

**WHATEVER
HAPPENED TO
COMPANY A?**

**by
Caldon R. Norman**



4230 S. E. Ogden Street, Portland, Oregon 97206

May 28, 2001

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Dear Sirs:

Please add this volume to the written records and memoirs of the 100th Infantry Division's collection that honors the memory of General Withers A. Burress.

This account of a particularly grim sacrifice of Infantry officers and men on the Alsatian front during the winter of 1944 was assembled from recollections of the participants who were fortunate enough to return alive from the World War II experience. It attests to the strength and fortitude of men who endured months of imprisonment and labor at the hands of their German captors.

Sincerely,

Caldon R. Norman



Whatever Happened to Company A?



Caldon R. Norman



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO COMPANY A?

Caldon R. Norman

Portland, Oregon ■ 1991

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Memory is not merely recall. Some things we choose to forget. Some, which we cannot forget, we make bearable. Life washes through us like a tide. In its ebb and flow the fragments of the past are ground smooth so that, with time, we can handle them like stones from a rock pool, admiring their color, shape, and texture. We do not know which of them will stir and rattle as the tide ebbs from us for the last time. These are pebbles from my skull.

Stuart Hood, Carlino

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Preface

The impetus behind this effort to reconstruct from participants the events of a memorably terror- and emotion-filled night that ended in misery and despair for well over 100 officers and men of Company A, 398th Infantry, Battery A, 375th FAB, and Company D, 398th Infantry, was slow a-borning. For years, my immediate family would periodically ask questions about the "Great War" and my part in it. And for desultory reasons, primarily that of time, I would stiff-arm them and respond in as trite and off-hand a manner as would lay the questions to rest for the time being. Then, came my own retirement with access to all kinds of unstructured time. Along with that came the reminders and admonitions of my wife. So, the slow process of reading the available information and placing it into a context of a larger war began.

My own recreation of the time spent in Europe from October, 1944, through June, 1945, was completed in November, 1988. I dealt chronologically with events as I had remembered them. Once started in the writing, I was constantly reminded of incidents or events that had to be fitted into the narrative. So, it seemed I was always adding and rewriting. I even reached back to days in 1946-49 when I wrote some passages descriptive of the Vosges countryside and wove that into my story.

I was particularly struck by some words by Brendan Phibbs in a chronicle of his work with the 12th Armored Division, The Other Side of Time:

"What we were and what we did, at our best, and what happened around us, is slipping out of knowledge. That's a pity. Please, young people, listen to us before we leave."¹

Then began a process of trying to locate as many survivors of that time. I had for years been in intermittent contact with several First Platoon buddies, now scattered throughout the United States. I then checked with the 100th Division Association Newsletter to get current addresses of former compatriots. I checked these against photocopies of Company A Morning Reports obtained from the Personnel Records Section in St. Louis that listed those in Company A who were reported as Missing in Action after December 3, 1944. I had some successes in contacting the alumni associations of colleges where I was sure former buddies would have returned to continue their education. No group is more determined to maintain contact than alumni associations and colleges with interminable requests for alumni financial support! The Veterans Administration was also most helpful in forwarding my letters to former buddies on their rolls and in, sadly, helping me to remove from lists those who had since died.

A further step in this total process occurred when my wife and I were visiting in Wingen sur Moder in May, 1989. We were approached at the Hotel Wenk by a lady, Mrs. Linda Bergmann, who was involved in writing some of the town's World War II history. She indicated that she had been in contact with Bob Kramer, Fourth Platoon, and with his son, Bob, Jr., who had visited the area often. My later correspondence with Bob led to addresses of other

Fourth Platoon members, friends with whom he had continued to maintain contact.

My most recent efforts to expand the list of survivors came at the 100th Division Association's 1990 Reunion in Monticello, NY. I was able to talk with several more fellows who could provide information.

A letter (Appendix I) was sent to as many survivors as I had listed outlining the purpose of my project. I asked them to respond on an enclosed postcard. Letters were sent to 33 persons. Post cards were received back from 22 of them. One letter was returned as undeliverable--no forwarding address. In later conversation and communication with others, I assume that two persons are deceased. Two individuals indicated no interest in the project. A list of persons contacted who contributed their recollections is included in Appendix II.

Again, taking a clue from Phibbs, "Name any object and you'll see it,"² I tried to construct a general chronological outline of the events as I remembered them and that I used in my own personal narrative, hoping these would enable buddies involved in the project to focus their memories and aid recall. I included two maps to facilitate this as well (Appendix III).

From these responses and from the extended reporting of various facets of their experience this account is drawn. In many instances, the respondents' richly personal accounts are recorded verbatim and are identified with their parenthesized name. I provided the linking

narrative stitchery. Efforts were made to check essential facts contained in this account. Any errors of omission or commission, when not directly attributed, are mine.

Throughout this account the term "kraut" is occasionally used. Its use is not pejorative but instead is an historical reflection of the times and circumstances.

Special thanks are extended to those who contributed their recollections to this reprise. They are named in Appendix II. Thanks, also, to those with whom I spoke about the project and who encouraged its completion. I mention particularly Harold Krivoy, who is at work on a complementary writing venture, and the contributions of Mrs. Linda Bergmann, Wingen-sur-Moder, and Bob Kramer, Jr.

The experiences related in these pages, the stories told, the emotions bared - are just a start. There's much more to say; much more to share. One hopes that the hesitant, the less confident, the more introspective survivors will one day add their valued recollections to the saga of Company A.

To these folk and to those we left behind in the Military Cemeteries at St. Avoird and Epinal, as well as in resting places in the United States, this effort is dedicated.

Endnotes; Preface

¹ Little, Brown & Company, 1987. p. ix.

² The Other Side of Time. Little, Brown & Company, 1987. p. 5.

Introduction

Cold, penetrating damp and weeping, steel gray skies greeted GI's early on a December morning in Northern Alsace as they clambered stiffly out of foxholes and slit trenches on the wooded slopes of a long ridge running northeast toward Wingen sur Moder. Preparations for the continuing advance of Company A, 398th Infantry consisted of tearing open K ration cartons and devouring those parts felt most edible, washing them down with swigs from canteens, taking a leak behind a nearby tree, donning field packs, checking rifles and other weapons, and waiting for orders from officers and non-coms.

Company A, together with a forward observer team from Battery A, 375th Field Artillery Battalion, and a heavy .30 cal. machine gun squad from D Company, had begun its drive toward Bitche, a key to the German-occupied Maginot Line, from the town of Lohr the previous day and halted that evening on the ridge slopes overlooking the small town of Zittersheim. On this day, December 3, 1944, the company continued its push for six more kilometers along this ridge through forested side hills, brushy country lanes, and an occasional open field to arrive at dusk on the nose of the ridge overlooking the town of Wingen sur Moder. Shortly thereafter, the Krauts, by now alerted, poured mortar shells, 20 mm. cannon fire and machine

gun tracers into the company's temporary positions at the base of the rocky heavily-forested nose.

