for his and a Lt. spoke up and said " Col. If you touch my potatoes, I'll break your arm". The Col. removed his arm and walked off. I decided then that you cannot be given respect, you must earn it. That Col. was our leader and we had no respect for him. The next day as we left, I found a barrel of pickles and I ate pickles for the next few days.

Harry Woods and I generally slept near each other. In the morning, our shoes would be frozen solid and we would have to put the shoes in the sack with us to try to thaw them out. We finally decided that we should pool our resources and make a bedroll out of our two blankets. We each had a German army blanket. It was blue and was not as big as our American Army blanket but we made do with them. Anyway, we sewed our two blankets together with binder twine and made a sack out of them. We would then put our shoes in the sack with us when we went to bed at night to keep them from freezing.

On the end of one of our walking days we were out in an open field and nothing was in sight. We were lost. The Germans didn't know where we were supposed to go and didn't know how to get there if they did know. It was growing dark and our situation was getting very critical. If we had been stranded outside all night, probably most of us would have frozen to death. They sent a recon. party of several Germans and a couple of American Field Officers on up ahead . This recon party made arrangements in the next town for sleeping accommodations and something for us to eat, so we pulled out of that mess. After this episode , each day a recon party was sent ahead to make arrangements for sleeping and eating. This party always included some Americans.

Sleeping arrangements were very miserable. In a hay loft there was not always hay in the loft, and we slept on the wooden floor of the loft. The lofts were generally very big and could accommodate several hundred men. We would lie down on the floor shoulder to shoulder and foot to head which means there was not any empty floor space left. If you were on one end of the loft and had to go relieve your self at night, you would have to walk over everybody between you and the ladder to the ground. Also, if you were anywhere near the ladder you would be walked on all night.

As time passes on the march, men would get sick or their shoes were such that they could not walk any longer and would be sent to another camp somewhere in Germany. Their transportation would be in an open steel freight car. Riding in these open cars was worse than walking. At least, we could build a fire and get warm, but in the steel cars, you could not. Men were sent on ahead several times and probably several hundred ,men were sent this way. There were also probably several hundred men escaped or somehow or another got loose and headed east toward Russia. How many of them made it home through Russia ,I don't think anybody really knows. One of our men made an attempt to account for everybody and I think he came very close to getting an accurate account.

Feb 12, 1945- On the march

Our route was east for awhile, then north, then east ,then north, then northeast, etc. We were trying to keep away from the Russians and as the Russian Army would advance we would veer away from where they were heading. We eventually ended up at a German Naval Base on the Baltic Sea near the town of Scheinmunde. This was at the Oder River Estuary. We were put up in the attic of a single story building. The heating ducts were in the attic and the attic was very warm. I began to thaw out and as I did my stomach began to cramp and I had severe stomach pains. We were fed in a messhall for German sailors and after eating my stomach pains were gone. I think we had been so cold for so long that starving was no longer a problem, but freezing to death was. After I got thawed out, then starving to death became a problem again!

After we had eaten, I was walking around looking at the base and I saw a Swedish Red Cross ship being loaded at the docks. I watched the men loading the ship as they went to a building, put a box on their shoulders and then walked onto the ship up a gangplank. I thought, If I could get one of those boxes I could walk on that ship and go to Sweden, which was a neutral country. I slowly began to edge over to the building where the boxes were when I noticed a German Navy guard watching me closely. I looked at him very closely and he shook his head slowly from side to side, meaning NO! So, I turned around and walked back to where I belonged.

At this naval base the Germans gave each one of us a loaf of bread and said it was to last for a week. There would be no more bread issued. I cut one slice of bread and ate it and then looked at the rest of the loaf. I thought, just one more slice will not be a big problem so I cut another slice and ate it. I kept this up until I had eaten the whole loaf of bread and had none left for the rest of the week. There were two kinds of eaters in a prison. The kind that I was, that would eat everything in sight, and the kind that would nibble on their food and never eat it all.

Jan 28, 1945- on the march

The next town I remember, we slept in the attic of a little church. I crawled up in the attic and was beside Rod Rodriguez from San Antonio and he said "I have been watching you and I haven't seen you eat anything for a week. Have you had anything to eat?" I said "no" and he gave me a slice of bread with butter and jam on it. I have never forgotten Rod. I tried to find him in San Antonio several years ago, but finding somebody in San Antonio named Rodriguez is like finding a straw in a haystack.

We crossed the Oder Estuary across two small islands and went into Germany. The Latvian guards that were with us were made to stop and go back into Poland. They were not allowed in Germany.

The weather began to moderate a little as we entered Germany. The sun came out several times and the road began to thaw out a little.

Feb 21, 1945- on the march

At one place, we were issued Canadian Red Cross Parcels. This parcel contained regular ground coffee, where the American Red Cross parcels contained powdered coffee. This coffee was a real treat and was much in demand by the Polish people. The coffee was so desired by the Polish people and they were so interested in getting some of ours that we came up with an idea. The coffee in the Red Cross parcels was in a small can that contained about a dozen tablespoons full of coffee grounds. We got the idea of making our coffee with the grounds and then drying the grounds and filling the can back up with the used coffee grounds and trading them to the Poles. This worked for about 2 days when the Poles started passing word to the next towns what we were doing and the trading was over. We did get some bread out of them before they found out about our crooked deal!

At one place I got up early and found a German wagon that was passing out bread. I got my bread and went back to the barn we sleeping in and found my friend John Goode, who was still asleep. I woke him up and he tried to get his shoes on to go get his bread, but his shoes were frozen and he couldn't get them on. I grabbed his shoes and went into the house where the lady of the house was cooking breakfast. I placed John's shoes on the stove and thawed them out and ran back to his bunk and handed them to him. He remembered that incident for at least 50 years after the war was over.

At one place there were a lot of Russian prisoners and slave laborers from different countries. During the day somebody stole a chicken from the people that lived on the farm. They told the Germans about the theft and the

Germans went around threatening everybody. They said if somebody didn't own up to the theft they would start shooting. Somebody found a Russian slave laborer and took him to the Germans and said that he stole the chicken. The German officer took out his pistol and killed the man and that was the end of that incident. Any human life was worthless in these conditions- especially a Russian!

A man named Vic Kanners kept a real accurate diary and at the end of the war he wrote his diary into a narrative and gave all of us a copy. I have included his diary in this narrative rather than trying to remember everything that happened. He was in the same platoon as I was and he and I were very close on the march, even though we did not know each other at the time.

March 1, 1945- Waiting for a train

We finally reached a town named Parchim, Germany. At this town we were supposed to be put on trains and taken to some other place. We stopped at a place named Altmühlburg to await transportation to another camp. We stayed at this place for about 6 days and rested and traded for food. When we were ready to leave we went to Parchim and boarded a train to go to Hammelburg! The weather had continued to moderate and we were not nearly as cold as we had been for the last 6 weeks. We were allowed to write home from here. I wrote home and told my folks where we were and where we were going. My mother saved this letter and it is included in this story.

The train ride to Hammelburg didn't last very long. We arrived at Hammelburg in a couple of days. The train stopped at the train station and the camp was on top of a hill that we had to climb. We were still so exhausted that climbing that hill was a real challenge, but we made it. We stopped just outside of the camp and the German Commander told us that we were a real credit to the US Army and he wished the German Army had officers like us.

There have been a lot of stories written about our entry into this camp and I will include some of them rather than write another account of it.

Vic Kanner's account of the march is on the next 18 pages. He kept an accurate account in his diary while he was on the march and wrote the following account in 1945 as soon as he returned home. It is generally accepted as the best and most accurate account of the episode.

This is my diary of the march from Oflag 64. Most of it was written as the march progressed and some it was done at Mooseburg, when it was obvious that we were going to be freed. Several of us got together and compared notes and we all completed our account of the march. The diary on the next few pages is an excellent account of the march and is accepted by all of us as a true account of what happened.

~~CLEANED UP ORIGINAL~~ SO IT
COULD BE READ.

Page 1

- 1945
- Jan 21 - left Oflag 64 (Schubin) 1391 OFF & EM (10 men in Hosp)
Arrived 6 km beyond Exm to Weptheim. Distance 22 km
300 loaves of bread issued to head of column. Didn't
receive any. Really cold well below zero. Slept
in hayloft with Rod, Goode & Woods
- 22nd 27 km to Polenburg (Eichfield) No chow. Crossed
Bromburg canal. Heard Russian mg fire. Rec'd
2 pcs. of bread & butter from Polish girl for 4 cigs
- 23rd - Arrived Charlottenberg. 7 km. Jarry guards
left us because of Russian combat patrol.
Poles butchered a hog for us, gave us cake,
cookies & jam. Guards came back & refueled
us, marched through deep snow drifts. Pao soup
at night.
- 24th - Lobzen. 12 km. Rec'd wurst, bread, cookies,
cake, apples, coffee from Poles, frac. cotmeal for
supper. 1/2 loaf of bread, murg & sliver of cheese.
- 25th Flatow. 18 km. 1/4 loaf bread, barley soup for
supper. Dead Russian in Sheissien area.
- 26th layover. 1 loaf of bread. 90 men left by train
potatoe soup.
- 27th Jastrow. 20 km. 100 men left by train, barley soup
- 28th Zippenow. 19 km. slept in aisle of church. Killed
Woods. D-burr & can of Salmon he forgot he
had.
- 29th Oflag 28. 8 km. heated water, shaved, Rod, woods
& I shared room. slept on floor. Sourkraut, ersatz
coffee & spuds. 100 men left behind.
- 30th Machlin 14 km. soup. 1 loaf of brot. deep snow
drifts on plain snow knee deep. Frozen
Pole along road.
- 31st Templeburg 14 km. passed column of Serbian
off POW.
- Feb. 1st Weindrich fort 7 men 1 loaf brot.
- 2nd Mi hagen (Zubshaven) 18 km. passed through
- 3rd Falkenburg.
- layover

~~RECORD~~ RECORD OF MARCH FROM OFLAG 64
SCHUBIN POLAND TO HAMMELBURG GERMAN
JAN 21, 1945 TO MARCH 9, 1945
TOTAL DISTANCE - 355 KM.

- Feb. 4 Greinow 18 km. potatoes & barley soup. cold spuds.
 5th Greinow 18 km. 100 men left by train, potatoes,
 oatmeal & coffee. lots of trading with Russians
 through fence.
 6th Kegenwald 22 km. cabbage soup. 1/6 loaf brot
 Slept in barracks.
 7th Plathe 20 km. 1/2 loaf brot, spuds & ersatz.
 8th Greisenburg 19 km. through Jestrów.
 9th Stiesow 15 km., boiled spuds, flour gravy
 10th Dievenow 15 km. naval air base. 1 loaf brot
 potatoes, gravy, turnips (brick barracks)
 11th Nevendorf 14 km. barley & spud soup
 12th Schweinmünde - 24 km. Marine base. Really
 hungry. left 21 men behind
 13th Gary 7 km. 1/10 marg. Potato, turnip, meat gravy
 14th Stolpe 16 km. 120 men left
 15th layover.
 16th Anklam 25 km.
 17th Gutchow 26 km.
 18th layover. Red cross parcel, barley soup (prime)
 19th 6 km. beyond Jarnia 12 km. 1/6 brot
 20th Walkow 21 km.
 21st layover. Canadian Red Cross parcel.
 22nd Neukölen - 17 km. 1/6 brot
 23rd Bosedow - 20 km. ? brot
 24th Cramen - 22 km.
 25th Plavertagen 22 km.
 26th layover 1/8 brot
 27th Lutherow 18 km.
 28th Seiggelkow 12 km. 1/2 RCP, 1/6 brot.
 Mar. 1st layover.
 2nd "
 3rd "
 4th "
 5th "

May 2

Mar. 6th. Pouchim 8km. (out on train)
7th - }
8th - } TRAIN { arrived Mar. 9th at Hammelburg.
9th - } 480 off train

27. Task force feed us

Page 3

This is Vic Kanner's account of the 39 day march across Northern Poland and Germany in Jan and Feb 1945. There is no way to describe the cold and hunger and exhaustion. I think he did the best job of describing it, so I decided to use his words. There were a lot of marches like this during the war. Some were easier than this one and some were worse.

“Come on, you Ruskies !“

This was the most familiar phrase for days at Schubin, Poland where 1400 American Ground Force Officers were being held prisoner by the Germans (or Goons as we lovingly called them). Our secret radio, termed THE BIRD for security purposes, gave up-to-the-minute news of the rapidly advancing Russian Army, and excitement ran high in anticipation of our liberation. For some time we had expected orders moving us away from the battle zone, but by **January 19th, 1945** it was clearly evident that the German High Command had delayed too long and the Russians would be upon us at any minute.

January 20th the order came that we would walk five miles the next day to Exin where trains would move us farther West, IF the Russians were not here by then. The entire day was spent preparing for our departure. For newcomers to Schubin like Mike and myself, it was only a matter of minutes to pack, for we had not been there long enough to accumulate anything. But the old kreigys (short for kreisgefangenan or prisoner of war) who had received parcels from home had books, letters, pictures, extra clothing, and even musical instruments. I went to another barracks and watched a friend of mine, **Carlos Burrows**, pack his belongings.

Carl was an old kreigy, with over a year and a half at Oflag 64, the camp's proper name. He was down on the floor with everything he owned in a heap. A wooden suitcase, a gift of the YMCA, was being stuffed with the articles he valued most. At the same time, he was sorting pants and shirts onto piles before ripping them into the desired shape to be used as a makeshift pack. Up and down the room everyone was engaged in the same mad scramble of disposing of excess articles and preparing what they wanted for their departure. The excitement of these old kreigys disturbed me because I didn't share their enthusiasm and I wondered why.

I had just arrived at Schubin three weeks before, after eight days of living in one third of a boxcar with 23 others. We had been bombed by the RAF, and 60 fellow officers in other cars had been killed. I, for one, was not eager for any train rides.

I questioned Carl as to why he was so excited, he looked up from the floor, and I saw what I hadn't noticed before. His eyes were full, and his whole body was quivering. "I don't know about you, but I'm getting out of this place," and he went back to his task. I understood now how these men felt, and I couldn't blame them. A year and a half as a prisoner of war in the same place gets pretty monotonous.

You get sick of looking out the window, or watching the guards. You get sick of just plain thinking or letting your mind wander. You get sick of the same faces, the same talk, the same thoughts food food food. All of these men had been in this

same enclosure over a year, and now they were leaving.

What the outside held for them was of little concern — they were leaving. Many had studied Russian and Polish day after day, this might be the chance they had prepared for they were leaving. I left them and returned to my barracks where activity was normal.

Some men were perched on their bunks reading, sleeping, or just staring in meditation. Some were crowded around the oil-barrel stove heating a crust of bread saved from the night before. A few were playing cards or just talking. Nowhere was there any evidence of the bedlam that was occurring elsewhere. In a few minutes Mike came in and I suggested that we go for a walk.

Just inside the barbed wire enclosure was a path which every man was to walk daily for one hour by order of Colonel Goode, the S.A.O. (Senior American Officer). In the event that the Goons marched us out of Oflag 64, he wanted no one to fall by the wayside for lack of being in condition. There was no such thing as being in condition with the diet we were on, but at least the exercise would keep our muscles from going stale. The path took about eight to nine minutes for one complete turn. It was a good order and for our own benefit.

The day was clear and brisk as we started to do a turn on the snow covered path.

"Them Ruskies better get the lead out of their ass or we'll all be gone."

"At the rate they're going, they could be here today. 60 miles away yesterday, heard 42 this morning. Boy, 42 miles, oh."

We walked on in silence along the portion of the path that was near the main road. For three days, the road had been lined with an endless crawling caravan of refugees (all German this time) perched on their horse drawn carts. Wagons of every construction loaded with the most valuable of household equipment such as pots, pans, mattresses, a chair or two, a bicycle, moved slowly down the road. Most were covered with canvas or large rags thrown over a ridge pole as a tent top, and the rest were without overhead protection. The people, all very young or very old, remained huddled together for warmth while the horses plodded on snorting steam under their heavy loads. We had watched this procession begin almost a week before with only a few carts, but for the past three days it had multiplied into a double file which creaked onward day and night.

"We're really seeing something. Remember the newsreels of refugees in France cluttering up the roads ? I certainly never thought that I'd ever see it, but there it is."

We followed the path around a turn away from the main road and

continued on. I began to think about Carlos and the old kreigys wanting to leave, and how Mike and I would be content to stay, even if the Russians weren't so close. The Oflag to us meant regular Red Cross parcels, the most important item in a prisoner's life. At Limburg, a transit camp before Schubin, Red Cross parcels were scarce and each man received an equivalent of 1/5 of a parcel a week. At Limburg, I lost 35 pounds. Here each man received a full parcel per week, and the stock was high enough to last for six weeks. I hadn't lost any weight here yet. We were both thinking — the war will be over in six weeks anyway. And it's safe here too. No barrages to sweat out, no fields to cross in night attacks, and wonder if the next mine is for you. Remember the German machine gunner that played tag with you in that open field for two hours one day? How you laid there alone in that shell hole and wondered if he was still watching you. And when you sprang up and dove for the next hole, how he marked your path by spitting up dirt behind you and then ahead of you. Down in the new hole breathing twice as hard you thought 'If I ever get out of this one'. You had your neck up for a target long, enough, and they missed. That's their tough luck. Let someone else be the target for awhile. You've got a place to sleep, and you get something to eat. You're content to stay here till it's over. And that won't be very long. These old kreigys have forgotten the war and all that's in it. That's why they're eager to leave.

We passed a guard tower and noticed the soldier on duty watching a fellow guard who was posted along the fence. We watched him too. He took three or four steps, stopped, clasped his hands behind his back, and peered over the snow horizon to the East. He repeated this routine several times. Then Mike called to the guard in the tower, "Ruskie comin— ya!" The guard laughed, pointed to his worried comrade, struck a pose of sighting off into the distance and laughed again.

We walked on. Will it be over in six weeks? Damn it, sure it will. There's nothing holding us up now. If the Germans could see the supply dumps and piles of equipment behind our lines, and compare it to the meager few little ones they have. And their horse drawn artillery pieces. Practically a laugh. All we have to do is break thru their thin line of defense and then run wild. Yeah, but how about that Chapple fellow from Texas and what he said? The kid captured in Africa that I talked to the first night here. Said he saw those same thin weak lines when they got him. And that was a year and a half ago. Dam, they sure as hell had something holding us up. Alright, maybe it will be two months, maybe even three. That still isn't so long. I'd like to stay right here and sweat it out.

During the afternoon Red Cross parcels were passed out — one per man with instructions to save the Dbar (a concentrated chocolate bar used as an emergency field ration) because we didn't know when we would get the next one.

Contents of a # 10 Red Cross Parcel

1 Lb. can of powdered milk - most common brand was Klim. These cans were the largest in the parcel, and for this reason we fitted them with makeshift handles, and used them to receive our soup with. Hence, we referred to them as our Klim tins.

- 1 lb. can of Oleomargarine (Standard or Miami brand)
- 1 lb. box Prunes or Raisins (3—4% moisture added)
- 1 can Spam, Preme, Bully Beef, or equivalent (12 oz.)
- 1 can Salmon or Tuna (6 3/4 - 7 1/2) or 2 cans Sardines
- 1 can C-rations
- 1 small can Jam (Schimmel) or Grapelade (Welch's)
- 1/2 lb. can Cheddar Cheese or package Sheffards
- 1/2 lb. Sugar - Dots or Cubes
- 1 1/2 oz. can Soluble Coffee
- 1 small can Rose Mill Pate (Liver or Special Chicken) or small can Peanut Butter
- 1 box of 12 Biscuits (J.B.C, arr) or box Premixed Cereal
- 2 D-bars, or 1 can Cocoa, or 1 D-bar and 1 pack M & M's
- 12 Vitamin tablets
- 2 bars Swan Soap
- 3 to 5 packs of Cigarettes — depending on the other variables in the box.

Immediately after this issue, Mike and I like the rest, busied ourselves packing and repacking our loads that we intended to carry. The day before we had received the week's regular issue of a Red Cross parcel so now we had the equivalent of 3 1/2 boxes between us. Since arriving at the Of lag we had pooled our food together and shared every crumb (and the crumbs were important, too). So now we put all open or partly used tins into a "working box". Together with coffee, sugar and powdered milk we expected to use this parcel first. The remaining unopened tins were fitted into a single box which wouldn't have to be opened for several days or until needed. As the working box became lighter we would alternate the loads.

After tying all sorts of improvised rag packs to my back, Mike spotted someone whose idea we both agreed upon immediately. A long sleeved winter undershirt tied in a knot at the waist section. The main body of the shirt was placed against the flat of your back. By passing one sleeve over a shoulder and the other sleeve under the opposite armpit, they could be knotted in front at about chest height. The neck of the shirt was the opening and just big enough to permit a parcel at a time. It could hold two parcels, and because of the give in the material, excess items could be stuffed in on the sides. The boxes in the pack laid flat against the back and the sleeves could be tied alternately on different shoulders. At the time, we thought it was the best conceivable pack, and to date, I still think so.

What the temperature was that week I don't recall. Cold would only begin the description. And cold was how we felt most of the time at Schubin. That evening we assembled a wardrobe from the excess clothing that the old kreigys had discarded. The items of clothing that I wore were as follows:

- 1 suit long underwear, (top and bottom)
- 2 pair O.D. wool pants (one on top of the other)
- 1 O.D. wool shirt
- 1 sleeveless sweater
- 1 high neck sweater with sleeves
- 1 field jacket
- 1 short wool jacket with high collar
- 1 wool knit hat

- 1 pair socks
- 1 pair leggings
- 1 pair shoes

In addition to this I carried a towel to use as a muffler, 2 pair of socks to use as gloves, and one extra cotton undershirt. Mike's apparel was similar except for a GI blouse and a long Belgian overcoat. Instead of leggings, he had combat boots. Excitement was at a peak that night. The anxiety of the Russians anticipated arrival was like awaiting the end of a dozen 4 star movie thrillers rolled into one. This might be the climax we had waited for — 24 hours each day. This could be it- liberation,. the trip home -. Oh God, HOME.

To add to these thoughts was the amount of food that each man had. Almost two full parcels. That much food was like waking up during a dream and finding it true. The food alone was enough to make everyone's blood run high. All these thoughts of food and liberation raced back and forth in our minds until the pace left us tired, and off to sleep we went.

Up with the dawn on the 21st, and disappointed that we hadn't been aroused during the night with the word we were waiting for the Russians. Mike started the oil-barrel stove with paper and cardboard, and we had a breakfast that was what we called a real bash. A . a can of Preme sliced up and fried, 5 or 6 potatoes hash brown, and 3/4 of a Klim tin of chocolate prune pudding that I had made the night before. This was rapidly becoming my specialty.

Formation at 1000, ready to move. This information we were sure of, but the rumor was what we thought about. The Rusksies are only 23 miles away. 23 miles. Any minute they could be here. Wonder if they know we're here ? Hope they don't blow this building to bits before they find out. 23 miles.

People were still trying their packs on and making adjustments when the call came to fall out — everyone — ready to move. We hoisted our packs and blanket rolls and left the barracks. It was clear and cold with about 2 inches of fresh snow. We were bundled up plenty warm, but after about half an hour of waiting around, the cold had begun to penetrate and we were ready to move or do something. The formation was by platoons of which there were 27 (50 men per platoon). All of the medical men were distributed throughout the platoons and we agreed to take turns carrying the small box that the medic with our platoon had. A group of men were being left behind in the hospital with one German soldier, and these people were waving out the windows that they'd see us in a few days again when we moved back in. No one felt that it would be more than 2 days before the Russians overtook us.

Ted Palowski, a friend of Mike's from West Wyoming, Pa. (and a 2 year man) had told us that Captain Menner, one of the German officers in charge, had sold out to us.

He wanted to stay with the Americans when the last minute came and the rest of the Germans took off. He himself had said that it couldn't possibly be more than 2 days. Now he was making his routine count and at least ten men were not in ranks. Ted had

also told us that some men were going to hid in a tunnel they had dug under the floor of the White House, our main building. The guards went around to look for them, and we stood in formation getting colder and colder, but happy for the delay.

