

**Memoirs:
Jesse S. Harper**

P. O. W. 6761

Stalag Luft IV

Germany 1944-1945

Regt., Corps, Unit 322 CP 450 5000 PW No. 6761

REGISTRATION CARD

Insert here whether Navy, Army, Air Force or Merchant Navy, and of which United Nation (if British, state whether U.K., Dominion, Indian or Colonial). Cas. C. USAAF

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Last Name _____

Initials J. S. Rank S/SGT

Pers. or Army 38164315
or Service No. _____

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Foreword

History teaches that those that do not know history tend to repeat it. As a former classroom teacher, I find that most students, young people, and even baby boomers do not know history in the real sense. In fact, I doubt many baby “boomers” even know why they are called that or why they fit into that category. Perhaps they should find out. It has been my pleasure to know the author of this work for a number of years. When it became known to me that he had experienced being a captive of the German army for nearly a year, I began to encourage Jess to write these events down for posterity. Most people will not believe what they read here; they will consider it a matter of fiction. I know better, because I know the man. And the man experienced the events in this book. I feel sure that there is much that has not been told in this work. Also, it is known that the recalling of these events has taken a toll on the author. It has caused repressed memories to be dredged up from the deep recesses of the mind, and many of those recalled horrors are not written here, because of simply that: they are too vivid and horrible to be brought back.

But for you, dear reader, this treatise needs to be a part of your reading. It should be required reading for all high school graduates. They should be made personally aware of what one human can and will do to another in the name of politics.

Share this story. Because of this man and many others like him, you have the freedom to read this work. Had Hitler’s forces won the war, you would not be reading this information.

Jess’s story is not the only one. He is, however, one who decided after much thought and prayer to share his story. Remember the Battle of the Bulge, Iwo Jima, Saipan, Bataan, Normandy, and Omaha Beach? No? Then you have just proved my point. Other stories need to be told just as this one. Remember also that the people who lived through these episodes are now disappearing in great numbers. Their generation is passing on. Jess has taken this means to pass on to you his story. Hogan’s Heroes on television is not real world. This is real world. This is real life and death.

As editor of this work, there have been very few changes made. It is a story told in the first person, because the first person experienced it. A few grammatical and spelling corrections have been made, but for the most part, it is as Jess told it. Remember it and take it to heart. The first line of this foreword tells of history repeating itself for those who don’t know history. Don’t allow that to happen. Ever again!!

Joseph D. Windham
January 2003

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At times, various people have suggested that I put in writing an account of specific happenings in my life. After some thought, I have decided that this should be more of an accounting of my military and prisoner of war experiences, since nothing earth shaking has ever happened to me.

Name: Jesse S. Harper
Address: Route 3, Box 224
 Mexia, TX 76667
Birth Place: Warren, TX
Birth Date: September 18, 1914
Parents: Benjamin F. Harper, Father
 Gracie E. (Hinson) Harper, Mother
Education: Warren (TX) High School
 Woodville (TX) High School
Sports: Basketball, Football, Track, Baseball
Hobbies: Travel, Golf, Fishing, Gospel Singing,
 Gospel Song Writing

I grew into the workforce during the depression of the 1930's. People born after 1930 find it difficult to believe that skilled construction workers were paid as little as 15cents an hour (if a job could be found). Cotton was picked for 25 cents per 100 pounds. In 1942, when I went into the military, truck drivers and muleskinners were making \$2.50 per day in the timber industry in east Texas. Timber was—and still is—the basic economy in deep east Texas. Now truck drivers make \$100 or more per day and muleskinners are non-existent. Mules, also.

For a time I managed a garage/filling station in Warren. The station belonged to a member of the family who owned and operated the Warren Lumber Company, a sawmill, and a planeing mill operation. We had four mechanics and two wash-and-grease rack attendants. Our primary responsibility was to service the mill company trucks. However, we also serviced several contractors' trucks and were open to the general public. My job was to keep the books, (we did lots of credit work), pump by hand all the gasoline sold (there were no electric pumps), bid all the non-company repair jobs that we did, open up by 5:00 AM, and close when we could. 9:00 PM was early closing. All this was for \$2.50 per day. And at that, it was a better job than some had.

Just prior to my being drafted, I left Warren and started driving a truck for the Union City Transfer Company. They were hauling oil-field equipment. They had more than 200 trucks, a yard in Beaumont, TX and one in Houston, TX. I worked out of the Beaumont yard. Heavy equipment operators (including big trucks) were paid \$1.25 per hour. Pipe haulers, others, and myself were paid \$1.00 per hour. They did not pay any overtime, but one could work as many hours per week as they wanted. For a time, I worked more than 100 hours per week. Of course, I became "filthy rich".

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I was inducted into the military on July 2, 1942, in Houston, TX. I was then sent to Fort Sam Houston by bus on the same day. There we were issued clothes, shoes, etc, and I received my first G.I. haircut. A group of men from the Bryan (TX) area came in to Fort Sam the day after we did. Some of them were Texas A&M students, and they were wearing their hair rather long. The Post barbers had a field day!! They would say to the inductee “man, that’s pretty hair. Would you like to keep it”? The GI would say, “I certainly would”. Then the barber would gather a hand full of the longest hair, then cut it with scissors as close to the head as possible, and present it to the GI. There were lots of angry men, but there was not much that anyone could do about it. Later we learned that lots of little things were done to you that would antagonize you, and would cause you to be more ready to fight when you reached combat. You stayed about half mad all the time.

I had attempted to enlist in the air corps on January 1, 1942 and wanted to attend flight training school. I was rejected, however, because I was already too old, being past 28, and did not have enough education. I was told that I could enlist, but no one knew what branch of service I would be assigned to. I knew I would be drafted before long, and since I had no choice of branch of service, I elected to wait until I was drafted.

While at Fort Sam Houston, about 200 of us were sent on a cross-country hike, which amounted to about six miles. Shortly after we left the housing area, we crossed a dry creek. There was no water at all. While we were on the hike, a torrential downpour, lasting about thirty minutes, came. When we reached the creek on the return, the water was about 3 feet deep in the creek. We had no means of communication and the sergeant in charge of our group said we would have to wait until we were missed before someone would begin to search for us. Several of us were fairly tall, and the creek was about 50 feet across. Many of the group were shorter fellows. Some of us suggested to the sergeant that we form a human chain across the deeper water, then all the shorter guys could hold on to the stationary ones if they began to lose their footing. Since it appeared that another downpour was in the making, the sergeant was pretty easily persuaded. We tried it. It worked. Since all of us were already soaked, we decided to hold onto each other’s belts rather than hold to our hands. We reached the base fairly soon, and the sergeant had us to wait in front of the headquarters building while he reported in. After a few minutes, the sergeant and a major came out, and the major gave a brief talk and commended us on our resourcefulness and the ability to think under pressure. The sergeant was a nice fellow, and refused to accept any of the credit for what was done. He insisted to the major that it was our idea, and he was pleased with the way things had turned out.

After a couple of days at Fort Sam, we were bussed to Wichita Falls, Texas, to Sheppard Field Army Air Force Base. There we were assigned to the USAAF (United States Army Air Force). We were given some choices as to what type of duty we preferred. I chose to be an aircraft mechanic. A course of instruction was of

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13 weeks duration. While on student status, we also received our basic training. Up at 5:00 AM, one hour of calisthenics, then breakfast. Back to the barracks for policing up the area, then clean the barracks, and make the beds. We would march to school in formation, with classes until 12:00 noon. Then came lunch time. We were back in school at 1:00 PM until 4:00 PM, more calisthenics until 6:00 PM, then formal retreat. We were usually finished by 7:00 PM and then we could go eat, go to the PX, or go to town if one could manage a pass. We must be back on post by 10:00 PM, because lights were out in the barracks at that time.

At retreat, someone always made an impassioned plea for gunners, the pitch being: "Go to gunnery school for 6 weeks, graduate as a staff sergeant, and be assigned as a gunner to a bomber crew, thus getting to combat real soon."

I applied on several occasions, but when I reported to the base hospital for a physical, I always failed. I was too tall. They wanted men no taller than 5 feet 10 inches. I had reported for examination so many times that most of the hospital personnel knew me by name. I had passed all the necessary tests, such as sight, depth perception, etc. I was just too tall, according to rules and regulations. One day while waiting for the ranking doctor to tell me I was rejected once more, the hospital chaplain walked by and saw me. He came into the room (he had seen me at the hospital on several occasions). He was aware that I was not being accepted on account of my height. We discussed that, along with other things, and he was convinced that I really wanted to fly, and the only way I could make it was to be assigned to a bomber crew. The doctor, a Major, came in and the Chaplain asked him if the air force did not have gunnery positions other than the ball turret in an airplane. They discussed that at length, and finally decided that I might make it. The Chaplain asked the major if he could conduct my final interrogation. The Major agreed. The Chaplain informed me that he wanted only truthful answers. I agreed to answer truthfully. He had only one question: "Private Harper, are you as much as 5 feet 10 inches tall?" My reply was "yes, sir". He then turned to the Major and said "I believe he answered truthfully, and I think he deserves to go to gunnery school".

In November 1942, I was sent to the Glenn L. Martin Factory in Middle River, Maryland. There were about 60 in my group. Other groups were assigned to other aircraft manufacturers if they were aircraft engineer students. We were there to study the B-26 airplane in the classroom as well as on the assembly line. The name 'Engineer' became "Flight Engineer" and was totally in charge of the plane while in flight. At the factory school, we enjoyed the most pleasant living conditions of any time while I was in the service. We lived in dormitories rather than barracks. There were two men to a room with maid and janitor service. We did not even have to make up our beds. Each dorm had a 'day room' for lounging or studying. We ate in a civilian cafeteria, a well-known chain, under contract to the Martin Company.

The factory was just a short streetcar ride from Baltimore, Maryland. We were allowed to go into town any time we did not have class or was assigned to the factory. The transit company would not allow servicemen in uniform to pay any fare. We

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arrived there in late October and left on December 28, 1942. The civilians were very nice to the servicemen, and in many cases, they would come to our table in a café and insist on paying our ticket. In most cases, we let them because our pay of \$50 per month would only go so far.

The school and housing was civilian operated. We were treated extremely well and as courteously as possible. The course of study was interesting and informative. Students really applied themselves to the subject. After all, it was to our advantage to learn all we could about the airplane, because we were going to live with it for the duration.

I got a chance to fly on an acceptance flight just before we left for gunnery school. This meant the initial flight of the aircraft after it came off the assembly line. A civilian pilot, an engineer, and I were the only ones on board. The flight was only of about 30 minutes duration. We did not do any acrobatics. We did do some low level “buzzing” and some steep climbs. The pilot seemed pleased with the performance of the aircraft. They let me out of the plane, taxied across the field, and ‘sold’ the plane to the Air Force. The Air Force later did their own version of a test flight.

We left Baltimore on December 28. The temperature was 9 degrees. We arrived in Panama City, Florida on New Years Day and went swimming in the gulf that evening.

For some unknown reason, I was always in charge of the group I traveled with. I was given all the travel orders, meal tickets, etc., and had to make all travel arrangements with the railroad personnel while traveling by train. We had meal tickets to eat in the dining car, but discovered there was no dining car on this train. We were given box lunches on three occasions from Baltimore to Dothan, Alabama. In Dothan our two Pullman cars were detached from the original train and left on a siding to be attached to another train and taken to Panama City, Florida. Around 5:00 AM, when daylight came, our people began awakening and wanted to know “when are we going to eat”? I went into the station and asked the agent if there was a restaurant nearby that could feed 60 men. He said there was one not too far from the station, but we would not have time to eat since the train that was supposed to take us to Panama City would arrive before we could finish eating. I asked one of the fellows to go back to the train and see that all our people were awake and dressed while I went to the restaurant and make the necessary arrangements. When the station agent began to argue that we would not have time to eat before the train came, I pointed out to him that for more than two days the railroad had not met their obligations to feed us, that my men were hungry and more than a little discouraged with the way we had been treated by the railroad, and if I encouraged them, they would come in and wreck the station. Also, if the train people wanted to haul two empty Pullmans to Panama City someone would have a lot of explaining to do. I then learned that the expected train was a short line operation from Dothan to Panama City only, and had no regular schedule. The station agent had no idea when it would arrive.

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At any rate, I walked three or four blocks to the restaurant and explained our situation to the manager. He assured me that we were welcome and that he could and would feed us every thing we could eat and would be happy to take our government meal tickets. We were well fed and treated with respect. The train from Panama City arrived to pick up our cars after 10 AM. I really felt like letting our people go ahead and wreck the station but decided against it because service men were not universally liked in the United States, sometimes because of irresponsible actions on their part.

We were in Tyndal Field (Gunnery School) for six weeks and were restricted to the base. We never saw the city of Panama City. The hours of duty were from 5:00 AM until 10:00 PM with eight hours of classroom and the remainder of time spent in physical exercise. We did road runs in deep sand for an hour at a time. We crawled under wire net that was no more than 20 inches above the ground with LIVE 30 caliber machine guns being fired across our path, and, hopefully, above the wire. The food was horrible. We got creamed chicken with feathers in it. We got lamb chops which some of the fellows said was well burnt. I don't know about that because I don't eat lamb or mutton. I went to breakfast only while there. I could manage the greenish scrambled eggs and foul tasting coffee along with the inevitable orange marmalade. I bought candy bars and cookies at the PX and survived on that. I lost 15 pounds in six weeks.

The final week of gunnery training was devoted to the actual use of guns. We did a lot of gunnery practice on the ground, and also did our air-to-air practice. Air-to-air gunnery was so enjoyable that it almost compensated for the long tiresome days of school, P.E. and poor food. An AT-6, a two-seated open cockpit type of plane was used in that phase of training. The pilot sat in the front seat and flew the plane. The student sat in the rear seat facing the rear. A 30 caliber machine gun was mounted on a circular track which enabled the gunner to move the gun from side to side of the plane and fire the gun at a canvas sleeve-like target that was being towed by another plane. A flight usually consisted of a tow plane, which was another AT-6 that had a winch whose cable was attached to the target sleeve, which would trail 600 feet behind the tow plane during gunnery practice. There were two student gunnery planes, one on each side of the tow plane at about 300 feet from the tow plane. The students were assigned ammunition of a specific color. When we exhausted our ammunition and returned to base, the instructors could then determine the student's score by counting the holes in the target that were the color assigned to the student.

The pilots were all enlisted men with a sergeant rating. The reason they were all enlisted men was that they had been members of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and Canada did not have very many commissioned officers flying fighters or bombers. So when Canada joined WWII the Canadian pilots transferred to the USAAF. The USAAF does not have any enlisted men as pilots so these pilots were sweating out their commission so they could get into combat. In the meantime, they were bored, disgusted, browned off at the Air Force for the delayed commissions. We were advised never to tell the pilot that his was your first or last training flight. If they learned that bit of information, they would 'forever more wring you out'!! The

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gunnery training flights were always over the Gulf of Mexico and several miles offshore.

We were most happy to see graduation and promotion to staff sergeant. A rather impressive ceremony was made of the occasion. Perhaps the most appealing part of the ceremony was when a student received a certificate showing he was qualified to man a machine gun in aerial combat. Of course, being promoted from buck private to staff sergeant was not to be sneezed at. That was a three-grade jump and a \$46 a month pay raise. Things were looking up!! At least we felt we were finished with the long days and hours and hours of P. E.

We were shipped to Avon Park Bombing Range, an air force base about 10-12 miles from the small city of Avon Park, Florida in late February. We arrived in the evening on a Sunday, and while we were attempting to locate our barracks and bed space, an orderly came into the barrack and asked for me. I wondered why, but went with him anyway. It turned out not to be too bad. The executive officer was a man with whom I had attended high school and had played basketball with. I had also dated his sister for a short time. He wanted to know if I would play basketball on the base team. I really wanted to play and agreed to join the team. We had three officers and five enlisted men on the team, we worked out in a hanger on the base, and played our home games in the Avon Park High School gym. The base would supply a plane for us to fly to our 'away' games, and we played two nights a week. Our team won the Third Air Force Championship, which was not too big a deal, since there were only four teams in the league, which were Avon Park, Myrtle Beach, SC, Tampa USAAF, and Fort Meyers USAAF. We enjoyed playing and it was a welcome break from what we had been doing.

Lt. G. B. Freeman, the executive officer, asked me to consider going to O.C.S. (officer candidate school) since the squadron commander was being transferred in another few weeks and Freeman would become squadron commander. When I completed O.C.S., he would request me as his executive officer. Since this was not in the form of a direct order, I declined. I really wanted to fly and get to combat. If I had elected to stay there, it could have been for the duration but would have been rather monotonous since we would have dealt only with housing and personnel.