Then, as pitch black night closed in upon them, Company A, following Battalion orders filtered through erratic radios and phone lines, proceeded, despite continuing enemy fire, to move into the outskirts of the town and, then,.....to vanish from sight.

Whatever happened to Company A?

The Background

Three paragraphs chronicle the events of December 3, 1944, as they affected the lives of the men of Company A, in the written history of the 398th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division. The three paragraphs suggest a rather broad tactical plan being implemented by the 1st Battalion in its drive toward Wingen sur Moder and infer from sketchy evidence the tragic dénouement of that action.

....The 1st Battalion struck out for Wingen. The Germans were very sensitive to our probing the approaches to Bitche and showed it in the fury of their resistance as we methodically smashed defenses and forged ahead. They were determined to impress upon us the futility of this daring venture but we were just as determined to reach our objective.

Heavy small-arms fire and artillery greeted the 1st Battalion driving in on Wingen. Companies A and C, attacking the flanks, went through barrages of mortar and 88mm fire. Company C was stopped but A Company crashed through the defenses and entered the town. The Germans thrust back savagely and cut Company A off from the rest of the battalion. Out of contact,

the men fought doggedly to break the ring encircling them but to no avail. Reconnaissance and combat patrols from the battalion attempted to break through from the outside, but withering machine-gun fire forced them to withdraw.

Fighting gallantly against a numerically superior enemy, Company A with the exception of one platoon, which managed to fight its way free of the trap, was compelled to surrender after exhausting its ammunition.¹

By the early morning hours of December 4, 1944, some 104 enlisted men and 4 officers of Company A, the four-man forward observer team from Battery A, 375th FAB, and the 1st section, 2nd platoon from D Company were "Missing in Action." During the next several days, close to 18 wounded enlisted men were discovered hiding in an outlying farm building.

The December 4, 1944, Company A Morning Report stated the following wounded moved to the 325th Medical Bn.:

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| S/Sgt. John Socha | S/Sgt. John Stanley |
| Pfc. Henry Napoles | Pfc. Merlin Dubbelde |

To the 9th Evacuation Hospital:

Pfc George Pebling

The December 5, 1944, Morning Report listed:

To the 325th Medical Bn.:

Pfc. Jack Glasser

Pvt. Vito Sala

Pfc. Vito Ursini

To the 9th Evacuation Hospital:

Pvt. Henry Benson

Sgt. Lawrence Steven

Pfc. Richard Baumann

Pfc. Robert Norton

Pfc. Don Rupp

Pvt. Roland Kimmey

Pvt. Alvin Cohen

Pfc. Glen Crum

Pfc. Elton Vinson

Pvt. Ohlin Liams

The Company A Morning Report for December 7, 1944 listed the following as MIA:²

Charles Kierniesky, Capt.

Thomas Zakely, 1st Lt.

Peter Greenwood, 2nd Lt.

Henry Brackett, T/Sgt.

John Nix, T/Sgt.

Anthony Arlio, S/Sgt.

John Gorgenik, S/Sgt.

Eugene Grisham, S/Sgt.

Marion Knopp, S/Sgt.

Robert McLoughlin, S/Sgt.

Harry Snyder, S/Sgt.

Ferdinand Tartaglione, S/Sgt.

Jack Shephard, S/Sgt.

Vance Chavis, Sgt.

Frank Corbett, Sgt.

Edward Gogolen, Sgt.

Percy Reader, Sgt.

William Achille, Pfc.

John Andrews, Pfc.

Manuel Braga, Pfc.

E. C. Brown, Pfc.

Louis Cupp, Pfc.

William Dodds, Pfc.

Constantine Egizi, Pfc.

Roy Eldridge, Pfc.

Guy Fisher, Pfc.

Joseph Kenney, Pfc.

Alle Levy, Pfc.

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Robert Lougee, Pfc. | Francis McNamara, Pfc. |
| Knakal Mieg1, Pfc. | Francis Monahan, Pfc. |
| James Pedersen, Pfc. | James Percifull, Pfc. |
| Carl Phillips, Pfc. | Charles Pruitt, Jr., Pfc. |
| Francis Quindlen, Pfc. | Charles Raffine, Pfc. |
| Herman Rawlings, Pfc. | Dennis Raymer, Pfc. |
| Charles Robinson, Pfc. | Thomas Roth, Pfc. |
| Mahlon Shoff, Pfc. | Clifford Shore, Pfc. |
| Homer Shue, Pfc. | Jack Strausberg, Pfc. |
| William Taylor, Pfc. | Lloyd Thornton, Pfc. |
| Roman Van Sloun, Pfc. | Thomas Vierra, Pfc. |
| William Blanton, Jr., Pfc. | William Kistenmacher, Pfc. |
| Armando Aguilar, Pvt. | Alfonso Armenta, Pvt. |
| John Bales, Pvt. | Joseph Brown, Jr., Pvt. |
| Floyd Hampp, Pvt. | Thomas Hayes, Pvt. |
| Norman Herrmann, Pvt. | George Johnson, Pvt. |
| Bertrand Kupp1n, Pvt. | Ernest Matteson, Pvt. |
| Garland Mills, Pvt. | Harvey Nourse, Pvt. |
| Cleo Reynolds, Pvt. | Ralph Simons, Pvt. |
| Robert Smith, Pvt. | Wilbur Stephens, Pvt. |
| Orville Stroup, Pvt. | George Sykes, Pvt. |
| Russell Tong, Pvt. | William Turner, Pvt. |
| Albert Welch, Pvt. | Rudolph Wilson, Pvt. |
| Orbin Campbell, Pvt. | Jess Edens, Pvt. |
| Damon Ervie, Pvt. | Stanley Kuiken, Pvt. |
| Melvin Baker, S/Sgt. | Frank Bell, 2nd Lt. |
| John Canavan, S/Sgt. | Joseph Carfora, Pvt. |

| | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Bertrand Caouette, Sgt. | David Chambers, Pvt. |
| Lawrence Einheuser, Pvt. | Richard Forrest, Pfc. |
| Peter Gomben, Pfc. | John Goodlow, 1st/Sgt. |
| Charles Holland, Jr., Pfc. | Joseph Klemyk, Sgt. |
| Wesley Herzberg, Pvt. | Robert Kramer, Pfc. |
| Hugh MacDonald, T/Sgt. | Henry Marzion, T/Sgt. |
| Jerome Mulvaney, Pfc. | Caldon Norman, Pfc. |
| William Olewiller, Sgt. | William Pebley, Pfc. |
| Julian Strickland, Pfc. | Leonard Wagoner, Pfc. |
| Michael Waltos, Pfc. | William Watson, Pfc. |
| Russell Wolfe, Pfc. | William Wasik, Pvt. |
| Thaddeus Samorajski, Pfc. | Gustav Schmieman, Pfc. |