This same secret tunnel holds many security items such as flags, flashlights, German uniforms, and compasses which had been smuggled in. The compasses were passed out last night, and Mike had one in his pocket. But why the hell hasn't Col. Goode and the rest of his staff devised an escape plan ? They could use some of these things. They've laid here long enough to think of a plan, and a good one. Boy, if the Russians don't free us I'll never forgive our staff. Here we are, 1300 of us, and about 100 Goon guards. Rifles, or no rifles, we could overpower them if a plan had been coordinated. Goode told us that escape would be up to each man. Maybe he feels responsible and doesn't want anyone getting killed now, but we all took chances on our life or we wouldn't be here, and I'll bet the majority would be all for a mass escape plan. We could stay right here in camp and hold the Goons with us. Damn, we could do something.

Oberst (Colonel) Schneider, the Goon Commanding Officer, gave us a talk thru his interpreter. The gist of it was that we were officers and he expected us to act like officers. I guess he wanted us to be good little boys. He also said something about getting us transportation, and saving us from the horrible fate that would be ours if the Russians overtook us.

1030 , the missing men were not found, and so we are to leave without them.

Damn, why didn't I hide somewhere ? There were places. Yes, but then I'd be alone. Maybe Mike's right — stick with the mob, they won't kill all of us.

Colonel Goode led the column out of the enclosure, and an able leader he was bagpipes in hand and his staff close by, he strode out of the gate and down the road with the platoons following in numerical order. Platoon 22 was formed near the gate and while waiting our turn in line, we watched the men file out in a column of fours. Sleds, wagons, boxes dragging on the snow, two men carrying a long pole with their belongings tied to the center, every imaginable pack was here. Most sleds were nothing more than a box with one or two wooden slat runners tacked on and pulled with a cord. Platoon 22 at the last minute spied the remains of an old horse drawn wagon inside the enclosure and took possession of it. The Goon guards didn't seem to care, so from that moment on this huge 750 lb. wagon was part and parcel of platoon 22. Most all the men in the platoon piled their packs on the wagon and began taking turns, either pushing or pulling. **Major Cassidy** (CO of Platoon 22) had by far he biggest pack I saw that day. It was a blue and white checkered mattress cover. Half of his stuff was in one end and the other half in the opposite end. The middle was draped over his shoulder, and he literally sagged to the ground under the weight. Without the wagon that day Major Cassidy would never have gotten to the camp gate.

Mike and I elected to carry our own and not be burdened with pushing the wagon, which got to be quite a task. We had

only our undershirt packs tied on one shoulder, and a horseshoe blanket roll, on the other. We had two blankets apiece, and our loads rode very well. Nothing was excess, and nothing would be thrown away.

Out on the road it was impossible to maintain the column of fours. The road was icy and rutted, and the caravan of refugees took the two center files. For awhile the horses and wagons would be stopped, and we would move on around them. A few miles later something would be holding us up. Some men were walking on the path at the side of the road with the guards. If it was too slippery there, then the guards walked with us in the middle of the road. Here and there someone stopped to adjust a pack, and before long, sleds were toppling over in front of you or waving back and forth as they followed a rut in the road. People without sleds were cursing those with sleds, and the people with sleds were advising the others to "blow it". Before long the column was no longer a unit marching by platoons. It became a 3 to 4 mile long line of men strung out here and bunched up there.

At the side of the road, a pair would stop to discard items that made their load too heavy. An extra pair of shoes, a wad of letters, china cups from the Of lag, all of the non-essentials. Food and blankets, these were the only essentials. Each time a discard was made, someone else was ready to pick it up because it looked good to him. We spied a sled that had broken down due to its heavy load of books. The owners were sorting their young library and preparing to relieve themselves of many volumes.

"That's just what we need Vic, a sled."

"Just the thing. Don't know how we're getting along without one."

"A sled ... to carry all our good shit in."

During the day, we managed to catch up with Ted and Steve. Ted could speak Polish and Slavish, and Steve could speak Russian and Ukrainian. We wanted to stay close to them. In the event of escape, making yourself understood becomes of paramount interest. For awhile we walked along with them munching on prunes from my side pocket. While we were walking, Ted pulled out a loaf of dark goon brod (similar to our wheat breads), cut it in half, and stuffed one of the pieces in Mike's pack. He said they had enough and he knew we didn't have any. He was right about us, but dead wrong about himself, because nobody with half a loaf of bread had enough, when they didn't know where or when the next piece would come.

Their giving us that brod is something that I will never forget. Food was just something that was not given away. There wasn't enough of it, and here they gave us half a loaf.

Mike and I were in good shape and moved along at a regular pace trying not to step on sleds. Each time a sled got in our way, we concurred again that a sled was just the thing that we needed. Some men stopped and took ten to fifteen minute breaks by the side of the road. The column was easily long enough to take an hour break from the front to the rear. The guards were having a rough time on their own and were not interested in making everyone keep closed up tight. They had full field equipment to carry in addition to their blankets and ration of brod. And most of them were 40 to 50 years old.

We came to **Exin**, a small town, and passed thru with all the Polish townspeople standing in doorways and at windows waving to us. We called "Polski" to them, and when they answered "Ya" we called back "Americanski". It was like liberating a town, only it wasn't. As we passed close to open doorways and high fences my eyes were constantly searching for a place where I could duck out of sight. There were opportunities, and lots of them, and many fellows took them. But I couldn't get Mike to agree to it, and we had promised to stick together.

Beyond the town was a long stretch of flat open country, and we marched on to an isolated group of barns by dark. Twenty two kilometers or about fifteen miles. As we stood in the dark waiting for our platoon to be assigned to a barn, we realized that we were plenty tired. While walking it's not hard to keep picking them up and laying them down, but when you stop you feel it, and we felt it. Finally Cassidy called out "over here" and we scrambled into a huge barn filled with cattle. The barn was divided into about five partitions. We picked out one that wasn't too crowded, and down we went on the straw. We had plenty of room on a manger between **Paris** and **Heidt**, and **Dunc** and **Chappie**. I took tins outside to get some water and found a spigot in another barn with only four or five men waiting in line. I filled our two tins and as I stepped outside I heard someone ask the goon guard if the water was okay to drink. At Schubin, all water had to be boiled before using. The guard said no, but that they would boil some for us as soon as the wagons got there.

Those wagons will get here tomorrow, and I'm thirsty as hell. So, back I went to our barn with the water and Mike made a thick creamy cocoa drink with plenty of powdered milk. What one drink can do for a person. We bashed the bread that Ted and Steve had given us and fell right to sleep. I woke up about 1 A.M. with sweat on my forehead, and removed both sweaters that I had on. We hadn't undone our blanket rolls, but instead used them as pillows. The straw was so soft and comfortable that I almost felt good. There were enough animals in the barn to keep us very warm, and I lay for a while still debating whether to try and escape or not, and cursing the staff for not having an organized escape plan.

The next morning I stepped outside and saw one of the most beautiful winter scenes that I can recall. The ground was covered with fresh snow, and the freezing weather had formed a layer of crust that glistened and sparkled in the sunlight. The trees and bushes seemed made of ice for everything was coated with this thin white cover of frost.

What a picture. This would be truly beautiful if a long line of white-starred tanks would come rolling down the road. What a shame that we can't fully appreciate this scene.

The word was passed around that anyone who was sick or couldn't march should come to the main barn and see the Medics. The goons had said that a few men from each platoon could be left if need be. At Mike's insistence we both went to see the Medic. We waited for the end of the line and then stepped up.

"What's wrong with you ?"

"Nothing, no one from our platoon is even over here, and someone might as well

"Nothing doing. Col. Goode says only the people who absolutely cannot march will stay... Everyone else goes."

I guess he was trying to do the fair and honest thing in hopes of receiving like treatment in return. So that was that.

We left at 0900 and the column was really jammed up. There was no system of breaks (rest periods) and so people were stopping and starting on their own volition all along the road. However, at noon the column halted and we moved off the road. Mike and I bashed a can of Preme by cutting it in half and putting the chunk between two slices of brod. I carried a small can opener (from an American 10 and 1 pkg.) and had to stop and warm my hands twice while trying to open the one can. To eat one hand held the food while the other was being kept warm in a pocket. Alternating hands while biting off pieces of Preme and thinking it was delicious. That was without a doubt the coldest meal I have ever eaten.

Later in the day, we caught up with Ted and Steve. Steve had a wad of cotton stuffed in one nostril which had obviously been bleeding. He explained that while trying to go over a wall last night a guard saw him and swung with the butt of his rifle. However, Steve didn't seem too perturbed over his thwarted escape. Ted told us that **Col. Millett**, the American Executive Officer at Oflag 64, had taken off during the night with about 100 others, and they were headed back to the Oflag to await the Russians. As we finished off the prunes in my pocket I thought about the people that had remained in the barn we were in last night. They just hid in the straw and planned to stay there. But they could speak Polish and that made a lot of difference. After quite a discussion about the problems of escaping such as food, shelter and recognition by the Russians, I persuaded Mike to agree to escape at the next opportunity that looked promising. Also we concurred on trying to stick close to Ted and Steve with their linguistic abilities. The column halted in **Wirsitz** to wait for the stragglers to catch up.

The goon guards were much more tired than we were, and they decided to do something about it. We watched them commandeer several civilian horses and wagons, and then load their equipment on to ease their burden. This helped them considerably, and without it many of them would not have been able to carry on. Every time we stopped we had to continue moving our feet or lose the circulation in them. Usually it was steady kicking of one foot against the other, and then change over to kicking the other foot. Up and down the column everyone was unconsciously involved in this method of keeping their feet warm. Here and there, someone would be lying on the ground with upraised feet, kicking hell out of both of them.

After about a two hour wait, the column started off again. The goons must have commandeered a large stock of margarine for each four men received a one quarter lb. block as we moved out of the town. We began climbing a slow winding road, and my heart sank as we neared the top of the first of a series of small hills. The long column of refugees with their horses and wagons was having a hard time on the hill. Platoon 22 with its huge wagon was also having a hard time, and rotation became very frequent for those pushing or pulling. But my hard time was caused by the sight of about a

company of Jerries digging in along the rise of hills. Zig zag trenches hidden in the snow and a long snaking line of barbed wire. This is what I had watched for, but knew that I would hate to see. I had known that we were between the Russians and the main body of Jerries. As long as we remained in that relative position, our chances of seeing Tovarich were good. But Jerry was contemplating a new defense line, and no one knew where he would choose to stand. Well, here it was. The first indication of that line. Beyond would be more and more defense lines, as the Germans were masters at preparing this type of depth defense. If we continued marching we would be swallowed up inside Germany once more, and our chances of escape would be that much more difficult.

About two hours later we heard that old familiar rattle of machine gun fire. It was behind us and must have been a Russian patrol making contact with the Jerries we left on the hillside. What a helpless feeling that was to know that only 3 to 4 miles away was the end of all this damn business. And yet, on we marched, our long column inching forward in the snow. Across a bridge, the Bomberg Canal, guarded by a Jerry patrol, deeper and deeper inside his lines we moved. We turned off the main road and finally reached a very small town, Eichfelds. 26 kilos, 17 to 18 miles this day.

We were divided into groups and housed in small barns throughout the town. It was dark already, pitch black in the barn as we crowded our way inside and wedged into a spot in the straw. The first thing we did was make the "sack" so we could get in and warm our feet against each others bodies. The one GI blanket that I had was folded in two and sewed around the bottom and up half one side. A perfect sack when augmented with other blankets. Our blankets were laid in the following order: Mike's heavy small grey one, his big torn black and grey one, my GI, my brown hair one and then the coats. Mike's coat wrapped around the bottom portion and then my short coat was thrown on top. It really felt good. Next came the evening bash. We had no brod and could not build fires to heat anything on, so we spooned (i.e. ate alone with no side dishes) a can of strawberry jam. Sounds nauseating and it was, but we hit the sack and fell right to sleep.

Next morning we were awakend with the news that the guards had taken off. We couldn't believe it at first.

Free. It's here at last. They've really gone. Hot shit. Come on, get up. Boy, wonder when the Ruskies will be here ? I didn't hear a thing last night. Oh God, this is it. It doesn't seem possible.

In a few minutes, we got the word that we were to hold tight in town and we would wait for the Russians. Someone made a large vat of bean soup from the farmer's stock, good and hot, and we all partook of it. I was rolling our blankets up when Mike came in with a hushed "follow me". He led me around an adjoining barn and into the back door of a Polish house. He had just left the house a minute before and so he introduced me to the old woman there with the words "Comrade - Americanish". We jabbered back and forth in the few words that we knew such as Polski, dubja, soldat, Schub±n and kreigsgefangenan. We each washed up and tasted some of her delicious cake. What it was I don't know, but it was good and certainly tasted like cake. I went out and brought back Ted and Steve. The rest of the household was now present, the old daughter and her husband, and their little girl of ten. Ted with his fluent Polish was greeted like a lost son. Tears in the old woman's eyes made me

feel that she thought a miracle had taken place. She knew the Americans were helping them, but here was an American and he could speak Polish. Now she felt sure that the Americans were helping them. They were happy that the Germans were being driven out, but just as fearful of the approaching Russians. Civilians in a war area are treated pretty rough by soldiers of both sides. These people had gone thru this before and knew what to expect. Thoughts of this scared the daylights out of them. The old woman made us some potato soup that was thick and creamy. We all had seconds in addition to brod and sorgum. In turn, we gave them coffee, cigarettes and chocolate.

About noon several Jerries came thru the town and said that our column was to begin marching at 3 P.M.

What the hell goes on ? What are we letting those boys run around for ? Why don't we pick them up ? If this bunch ever leaves town, I sure as hell won't go with them. Where is the staff now ? Sit tight, shit. Why don't we grab those guards and their rifles, and take off toward the East ? Or just hold this town till, the Russians come ?

By this time, many kreigys were thinking the same thing, only they began taking off to the East across the open fields. That seemed silly to me because a lone man could die of exposure in a short while in that weather. The thing to do was to hide in town there until the column left, and then try to be sheltered by one of the Polish families. This shelter business was damn important. More guards came into town and began organizing the column to move. Ted asked the old lady if we could hide in her basement. She pounded her heart with a clenched fist and explained how frightened she was for her life. We all realized that these people in five years of Nazi domination had had the fear of a soldier put into them too strongly, and we could not trust them not to tell on us. In spite of this I persuaded Mike, Ted and Steve that we should let the damn column go, and hide in one of the barns. When the soldiers are gone someone in town would shelter us. We crouched low behind two large haystacks, as the column marched down the road out of the town.

At last we're free of the column. Whatever the hell happens I'll at least be satisfied that we tried to escape. In about an hour we can hit one of these houses and I'll bet they'll fix us up in a basement and feed us. It would be suicide to strike out across the open fields. Just how do those clowns expect to make the Russians understand that they are Americans before they get shot ? We always shot first and then asked the questions. Well, it's their hides, not ours.

After the column had gone, neither Mike or Ted or Steve looked too happy with the decision to stay. Ted said that we would have a better chance. of staying alive if we were liberated with the long column than if we were found in a town by ourselves. He told us that someone on the staff had a large American flag ready to unfurl at the first sign of the Russians. Ted, Steve and Mike looked at one another and in unison said "Let's go". I went over my points again, but to no avail —three to one, and off we went to catch the tail of the column. We all still believed that a day or two and we would be under Russian control. Seven kilometers to Charlottenburg and into huge barns. I made the sack while Mike fixed a small bash —one cold Preme sandwich, and that was the **23rd of January**.

The morning of the **24th** was bitter cold outside. Mike stayed in the

sack while I sweated 'out a line 150 yards long to get half tine of pea soup for us. This was the first food that the goons gave us with the exception of the piece oleo. During the night, someone stole a Red Cross parcel from another man. Several announcements concerning it and much mumbling by everyone. Pretty damn low trick, but it made Mike and I glad that we had eaten most of our food. We knew that it can't be stolen when you carry it in your stomach. We left at 0900 and arrived at Lobsen that afternoon.

Word came that we would take a short break in town. In about five minutes everyone had learned that it was a Polish town and very sympathetic toward Americans. The waiting column literally dissolved into the alleys, doorways and stairways. The townspeople gave us most all that they had in the way of a fast bite to eat, and everyone enjoyed a brief interlude of genuine hospitality. Mike picked up a full loaf of brod and I got four sorgum sandwiches. An abundance of cheese was passed around but we missed out on that. We just weren't at the right place at the right time. Finally everyone was routed out and we were on our way again. We arrived in a barn area, and there was Col. Schneider and our old guard company, the ones who had taken off a couple of nights before. We were formed into a compact group and the Col. talked to us. He said that we hadn't been acting like officers, and that he had requested SS troops be assigned to guard us. Immediately after his talk we were put into barns for the night.

Mike and I got a good spot on the main floor of the barn. Next to us was **Capt. Austin** (of "suffering the torture of the damned" fame) and his buddy, an Englishman. The contortions and discussion that they had before finally getting settled gave us a good laugh. Before hitting the sack, we warmed ourselves around small fires, which were permitted for the first time.

Up the next morning and around the fires to wait for the chow line to get smaller. Feeding 1000 men poses quite a problem especially for the men when they knew as we did .at there wasn't enough food to go around. To get in the first half of the line you had to start running before they finished announcing where the line would be. To be in the last half meant being at the mercy of the man serving who continually kept cutting the size of the portions to make the food last. And then if you took the chance of being at the tail end they might have a little left and really fill up the last few men. And then again, they might run out. As they would say in the Russian army - tough shitski . Finally we took up a place in line and began sweating it out while trying to keep our feet warm. We received about half a tin of oatmeal to which we added sugar and it was pretty good. After much commotion we formed into our platoons at about 0830 and were issued a loaf of brod for each five men, some margarine and a finger of cheese. The guards fired into the straw where we had slept to see if anyone was planning on staying behind as so many had done the night before, only to be rounded later. By 0900 we began another days march.

Throughout the day, we heard continuous artillery fire. The wide open snow covered plains made it difficult to estimate the range, but to hear it kept our hopes of liberation alive. We passed thru Flatow which was a fair sized town where civilians were being issued Army equipment for the defense of the town. Some time during the day we learned that Ted and Steve had remained in Lobsen.

Why the hell couldn't we be with them ?

Cold, it was plenty cold. Mike stopped to relieve himself during a ten minute break, and his hands were too cold to button his pants in one operation. So he stood there as the column moved on holding his pants up and warming his hands in his pockets at the same time. A few minutes later he caught up to us again, and returned to me our one roll of toilet paper, which I always kept handy in my big side pocket.

We made 23 kilometers before stopping in a large barnyard. This barnyard was average for size. It had 4 or 5 large barns in addition to 2 or 3 buildings which were used as living quarters. The whole area was well stocked with slave labor, and each farm had about 20 or 30 people. The Goons usually took over the living quarters where it was warm. Our staff would pick a small shed where they would have plenty of room and maybe a light. The rest of us (about 1000) would be crowded into the barn lofts. The main floor of each barn was occupied by the animals, usually horses, cows and pigs. On these main floors there were always a few cubby holes where a dozen or so fast actors could find room and enjoy the warmth of the animals. They would also evade the long line on the single ladder leading to the loft. This particular night, Mike and I, by leaving the line at the right minute got ourselves established in the corner of a goosepen on the ground floor. We found some slats for the wet floor and others to make ourselves exclusive from the geese. Dunc and Chappie were right behind us, and the four of us had a right handy spot. We made the sack up and got right in. At 10 PM, barley soup and back to the sack. First thing in the morning everyone would roll their blankets, adjust their packs and be all set to go. But Mike and I too thoroughly craved the warmth of the sack to get up more than five minutes prior to departure time. **This morning, the 27th**, we laid there watching others prepare to move when word came that it would be a day of rest. Well alright! So we stayed in the sack all day and rested. We both believed in conserving all possible energy. If blankets would keep us warm then our bodies would not have to produce that heat, and we could get along on less food. We were figuring it just that close.

About three in the afternoon they started to feed, and after a freezing two hour wait we got ours - - soup. The staff was still not able to convince all of our people that we could be fed the goon rations in an orderly fashion with only a few men at a time having to wait in the cold. We were all too fearful of not getting any, and so it was each man for himself. And EVERYONE stood in the cold.

During the day Col. Schneider announced to us that Russia had recalled her ambassadors from the U.S. and from England. What it meant we didn't know, and I guess he thought that he was scaring us. Speculation ran wild on the subject, but most of us were concerned with a far more important subject - - how to make food go farther. The owner of these barns was a Swiss, and we had quite a chat with him in our broken Polish and German. He said that the war would be over in five days. It was - - for him.

That evening one of our medics tried to help a Russian PW who had fallen out of his column that had passed thru the day before us. The goons wouldn't allow us to help him and made the starving Ruskie stay outside in the cold by himself. By morning he had frozen to death, and the guards had thrown him in the "shizzan area". Shizzan area means latrine and is quite a

site after 1000 men have used the same manure pile as a backlog. In this particular barn area the shizzan area was a large chicken pen formed in part by two adjoining barns. The two barns touched at one corner making two sides of the pen walled in. The wind would come whipping into the corner formed by the buildings and then sweep upward in a whirl taking vast quantities of used toilet paper with it. By morning, the shizzan area beckoned only the brave men and the one fallen Ruskie.

Thin soup in the morning and on our way again at 0800 on 4 inches of freshly lien snow. Sleds were still prevalent and Platoon 22 plodded on with their enormous wagon. In Jastrow, we by-passed a resting column of British, French and Russian PWs. We slipped them cigarettes as we passed and learned that some of them had been in the bag for six years.

Six years is a long time, but they seem to be going it OK. They certainly will be glad when it's over. The cigarettes that we gave them were the one item that we had in abundance. Before leaving Schubin, the entire store of personal cigars and cigarettes from private parcels was distributed among everyone. Mike and I started with about 30 packs and with me not smoking we still had plenty. The weather was too cold to smoke on the march, and in the barns, it was verboten. In spite of this, butts were never thrown away. Our men had seen a time when tobacco was scarce, and now they were reluctant to throw any away. On the ride from Limberg to Schubin, 23 of us were caged in one third of a 40 by 8 boxcar. Butts were saved and rerolled into new cigarettes over and over until one butt may have been thru 4 different cigarettes.

Eight days like that and I was certainly glad that I didn't have the nicotine habit. These poor Ruskies really look like they've caught hell. Giving them a few cigarettes is OK, because they're hurting worse than we are, but to throw tobacco away -never.

We arrived in a barn area but had to wait two hours before getting inside. The platoons were assigned barn space in a numerical order and we were near the end. Add to this a little quibbling here and there about who is going where and how much room they'll have, and Platoon 22 was the last one in. While standing and waiting, my shoes, socks and feet became soaking wet. While walking the activity and heat from my feet would keep them dry, but two hours of standing on ice and they were really miserable. It actually hurt when you had to take a step after they were in that condition. At night, our only consolation was getting into the sack. We finally made it inside and took the last available spot on top of the highest level of straw against the ceiling.

Mike's feet were in pretty bad shape, so I sweated out the chow line with two tins. After 45 minutes of waiting in soaking wet feet, I finally got two tins of soup and started back to the barn. Inside, I set one tin on a rafter so I could crawl over the other, and cautioned the man next to me to "watch the tin here" • I turned back just in time to see someone else accidentally knock the tin over. "Son of a bitch, just said watch the tin here". Back I went with my wet feet to wait in the line again. Maybe there would be a little left over.

January 28th - Up in the morning and into wet shoes and

socks. To start right out walking wouldn't be bad as the shoes would slowly dry. But from the activity but our column took about an hour to get organized. Everyone out of the barns, platoons lined up, all equipment shouldered and ready to go - - at least one hour. And during that hour we stand and hit one foot against the other to keep the circulation going. This morning in particular we had an exceptionally long delay as 120 men were allowed to remain behind - - - sick and unable to walk any further.

The heavy snow loomed as too big an obstacle for the tremendous wagon of Platoon 22. One mad scramble and everyone was carrying his own equipment, leaving the cherished piece for someone else. We made 18 km thru a severe blizzard dreaming all the way of that ONE and ONLY consolation - - - the sack. We all had towels up around our heads and over our faces leaving just a slit for our eyes. It was flat country and the wind literally "swept across the barren plains of Poland".