The housing and food at Avon Park were crude and poor, and I am being very generous in my assessment of the facilities. We lived in barracks made of rough-sawn lumber, about 24 feet wide and about 72 feet long. There were single wood walls and floors. There were six 30-inch square windows to each side with a screen but no glass. Rough wood shutters kept out the weather. The outside of the building and the roof were covered with tarpaper, a material very similar to present day roofing felt. Air conditioning was not even a dream in those days. The streets were not paved and we faced mud or dust, depending on when it rained. The mess hall was no better. We did not have tables and chairs. Shelves, about 40 inches tall and about 2 feet wide, served as tables. We stood to eat out of G.I. mess kits made out of aluminum. After we ate, we dunked the kits, including flatware, in a tub of boiling

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water to clean them. Food was nothing to brag about but it was better than we had in gunnery school.

At Avon Park we were assigned to combat crews. A B-26 had a crew of six. Lt. David Davidson was our pilot, along with Lt. Max Bedell, copilot, Lt. Chuck Godsey, navigator/bombardier, S/Sgt. George M. Wells, radio operator/gunner, S/Sgt. Chalmer D. Johnson, armorer/tail gunner, and I was engineer/top turret gunner. We completed our prescribed training schedule about the middle of June 1943. We had a lot of time on our hands and spent some extra time on the skeet range. I got to be a fair shot with a 12gauge shotgun. About that time, Lt. Godsey was pulled from our crew and placed on another crew, which was being sent to combat. I spent some time with an 'operations' crew whose job was to train new crews. A Lt. Dean was pilot instructor, another permanent party sergeant was radio instructor, and I was engineer instructor. The pilot instructor checked out the student pilot, the radio instructor checked out the student radioman, and I checked out the engineer. These training/check flights involved lots of take-offs and landings. When we landed, the student engineer and I would do a pre-flight check of the plane. We would have to do a 'walk-a-round' of the plane, feel the brake drums to determine if they were overheating, have the pilot open the bomb bay doors so we could check for hydraulic leaks, and have the pilot move all the elevator controls so we could see if they were working properly. We would work with four student crews each day, and would not see the same crew on too many occasions. There were normally about sixty training crews at a given time and most of them were responding to the training really well. When the instructor pilot felt that the student pilot was capable of taking over the crew, the new crew would then train the other members that were assigned to that crew.

On landings and takeoffs, my position was standing in the door between the flight deck and the navigator/radio room and immediately behind the control panel. This enabled me to be in position to assist the pilot with the controls if necessary. We had only one incident when I had to help in that manner. The student pilot had shown real promise and Lt. Dean was considering ending his training period that day. The trainee was flying in the pilot's seat and actually was doing quite well. However, this was to be his first unassisted landing. As we approached the runway the student seemed to 'freeze' on the control column. His approach was good, his angle of descent was good, but he had not let down the landing gear and had not lowered the flaps. The speed of the plane was much too fast. Lt. Dean had tried to wrestle the controls from him without too much success and the ground was moving up in quite a hurry. I was standing behind this man and Lt. Dean yelled at me to get him off the control column. I hit him with my fist as hard as I could behind the right ear. This seemed to awaken him and he relinquished the wheel to Lt. Dean who rejoined the landing pattern and brought the plane in. I fully expected a court martial for having hit a commissioned officer. While we were pre-flighting the plane, both officers got out of the plane and called me to join them. I apologized to the student for hitting him and that I would take my punishment. I also said that I thought I was doing what was right to avoid a major crash. The student thanked me for averting a crash landing

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and asked Lt. Dean and me to forgive him and he said he would not report the incident and asked Lt. Dean not to report it. Lt. Dean said he would not report it, but would recommend a few more days training. This was the end of that episode.

We lost several planes during this training period. Some of it was pilot error, but most of the losses were primarily because the planes we were using were 'combat weary', being worn out in combat in the South Pacific. I survived my first of three crash landings at Avon Park. The others will be discussed as they occur.

We were shooting landings that day—a term used to describe landing and take-off practice and had retracted the wheels before reaching the end of the runway. An engine FAILED!!! DIED!!!! Fortunately, there was a marshy area with no trees for a few hundred feet, and Lt. Davidson belly-landed the plane. There were no injuries and very little damage to the plane. We got our feet wet, having to wade a little water to get back to the end of the runway. An ambulance hauled us back to operations. After operations were assured that we not injured, we were assigned another plane and continued to shoot landings.

The weather was never really 'right' in central Florida. In the winter, the wind was cold and the air was humid. In the summer, the wind was hot and the air was humid. We arrived there in February and the east wind coming off the Atlantic Ocean was miserable. I think I wore my G.I. overcoat more in Florida than I did anywhere else. I wished I had had it in Germany and Poland in the winter of 1944-45.

In late August of 1943 we received an 8-day delay in route. It was just another name for a furlough. We had not had any leave since entering the service in July 1942. Lt. Davidson was married and his wife was in Florida, but their home was Texas City, Texas. I hitched a ride with them to Beaumont and my oldest brother took me to Warren (about 40 miles) to where Dad and Mother lived.

I was to meet the Davidsons in Beaumont on the return trip. The leave ended all too soon and we left Beaumont on the seventh day of our leave and spent that night in Lafayette, LA. Mrs. Davidson had relatives there and visited with them overnight. I stayed in a motel. We returned to Avon Park base on the 8th day of the leave and began making preparations to leave for combat. Prior to our leave we had been given a general physical exam at the base hospital. The day before we were to depart, we were given another exam in the company day room. Everything was rush-rush. In a matter of minutes, I had seven teeth filled and lost four fillings in route to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, our embarking center. We were the first group that did not fly our own planes to the combat zone. It seemed that there were enough planes and not enough people. We were two days and one night on the train reaching Camp Kilmer late in the afternoon on the second day. There was mass confusion. This is where we were really indoctrinated with the policy of "hurry up and wait". We were told that we must find our housing assignment, draw bedding from supply, eat at a designated mess hall (there were eight), go to headquarters and register and get to bed early since we would be leaving the next day. Sure enough, in the evening of the fourth day, we

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boarded a train for a short train ride to the New York harbor where we boarded a ship. It was a converted cattle boat named Her Majesty's *The Schythia*.

There were sixty air crews, six men per crew, in our group. The enlisted men were assigned to quarters on "E" deck, which was below the engine room. You cannot imagine how hot and noisy. It was below the water line so there were no portholes. There were two thousand black quartermaster troops, our one hundred-eighty flying officers and one hundred-eighty troops, one hundred eighty Canadian flyers, and about one hundred fifty American doctors and nurses on board. On the second day out from New York, our ship developed boiler trouble and had to return to New York for repairs. While the boilers were being repaired, the Canadian flyers were removed from our ship and we were assigned to the quarters that they had vacated. This was a very welcome change since our new quarters was on a smaller deck above the "A" deck. Our new quarters would comfortably house about two hundred, so our one hundred eighty were not crowded. We had our own deck and there were plenty of portholes.

When we started again, we joined a convoy said to be the largest, slowest convoy ever assembled. We could see other ships in every direction at about five hundred feet apart and as far as one could see. We were told that the average speed for that convoy was about five knots per hour. We were also informed that we could expect a German submarine attack at any time. I do know that destroyers and destroyer escorts were weaving in and out of the convoy constantly. We never experienced a submarine alert. As for speed, we left New York on September 5th, and arrived at Grennock, Scotland on September 23rd.

On the first day of our second departure from New York, a major came to our quarters, introduced himself, and told us he was the transportation officer and he was in charge of all American troops on board the ship. He was "regular army" with twenty-six years of service. He spent a lot of time with our group, since he was making his first trip as an officer. He was promoted from Master Sgt. To Major under some unusual circumstances and was more comfortable with the enlisted men. He informed us that he wanted us to act as security personnel for the voyage. He asked us what kind of arms (guns) we were carrying. We told him that we did not have weapons, that we had been issued 45 Colt automatic pistols at Avon Park, but when we arrived at Camp Kilmer we had to turn in our guns and that they were crated and in the cargo hold. He began to use some language that we were not accustomed to hearing, wanting to know who was in charge of the Air Force people. We told him our commanding officer was Major?????. He sent one of our group to locate the major and tell him (our major) to report to him immediately and to come to our deck. When the Air Force major showed up, the transportation major threw a 'wall-eyed fit', wanting to know what kind of a %\$^&()*&^ war he thought we were going to fight. "Why do you spend thousands of dollars to train a man to fight, give him a gun, send him off to war, but then take his weapon away from him before he gets there?" He then ordered our major to go and get a detail of black troops and go to the cargo hold and find our guns. Then bring them to our quarters and clean them. They had been

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stored in cosmoline to prevent them from rusting. He would not allow us to touch the guns until they were cleaned. He then called a boat drill. All passengers reported on deck. There were quite a few life rafts in stacks of five on deck. In addition to that there were twenty or more lifeboats. He informed the passengers that they were not to touch a life raft or lifeboat until ordered to do so, even if we had to abandon ship. He also told them that our enlisted men would be strategically placed in groups of four, that we were armed, and were ordered to shoot anyone who even touched a life boat or raft. After he had dismissed the drill, he informed us that he was dead serious about shooting anyone who disobeyed the rule he had just made since in case of emergency, it might take something of this nature to keep people from rioting. Fortunately, we were never faced with that situation, so I don't know whether I would have shot anyone.

On September 23rd, 1943, we arrived in the Grennock, Scotland harbor. Grennock was not a deepwater port, meaning our ship had to remain in deep water almost a mile from the dock. All the ship's passengers and their equipment had to be "lightered" (small boats) to the docks. This was very time consuming and the people did not get to leave the boat until the next day.

When we did go ashore, we boarded a waiting train, but did not leave the station for some time. Many young Scottish kids came to the train and began to bum us for candy and chewing gum. Their plea went something like this: "Hey, Yank, gotndy Kahndi or Gum"? They were downright abusive when they learned that we had none. Due to the long voyage and the fact that British "Ships Stores" (Canteens) did not stock much of that kind of merchandise, we just did not have any to share with them. We learned that when American troops were being moved anywhere in the United Kingdom that we would be besieged by kids wanting candy and chewing gum. Apparently the stringent rationing that was in effect had deprived the merchants of these articles. They were fairly plentiful in the base PX and most of us would try to have some extra with us when/if we ever went on leave.

We traveled about three hours on the train to a Repple Depple (Replacement depot) in Scotland. We stayed there only a few days and were flown over to North Ireland where we would receive some advanced combat training. Our base was about five miles from the small town of Antrim and about forty miles north of Belfast, the capitol of North Ireland. A well-traveled highway went through our base. We had a guard post at each entrance, but no gates. No one ever bothered to stop anyway. In the U.S.A. all bases were heavily guarded, and every person in uniform had to show some sort of authorization before being allowed to enter or leave the base. This was not so in the U.K. Later, a public road crossed our base in England.

I bought my first bicycle at the age of 30 in Northern Ireland. I was born and reared in rural east Texas, and non-paved deep sand roads were not conducive to bicycle travel. Such was not the case in the U.K. Almost everyone rode bikes. Very few people owned automobiles and the bus transportation was not dependable, so bikes were the chosen method of conveyance for local travel. Trains were quite dependable

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for longer trips. This was a training base and when a class finished training and were sent to combat, those who owned bikes would sell them to the in-coming class. Then when that class moved on they would sell them to their successors. Many elderly Irish people rode bikes and rode them quite conservatively. The terrain was a bit hilly and the Irish would walk and push their bikes up the hill and would walk them down the other side. Not the Americans!!!! Oh, no. We would ride our bikes as fast as we possibly could up and down hills. This did not set very well with some of the kind and gentle folk and they really were kind and gentle that lived with the most severe rationing system that one could imagine. Soaps, toilet articles and nylons were almost impossible to find. Meat and some foods were available but lack of ration coupons kept the average family in short supply. They were a very generous people with their meager supply and would invite Americans to stay over night or the weekend with them. The American authorities were aware of the living conditions of the citizens and issued orders that if an American trooper availed themselves of the local hospitality, the trooper could go to our supply and pick up certain foods such as staples and jellies or jam for their hosts. Toilet soap was available in our P.X. along with toothpaste, toothbrushes and razor blades. Our people would purchase some of these items as gifts. If ever a G.I. could come by some nylons of any color, he was the greatest.

There were several small towns within bicycle distance of the base, and usually there would be a dance in the village hall of most of the villages on Saturday nights. That was just about all the social life that was offered to the Americans. There were many unmarried civilian ladies who attended. Many wartime romances resulted, but I cannot recall any marriages of any of the school group that I was with.

While we were in Northern Ireland, the military tactics of the B-26 Bomber were changed due to some terrific losses of aircraft and people. We mentioned earlier that we trained to do low-level bombing but the first two missions of the 322nd Bomb Group were total failures. On the first mission, twelve planes were sent to a Belgian town to bomb a power plant. One plane developed engine trouble and returned to base. The other eleven planes received extensive damage and many of the crewmembers were injured. Two weeks later, thirteen planes were sent to the same area to bomb submarine pens. Again, one plane developed engine trouble and returned to base. That was the only plane that returned that day. Later, after I became a P.O.W., I talked to some of the people who were on that mission. They said they were flying so low that people who were in church steeples fired DOWN upon them. This type of operation was suspended for several weeks and other tactics were devised. As a consequence we spent more than three months cooling our heels in North Ireland.

Training began to get monotonous and we were doing less flying than we normally would have done. While there we experienced our second crash landing. We had a normal take-off, had retracted the landing gear, and were about to reach normal flight when a propeller 'ran away'. The props were electrically operated, not engine driven. Occasionally an electrical malfunction would cause the prop to rapidly increase the

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prescribed rpm setting, thereby making it necessary to shut down the prop, rendering it totally useless. Fortunately the pilot maintained control of the plane, got into the landing pattern and landed the plane without further damage. However, while we were trying to gain some altitude on one engine, we flew through a very high voltage electric power line and a prop blade on the good engine made contact with one of the power lines. A hole almost an inch deep was burned into the leading edge of the prop blade. That was the extent of the damage to the plane, but our landing went down in the books as a crash. Some of our neighbors were slightly upset because of the power interruption.

We remained in North Ireland until in March 1944, when we were sent to England to combat. Our crew was assigned to the 450th Squadron of the 322nd bomb group. We were near the village of Great Sailing in Sussex County at Andrews Field. We were about five miles from the town of Braintree and a two-hour train ride from London. We had to change trains on the trip to and from London. There were many short line railroads in England. Some were not more than fifty miles in length. However, the schedules were really well kept. Long-range bus transportation was almost nonexistent.

Early on, we experienced some weather delays and could sometimes wrangle an overnight pass to London. London was unlike any city I had ever seen. Of course the total blackout at night added to the general confusion. Also the peace and quiet was interrupted every night I was there by a German air raid. When the alarm sounded, the streets became empty space since everyone took shelter in the subways. Sometimes it was rather crowded and the electric power would fail, thereby adding to the confusion. Everyone carried a torch (flashlight) so the subways were not totally dark at all times. Food was extremely short in London. There were no up-scale restaurants. Some of the hotels served meals, such as they were, but their menus were quite limited. Many of the hotels had some permanent residents and these residents usually supplied their own food. It was quite common to see one of the locals bring their own jellies and jams to the breakfast table and drink the tea that was furnished by the hotel. The United Kingdom population suffered some extreme hardships all during World War II. They were a hardy people in spite of all their problems. One has to admire them for their attitude and perseverance.

The most popular food in down town London was Fish and Chips. The average Fish and Chips place was a hole-in-the-wall type, only about eight or ten feet wide, but considerably deeper. It seems they were between two buildings. On one side of the place there was a grill and a few cooking utensils. They were behind a narrow counter. On the opposite wall was a shelf where one stood and ate. There were no tables or chairs. You placed your order at the counter and when you were served you ate from the shelf. "Chips" were French fries. Fish is fish, and you never asked what kind. Your fish and chips were served on a piece of newspaper. That way one could get an update on the news along with the meal. There was no silverware to contend with and many people took their paper-wrapped meal and ate it as they walked on down the street. No bread or anything else—just fish and chips, that's all.

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We flew our first combat mission on March 7, 1944. In March we flew ten combat missions, two local training missions and had to abort two combat missions because of weather. In April we flew eleven combat missions, three local training flights, and aborted three missions due to weather over the target. In May we flew twelve daytime combat missions, five night time training flights, had no abortions, and flew the first night bomber mission ever flown by the USAAF in the E.T.O. (European Theater of Operations).