The Company D Morning Report for December 7, 1944, listed the following as MIA:³

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Edward Haller, T/Sgt. | Henry Valdez, S/Sgt. |
| John Danieluk, Sgt. | Glenn Blumberg, Sgt. |
| John Salkowski, Jr., Pfc. | Ronald Taylor, Pfc. |
| Louis Himmelfarb, Pfc. | Werner Meyer, Pfc. |
| Eugene Wassil, Pfc. | Stanley Franczyk, Pfc. |
| Alvin Greenfield, Pfc. | Earl Hoyt, Pfc. |
| James Tronthen, Pfc. | |

The Battery A, 375th FA Bn. Morning Report for December 7, 1944, listed the following as MIA:⁴

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| William Nowak, 2nd Lt. | John Hathaway, S/Sgt. |
| Frederick Stockmeier, Tec 5 | Charles Key, Pvt. |

The December 13, 1944, Company A Morning Report changed Homer Shue's classification from MIA to KIA.

Shortly thereafter, as latrine rumor would have it and subsequently verified, both the 1st Battalion and Regimental Commanders were reassigned to other duties.

Endnotes; 1 The Background

¹History of the 398th Infantry Regiment in World War II, pp. 48-49.

²Morning Report, 7 December 1944, Co A, 398th Inf Regt, Meisenthal, France.

³Morning Report, 7 December 1944, Co D, 398th Inf Regt, Meisenthal, France.

⁴History of 375 F. A. Bn., p. 69. Morning Report, 7 Dec 1944, Btry A 375th FA Bn, Goetzenbruck, France.

The Ridge

At the end of November, 1944, the 398th Infantry Regiment had completed its movement through areas of the Vosges in Alsace, France. The 1st Bn., having swept down the Plaine River valley and on to Schirmeck, moved from the area around St. Blaise to Troisfontaine, SE of Sarrebourg. It was then that the 100th Division joined the XV Corps and went into Corps reserve.

Company A was trucked some 35 miles from St. Blaise to the small town of Vallerysthal through cold but clear weather. Vallerysthal was located in rolling country, away from the heavily forested slopes of the Vosges Mountains we had just left. Cultivated fields and pastures alternated with wooded hilltops all the way to the far horizons.

The company was billeted in several houses in the town and spent the next few days engaged in that old Army euphemism, "Care and Cleaning of Equipment." It was here that the Company kitchens could provide hot meals for the first time in several days. It was here, also, that the Company engaged in training on the attack of fortifications and on the use of bangalore torpedoes, beehive charges, and pole charges.

The weather remained overcast but assurances of shelter and relative warmth

in our billets made it bearable. Some shriveled apples were found in the attic of one of the houses. Despite their appearance, they were sweet and delicious. News reached the Company that both Sgt. Ardilio Malavasi and Pfc Edwin Tarter were reported as KIA. Ten EM arrived from the 2nd Replacement Depot and were distributed to platoons. Pfc Frederick Danner was evacuated to the 325th Med. Bn. clearing station.

On the 2nd of December, Pfc Danner reported back to the Company, and Privates William Blanton, Richard Forrest, Jim Gainer, William Kistenmacher, and Vito Ursini received promotion to Pfc. Pvt. Elmer Mikola reported to the 325th clearing station.

December 2 was rainy and cold. The Bn. was moved some 15-20 miles to the village of Lohr in two series of moves. Motor convoys left at 1100 and arrived at Lohr at 1406.

Travel by 6 x 6 GI truck was still something of a rarity for us. One clambered up into the steel bed of the truck and tried to make oneself comfortable either on the cold, unyielding benches or huddled with buddies on the steel bed. Packs and weapons were added necessities. Troops sought shelter from wind and rain by huddling beneath the truck's canvas canopy, if the truck were provided with one. More often troops rode exposed to all the rigors of the elements.

Here Company A continued on foot at 1500 to an area some 1.5 miles SW of Zittersheim where it bivouacked for the night. The Company Morning Report stated that rain had begun to fall.



Map 1.

Extract from Carte Topographique
No. 12, Strasbourg-Forbach, au
1/100,000, Copyright © 1984, IGN.

The location of a bivouac area was dependent upon the particular combat mission the company was engaged in. Hours of daylight remaining or the proximity to normal meal times were only incidental to decisions to halt operations. The company commander met with his platoon leaders to deploy the troops and then the platoon leaders and their platoon sergeants deployed squads in the same fashion. They identified fields of fire, checked the placement of automatic weapons, and then the GI's began to dig in. Slowly they sank into the foxholes and slit trenches they were scooping out of the forest floor. Guards were posted and GI's, accustomed now to life in the open, hunkered down to catch what rest and accommodation to cold temperatures, rain, and hard, damp earth they could garner.

*During their visit to the area in May, 1990, Bob Kramer, Thad Samorajski, and Bill Watson found traces of foxholes and slit trenches in this bivouac area.

Cold and damp weather continued to hold and so, on December 3, the Company formed up promptly after preparations and continued its advance along the crest of the long ridge line headed for the town of Wingen sur Moder.

The town of Wingen, with a population in 1944 of about 827, lies along the narrow river Moder and athwart the intersections of routes north through Goetzenbruck and Lemberg to Bitche and east and west from Ingwiller to Saarguemines. The area is presently a part of the Parc Regional des Vosges du Nord which speaks to the rugged hills and narrow valleys that channel auto and rail routes through the region; one reason for its strategic importance. The heights around the town which command the area rise to heights of 308 meters on the Kirschberg and the nearby

Hochberg. Wingen itself is a center serving the general area as well as a rail stop and is the location of a renowned crystal works, Lalique.

To the West of, and parallel to, route D135, Company C continued its advance, also. Company B followed these formations in reserve. The 398th Infantry Regiment's After-Action Report identified 3 TD's from the 106th Cavalry Group and attached Engineers as a part of this effort.¹ The 106th Cavalry Group's history, however, speaks only of action around Wimmenau and, on 3-12 December, "Continued to patrol and maintain contact between the 44th and 100th Divisions....Enemy withdrawing slowly....Light snow turning to rain..."²

Just before the Company jumped off towards Wingen sur Moder, the Forward Observer team from Battery A, 375th FA, joined us (Stockmeier). The Company formed up in a column of platoons-1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th (MacDonald), with scouts out (Kramer), and advanced generally north by east along the sides of a long series of ridge lines. The ridge slope descended gradually to the west, forming a valley below us on the left, at one point about a half-mile away. Company C was apparently down there moving in the same direction toward Wingen sur Moder. The new replacements were with us. The ground was rather open in places with brush and tree lines close to the crest of the ridges. Visibility was fair according to the After-Action report. John Goodlow recalls, "To me, the high point was the dash of a wild boar across the line of march." One could hear shelling now and again but, as it wasn't directed at us, it was ignored. Our approach march took us steadily north by east along trails and rude tracks and across fields. One assumes we stopped to tear open K rations and eat at some point on the trek.