The drippings from my nose froze there until Mike would knock them off. Anyone ever mentions Poland to me — Ugh

We made it to the shelter of a small town called Zeppenow and paced back and forth in the street for 1½ hours till they found places to house all of us. The Oberst, a man of at least 60, had been outranked out of his car a few days back and was making it on foot too. There was no prior planning or coordination for this trip, and if there had been, the swift changing situation would have thrown it out of balance anyhow. As a result, we were being housed on a catch as catch can basis, and fed the same way. This day we got nothing to eat. One large group was bedded down in a church with Mike and I in the main aisle. We got straw from a large barn a few blocks away, and at least we were out of the wind. Earlier in the day, Jim Henderson was about to discard a canteen. It was full of water, frozen and as a result, heavy. He asked if anyone wanted it, and I quickly inherited one GI canteen. That night in the church we had hot cocoa, heated by dropping canteen and all down in a stove. We decided not to eat our last can of tuna or the Last spoonful of cocoa in the can. These would be kept for a "liberation feast".

Next morning we got a tin of thin soup each and were soon back in the street getting lined up. Mike is appeared for a few minutes and came back with a bulge in his coat that betrayed a loaf of bread.

"How'd you get it?"

"See the alley there?"

"Yeah."

"Around the corner of the big house. A couple of old women. They both had bags with bread in them. I said Haben ze brod?' with a real pitiful look on my face. They said something back and forth and then one gave me this."

"Let me see it again"

"It's a full one. Not one of the dinky small ones."

"Boy. It's solid too."

As we started walking again, I looked at Mike and studied him.

'A real pitiful look on my face' he said. If Margaret could only see him now. Nine days beard, shabby coat collar up around his neck, hair hanging all over, knit hat pulled down over his ears. He sure looks the part of a bum - - but, boy that loaf of bread.

It was another blizzard we were in and my feet were soaking wet. While walking, I could stand it, but each time we stopped the wet penetrated all up thru my body. Only 4 km., but miserable ones, and we arrived at an abandoned camp named 2 D. The camp was a newly furnished enclosure for French PW's, and they let us roam the entire compound. There was plenty of room for all, and we grabbed one of the rooms that had 16 bunks in it. We found brand new stoves piled up in the snow, and immediately dragged a complete unit back to our room. In another room we found a tremendous pile of bricks. We made several trips carrying as many of the bricks as we could. Not that we could use that much coal in a week, but being so cold so long and those bricks represented heat and lots of it. Exemplifying the same idea was the kreigy who first uttered one of the classic remarks of the trip. He had found a basement full of potatoes, and was frantically looking for something to carry the entire basement in when a second kreigy happened on the cache and endangered his take. Falling to his knees with his arms stretched as wide as he could he cried "From here, to here.....js mine".

In a few minutes a roaring fire was going, coffee was put on to boil, and vet socks were hanging over the stove. We sat and rotated out bodies to absorb the heat. We toasted slices of bread one after the other and prayed that tomorrow would be a day of rest. The men needed it, and Col. Goode said that he would try to get it for us.

Boy, a spot like this to have a day of rest • Wow

Here we met **Jim Doyle** and **Eddie Varella**. But too many things were happening to pay much attention to other people. Bread to be toasted. A warm fire, then later there was a watery cabbage and potato soup, but lots of it. To bed on a straw tick with a blazing fire in the stove. Mike thinks he has lice.

Next morning up early to enjoy the hot fire. More toast and then on to the potatoes which we had stored up the day before. We washed and shaved for the first time since leaving Schubin. Still hoping to stay for a day of rest. Rumor put the Russians in Jastrow about 14 km. away. At 1100 more soup. Mike snooped around and brought back some pickles. Pretty classy we are — pickles. At noon, word came that we are to leave at 1300. All sick people report to medics. After much dickering about 100 men who were too sick to go on stayed at the camp as the rest of us left.

I wrapped my feet in burlap sacks that were stuffed with excelsior, hoping to keep them dry. It lasted about an hour when the water finally penetrated through, and away went the burlap.

In the evening, it got so cold that the soles of my shoes froze solid while I was marching. The dampness within the sole had frozen and the warmth of my feet was not enough to keep the leather pliable. We kept thinking of that nice warm building that we had left, and if and when we would ever get to another one.

I, even if we didn't get a building we still had the sack to look forward to. Night came on and we were still marching. The Goons got lost in the dark and we took a wrong turn. When it was discovered we had to backtrack about a mile. Made 15 km. thru Roderitz to Machlin. Waited for two miserable hours with cold, wet feet for the housing situation to be solved. Finally, in groups of 50 we were led away to various barns. Mike and I were near the end of the line, but happy to get even the Loft next to Dunc and Chappie, until we realized that it was dripping and our sack was directly below the biggest and heaviest drips. The hell with it. In the sack for me. Mike threw some straw down thru a loft opening to Paris and Heidt who were on the ground floor with the cattle. **Capt. Gleason** started bitching because a few strands were falling on him, but quickly shut up when Mike told him off. Mike was pretty bitter at this point. After this Mike went down and with the barn owner's permission heated some water in his kitchen for milk. I stayed in the sack and drank the milk which was wonderful, but still went to sleep swearing about my wet feet.

Jan. 31st. Mike up early and down to the kitchen again. I rolled the blankets and joined him. The owner was pretty good to us, letting us heat water and we all stayed in the warm kitchen until time to leave. While waiting we had a pickle sandwich with memories of the day before. On the way out of town, we were issued a full loaf of brod per man. A miracle, but we took it without any questions. And there is such a nice comfortable weight to the burden of a loaf of brod. During the day we made 18 km. into Templeburg. We are now over the German border, and dreams of escape or liberation are becoming fewer and farther between. For the night we are divided into 100 man groups, and housed over about a three mile area. Our 100 man group had one small set of farm buildings where Mike and I acted fast in getting settled. No loft tonight. Paris, Heidt, Belleau, and the two of us in an exclusive little feed room adjoining the barn. Plenty of straw and I am getting to be an expert with the sack. Making it just big enough to get into and still not big enough to allow any air pockets to be present. Late at night soup was to be about 200 yards away. I tramped down thru the snow and brought back two tin-fulls as Mike wasn't feeling very good. We were lulled to sleep by the vocal ramblings of the one and only rambler, G. Frank Heidt. This night's episode was about the comparative merits of a paratrooper as against an Infantryman.

Next morning a real find - an inside one—seater alongside the back of the shed. We all took turns just to loll in the luxury of an honest-to-goodness one-seater.

Off again at 0900. Only 6 km. to Heinrichsdorf and into hugh barns. In the sack by 1130 and out only once for the next 24 hours - for soup that night. Our platoon was first for chow and we were right up front. We were waiting in the dark for soup to be brought out when a large truck loaded with brod pulled up to the doorway where we were standing. The fates were with us - the one gas Lantern the Goons were using, and the only light, went

out for 30 seconds. In that 30 seconds I had 3 loaves of brod - one to Mike, one to Paris, and one in my jacket. We'd have been shot if caught, but brod is the staff of life. Just a case of being at the right place at the right time. It was a fairly thick soup and so our visit to the chow line was well worth while. We munched brod and margarine in the pitch black barn, and crumbs in the sack. Plenty of rest in spite of the fact that our sack was at a bend in the aisle and Mike took a few stray feet in the back during the night.

Feb. 2nd. - A second miracle, another loaf of brod per man. Just before this issue Paris tells us that the Goons are searching for the stolen brod (at least 25 loaves must have disappeared when the light went out), and they can tell which are the stolen loaves by the date mark which is impressed on each loaf. We cut slices, which included the date lines from our loaves and consumed them immediately. This eased our minds but we wound up pretty stuffed. However nothing ever came of it. We didn't leave until noon, and received soup again just prior to our departure. The column had stayed there from noon till noon and Mike and I had spent 23 hours in the sack. We felt rested as we left for **Zulshagen** 18 km. away.

Thru **Falkenburg** and Mike's left foot became painful as hell. We're never told how far each day's march is to be, so we exist on rumors. Three more kilos to go, we hear. And after we knock that off and find ourselves still marching, we hear that it's just three more kilos to go. Fortunately I felt good and carried Mike's blankets as he limped along on his increasingly painful foot. He said that it felt like his toes were all cramped up. It was dark when we turned into our new barn area, and I was worried by thoughts of Mike having to stay behind because of his foot. It meant a hell of a lot to have someone looking out for you when you didn't feel good, and know that the support was mutual.

We groped our way into a barn and up the loft ladder. Mike gently removed his shoe and found that the cardboard insole had come loose and worked it's way forward so that it was all bunched up under his toes. Well, he had said his toes felt cramped, and I guess they were. We lost no time in throwing the sack together and diving in for our only consolation. Mike is bothered by lice.

Feb. 3rd - And a day of rest. The sun is out strong but the cold air kept me in the sack. Soup at 1400. Our men are tading with SS troops who ate stationed nearby. We all have cigarettes and coffee which are the most valuable items of exchange. For these, we would receive brod, meat of any kind or cheese. During the day a woman from a nearby house told a Goon officer that 3 of her chickens were missing, and later showed him the head and feet from 2 of them. Oberst Schneider yelled about 10 minutes over this and we all stood and listened. Had we been Russians they would have shot 3 of us. Later that night we heard that they found a Russian, accused him of the act, and did shoot him. In the evening Mike picked sow beans from the hay in our loft and boiled up a big "sow bean bash". Not bad. More lice for Mike.

Left at 0830 the next morning. It was windy, cold and frozen over, but turned out to be the nicest day yet. We made 17km. to **Genow** with Mike and I discussing food over the entire

17 km. What meals we liked (we liked them all), and how we liked them fixed. Breakfast menus, dinner menus and raiding a bakery shop. In our new barns **Jim Lockett** (our new platoon leader - platoons 22 and 23 having been merged) assigns each man the spot where he sleeps and no one beds down until everyone has a space. Only one ladder for 150 men in a loft, but we do have room. **Major Hazlett**, with two Goons had gone ahead of the column and divided all the barn areas equally among the platoons. As we marched into the area, we were told exactly where to go and everyone had to stay in line. So now we have a billeting officer, and thus ended our scrambles for the choice spots. That night we got a thin soup and each man had to be in line with his platoon. At last, we had acquired some organization. We were allowed fires for an hour and just before dozing off that night, Lockett passes on what he remembers of the BIRD from the platoon leaders meeting. BIRD is our term for the BBC News. Our little radio as big as a match box is back in operation and it was a flock of eager ears that heard something beside rumors that night.

Feb. 5th and a change in the menu. Ersatz (or synthetic) coffee and about three boiled spuds for breakfast. Something new has been added. The ersatz we've had before, at Limburg, and it was just as bad. But it was hot and that made it good. We left at 0900 on slushy roads and passed thru **Wangerin** which was being-evacuated. Road blocks were being erected in the streets and everywhere the people were hurriedly loading wagons. For a change it was nice to see store windows in spite of the empty carton displays. Up to now everything had been barren farms or wasteland and I began to look forward to what could be seen as we passed thru the towns. Here was something to break the monotony of staring at open fields while plodding along. Cobblestone streets, old road signs. The only shops open for business were the "Fine Bakieris" and we looked longingly at these. Somewhere about this time, the Oberst acquired an auto by use of his rank. His guard had also managed to increase the size of their wagon train. By now, they had 4 or 5 wagons to carry their equipment and a few of our very sick people. We finished 20 km. to **Zeitlitz** and I thought that we would never stop.

I made the last hour in a semi-conscious state, and as we entered the barn, I woke up to all that was around me. We hit the sack immediately. Later there was a chow line, cabbage, noodles and meat soup with spuds and ersatz. Sounds like a lot, but for every piece of meat the size of a small radish there was a gallon of water. Two or three boiled spuds didn't last long, but it was better than we had been getting.

That night they announced that about 100 men could be taken by train and I contemplated going. I felt sick and yet I wanted no part of a train ride. I recalled the eight days from Limberg to Schubin in a boxcar. The first three days it didn't move because the track had been bombed out. And where were we when the track was being bombed? On the train listening to the rising crescendo of the falling bombs. Many were hurt and 60 American officers were killed by a direct hit on the one-room building that we had been quartered in for three weeks. And only 2 hours after we had left the building. No sir, no train rides. I'll keep walking.

That night 180 men left to board trains.

Next morning I felt much better and stood in line for thin oatmeal and a few spuds. We left at 0900 and paced off another 20 km. to a slave labor camp at **Regenvalde**. Our days have been pretty well regulated lately. We take ten minute breaks every hour 1/2 miles an hour. The deep snow is past us, altho' it is still wet and plenty damp. We still look forward daily to our ONE consolation - the sack. That they can't take away from us. No matter how miserable the day, no matter how thin the soup - our sack, that we have in all its glory.

On this day, something new was added. During the noon break an old two-wheeled boiler with a belching smoke stack comes rolling up behind a pair of skinny steeds - the Coon mess truck.. Lo and behold, we are served ersatz on the move, 1/2 tin per man. Herein began the era of "Ersatz Charlie". With a grin like Scurvy's and a coat that swirled and swayed to the ground, he was a welcome sight at noon each day bringing hot coffee. Ersatz or not, it was coffee. Well, at least it was hot.

We were plenty tired by the end of the day from all the sloshing around, and glad to finally grab a bunk in one room of these one-story slave barracks. Jim Doyle stole some wood from the camp supply which was off limits, and had the canteen inside a blazing stove in nothing flat. There were about ten of us in the room and we dried our socks and feet, had toast and a hot milk drink. Inside four walls —prima! Found the latrine building and had to hang from and between the booth partitions to stay high enough to clear an overfilled bowl. And this was the cleanest stall. The Germans were leaving nothing but decay for the Russians. Ya.

Had soup and 1/6 of a loaf of brod issued in the morning, and then after standing around until 1000 so our feet got thoroughly soaked we took off. Thru **Plathe** 20 km. more to **Lubbin**. Day after day, kilo after kilo, and there is no end in sight.

Today - 20 km. - soup - sleep in a barn and dream of food. Tomorrow - 20 km. - soup - sleep in a barn and dream of food. When will all this end? It can't go on forever. Wonder where Ted and Steve are? Bet they're on a plane headed to the States. Why the hell didn't we take off that night the Goons were gone? Why didn't the staff have an escape plan? Why couldn't the Russians have gone North from Staggard? We were headed there and they took the town while we were still 50 km. East. So we turned North and got around them. The Germans sincerely believed that they were saving us.

We were housed in a newly constructed barn this night. Mike and I try to kid about how wonderful it is to sleep in a barn. I relate to him my Dad's desire to recall boyhood days by sleeping in a barn; and how he would always say "nothing like sleeping in a barn". We agreed. There is NOTHING like sleeping in a barn. We had had soup in the morning, so there was none that night.

February 8th - same pattern as the days before - a few boiled spuds and ersatz for breakfast. We left at 0900 and made 20 km. to Stuckow. Getting dam tired of boiled spuds and watery soup, but we are so hungry that it always tastes good. Also getting tired of Jim Lockett and his lack of push. He is so tired

himself that it takes him an hour to get us all spread out or rather jammed in for the night. He moves us back and forth trying to see which way will allow the most room. As a result, our platoon, the Lockett's Rockets, is always the last one bedded down. Seems like every night we get assigned to a loft and Jim never bitches about it. Other platoon leaders are always sticking up for their men to get them the best, but Lockett is just too pooped out. When it comes to passing around the BIRD each night, Lockett forgets half of it and then wind up by telling us "no change" or "about the same as last night". Waited till after dark in a long line for carrot soup and cartofels (spuds). Mike's lice are worse.

Next morning Dunc and Chappie tell us about how they were at the right place at the right time last night. They happened into a doorway looking for a trade and got invited in for dinner with one of the Polish slave labor families living there. They were feted with pancakes, syrup and baked beans - all they could eat.

A kreigy's delight - the right place at the right time. How we drooled as they told their tale. Talk like this passed the time of day and I always welcomed it. With Mike ~ discussed food, families and past experiences. For sports, Tom Paris was the man to stroll along side of. Whether it was baseball, football, bowling, boxing, racing or what have you - Tom knew the past, present and future stars. Frank Heidt - Frank was in a class by himself. Regardless of subject, Frank was willing. No one else was quite like Frank. On cold days, he walked with a towel wrapped around his head shielding his eyes like blinders. He walked with Tom and often he would call out "Tom, Tom Paris?" without looking around. Tom was right along side of him and would answer "here I am, Frank". "Oh" was Frank's reply. He was always watching out for all of us. Racing to get a good spot in a barn for Dunc and Chappie or Mike and I. Or running to get us when a wagonload of milk was found and about to be passed out (to the first comers) as occurred on this afternoon. We had just finished 14 km. in a drizzly rain and entered a barn area.

Frank was off like a flash to look around as was his custom. He believed that if he got around to a lot of places he would be at some of them at the right time. And this was one of those times. He found a wagon loaded with 25 large milk cans that the old watchman didn't care if we took. Now that was a dangerous place to be with the stampede of about 600 men that was ready to take place as soon as the word spread. But Frank was back for us with a hushed "follow me", and we all got about 4 or 5 tins of skimmed milk. We left the wagon and the still growing mob bloated with milk and carrying one full canteen. Yes, there was no one quite like Frank Heidt. Boiled cartofels and gravy from the Goons that night and into the sack. Nothing like sleeping in a barn.

Rumor had it that we would arrive at an Of lag on an island in the mouth of the **Oder River** by nightfall. It was also rumored that we would get Red Cross parcels. This one undoubtedly arose straight from the shizzan area and we knew it, but still it plagued us. The thought of parcels - and we killed time debating the possibility of receiving them. We walked thru **Stresow to Dievenrow** from where we could see the Baltic Sea. Wild escape ideas filled my brain. Hiding on a boat and going to Norway. Anything that led to home was worth thinking about, and we had nothing else to do but think as we marched along. Many

seaplanes were overhead as we passed thru a very modest looking resort community. Across a large wooden bridge and into a Luftwaffe camp. Our platoon got wooden barracks and we grabbed a room with Doyle, Enochs and six others. It had an electric light that worked and a stove which we immediately fired up. An electric light bulb is truly a wonderful thing. For the past three weeks we were accustomed to groping our way in the pitch blackness of barns.

We had learned from experience to cooperate when choosing a spot to sleep, so as to leave aisles leading outside. In the beginning it was each man grab a spot for himself near the door and the hell with the others who will have to sleep back in the corners. But those few near the doors, found themselves stepped on all night long and usually with pretty heavy boots. Not intentional, but when a man has to get outside fast he cannot stop to grope for aisles that aren't there. Those first hard days produced some of the classic remarks of the trip. Late in the night and out of a coal-black barn came the pathetic wail "I don't mind you stepping on my face, but DON'T STAND THERE". By now, we had all learned to take our shoes off at night. If the shizzan area beckoned, we crawled along on our hands and knees feeling our way in the narrow aisles, so as to not disturb the sleep of others. We were bitter enough under the circumstances without fighting among ourselves.

Inside the barracks, we each had straw ticks to sleep on and the forthcoming night loomed as a pleasant one compared to our consolation in cold dark barns. We stood in line for soup and watched the Nazi Junior birdmen marching and singing on the parade grounds. Soup was the best yet with boiled cartofels, gravy and a few real chunks of meat. I mean. Even in Deutschland the Air Corps had a better setup than the Infantry. We sat up till midnight toasting brod and baking cartofels, but mostly reveling in the luxury of being inside, having an electric light and dreaming of the rumored Red Cross parcels. During the night, a very unexpected discovery was made. I, too, have lice.

Next morning we shave, again the first time in ten days. Toasted more brod and listened attentively to a fellow Timberwolf relate his war stories. We marched out at noon feeling very revived and thankful for the dry weather. Our route was along a double lane cement highway, which was used as an emergency runway for the airfield. Camouflaged planes were dispersed in the edge of the woods along the road. Jerry infantrymen were conducting problems in the area and we watched squad after squad marching back toward the camp. The area was a great deal like Camp Blanding, Florida. It was flat, half marshy and had many tall trees. I recalled some of my training days there.

The rest of the afternoon Mike and I discussed food and finally agreed upon a

MODEL BREAKFAST

Park Central Hotel - New York City

Sliced bananas and cream
Oatmeal or yellow cornmeal

Two eggs with a ham steak and french fries
Two pancakes with sausages and two
french toast
Hot chocolate and two jelly doughnuts

At first, two of each thing seemed hardly enough, but we finally decided that it would be better not to fill up on any one item. We took turns thinking up the most appetizing words to describe this meal with. Our minds ran wild in bakery shops recalling all the pastries on display, and what we would do to them "some day". not much satisfaction now, but still we repeated "some day".

We arrived at our next stop - **Neuerdorf** - where there were only two barns. By this time each of us was an evacuation expert being able to judge with a quick glance just how many kreigys could fit into a barn — and this looked impossible. But up the ladder and into the loft the line started. The first ones in leveled off all the straw and the line kept moving up and in. Three hundred and sixty men in one loft and this was not an exceptionally large barn. **Hauptmann Menter** told Col. Goode, that there would be no chow tonight. Col. Goode reprimanded Menter for moving us that day, without previously making any arrangements for feeding. He said that he would report this to the Red Cross, but never-the-less we went to bed with no chow.

Mike and I were on the end of a row wedged between the loft floor and the slanted roof. I couldn't move without the three men next to me sitting up first.

Throughout the march, many people were afflicted with dysentery, diarrhas, shizzans, or just plain shits, caused by a combination of a watery diet, eating from Klim tins seldom washed, and by our continuous proximity to these shizzan areas. It was a common sight to see someone rush from the moving column to the edge of the road and drop their pants just in time. Weeks ago, in the extremely cold weather a classic phrase was coined "A man has to have a grudge against his ass" when some poor guy was forced to bear his while walking across the windswept plain.

They never had to go while we waited in the shelter of some barns, but always when the snow was swirling in the wide open spaces. Since those days many people left pants undone for fear the urge would beckon a second too late to allow fumbling with buttons. Frank Heidt had coined a well-worded phrase when he first said, "I gotta GO — and I don't mean in three minutes". Fortunately, for a diminishing roll of shizzan paper, Mike and I had been spared from prolonged periods of this most torturing of afflictions. But this particular night, probably due to our being wedged in a back corner, I awoke with a full realization of what Heidt had meant.

There were no aisles because of our cramped quarters, and so I started to crawl over rows of legs to the far left shutter where a ladder lead down to the ground. Realizing that I would never make it that far, I turned toward a closer shutter. Even this seemed unobtainable due to my hands and knees position, which wasn't helping to prolong anything. To stand up meant stepping on someone and probably falling down again, which was something that I couldn't afford at this point. Sheer determination combined with a strong teeth-clenching act helped me reach the

open shutter in two minutes and fifty- nine seconds. Crawling back to the sack, I again stepped on someone who was lying in wait for my return trip and a chance to curse me out. Luckily, it turned out to be Glenn Chapman.

The next morning we had a small portion of gruel for breakfast. It was prepared like all of the soups, which are boiled in a large circular vat. The Goons dumped in one pail full of barley, or whatever was available, and kept adding water until all 600 of us are fed. A man winds up with two kernels of barley and considers himself fortunate because the next fellow only got one. We built fires while waiting this morning and Mike fixed a tin of strong, potent black coffee. Tasted delicious, and with one tin full I was sold on having the same thing each morning & before leaving. Besides being hot, it stayed that feeling of hunger for a little while longer. In the first town that we passed thru, a small boy came running out of his house and very playfully began marching with our column. When his mother spied him she swooped out and snatched him up kicking and crying fiercely. But Mother was not to be deterred.

The coffee we had acted as a wonderful stimulant and we didn't get that gnawing hungry feeling until 1100 (instead of the usual 1000). Many people collapsed this day from the grueling 25 km. (17-18 miles) we made. Undernourishment is rearing its ugly head and taking a toll among the older men who don't revive after a night's sleep the way the younger ones do.

Obviously, we are using more energy daily than the amount that we are replacing. What we are living on is that reserve developed from a childhood in America. America, will we ever see it again? If we ever do, these people over here just don't know what that means. They're hungry, but they've been that way since they were born. They don't know what it's like any other way, so it doesn't bother them so much. But us, oh! Sunday dinners. These people would go crazy if they ever sat down to an average Sunday dinner in America. Here, one piece of meat is boiled in a kettle of water - soup for five, and that's their dinner. A little kid in America would eat the same bite of meat and start to yell for his dinner. The average Tuesday morning breakfast in America would look like a Thanksgiving dinner here. Thanksgiving - someone had the right idea when they made a day of Thanksgiving in America.