Nighttime bombing is totally different from day bombing. In day bombing, we flew as tight a formation as could humanly be maintained. We flew three planes to a "box", four boxes to a squadron, and four squadrons to a group. That was maximum effort from each group and at that time, we could consistently put up maximum effort. We did experience some shortage of personnel, and on occasion we had only a five-man crew, which meant that when we were over the target area that only one man, the pilot, was on the flight deck. When that happened, the engineer flew as co-pilot during takeoff, normal flight, and landing. After crossing the English Channel and reaching Europe, the engineer manned the top turret guns. Due to the formation structure (each squadron being successively behind and lower than the leader) we opened our bomb bay doors when the leader did and released our bombs when the leader did. There were not nearly enough Norden Bomb Sights so each plane could have one. Consequently we monitored the leader quite seriously and bombed when he did. The results were surprisingly good. Our accuracy was usually more than ninety percent. The "heavies" (B-17 and B-24) each had a bombsight since they flew at a much higher altitude than we did. Also they encountered much more air-to-air opposition than we did, making it necessary to bomb on an individual basis.

In night bombing we did not fly formation. Each plane took off at thirty-second intervals and flew a prescribed course and elevation. Each plane had a specified angle of approach and a specified time and altitude over the target. This specified time and directions was ABSOLUTE. Should a plane deviate from its assignment, it could cause a crash between two planes or perhaps bomb a lower plane. I need to mention that each plane, if it maintained proper elevation, was separated by five hundred feet above or below any other plane that was over the target at any given time. The angle of approach was 15 degrees separation.

A night mission was much more nerve wracking than a daytime mission. You could not see planes, as you were accustomed to seeing in the daytime. You were alone. The enemy was firing tracer ammunition at you and it seemed that every one of these bullets was coming directly at you. Since the world was totally blacked out, you had no reference points. You were definitely flying 'instruments'.

Our first night target was a railroad yard located between Paris and St. Lo. We never knew too much detail of the results of that raid. All we knew was there was lot of fire and smoke. Our pilot, Lt. Davidson, went into Colonel Nye's office the next day and informed the Colonel that he would not fly another night mission. He told us (the

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crew) that he told Colonel Nye “I will never fly another night mission. You may do whatever you wish to me. You may send me to prison, you may break me back to private. Whatever you decide to do is ok with me. I will not contest your decision”. At any rate, Lt. Max Bedell became our pilot. We had a few different pilots at different times fly co-pilot with us.

This was during the time that a manpower shortage reared its ugly head. There were just not enough people to fill all the positions. We occasionally flew with a five-man crew. In other planes, enlisted men have been known to fly as bombardier. This was not a big deal, since he opened the bomb bay doors when the leader did and released the bombs when the leader did. Since tripping a single toggle switch released the bombs, the bombardiers soon acquired the title of “toggleirs” (in private, never in the briefing room).

The Air Force was a little less formal than were some of the other branches of service as related to uniforms and conduct toward officers. We considered each member of a crew to be a valid part of that crew and to be totally responsible for the duties assigned to that crew position. If a man did not measure up, the pilot soon found a way to get a replacement. There was no lack of respect for our officers. We worked as a team and respected every man for his ability to do his job. Naturally the officers and the enlisted men did not live in the same quarters or share the same mess halls and recreational facilities. I think that each seasoned crewmember thought of his crew as being the best crew in (quoting Andy Griffith) “the whole dangd Air Force”. We did what we were trained to do and did it with pride. We took a back seat to no one.

I mentioned Lt. Davidson a few paragraphs back. After he was removed from our crew, we lost track of him. We were getting busier and just did not know what ever happened to him until after the war. Several years after the war I bought a book depicting the B-26, the “Annihilator” groups, of which we were one, and the 9th Air Force as a whole. It is a well-written history of the accomplishments of the B-26 and the people who flew them. Our group, the 322nd, is prominently presented, including crewmember’s names and incidents related to them. This book told that Lt. Davidson had been killed on a NIGHT mission just a few days after we were shot down. This was most ironic. We never knew what caused him to go back to flying night missions.

The weather conditions began to get much more friendly toward flying. We became extremely busy. The Germans were constructing “buzz bomb” launching ramps along the French shoreline of the English Channel. These were small engine-powered bombs aimed in the general direction of London and the fuel range was also set for the London area. If they missed by a few miles, they were still very destructive and mind shattering for the British. There were many of these launching sites being erected and they were well camouflaged and difficult to find. If we found our target, we bombed. If we did not find the target, we brought the bombs back to base. This area was not industrial and was heavily populated. Not an ideal situation to find a

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'target of opportunity'. We were also hitting strategic targets such as railroad yards and bridges, highway bridges and factories. We occasionally made two missions a day. On "D" day our group made three missions. Our crew made all three missions.

The massiveness of material and manpower that was exhibited on "D" day made a never-to-be-forgotten impression on me. We took off before daylight, formed up and headed for France. The English Channel was literally filled with Allied boats. It looked as if one could almost step from boat to boat. This was not true, of course, but the awesomeness of that sight will live in my mind forever. The air was thick with planes. There were planes in every direction as far as one could see. Our group was to hit a long-range gun emplacement just two minutes before the first wave of troops went ashore. We did hit our target, but lighter guns and hand held weapons did take a tremendous toll on our troops all along the entire beachhead. Our troops took these landing areas purely by sheer weight of manpower. The allies lost many thousands of good men that day.

On "D" day we were instructed to fly on across the Cherebourg Peninsula, pass over the tip of the peninsula and Gurnsey Islands, go around the tip of the peninsula and return to base. Do NOT turn and head for England, since all seagoing vessels had been instructed to shoot down any plane of any description that was headed toward England, the reason being that we were not to fly over the fleet of ships. Also, the crewmen on board these ships were so busy that they did not have time to try to identify an airplane. We hit inland targets on the next two trips and got back to base about 9:30 pm. It was a long day.

After "D" day we seldom had a formal briefing. All personnel checked the flight roster each day and if your name was listed, you were expected to be available all day. There was a public address system that could be heard all over the base, and if an announcement such as this: Mr. Jones, you have a telephone call at the orderly room" was made, you knew a mission was on. The enlisted men headed for the plane and made everything ready for take-off. I made a 'walk-around" inspection, along with the crew chief, then went into the cockpit and started the engines so the magneto output could be checked, checked all the controls, especially the wing flaps, the rudder, and elevator. Johnson checked all eleven 50-caliber machine guns for proper loading and for a sufficient amount of ammunition. Wells checked all seven of the radio sets that were aboard the plane. Usually, by that time, the officers had arrived with the target data and we all assumed our proper positions in the plane. At the signal "START ENGINES", all planes cranked up and waited for the order to taxi into position for take-off. When that order came, the planes began to take off in a prescribed order and after reaching an altitude of five thousand feet, the group began to get into formation. When the group was formed up, we started toward France.

On one occasion, the P.A. order system was this: "All alerted crews go to your planes immediately. Prepare for take-off as soon as possible, taxi into position, and take off when ordered. The target area will be given after your group starts toward target". We were nearing the English coast when the target data reached us. We

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were to bomb a railroad yard that had two trainloads of the highly respected German Tiger Tanks being off-loaded at that time. When we arrived, most of the tanks were still on the rail cars and were not in position to offer us any opposition, so we split the group and bombed by squadron. We made four passes over the target and inflicted considerable damage to the tanks and the rail yard. Photo intelligence pictures, shown the next briefing, were good and the group received a 'well done' from the General Headquarters.

Not all of our missions were 'milk runs'. Some, in fact, most, of them were pretty hairy. We did not encounter any air-to-air opposition, but the German anti-aircraft flack fire was heavily concentrated and quite accurate. We managed to avoid a lot of flack when we were flying at ten to twelve thousand feet elevation by using extreme evasion tactics and by tossing bales of tinfoil out of the planes. This foil would distort their radar-controlled gun aiming since their radar would lock on the foil. We ceased to fly at that elevation after "D" day. We were ordered to give direct ground support to the troops, regardless of how low the clouds were. We went in under the clouds. This was visual bombing. We have flown so low that we came back with a few of our own bomb fragments embedded in our own planes.

So many things occurred that time and space does not permit an account of every mission. We will touch on only a few of the more memorable ones. On one mission during the labor shortage, I was assigned to fly with a Lt. Golden whose engineer was sick that day and unable to fly. People who were not normally scheduled on a given day were sometimes assigned to a crew that had a temporary vacancy. That was the case on this day. Lt. Golden was completing his tour of duty (fifty missions) on this mission, if it was completed. The mission was aborted due to heavy cloud cover over the target, so we returned to base. We were loaded with four 500-pound bombs. This was a lighter than usual bomb load, but the configuration of the bomb racks allowed only four bombs of this size. On some other sizes, we could carry 4000 pounds. As we approached the base, Lt. Golden announced to the crew that we were going to do a little 'buzzing' (high speed, low altitude) to celebrate his tour of duty completion. This was done on occasion, but not usually with a bomb load aboard. At any rate, we approached the runway in a normal manner but just before the wheels touched the asphalt, Lt. Golden retracted the wheels, gave both engines full power, and headed off into the wild blue yonder at about fifty feet elevation. We flew lower than most power lines, disrupted the peace and quiet of several dairy herds, and, according to the local papers, caused the hens to quit laying for three days. I do know there was much unhappiness among the Brass at the base. I was not really happy to have those 500-pounders banging and clanging in the bomb racks. I complimented Lt. Golden on his 50 missions, wished him well when he was called in to see the Colonel, and told him I sincerely hoped that I would never be assigned to his crew again.

On another mission to a target in Holland, our crew minus a copilot was in the last box and our plane had been really damaged by flack. We were on the "bomb run" when we were hit and managed to drop our bombs on target. Some hydraulic lines were severed and we began to lose hydraulic fluid rapidly. We were able to close the

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bomb bay doors and to continue straight and level flight, but the right engine was beginning to lose power. Lt. Davidson was still our pilot then. He called me on the intercom and told me to come to the cockpit. By the time I arrived and got into the co-pilot's seat, things were getting much worse at a rapid rate. The right engine was almost useless, as we were getting almost no power from it. I advised him to shut down the engine, feather the prop, and tell the flight leader that we could not stay in formation, that we must pull out of formation and go back to base alone. He argued that he could not break radio silence to advise the flight leader of the problem when the flight leader advised HIM to pull out of formation and head for home. Dave was trying to tell flight leader that we had no fighter escort when another voice came from one of our escort planes. "Big Brother, this is little brother. Go home, we've got you covered". This communication came from one of our escort planes. We dropped out of formation, put the plane in a 10-degree descent mode and started for England. Our escort consisted of four British Spit Fires, a very fast and very maneuverable plane made from plywood, yes, plywood, and flown by Polish flyers. The Poles had joined the British Air Force shortly after Hitler had invaded Poland and were excellent flyers. Since we were losing altitude under power, we soon out-distanced the group and reached the base several minutes ahead of the others. The B-26 'redlined' at 325 miles per hour. We usually flew formation at around 250 miles per hour. When we reached England that day we were making 380 air speed miles per hour. The Polish flyers turned back to France after we reached England to look for "off target opportunities" like a train or truck convoy. Those guys were good!!! We reached base and asked for emergency landing procedure. We were advised to make one pass over the runway, release a red flare, and then assume the landing pattern. The flare pistol had a barrel almost two inches in diameter and locked into a tube that protruded through the roof of the plane. I loaded the flare into the pistol, locked the barrel into the tube, and when we were over the field I shot the flare. That was the only direct hit I was credited with in all my war experience. The flare made a perfect arc and landed in a farmer's haystack. The hay burned quite well. I have often wondered how much that pile of hay cost the government.

I mentioned that we were losing hydraulic fluid and since most of the plane's functions were hydraulically controlled, we were experiencing some problems. I had to lower the landing flaps with a hand crank. The landing gear was also a problem. The rear wheels were easy since the slipstream helped to force them down. They opened to the rear. The nose wheel, part of a tricycle landing gear, opened to the front and was more difficult. When we boarded or left the plane our passage was through the nose wheel well. Since the nose wheel would not fall freely into position, I had to help it. We wore British type parachutes rather than American, since they were easier to handle while in flight. We wore the harness at all times, but not the 'chute pack. In fact, I could not have sat on the seat in the machine gun turret while wearing an American parachute. There was just not enough room. At any rate, the nose wheel was partially down and the door was open. Johnson and Wells held on to my parachute harness while I eased, feet first, through the nose wheel door, got my feet on the wheel, and with my shoulder against the structure, was able to push the wheel down into place. It surely was good to hear Dave yell, "Down and locked".

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Then all Johnson and Wells had to do was get me back into the plane. After we touched down we discovered that the brakes would not work. There was no hydraulic fluid left. The hydraulic fluid pressure was set for a maximum of 250 pounds per square inch. There was an emergency bottle of compressed air about the size of a quart coffee thermos bottle for just such occasion. The air pressure in this bottle was 1250 psi. This bottle was mounted just above the door into the radio room, just behind the cockpit and was equipped with a small “T” handle to be pulled to release the pressure when needed. The proper procedure was to release the pressure as gently as possible. The term “milk the bottle” was commonly used when we were being instructed as to its use. We were on the ground and the end of the runway was getting really close. Dave was yelling “milk the #\$\$%^&***&%%% bottle”. I told him that the bottle would not milk and to hold on, as I was going to “pull” the bottle. When I gave the handle a big pull, the plane began a drastic slowdown, the left main wheel locked, and the plane did a “ground loop”, meaning that the plane abruptly turned to the left at such a speed that the right wingtip dragged the asphalt runway, causing some damage. Fortunately, we cleared the runway before the plane finally came to a halt. The rest of the group would be arriving momentarily, and we needed the space. As soon as I reached the ground, I sat down beside the nose wheel and vomited. I was scared and I was shook up. The last ten minutes had been bad—real bad. While I was trying to get straight, Colonel Nye drove up. The fire trucks and ambulances were already there. We did not need them, thankfully. Colonel Nye knew every air crewman in his group by name and would speak to you as a person, not as a uniform. He got out of the car, came over to me and said “things were pretty rough, weren’t they, Harper”? About all I could say was “They certainly were, sir”. Then he asked if any of our crew was injured. I told him that we had no injuries. He then told me that we could have bailed out and had justification to do so. I told him that we had never considered bailing out, that we felt that the plane could be made to fly again, and that we had five live bodies ready to do just that. He agreed and later called us all into his office to compliment us on getting back and getting the plane back.

The plane was overhauled. Both engines required complete overhaul since we overheated the good engine while coming home and the wing repairs were not too great. Ironically, though, the plane never flew again. After it had been repaired and was moved from the hanger to the apron, the mechanics were “running up” another plane’s engines and this plane jumped the wheel chocks, ran into our plane, and their props chewed off most of a wing and did much damage to the fuselage.

As we have stated already, things were getting more hectic every day. Sleep was harder to come by, tension was mounting, and nerves were becoming more frayed. Everyone seemed to know that “D” day was near; however, no one seemed to know just when. One day at lunch we were a little late since we had just returned from a mission and the food was almost gone. We were scrounging around trying to find enough to eat, and while going through the chow line I dropped my knife on the floor. We were using the infamous mess kit and the sheet metal knife, fork and spoon. When I dropped my knife a guy sitting at the table close to the chow line put his foot on it. I asked him for my knife, and he told me to go to hell, that the knife belonged

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to his buddy. I called him a damn liar and told him that I was going to get my knife. He got to his feet and started to swing at me. I guess I was faster than he, because I hit him in the jaw, knocked him over the table, and partially under the next table. His buddies started to close in, but fortunately some M. P.s were in the mess hall and did not allow that to happen. An M.P. advised me to wait until the provost officer could be located and could come to the mess hall. In the meantime, the M.P.'s were talking to various people about what happened. In a short time the Provost officer, a captain, arrived and talked to the M.P.'s first. He then called me aside and asked me my version of what had happened, and I told him how it was. He said that there would not be any charges brought against me since it was obvious that I was defending myself against a known bully and a troublemaker. He further told me that the group of people, who were about to bruise me a bit, was a part of the airdrome squadron. This squadron was a base maintenance crew whose duties were to keep the base cleaned up and work on the streets, etc. They definitely did not do any maintenance on the aircraft. He also said that this group had a reputation of being bullies and caused a lot of behavior problems. He said that he was going to warn their commanding officer that their conduct had to improve or they would be shipped out to some other outfit.

We talked quite a while. He was an aggie graduate and we talked about Texas a bit, even though his home was in Missouri. He inquired if we did not have side arms. I told him we did, but had never worn them on base. He advised me to get word to all the enlisted airmen to start wearing their pistols as a precaution and to be certain to wear them in combat since no one knew when we might become more involved in combat.