A unit on an approach march, not knowing where an enemy lies, moves steadily with scouts ahead of the main formation and with security outriders on the flanks. Proper distance between men is maintained. Everyone is vigilant, alert to any movement from far or near or above, if forested areas are traversed. As one trudges forward, he is also alert for areas of defilade, ditches, folds of ground, hillocks, banks, cuts, anything that might protect from flying shrapnel or enemy fire. Doing this and keeping steady footing on forest floor, brushy areas, and plowed fields, with weapon at the ready, demands vigilance. One also keeps an ear cocked for the sounds of distant artillery fire, sensing whether it is "theirs" or "ours." In this manner, the Company continued its advance for some 4 kilometers until it arrived, late in the afternoon, at the nose of the ridge, overlooking some houses and farm buildings below.

Endnotes; 2 The Ridge

¹After-Action Reports, 398th Infantry, 3 Dec 44.

²The 106th Cavalry Group in Europe 1944-1945. p. 84.

The Nose

Near dusk, the Company arrived at the nose of the ridge, the Kirschberg. It was forested in the European plantation style with little heavy brush on the forest floor. The western ridge slope descended to a barely discernable valley floor in two stages; first, a rather precipitous drop encrusted with rock outcroppings led down to a more level area wide enough to permit a narrow forest road or trail to snake its way through the trees, and; second, a more gradual gradient of fields and brush covered areas which led down to what was later discovered to be the Moder River. To the north and west, through the trees and brush, depending upon where one was located, could be discerned the tiled roof tops of farm buildings.

Some grass lands or pastures separated the edge of the woods from the first home (Gomben).

We could not see the town from the backside of the Ridge, but the next day when we got closer, we could see some of the outer buildings and a small farm. Company A moved in around one of the buildings and soon received mortar fire. At this time, my assistant squad leader, Sergeant Stanley had a mortar explode while he hit the ground and it blew

the front sight off of his rifle. I went out and brought him back to the building. His next trip was back to the rear. I never saw him again (Baker).

The Company halted here for a short while and then, suddenly, mortar shells started falling in among the men. Another fellow, a new replacement, and I sought shelter on the side of the ridge beneath some rock outcroppings. We dug in there for more protection from any tree bursts. Then we were told to form in the lower area along the logging road and we dug in again as mortar shells kept coming.

I hit a big rock some ways down in my digging and squeezed myself in by the rock until I could dig around it for more protection (Norman).

I remember walking in a diamond-like formation when a shell apparently hit a treetop. Five of us hit the ground. I believe it was the incident in which Johnnie Socha's leg was hit and shrapnel took out a chunk of his calf. I believe the man on my right was killed. I called out to MacDonald that I thought shrapnel hit the small of my back....I couldn't move. He advised me to try to move my toes...which I did and then discovered that the shell sheared off the top of a tree which fell across the small of my back. I remember a Sgt. Brewer, or Brewster, shouting that he was hit. I checked out and cut away his upper-arm raincoat, overcoat, field jacket, shirt, and woolen top long johns before

I reached what seemed to be a half-dollar sized hole in his shoulder muscle. I called the medic who took him someplace. I never saw him again (Canavan).

Machine gun and small arms fire then erupted from areas near the buildings at the edge of the town. As machine gun fire with tracers saturated the old logging road we were descending, we simply tried to spread and seek cover. We then experienced a siege of artillery and mortar fire for what seemed like 2 or 3 hours (Caouette).

We came to the outskirts of Wingen and the Second Platoon took over the point. A squad led by Sgt. Hamelin went out and was clobbered. One man was killed, several wounded (MacDonald).

Some time in the late afternoon or early evening, the Germans started firing mortars into our area. It was rather forested and the shells would hit the tops of the trees and explode downward. This shelling went on for some time and there were a few casualties. I remember that the ones on each side of me got injured and my helmet was blown off several times. I remember trying to dig some kind of depression, propped up on my elbow and cursing the roots that I always seemed to run into (Gomben).

As it grew dark, the shells still came and cries for "Medic!" were heard

now and then. Bob Norton was hit here as were several others. I can still see in my mind's eye a low puff of grey suddenly appear on the forest floor as a mortar shell exploded. One feels so helpless being shelled like this. Someone else controls your safety, your life!

Our movement towards Wingen was marred by some light automatic weapons fire of short duration. Key did not enjoy his baptism of fire. A branch over his head was clipped by a slug and the branch, in falling, brushed his helmet causing him great concern as to his future....During the day we also received mortar fire which seemed to come from beyond a ridge forward and to the right. We tossed a few rounds of 105's in the general direction and the mortars became quiet - but only for a time. They reminded us several times of their presence and the fact that they knew our location. I collected several pieces of shrapnel which bounced off of me without doing any damage (Stockmeier).

By late afternoon, artillery fire was added to the machine gun fire coming from the German side. Sergeant Nix was determined to have a better look at our platoon front. He called me over and we crawled behind a big tree at the edge of the woods. What we saw was not very reassuring. To our immediate front was a clear field with a thick stand of trees and brush on either side. There were houses on the

far side of the field, connected by freshly dug trenches. Small arms fire seemed to be coming from several different places. Our artillery did not appear to be focused on anything specific in Wingen and our mortar section was inactive and far away from an ammunition resupply point (Samorajski).

I recall that there was nobody on our right when we were stopped by the enemy fire, so apparently the weapons platoon (4th) was slightly to the rear and on the right flank at that time. Automatic weapons fire was heavy from two enemy emplacements, I believe, and as the shells struck the mountain side where we were located there were numerous small explosions as they impacted, so they were apparently something like our 20mm anti-aircraft guns. The ground where we tried to dig in was very rocky and I could not dig much of a hole, although I certainly tried. I was aware that several men were wounded and were being helped back up the mountain side. I was not aware of any orders and I had no idea what was going on other than that we were being fiercely opposed from within the village. We began moving forward as the enemy firing eased up (Rawlings).

And, so, once the Company had arrived at the outskirts of its objective, the Germans, taking note, proceeded to subject it to mortar, artillery,

and automatic weapons fire. Casualties were taken and, in the gathering dusk, the Company awaited its next move.