At this point, my mind reached for a prayer of Thanksgiving, and I finally satisfied myself.

"We give thanks today for the greatest gift that man can know. To be an American, and live in America. " If I ever get home, I'll repeat that prayer every Thanksgiving as long as I live.

After dark we arrived at **Swinemude**, with its' Marine base. A German Marine officer wanted to take charge and feed us before seeing that we all got bedded down. But one of our Goon Hauptmanns would have none of this. He knew what he was doing and said no food until morning. AFTER ALL, WE DID HAVE GRUEL 12 HOURS BEFORE. About ten of us on the end of our platoon line are shunted back and forth from a wonderfully warm bowling alley in the basement of a modern officers recreation building to a 16 man room in a cold barracks. We were too weak to complain that there was enough room in the bowling

alley for us, and we were happy to finally be inside. Half a slice of brod each for Mike and I and into the bunks.

A fair soup is served in the morning inside a real mess hall and we make seconds on it. A little later, we all wait inside, while a Goon medic examines 39 of our sick men. Col. Goode explains that we have traveled 235 miles by foot in 23 days. We've received 4 loaves of brod per man, a little oleo, and never more than one cup of thin soup a day. These 39 men are deathly sick and the rest of us will soon be the same way unless we are given more food and more rest. Hauptman Menter says that no one can stay. His orders, from Oberst Schneider who has gone ahead, are that everyone must stay with the column. Col. Goode gets hot as hell and continued to bitch. At last, he's learned that it won't help to play square. That first day put when he wouldn't let anyone stay behind. He thought that by being fair with them they would be fair with us. He's come a long way, but it's a little late now. Menter is a two-faced bastard, and I'd like to bust his head and that smirking smile. The outcome was that four men were left as hospital cases and the rest will have their packs carried on the Goon wagons. Mike and I were in am good condition as anyone else, but it hurts to see our boys in such an exhausted state.

At 1030 we moved out into a snow flurry and were on our way once more. At the center of town we are ferried across the Oder River. This is one of the three branches that lead in from the Baltic. Nine km. to **Garz**, where we are split into groups of sixty to sleep in small barns in town. Big Jim Lockett is in command and with the aid of about ten others enough items of food are collected among the 60 of us (bullion cubes, cartofels, some carrots, salt, oleo, etc.) to make a good soup with second all the way around. Jim is so excited about this terrific undertaking that he forgets to send a man down to pick up our platoons ration of oleo and we miss it. Mike and I sleep in the loft under a dripping spot in the roof. Lice running wild on both of us. NOTHING LIKE SLEEPING IN A BARN.

In the morning, three boiled cartofels per man and we are now out of danger of the Russians. Oberst Schneider announces that he is proud of the way that we have conducted ourselves.

THAT SON OF A BITCH. WHAT DOPES WE WERE FOR NOT TAKING OFF WHEN THE OTHERS DID. TWO OR THREE DAYS - TWENTY FOUR NOW AND STILL NO END IN SIGHT. WHEN WILL THIS DAMN THING END? We finished 15 km. to Stolpe, and Schneider makes another announcement—a day of rest, but we should be good boys and no stealing this time.

This is our fourth week and the third day of rest. Our barns are in the midst of a barren spot in sight of the Oder. NOT A CHANCE TO TRADE, LET ALONE STEAL. We are all so starved that cartofels are as welcome as brod. Our morale is low as hell, but we are glad for the day of rest. The lice missed the Oberst's announcement and were very active throughout the night.

February 15th, our day of rest. Mike and I took turns staying in the sack. One of us would look for the lice in our

clothes while the other baked the few cartofels around the fire. Dunc and Chappie kept the fire going all day as they were making an all day stew. The stew was ready early in the day, but it was a comforting feeling to continually stir the stew and know that you were going to eat it. The actual amount they were making was not that much and so they felt that more good would be derived from prolonged contemplation than had it been eaten when ready.

The lice would stay in the seams of our clothing to keep warm while we marched. But when we hit the sack where it was extremely warm, they would come out for a little stroll. They caused no infection or disease, but managed to irritate the hell out of you. "Don't scratch them Mike, it will only make it worse." And then five minutes later it was "Don't scratch them Vic, it will only make it worse." Try as we would, we couldn't keep from rubbing and scratching continually. But by taking off a shirt or a sweater we could find and kill them between our fingernails. This was our main occupation on Feb. 15th. One soup before dark and back to the sack for another night. BIRD—no change. Dreamed of Red Cross parcels.

Next morning, 100 of our sickest men remained behind to wait for trains as the rest of us began the trek again. It was a fairly nice day, considering the weather we had been through.

At noon we crossed the third branch of the Oder and took our break just clear of the bridge. Mike and I had our lunch—one small onion and one cold boiled cartofel, each. And of course, Ersatz Charlie was on hand.

SOME DAY WHEN I WRITE MEMOIRS OF THIS DAMN TRIP I'LL RECALL TODAY AND THE MEAL WE'RE HAVING. AND I'LL WRITE, "ON THIS DAY MORALE WAS LOW".

On our feet again, a forrward hoooo from Col. Waters, and on our way. He was in the habit of calling out this forrward hoooo every time we finished a break and were to begin marching. His call could be heard the length of the column. We made 23 km. arriving at barnyards just short of Anklam. From force of habit, Big Jim climbed subconsciously up the ladder into the loft with Platoon 22 - 23 following him. The area for our platoon was just not big enough, and Lockett had a hell of a time. The 50 of us were standing with our equipment as he surveyed the small area with its many beams and rafters.

"You 10 men lay down against that side.....push up against the edge here, one more ... you...squeeze in with them.....now, you 11 men on this side... you three right here leave an aisle over there.....3 more right here...Cass, you and I'll sleep on this high spot in the corner here.....how many more don't have a spot ?..... hmmm.....you two right in there. "That's the aisle there" everyone chimed in. "Alright, but sit down for now.....now, how many are left ?.... hummm.....9 more...ah Crisset, see if you can find Hasslett and tell him we can't all get in here. Let's see.....anyone that doesn't have a spot stand over here in the aisle..... that's it.....3.4.5.....what are you two doing there, that's the aisle ?" "You put us here,sir" "Oh....I did?...hmm.

About half an hour, later Mike and I went down the ladder and found our own spot to sleep. And on the ground floor too. Later we learned that Frank had found three Russians buried in the straw of that loft. They had been there for two days without moving, having dropped out of their marching column. Frank, true to his Allies, left them hidden without disclosing their presence. Cabbage soup, cartofels and knack brod at night. Not bad for a change. We munched the knack bred in the sack dropping crumbs which made us squirm all night. Of course, the lice had nothing to do with our squirming. Because we were bedded down with another platoon, we got to hear the BIRD. The Russians were still advancing having taken about 100 more towns. The Western Front was beginning to move which was good news from a long range view. At the time, we could hardly appreciate the long range view.

After a miserable night with my friends, the lice, I decided to do something about them. Using a razor blade, I removed most of the hair from my armpits and crotch. These were their nesting places and were literally filled with tiny eggs. So on this day, **Feb. 17th**, I made a present of these little fellows to the local shizzan area.

For breakfast we had tea (if you could drink it), a couple of cartofels, 1/6 of a loaf of brod, and another box of knack brod. These boxes of knack brod were like a dark crisp cracker and came 12 crackers to the box. As we left the barn area, a rumor came down that Col. Goode had gone ahead with Schneider to get the Red Cross parcels. It was only a rumor, but one to set the mind afloat in a maze of dreams about food. The entire marching day was spent dreaming of what we would eat first from the package and how we would fix each thing. And then it came, after 20 km the Coon Sgt. who used to be a boxer announced in his broken English "Gentlemen, your parcels have arrived". Six more gruelling km. through Gorzkow to the new barn area. And then the announcement that they would be issued to us in the "MORGAN" when it was light. We were plenty pooped as we waited in line to go up the ladder.....Lockett's platoon in the loft again.

Later we stood in line for the thickest soup yet. It was boiled barley, carrots and turnips with very little water. Mike snooped around and overheard one of the staff say something about a day of rest tomorrow. So while everyone else waited for seconds on the good soup, Mike and I were doing a round robin with 20 others on the cartofels. They were one damn heavy load to march with, but we gambled on the next day being one of rest and passed up the seconds on the soup. The man passing out the cartofels was holding a small candle and couldn't see more than 10 feet away because the light was so near his eyes. He thought that he was passing out seconds to a long line, but there were only 20 of us and we kept circling back into the line until each of had gone thru seven times. The load we had couldn't possibly be carried, but on the tip about the day of rest we knew that we could eat that many and therefore not have to dig so deep into our coming Red Cross parcels. And it paid off for the announcement so came just as Mike had heard it. Lockett told us what he remembered of the BIRD and concluded with his standby "not much change".

Mike and I crawled into our sack knowing that our friends,

the lice, would be waiting for us.

Feb. 18th – the big day. Up at 0730 for the parcel issue. One sealed # 10 Red Cross parcel for each man. We started a fire and a new clan was formed. Duncan and Chapman, Heidt and Paris, Lyons and Varella, Doyle and Enochs, and Mike and myself. We were all cheerful and felt great – these were good times. For breakfast we had fried spam and a BIG panful of fried cartofels. Mike turned out to be a big operator and traded a few cigarettes for some onions (sweebals), a hunk of bacon (fleish) and a half loaf of brod. We sat by the fire all day and bashed. We fried cartofels, baked cartofels, boiled cartofels and really filled ourselves up. Chappie had one of rarest and most precious of items – a frying pan, which he had carried from away back. And now we were all taking turns with it. During the day I washed and shaved in the cow barn where I bummed some milk from the Polish slave laborer. Mike and I got some blue ointment from the medics for our lice. Truly and eventful day.

Up early the following day for the fire and breakfast. Delicious premixed cereal with powdered whole milk. Preema! We left at 1100 and marched 11 km. A little cheese and pate for lunch amidst a mob of kreigys with the GI's. The rich food gave almost everyone the runs and people made fun of them exclaiming loudly as to the quantity and texture of these deposits. Most people had exhausted their initial supply of toilet paper, and a day such as this caused many a trying moment. In spite of how much Mike and I accused each other of using too much paper or using it too often we still had an ample supply.

This night's stand was in a barnyard next to a bombed and then burned out house. Lockett's platoon stood still for one hour as other platoons moved in, and then we moved in and bedded down. It seemed like downright discrimination. Mike and I crawled up and over some unthreshed wheat for a spot near the ceiling. It was prohibited territory but nothing ever came of it. We had our fire in the rubble of the burned out building and bashed before the Goons issued cabbage soup. The cabbage was water logged and for the first time I turned something down. The last time that we had cabbage soup it had made me sick so I passed it up. Cabbage or no cabbage, I still had to get up twice during the night for trips to the shizzan area, and then the long crawl back up to the sack. During the night one man fell out of the loft but fortunately received only a minor sprain.

Up early in the morning to bash before leaving at 0800. We made 20 km. through Demin where we heard that we were to get another parcel. THAT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT THE STORY IS THAT THE TOWN IS A RED CROSS DEPOT AND BEING EVACUATED • MY GOD ANOTHER PARCEL . WOW ! HOW'LL WE CARRY IT ? HA ! WE'LL CARRY IT OK. THAT'S SUCH A COMFORTABLE LOAD. The town was fairly modern with many brad shops, but Mike and I are looking at them and laughing this time because we know that we have more on our backs than they have in the shops. Outside of town to a large farmyard where Mike and I get a ground floor spot in the barn next to Jim and Cass. Parcels were issued one per man with each pair of men getting one Canadian parcel and one # 10 American. Our Canadian biscuits were moldy and we threw them away rather than take a chance on getting sick. We bashed around the fire for awhile and then munched chocolate in the

sack. This was the height of anything known to a kreigy – munching chocolate in the sack. A day of rest was announced and we laid awake planning the following day's menu. This also was the evening that Frank had his nasty word tussle with Palmer, a Lt. Col. and Frank had the last word. And the nastiest one too.

Feb. 21st - Up early to bash which we did all day. Mike made salmon patties for lunch and even washed his hands before preparing the dish. We were really beginning to go first class now. It only costs a little more. In the afternoon, it warmed up and so I washed and shaved. One soup from the Goons and 1/6 loaf of brod. For supper we had hash-brown, C-ration and whipped - no lumps, no bumps, not mashed, but WHIPPED - Cotter style cartofels, with melted cheese sauce. Lockett too was feeling better because this particular night he remembered part of the BIRD, or maybe I recall it because for once we were close enough to hear his exhausted mumbling — "Today the Russians liberated 7,000 British PWs, 12,000 Serbs, 1,000 Americans and everyone else but us God damn fools." Our bellies were full and so Lockett wins a chuckle. A man can appreciate a lot more with a full stomach. His remark was well understood by all, as by now everyone was disgusted with themselves for not having taken off back about the second or third day out of Schubin. Applied more ointment and for a change we both slept fairly well.

The next morning at 0830 after a quick bash we left the barmyard and a very, very full shizzan area. Our loads were heavy but something about the weight of food made it comfortable. After 16 km, a visit from Ersatz Charlie, and much menu planning, we were quartered in barns in Neukalen. Mike and I lag back in line and get a spot on the ground floor — again near Jim (You hold our spot, Cass, while I put the men in) and Cassidy. Soup was issued at the other end of town and we had a nice stroll for three tiny cartofels and a good soup. Spirits are good as a result of the parcels. That night about four or five different people asked Lockett, if he had any announcements to make. This was their way of asking f or the BIRD • He hadn't gone to the staff meeting and so he didn't have anything to tell us. Finally the Chief Rocket became disgusted by all the requests and made an announcement to quiet the clamor — "There are no announcements tonight — no change."

For breakfast on the 23rd, we bashed like mad. While we had food, we were going first class. We realized that the best place to carry food was in one's stomach. It weighs less there and does a man more good. Mike makes a good trade to one of the women in town — one loaf of brad f or a small can of Canadian coffee. He also traded f or two sandwiches and some cookies from a French slave laborer. At 1000 we left the barns and began marching in the rain. It was 19 km. to Basedow where Oberst Schneider announces that we will get transportation soon, meanwhile we will continue to march. THAT'S A SILLY DAMN ANNOUNCEMENT. WE'VE BEEN GOING TO GET TRANSPORTATION SINCE WE LEFT SCHUBIN. OH WELL, THE OLD GEESER LIKES TO MAKE ANNOUNCEMENTS. HOPE TO HELL WE DON'T GET TRAINS ANYHOW. I DON'T WANT ANY TRAIN RIDES NOW. Our barns were near a school for a junior youth movement. English must have been one of the subjects taught at the school because several of the students were down showing off their fluent

English and boasting in true Hitler fashion of the Nazi powers.

As our platoon entered our assigned barn, they had to call Big Jim down off the loft ladder to tell him that Lockett Rockets were supposed to sleep on the main floor. In addition to this the Rockets were first for cabbage soup and the few cartofels that were issued. Received 1/3 loaf of brad and into the sack.

At 0930 the next morning we are all lined up ready to leave. However, the Goon Regimental Train (now expanded to 10 wagons each complete with two steeds) is stalled until 20 of the guards put their shoulders to the rumps and get the horses moving. Over hills and thru pine forests, very rolling country, plenty of wild deer and much lumbering. We made 22km. to Cannon which is just like all the other towns we have gone through, streets of cobblestones with one lone horse pulling a wagonload of fertilizer or just plain horseshit. Always we saw this one. It seemed to be the only trade left in Deutschland. No clothing stores, no plumbing trucks, no furniture wagons, no nothing save for one lone wagonload of horseshit. And each town had its' one load regardless of how big or small the town was. And it always clattered along on large, rough cobblestones.

We were all pooped but eager to bash as the Rockets moved into a loft f or the night. Cotter and Kanners were a smooth working team these days. It was always the same as we moved into an area. Mike would break for the fire area to start a blaze while I'd carry the blanket rolls loftward, and make the sack. Our fire this night was in a big hollow and we had a C-ration special; hash brown C-ration and Whipped cartofels, with melted cheese sauce. The Goons issued soup and a few cartofels, which we ate while sitting in the moonlight. It was a beautiful night, but we sat dejectedly thinking of the BIRD which remained as always — no change. AND **FEBRUARY 24th**, WAS THE DAY I PICKED FOR THE WAR TO END.

Next morning I made good my promise to give Mike breakfast in bed on his birthday. It was not a particularly happy occasion though, as Mike felt rotten and could hardly get out of the sack. At 0930, we began the days march on side roads and trails through woods in a high wind and rain. Mike was weak as hell during the day and almost passed out at noon. The only possible cause we could think of was the home-made spread on the sandwiches we got from the French. At Plauerhagon, we moved into barns after dark With Mike and I in the loft. But something was different this time - - we had all the room we needed. No fires were allowed so into the sack Mike went. Chappie and I eluded the guards and managed to put in our appearance at several back doors with the hope of a trade, but to no avail. Happy birthday.

Feb. 26th was a day of rest, which is exactly what we did all day. It was extremely windy and the Goons would not allow any fires for fear of the barns. We stole some carrots, bummed some milk from the Polish help, and later cleaned ourselves up a little. Some work on the lice and into the sack again... our major consolation.

Next morning we took a fast shave before dining on a soup made from minimum contributions by each man of three platoons. It turned out very good and we made seconds, which meant that it was twice as good. At 1000, we were on our way through Lubz to Lutheran. More horseshit and more cobblestones. During the afternoon, Capt. Kunkel cinched the title of the "Biggest Operator" by his attempted trade with a woman kneeling at a roadside shrine. He was known for never missing an opportunity, but when he kneeled alongside this woman, he surpassed anything we had seen before. We moved into barns with Mike and I next to Jim and Cass again. No fires this night and "no change"

Mike is up early the following morning and again brings home the brod – two loaves this time and some onions. We received a partial parcel issue, one box for every two men. As usual, Mike and I pick the lowest cards in the drawing held for the items in an extra parcel. It was a nice day and we felt good with our added loads. We marched part of the 15 km. to **Siggelkow** where it is announced that we will wait for transportation to arrive at **Parchim** only 7 km. away. We're going to a camp at **Alamailburg**. Mike and I managed a ground floor spot in the new barn and we are first in line when the medics announce that they have GI louse powder. The knowledge that our marching days are over combined with the louse powder made our consolation this night supreme.

March 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th were all identical rest days spent bashing around our ten man fire. The Goons fed us one soup daily with a few boiled cartofels. We received one parcel per four men, truly a parcel. We stole wood daily to keep our fire going constantly. Fried crackers, cartofels, C-ration special and at long last, some fried "eire" (eggs). We certainly waited for those. Mike cultivates a Russian friend who bring in a "Cookin" (chicken) one night to show his loyalty. Would have been nice, but we recalled some of his dead comrades who were killed for the same act. We had coffee and milk drinks constantly, and I fixed my chocolate prune pudding as a departure special. We managed to clean up and some people even got haircuts. Our whole crew looks as though we are ready for a Western picture with Ray Lyons leading the production. Mike and I had much relief from the lice. Jerry jet planes were overhead daily and were the smoothest and speediest ones we've ever seen.

But the fastest one of all was Jim Doyle's swap of a coffee can of sand to a Jerry for some brod. The Jerry complained to someone in our platoon who got the whole barn up in arms against anyone who would jeopardize our few privileges for his own lowly means. Most everyone contributed a tinful of coffee to repay the Jerry, including myself and Doyle's own partner, Enochs, who didn't know about the trade. Mike also scored with 2 1/2 loaves of brod, during the five day stay. The last loaf was huge (2000 grams) and came on the last day prior to our train trip on the 6th. I made a prune whip to go with it. The Goons issued a loaf of brod and some margarine for the trip. "Haben ze, haben ze" is working good and Mike gets 2 lbs. of sugar to wind up the trading. On the morning of the 6th, we were up at 0430 to have a meat broth made from three days meat ration and on to Parchim.

At **Parchim** our march is completed. This is the transportation they'd get for us on January 21st.

We marched 580 km. or 362~ miles.

We marched for 33 out of 39 days.

1300 kreigys started - 488 OLD KREIGYS finished

OH, THE RUSKIES WILL OVERTAKE US IN A COUPLE OF DAYS

The old 40 by 8 cars are waiting for us and we load up 40 men per car, Lockett with us and Cassidy with the rest of the platoon in another car. The three day train trip was fairly uneventful, that is, no strafing or bombings. Karl, a Goon Pfc., taught us some German in return for the English we introduced to him. Frank Heidt, knowing that the train wouldn't stop in three minutes for him, outdid his own ingenuity by suspending his ass over a guard bar and proceeded with his shizzaning "no hands". His only remark with an expressionless face was "It's cold out there". During the trip we learned that Lockett was a squirrel, one who never eats a full slice of brod, but instead eats half and saves the other half, eventually driving himself crazy thinking about the remaining half, eventually driving himself crazy thinking about the remaining half.

At **Hammelburg**, we were stretching ourselves after debarking when Old Jim greeted Cass (or what the Col. said to the Major)

"Have lots of room, Cass? "KNOWING DAMN WELL THAT CASS WAS JUST AS CRAMPED AS HE WAS

"Yah, plenty. Whole corner."

"D'eat much, Cass? "KNOWING THAT CASS WASN'T THE SQUIRREL HE WAS.

"Ate everything."

Here the corners of Jim's mouth turned up and the corners of his eyes turned down as he smiled broadly. He had Cass, and he knew it. "I still got a can of jam". This was the moment that a squirrel waited for, to have something left when the other fellows food was gone.

His third and final question was the payoff to the truly important things that bind one kreigys life to that of his partner. "Still fartin' good, Cass?"

We left the railroad siding and marched up the steep hill outside the town where the Oberst assembled us for his last talk. He told us that there was a General at the camp and that he himself might be sent somewhere else. He said he hoped the war would soon be over and that we might have a speedy return to our homeland. I believe he was sincere.

End of Document



Kriegsgefangenenpost

Correspondance des prisonniers de guerre

Postkarte Carte postale

An
A

DR W A THOMPSON

Gebührenfrei! Franc de port!

Absender:
Expéditeur:

Vor- und Zuname:
Nom et prénom

LT ROBERT T THOMPSON

Gefangenennummer: 076148

No. du prisonnier

Lager-Bezeichnung: OFLAG 64

Nom du camp

siehe Rückseite
voir au dos

Empfangsort:

STIGLER

Lieu de destination

Straße:

OKLAHOMA

Rue

Land:

USA

Landesteil (Provinz usw.)

Département

11113

Deutschland (Allemagne)

U.S. CENSOR

Kriegsgefangenenlager

Camp des prisonniers

M.-Stammlager II:

Datum:
Date

MAR 1, 1945

DEAR DAD AND MOM. HAVE MARCHED 350
MILES FROM ALBURTGUND. ULTIMATE
DESTINATION IS HAMMELBURG. AM NOW
AT DARCHIM. STILL IN PRETTY GOOD
CONDITION. SEEING A LOT OF COUNTRY
ANYWAY.

BOB

CHAPTER 10- OFLAG XIIB- HAMMELBURG, GERMANY

March 7, 1945- at Hammelburg

When we arrived at Hammelburg there was only about 450 of us left. The camp was populated by officers that had been captured in the Battle of the Bulge and they were in bad shape. Their moral was bad and they looked awful!

The Task Force Baum Raid on the camp at Hammelburg was very controversial and also was a disaster for all the men involved in it. General Patton was accused of sending the raiding party on the mission to recover his son-in-law Lt. Col. Waters. Whether he did or not, is immaterial. He wasn't recovered but was seriously wounded and spent a year in the hospital when he returned to the states about a month later. There have been a lot of stories about the affair and a lot of the men involved have put their impression of the affair in print. We invited Capt. Baum to our reunion in Las Vegas in 1996 and he accepted our invitation. We wanted to do something to express our appreciation for what he and his men did on that day in March, 1945. We decided to get as many of the men as we could find to write Capt. Baum a letter expressing their thoughts about the raid. We received 31 letters. We had the letters bound and presented them to Abe at our reunion. Rather than try to explain everything that happened on the raid I have included 3 of the letters that we put in the book and presented to Abe Baum.