It seems criminal to think that one would have to protect himself from people in their own outfit, but that's the way it was. Our housing area was more than one half mile from the common area where the mess halls, showers, and the P.X. were located. The airmen began to be a more closely knit group and traveled in greater numbers. We never had any more trouble from these people. The grapevine report was that the guy I hit had a broken jaw and a broken wrist. Strangely, I never felt bad about what happened to him. I guess I was getting more combat ready.

Finally, the big day arrived. Earlier, we have tried to explain the impact it had on most people. We were most proud of the progress our ground troops were making and we exerted every possible effort to give them any support in any way we could. Sometimes all available planes were less than full group strength in number, but we tried to support them every way possible. They would request us to hit a certain target, and we would try. Some missions were effective, and some were not. We never achieved one hundred percent accuracy.

On the night of June 14, we flew our second night mission. I do not recall where, or what it was. I remember we had been assigned a co-pilot, Lt. James. H. DeLoach, and this was his first mission. What a way to break in a new person. We hit the target and returned to base with no damage to crew or plane.

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On June 15, our target was a fuel/ammunition supplies dump some 10 minutes inland from St. Lo. We had positive results, since we left the place a smoking bomb crater. We were approaching the coast on our return and could see our fighter planes taking off and landing on hastily constructed metal runways. I had already stowed my guns, and was about to leave the turret when we received a direct hit on our left engine from an anti-aircraft gun. The propeller separated from the engine and flew back over the wing. The engine fell forward of the wing and to the ground. This incident will vividly remain in my memory as long as I can remember anything. A bit of background is important here. Lt. DeLoach was pilot that day and Lt. Bedell was co-pilot. This was a courtesy extended to DeLoach by Bedell. When we were hit, I was dislodged from the turret, and was scrambling around on the floor of the plane trying to gather up my parachute, which had “popped” and was planning to hook it to the harness which I was wearing and to bail out of the waist window since I had heard the “bailout bell”. Sgt. Wells told me that Bedell wanted me to come to the flight deck and assist him. When I reached the rear bomb bay, I met Lt. DeLoach. He was attempting to reach the waist window so he could bail out, and had abandoned his post. I managed to get past him and reached the flight deck. Bedell was in the co-pilot’s seat, and had wrestled the plane into a reasonably straight and level flight. When we were hit the plane went into a flat spin and the torque from the one engine almost overturned the plane. He had done an almost superhuman feat in getting the plane back into a flying mode. He told me to get in the pilot’s seat and fly the plane while he could move his seat backward enough to let Lt. Swart out of the tunnel that connected the flight deck to the bombardier’s position in the nose of the plane. This we did. When Swart got out of the nose of the plane, Bedell told him to sit in that seat and fly the plane so that I could vacate the seat I was in, and Bedell could sit there and try to maintain control of the plane.

Under the circumstances, we would have bailed out had we been at a higher altitude. But we were not too high above the treetops and the terrain in Normandy is small valleys and sharply rising hills. We reasoned that if we bailed out over a valley that a parachute might not open until we were being dragged through trees. We elected to crash land in the largest open area that could be found. Bedell, Swart, and I remained on the flight deck. The others assumed the prescribed crash landing body protection position, and since the cockpit instruments were inoperative, I stood in the door of the radio/navigator room and called out the altitude and airspeed to Lt. Bedell as those instruments were still operating. Bedell selected a small wheat field in which to land. It appeared to have no more than four acres of open land and was surrounded by some fairly large trees. They could have been oak trees, but I never thought to check. Under normal circumstances the B-26 was a ‘hot’ landing speed ship. It stalled out at 135 mph, and from that point on, its glide angle was straight down. So when landing on its belly, we had no control as to direction it might take or how far it might slide.

Lt. Bedell did a super job of getting it on the ground in an upright configuration and it seemed that the entire bottom of the plane made ground contact at the same moment.

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There was no bouncing and bumping along. It was as smooth a ride as anyone could ever hope for in this situation. Bedell was a great pilot and must have exerted some super human effort in righting the plane when we were hit. He was, physically, a very strong man. As a side note here, he escaped and was returned to the U.S. long before the rest of us. The last account I had of him, he was a senior pilot for United Airlines flying out of Chicago. He was a truly great guy. I owe my life to him, not only for the last landing, but also for several other occasions prior to that.

When we touched ground, the plane seemed to be heading toward some trees and if we continued at that speed and direction we would surely hit the trees with enough force to tear the wings off the plane. As we neared the trees, the plane began to turn partially around, so that the tail of the plane was even with the nose. This helped to slow the momentum of the plane since more surface was making contact with the ground. The plane did turn more nearly around and it slid under the tree branches, which evidently concealed it from the air. A small German plane flew by and apparently did not see us. We saw him, however, and that caused a few anxious moments. At that time, and to this day, I think we experienced some divine intervention! All seven persons escaped without a scratch. There was no blood, and no broken bones. That is a lot better than just plain good luck.

Earlier, we had said that a B-26 crew consisted of six men. That's correct, but on this flight a Captain West, a photo/intelligence officer, as an observer, accompanied us. We had on occasion been selected to take photo/intel people with us. On every occasion that one of those guys was present we had a rough day. They were a jinx!!!! This one was about as rough as it gets, unless you "buy the farm" (slang for being killed).

As soon as the plane finished sliding, we began to exit. Some went overhead through the hatch, while others went out the waist windows, and two exited through the nose which had lost all its Plexiglas coverings. At any rate, we were all out and accounted for. We expected the plane to catch fire, but for some reason it did not. In fact, Wells and I went back into the plane to destroy the seven radio sets and to find something or some way to set fire to the plane, which was standard procedure designed to prevent the enemy from getting any additional technical information. I was not able to fire the interior of the plane and had gone back outside. I was intending to crawl under the wing and open a valve in a wing gasoline tank, let the fuel drain a bit, and then toss a lighted match into the puddled gasoline. By that time, however, French civilians, some of whom could speak English, surrounded us. A well-dressed very attractive French lady who spoke excellent English, advised us to vacate the premises as rapidly as possible and the French would fire the plane. We gave the parachutes to them (they were very pleased to get them) and followed a man to a farmhouse approximately one half mile from where we were. When we reached this farmhouse, we were introduced to the owner, a rather feeble man, who insisted that we go to the basement where we were offered something to drink, a wine, or some other kind of alcoholic beverage, which I did not care for. The wine was acceptable.

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I had gotten my tobacco ration that day and in that ration were two cigars. I gave the cigars to the old gentleman and he was one of the most pleased persons I had seen in a long time. In the meantime, the English-speaking lady had gone, but she said she would send someone to take us to an abandoned barn where we could stay until we wished to leave to make our way back to where our troops were. Prior to "D" day, we were advised to attempt to contact the French underground and allow them to get us out of their country through Spain, in the event of a situation of this kind. After "D" day, however, we were told to remain in uniform and attempt to get back to our own troops. Otherwise, if we were caught out of uniform, we could be considered a spy and would be shot immediately.

While we were at the farmhouse, we could see the smoke from the burning plane and hear the exploding 50-calibre machine gun rounds. There were 2400 of them aboard. It was really sad to see such an ending to a fantastic old airplane, which had served us well and to which we had grown very fond.

We reached the old barn well before dark and some of us tried to devise a plan to reach our troops while others were sentries. We had been told by the French that we were within twelve miles of actual hand-to-hand combat, had been shown a local map, and advised of the latest known German troop concentration. It appeared that we would have to make our way through the German army or try to find a place in which to hide until the Germans retreated past our hiding place. They were retreating at the time. We were advised not to try to hide in the immediate area, but to get as far from the plane as we could. That made sense to us, so we decided to go directly toward the ground fighting once it became dark. We hoped that in the dark we would not be discovered.

After dark, we headed toward where we were hearing artillery fire, moving as quietly as possible. Since I was the only country boy in the group, I was elected to take the lead and we would go single file and hold onto the one in the front. I had, of course, no front man. We made fairly good progress considering the circumstances. Sometimes we could hear voices, then we would have to lay low or to detour. We tried to stay as far away from them as we could, and we were successful until just after daybreak. During this time, we received the "scare of our lives". We crawled on our bellies a lot of the time because we were so near to the Germans. At one time their voices had grown quieter and we had stopped crawling and were conversing in whispers when we heard this loud S-W-O-O-S-H-I-N-G sound. We were within 200 feet of a rocket-launching vehicle, which had just launched four short-range rockets. We learned later that these vehicles were highly mobile and that the rockets were designed for relatively short range, some four to twenty miles.

Had we remained in the forest, we would not have been discovered. We had been in the forest all night, had crossed several roads, and were within the sound of rifle fire, which was coming from a small village near us. We reached this road and exposed ourselves before we realized where we were. The road was graded but unpaved. About thirty-five or forty German troops were coming toward us and they saw us

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before we could get off the road. We did run a short distance and found a dugout place where we tried to hide. This was not a foxhole, but was a place where a bulldozer had been working. At any rate, the Germans soon surrounded us and ordered us to come out. I had a Colt 45 automatic pistol in my boot, but was not stupid enough to come out firing when all those people had rifles or other arms. There were a lot of young troops in the group and they seemed as scared of us as we were of them. They were retreating, by the way, and had we not been seen, we could have made it home in a few days.

One of their officers could speak some English, and he had us wait while he could call by radio to someone else for further orders. During the time we were waiting, we were searched. They took all our tobacco and cigarettes. They left us all our identification papers, cards, etc. In this search, they missed my pistol. I was careful not to let them know of its whereabouts, and kept it on my person all day. Late in the evening, I buried it in a pile of wood chips. A weapons carrier arrived after a time and we were ordered to get aboard. We were hauled for hours and hours in German occupied territory. Several times we were forced to hurriedly leave the vehicle and find cover, since one of our own fighter planes would be in the area. We were never fired upon during that day and late in the afternoon we were taken to a very large mansion-like home. Apparently this was German headquarters for that area. Our officers and enlisted men were separated for the night. The officers were put in a small basement and Johnson, Wells, and I were put in a small brick/stone building where they stored their firewood. We were given a slice of bread and some water for the evening meal. SOOOOO!!!! We were taken to the "woodshed" and started on the German weight loss program at the same time. In this woodshed, I performed "last rites" and buried the unused Colt 45. We dug a fairly deep large hole for the pistol and it may very well still be there. We'll probably never know.

The next day they took us further south to a holding compound, just outside the city of Alencoln, France. The prison was designed for political prisoners, not war criminals such as we, and was not heavily fenced. However, it was heavily guarded while we were present which was mostly at night because they kept us busy in town during the day. The buildings were almost identical to broiler houses in east Texas. They were long and narrow and made of corrugated metal. About mid-way up the sides there was a two-foot opening along the entire length of the building. The floor was dirt, the bunks were wood, and the mattresses (?) were burlap bags with straw and wood shavings in them for filler. They were definitely not "Sealy Plush" or "Pillow Top". There were no pillows. We were given one dirty, stinking blanket. Fortunately, it was summer, but at times the nights were a bit chilly.

We arrived there about mid-afternoon. We were told that we would not have to work any that day and that we would be fed later. We were getting hungry, since we had had no food since the evening before. While we were trying to get settled, a few German troops began to come through the barracks to try to trade us out of tobacco or cigarettes. We had been relieved of our tobacco the day before and had nothing of any value to trade. One soldier spoke good English and asked if any of us were from

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Houston, Texas. I told him my home was about 40 miles from Beaumont. Then he said he had been a chef in a Hotel Beaumont and in the Rice Hotel in Houston. Both hotels were quite well known in that time period. I asked him why he did not stay in the U.S., and he said that he was forced to come back and serve in the German army. He said that he was contacted and told to return to Germany or else his parents and his two sisters would be killed or imprisoned. His two brothers had already been forced to become soldiers.

Later, we were given what we loosely interpreted as a meal. It was a small cup of soup and a thin slice of black bread. The soup reminded me of split pea without any salt or any other seasoning. We had to drink water and had been cautioned not to drink European water because of human waste contamination, but that was our only option. Since we had no assurances of our future, we drank it. It helped to fill the ever-increasing void in our stomachs. Soup and bread was the only food we were ever offered while at this place. A cup in the morning, and a cup at night. That was all.

The officers of our crew were removed from this place on the third day. We enlisted men stayed there from mid-June until mid-September. Before we were moved, we were made to work at anything that needed doing. We worked on bombed-out railroad yards and a bombed-out airport. We worked on city streets and roads, repairing bomb damage. Everything we did was a direct aid to the military, which was totally against the rules of the Geneva Convention. The Geneva Convention, of which Germany was a part, specifically states that no "holding country" would require prisoners of war to work at anything that would aid the war effort of that country. This was totally disregarded by the Germans. The Convention also stipulated that prisoners were to be fed "garrison rations" which meant that we were to be fed equally as well as their own troops. That did not work either. No soldier could fight a war if he was as poorly fed as we were. When we worked on the streets, sometimes a French civilian would slip us a few bites of food if they could do so without the guards seeing them. Also, the cherries were beginning to ripen and, even though I did not like cherries, I developed a tolerance of them. They helped fill the void also. Today, I don't like cherries.

Along in July, the German army was experiencing heavy losses and many wounded. They evicted all the French patients from the local hospital and began using it as a military hospital, manned by the hospital workers. They began using us as stretcher-bearers and hospital workers. We welcomed hospital duty because we had more chances to scrounge a little food. The French employees were really helpful in getting us a few bites. An interesting sidelight: Wells and I lifted a stretcher from an ambulance that contained the officer of the group that captured us. He had lost an arm and was unconscious. We never saw him again.

We continued to stay in this place until sometime after the middle of September (dates are not easily remembered) and had never been officially interrogated or registered as P.O.W.'s. Then we were told that we would leave immediately and be

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sent to an interrogation center and then sent to a registered prisoner of war prison. Up until this time, we were listed by the Air Force as M.I.A. (missing in action) since the German government had not notified the U.S.A. of our capture. The Air Force, our families, or no one had any idea of our whereabouts.

Early one morning they loaded us into a truck and after about a three-hour ride, we arrived in Paris and were taken to a train station. We were put into a fairly small room, under guard, with no furniture, no plumbing, no windows, nothing but bare concrete floors. When it was necessary to relieve oneself, we had to notify the guards and one of them would escort only one of us at a time to the facility. Toilet appliances were crude beyond imagination. The urinal was a sheet metal trough fastened to the wall and slanted so it would drain into a hole in the floor. The toilets were not toilets, but holes, about six inches in diameter, in the floor. On each side of this hole was a two-inch high build-up of concrete. One did not sit to use this facility—one squatted. These built-up places were where one placed one's feet. Water was flowing underneath these open holes and removed human waste as it was deposited. We were allowed to look outside and directly across the street from the train station was a sheet metal partial enclosure. This was where busy Parisians relieved their bladders. This enclosure had a closed end, which was fastened to a building and protruded about thirty inches directly across the sidewalk toward the curb. Then another piece of sheet metal about six feet long paralleled the curb. These semi-walls were only about three feet high. They were fastened to metal posts. The bottom of this wall was about twenty inches above the sidewalk and the head of an average height person could be seen above the wall. It was open on one end to allow persons to enter and exit. There was a trough-type urinal that people used, but it drained, openly, across the sidewalk. A sign on this convenience station identified it as a "pissor". Probably men only were the users of this "whatever".

We were not fed heavily on that day. The predictable cup of soup and a slice of black bread were doled out in mid-afternoon. Just before dark we were loaded into a boxcar on the railroad. The boxcar gained notoriety in WW I as "a 40 and 8", meaning it was designed to hold forty men or 8 horses, not forty men AND eight horses. We were not crowded on this trip since there were only about thirty of us on board. The toilet facilities consisted of one 10-quart bucket. The guards did not ride in the car with us.

The British were bombing Paris that night, and after the bombing began, our train moved around quite a bit. We seemed to go forward for a time and then backward for a time. Based on the direction and distance of the bombings, we could never estimate whether we were being moved away from the bombing or toward it. It did not enter our minds that if we took a hit, the Germans would not have to worry with us anymore. Maybe not.