The Action

The change from gray day to dusky twilight to a palpable pitch blackness in these latitudes at this time of year was upon one with a suddenness broken only by the crack of automatic weapons fire and the whip of tracers flung across the sky. The word was passed back that the Company was to move in to the edge of the town in single file. Everyone was to move as quietly as possible in spite of the fact that, considering their fire, the Germans appeared to be well aware of our presence.

Recent research identified the German units in this section of the Heeres Gruppe G front as the 25th Panzer Grenadier and the 361st Volksgrenadier Divisions.¹

A telephone line had been laid from battalion during afternoon. At dusk, Captain Kierniesky was on the phone and after a couple of "Yes, sirs," he gave the command to move into the village in platoon sequence, the order of which I don't remember. I know I was in the final group to move forward (Company HQ). By the time our attack started it was totally dark. To reach the nearest houses in the village meant crossing an in-

determinate distance across an open, fairly level, treeless area beyond the edge of the woods. In the center of this area there was a narrow and shallow run of water. German fire was intense and those wounded were taken to a barn at the edge of the woods. From where I was positioned in the woods it appeared as tho' most of the German fire was directed across the open area mentioned above and not directly at the woods. When the German fire slackened the Company moved into the two houses near the woods (Goodlow).

When we returned to our platoon, Battalion Headquarters was in radio contact with our captain. The conversation was very animated and the Battalion Commander did most of the talking. The conversation was about taking Wingen. The captain was reluctant to advance any further. He explained that it was getting late in the day, that he was under heavy enemy fire, and that we were miles away from our ammunition resupply point. The words tired and hungry also crept into the conversation. All within earshot of the conversation readily agreed with the captain. The colonel wouldn't buy any of it. As I recall his last words were, "You will attack, you will use bayonets and rifle butts if you have to but you will take Wingen tonight." The captain's response, "Yes, sir." (Samorajski)

After darkness had set in, a runner came back with word that the remaining troops move into town (Stockmeier).

A German opened up on me with a machine pistol. I fired back and "Red" said the Captain does not want you to fire. You will give away our position. I said, "Hell, he knows where I am...he's shooting at me!"(MacDonald).

As I remember it, one squad went in first and then the second one went in. Many were killed or wounded before I went in with my squad. I only had eight men from the platoon. I didn't know where Lt. Greenwood was after he sent my squad in to Wingen. I didn't know there were so many casualties. Enemy fire had stopped as we were going down over the hill from the woods and from the buildings. I saw a man going into town from another building and I wanted to shoot him but from the top sergeant, I was advised not to. I think to this day, that man gave our position away. At the bottom of the hill as we were about to cross a small stream, my radio man was shot in the heart by a German sniper. He died instantly. I cannot remember his name. At that time, someone shot toward the town. I did not like it because I thought he also gave our position away (Baker).

It was getting dark. With the darkness, a new element was added to the situation. The Germans began firing 20mm

antiaircraft rounds into our position. We could hear and see them exploding in the trees above us. Shrapnel rained down on the forest floor. It was pretty darn frightening. We had never encountered anything like this before (Samorajski).

After enemy fire ceased, there was a great deal of confusion! I remember 15 or 20 guys hollering for help which we could do nothing about. I believe it was Sgt. Goodlow who yelled for anyone that could, join him in a small hollow for protection! I don't know how many got there - maybe 35! We then crossed the field in stages, one by one - first the farmhouse, then waded a brook that crossed (sic) remainder of field to a large steep bank. On top of this bank was a large trench, about 4 or 5 feet deep that the Germans used to fire on us as we crossed the field (Caouette).

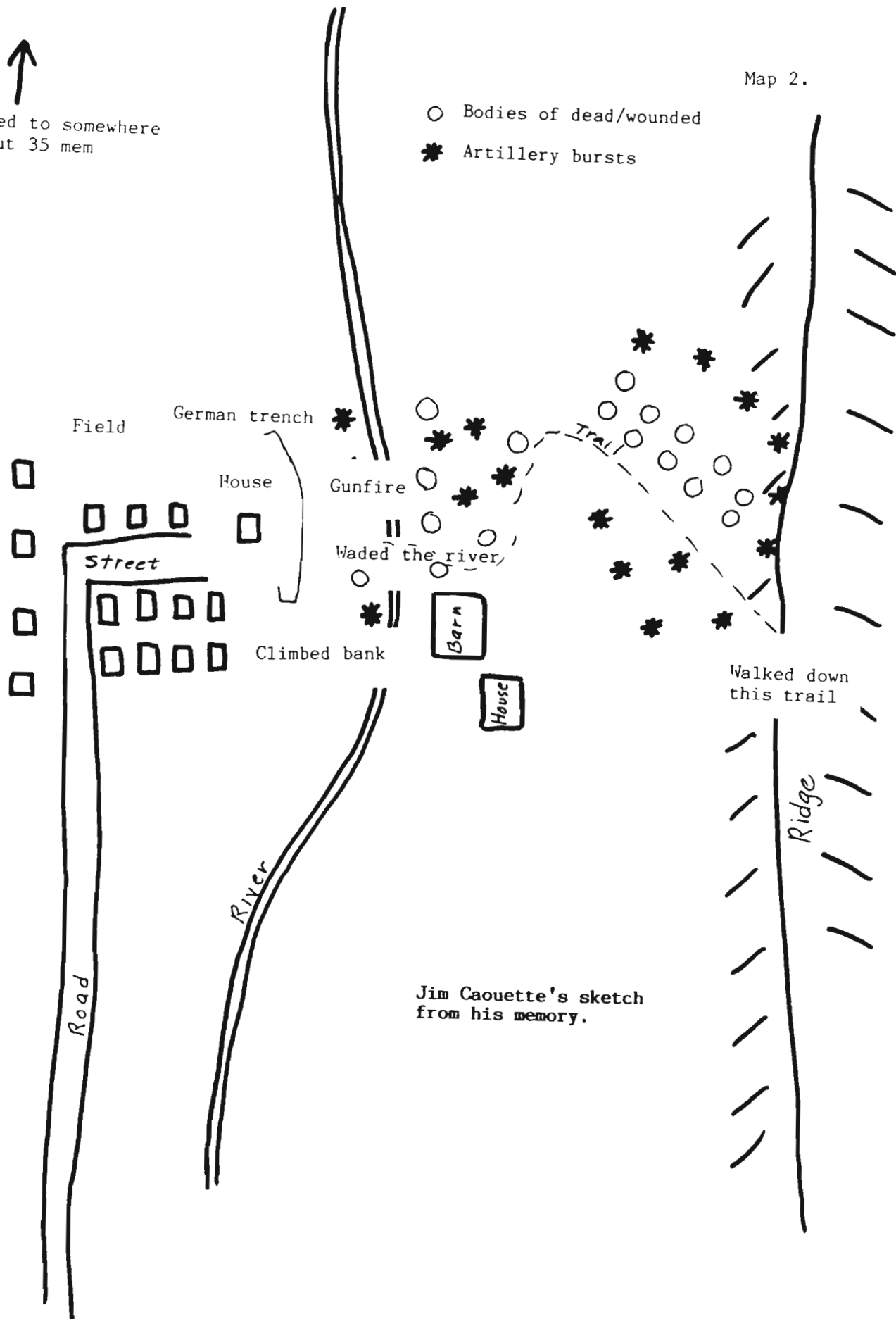
Enemy fire was over our heads. You could hear bullets going thru the trees (Kramer).