We were only at Hammelburg about 3 weeks when the Raid by Capt. Baum took place..

The malaria began to take hold of me again and I was bothered by it for almost the whole time we were here. I would get the shakes and get real cold and the other men in my barracks would pile clothing on top of me until I would start sweating and my fever would break. It seemed to work every time. The food was terrible. I got so weak that I couldn't climb three steps that led to the latrine. I had no trouble getting down them but getting back up the 3 steps was a real chore. I would lay down and throw my feet up to the top of the three steps and then slowly pull my body up to the top step and then go on over to the top of the steps.

One of our men was walking down the street beside our barracks during an air raid and a German guard shot and killed him. We had been told not to go outside during an air raid and he did just that and got shot. We had a small funeral procession for him and it was real sad. I inquired after the war and somebody notified his parents what happened to him.

Oflag XIIB was a camp for American Officers but there was another part of the camp that was for American enlisted men. We never saw them and really didn't know they were there until after the war was over. In an area near ours, was a place reserved for Yugoslavian Officers. These men were mostly political prisoners and were of very high rank in both civilian and military affairs. Somebody cut a hole in the fence that separated us from them and there was quite a bit of traffic through the wires.

When Abe Baums raid was over and we all returned to the camp, I was placed in building all by myself. It was dark when I was taken to the building and suddenly I became very homesick. I didn't know what had happened to anybody else and as far as I knew, I was the only one of my friends that was left alive. I had been overseas for almost two years, but that was my worst night .

The next morning we were taken to the railroad station at Hammelburg and loaded into freight cars for a trip to-who knows where! As we were sitting on the railroad siding, the air raid sirens began to blow and the people in Hammelburg began to leave the town and go out into the fields nearby. I saw women with a suitcase in one hand and a child in the other running for their life. Shortly a group of American P-47 came over and made a strafing run on us. The German guards jumped out of the cars and hid in the ditches beside the tracks, but we were

made to stay in the cars. I don't think anybody was hurt, but the fighter planes made another run on the hill where Abe Baum had been on side of the hill above us.

Kriegsgefangenenpost

Postkarte

Kriegsgefangenenpostkarte
 zur gebührenfreien Befreiung
 An:
 Gefangener D 7
 Kriegsgef. Offizierslager XII B

18.4.45.

DR W A THOMPSON

Empfangsort:
 lieu de destination: STIGLER

Land:
 pays: OKLAHOMA

Gebührenfrei

Landesteil:
 (Provinz usw.)
 départm.: USA

Camp de Prisonniers de guerre
Lg. Hammelburg

(Seulement No. du Camp, selon les instructions du Commandant)

Date MAR 16, 1945

Je suis prisonnier de guerre en Allemagne et en bonne santé —
 (ou:) légèrement blessé.

Nous serons transportés d'ici dans un autre camp au bout de
 quelques jours. N'écrivez jusqu'à ce que je vous donnerai
 la nouvelle adresse.

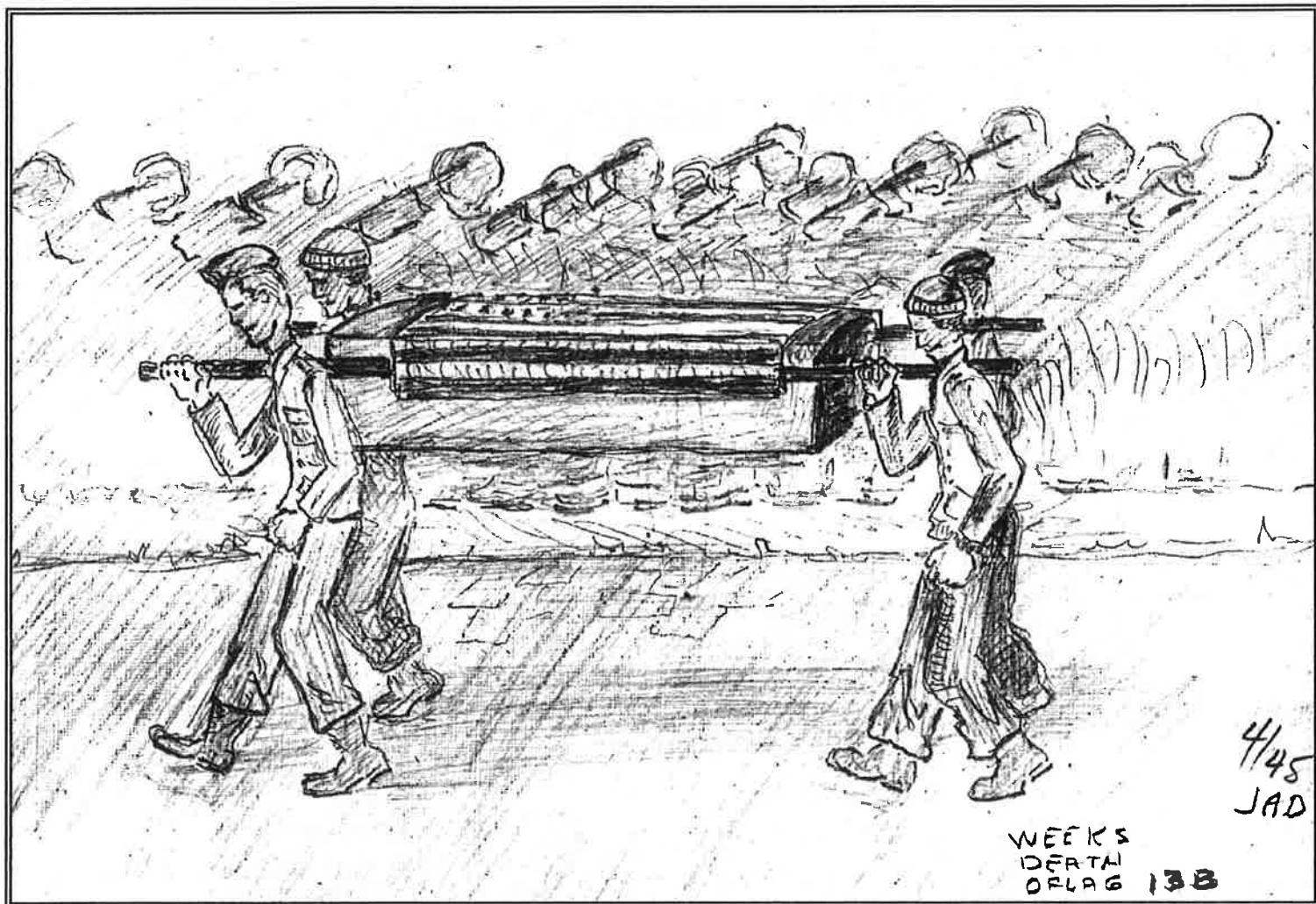
Meilleurs souvenirs

Prénom et nom de famille: ROBERT T THOMPSON

Rang: 2ND LT

Détachement: 076148

(Aucun autre détail. — Ecriture lisible.)



This is a sketch of the funeral procession of Lt. Weeks. He was shot and killed at Oflag XIII B when he was outside the barracks during an air raid. We had been given warning about being outside during an air raid. He was a friend of a friend of mine, Jack Behling, of Tulsa OK. Jack went out in the street and brought Lt. Weeks back into a barracks but he died before Jack could get him inside. We all lined up at attention and saluted as the procession went by. He was buried at Oflag XIII B

Narrative of Capt. Baum
CO - 10th Armored Inf. Bn - 4th Armored Division

Raid on Hammelburg, March 27, 1945

NOTES ON TASK FORCE BAUM

We broke through at SCRWEINHEIM and started to clean out that town at eight o'clock that night. It took us until twelve-thirty before we could pass anything through. From there we went to HAIBACH GRUNMORSBACH where we received our first bazooka fir. I lost a few infantrymen, but no vehicles. We continued on to STRASSBESSENBACH and turned north to KEILBERG. This was somewhere between one-thirty and two-thirty in the morning. At KEILBERG, we got on the main road and went through FROHNHOFEN LAUBACK and HAIN and then went through a stretch of woods. All during this operation, we lost infantrymen in these various towns from small arms and bazooka fir. We kept on going through that stretch of woods and got to RECHTENBACH.

Just outside of the town of LOHR, we lost our first tank. Of course, during our trip, we shot up various vehicles and Krauts in all towns, but the momentum of our column was too fast and too great and so we went straight through. In the town of LOHR itself, we got a Kraut column of twelve vehicles coming toward us. The town was so situated that we just happened to get on the right road and pass through and out of it.

We then got on the road junction and all along the railway from LOHR to NEUENDORF to LANGENPREZELTEN to GEMUNDEN were trains. I estimate that there must have been about twelve trains each consisting of about twenty cars. It was just getting light and it was there that I realized that I was going to run into something. We shot up these trains and a big thirty-car ack-ack train, which was loaded with anti-aircraft weapons and concrete pillboxes. The infantry cleaned that out. We got some 20mm fire from the vicinity of GEMUNDEN and from the other side of the train, but they stopped firing at us as soon as the column really started rolling.

We got into GEMUNDEN and lost three tanks and a bunch of infantry, including a platoon leader and to this day I don't know whether he's dead or alive. They blew a bridge right in our face. This bridge was the only one that would take us to the place we were going to. After further investigation, a PW informed us that the region around LOHR and GEMUNDEN was a marshalling area for two divisions, one division having just unloaded in GEMUNDEN. I believed it as the Krauts were filtering all over the place. After losing three tanks and finding the town loaded, I decided it was best not to go in and seek another route. We backed out of town and went north.

It was about eight-thirty when we got into RIENECK. SHAIPPACH was the town before that. The momentum of the column was quite great and we picked up a couple of Germans in that town and used them to guide us to BURGSINN as there was no bridge in RIENECK. In BURGSINN we captured a Kraut General and his staff. I also picked up a Kraut civilian to guide us to the town of GRAFENDORF. We took off cross-country and went up a mountain trail. In and around GRAFENDORF, the task force freed 700 Russians. These Russians took a magazine and some of them armed themselves and took to the woods in the direction from which we came. We crossed the bridge at GRAFENDORF and followed the river and railroad until we came to WEICKERSGRUBEN.

At this time – two o'clock in the afternoon, I noticed a Kraut liaison plane in the air. I also heard vehicular movement other than my own column when we stopped. I then stopped to orient myself and decide which way to attack this town where the PW camp was located and also find out exactly where the American prisoners were. We left WEICKERSGRUBEN heading northeast and were engaged in a tank fight at OBER. We didn't lose anything nor did the Krauts. The column started moving again, but I knew damn well that we were going to have a tank fight real soon.

From ESCHENBACH to the campsite, we went over two bridges – bypassing the town of HAMMELBURG. We had a tank fight and my platoon of lights, one assault gun, the majority of half-tracks and a platoon of infantry went and started making a move to free the camp.

Meanwhile, my medium trucks, of which I had about six left, engaged these tanks and knocked out three of them, also knocking out three or four ammunition trucks that were in the Kraut column. I kept pushing the task force over the ridge onto this high ground where about two companies of Kraut infantry were dug in. It took us two and one-half hours to clean it up so that the infantry and tanks could move in. In the meantime, the Kraut tanks had knocked out five of my half-tracks and three peeps, one being a medical peep – one of the half-tracks contained gas and one other 105 ammunition.

It was about four-thirty when the first shots were fired on the guards of this military camp. It was about six-thirty or seven-thirty in the evening when the American PW's came out of the camp. I gave them instructions and as many of them as possible road on my vehicles, reorganized and got ready to go back. A great number of PW's were in no shape to go anywhere and they immediately took off in a group carrying a white flag back to the camp.

Starting back, we hadn't gone fifty yards when we lost another tank by bazooka fire. I had to change my direction so took a compass reading and went cross-country. Everything was fine until I crossed the bridge and got into HESSDORF and ran into two roadblocks.

At HOLLRICH, three more tanks were bazooked. I lost a tank company commander there and a large group of infantrymen. Knowing that I couldn't mess around there, I backed out of the area into assembly for reorganization on Hill 427 – coordinates 495652. It was about three-thirty in the morning when I got back on this hill. I immediately got the people together and found out how much gas we had. We siphoned gas out of eight of the half-tracks and destroyed eight to give us some zone of radius for the vehicles. At this particular time, I had three mediums and three lights, plus one command truck.

It was then that I sent my last message to the battalion that the mission was accomplished and we were on our way back for the second time. I oriented the people and informed them to use half-tracks for bridging equipment if necessary to cross streams so as to avoid towns. The real seriously wounded were left in a building marked with a big Red Cross just before daylight.

I got the men together here on top of this hill and gave them a pep talk and, upon finishing, got into my peep when the Krauts attacked. They had an unknown number of SP's to my south, six tanks and the equivalent of two infantry companies advancing on the position from the southeast, backed by SP's which were stationery. To the northwest were six Tiger tanks that were in position firing. A column of tanks came in from the direction of WEICKERSGRUBEN when the attack commenced and stayed in the northwest. At the time they opened up, everybody was just ready to move out. In fact, I had pulled my peep out to form the column when they hit us with the fastest automatic tank fire I had ever seen. My tanks returned the fire as best they could and jockeyed for position. All the vehicles were knocked out and burning and the infantry was being blown to bits by this direct tank fire.

The Kraut tanks and infantry advanced under this assault. They practically destroyed the building which the wounded were in that was marked with the Red Cross. We moved out into the woods and assembled. We then tried to get back to see what we could salvage out of the mess, but each time we showed our faces, the infantry opened up with small arms and the advancing tanks started firing again. We went back into the woods and the two platoon leaders who had taken over told the men to split up in groups of four and take off in the general direction from which we had come. The entire fight lasted twenty-five minutes, but that was the fight.

At this time, the Krauts had the situation well in hand and they continued blowing more bridges in preparation for a larger force. The infantry started mopping up the area with the aid of bloodhounds from the HAMMELBURG PW camp and captured quite a number of the men. In overrunning the positions, they also evacuated our wounded to the hospital in the prison camp that we had just set free. Major Stiller, myself and a lieutenant-anonymous took off in the woods. They ran us down – it got too close for comfort. I could barely walk and had been shot in the knee and in the leg with a thirty-eight which convinced me I had enough for a while. After being captured, we were evacuated to the town of HUNDSFELD. The confusion was so great at that town

nobody even bothered to search us and from there we were marched back to the prison camp.

I was being partially carried-one man assisting me. Being wounded, I managed to get in the building that night while the other prisoners were being taken away. Some of these ex-prisoners who knew the ropes told the Krauts I was one of the group who had escaped and should be sent to a hospital as I couldn't walk. Before I knew it, a Kraut woke me up and sent me by truck to a Serbian hospital at the PW camp – and I still had on my equipment with the exception of the pistol – map, compass and everything else. When I got to the hospital, I found some thirty-five of the men who were wounded in my operation and recaptured. A German surgeon gave an American and Serbian complete control over all the wounded and left us alone. The American doctor, Capt. BRUBACKER, put me in a room off in a corner and I was just a patient. The Germans didn't know who I was or anything about me.

The following day, the General of the camp came back with more guards after marching some 500 to 600 prisoners to NURNBERG. As these American prisoners were recaptured, they were marched back to NURNBERG. They started to evacuate American wounded to BAD KISSINGEN which was declared an open city due to the fact that it had some thirty to forty Kraut hospitals. They had no Americans in the town and wanted to put up an American flag because they were afraid of trouble when the Americans came. In this town was either Goebbel's or Goering's family – I couldn't swear to which. Within the next four days, German ambulances came and evacuated some sixteen or eighteen Americans to this town. All during the days spent in the hospital, the Serbs had hid American PW's that came back in their barracks. The enlisted men's camp had no guards whatsoever, but we gave them instructions they were to stay in camp and not wander out. Only the French and Russians took off for the villages to get food. A batch had taken to the woods in the vicinity of the camp and they were in such a position the Krauts couldn't handle them to evacuate them – that's the way we wanted to keep them.

On April 6th, the 14th Armored Division rolled in with a combat command reinforced and freed the place. Immediate evacuation of our medical patients was made. The enlisted men and sixty-five or seventy officers that remained at that camp were taken care of through proper channels. These officers I refer to are ex-prisoners who had sneaked into the Serbian hospital – they knew the ropes. When we saw the difficulty we were going to have, these sixty-five remained and the balance went back to stockade. Quite a few of those sixty-five were killed or wounded, but they were fighters.

Regarding operations, that's what transpired going from the beginning to the end.

This is my account of what happened at Hammelburg when the raiding party arrived at the camp.

On March 27, 1945, I was a prisoner of war of the German Army at Oflag 13b, near Hammelburg, Germany.. I was member of a group of prisoners that had been evacuated from Oflag 64, a prison for American Ground force officers near Warsaw, Poland. This group of men had departed Schublin, Poland on Jan. 21st, 1945 and walked 355 miles in mid-winter to a town named Parchim, Germany. At Parchim, the group was placed in boxcars and sent to Hammelburg, Germany arriving on March 1, 1945.

On March 27, 1945, the Germans told us that we would be leaving the camp at Hammelburg and going to where they did not say. As the men begin making ready to leave, I checked into the aid station that was manned by American Doctor prisoners. They told me that I had a temperature of 102 degrees and I would not leave with the main body, but would remain at the camp with the rest of the sick men. I was told to go to the second floor of the Administration Building and wait, which I did. I had contracted malaria somewhere either in North Africa or Italy and had bouts with the fever and chills at fairly regular intervals for the last year or so.

While waiting on the second floor of the Administration building, one of the men with me came to me and said "I saw a tank on a hill about a mile from us that had a white star on the turret". I thought he was mistaken, but took a look and saw the same tank that he did and it did have a white star on the turret. At that instant the tank fired a round from his tank gun and hit a guard tower. The other tanks then began to fire their machine guns at the camp buildings. I walked to the other side of the building and could see the MG bullets (tracers) setting fire to some of the barracks buildings. I then saw four men, 3 Americans and 1 German, walking toward the exterior fence with an American Flag and a white flag. They were going to contact the Americans and tell them to stop firing, because the Germans had surrendered the camp to the Americans. I then saw an American tank pull up to the administration building and stop. The prisoners were crowding all over the tank and grabbing for food, I then decided that I would leave the camp and head for the tanker positions. I ran down stairs and out in the street and headed for the hole in the barbed wire that the tank had made. As I was climbing through the hole in the barbed wire that the tank had made I saw two men bringing a wounded man in and laid him on the ground as they tried to figure out how to get him through the tangled up barbed wire. I then pulled back the blanket or whatever cover they had placed over the man and I saw that it was Lt. Col. Waters. His

face was gray from shock and I assumed he was dead. I helped the two men get him through the barbed wire and they left with him. I learned later that they had taken him to the Serbian barracks where they could get some medical attention.

I thought the best way to find the tanks would be to follow the tank tracks made by the tank that had come into the camp. As I got near the tanker positions I noticed an American soldier that was lying on the ground, obviously dead. A short distance later I arrived at the tanker positions.

In a very short time, the tanker positions were crowded with prisoners that had followed the same path that I had. I saw a Major and asked him if he was the commander and he told me he was an observer. This was Major Stiller, Gen. Patton's aid. The commander of the tankers, Capt Baum, and our Senior American Officer, Col. Goode., then told us that we had two choices. Head for the American lines which were 60 miles west of where we were or go back to the camp and wait for the main body of the American Forces. I decided I didn't like either of these choices and hid in the bushes and waited for the tankers to start their engines to make their way back to the American Lines.

When the tankers started their engines and were getting ready to leave, I started looking for a place to ride. The only vehicle with room was a half-track that was the third vehicle in line. The only place to get on was on the hood and hold on to the 75mm gun that was pointed out over the hood.

This column of vehicles was a recon patrol that was going to look for a way to get back to the American Lines. We went through one small town and saw a bread truck that had been turned over. Another time we passed some German soldiers on the street that thought we were a German Armored Column and waved at us as we went by. A little later a loud explosion just ahead and the whole sky turned white. A German Panzerfaust had hit the first tank. A few minutes later another loud explosion and the sky turned white again. We knew the first two vehicles had been hit and the driver of the halftrack we were on was trying to get the vehicle turned around before we were hit. He made it and we started back in the direction we had come from. Sometime later the sides of the halftrack were being hit with MG bullets and everybody jumped off and into the ditch beside the road. My best friend, Lt. John Goode was in the half track with me, but I couldn't find him as were lying in the ditch. I called out loud "John Goode, where are you"? He replied "I'm in this half track". I yelled back "you had better get out of that thing or you will be killed". He replied "this half track is full of food and I am not about to bail out of it". Lt. Goode made it back

home and died in the fall of 1997. After a few minutes we all got back on the halftrack and proceeded to the place where we were to meet with the main body of the task force.

When we reached the point where we joined the main body of the task force, we were told that we had only enough gas to go halfway back, but we would empty the gas tanks on one half of the vehicles and fill the other half of the vehicles to full and maybe we could make it back. We did this and when we were finished I found an M-1 rifle and two bandoliers of ammo and climbed into one of the halftracks and was ready to try again to make it back. In what couldn't have been more than 3 minutes a shell hit the halftrack I was on, blowing me off and into the side of the building nearby. The gunfire continued and was joined by German MG fire. I crawled around to the rear of the nearby building and joined probably 25 or 30 more soldiers. We all lay as flat as we could while the gunfire continued. A soldier lying next to me asked if I thought we should pray. I said yes, but to not stop digging. The ground rose behind the building such that a shell would go through both walls of the building and explode into the ground just above us and probably 10 feet from us. We knew something had to happen and fast or none of us would survive this shellfire. We took somebody's t-shirt that was white, placed it on the end of a bayonet of a rifle and waved it around the corner of the building so the Germans could see it. They did see it and ceased firing.

A German officer came around the corner of the building and told us to get up. We were separated into two groups, the tankers and the prisoners. We were then told to go into the building that had taken all the gunfire and retrieve all the wounded and the bodies. I remember helping one wounded man to a halftrack and helping him into the halftrack when I spotted some food in the halftrack. I reached for the food and a German soldier put his gun in my ribs and told me to get back to getting the building emptied. My mind goes completely blank from this point time until we were put in our own vehicles and taken back to the camp. Some Hitler Jugend "Hitler Youths" were lined along the road as we approached the camp. They began to spit at us and throw rocks at us as we passed by them. On the trip back to the camp. I found a box of diamonds in the back of the halftrack I was in, but had to bury them before the Germans found them on me. I didn't want to be accused of looting and be shot. I went back to Hammelburg in 1967 to retrieve the diamonds, but was unsuccessful. I also found a mussette bag and a sweater. The bag contained shaving articles and toothpaste and a toothbrush. They belonged to Major Stiller. I used his razor and toothbrush for the rest of the war. I gave the bag and sweater to the Patton

Museum at Louisville, Ky.

We spent the night in the camp and the next morning we were put on a train to go to Nuremburg. We were strafed by American fighters at Nuremburg and the only casualty I know of was an Englishman that was hit in the arm by shrapnel. He was getting some hot water out of the engine to make some coffee. We spent a few days in Nuremburg and went on to Mooseburg by train where about a month later we were liberated by the 14th Armored Division and the 99th Infantry Division.

General Patton entered the camp with a tank and visited with us briefly. We were flown to Rheims, France and then onto Le Havre, France by train where we were put on boats and went home.

This letter was written by a man that was
on the half track with me when we were wiped
out. I saw his leg fly through the air.

(ROBT ZAWADA)

887-8277

6000 FLAGLER (METairie, LA)

DEAR MR S.