We left Paris sometime before dawn and traveled in a haphazard manner. We did a lot of stopping. In a small French town near Nancy, our little train engine developed some sort of problem and left the train cars at the station and went to a shop, which

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was a few blocks away. We were confined to the car and were not allowed to get out and walk around until the air raid siren sounded. The guards opened the doors and allowed us to get out of the car and go about 100 yards to where we could lie in a road ditch. We could see a group of B-17's just west of us going in a northerly direction. Shortly after that we heard explosions. They had bombed a railroad tunnel about six miles from us. Later we learned that the tunnel was on the same road as we. When the "all clear" sounded, and we were being escorted back to our train, we saw a squadron of P-38's flying low and toward the train station. They had been fighter escort for the bombers, and since they had encountered no air opposition, they were looking for something to shoot up. Trains were a primary target. All German rail cars had the Red Cross insignia painted on the top of the car, which identified it as a hospital car even though it may be loaded with explosives. There were four planes in the squadron and on the first pass, two of them jettisoned their wing tanks giving the station house a liberal dose of 100-octane fuel. On the next pass, they did a "John Wayne" and came in with all guns blazing. A standard ammunition mix was three armor-piercing bullets to one tracer bullet. The tracers cause the gasoline to burn and fired the station also. The fighter pilots were having a fun day. They shot up the train, the water tower, and the area in general. There was a small apple tree, about four inches in diameter under which several of us attempted to hide. Fifty caliber bullets plowed the ground within three feet of my nose and from our own Air Force planes!!!! Believe me, a P-38 is a vicious looking piece of equipment when it is headed directly at you with all six of its guns blazing.

None of the train cars caught fire and in a short time the engine returned, hooked to the cars, and took off. Our train had to travel a different road than the one we were on because the bombers had closed the tunnel ahead of us.

We reached the city of Koblenz, Germany late in the afternoon. We were stopped near a busy railroad station and many, many people were milling around waiting for a train or leaving on a train. It seemed that most of them were commuters. People who worked in the city were riding the trains' home. We had been allowed to get off the train and were being kept in a group a short distance from the other people. Seemingly, the word got around that we were prisoners and some of the civilians began making threatening noises and moves toward us. The guards moved us into the building and into a small room. After the rush was over, we were loaded onto another train and traveled all night, with several stops, for no apparent reason.

The central interrogation center for the entire German military was at Frankfurt. That is where we were supposed to be going. We arrived there shortly after daybreak, and as best as we could tell, there was not a whole building in the entire city. We were told that it was a fairly large city, but our Air Force had completely leveled it a few days earlier. We went on a few more miles and reached the town of Wetzlar to where the interrogation center had been moved. The center seemed to be well established and we found out later that their records were quite up to date. They must have moved several weeks before the Frankfurt bombing. This place was known as Dulag Luft. Immediately adjoining it was a factory that produced highly sensitive lenses

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used in the bombsights, cameras, and other military sighting devices. The factory was camouflaged and marked to look like a hospital and the Dulag was marked as a P.O.W. compound. Consequently, the Allied Air Force never bombed the factory. We stayed there only a few days, but were allowed to shower and shave. Our clothes were dirty and beginning to show some wear. We were permitted to wash our clothes, however, and when the weather was good, there were many scantily-clads all over the place. We were fed a little better there than we had been in France. At this time, food had gained a most prominent position in our minds and in our conversations.

Interrogation was a farce. The German's had more personal information about us than we did. They knew when and where I was born, where I went to school, when I entered military service, the day we were shot down and my crewmembers names. Their intelligence branch was most efficient. When I was called to report for an interview, I reported to a German Hauptmann (Captain). I gave him my name, rank, and serial number. That is all the information that the Geneva Convention allows the holding country to inquire about. However, again they did not abide by the rules. He was a nice guy when I entered his office, but as I continued to refuse to answer his questions, he became rather upset, started yelling and threatened me with solitary confinement until I saw fit to cooperate. He told me that I may as well answer his questions since Johnson and Wells had already told him what he needed to know. I knew then that he was lying, since I was the first one of our crew to be interrogated. At any rate, my interview was soon over.

We stayed at the Dulag for only a few days and were again loaded into a boxcar for delivery to a prison camp. Somewhere. No one seemed to know where we were going. This time, there were sixty men crowded into the boxcar. Remember, it was designed for forty men. Four of our sixty were stretcher cases, wounded, unable to walk or to even sit up. The single 10-quart bucket toilet facility was again so generously provided. Since the walls of the boxcar were slats instead of being solid, the men urinated through the openings in order not to overflow the bucket because we never knew when we would be allowed to empty it.

We arrived at a rural railroad station named Keifeidh (name later changed to Gross Tychow in the 1970's) before daylight. We were about sixty miles southwest of Danzig, Poland. We had to remain in the cars until the prison guards came for us. They came about 8:00 am. There were quite a few of them and a lot of barking dogs. There were more than 200 prisoners, and we lined up in columns of five to march to the camp, which was more than a mile distant. There was a lot of yelling—Germans tried to intimidate by yelling--a lot of dog barking and general confusion. We were started marching and then the order was given to start trotting. By the time the stragglers got started trotting, the leaders were given the order to walk. The ones in the rear over-ran the ones in the front, causing more confusion. Then the order to run was given again. When the ones in the rear were moving, the order to halt was given. This tactic was repeated a few times, and absolute chaos resulted. That is when the

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guards started wielding their rifle butts and the dogs were allowed to start biting. I missed being hit or bitten by a dog until later.

An appearance of order was restored and we were ordered to run. I did not run very far before I was totally exhausted. I had had very little food for the past three months. I ran as far as I could, then fell, face down. A guard walked up and down my back with his hob-nailed boots and allowed his dog to gnaw on my legs. They left me alone after a bit and then I got to my feet and went on into the camp with the other stragglers. During this torture run, many men were bayoneted as they lay on the ground. Some were seriously wounded, and a few died. They were attempting to bayonet a man's privates as he lay on the ground. The guards were having a field day getting to bayonet as many as they wanted. I was fortunate in that I was not seriously wounded. I will always remember how those hob-nailed boots felt on my back. I can forgive the dogs, because they were doing what they were trained to do what they did. I think the men enjoyed what they were doing.

We reached the prison about mid-morning, and were ushered into a fairly small fenced enclosure where we remained almost all the balance of the day. No food, no water, and no toilet facilities. We were kept there until late afternoon. This was along in September and the sun was quite warming at mid-day. Along toward evening it began to get cooler. It was in this enclosure that two men were allowed to bleed to death. They received absolutely no medical attention, even though the guards were asked by others to do something for these men.

Eventually we were given a card with our POW number on it and were told that we must have this card in our possession at all times. We were given a slip of paper showing our barrack and room number. As we were going to our barrack, I noticed a fellow sitting on the steps of a barrack who looked familiar. His name was Robert L. Phillips and his hometown was Hillister, Texas, a small town just four miles from my hometown. He was a bomber crewmember and had been shot down a couple of months before, but had reached this prison shortly after being shot down. After the war was over, we maintained contact for a while, but eventually lost contact. He lived in Port Neches and worked for one of the oil companies.

Two men of our group were assigned to a barrack and a room that already had fourteen men in it. There was bunk space provided for twelve men, which meant that four men had to sleep on the floor. We were given a burlap bag with straw in it for a mattress and two blankets. Again, there was no pillow.

The room was about sixteen (16) feet square, had a table about four (4) feet square and four (4) short wooden benches for furniture. A small pot-bellied coal-burning heater occupied a space near the only door that opened into the hall. One window was in the outside wall, directly across from the door. The window was glass, but there was a wooden shutter that must be closed at night and when the air raid siren sounded during the day. The air raid siren sounded several times, but the planes were never seen, even though we could occasionally hear them.

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This needs to be told here:

The commanding officer's home was in Frankfurt. He went home on leave, found his home destroyed, and no trace of his family. When he returned to the prison, he would go "APE" when an air raid was in progress. He would walk into the roadway between two compounds and fire his pistol into the barracks. As best we could determine, no one was ever injured by his actions.

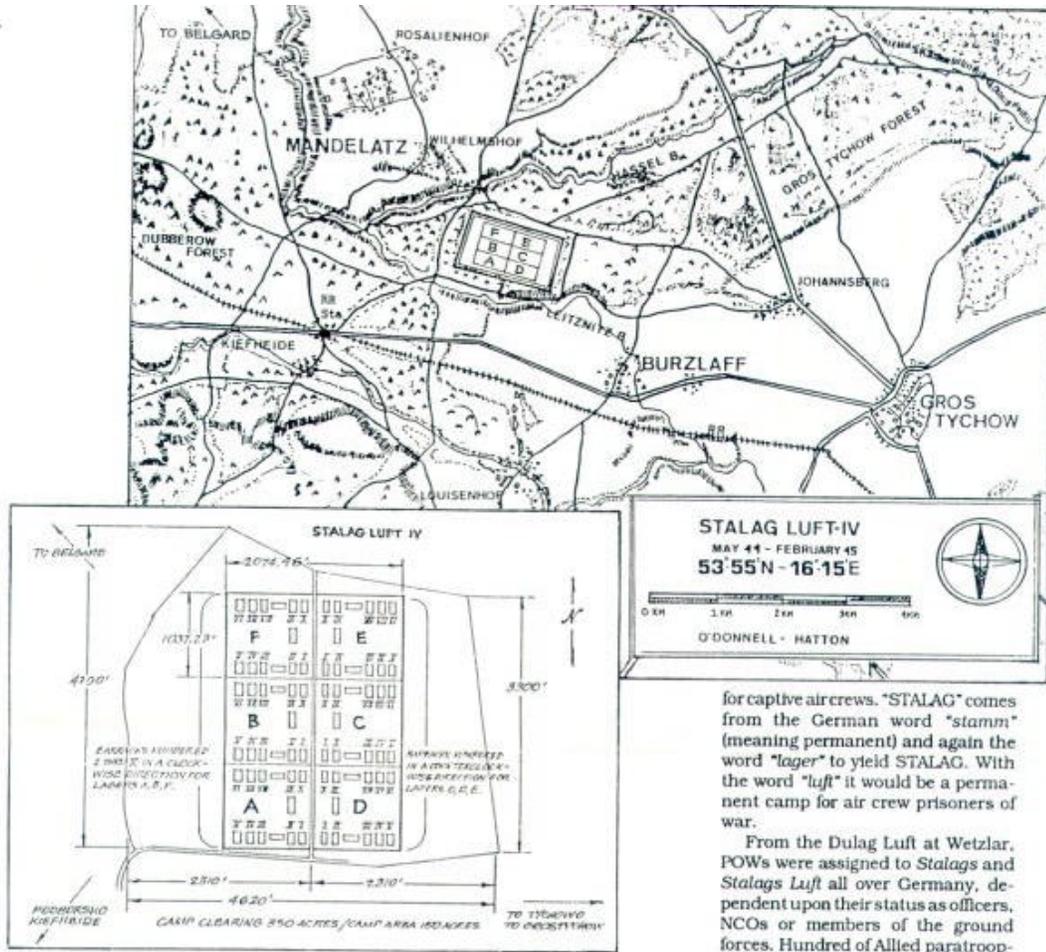
The Stalag consisted of six compounds, each holding approximately 1750 prisoners, making a total of approximately 10,000 prisoners in this one small prison. We were all Air Force, mostly American, with a small amount of British and Canadians thrown in. The Germans subscribed to the idea that their air force personnel were more "High Class" than their ground troops and it appears that this idea was in their minds when dealing with us. On the other hand, the Geneva Convention states that all non-commissioned officers and all commissioned officers were not required to do any labor for the holding country. All American flying personnel were sergeant or above; therefore, we did no work. We were allowed to volunteer, but no one was that stupid.

There were eight (8) barracks in each compound, four to each side. The barracks were about forty (40) feet wide and one hundred (100) feet long. They were about sixty (60) feet apart. Midway of the barracks was a smaller building that housed the latrine. This was an open pit type. There were no showers; in fact, there was no plumbing. In the interior of the compound was an open space, probably one hundred twenty (120) feet wide and five hundred (500) feet long. The office, a kitchen, and a mess hall were at one end of the compound. There was never a meal served in the mess hall as long as I was there. What little food we were allowed to have was cooked in the kitchen by Americans and one person from each barrack would get the food or drink in a bucket and bring it back to the room. We were allowed a spoon and our dinnerware was a tin can.

A barbed wire fence enclosed each compound. This fence was about fifty (50) feet behind the barracks and there was a "warning wire" stretched about twenty (20) feet inside the fence but paralleling the fence. Just inside this warning wire was a well-beaten path where most of the prisoners walked for exercise. There were guard towers at each corner of the compound and one about halfway between the ones on the corners, so we were continually within sight of a tower manned by guards armed with machine guns. We were allowed to walk alongside the wire but were not allowed to touch it. Signs warned us that we would be shot if we touched the wire and would be shot to death if we crossed the wire. That was one positive method of committing suicide. I saw it happen on one occasion. This man apparently just "lost it", jumped over the wire, and was trying to climb a leg of the guard tower when the guards riddled his body with machine gun bullets. I never knew the man, but some of his friends said he talked constantly about committing suicide.

In the middle of the compound, in the open space, men were playing softball when we arrived there. The International Red Cross had arranged for a meager supply of

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for captive aircrews. "STALAG" comes from the German word "stamm" (meaning permanent) and again the word "lager" to yield STALAG. With the word "luft" it would be a permanent camp for air crew prisoners of war.

From the Dulag Luft at Wetzlar, POWs were assigned to *Stalags* and *Stalags Luft* all over Germany, dependent upon their status as officers, NCOs or members of the ground forces. Hundred of Allied paratroopers were processed thru the Wetzlar Dulag Luft following the debacle of



May, Stalag Luft IV 1944-February, 1945

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sporting equipment like a couple of softball bats, a few soft balls, and couple of footballs. Also they had arraigned for some musical instruments and a really good orchestra had been put together since there were several really good musicians in the prison camp. A prisoner from Marshall, Texas, a man named Harris, was a really talented musician. When a new prisoner came into camp, Harris would interview them and if the newcomer could hum a tune to a new song and knew the words, Harris would set it to music and would write a score for the entire orchestra.

We were permitted to use the mess hall for shows produced by the band and others. I could not play an instrument, but did sing in the Christmas show. All the off-duty guards attended our shows and took up most of the space in the small building. Many prisoners did not get to see the shows even though they were presented as many times as the Germans would allow. This was a rural area and the Germans did not have too many nightlife attractions, so they monopolized our shows.

It began snowing in earnest about the first of November. This curtailed our outside activities quite a bit. We resorted to all day long bridge games in the rooms. We had room tournaments with the winners progressing to barracks tournaments, and the barracks winners going on to compound tournaments. We were never allowed out of the compound, so we never had a prison champion.

The guards frequently harassed us at night. Usually around midnight and after everyone was asleep, the guards would open the main doors and bring a lot of dogs and huge buckets of water into the barracks. They would make us stand in the unheated hall clothed in our 'longjohns' only, no pj's while they went into the rooms, ripped open the bed sacks, scattered hay/straw all over the room, and then poured water all over everything. They said they were searching for contraband.

There was one totally disliked guard whose sole aim was to be mean and abusive to the POW's. He was well over six feet tall and weighed close to 250 pounds, was arrogant, non-communicative, downright mean, and also ugly. The POW's called him "big-stoop". Everyone vowed vengeance provided they could ever get the opportunity. I do not know what happened to him. I do know he did not accompany the approximately six hundred people I was with.

In this latitude, the days were fairly short in winter and due to some extreme weather conditions, we spent a lot of time in the barracks. It is remarkable that there were very few arguments or harsh word exchanges. The environment was certainly conducive to short tempers and bad feelings. Fortunately, all of the men exhibited a terrific restraint in that area. Time did seem to drag and rumors continued to be plentiful. However, we did have access to radio reports from England, which were almost opposite to the German radio reports. We were fairly well advised as to the progress the allies were making.

Time continued to pass slowly, and as January began to run its course, we began to get more authentic reports of the war's progress. Also the German guards became

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much less abusive and made some attempts to become friendly. Not many POW's fell for that. There were too many bad memories.

Early in December we began to receive full Red Cross food parcels, one whole parcel per man per week. Each parcel contained five or six packages of cigarettes (that is where the Germans had been getting all their American cigarettes), a pound can of powdered milk, two ounces of soluble coffee, four ounces of concentrated chocolate, one-half pound of sugar cubes, one pound can of margarine, and a pound can of Spam©, or corned beef. With this much more than we had had to eat, we began to gain weight and strength. Since many of the prisoners did not smoke, cigarettes became the recognized medium of exchange. Example: 5 packs of cigarettes for one can of Spam©.