As we broke out of the woods we crossed some fields and a stream and, as the water was over my boots, I recall that I was now soaking wet from the knees down and my boots were full of water. Apparently, at about that time, the Weapons Platoon was still slightly behind the rifle platoons, and the Company headquarters was close by.

Map 2.

↑
Walked to somewhere
-about 35 mem

- Bodies of dead/wounded
- * Artillery bursts



I recall seeing the Captain several times (Rawlings).

Our squad came down the ridge at approximately 4 o'clock - heavy enemy fire (tracers). I do not remember receiving or hearing any orders. We came to a clearing just before the river (creek) - several dead cattle lay there. Stayed in the river bed for a while (an hour or so) - heavy automatic fire overhead that lit up the area (Shore).

I remember being pinned down by machine-gun fire. Later on while advancing across the field toward the town I saw one of the men from another part of the Company lying on the ground apparently dead. He was wearing a bright blue scarf which his wife had sent him for Christmas, which was only three weeks away. The mortars continued to explode behind us which indicated to me that the Germans were trying to drive us into town; at least that was my thought (Canavan).

The file of GI's groping their way in the darkness was forced to grab hold of the man in front so as not to lose the way. Then the line stopped for a time and word came that contact had not been maintained. Once moving again, we moved through brush and across a field fording a stream that flowed across our path. We moved up a bank and across some trenches dug in a garden area. Here, we walked past a dead GI lying beside our path who, later, was found to be a guy named Shue.

We entered and, I believe, occupied three houses on the edge of the town. After a bit, Captain Kierniesky asked for a volunteer to go back across the (approx.) 1,000 yard field, back into the woods and bring the rest of the troops into the town. I said, "I have buddies over there, Captain, I'll go." ...By this time it was completely dark. After laboring across that field, crawling most of the way, ...came to the woods and I commenced calling Lt. Zakely's name. I gather he thought we were the enemy because there was no response. I then shouted, "Lt. Zakely, it's Sgt. Canavan!" That received a response....I guided twelve wounded men to a barn, led the rest of the troops back into the town and into the three houses we had occupied (Canavan).

For some reason, I and some others were detailed to the rear early on December 3. While we were gone the Company evidently moved out. I remember returning in the dusk or darkness trying to find where I left some of my equipment--perhaps my pack. Someone came through with a number of other "stragglers," and we headed out across a field. It was quite dark by then and I couldn't recognize those fellows I could see.

We took off in single file across the field, moving as fast as we were able. I remember seeing tracers off to one side, but not their source. I had a feeling of helplessness, having lost my equipment except for my

rifle, and my squad. We went around one dead soldier (Holland).

I was the last in line during all of this time. My machine gun section was advancing just ahead of me. I approached a body lying on the ground. I stopped to look. Someone standing nearby ordered me to keep moving. By this time the men in front of me had disappeared from sight. I decided to head for a small house I could see on my left. As I approached the house, I was challenged by a guard. He told me that the basement was filled with wounded. I decided to continue on in the direction of Wingen where I could just make out a cluster of houses on a ridge above me.

As I began to climb up a steep bank, I caught sight of several figures moving up toward the houses in front of me. I quickened my pace to catch up. I cautiously passed between two houses and caught sight of several figures disappearing down a stair well of one of the houses. I took a couple of steps in the same direction. Suddenly, a German machine gun opened fire. The plaster of the house behind me seemed to explode. I raced for the house in front of me and dove down the stairwell as another burst of bullets smashed into the house just inches above my head. I rolled down to the bottom of the stairs. It was a close call (Samorajski).

We found out we were going to invade Wingen sur Moder when I talked to an artillery observer by radio..... I remember him telling me that when he got the orders, he was told they (the higher officers) did not care if anyone came back alive.

The town was going to be invaded by the troops coming in from out of the valley. We were going to make a surprise attack from the side. When we began the attack, we came down off of the mountain and headed for a barn. My Captain asked me where Lieutenant Bell and the others were, and I told him that they were still up in the woods. He then told me to go get them and bring them down to the barn. I asked him, "What did you say Captain?" because I knew that was the job of the Runners, and there were two right there beside him. He told me again to go. Knowing not to dispute what a higher officer tells you to do, I went to get Lieutenant Bell. I knew where all the fences were cut and brought the men to the barn.

As we were moving on toward the town, we had to cross a creek. The Germans found out we were coming that way and opened fire on us. The first scout was killed, and at least nine of the first twelve men in our company were killed or wounded. The remaining eighty-five of us retreated back to the hill. Our medic ran off, leaving men wounded and dying. The Germans showered the area,

where we had been, with artillery. We had taken five buildings when the Germans counter-attacked and we hid in the basements of the houses (Cupp).

The movement from the edge of the woods at the lower reaches of the ridge, across the open area, and through the waters of the Moder River, was apparently undertaken in two phases. The greater portion of the Company moved across the area to the accompaniment of German automatic weapons fire. At some point, contact in the line of advance was broken, and, once re-established, the second group, primarily the Fourth Platoon, followed. The goal was the occupation of several houses across the river and at the edge of the town.

Endnotes: 4 The Action

- ¹ Correspondence with Dr. Ostertag, Major, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, and his reference to Hermann Jung's Die Ardennen-Offensive 1944/45: Ein Beispiel für die Kriegführung Hitlers. Göttingen - Zurich - Frankfurt: Musterschmidt, 1971, p. 399.

The Entry

Three houses backed unto gardens laced with German-dug trenches at the top of a bank rising from the waters of the creek-sized Moder River. The first was a tiled, gable-roofed bungalow. To its north, lay a larger house with a modified gambrel roof. And, continuing north on this street, the rue de L'Ecole, a two story square house was located. Each of the last two mentioned houses had a basement.

In retrospect, the Company had spent almost all of its time since the first of November out on the mountainsides of the Vosges, subject to all of the rain, cold, snow, and physical discomfort and misery that could be heaped upon it. Was it possible that the choice of spending another wet, cold night either on the forest slope or under dry shelter was a mite unfair?