9-27-81

IT WAS VERY NICE OF YOU TO CALL, ALWAYS INTERESTING
TO TALK WITH SOMEONE INVOLVED IN THE PAST. PERHAPS YOU
COULD ANSWER SOME QUESTIONS I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CURIOUS
ABOUT - WERE YOU ON OUR HALF-TRACK DURING THE NIGHT AS WE
TRIED TO BREAK OUT? IT WAS ONE SELECTED TO BE BURNED,
WHICH IS WHY I ENDED UP IN THE BACK OF THE ONE YOU ALSO
~~WERE~~ ON AT THE END. THERE ARE SOME SPOTS MY MIND IS
COMPLETELY BLANK ON, & CERTAIN THINGS I DO REMEMBER
DO NOT COME IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER. I REMEMBER WE
WERE TOLD TO ABANDON OUR HALF-TRACK, I WAS GIVEN IN-
STRUCTIONS TO BE SURE & DESTROY A RADIO CODE BOOK (WHICH
I IN 5 MONTHS AS R.O. I HAD NEVER USED) BUT I DO NOT REMEMBER
SEEING THE VEHICLE SET ON FIRE (IF IT EVER WAS) THE NEXT
THING I RECALL WAS BEING IN THE BACK OF SOMESONE'S H.T.
SITTING ON THE TOP LEDGE, WHEN THE GERMANS OPENED UP.
THEN I GO BLANK - I HAVE NO IDEA HOW I GOT OUT OF THE H.T.
OR HOW LONG A PERIOD OF TIME ELAPSED TILL THE NEXT
I REMEMBER I WAS RUNNING & JUST AS I GOT HIT. I RECALL GETTING
UP & TRYING TO RUN AGAIN, NOT REALIZING MY LEG WAS GONE.
I VAGUELY RECALL WE WERE NOT THAT FAR FROM THE CREST
OF A HILL, I WONDER IF THAT WAS WHAT I WAS TRYING TO GET
OVER, OR IF I WAS TRYING TO FIND COVER AWAY FROM THE
VEHICLES. (ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS YOU LEARN IN AN AMB DIV.
IS THAT WHEN YOU ARE RIDING ON ANY VEHICLE AND IT STARTS
RECEIVING TANK FIRE, IS TO GET AWAY FROM IT AS THAT IS
WHAT THEY ARE SHOOTING AT.) OR IT OCCURS TO ME THAT I
JUST PANICED AND WAS AIMLESSLY RUNNING AWAY. ALTHOUGH
I SEEM TO REMEMBER A NUMBER OF PEOPLE AROUND.

ME DOING THE SAME THING, OR WAS THIS MY IMAGINATION?
COULD YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU SAW & THOUGHT AT THE TIME? THEN
THERE WAS A SEQUENCE OF EVENTS THAT I CANNOT PUT IN ORDER.
THE FIRST THING I DID WAS MAKE A ~~TURNOUT~~ TORNICQUET OUT OF
MY BELT (NOT A NECK TIE) THEN GOT MY P-38 PISTOL, GERMAN
WATCH & FEW OTHER GERMAN SOUVENIRS & THREW THEM AS FAR AWAY
AS I COULD. A LARGE TREE WAS HIT & I MANAGED TO WILLIE UNDER-
NEATH IT, PROTECTING MYSELF FROM ANY AIR BURSTS. WHEN
THE SHELLING STOPPED A NUMBER OF PEOPLE FROM OUR PLATOON
STARTED TO COME BY THAT HAD BEEN ON VEHICLES (PROBABLY
TANKS) FURTHER DOWN THE HILL. THERE WAS (VERY CONVENIENTLY)
A LARGE DITCH CLOSE BY THAT HAD SERVED AS COVER FOR THEM.
MOST LOOKED THE OTHER WAY WHEN THEY SAW ME, BUT FINALLY
ONE STOPPED I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER HIM, HIS NAME WAS
"DELAPIRZA" & WAS FROM N.Y. CITY. HE ASKED IF HE COULD HELP ME
I TOLD HIM NO & TO GET GOING WHILE HE STILL HAD A CHANCE. THEN
THERE WAS AN AIR FORCE LT. (HE WAS WEARING ADDRESS UNIFORM
PINKS ETC.) CAME OVER & PICKED ME UP & CARRIED ME OVER
BEHIND ONE OF THE M.T.'S. BUT THEN I WAS OUT IN THE OPEN
WHEN THE LINE OF TANKS PULLED UP TO THE EDGE OF THE WOODS,
AS THERE WAS ONE DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF ME. FORTUNATELY,
THEY MUST HAVE BEEN SHORT OF AMMO, AS THEY DID NOT SPRAY
THE WOODS WITH M.C. FIRE AS WE WOULD HAVE. OTHER EVENTS
I RECALL (BUT DID NOT TELL BARON IN THE INTERVIEWS) I DID NOT
RECALL TO MUCH RETURN FIRE, BY THE TIME THE TANKS & INF.
STARTED TO MOVE IN ON US THERE WAS NONE, UNTIL SOMEONE
GOT ON THE BACK OF ONE OF THE TANKS & STARTED SHOOTING
THE SO CAL. M.C. AT THE GERMANS. WHEREUPON SEVERAL

IF HE DID NOT STOP IMMEDIATELY, WHEN HE FORTUNATELY DID
THEN THERE WAS THIS TO MY LEFT & FURTHER DOWN THE HILL I SAW
A BLACK SOLDIER WITH A LEG ALSO BLOWN OFF WHEN THE GER.
INF. CAME IN PICKING UP PRISONERS I ~~THOUGHT~~ I SAW THEM
SHOOT HIM IN THE HEAD. THIS MADE FOR MY WORST MOMENT AS
SOON AFTER A GERMAN WALKED UP TO ME WITH HIS RIFLE POINTED
AT MY HEAD & HAD HIS FINGER ON THE TRIGGER. I TURNED MY HEAD
& CLOSED MY EYES, THE NEXT THING (AFTER A FEW TENSE SECONDS)
I FELT HIM FUMBLING WITH SOMETHING AT MY SIDE LOOKED OVER
& HE WAS TRYING TO UNHOOK THE BAYONET FROM MY BELT. I TOOK OVER,
GOT IT OFF, HANDED IT TO HIM, HE PICKED UP HIS RIFLE WHICH WAS
LEANING AGAINST A TREE & WALKED OFF. I DON'T BELIEVE EITHER
OF US SAID A WORD. I DID NOT RELATE THE THING ABOUT THE BLACK
TO BARN IT SEEMED A LITTLE FANCIFUL. BUT THEN IN THE BOOK
HE TELLS ABOUT SOME OF THE S.S. CHECKING FOR BLACKS, I BEGAN
TO WONDER. THEN BAUM SAYS THERE WAS A BLACK AMPUTEE
IN THE BED NEXT TO ME, COULD THIS BE THE SAME ONE? DO YOU
RECALL ANY OF THIS? THE GUY NEXT TO ME DIED ONE NIGHT A
FEW DAYS BEFORE THE CAMP WAS LIBERATED.

THE INDEX LIST SHOWS PEOPLE WHO MUST HAVE BEEN IN THE
CAMP HOSPITAL, NOTICE HOW MANY SOME HAVE BEEN PRISONERS,
ALSO SOME NAMES I PICKED UP IN VARIOUS WAYS. HOPE THEY
HELP YOU FIND SOME OLD FRIENDS. IF YOU RUN ACROSS ANY ONE
WHO WAS IN, OR KNOWS SOMEONE THAT WAS IN THE HOSP. WARD
WITH WATERS, PLEASE LET ME KNOW. I WILL TELL YOU MORE
ABOUT THAT SOME OTHER TIME AS I AM RUNNING OUT OF SPACE.

SINCERELY

Bob Lawa

This man was also on the ~~Paratrooper~~ half track with me when we were hit. He lost his hearing and has been almost deaf ever since!

2928 W Gardner
Spokane, WA. 99201

10-5-98

Bob Thompson
7448 E. 68th Pl.
Tulsa, Ok. 74133

Dear Bob: my daughter will see that you get this. I won't know if I'll need more surgery until 15 Oct.

As I remember the Hammelburg raid, the facts are as follows. For the record, I was a 2nd Lt assigned to H Co, 504th Para Inf Co 82d AB Div, when I was captured in Sicily. After our stay in Oflag 64 and the long haul to Hammelburg I was hoping for something to change in the fortunes of war - and it did. I believe it was on the afternoon of 27 March when Capt Baum and the 10th Bn, 4th Armored arrived at Hammelburg with guns blazing. It was quite a sight to see those US tanks on the hill overlooking the camp. I got a kick out of seeing a tanker climb out of a tank and calmly urinating at its side.

When we broke through the wire Lt Col Waters had already been shot. After reaching the tanks the first officer I talked to was a major. He asked me if I knew where col Waters was. I told him, no. I then asked him if I could join his outfit. He said he was not in charge, Capt Baum was. I then asked him who he was and he replied he was an observer. Just then Capt Baum drove up in a jeep. He said he couldn't take everyone back and that he was running short of gas and ammo but they were going to try to fight their way out. I asked him if I could come along and he said I was welcome to climb aboard.

I climbed aboard the rear tank along with a black captain. He was also a prisoner and we talked briefly. I told him I was a paratrooper and he said "I'm armored, I'm home".

We had just started to roll when there was a large explosion at the head of the column and we stopped. A short time later a group of Germans came out of the woods on our right. I could see some carrying bazookas. The tank commander had previously passed up some M2 "grease guns" through the hatch. We opened up on the krauts and a couple went down. The rest ran back into the woods. The capt jumped off the tank and followed them into the woods. He never returned.

**MRS. JOHN KNIGHT WATERS
3900 TUNLAW ROAD, N. W.
WASHINGTON 7, D. C.**

May 14, 1945

Dear Mrs. Thompson:

The men from Oflag 64 were pretty well scattered. Some of them like Captain Dunn escaped. Colonel Waters stayed with the group to look out for them and went to Hammelburg but after he was wounded most of them were marched to Moosburg. Those men have since been freed and also the group which went to Luckenwalde has been freed. There have been many hundreds of prisoners freed and of course the War Department has to be very careful in screening the names of the liberated men. They have announced that they will put the names on the air and in the newspaper as soon as they are forwarded from overseas.

Colonel Waters was badly hurt at Hammelburg and does not know what happened to the individual prisoners after that, but we all hope that you will soon get the good news that your boy will be liberated.

Sincerely yours,

Beatrice Patton

Mrs. W. A. Thompson,
Stigler, Oklahoma.

CHAPTER 11- THE TRIP TO SOUTHERN GERMANY

March 31, 1945- Nuremburg, Germany

When everything was ready the train pulled out of the station and headed south for Nuremburg. We were on the train maybe 2 days and pulled into the train station at Nuremburg. The next morning at Nuremburg the sirens began to blow and our senior officers talked the German into pulling the train out of the freight yard and out into the countryside. As we were sitting in the train in the country, maybe 3 miles out of town I noticed two Germans with suitcases running for the open countryside. I got up and walked to the engine and found out that the two men were the men that were running the train. I thought that as long as I was there I would get a little hot water from the engine to make some coffee with. There was one man ahead of me to get water and he was getting water with a big aluminum pitcher. He was a Scotchman and was in the British Army. Just as he was getting his water, I looked up and saw several P-51 fighters coming straight at us with their machine guns blazing. The first fighter fired his guns but I guess he saw who we were and told the other fighters to not fire. Lucky for us the others did not fire. I think the only person hurt was the Scotchman. He was hit in the arm with a bullet or a steel fragment.

There were others that were evacuated from Hammelburg by walking. They were at Nuremburg at the time of this air raid and were caught in the bomb runs of some American B-17's. About 25 of them were killed and lots were wounded.

We walked from the freight yards to a camp for American Air Force prisoners. The walk was about 5 or so miles and was right through the downtown section of Nuremburg. This town was desolation first class. There was not a building standing that was not damaged severely. Most of the buildings were just walls with holes where the windows had been.

We made it to the camp and I began to get sick again. I felt really lousy. I lay down on the ground and curled up and tried to go to sleep and somebody walked and put his foot on my back and rolled me over and said " what is the matter with this man? I told him I was sick and he got two men that picked me up and took me to a barracks used as a hospital. They put me to bed and I went sound asleep. I guess I was just exhausted. They fed me a piece of bread and after several hours, I began to feel better.

I then began to notice that everybody was gone and I was alone. I got up and looked around and everybody was leaving. They had lined up out in the yard and were preparing to march off. I ran to the kitchen of the barracks where I was and began to grab food. I found a can of powdered milk and box of raisins and some other things from a British Red Cross Parcel. I quickly mixed up the can of powdered milk and mixed the raisins in and ate it all. The milk was in a can the size of a 1 lb. can of ground coffee and the raisins were in a box about 6" high and 3" square. I thoroughly enjoyed eating the treat, but I really paid for it later in the day!

We went to the train station and were put in boxcars, but the train didn't leave for awhile. The Germans were much more relaxed about us than they had been all winter. The war was about over and everybody knew it. We walked up and down the tracks talking to people. There was a train full of Jews, mostly young women on the train next to us and we shared a lot of our food with them.

I walked into the train station where the German civilians were waiting for trains and sat down on a bench. I saw a German newspaper and picked it up and was trying to read it when a German man looked at me rather funny and called a guard over to make me get out of the waiting room. The guard took me back to where the rest of the prisoners were.

We were finally all loaded on the train and the train pulled out of the station and traveled all night. The next morning they opened the doors and we were still at the place we started from. We hadn't gone anywhere.

The train then pulled out again and in a day or so we ended up at a place called Mooseburg, which is northwest of Munich about 30 or so miles. We unloaded and walked to the new camp.

From:

To: DR. W. A. THOMPSON
STIGLER, OKLAHOMA

LT RT THOMPSON, C-1179720

STIGLER, OKLAHOMA

MAY 29, 1945

[CENSOR'S STAMP]

See instruction No. 2

[Sender's complete address above]

Dear Dad & Mom,
I haven't written because I've been expecting to be on my way home at any time, but it keeps dragging on until I'm getting impatient. It is definite that I'll be sent home and I have a good priority on ships, but you know how that goes.

I'm feeling fine and much more new than I ever did before. We have wonderful chow and I'm really doing an A-1 job of taking care of it.

We have no return address, so you can't write me. How I wish you could! I haven't heard from you in almost ten months now and a lot could happen in that length of time. I try to write regular until I feel it's not necessary & will talk you as "th" as I reach the U.S.

As ever,
Bob

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?



Print the complete address in plain block letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided. Use typewriter, dark ink, or pencil. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.

No. _____



(CENSOR'S STAMP)

To

DR. W. A. THOMPSON
STIGLER, OKLAHOMA

From

C-1179-20

J. R. THOMPSON
(Sender's name)

U.S. ARMY
(Sender's address)

STIGLER, OKLAHOMA

MAY 4, 1945
(Date)

Dear Dad & Mommy
I have written one other letter. You may get it & you may not. I said go into any long details about anything, the important thing, I guess, is that I'm alive, sane, & still have my good health, in spite of the Germans. My teeth went in when I was a kid, but they can be fixed up. I have plenty to eat now, in fact, more than I can eat. I should be on my way home very soon, just when I'll get home I don't know, but it won't be long. I'll cross you long distance as soon as I can in the U.S. I'm going to try to fly to either Tulsa or Okla. City so be prepared to meet me there. The sooner I wake up on our back porch the happier I'll be.

V-MAIL

This letter was written from Mooseburg POW Camp. We are still there awaiting transportation out! I bummed this stationary from an American tank, wrote the letter and handed it back to him and asked him to mail it for me, which he obviously did!

Print the complete address in plain letters in the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark

panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the left. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

Handwritten signature in a circle

(CENSOR'S STAMP)

To: DR. W. A. THOMPSON
STIGLER, OKLAHOMA

From:

LT THOMPSON, C-1179720
STIGLER, OKLAHOMA
MAY 4, 1945

See instruction

(Sender's complete address above)

Dear Dad and Mom
I just received another V-mail from so I may as well try another letter. Just finished a meal of bacon eggs & kaffee. First fresh eggs & bacon since I left in 9 mos. They really tasted good, too. The first thing I want when I get home is a big sweet potato pie. Starvation peak & seen bread. I'm really becoming impatient to get home now. The closer the time gets the more impatient I get. I've waited 18 mos, already so I guess I can wait a few more weeks.

I hope these letters I'm now writing get to you. It's more a less a bit of mispropagation.
Happ
Bob

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

REPLY BY
V...-MAIL

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

1204

SYMBOLS

DL = Day Letter

NL = Night Letter

LC = Deferred Cable

NLT = Cable Night Letter

Ship Radiogram

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

OFS18-17

Washington, D. C. 351 p.m. 5 22 45

Home Service ARC.,

Stigler, Okla.

May 21 1945 second Lt. Robert Thompson 0-1179720 requests
Dr. W. A. Thompson be notified his liberation.

Margaret Shotton, National Home Svc.
325 p.m.

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

4/2/45 German radio carried message to
you from someone whose name I did not
get, but who is in Coflag 64 - saying
"Am well - doing fine - write to me -
all my love"

J. K. Hopkins

45 Caroline Rd

Upper Mountain

N. J.

CHAPTER 12-MOOSEBURG AND FREEDOM

Mooseburg, Germany- April 10, 1945

Mooseburg was a huge camp. It held men from armies all over the world. They were from France, India, Greece, Australia, Yugoslavia, USA, Russia, etc. They even had a bunch of Russian women as prisoners. There were about 100,000 total prisoners there. When we got there, there were a lot of American Air Force men there as prisoners.

We were now in Southern Germany and spring was here. The weather was real warm and we could sleep out in the yard in the dirt. There was no grass because we pulled it all up, and made soup out of it. The food was lousy as usual.

One day there was some activity around the bulletin board and I walked over to see what it was. The news was that President Roosevelt had died and Harry Truman was the new president. Harry Truman? Who was that? We had been so isolated for two years that we didn't know who was vice president!

We arrived at Mooseburg about April 1, 1945 and on April 29, 1945 I was walking around outside batteries and flew over the front lines. I thought something would happen soon and went into the barracks to take a nap. Just then somebody hollered and said we have been liberated. There is a tank outside and Gen. Patton is with it. I told him to leave me alone. I had been through this liberation business twice and I was sick of it. He got very serious about it and I thought I should go take a look. Sure enough, there was Gen. George Patton and a Sherman tank was right behind him.

I walked outside and Gen. Patton assured us that we would be fed and taken care of and not to worry, He said he would get us out of there as soon as he could and turned around and left.

While Gen. Patton was at our camp there was a lot of excitement. One of our men found a newspaper on the tank from Philadelphia that was several months old and he found his name in the paper announcing that he was missing and was assumed to be a POW.

Gen. Patton got out of his jeep and went into one of the barracks and talked to our men for awhile. I asked one of the men on the tank if he had some stationery that I could have and he handed me a blank form for mail that the Army used. I sat down and wrote my mother a letter and handed it to him and asked him if he would mail it for me and he assured me that he would. Momma saved the letter and I still have it. It is included in this story.

A Chaplain from one of the Infantry Regiments in the area came down the street looking for a man named John Goode, from Martinsville, VA. That was my best friend and we got John and told him about the man. The man was from Martinsville VA and knew John Goode's mother. John's mother had asked the Chaplain to see if he could go into the POW camps and find her son John. He found him. The Chaplain took John back to their old Infantry Regiment. They gave him a bath, a shave, a haircut and some new clothes and invited him to stay with them and go home with the Regiment. John said "No, I belong over there with the rest of the prisoners and he was brought back to the POW compound. He brought with him some rations that included a one gallon can of ham and raisin sauce. We built a small fire with some sticks and heated the can of rations. We hadn't eaten anything like that in almost 9 months.

I still had on the clothes I wore when I was captured and they had not been washed. My pants were so thick with grime I could run my fingernail down my leg and see the traces of it on my pants. I did not have a razor or

toothbrush or comb and we all looked pretty raunchy! I had a toothbrush I found on a halftrack at Hammelburg and was using it the last month of the war. The first thing the US Army did for us was to delouse us. We lined up in an open pasture near the camp and the soldiers would squirt powder up our legs, down our shirt front and in our open fly. What a relief that was !!!

Gen. Patton said that the 3rd Army would start bringing in rations for us, but I never did see any of them. I would go to town and steal food from the civilians. Most of the things were already stolen, but I managed to get a few rations. We could get out on the highway and stop American Army trucks and yell at them to throw us some food. They would throw rations out the window that we would pick up and eat.

When the American Army approached the POW camp where we were the German Army refused to surrender the camp. The Americans brought up some tanks and the German Army brought up some SS troops. The Americans slaughtered the SS troops and entered the camp. The gunfire of this battle entered the camp and wounded a lot of POWs and killed some also. I did not hear the firing.

Somebody had an American flag that was raised on the flagpole at the camp. They first took down the swastika and then raised the American Flag. Whatever happened to the flag? Nobody knows!

Naturally, when we were liberated the German guards were thrown into barracks and locked up. They weren't fed and started complaining. You can imagine how far the complaining went! I heard later that some of the POWs took 8 of the German guards out in the woods surrounding the POW compound and hung them in the trees.

On the day before the war was over in Europe there were a lot of trucks came into the compound and took us to a town named Ingolstadt, on the Danube River north of Munich. There was a German Air Force base there and we were to be evacuated from there to France. The first day nothing happened so we went down to the town and spent the night in an old German Army camp. The next morning we spent several hours throwing German Army weapons in the Danube River.

We were finally taken back out to the Air Base and waited for several hours when somebody noticed a German Air Force plane coming in to landing strip. The Americans had an antiaircraft gun on the field and started firing at the German. Somebody then remembered that the war was over at 12:00 that day and it was 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The war had been over for 4 hours and the firing stopped. The German landed and about 1,000 POWs surrounded the plane and started looking for souvenirs. They pretty well stripped the plane of anything valuable.

Shortly after this, an American plane landed and we looked up in the sky and the sky was full of American planes coming in to evacuate us. They started landing and we would run up to the plane and they would load 25 of us, then turn around and take off and head for France. They evacuated about 10,000 of us that afternoon.

The airplanes were C-47's, the kind used to drop paratroopers. The seats were along each side of the airplane and faced each other. I noticed one of our men that picked up an earphone that was playing popular music. He listened quietly and soon I saw tears forming in his eyes. He realized that he was going home and was overcome with emotion.

CHAPTER 13- THE TRIP HOME

Leave Germany arrive in France- May 9, 1945

The plane flew over Germany and we were all interested in looking down at the landscape as we flew over it. All the crossroads in Germany were pockmarked with bomb craters. In a short time, we landed at Rheims, France. As we were going to the hangers in the back of trucks, we passed a truck with Germans in it. The man in the truck with us told us that the Germans were the Generals and Admirals that had come to Rheims to sign the surrender documents.

Our stay at Rheims, was at an abandoned hospital. There were several big buildings, but not near enough room for all of us. They had a mess tent set up in one of the streets that was open 24 hours per day. I slept in the street near the mess tent and ate 6 meals per day. I would eat breakfast about 3 am then again about 7 am then lunch about 11 am then again about 3 pm. There was a Red Cross facility there, that handed out chocolate bars and other kinds of candy. We would get a piece of chocolate about 1" thick and about 8" square and eat that between meals. I don't think anybody got sick, but I sure don't know how they kept from it. We spent about a week there and boarded a train and went to Camp Lucky Strike that was located near Le Havre, France.

Camp Lucky Strike- Le Havre, France- May 12, 1945

Camp Lucky Strike was a staging area for returning soldiers that had been in prison. It was known as a "RAMP CAMP". Ramp was recovered allied military personnel. There were about 100,000 men there at the height of the activity. We had nothing to do but sit around and wait. At least we had good clean quarters and plenty to eat and I don't think anybody did much griping. There were entertainers there from the USA and sometimes they got a little raunchy. I suppose it was OK because all the audience were soldiers.

There was a landing strip that ran down the center of all the tents that was a German Airstrip that they used in the Battle of Britain. One day I saw an airplane land and slowly pull up to near where I was standing and as the men started unloading I noticed that a lot of the were Generals and Admirals. Then came the reason for all the Generals. Down the ramp came General Eisenhower. He walked over to where we were and asked us how long we had been there. We told him we had been there almost a month. He said, I will take care of that. You men go to your tents and start getting your gear ready because we will started overloading every ship going home and put all of you on them.

Sure enough in a couple of days, we began to load into the back of big trucks and head for the port at Le Havre. The day I was on the trip to Le Havre, there came a big rainstorm and the truck we were on drowned out and we were stalled on the road. After a while the driver got the truck started and we were on our way again. When we left Lucky Strike we were in a convoy of several trucks and when we got to the port we were alone, The driver drove around awhile and said " I don't know what to do with you guys and so I will take you back to Lucky Strike" I thought "I am this close to the ocean and I am staying close". I jumped off the truck and the driver started back to Lucky Strike. I saw a big ship with a small gangplank at a pier that was guarded by a Marine corporal. I walked up to the Corporal and asked if this ship was going to the USA and he said "yes". I said, " I think I will go with it" He told me I could not go unless I had some papers. I told him I had nothing and he said I could not go. I said how about that guy there and pointed down the dock and he turned and looked. When he turned and looked I ran onto the boat and made myself scarce.