Earlier, I mentioned the deranged commandant who would fire a pistol into our barracks during an allied air raid. Just a few days before we were to evacuate the camp, he issued the order that all prisoners would turn in all over-coats, jackets, shoes, socks and underwear and that when we walked away from camp we would be barefoot, no head gear, and no coats. Fortunately, the other officers overpowered him and rescinded that order. Then two days before we walked away from camp, all men were outfitted with serviceable shoes an overcoat or jacket, depending on size and availability. None of the overcoats were ever large enough for me. Also, every man was given two suits of long underwear, two pairs of socks, and two blankets. Those who did not have a shirt were given one. All these supplies had been in their warehouse all this time, but they had caused our people to suffer instead of allowing us to use them. The U.S.A. and the British governments furnished all these clothes. There was a good bit of medical supplies in the warehouse. They were divided into small lots. Those of us who were able to carry them carried these small lots. I was given 2500 aspirin to carry. There were five bottles of 500 each. I used a lot of them for myself, as my teeth were beginning to crumble and there were a lot of exposed nerves. One-half aspirin pushed into a shell of a tooth gave temporary relief.

We walked away from Stalag Luft IV on February 6, 1945 and continued to walk until May 2, 1945, always under guard. The first day was bad. It sleeted, snowed, rained a bit, and was mostly disagreeable weather. When night came, we were ordered off the road and into an open field and were told that we would spend the night there. We formed groups of three, and since all had two blankets each, we spread three blankets on the ground, then the three men lay on those blankets and tried to cover with the other blankets. There was not much sleep that night. We were not allowed to build fires for security reasons. There was no wood available anyway, and had there been wood, it would have been too wet to burn. That was the only night that we did not have some form of shelter.

At this point in the march (walk), the guards were pretty tough. A lot of our people had diarrhea and found it necessary to relieve themselves occasionally or frequently and the guards would not stop the column for this happening. In fact, on the third day of walking, a prisoner stepped out of line for that purpose, and a guard shot him dead

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and left the body there. I don't have the words to describe in acceptable terms, some of the horrors we saw in the early days of this forced march.

Lack of food was always a major concern. When we would depart a given barn and start for another farm, a "kitchen crew" who could walk faster would precede us to our day's destination and would prepare food for the main group, if any food was available. In many cases there was no food when we arrived. At best, we could expect only a few boiled potatoes. There was no salt or pepper, no butter, no sour cream, no cheese, and no bacon bits. It is a fact that a person can survive on cold, boiled potatoes if there is enough of them. Occasionally, there would be more than was eaten at the only meal, the evening meal, and if you were lucky, you could scrounge a few and have them for the future. On one occasion, I came up with five extra potatoes and hid them in the lining of my jacket. I ate the last one three days later. During this walk, I have gone three days without a bite of food. Time seemed to drag on forever, but our thoughts focused on:

1. Stay alive
2. Think of the future
3. Keep putting one foot ahead of the other.

At times, one had to really concentrate on "keep walking". It would have been so easy to just lie down and die, when you were so tired and too weary to care. Hope, simply hope, kept most of us going.

As I have said, early on the guards were mean and abusive. As time passed, they became less abusive and friendlier. We had news passed along to us about the true status of the war, and began to realize that we must hang in there because the end of the war was in sight. We were instructed not to attempt to escape: we were too weak to escape and make it on our own, and it seems we were more of a problem to the Germans because they were using a lot of manpower to guard us that could have been in combat.

We were given more rest breaks and were allowed to build small fires if wood was available and cremate some of the body lice that inhabited our clothes. By turning a wool shirt in side out, and holding the seams near an open fire (but not TOO near), you could permanently dispose of lots of lice. Please recall: we had no bathing facilities all this time, and it may be well that the cold weather stayed on and perhaps helped to keep down the body odor that we had acquired.

I buddied with a German-American whose home was Des Moines, Iowa. He was born in America, but his parents were born in Germany and came to America before he was born. His mother could not speak English very well. His name was Wendell K. Theimann. He could speak German quite well and he developed a speaking relationship with one of the younger guards who was unfit for combat, since he had been wounded and walked with a pronounced limp. The off-duty guards stayed in the farm workers houses at night, and ate whatever the workers ate because the guards did not receive a food ration. This guard would sometimes sneak Theimann and I an

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occasional slice of bread with cold bacon fat (congealed grease where the bacon had been fried) on it. Now, it does not seem too appetizing, but at that time it was absolutely delicious and loaded with much-needed calories. We were not, however, counting calories at that time.

Time marched on, as did we, and the weather began to warm a bit. We were not then continuously cold. Attitudes began to improve and hope seemed to grow stronger. Also, the Germans began to let us have a small amount of Red Cross food. This helped our feelings tremendously. One day, a horse-drawn wagon loaded with REAL (editors note: see the recipe for POW's black bread, consisting mostly of sawdust) caught up to us. We were divided into groups of fifteen and were given a loaf of bread. That's right: one ten inch loaf for fifteen men. We were told that this was a 15 day ration. After carefully measuring and slicing the loaf, it lasted for only a very few minutes. That was the only bread ration we were given for the entire eight-six (86) day march.

In the latter part of the march, we reached Stalag X1 at Falling Bostel, Germany, located about midway between Hamburg and Hannover. This prison camp housed mostly political prisoners. Many French and many Poles with probably equal amounts from each Nation. We never knew the total number of prisoners. We were segregated from the other prisoners, and, even though only a barbed wire fence separated us, we never established any contact with them. From what we could see, there were many crippled and mal-nourished people in their group. All prisoners had to line up for roll call each morning. Actually this was just a headcount. Food was furnished, based on the number of people who made roll call. French prisoners were in the compound next to us, and we could see them bring out corpses and hold them erect for the count. This was a common practice in that prison, and they would use the dead bodies in that manner until the bodies were so decomposed that they could no longer handle them. It seemed that the guards were aware of this practice and allowed it to happen. Thankfully, we never had to resort to this, but I feel sure that if one of our people had died, we would have done the same.

We stayed there for just over a week, and were loaded in boxcars and sent back east of the Elbe River because the Allies were breaking out of the "Bulge" and were not too far from Hamburg. We were helped in our stay in this place, because we did not have to walk and we got a little more food.

Time seemed to have more meaning, since we could actually anticipate the war's end and our freedom was coming into view. Food became a little more plentiful and the guards began to try to engage us in conversation. There were a large percentage of the guards who could use some English, but I never felt the urge to carry on a conversation with one of them.

Earlier, I should have attempted to describe the farms where we were housed at night. There were no small, individual farms in Germany. They were communal farms. Each one was a small village to itself. Each farm was under the direction of the

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“Burgermeister” who lived in a large house. All the other people on the farm lived in smaller houses scattered about the village. We were usually kept in the hay loft of a dairy barn. There was a bakery, creamery, butcher shop, and a granary, and all the crops that were grown went to a central location. The farm workers were not allowed to keep any of the food they grew. All their food was rationed. They drew a daily ration based on the size of their family. At around 4:00 am, several women would come to the barn to milk the cows. After the milking was done, they would clean the stalls and put down fresh straw for the cows. We never got any fresh straw to sleep on. We slept on the lice-infested straw in the loft. The cows were never left outside the barns during the winter. The lice-infested straw was the result of having housed many hundreds of American prisoners, prior to our being there. The Germans had no place to take us, so they moved us from barn to barn, on a daily basis, with very little food. This was simply to keep us in a weakened condition to prevent any escape.

Finally, the day came!!!!!!! At roll-call that morning, the officer in charge of our group told us that we would not be walking that day, and that we could build small fires, heat small containers of water, de-lice our clothes and just rest. We were trying to clean up and improve our personal appearance as much as possible, and were not really paying much attention to what was going on, when an army jeep drove into the farmyard. It contained an American sergeant and a British lieutenant. They parked about fifty yards from where we were and, when we recognized them, we made a mad dash toward them. The sergeant came to meet us and asked us to hold up until the lieutenant had talked to the German officer in charge. We watched the Hauptmann (captain) come outside the main house and the lieutenant talked to him a few seconds. The German then started yelling to the guards, and the guards quickly lined up in formation and “stacked” their rifles. We then knew it was O-V-E-R!!! There was absolute and total pandemonium. There were tears, laughter, hugging, back-slapping, and prayers. Then the sergeant climbed up into a wagon after a bit, and told us that we were, in effect, liberated. The German government had officially capitulated earlier that morning. We were cautioned that we had to walk through two small villages whose people may not have been advised that the war was over, and that it may be best that the guards carry their rifles until we had passed through these two villages in the event that they might be hostile to us. He also said that he was part of a reconnaissance group that was attached to the British 2nd Army, whose sole purpose was to liberate more than 200,000 (two hundred thousand) prisoners in three days and would accept surrender of more than 1,000,000 (one million) Germans in that same time frame. I cry now, as then, as I relive that occasion.

They left us shortly after that, and we lined up and started walking, under guard. The Allies had practically no vehicles on the east side of the Elbe canal, and since most of the bridges were destroyed, there was no hope of our getting any transportation until we reached the west side of the canal, which was about fifteen miles west of us. As we walked, the idea came to us that since the guards were carrying loaded guns, why did we not relieve them of their guns, put them in a marching formation ahead of us, and if any civilians in the villages appeared hostile, that we would just shoot them

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with the German guns. Since the guns were a bit heavy, we would take turns carrying them. We never saw a civilian of any description as we went through these villages. However, we relieved them of anything that we took a liking to.

About five miles from the far, the road we were walking on came to dead-end into a paved road. When we came in sight of this paved road, we could see surrendered German soldiers walking five abreast. We could not see the end of the line to the east of us or to the west. We could see at least two miles in either direction. There were thousands of them. They were walking in a westerly direction headed toward Luneberg, Germany where the British military had established its headquarters. A British soldier was stationed about every fifty yards on both sides of the road to keep the line moving and to prevent any escapes. The Germans must have been caught off-guard when their officers surrendered, because many, in fact, almost all, of them had civilian clothes in their knapsacks. They had hoped to don civilian clothes and just slip off into the countryside.

We were able to cover more ground than this mass of soldiers could, so we passed many hundreds of them as we walked. At one village, we could see a British soldier motion to one of the Germans to fall out of line and go behind a house. A few of us also went behind the house just to see what was going on. We saw some British troops relieving the Germans of some of their loads by taking watches, rings, and other valuables and throwing them in a pile in a stable. They did not molest too many Germans who were not officers, even though the officers had removed all the insignia denoting their rank. They usually appeared to be more prosperous. There was a British soldier about six feet tall, weighing about two hundred fifty pounds, who was their official "persuader". In the event that a German gave him any argument, he would re-arrange their nose or ear, with his fist. They told us to take as much of the loot as we wanted, because there was plenty more coming by all the time. I did not take any. It had not dawned on me that we were the "winners" and they were the "losers".

We reached a British temporary headquarters just before dark. We were supposed to have been fed and housed there. Sure enough, just as we arrived, they ran out of food. They had bread, tea, and jam. Nothing ever tasted so good. There was "white" bread, the first we had seen in almost a year. We ate enough to calm a rumbling stomach and began to look for a place to sleep. We encountered a British soldier and asked him if he knew where we could sleep. He answered "Bloody hell, Yanks. Ye are not prisoners any more. Sleep any damn place ye want, and if any Kraut gives ye a spot of gaff, come get me".

George Wells, our radio operator, and I had found each other, and we stayed together until we returned to the U.S. George, two other guys, and I went to a small house in the village. We knocked on the door and a very small, very old man came to the door. We were able to communicate enough to make our wants known, and we were invited to come in. An elderly lady was the only other occupant of the house. These two old people were very courteous and offered to cook some food for us, but we declined,

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since we had already had some food. They heated water for us and we managed to clean up a bit. We borrowed the old man's straight razor and shaved as well as we could. We also used the razor to cut each other's hair. There was some improvement, but not much. They couple insisted that some of us use their bed. I tried it. It was a feather bed, and much too soft and much too warm. I gave up after awhile and lay on the floor. I rested well and slept quite a bit. I think the old people stayed awake most of the night, heating water and trying to make us comfortable. They were old and very feeble, and we did not give them a hard time.

Before going to bed that night, I decided to take a look around inside the house in search of booby traps. This house had a stable under the main roof, since it was common practice to keep large animals (horses and cows) that belonged to individuals, in the house with the human occupants. I climbed over a wall about six feet high and discovered a wagon loaded with Red Cross food parcels. I did not tell the others about the wagon and the food parcels that night.

The next morning, I told the others about my discovery after the old lady had cooked us some ham and eggs, with toast and tea. They had no coffee. After we had eaten breakfast, we went into the stable and stripped as many of the food parcels of the goodies, such as cigarettes, Spam©, coffee, sugar, and chocolate, as we wanted before we told any other ex-POW's about the food. When the word spread, there was a big rush to this little house. All the guys were happy to find the food, but very unhappy that the Germans had kept it from us when we needed it so badly. I cannot believe that these old people had voluntarily hidden the food. I believe it was forced on them, but on the other hand, they could have told us about it. I do know that the group I was with did not cause any harm to the old couple. I do not know if they were harmed after we left, but tempers were pretty high.

There was a wrecked bridge across the canal where we were located, and it was not usable. We were advised to walk about two miles to where there was a damaged bridge that we could cross. There were many army trucks traveling a road that paralleled the canal, on the other side of the canal. If we could get across, we could get a ride to Luneberg. We started, and had gone perhaps one-half mile, when we began hearing the loudest diesel engine noises we had ever heard. We walked over a small hill and there were more German Tiger tanks than we could imagine. They were coming toward us!! We turned and started back toward where we had come from and met a jeep with two captains in it. We told them of our problem, and they had a good laugh. They were on their way to accept surrender from the tank commander of an entire division of German tanks. We were quite relieved and continued on our way. After we crossed the canal, we had no problem hitching a ride. Many trucks were going in both directions. We hitched a ride with a stake-body truck that was loaded with empty five-gallon gasoline "jerry" cans that were being carried back to a fuel station somewhere. We rode this truck for more than an hour and came to a river with a pontoon one-lane bridge across it. Since there were so many trucks on both sides of the river, and since the MP's were alternating the traffic flow, we abandoned the truck we were riding on and walked across the bridge. Then we

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hitched a ride on an empty G.I. truck. There were about twenty of us on this truck. It took us about two blocks from the British headquarters. When we arrived at the main building, the first thing we saw was a mountain of Spam©. Actually all canned foods we possessed had to be deposited on the pile. The pile of canned food, all from Red Cross parcels, was twenty to twenty-five feet high and thirty to thirty-five feet across at the base. We were then told to go into an adjoining building and dis-robe completely. All clothes, shoes, hats, caps, etc. went into a big incinerator. We were given a small bag for our personal belongings. I had none, so I did not take a bag. Then they dusted us with a powder, probably D.D.T., and left that on us for about thirty minutes. We then went into the bathhouse for a shower. This was a pleasure that you just cannot imagine. There was plenty of hot water and soap, although it was not Dial© or Palmolive©. We were not rushed and had time to luxuriate a bit in the shower. It was pure, unadulterated pleasure. They had no actual towels, but had 36inch square pieces of terrycloth, which made excellent towels.

After the shower, we went into the clothing warehouse for something to wear. I found American shoes that fit, wool pants (American), a khaki shirt, also American, and a British battle jacket. There was no headgear available, but that did not matter. The weather was warming quite nicely. Let it be said here that no government could have anticipated the sudden influx of people or the resulting demand for clothes. Consequently, all Allied nations furnished what clothes they had available, and dressed the returnees as best they could in mixed uniforms. MP's never bothered us about our uniforms until we reached Los Angeles. That is another story, later.

After we dressed, we registered and were told where to get blankets and then find a place/space where we could sleep, on the floor. The building had been used as a school of some sort and was five stories tall. We (the four of us) found some space on the fifth floor. George did not feel up to making the trip to the kitchen, so we left him with our blankets and went in search of food. The usual bread, tea and jam was all that was available again. That was no problem—there was plenty of canned food in the pile just outside the kitchen door. We got our tea and bread, then as much canned food from the pile as we could carry, and then went back upstairs and proceeded to gorge ourselves. This was a huge mistake. During the night, we suffered pain, bloat, nausea, and vomiting. There were no Roloids©. We learned the hard way that our stomachs had shrunk and could not accept very much food at a time.