We moved into that portion of town cautiously and didn't find any of the enemy. We were then told to occupy probably five or six of the houses until morning. From this point on, we felt rather critical of our leadership. There really was no reason to move two or three hundred yards into a town and then coop yourself up in a house. It would have seemed more

logical to remain in the woods over night and then with the aid of patrols, move out early the next morning. However, into the house we did go, and after we were in the homes for awhile, somebody wondered whether we had placed our security outside. It seems that our Captain Kierniesky disregarded the setting up of outposts and by the time it was realized, it was too late. We had nobody on guard duty, nobody setting up fire lanes. It seems that the only post we had was somebody by the door or by the stairs (Gomben).

Orders were to take the town at all costs from Captain Kierniesky. We crossed the little stream going into the town and took a few buildings and then it became dark. I just had these eight men so I put four outside as guards and the rest of us went inside this place which I thought was a small hotel or boarding house. The four men on the 2nd floor were resting, the other four, on guard duty (Baker).

Entered house by side door. As I recall Captain was inside door saying, "4th Platoon - down in basement." It was very dark inside and out.....Remember being told to lie down on basement floor and get some rest (Kramer).

When we settled into one of the houses occupied by our Platoon I commenced to hear a loud ticking sound. I

WINGEN SUR MODER

1. Gare
2. Hotel We
3. Ecole
4. Play fie
5. The hous

Wingen sur Moder

Ingwill

KIRSCHBERG

Map 3.

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- WINGEN SUR MODER
1. Gare
2. Hotel We
3. Ecole
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5. The hous
- Wingen sur Moder
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Map 3.

chased everyone out of the room, foolishly thinking it was a ticking bomb. After tracing the course of the noise (in a cold, scared sweat), I discovered it was a grandmother's clock mounted on the wall. I unhooked the pendulum, bent the hands forward, I think I then, somewhat exhausted, eased myself on the floor in a sitting position, heaved a huge sigh of relief and called all all you guys back in the room. It was then that I shouted, angrily, "I can't understand what the hell we're doing moving into a town in the God-damned dark. This could have waited until tomorrow. We'll either all be dead or captured by morning."

As we reached edge of town, everything had quieted down. It was raining very hard, so somebody ordered us to enter the basement of the closest house via a bulkhead. We passed through one portion of basement to another smaller room at further end. This little room was so full, it was very difficult to even sit down. I sat directly under a small window just overhead. We all just sat there wondering what was going on and what was to happen the next day. I don't recall any of the GI's with me. Too much confusion (Caouette).

We came to a one or two story house and several of us were directed to enter the cellar door. (It was my understanding that this house contained the Captain's

command group.) It being pitch black, the few of us had to grope among other soldiers already "bedded down" in order to find a resting place. I pushed my way into a corner where I could prop up my gun and sit against the wall. A few were talking, but most of us, not being able to see our neighbors, went into the soldier's temporary hibernation, awaiting the next order to "mooooove-it-out." (Holland)

The 1st Platoon settled into a house with the squad from D Company (MacDonald).

It is my impression we arrived in the town after nightfall and several others and I....went into a house, detailed our guards, and caught some sleep. I remember being concerned about booby traps inside the house but we never encountered any. It is my recollection we assumed the enemy had abandoned the town and we would move forward again in the morning (Bell).

There was a foyer close to the front door with a step landing (the house we entered). Believe all my squad, and more, went into the house - it was crowded. The orders I remember were that no one should leave the house or open a door, windows, or shutters. I ate, made coffee, and went to sleep in the kitchen. Sometime



Two of the houses occupied by Company A as seen from the sports field. These are the only houses on the rue de l'Ecole that were here in 1944.



Looking up the bank from the Moder River to the houses.



The gardens behind the houses were criss-crossed by German trenches.



Two of the houses from the rue de l'Ecole. Both houses had basements where much of the Fourth Platoon was located.



A view from the rue de l'Ecole. Part of the ridge line can be seen in the background (Bob Kramer photo).

later....I was awakened by NCO who placed me on guard at the front door. Another GI was there with me at post.....This went on for some time (30 minutes to an hour). During that time one of us (guards) went to the NCO that placed us there to advise. He said orders remained the same (Shore).

I was in one of the basement rooms of the house nearest the woods as was Capt. K. and Lt. Zakely along with several others. We had lost telephone contact with Battalion during the move forward. The Company had a large battery operated radio phone and efforts were made from an opening on an upper floor to establish contact with Hdqrs. but they were not successful. Finally, Lt. Zakely stood up and said he was going to get some grenades and clear out a few more houses (Goodlow).

We Forward Observers went into the same house where the Company Commander had settled. We were in the basement. Before we really had time to settle in, the Company Executive Officer entered the room where some of us were situated, called for a sergeant and told him that he should get his men outside to establish security, that no one was on guard. If my memory serves me correctly, it was at that time that we came under heavy automatic weapons fire, effectively preventing anyone from safely getting outside. Several minutes later I was called into

the other room (where the Company brass and my own artillery officer were situated) and asked about using the Field Artillery radio to get a message out. Apparently the Company's radio was not getting out. Because my radio was also a line-of-sight unit, I advised against it. I mentioned that at La Trouche the Krauts had picked up our radio and had blessed us with some unpleasant fire from their 88's, as well as transmitting "Eins, zwei, drei," on our frequency. For a change, the officers agreed with me (Stockmeier).

We came upon some houses and I entered one with the Fourth Platoon, knowing I would rejoin the First Platoon in the morning. I believe the Captain was in the same house upstairs. A group of us went down into the basement to one of the several rooms down there. This room had an open basement window high on the wall that opened to the outside. The Fourth Platoon was in here with some .30 cal. light machine guns. Their Platoon Sgt. was here as well. Then we arranged ourselves on the cellar floor, believing that items like guard duty and all were being arranged topside. No one had sleeping bags so we just stretched out in the dark to catch a few winks (Norman).

The interval between entering the town, finding some shelter in the houses, and settling in for what remained of the night was all too brief. Prospects for some rest after the emotion- and fear-filled hours preceding were quite welcome.

The Disappearance

Unbeknownst to the survivors of the selective carnage wrought earlier on the hillside by German mortar shells, 20 mm cannon fire, and machine gun tracer and ball, hunkered down now in chilling cellars attempting to erase from memory the events of the recent past by nodding off, the dénouement was close at hand.

Because the members of the Company were holed up in three houses, elements of the ensuing action apply only to the settings of the individual witnesses. Julian Stricklin sets the time at about 2-3 a.m.

We could hear footsteps and low talking (mumbling) coming closer. We thought chow and mail were coming. The footsteps came up the steps to the door. I challenged - "Halt, Lucky" (the counter was "Night"). At that time a potato masher came into the foyer. I made a dive for the stair landing and the masher exploded. The "kraut" (or "krauts") may have come into the foyer. I did not remember very much after that - could not hear, etc. I do not know what happened to the other guards (Shore).

Cliff Shore went on later to say that the Germans who stepped over him may well have thought him dead.