June 1945, on the North Atlantic- going home!

The boat had room for 3,000 men and 6,000 men were loaded on it. Each bunk was rotated among men, so that each man occupied a bunk for 8 hours and then walked around for 16 hours. I was able to always find a place to sleep when it came my time. It took about 10 days for us to cross the North Atlantic. It was a peaceful voyage and I think we all enjoyed the trip. There was plenty to eat and we could take showers. Close to home, I saw a whale and then a lot of porpoises followed the ship.

We arrived at Newport News in VA and unloaded at a pier that was operated by women. When we unloaded, the women looked at us and said, " who are you guys"? We had no identification and we had no emblems of rank. Our uniforms consisted of wool OD pants and wool OD shorts, which is standard wear for soldiers. I don't think anybody responded to their questions and we loaded into boxcars and headed out for Camp Patrick Henry, which is where I was when I left for overseas almost 2 years ago.

The telephone company made arrangements for all of us to call home free and we all up on that. You would place your call and then wait, sometimes maybe 4 hours for your call to go through. When my call went through, I told Momma to meet me at the Officers Club at Camp Chaffee, on a certain date. I also had to get new ID cards because I had none. I threw away all I had at Hammelburg, because I did not want to get caught fighting the Germans as a liberated POW, because I thought you could be shot on sight. I was issued new ID Cards and still have them.

When the time came to leave, we were all put on coach cars and headed west. They made the train up so that they could leave cars on the road as we went along. I think they left some in West Virginia and some in Illinois and another place that I don't remember. It took about two days to get home.

June 1945, Camp Chaffee, Arkansas

At Camp Chaffee, I was at the finance office making arrangements for my paychecks to start being issued again. I was walking down a street back to my barracks when Momma spotted me and jumped out of the car and ran as fast as she could and grabbed me and I thought would never let me go. My father sat in the car and I walked up and shook hands with him. I don't remember him saying anything. He never did say very much.

have cherished every moment of this great bond that has kept us together for over half a century. I constantly dream of us FO's doing our duty in time of war, and the dreams are so vivid that they look so real... in appearance.

I want so much to see all of you again. For that matter - I want so much to see all of you again. But I want to be truthful, to be sincere, amid the situation. Ever since my condition was discovered, the doctors have said I'm "terminal ill," whatever that is. And for that reason - I have to spend my days at the hospital under different kinds of treatments all day ~~long~~ long, no visitors allowed. Sometimes even on weekends.

As such, I don't want to see you making that trip all the way here for nothing. But I've come up with an idea of my own. Come October - Rosie and I have planned to go to the Reunion this year - even if I have to crawl. It's going to be in San Antonio, but in October. So, I'll get in touch with you later to learn about your plans. I want to see you all before I expire.

Thinking of all of you - I'll say - so long - for now. As ever,

Rafael DeLaRosa (Raf)
God Bless you all.

Houston, Tx.

July 31, 2000

TO:

Mr. & Mrs. Robert T. Thompson;
Greetings, my friends.

It is with great sadness in my heart that I write this letter. I received your letter last week but didn't have the time to answer because of the mean circumstances on my part.

I want you to know that your nice letter brought me the most tremendous amount of happiness anyone has ever got to receive in a lifetime, when you spoke of your desire of you and Jimmy Painter wanting to come over and see me even if it was for a day.

Did I ever tell you about my ~~problem~~ problem? It seems that the doctors have discovered that I have three strikes against me: lung cancer, lymphoma, and hodgekins disease, that seems to be taking over my body; and the doctors at the VA hospital gave me eight more months of life.

How lucky can I be to have such wonderful friends as the four of you — who's bond has not dissolved in a lifetime of friendship. I want you to know that I

- 2 -

Waiting for the German machine-
gunner to start shooting - remember
how I cracked, Lieutenant? How I went
temporarily out of my head? "They're going
to shoot us, Lieutenant!" "They're going
to shoot us," I yelled over and over
again. And you said to me, "easy, Del, easy,"
and then, turning your face to see us you
said, "Well, this is it, men," so long!
Then - we four faced the machine gunner.
Boy, some memories, eh?

But you know that talking about our
war experiences in front of two very lovely
ladies made me feel good in getting it
out of my chest. More so in seeing how
very attentive and how interested they
were over our conversation. In a manner
of speaking - I felt young all over again.

When we parted from the restaurant - I felt
a little sad all over again - remembering the
time when you were separated from us in
prison. We three just stood there, facing one
another - unable to speak. But thank God
we found each other again. Amen.

Lieutenant, your poem brought tears
to my eyes as I read it. Thanks for sending
it. But listen, I'm sending it back to
you so you can autograph it - then send it
back to me. That's how much your friend-
ship means to me.

Lots of love for you and yours - and may
God Bless you and keep you safe.

As Ever
Del

your one powerful
friend
Del
they're beautiful

Houston, TX,

Nov. 9, 1996

Greetings, my very good friend,
Mr. Bob T. I received your letter this evening but I didn't get around to write back because I've been under the clouds lately. I've been on my back for almost a week now — nothing serious, just my back. I cannot straighten up so well. Feels like I'm breaking in half. But this comes and goes lasting about a week or so each time. So no big problem.

Hey, I liked the pictures very very much. You look sharp wearing the cap I bought for you. You look like a General! Listen, can I say something? Be like me in every aspect at all times. Wear your cap with pride all the time, anywhere and everywhere every time. That's what I do.

Lieutenant, I'm very glad and happy to hear that you and your lovely wife got back home safe and sound, and I thank God for you. You see, aside of having so many health problems, God has been all the difference in my life. Remember when we were standing in front and facing that "one man" firing squad ~~waiting~~ waiting to be shot full of holes?

Remember how I was so scared that I started to pray aloud? Well in spite of my fears I got the sudden feeling that it was because of God and you that our lives were spared.

over, and then they opened up with every thing they had for about 45 minutes. Do you remember the wailing and clamoring that followed as men yelled for the Medics? Those yells and screams are still in my ears. Do you remember how later — just the four of us — walked into a road-block? But anyway, I'm glad you have located another POW ^{who} went through the same experience. Who knows, maybe some more names of POW's will come to light... later.

I belong to the ~~Houston~~ Texas Gulf Coast Chapter of American Ex Prisoners of War Inc. Here in Houston, but mostly are from Korea or Vietnam eras. Listen, anytime you have some more info about POW's in Europe fill me in on it, OK.

Our Regards to you and Yours.
God Bless you and Yours —
" " " (that's what FO's called me)
" " " remember?

P.S. I couldn't very well make out the man's name

Sept. 11, 1996

Greetings, Mr. Bob T.;

Got your letter a little while ago and as usual - was very very glad to hear from you once more. So how's the weather down your way, eh? Man, I mean it's hot down here. But all in all - you made my day just reading your letter.

So how goes it with you, eh? I mean - your health problems? You know what, the time in prison at Stalag VII-A and elsewhere - everytime I got sick I learned to sweat-it-out simply because we never had doctors in camp. They all were at the front-lines taking care of their wounded. So that's what I'm doing now, Lieutenant - sweating it out, because no doctors here in Houston have been able to pin-point my troubles in all this time. So —

Lieutenant - this man you mention - from Co. E, 142 Inf. supposedly captured the same as us around Remieremont - my mind is a blank on that point in time. It may ring a bell though, because he mentions our own "objective" Remieremont, and he also mentions Stalag VII-A. But then - we got captured on Sept. 25th 1944 just south east of Remieremont.

Do you remember the "ambush" we ran into after following some ravine, we later discovered - amid a thick heavy blanket of fog - to be between two high hills? The Germans waited until we were half way

about - I hope you can make it. If you think you can - please let me know so I can get in touch with Jimmy Painter, so us three can get together. Did you know that Ernest Flipp passed away years ago? He was a FO also.

Well - guess I'll close now. Don't want to tire you. What do you say, we'll keep this line of communication open, Okay? Fine. I'll write some more later. Meantime, may God keep you and yours well, and may the blessing of Almighty God our Father be upon you and yours for ever and ever. Amen

These are pictures we took at the Dallas reunion

P.S. I just got back from San Antonio, but because I didn't know about our files there I'm going to make a special trip just for that.

I'm still very active in Veterans Organizations -
Later!!!

like the baby I almost was.

Lt. Thompson; never had I known the meaning of true love. Never had I known that besides women - men could love one another also. Never had I experienced such a feeling, such a strong bond, such unity, such togetherness, as that which we had developed between us four. Want to know the truth? I got to love you three guys more than my own brothers. Why? Well we had lived together, ate together, slept together, fought together, and almost had died together. Those memories is what keeps me going, Lieutenant!

As with you I - I got word of Jimmy Painter by means of the EX-POW ~~bulletin~~ ^{reunion} every month. Such was the case that when the 36th Division ^{reunion} was held in FT. Worth a few years ago - we ran into each other. Remember Ernest Flipp? He attended also. And man, did we three have a ball! Sgt. Charles Prater was there. Also Johnny McKeel, Sgt. Campbell, and a bunch of B. Battery men.

Listen, Lieutenant, this year the 36th Division Reunion is going to be here in Houston. If you're up and

Houston, Tx. 77087
5819 Vena Dr.
July 5, 1996

Hello, there, Lt. Thompson —

I received your letter yesterday pm. and, you'll never know how happy I was at hearing from you after all the years gone by. I was so overjoyed that my eyes got real watery as I read about you. Matter of fact - I'm still up in the clouds, and somewhat emotional, if I may say so.

You know, Lieutenant, somehow - I never lost hope in that some day our paths would cross again and thereby re-establish our friendly relationship as in the past. I'll never forget how following our captivity — after the Germans separated us four — did I realized what the meaning, real meaning of comradeship was.

When you were the first one to be taken away from us, I went to pieces. When Sgt Painter was separated from Heatherington and I, I went to pieces. When Heatherington and I were separated — I went to pieces. Now, — was nothing but pieces. I felt all alone in hundreds and hundreds of men. I felt lost, I was lonely, I was miserable, and I cried.

we were spies because we were in
their territory - and as spies - we
going to be shot. Remember how they
lined us up to shoot us?

Excuse me sir; it's not that I want
to revise memories. It's just that
I'm happy over having learned of
your whereabouts, and that alone
makes me feel younger even if I'm 73.
St. Thompson, if you are up to it -
please write to me, sir, as I am
very happy for you.

Remember how the FO's used to call
me Del - for the La Rosa?

P.S.

I called you over the phone but did
not make contact.

Mr. Bob Thught, (General) gave me your
address and phone number.

May God Bless you
and yours,
Del

Houston Tx. 77087
5819 Vena Dr.

June 26, 1996

Dear Lt. Robert Thompson.

With all due respect, sir, I'm trying to think of a way to start this letter, but there are a lot of mixed emotions within me at the moment, that words are hard to come by.

Today, I received my T-Patch Newsletter, and upon reviewing it — I almost went through the roof. There, before my very eyes was your picture in uniform, and as we both stared at each other my mind went back half a century ago.

From the write-up along with your photo: Lt. Robert Thompson, Btry. B. 132nd FA, 36th Division — I knew it had to be you. Perhaps if I introduce myself you may just remember me: Pvt. Rafael E. De La Rosa. You and Sgt. Jimmy Painter, Pvt. Heatherington and myself — we got captured together at the same time on Sept. 22nd 1944, on the outskirts of Remiremont, France? Remember Lieutenant?

Remember that as we were searched and questioned — that the Germans thought

came by and brought food. She knew they meant well. But it was hard for her to take. Then when Paul was missing the same people came by to pay their respects and brought food. It was also hard for her to take this. Then when they got word that I was missing she told me that she and Daddy could not take any more of this and they went to Ft. Smith and checked into a motel and stayed a week.

Maxie told me that he was in school when Pershing was reported missing and the principal of the school, A. J. Holland came to him and told him Pershing was missing and he had better go home. Then when Paul was reported missing he was out at football practice and the same man came to him and told him to go home that another of his brothers was missing. Then when I was missing Mr. Holland came to him and took him by the arm and told him to go home. He did not say another word, because he was so choked up could not talk.

I enrolled in school that fall for the next spring semester at Stillwater (Oklahoma A & M) and about 6 weeks after school had started Daddy had a stroke and was very sick for a long time. He never fully recovered, I think the events during the war had a lot to do with his having a stroke. I don't know how he stood it as long as he did.

Events during the war about three brothers missing or killed in action.
Summer of 1945

After I had been home awhile, momma got all the letters she had received during the war and showed them to me. It was very painful for her and it became very painful for me, also. We went through all the letters and read the ones we could stand to read and then put them up. When she died, I gathered up all the letters and telegrams and took them home and kept them. Probably most of our family has never seen nor read these letters.

When Pershing was listed as missing, Momma started trying to find out what had happened to him. She contacted a lot of brass in the Pentagon and received a lot of letters. She also received letters of condolence from friends and neighbors. These letters and other forms of correspondence are placed here in the next few pages.

When our parents were notified about Paul being killed in Normandy, most of the correspondence went to Paul's wife Betty. I assume that she got all the correspondence because we have no record of any of the letters or notifications. All we have about Paul is the obituary in the magazine of West Point known as the Assembly.

When I was listed as missing all the correspondence went to my parents who kept all of it. All of this correspondence is placed here in the narrative. Maybe you can better understand the grief and agony my parents experienced for the two years that 3 of their sons were gone.

Rafael De La Rosa-Member of our Forward Observer Crew
Dallas-1996

De La Rosa was a Mexican man from Houston and was in the 36th Division National Guard before the war. When we first made contact several years ago, he became very sentimental about our renewing our friendship. I was very pleased to hear from him, and naturally, I was pleased to learn of his feelings about me, and the other members of the crew. He was a little man and dark skinned and I think the Germans treated him badly. I have placed several of his letters in the following pages and maybe you will understand his feelings after you read the letters.

NORTON McGIFFIN

Radio Station WBAP

Fort Worth, Texas

April 8, 1945.

Dear Mrs. Thompson:

I am so glad to learn that the Lieutenant is alive. Naturally I remember you and your letter.

Your son's sufferings as a German prisoner of war should not be forgotten by the peace makers. I think the Germans should pay for the damage they have caused.

The enclosed letter from Ingview would have been sent long ago, but I could not remember your name. Sorry.

I am so glad Mrs. McClure got in touch with you.

Sincerely, Norton McGiffin

Note: This Private Early
evidently knew you
son.
McG.

J. J. Gerhardt
500 Texas St.
Longview Texas
1-12-45

Mr. Norton W. E. Griffin
10 Radio Station W.B.A.P.
Fort Worth 2, Texas

Dear Sir:

Received your letter in
regards to information you want
and am very glad to furnish
you what I received from
my Brother in the same outfit.
My Brother writes that the Boy or
Buddies name is as following:

Private RIGS. EARLY.

B. Btry. 132. F. A. BN.

A.P.O. 36. 90 Postmaster
New York N.Y.

I wrote my Brother in regards to
to the Buddie of the missing Officer
and I received the address above
if I can be of any more assistance
I will be glad to try.
Yours Truly,
J. J. Gerhardt

WAR DEPARTMENT
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE

IN REPLY REFER TO:

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

AGPC-3 201 Thompson, Robert T.
(15 Oct 44) 01179720

21 December 1944.

Dr. William A. Thompson,
Stigler, Oklahoma.

Dear Dr. Thompson:

I am writing you concerning your son, Second Lieutenant Robert T. Thompson, who has been reported missing in action in France since 22 September 1944.

It is sincerely regretted that up to the present time no further information regarding the status of your son has reached the War Department. A report has now been received, however, which discloses that on 22 September 1944, Lieutenant Thompson was a member of a forward observation unit with a company advancing toward enemy positions. While the company was engaged in an attack against the enemy south of Remiremont, France, a radio message received from your son gave his position, which was about one thousand yards ahead of his organization. This area was not reached until two days later, at which time no trace of Lieutenant Thompson or the other members of the observation party could be found.

Lists of prisoners of war received from the enemy, through the International Red Cross, have been carefully checked, but Lieutenant Thompson's name has not been found on any of them. The military authorities are utilizing all the means at their disposal to locate our men missing in action, and you may be assured that if any information is received in this office concerning your son, it will be communicated to you without delay.

My sympathy is with you during this long and difficult period of anxiety.

Sincerely yours,

Robert H. Dunlop
ROBERT H. DUNLOP
Brigadier General,
Acting The Adjutant General.

France
Nov. 21-1944
1125-AM.

My Dearest Mrs. Thompson

I recieved your letter
which was written Nov. 8th,
last evening.

I know your son, and
also know him to be one
of the finest men I ever
met.

If censorship regulations
would permit I am positive I
could tell you many good news.
Please try not to worry too
much, and just cherish
that news good news. I am
sure when you do, that, it
will be a great relief,
and every thing will be all-
right.

I would like to see you
and my address - for I don't
worry I know my way around
Singapore.

Sincerely,
H. H. H.



ATTENTION:

HEADQUARTERS, ARMY AIR FORCES
WASHINGTON

NOV 16 1944

Mrs. W. A. Thompson

Stigler, Oklahoma

My dear Mrs. Thompson:

This is in reply to your letter of October 30, 1944 regarding your son, First Lieutenant William M. Thompson, O-25775, Air Corps, who is now stationed at Great Bend Army Air Field, Great Bend, Kansas.

Your feeling for the safety of your fourth son is well understood and I have directed the Commanding General, Second Air Force to retain him on duty in the United States for at least another year.

Nothing can be said, I realize full well, which can compensate you and other members of the family for the loss of your sons. It has not been the lot of many families to have made such a sacrifice for our American way of living. It is my sincere hope that you may find some measure of comfort in the thought that your sons were not found wanting in the crisis in which our Nation found itself, and that by their endeavors and accomplishments they have helped to bring closer that day of "Victory" for which we are all striving. The memory of our brave heroes who have given their lives in this fateful struggle will forever be enshrined in the hearts of a grateful Nation.

My deepest sympathy is extended and I join with you in the hope that your son, Lieutenant R. T. Thompson, may be returned safe and well before long.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "H. H. Arnold". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

H. H. ARNOLD
General, U. S. Army
Commanding General, Army Air Forces

WAR DEPARTMENT

THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

IN REPLY REFER TO:

AG 201 Thompson, Robert T.
PC-N NAT 244

15 October 1944

. Doctor William A. Thompson

Stigler, Oklahoma

Dear Doctor Thompson:

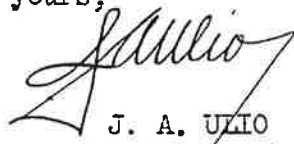
This letter is to confirm my recent telegram in which you were regretfully informed that your son, Second Lieutenant Robert T. Thompson, 01179720, Field Artillery, has been reported missing in action in France since 22 September 1944.

I know that added distress is caused by failure to receive more information or details. Therefore, I wish to assure you that at any time additional information is received it will be transmitted to you without delay, and, if in the meantime no additional information is received, I will again communicate with you at the expiration of three months.

The term "missing in action" is used only to indicate that the whereabouts or status of an individual is not immediately known. It is not intended to convey the impression that the case is closed. I wish to emphasize that every effort is exerted continuously to clear up the status of our personnel. Under war conditions this is a difficult task as you must readily realize. Experience has shown that many persons reported missing in action are subsequently reported as prisoners of war, but as this information is furnished by countries with which we are at war, the War Department is helpless to expedite such reports. However, in order to relieve financial worry, Congress has enacted legislation which continues in force the pay, allowances and allotments to dependents of personnel being carried in a missing status.

Permit me to extend to you my heartfelt sympathy during this period of uncertainty.

Sincerely yours,


J. A. UZIO
Major General,
The Adjutant General.

NORTON McGIFFIN

Radio Station WBAP

Fort Worth, Texas

Oct. 25, 1944

Mrs. W.A. Thompson,
Stigler, Tex.

Dear Mrs. Thompson:

I will try and locate the relatives of the Texas jeep driver you mentioned in your letter of Oct. 20; I will ask the question on the air next Monday, the 30th of October. I am afraid you are doomed to disappointment, unless this jeep driver was a close friend of Lt. Thompson and mentioned him in letters home.

However, I will be glad to help you; of course, you realize that the relatives may have received a letter from their son, the jeep driver, and not be ~~listeners~~ listeners of mine. It wouldn't hurt to run a personal ad in the Dallas News.

There will be no charge for this mention I make on the air; we do not feel like charging anything for a service like that; in fact, we never charge for sketches people sometimes ask for.

I sincerely hope that we can hear of something; I will tell my audience next Monday to get in touch with you there in Stigler, Oklahoma, if they know anything; I will mention your son's name slowly, also your own, and the name of your town. I do hope you get some word.

Sincerely,

Norton McGiffin

near
Just a word to let you know
that our hearts are with you.
and to assure you that prayers
for Betty's safety are being heard
daily - if more I could do - I
surely would. Celeste B.



A word of deepest sympathy
The burden that you feel -
Your sorrow - is a thing that time
And faith will surely heal.
Celeste & Cedric Barker.

Stigler Okla
Oct-22nd, 1944

Dear Doctor Ed Mrs Thompson,
When I

returned from Oklahoma City - last
Monday night, I heard the news that -
your Bobby is missing in action.

It would be presumption for
me, who has lost no one in this
war, to offer sympathy in your
soul shattering grief.

All I can say, dear friends,
is, you are constantly in my
thoughts - and this old heart - is
saddened by your loss.

Sincerely
Ethel E. Falconer.

United States District Court
Eastern, Northern and Western Districts of Oklahoma

Lawyer Broadbent
Judge

Muskogee, Oklahoma
October 14, 1944

My very dear Dr. and Mrs. Thompson:

I have no words left which have not already been used in an effort to convey to you the sympathy that has swelled my heart in your previous hours of grief and sorrow.

I now learn that Bobby is reported missing in action. I know your cup runneth over, but I pray God that in His limitless compassion. He will give you strength and courage of heart and mind to bear this additional heartbreak.

Most sincerely,

Viney W. Lomel

FOR DEFENSE



BP/mnn

WAR DEPARTMENT

IN REPLY REFER TO:

THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

AGPC-G 201 Thompson, Robert T.
(2 Jan 45) 01179720

29 January 1945.

Mrs. W. A. Thompson,
Stigler, Oklahoma.

Dear Mrs. Thompson:

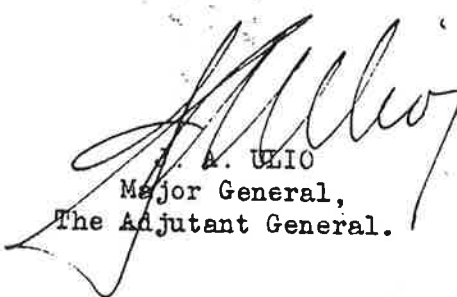
I have received for reply your letter of 2 January 1945, requesting information regarding military personnel associated with your son, Second Lieutenant Robert T. Thompson, who has been missing in action in France since 22 September 1944.

The anxiety of parents whose sons are reported missing is fully understood and it is regretted that no information concerning your son has been received in the War Department other than that furnished Doctor Thompson in a letter from this office of 21 December 1944. You may be assured, however, that any information received concerning Lieutenant Thompson will be forwarded to you promptly.

With regard to your inquiry concerning the military personnel associated with your son on 22 September 1944, it is suggested that you write your son's commanding officer for this information. It is not necessary to have his name; just address him as "Commanding Officer", using the same organization address you used in writing to your son.

My sympathy is with you in this period of uncertainty.