The British army had liberated us and had not had an opportunity to transfer us to the American forces, so we were still under their command. We had no quarrel with that, and were treated as well as circumstances would permit. In one sense, we were more-or-less on our own. We would have been more comfortable if we had been with our own troops. We learned that an American installation was about thirty miles south of us, so several hitched a ride down there. It was a transportation company of about 200 men and we were treated like royalty. First, the commanding officer, a Major, insisted that we go in the kitchen and have the cooks fix any food that we desired. I think all of us chose ham and eggs. Then the Major personally showed us around their outfit and brought us back into their mess hall where we had vanilla ice cream. We begged

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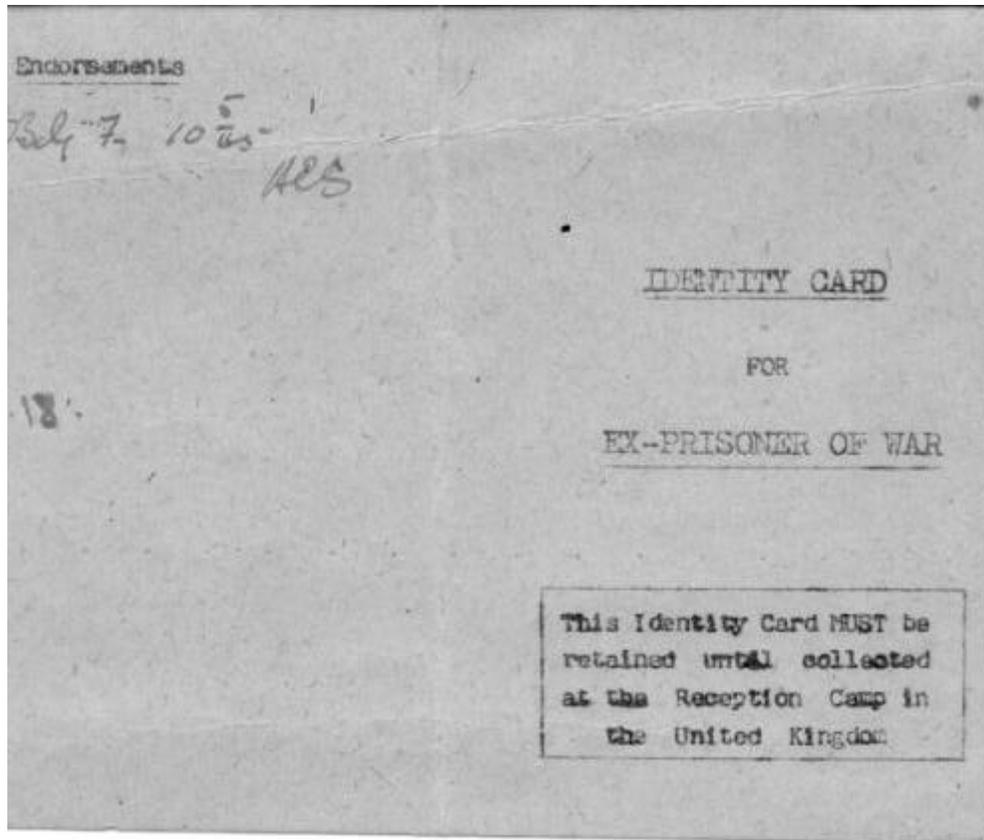
him to let us transfer into his outfit. Had it been allowed, I think he would have done so, but rules and regulations prevented it.

Service No. 38164315.
Serial No.
Surname HARPER.
Last Name
Initials J.S.
Rank S/SGT.
Regiment, Squadron, Ship or Organization 322. B. GP. 450. SQD. A.A.F.
Holder's Signature Jesse S. Harper
Signature of P.W. Camp Contact Officer J. Huran MAJOR.
Issued at SULLINGEN. on 4-5-1945.

While we were enjoying his hospitality, word came down that the British were flying us to Brussels where we would be transferred to the American command. The major immediately ordered a truck to take us to the airfield. Perhaps he was just trying to get rid of us. He was a prince of a fellow and made us feel welcome and wanted.

We reached the airfield in time to load into a DC-3 and were in Brussels in about an hour. G.I. trucks carried us from the airport to American headquarters in downtown Brussels, Belgium. There we registered and signed a lot of papers. Then we were shown a large gymnasium-type building where we would sleep. There were lots of folding canvas cots already set up. We staked claim on some of them. There were no mattresses, but the two blankets were there. Seems we received two blankets everywhere we went. At any rate, we did not have to sleep on the floor. Temporary portable field kitchens were set up in the streets to supply our food requirements. We must continue to remember that the unexpected influx of returnees overtaxed the normal capabilities of all the armed forces. We were not complaining, as this was so much better than what we had been accustomed to getting that we were happy. We were eating all we wanted, we stayed warm and dry, and had begun to feel that someone was beginning to care about us, and that most of the bad things were behind us. We just wanted to get it over and done with, and go home.

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While we were in Brussels, George and I ran into our old crew chief—the sergeant who maintained our plane in England. Our group was stationed very near Brussels and he was in town on a pass. They were doing very little flying since the Germans had capitulated and they were getting a lot of well-deserved rest. This must be said: The crews who maintained the bombers are the true heroes of the air force. A crew chief usually had three aircraft, for which he was responsible. This meant that he supervised three crews, four to six men for each plane, depending on the available manpower. Many times the only time these men had to rest was when we were on a mission. Our missions were a maximum of four hours and twenty minutes. That was our fuel capacity. Many times, these people worked all night in order to have a plane on flying status by take-off time. When the weather was good, and the situation demanded it, a plane would fly as many as three missions a day. I respected our maintenance crews and tried to work with the crew chiefs. When my crew was not scheduled, and the group was flying, we knew approximately when to expect them back, so we would stand near the runways and “sweat out” their return. The maintenance crews were there also, hoping and praying that their plane would land safely and reasonably intact. If a plane failed to return, you could see the grief that those guys expressed. They had adopted a plane and were completely committed to keeping it flying. They suffered the loss of a plane as well as the loss of personnel. They are my heroes!!

From Brussels, we were sent to Namur, Belgium. Namur was a “repple-depple” (replacement depot). In Namur, we had a couple of days with nothing scheduled, so

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we got in a little more recuperation time and much better food. Things were really looking up for us. While in Namur, I went into the orderly room for something, I don't remember what, and the clerk asked me if I would like to send a mother's day telegram to my mother. I gladly accepted his offer. It was already Sunday, and Mother's Day was already there. He assured me that it would reach the States on Mother's Day, since the time zones were to be accounted for. I sent a brief telegram saying I was liberated and was not sick or injured, and was on the way home.

Most telegraph offices in east Texas were in train stations, and the stationmaster, also known as the depot agent, was the telegraph operator. There was no telegraph at the Warren Station. The nearest one was at Woodville, twelve miles north of Warren. There were no telephones. When the telegram arrived in Woodville, the agent, Mr. Bruce Brazier, closed the office and drove to Warren and delivered the telegram to my mother. He became a truly great man in my estimation, and after I accepted employment from the company from which I retired, Mr. Brazier and I became good friends. We saw each other often since my company shipped an average of fifteen railcar loads of timber products a week from the station he was operating. He had transferred to Hillister, Texas shortly after I returned home. Cancer took him while he was in his fifties. I will retain a fond memory of him as long as I shall live. I can never forget his kindness to my mother and father.

We left Namur by hospital train. Can you imagine putting us on a hospital train after we had survived 86 days of "hard times" but had had almost two weeks of rest and adequate food. Comparatively, we were in better physical condition that at any time since we had left Stalag Luft IV. At any rate, we were supposed to be confined to bed. The hospital train was boxcars with bunk beds fastened to wooden walls. We never stayed in bed except when we wished. We had an orderly who was to care for us. All he did was bring us our meals and keep us supplied with coffee. Our destination was Camp Lucky Strike, a temporary staging camp, whose function was to expedite the returnee's transportation. We arrived at a railroad station at about 5:00 pm on the second day. We were told that the camp was about two miles up the road, and that we should get there and register as soon as possible, because we would probably be leaving for home the next day. Yes, you guessed it. After being on a hospital train, supposedly confined to bed for two days, we had to walk two miles to the camp. We arrived at headquarters after dark and registered. We discovered that we could get an advance on a portion of our back pay. The formula was this: a \$50.00 advance for those with six months or less captivity time, and a \$90.00 advance for those with more than six months time, regardless of how many years one had been imprisoned. Many of the fellows had been prisoners for more than three years. At Camp Lucky Strike, we learned the true meaning of "hurry up and wait", a slogan devised by impatient service men throughout all branches of service. We departed Camp Lucky Strike seven or eight days later.

While there, we had the opportunity to eat five meals per day, since we had been advised to eat less per meal, but more frequently. We had hot cereal for breakfast, along with plenty of coffee. Most of the other food was creamed chicken.

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Nourishing, but after a time, not so very appetizing. Today, chicken is not my favorite food.

One morning we went to the mess tent, and found that no food was prepared. We were told that the German prisoners, who were working in the kitchen, were on strike. They wanted to be paid, and wanted better working conditions. There were about 250 German prisoners who were to do all the labor duties, such as K.P., policing the area, or any other duties assigned to them. We could not believe that they could be allowed to strike, so a lot of our fellows went back to the tent housing area and removed a wooden cot stick from our folding cots and started across an open field to the compound where the prisoners were housed. As we progressed, more ex-POW's joined our group until there were about a thousand (1000) of us. When we reached the gate, a lone American M.P. confronted us and told us that we could not go into the prisoner's compound or harm the German prisoners. He also said that the entire base M.P.'s were alerted, and that they were en-route to where we were. They showed up in a short time. There were only about ten of them and they stayed well away from our people. We asked the guard if his rifle was loaded, and he would not answer. Later, we discovered that it was not loaded, so we relieved him of it. We started trying to open the gate and the guard produced a key to the lock and we opened the gate. By that time, the Germans had ended their strike and appeared anxious to go to work. They started to run across the field to the mess tent and we started to apply the cot sticks to any portion of their anatomy that we could reach. Yes, I did hit as many as I could reach and received a lot of satisfaction from it. This ended the strike, and later some of the M.P.'s told us how they appreciated what we did, since the Germans were becoming more and more hard to handle and that they were not allowed to even raise their voices to them.

After five or six days, we were told that General Eisenhower would be there the next day and would advise us of our future travel plans. A flat-bed trailer and sound equipment had been set up near the air-strip and we began to gather there about mid-morning. There were nearly three thousand (3000) of us. Finally, the general's plane landed and he began making his way toward the speaker's stand. The M.P.'s were opening a passage through the crowd, and the crowd parted with me standing almost in the opening. The general was stopping occasionally and saying a few words to a man, and when he came to me, he stopped, reached out his hand and took my hand. He then said "Tall boy, it's been pretty rough, hasn't it". I replied, "It certainly has, sir". He then asked me, "Where are you from"? I said "From Texas sir". He then said "We Texans can take it, can't we?" He then passed on to the trailer/platform and spoke for only about ten minutes. He apologized for our many delays in getting transportation, but said that several divisions of troops had reached Europe too late to get involved in combat, so they were being re-deployed to the South Pacific, and they were using all available transportation equipment. He did promise to have us moved to London by air the next day.

Shortly after breakfast the next day, we were told to go to the airstrip and wait for the planes. Fairly soon, a group of B-17's began to show up. They had stripped out the

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bomb racks and had placed a few boards in the bomb bay for us to sit on. It was pretty crude, but it was a ride homeward. Each plane could accommodate only about twenty men, so the loading and leaving began. I am told that this bomb group continued with this exercise until all the transits at Camp Lucky Strike had reached England. There would be many more ex-POW's pass through Camp Lucky Strike before final closure.

When we reached England, we were loaded into a truck and were escorted off the base, where we off-loaded from the truck and were told we were on our own. We were not wanted on the base because the group was flying home the next day and they did not want any stowaways. We were instructed to report to the American Embassy on a daily basis in order to keep informed of any travel plans. We hitched rides to London that day. There was no place to go. There was no place to report except the Embassy, and they knew absolutely nothing about our arriving, or how many to expect. They did have a partial list of names, and that is about all. George and I found our names on the list and while searching, we learned that Johnson was also in London. We began to search for him. We learned also that we could receive 65cents a day at the embassy, but had to be there every day to receive it. Since we had received \$90 a few days before, and were feeling pretty flush, and since there was not too much to buy in London, we seldom drew our daily allotment. We could sleep in a Red Cross hostel for about 25cents per night. It was simply a cot and was off the street. One could not make reservations, but had to register each night. One had to vacate the premises by 9:00 am. There were several of these places in London, so we seldom slept in the same place on successive nights. Meals could be had for 50 cents, or seldom as much as a dollar, so we fared really well.

Time dragged in London. We began to get impatient and to give the embassy people a hard time. We stayed in London for twenty or twenty-one days. Time, without a calendar, is difficult to keep. Late one afternoon, word reached us that we were to go to a specific railroad station and board a train for South Hampton, a seaport city in South England. We reached there around 11:00 pm and were hustled into a building and told to register, get a little food, find our assigned bunks, and get as much rest as possible, because we would go aboard ship the next day and head for New York. We were really excited. Unfortunately for us, it did not work that way. Seven days later we went by train to Grennock, Scotland. Interestingly, we ended up at the same port that we originally came in to. Remember, Grennock was not a deepwater port, meaning that ocean-going ships had to stay offshore almost a mile, and their cargo was "lightered", using smaller boats, to and from the docks. Wonder of Wonders!!! When we reached Grennock, we did not have to register. We left the train and boarded a 100 foot long boat and were carried to the longest ship in the world at the time—the *Queen Elizabeth*. It was a luxury liner in peacetime, and a troop ship during the war.

All the luxury accommodations, such as bathrooms, closets, and so forth, had been stripped from the staterooms of the *Queen*. Three-tier bunks had been installed instead. Each stateroom would accommodate 10-15 men, depending on the size of the room. There were approximately fifteen thousand (15,000) returnees, most of whom

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were ex-POW's. A person was allowed only eight hours a day in the bed. When we boarded the ship, we received a card designating our stateroom number, our bunk number, and the eight-hour period allocated to us. It was our responsibility to see that the person occupying the bunk removed himself from it when it was your turn to use it. A few arguments were heard, but no really serious problems existed.

The "*Queen*" was 1026 feet in length, said to be the longest ship afloat at that time, and was probably one of the fastest ocean-going vessels in existence. Some crewmembers said that the captain had set three consecutive speed records for Atlantic Ocean crossings on the last three crossings. I do not remember any specific numbers, but these same crewmembers said he had topped his best record to date by more than three hours. The captain was a most congenial fellow and would allow visitors to the bridge on occasion. I was fortunate to get to visit the bridge during a 78 mile per hour headwind. This is a hurricane-force wind and we were going directly into it. The bridge was 40 feet above the deck and the wind and waves caused enough spray to hit the glass-enclosed bridge so that it was necessary to use the windshield wipers at all times. One would have thought that the captain would have chosen an alternate route in order to miss the heavy seas, but he did not. He ploughed straight ahead and since the ship was so long, there was not much discomfort. We experienced a forward up-and-down movement, but no side-sway. We ate two meals a day on the "*Queen*". Boiled eggs, boiled sausage, tea and toast was our breakfast. Boiled potatoes, boiled sausage, tea and bread was our other meal. There was a "ships stores" (canteen) where we could buy candies and cookies and such, but they had a very small variety, so not much was bought.

Other than a few hours spent in the storm, the weather was ideal and I spent most of my waking hours on deck. We saw very few other ships on our trip to New York. The Atlantic is a very big ocean.

As we neared New York, spirits began to soar. In the distance we could see land, and we knew we would soon be there. It seems that every person on the ship was trying to stand at the rail. I made it!!! As we neared Long Island, we could see the Statue of Liberty in the distance. Believe me, this was the most beautiful lady in the world at that time.

Author's note: As I try to write this, I have to stop and wipe away the tears from my eyes. I am quite emotional and even though I try to control my emotions, lots of memories are just so deeply buried and imbedded in my mind and memory that the tears just come.

As we came nearer to the harbor, numerous tugboats surrounded us. Some tied onto the *Queen* to escort her to dockside, and others seemed to be equipped as fire fighters, since they were pumping huge streams of water into the air. Boat whistles and horns were going full blast and as we proceeded more up-river, we saw thousands of people on the docks, warehouses, and just about any place a person could find to stand that would give them a view of the *Queen*. At several places, bands were playing, people were laughing, crying, and flags were waving. It was a most happy and joyous homecoming. I will

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never know if some sort of announcement had been made that a shipload of ex-POW's were arriving in New York Harbor that day, but I will never forget the wondrous welcome the people of New York gave us. It finally had begun to dawn that even though you had been pushed to the back burner on numerous occasions, someone really cared, and it showed.

As we dis-embarked, we were met at ship-side by a special service group, U.S. Army, given a sort "welcome home" speech, and told we would be processed within two days and would then be on our way home. We were then given a choice of milk or Coke© to drink. I think every man chose milk. We then boarded a train for a short ride to Camp Kilmer, N.J., the same camp from whence we had departed in 1943. We were promised a steak dinner that evening, and they did serve steak. However, much of it had to be cooked several hours in advance in order to have it ready when the extra thousands of ex-POW's appeared, so it was not like eating at Outback©, but the idea was certainly appreciated.

On the third day, we departed Camp Kilmer, closer to schedule than at any place we had ever been. There were no hospital cars, Pullman cars, plush coach cars or anything of the sort on our train. The seats were wood with no cushions. They were mounted approximately in the same position as where a coach seat would have been. We rode this train to Chicago, and then changed to Pullman Coaches on a regular passenger train. We had been on the train from Camp Kilmer from late afternoon of one day, until late afternoon on the next day with no food. We had travel orders and meal tickets good anywhere, but we never had a chance to use them. There were toilets and drinking water—that's all.

There were four Pullman Coaches attached to the Santa Fe Chief in Chicago. Two of these were left in Salinas, Kansas, one was left in Ft. Worth, Texas, and ours was sent to San Antonio, Texas. There was a dining car with excellent food and service. The steward advised us that our meal tickets would not cover the price of the average dining car meal, but we were to order anything on the menu that we desired, and he would take care of the financial arrangements. He also said that if we were to let it be known that we were ex-POW's, that almost any civilian who was traveling on the train would pay for our meals. We just did not want to do that. We did not care to call too much attention to ourselves in that manner, because too many people would want to ask too many questions that we were not prepared to answer at that time.

I do not remember the day or date that we arrived in New York, but I vividly remember the day we arrived in Fort Sam Houston, Texas. The train backed our car into Fort Sam on July 4, 1945. Many of the personnel were off-duty that day, since it was a holiday. However, we were met and assigned quarters, took much-needed showers, were fed and then went to a barbershop. We received a larger advance on our back pay. I received \$600.00. We learned that we were free to leave Fort Sam on July 7 for a 90-day recuperation leave at home. I checked bus schedules and learned that an eastbound bus would leave San Antonio at 4:00am and arrive in Beaumont at 2:45 pm. I called my brother in Beaumont and gave him my estimated time of arrival (ETA). When my bus

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arrived in Beaumont, there were not too many other folks present, but the Harpers were there in full force. The Greyhound bus terminal on Pearl Street in Beaumont, Texas, became the scene of the HHH (happy Harper homecoming). My brother in Beaumont had gone to Warren and brought my Dad and Mother. My brother's wife and two children were there, along with my sister and brother-in-law and their two children from Nederland were there. My youngest brother, wife and child from Port Arthur were also there. All my immediate family was there. When word got around as to what the celebration was about, some other incoming passengers joined the party and for a time we disrupted the bus schedule. The management did not seem to care a great deal.

My Beaumont brother, Johnnie, took Dad, Mother and me to Warren. We arrived there just after 5:00 pm. Dad and Mother lived in the same place they were living when I went into the service, close by the highway, and near a convenience store. Immediately after we were home, people began to arrive. Some brought prepared food; some just wanted to say "hello", and "we'll talk later". Others wanted to visit, but strangely enough, none appeared to want to talk about the gory details. They were, and still are, some of the finest people God ever created. All during the time I was away, these wonderful people ministered to every need that my mother and dad had. While I was away, Dad was a Woods Foreman for the lumber company. At work one day, he stepped into a blind (grown over) stump hole and sheared a hip joint loose from his spine. He was in a body cast when I came home, and was in pain a large part of the time. This cast allowed him to walk, but to a limited degree.

Soon the visitors began to leave, and since I was getting rather tired, having been up since 3:00am, we ate and made an early night of it. I have no way of knowing, but I could believe my mother had the best night's sleep she had had since 1942, when I left for the military.

We lived almost directly across the highway from the Warren First Baptist Church. A couple of nights after I had returned home, the regular monthly gospel singing was held. Mom and Dad wanted to go. I also wanted to go, but I did not want to be the center of attention, so I suggested that they go and I would slip in later. It did not work that way. I did arrive after singing had been going for a while, but when I sort of sneaked in the door, the M/C saw me. He stopped the singing and prayer meeting began. There is no way a person could keep from loving that kind of people.

There were almost no military age males in Warren, but there were several ladies in that age group. Some of them had automobiles (at least their families did) and I would be invited to go to the movies in Woodville. There was no serious dating, but I had great companionship.

The normal working hours at the local sawmill was from 7:00am until 5:00pm, with an hour off for lunch. When the steam whistle at the mill started blowing at 4:00pm, and all the car horns in town started honking, everyone knew that something out of the ordinary was happening. Soon the word spread that Japan had capitulated. People were gathering at the convenience store near where we lived, so I went over there. Several folks were

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planning a trip to the Pleasure Pier in Port Arthur, Texas, just to celebrate. I was invited, and three carloads (about 15 people) went. I think that two couples were dating, and the others were just celebrating. The Pleasure Pier, at that time, was located on Pleasure Island. Pleasure Island was separated from the city of Port Arthur by the intracoastal canal only. A drawbridge was the only access to the island. The amusement center on the island was carnival in nature. There were lots of rides and other carnival attractions. It did have a really impressive roller coaster and an 80-foot Ferris wheel. Not long after the war, the amusement park was demolished and an upscale restaurant was built. The restaurant did not last long.

In the later part of September, I received orders to report to the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Santa Monica, California for separation from service. The Edgewater Beach was a luxury beachfront hotel at one time, but like the "Queen", it was converted to Military use. Some office space was used, but it was mostly for housing. The ballroom had three-tier bunks all over it. I am told that all the rooms had bunks installed. I never visited a room.

Our appointment schedule was extremely light. We made a mandatory roll call at 9:00 am, at which time individuals were notified of any appointments they had for that day. These appointments were for medical or dental. If one did not have an appointment for that day, they were free to go wherever they wished until roll call the next day. A streetcar line was about 200 feet from the hotel. We could ride to Los Angeles, about 12 miles away, any time we wanted, at no cost. We spent a lot of time in LA. We were still out of uniform, since official uniforms had not caught up with us. We wore a mixture of clothing (all was American), some being for winter and some for summer. Initially, this gave the M.P.'s a hard time when we first started going into downtown LA.

There were a lot of Navy personnel on the streets of LA. There were also a lot of S.P.'s. They patrolled in pairs, an M.P. and a S.P. together. They arrested quite a few of our people for being out of uniform but when the ex-POW's began to fight back and resist arrest, they gave in and released all ex-POW's that had been arrested. We outnumbered them approximately 200-1 and were not of a mind to submit meekly to what we thought was an injustice. There were a few fairly violent confrontations, but they soon became "nice guys" and everyone went their separate ways. We still subscribed to the theory that "we have already seen more than anything you can do to us" so we really did not have a problem with them.

The film industry in California was very nice to us. Their publicity people would sponsor many events for us. They furnished transportation to the racetrack and gave parties where the stars did all the work. I saw Bob Hope washing dishes at a party one evening. Almost all of the ones who had attained true stardom were very nice. They did a presentation at the Hollywood Bowl one evening and sent 1200 tickets. I did not go, but do not remember why.

Many of us went to the racetrack, but almost none were into heavy betting. I certainly was not. Many elderly people attended, and studied the betting sheets before placing a

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bet. Some won and some lost, but it appeared that this might have been the only source of income for some of these people.

A trip to Pershing Square in downtown LA was quite an experience. I had never seen so many “soap box” orators. Some were religious in nature, some were political, and some were completely off the page. Some were trying to sell something. In fact, many of the fairer sex were promoting their trade. One could get a liberal education in a very short time if one so desired. Strangely, the police never seemed to mind.

After several days at Santa Monica, we were sent to the Santa Anna Army Air Force Base at Santa Anna, California for final separation. We were the first group of returnees to be sent to this base, and the separation procedure had not been finalized, so we had a few days to wait. Security was lax, so we had a lot of freedom. We were given appointments, but again, were free to go unless we were scheduled. The base had four mess halls. One served breakfast all day, one served lunch all day, one served supper all day, and the fourth was a snack bar. They were on a 24-hour basis, so we never lacked for food. Food of your choice was available at all times of the day or night. This was a drastic change from some of our other experiences, but we applied ourselves and managed to survive.

On October 14, 1945, the great day arrived. Almost everyone had to have a chest X-ray on that day. I went to X-ray at 11:00 am. If there were no problems, we would get our discharge later in the day. At 3:00 pm, we lined up alphabetically and when our name was called, we went to a small office, stated our name, rank and serial number, shook hands with a Major, received our discharge, and was told to report to a captain in an office across the hall. When I entered his office, I learned that he was making a pitch for people to join the reserves. I asked him if it was required that we join the reserves, and he answered “no”. Then I asked him if I was a civilian and not under military control. He said the military had no more control over me. Then I told him what he could do with his reserve application. He said that I was only one of many who had told him to do the same thing. I had had enough regimentation to hold me for a while.

We were bussed to Union Station in Los Angeles where several of us boarded the Southern Pacific train, Sunset Limited. It was a really plush train for its day. It was not a local passenger train, and made only seven stops: one in Arizona, one in New Mexico, four in Texas and one stop in Louisiana before reaching its destination of New Orleans. Six M.P.'s were on duty around the clock, meaning there were eighteen M.P.'s on board in the event of an emergency. We were treated quite well and again the dining car and club car attendants told us that our meal tickets would be ample payment for anything we desired to order. The M.P.'s told me that they had very little trouble with ex-POW's. Occasionally, one would imbibe a little heavily and want to celebrate a little loudly, but seldom did one become unruly. I think this speaks well for so many fellows who had, for so long, been mistreated and browbeaten. We departed Los Angeles before dark and arrived in Beaumont in late afternoon the next day, about 24 hours in transit. I caught a bus to Warren and arrived without fanfare at 9:15 pm.

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A few days later, a recruiting sergeant came to our home and tried to get me to enlist in the peacetime air force. I was discharged a T/Sgt. He offered me a permanent Master Sergeant's rating. This was a really fine offer, since a Master Sergeant's pay, including room, board, and clothes, was comparable to a captain's pay, since commissioned officers had to pay for food, housing, and uniforms. Had I enlisted, I could have retired at the ripe old age of fifty-four. Again, I just wanted a chance to make it on my own.

In conclusion, I feel that you, dear reader, may feel that I have devoted too much space to the "I" and that I have devoted too much space to food. If so, I am sorry that you feel that way, but I do not apologize. I do feel that I was an active member of the very best Air Force in the world. I was a member of an aircrew that was second to none. I was privileged to fly in the best-equipped, fastest, best load carrying medium bomber in its day. Unfortunately, the plane was not designed to withstand a direct hit from a high explosive cannon shell. So since the plane was brought down, circumstances forced us into the area where food became such a very high priority. When one is really hungry, lack food becomes an obsession. Food is necessary to preserve strength and stamina to keep on going. Lack of food causes depression, sometimes to the point of despondency. I have been depressed on many occasions, but never became despondent. Now perhaps you might begin to comprehend why food, or lack of it, was so much a part of our thinking.

In essence, I have seemed critical of the services or lack thereof, that our military provided, or failed to provide, for ex-POW's after release. It appears that the war ended so suddenly that everyone was caught unawares of the need for food, shelter, and transportation to accommodate over two hundred thousand (200,000) additional persons. The delays might have been handled differently, and this is the biggest gripe. At least, we were staying warm, dry, and reasonably well fed. Things could have been worse. That was fifty-seven years ago.

Soon after I was discharged, a logging contractor came to my home and offered me employment driving a log truck. I had faithfully promised myself, while in service, that I would never haul another log. However, I succumbed to the offer of big money (\$10.00 per day) and became gainfully employed.

I joined the Warren Quartet fairly soon after I returned home. They needed a bass singer, as they already had the three other parts and a good pianist. L.D. Hatton, Lukie Hatton (brothers), and Floyd Watson, high school superintendent, were the other members. Alva Jo Hatton, niece of the Hatton brothers, was pianist. We sang in singing conventions only, and never did concerts. Later, Mr. Watson accepted employment at another school and moved away from Warren. I then sang with a mixed quartet for a while. There were a few personnel changes, but every one seemed to enjoy singing together, and we attended many local singing conventions.

In August 1946, I accepted employment with a wood treating company in Lufkin, Texas. As a land and timber buyer, I resided in Warren. In March 1948, I resigned this position

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and went to Beaumont, Texas, where I became a journeyman carpenter. While in Beaumont, I joined a quartet managed by Burl Carter. He represented the Stamps Quartet Music Company of Dallas, Texas. Mr. Frank Stamps was manager of the company. One of the members of the quartet was Jacqueline Haynes, a really good alto singer. We met in May and married in August. We never had any children, but had forty-two good years together before cancer took her in 1990.

There was a representative from the treating company at our wedding. He wanted me to take charge of all land and timber purchases for the company. The price was right, and since Jackie, my new wife, was a civil service employee and could transfer, we accepted and moved to Lufkin in 1948. While in Lufkin, we organized and managed two different quartets. Both groups were fine people and enjoyable to work with. Some were fairly young, and time has a reputation for changing the lives of younger people. So as some grew into other things, we would find replacements. There were two radio stations in Lufkin at the time, and for a time we did a weekly 30minute program on both stations. One program was sponsored, and the other was a public service type presentation. The Piney Woods Business College was our sponsor, and our quartet was called the Piney Woods Business College Quartet. The business college owner/manager worked closely with the many high schools in the area and would encourage the various classes, and other organizations, to schedule a concert as a fundraiser. We would do the concert for a percentage of the admission.

While we lived in Lufkin, I was elected chairman of the Angelina County Singing Convention. I was also a Texas vice-president of the Neches Valley Singing Convention. All county conventions met four times annually and the Neches Valley Convention met twice annually. Just as a matter of historical fact: after we left Lufkin and after Burl Carter passed away, I was president of the Jasper County Convention, President of the Neches Valley Convention, and President of the Deep East Texas Singing, simultaneously, resulting in eight conventions a year for which I was responsible. I was able to stay very busy.

We moved to Jasper, Texas, in 1964. Jackie and I sang with the Carl Lindsey Quartet from Buna, Texas. All this time I was actively engaged in conventions, I found time to play a little golf and do some fishing after Lake Sam Rayburn came into being.

By 1970, Jackie and I were not singing in a quartet, but were doing duets at conventions. In April of that year, Betty Bass joined with us and we became the Glad Tidings Trio. Betty played piano and sang, and Jackie played the bass guitar and sang. I paid the bills, set up the sound equipment, did most of the driving, most of the talking, and sang. We had a great ten years. We sang in Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. In 1980, Betty felt that she should move her musical talents more directly into churches. We respected her feelings and parted the best of friends. We see her on occasion and have some really good visits. She left the trio in June 1980, and for a time, Jackie and I did duets with Jackie at the piano.

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In October of 1980, Gwen McKee joined the group and we sang as a trio again, with Jackie still playing the piano. In December of 1980, Maxine Standley joined the group. She did not sing, but was a great piano player. Her husband Sam traveled with us and we soon were as busy as we wanted to be. We did a lot of full-service appearances in churches, especially for the evening service. We would have the entire church service from the opening hymn to the alter call.

We have been accused of deserting conventions and singing only where we could be paid. This is simply not true. We have been paid, on occasion, for attending a convention or a homecoming, and for setting up the sound system and staying for the entire program even after the "FAITHFUL" had grown tired and gone home. We did not attend every convention everywhere, but we did not desert the conventions.

Jackie died December 26, 1990. That was the end of a truly great twenty years of the Glad Tidings Trio. During that time we made seven long-play albums (now called projects), several different cassette tapes, and even one 8-track tape. That was way back.

Then, in 1992, Linda came into my life. I had known her for a long time and had seen her at many conventions over the years. We were reacquainted in May and married in September of 1992. We have had a very good ten years together. She has been very good to me and has been good for me. We go to conventions over a wide area, and as Linda's mother's health will permit. Her mother's health is not good, and Linda will not leave town if she feels the situation warrants her staying.

I wrote a few songs in 1964 and 1965, and submitted them to the Stamps Quartet Music Company. Jeffress Music Company of Crossett, Arkansas, published one of my songs in 1966. For several years, I did not do any more writing. Then, in the mid-1990's, I began writing some more, with the help of Mrs. Pauline Pate and Linda Spikes. These are two very talented and gracious ladies who have shared their talents with me. Together, we have done quite a few songs that have been accepted for publication by several music publishers. I am not a prolific song writer, but occasionally I am given an idea and a melody. Then we try again.

I failed to mention earlier that when I received my final back pay and mustering-out pay, I was able to purchase a relatively new three-bedroom house with four acres of land for my parents. They had not owned a home for several years, but had rented. They had also not used a penny of the allotment that I had sent home all the time I was in service.

I am thankful for the more than 80 years association with Southern Gospel Music. It is a true means of expression of what is in one's heart. I am thankful for the impact it has had on my life. I am thankful for the many friends that we have come to know. I am thankful for our "gospel singing family" as a whole. I love you all.

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