Sincerely yours,


J. A. ULLOA
Major General,
The Adjutant General.

HEADQUARTERS NORTHERN SECURITY DISTRICT
NINTH SERVICE COMMAND
INTELLIGENCE BRANCH
229 U S COURT HOUSE, P.O. BOX 951
PORTLAND 7, OREGON

August 29, 1944

Dear Doc:

Again I don't seem to be able to throw off my mind the recent bereavements of you and Mrs. Thompson and your families. I think you know it is quite a jolt to me, but all the time I thought only of you and Mrs. Thompson and his loved ones. My first thought was that you might do something critical and it would be no wonder how you could maintain your own equilibrium if I didn't know that you have the necessary will power, intelligence, strength and courage to meet whatever falls your lot. You were, and are, a soldier, and I believe that I have some idea of how a soldier feels when under great mental pain and stress.

I am more convinced each day that the world in which we find ourselves is governed by one Supreme Being and that the social structure of which we are a part is something that has already been dictated for us. But despite this I know that you, like myself, have wondered thousands of times why you should have so much grief to bear and, seemingly, unjustly too. That is another thing which is not always a matter of choice. We live in a world we little understand.

They had the necessary courage to make the supreme sacrifice in order that we might live in freedom, so it is our problem to ever keep their memories alive and ourselves worthy of the sacrifices made for us.

I don't know whether you wanted to hear from me or not at this time, but I just wanted you to know there are others who try to help you bear the deepest sorrow of your life.

Your friend,



From the USMA Assembly of April 1946

Paul Singer Thompson

NO. 8530 CLASS OF 1929

Killed in Action, August 10, 1944, in the European Area, aged 37 years.



N Brittany on August 10, 1944 in the bitter attacks against St. Malo, there died by enemy artillery fire an outstanding soldier, Paul S. Thompson. Tommy was commanding the 908th F.A. Bn. of the 83rd Infantry Division firing at pointblank range against the St. Malo fortifications. The manner of his death seems a fitting end to a great artillery career. He had lived as he died—In the saddle. Tommy primarily was a soldier's soldier and the many letters received after his death from his men and officers testify to the real admiration and affection of those under him.

Along with some five hundred other members of the Class of '29 Tommy entered the Academy on July 1, 1925. Here he was destined to spend eight carefree and happy years: four as a cadet when tenths and demos flowed in freely and four as an instructor in French with such side lines as cadet polo coach, contender in the National Horse Show and crack polo player. Looking back on Tommy's years as a young lieutenant one does not see a quiet, studious officer but rather boisterous hell-for-leather type of an officer who did everything well. No matter how late he got to bed or how two-fisted had been the evening Tommy was right on the ball the next morning. It took a rugged constitution and he had it, and it took a lot of real professional ability and he had that to an outstanding degree.

His first post was Ft. Stotsenburg, in the Philippines where he arrived, after the usual transport trip, the day before maneuvers. The 24th F.A. at that time was a pack outfit and with "A" Battery Tommy took off on the six weeks maneuver. He was broken in rapidly—six weeks on a jiggling horse is an effective if not a pleasant conditioning period.

Tommy was a natural athlete and although he played well anything he undertook, his love for horses directed his abilities towards the mounted sports. He trained his own horses and he did it well, constantly and enthusiastically. Before he left the islands, besides being known as a very capable officer, he was one of the hardest hitting and hardest riding polo players there and he maintained that reputation from there on. When he died he still carried four goals.

He departed Stotsenburg, in March 1932 assigned to the 16th Field at Fort Myer. From there, he took the 1933-34 course at Ft. Sill and followed this with the Advanced Horsemanship Course.

Next stationed with the 83rd F.A. at Fort Benning, his reputation as a soldier and as a horseman was preeminent. Then followed a year in Paris where Tommy learned to know the people, the country and the language.

In the summer of 1938, Tommy reported to West Point for duty in the Department of Modern Languages. He was married here the next year to Betty Wilson, sister of Bim Wilson, '28. There never has been a more devoted husband than Tommy was nor a prouder father after Paul, Jr. (Herkimer) arrived. Full and happy years followed while at the Point.

But after Pearl Harbor Tommy started to champ at the bit, a field soldier's place was in the field. After a refresher course at Ft. Sill in July 1942, he joined the embryo 83rd Division at Camp Atterbury as C.O. of the 908th F.A. Bn. (105mm). This was his outfit: he formed it, trained it, and led it until the end. For it and with it he won the Bronze Star in the Normandy campaign and a soldier's death at St. Malo.

Those of us who have known and loved Tommy will miss him as the years go by but so colorful was his life that we can always recall glimpses of him. Betty and Herkimer, old Pete the dirty dog, chunky Tiger Lily out-jumping all the thoroughbreds in the National Horse Show, the Ford with supercharger which jumped the open culvert at Benning, the terrific back strokes in polo, these and many other memories will come to our minds as we wait for Tommy's passing tread.

General Delivery,
Portland, Oregon,
October 25, 1943.

Dear Doc:

Ever since I heard of your apparently unbelievable loss, which must be assumed for the time being at least, thoughts of him, you, Mrs. Thompson, Paul, Albert, Bill, Donald and Maxie, as well as others to whom he was, and is, very close and dear, keep rising in my mind to the point that they almost force other thoughts out entirely. For all of us the cup is very bitter.

I have been hoping with all the hope possible that news will reach you that he is alive and safe but, in the meantime, please know that I, in some slight degree comparable with yours, share your mental anguish and torture. Perhaps this letter will not assuage your untold grief in the slightest measure, but I just want you to know that it pangs others too who knew, revered, respected and admired him and his deeds of noble sacrifice.

Someone has said that history is a record of human actions; a record of peoples. A person, by virtue of some extraordinary deed or action, creates history, and it is recorded for posterity. History is replete, as you know, with accounts of the ceaseless struggle of man in his pilgrimage for existence, survival, progress and growth. I suppose that's what we're fighting for now. This war is furnishing more material for historians than any prior world event. In this war the emphasis is on individuals who are noble, dynamic, animated, daring and sometimes audacious, who strolled through the pages of life with a superb confidence and an indifference to anything but the fulfillment of their destiny. Such was he in making such a glorious contribution to life and history. His deeds of greatness have, and will, influence many lives and what a colorful page in history! Thus, history is life, and therefore he lives!

So, he stands out, illuminating in my mind what otherwise is a blurred memory, leaving an imperishable, immortal picture. He was a moulder of history! You, his father, and his mother, have every reason to feel very proud.

Doc, if and when any further word is heard, and maybe the news you and all want to hear yet will come, please tell Ma so that she can let me know as soon as possible.

Sincerely your friend,



HEADQUARTERS, NORTH ATLANTIC WING
AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND
PRESQUE ISLE, MAINE

PFG/med
9 Oct. 1943

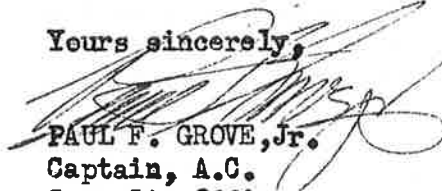
Mrs. William A. Thompson
General Delivery
Stigler, Oklahoma

Dear Mrs. Thompson:

Please accept my sincere sympathy on behalf
of your son, Major Jack P. Thompson.

His absence is a source of real regret, and
a loss to us all. Although the organized search for him has
been abandoned, the Armed Forces are ever vigilant for the
discovery of missing aircraft personnel. It is possible and
the sincerest hope of us all that he is alive, in good health
and that he will soon rejoin his organization.

Yours sincerely,



PAUL F. GROVE, Jr.
Captain, A.C.
Casualty Officer

Memorial Day 1986

"Taps" sounds at every service,
drill teams perform their perfect turns,
bands play in long and short parades
across a land remembering its dead.

The black marble wall reflects May sky,
etched names distort the brightness,
unite with sky and tourists passing by.

I find the yellowed clipping,
"J. Pershing Thompson, Down
on Convoy Duty in North Atlantic",
and feel again the coldness of your death.

I touch your name on a commemorative wall
which does not exist, journey nowhere to place
a wreath, a rose at a small white cross.
I want a pilot's flyover for you,
some ritual service as farewell.

On the warm waters of an inland stream
peony petals drift in memory of you
who perished in that distant sea.

- Helen Hudson Motulsky

his co-pilot, Lieut. Bill Crawford of Niles, Ohio, made a bomb "run" with five searchlights trained on them. The ack ack was devastatingly heavy, but Jack, calling on his expert knowledge of maneuvering, managed to escape after ten minutes of "living hell". Lieut. Crawford later wrote a book, "Gore and Glory" which centered around harrowing experiences such as this one.

No hero ever fought more fiercely or fell more bravely than did Jack Pershing Thompson. The medals he received were awarded for daring and valiant feats in combat service. An excerpt from the citation accompanying the Distinguished Flying Cross said: For "extraordinary achievement in aerial flights" in the Southwest Pacific sector between December 8, 1941 to November, 1942". He had flown over 200 hours on operational flight missions throughout which he "demonstrated outstanding ability and devotion to duty". When the Air Medal was awarded, a letter from George C. Kenney, Lieutenant General, Commanding Fifth Air Force, said the medal was awarded "in recognition of his courageous, fearless service to his combat organization, his fellow American airmen, his country, his home and to you", and closed with, "I would like to tell you how genuinely proud I am to have had men such as your son in my command, and how gratified I am to know that young Americans with such courage and resourcefulness are fighting our country's battle against the aggressor nations".

H. H. Arnold, Commanding General, Army Air Forces, on October 25, 1944, wrote: "It has been brought to my attention that Major Thompson earned a worthy reputation as an airman in this organization. He drew upon the experience of his cadetship at the United States Military Academy and the pilot school at Kelly Field, to aid him in achieving unusual success as an officer, and he made a conscientious effort throughout his military career". Following his valiant combat record in the Pacific area, Jack came home.

He landed in the States November 30, 1942, at Palmdale, California. Because of his brilliant and successful combat record he was appointed the Commanding Officer of the "Thompson Provisional Group", thus named in his honor. For awhile he was on duty as Commanding Officer of the Group and as an instructor at Pyote, Texas and Dyersburg, Tennessee, where he taught fledgling bomber crews the full meaning of their slogan, "Bombs for a Venom".

Not many of the 19th Group remained, the toll of lives in the Pacific having bled the organization of almost all of its original personnel. Consequently, Jack's services as an instructor were a valuable contribution to the war effort. Jack's mother requested that he not volunteer for another tour of duty overseas to which Jack explained that since he had been trained to be a pilot and a fighter it would be traitorous to his friends who had paid the supreme sacrifice and those imprisoned by the enemy not to continue in combat service. Daring, gallant, strong-willed and heroic, "Crash" requested another crack at the enemy.

Jack's life was such a costly sacrifice to lay upon the altar of world freedom and lasting peace—which he could never enjoy.

Only immortality can, and will, reward him.

Nat Henderson.

paign, Jack and his outfit carried the fight to the enemy, inflicting heavy damage against Lae, Salamaua, Rabaul and Kavieng. They never had the advantage of pursuit protection—their flights were always alone and unescorted. The bomber Jack flew was scarred and marked by battle bullets and shell holes that had never been repaired.

It may be truly said that Jack, who was affectionately called "Crash" by his comrades and acknowledged by them as one of the best pilots of his Group, was loyal to the highest ideals of the service. He was loved and respected by those who fought with him.

In a letter home, Jack once wrote:

"I have supreme confidence in the men I fight with; and just as long as I'm in there pitching with men such as they are, it will take considerably more than a little Yellow man to stop us!"

From March 17, 1942 to November 5, 1942, Jack was credited with 21 completed missions and 415:55 combat hours. But some narrow escapes marked his attacks against the enemy.

Once, while on a mission in the vicinity of Mareeba, a formation of thirteen heavy bombers, one piloted by Jack, was attacked by about 30 Jap Zeros. One of the bombers, piloted by Lt. Pease, was shot down in flames. Jack's radio operator, Sgt. Hickman, was killed instantly by an explosive shell, and Cpl. Copeley, his assistant radio operator, was seriously wounded.

A thriller took place in the sky when, on September 11, 1942, Jack's plane made a direct hit on a Jap destroyer, just south of the Tropical Islands, with a 500-pound demolition bomb. There was a Jap cruiser nearby. The plane Jack was flying "was just an old crate", as he put it, but the "run" was highly successful despite the "sluggishness" of the B-17. The flight indicator went out and Jack was compelled to fly by the needle and ball. The first "run" on the Nip destroyer brought forth a burst of antiaircraft fire which bit one of the plane's bombs just as the missile left the bomb-bay, and the resulting explosion was terrific. It hurled the plane upward more than 100 feet, filling the entire plane with choking, white smoke. Jack's lower turret man said he was blinded by an orange-like flame that belched over the plane, which caused him to "stop breathing for about two minutes". Jack said he wondered if "that was it". The ack ack was cutting all around them, and he was happily surprised to find the wings not in flame. He banked to the left and found the only damage inflicted was a few holes in the wings and control surfaces. With four bombs left, Jack decided to make a "run" on the cruiser and to see "how his crew would react to real danger". He banked out of range of the ack ack and started in on the cruiser as its guns spouted flames toward him. However, he started the "run" too far back, so it was necessary that he get away in order to make another "run" on the destroyer. The ship was critically damaged and doubtless sunk.

The Japs landed troops on Milne Bay, Papua, on August 27, in order to obtain an advance base to recapture their lost positions in the Solomons. Aircraft attacks by Jack and his comrades inflicted such heavy losses that the Nip forces withdrew two days later. An unsuccessful thrust for Port Moresby on September 10 was made by the enemy.

One mission, Jack said, added more gray hairs to his youthful head. On September 19, 1942 Jack flew on an armed reconnaissance in the Milne Bay area, searching for enemy shipping believed to be reinforcing the Jap landing party which had already penetrated the trackless jungle. Only a few days before, September 15, 1942, the 14,000-ton U.S. aircraft-carrier Wasp was attacked and sunk by a Jap submarine in the Coral Sea. She went down in an inferno of flame and smoke as she escorted a large supply convoy bound for Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. There were tropical rainstorms raging over the entire area when Jack's plane roared into the hazardous area, and visibility ranged from zero to fifteen miles in haze. The search area was dotted with small islands, mostly five or six hundred feet high. Several times Jack broke out of the blinding rain squalls, only to see an island directly ahead. The maps used were not too accurate. Only expert navigation and prayers brought them through without mishap.

Jack executed a daring feat during one of his on Rabaul that was described by a headquarters spokesman as "one of the finest examples of co-ordination ever put on in that part of the Pacific". Jack, then a Captain, and

From The Assembly- USMA April 1947

Jack Pershing Thompson

NO. 12037 CLASS OF JUNE, 1940

Missing since Sept. 29, 1943 somewhere over the North Atlantic Ocean, aged 26 years (Death is officially presumed to have occurred on Sept 30, 1943



After he had survived ten months of hard combat fighting in the Pacific area, and three crash landings, the entire citizenship of Stigler, Oklahoma, was bowed in sorrow at the tragic announcement of the death of Jack Pershing Thompson on September 29, 1943, while on a flight from Newfoundland to the British Isles as Commanding Officer.

On two occasions during the war Jack's parents, Dr. and Mrs. W. A. Thompson, and family, were overwhelmingly grief-stricken. On August 10, 1944, Colonel Paul Thompson, West Point graduate of June, 1929, was killed in action near Pleslin, France. With the loss of two sons, and three others still in the service, the entire citizenship shared the grief and anxiety of the Thompson family.

Jack Pershing Thompson, born June 19, 1917 at Kusa, Oklahoma, graduated from Stigler High School with the class of 1936. When he was chosen first alternate in competitive test, his appointment to West Point when his brother, Albert, failed to pass the physical examination. Jack entered West Point July 1, 1936, graduated June 11, 1940 and was thereupon appointed a Lieutenant, Field Artillery.

His father having served in two wars, Jack was the heir of a military tradition. From West Point, he came home in uniform, tall, muscular and handsome, he made a gallant picture and old and young alike idolized him. His natural shyness to public acclaim by reason of a beautiful modesty endeared him to all.

Jack took his pre-flight training at Tulsa and San Antonio and received his wings in March, 1941. During early training, it could be seen that he was destined to become a crack bomber pilot. He carried the freshness, eagerness and simplicity of youth into his work, studies and meditations. Jack went overseas in February, 1942, and at first was based at Melbourne, Australia as a B-17 pilot attached to the 28th Bombardment Squadron, 19th Bombardment Group.

This Group saw action for more than a year in various Pacific theaters of operation and was highly touted as one of the most experienced heavy bombardment outfits in the Army Air Forces. Its members are heroes to a man!

Although the Nips had complete air superiority in the Southwest Pacific during the early stages of the cam-

Print the complete address in plain letters in the space below, and your return address in the space provided. Do not stamp, use illustrations, check lists, or dark pencil. Pencil or small writing is not suitable for registration.

WED
Thompson

Dr. W. A. Thompson
STIGLER, OKLA

FROM
W. A. Thompson, 2-117230
182 FA BN, ARD # 1
26 PM, ALBANY, N. Y.

(CENSOR'S STAMP)

SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2

(Sender's complete address abroad)

Dear Dad, Mom,

Aug 10, '44

EVERYTHING IN TOP SHAPE.
HEARD ABOUT PAUL COMMANDING THE DIVISION
ARTILLERY. HE'S REALLY GOING PLACES, ISN'T
HE?

OUR MAILMAN IS LEAVING IN ABOUT
5 MINUTES. SO I MUST HURRY. REC'D THE
VASELINE HAIR OIL YESTERDAY

REALLY BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE IT
MIGHT BE OVER BY XMAS. DOESN'T IT? BOY, I
SURE HOPE SO.

WE'VE PICKED UP ANOTHER DOG. NAMED
HER "IDA" SHE'S NOTHING BUT AN OLD HOUND,
BUT SURE IS GOOD-NATURED.

WILL WRITE AGAIN SOON. YOU DO THE
SAME.

As ever
Bob

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE
ADDRESS AT TOP?

REFLECT BY
V-MAIL

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE
ADDRESS AT TOP?

If ⁵ you haven't already
sent some camera ^(size voice) films I wish
you would do so as soon as
you can. If you have sent some
send some more. I don't know
how long I'll be here and I'd
like to have some pictures
of it. I'll also take some pic-
tures of myself.

I'm going to try to
send around 10000 home there, I
of February so as soon as you
get what I send please acknow-
ledge receipt of it as soon as
possible. The first I heard of
you getting the 15000 was yester-
day in a letter from Dad,
however it was mailed Jan.
29th of Jan. not quite a month
ago.

⁶ If I start cussing it'll
be because everytime someone
walks by they shake my table,
& that is enough to cuss about.

I got Xhonia's letter that
she wrote just before she left
Albert's yesterday. I got yours
too Dad at the same time.
I know it kinda makes you
proud to get a letter from
your Mom & Dad at the same
time.

The mailman just came
so I'll stop & see if I get any
mail and continue ^{5 min} No mail.
He brought in a lot of packages
and I that maybe one of them
might be mine.

I'm going to mail this
mail so I'd better quit before it's
too big.

(over)

His son
Dad.

so I'll have to ³ either keep writing or quit altogether.

Tues. afternoon
4:00 PM

Just got back to my quarters after a 5 mile hike. Rll my GI OD's were dirty so I had to wear my green pants and by golly it rained, so I have nothing left to wear but my pink pants.

I've found another thing around here that is amusing. Every night about 10:30 Lord Haw-Haw from Berlin broadcasts to British and American Troops. There's also a woman broadcasts that goes by the name of Sally.

Some of the things they broadcast are ridiculous. The German people really must be gullible

to believe some^t of the things they say. Lord Haw-Haw said something about a German Division withdrawing on our to shorten supply lines, but that all attacks were beaten off during the withdrawal as if the Russian Army didn't have a thing to do with it.

tomorrow morning my buddy & I are going on patrol. We're going to town immediately after breakfast. rent a horse & ride till about 10 oclock, then go back to town & get a Turkish Bath. From then on we'll do just what happens to be in our way and I'm sure some thing will happen our way.

1 APR 1941

Sun. nite
Feb. 20th

Dear Dad & Mom,

Another week gone & still nothing has happened. All I've been doing since I've been here is sit around and wait and its beginning to get a little tiresome.

Didn't get out of room till noon today and this afternoon a picture was shown in the Rec. hut. After that came chess. In the evening I've been sitting around listening to the radio, smoking cigarettes, eating oranges & looking at magazines. About once every 3 weeks they get in a new batch of magazines so everybody has all the old ones memorized by the time the new

ones come in. The new ones aren't really new, they're just new to us. Tonight in an Amer. Home mag. I learned how to plant begonias.

You sure don't have much trouble going to sleep around here at night. The air is chilly as the dickens and you get warm as hair in your bedding roll. Everybody sleeps like a log.

Next time you write give me some more information about Albert going to S. America. I don't know whether he has a job there or not. I sure do want to go down there when I get back.

When I quit writing for a few minutes to think about something else to write my fingers get cold & I can hardly move them.

CHAPTER 14- HOME AT LAST

June 1945-At home

My long trip was over and I was home. Sometimes it seemed as if I would never make it, but I did. There were a lot of us that didn't make it.

HOME? What is home. All of us had been gone for three or four years and had not been home for more than a few days in all that time. When we left home, we were in the range of 17 to 20 years of age and when we came home, we were in our early 20's. When you are in the military in wartime you are on duty 24 hrs/ day, 7days/week and 4 weeks / month. In other words, you are in the Army, or whatever, all the time. You all dress alike, you all eat the same thing, and you all wear the same clothes. You are all young men and away from home for the first time. It gets to the point that where you are at the time is home to you. When you move, you are cast into a brand new bunch of young men and you start all over in making friends. I think for awhile everybody thinks of home but as the months and years roll by you begin to accept that where you are is home.

When I came home, I was the only one home. There was a system in the military that established a priority system for sending men home. Wounded, length of time, combat duty and POW were some of the priorities that decided when you would be sent home. I had a very high priority so I was sent home in the first batch.

The next men to come home were Pat Williams that was on the Phillipine Islands when they were surrendered, Pat took off and hid up in the hills and eventually joined the Phillipine Guerilla Army as a 1st Lt. He spent the rest of the war there. They evacuated him in a submarine and brought him home. The next one was Kirby Stevens who enlisted in the Marine Corps as a Private and came home as a Capt. in the command of a company of Marine riflemen. The next one was G.W. McDaniel who was a Marine and stationed on Wake Island. Wake island was captured by the Japanese at the beginning of the war and G.W spent all the war (4 years) in a Japanese Prison Camp. As you can see, these men were a little confused as to where they were and what they were supposed to do. Where was home to them? We were a little bit wild for the first few months, but as time passed on we began to get our bearings and settled down.

When I got home, I was the only one of my family that had been overseas and came home. Paul and Pershing never came home. At first, their loss was not brought up very often. I think it was so painful that nobody would talk about it. Gradually, their loss was talked about.

Billy came home while I was there. So did Donnie. Maxie was still in the Navy but was discharged soon after I arrived home.

Soon after getting home, I got real sick. I remember chewing on the sheet on the bed and being cold. Daddy didn't know what was wrong with me and I think became very concerned that I had picked up some exotic disease and was in grave danger. I don't remember how long I was sick, but Martha and Donnie were talking about going home and Daddy told them they had better stick around for a few days. I think he was very concerned.

Momma told me that while I was missing every time she would sit down to eat she would almost gag. The thought of eating and not knowing if I had anything to eat really must have upset her.

She also told me that when Pershing was reported missing a lot of friends and a lot of the people from the church

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23. Laboratory procedures: Kahn _____
Urinalysis: Sp Gr 1.032 _____
Microscopical (if indicated) _____
Other laboratory procedures _____
24. Remarks on defects not sufficiently described _____

25. Corrective measures, or other action recommended See both

#7

26. Is the individual presently incapacitated for active service?
If yes, specify defect _____

27. If applicant for appointment: Does he meet physical requirements?
Do you recommend acceptance with minor physical defects?
If rejection is recommended, specify cause _____

28. Examinee states he is _____ receiving pension, disability allowance, or
compensation or retired pay from the U.S. Government. If yes, state disability _____

RANPCR #1
(Initials)

S.D. Gummert Corps
(Name and grade) Major

28 May, 1945
(Date)

(Name and grade) _____ Corps

(Name and grade) _____ Corps

1st Ind

Headquarters _____
To the Commanding General _____
Remarks and recommendations _____

(Name) _____

(Grade) (Organization and Arm
or Service)
Commanding.

2nd Ind

_____, 19____ To The Adjutant General.