I heard nothing. The town was quiet - a ghost town.

The Krauts waited till we were all settled in building, then they let us have it with concussion grenades. We had no lookouts. No time, I guess, because we got hit soon as we were in the house (Klemyk).

In the house occupied by most of the First Platoon,

We had orders not to outpost the town. To keep sentries inside. I was on the second floor. Lt. Bell was on the first floor with a private who spoke and understood German....I was sitting on the floor with my back under the window when a concussion grenade hit the window sill. It knocked my helmet off and I had trouble hearing for about two weeks (MacDonald).

Some time later, those in our particular house heard some explosions outside followed by gunfire. We found out later that the Germans had thrown dynamite or hand grenades in through the open window of some of the houses. That gives you some idea of how close they came without us being warned. I don't remember the man or Platoon Leader who was in our house, but he was rather young and while he and a noncom or two were trying to decide

what to do next, we heard some German voices outside, evidently yelling at us. Somebody in our outfit could talk German and interpreted the outside yelling as commanding us to surrender or they would blow our house up also. After a few minutes of deliberation, our lieutenant told our interpreter to yell out that we would surrender. We left our rifles in the house and I remember as I walked out of the front door and down the steps with my hands on my head, "What a way for this whole experience to end." (Gomben)

I think I caught a short nap and was aroused by noise outside or someone aroused me because of the noise outside. When I looked across the square (ED: possibly a street intersection in front of the house), I could see a large part of the Company had been assembled and was under control of the Krauts. I heard no shots. Mac and I had time to confer a few minutes before the Krauts came toward us. As I recall there was no way we could attempt to assist those already captured without the danger of a slaughter in "cold blood" of those already assembled. I think this was around 11:30pm or so. When the Germans came and ordered us out of the house our only recourse appeared to be surrender (Bell).

Garland Mills, the man I had bunked with, and I

were told to check on the circumstances outside. When we opened the door to check, all we could see was German soldiers. We returned, and the other officers were saying that they were going to break their transmitters and surrender. Our Captain surrendered our company, and the Germans lined us up outside. (That was the last I ever heard from Garland Mills). (Cupp).

And in houses occupied by others in the Company,

There were no signs of our guards or outposts, but being dark, we may not have seen them. As soon as the last man got into the house, all hell broke loose. The Krauts had been waiting in hedgerows probably not more than 50 feet away. When they knew they had the whole Company in their trap, they immediately surrounded the house and opened fire. 20mm shells came through the basement openings (they were like 1/4 moon shapes). Then they threw in some concussion grenades (potato mashers). I was carrying mortar ammo and the concussion threw me down some steps and I broke my right arm in catching my fall. The Krauts were visible outside and were holding panzerfausts (beehive on a pole) . They demanded we surrender or be killed. The Captain surrendered and we exited with hands on our heads. I think the Krauts were wearing black uniforms. All this happened in about 15 minutes. I don't think we

fired a shot (Chambers).

As we came close to a house, a nearby German machine gun opened fire on us and we hurriedly entered the cellar of a French house for protection. The Captain, Executive Officer, and several other men were in the basement. The house was taking a lot of enemy fire, and it was difficult to get your head up to the window. I did so once but ducked down quickly, as the immediate area was criss-crossed by enemy tracers. At least one grenade exploded in the cellar, wounding some, but not me. If I recall correctly, it was the Executive Officer I heard telling the Captain that the situation was hopeless, some of the Platoons had already surrendered, and that we were taking fire from all sides. The Captain had been trying to use our radio without success, and he kicked it and said something to the effect that we were surrendering (Rawlings).

Bill Watson also remembers entering a basement of one of the houses. Almost immediately, the Germans had the house surrounded. They fired into the basement window and then tossed in grenades. Bill was lying third man from the wall when a grenade went off by the fellow next to him. Bill and Bill Pebley were also knocked out momentarily by the blast and remained groggy for a time.

After about an hour or so, we heard Germans yelling

something I didn't know. Again there was a short fairly quiet spell, when suddenly I heard the window above me smash - I knew immediately (instinct, I guess) that it was a grenade. Sure enough, it was!! A tremendous explosion followed and another chaotic situation was upon us. For quite a while, I couldn't hear a thing - I remember being pushed and stepped on and suffered a lot of pain physically from this. I kept thinking of that grenade and who it landed on - it was a very traumatic moment. The next thing I remember is standing on the lawn outside the house with our hands behind our heads. I could hardly hear a word that the Germans were yelling at us, only gestures (Caouette).

It seemed but a few minutes after settling down that we heard shots and running and men shouting. I believed these to be Germans. Through the cellar windows, which evidently were flush with the outside walks, we could see flashes of gun-fire. We could hear noises made by the boots of the soldiers running by. It was through one of these windows a shot was fired which sent a bullet ricocheting around the room. It was very still for a moment. I suppose we were all listening to see who might have been hit. Then a grenade was thrown through a window into the room. The confined explosion was deafening. Immediately the room was filled with shouts and cries of pain. The cellar door was thrown open, which,

from my vantage point, showed only light on the stairs. I imagine that for a brief moment we weren't sure whether Americans or Germans were up there. Anyway, no one of us fired into the doorway. Some German shouted some basic words we could hear. Having had a sophomore class in German the previous year, I plainly understood that we were to come out without guns immediately or they would throw in more grenades. I remember shouting the interpretation. Whether I was the only one doing so is not clear to me. Those near the stair began to move upwards and the rest of us poured after (Holland).

At almost the same instant German concussion grenades began exploding against an outside door into our section of the cellar and a runner from one of the rifle platoons came into the room and reported that men were surrendering. Someone said, "I didn't come 3,000 miles to surrender," as we moved into a larger room. After a great deal of confusion in the darkness and more grenades this sentiment obviously failed to prevail (Goodlow).

Next thing I heard was a concussion grenade going off in the basement. At this time I think my guards had already been captured. I had just pulled a drape off of the window and was about to set down on the floor and get a few winks when I heard an English speaking German holler,

"Surrender or we will blow the building up." I decided to fight it out but after looking out the window and seeing dozens of Krauts, it would have been suicide. I then talked to my men and we decided to tear our rifles apart and scatter them about. We went down the steps and out the door to our surrender. Outside, there were probably 100 or more Krauts. At the door on my way out, I handed the Kraut a hand grenade and he pitched it back in the corner of the room. I thought if he shot me, he would get it too (Baker).

At about this time, "Jerry" commenced throwing percussion grenades into the houses (we, of course, thought they were fragmentation grenades) and shouted to us to come out and surrender. Captain Kierniesky, I understand at this time called back to Regiment by radio to Col. Duff*(who, I understand, made the blunder earlier of ordering us into the damned town at night and, I heard, was later relieved of duty for it). Captain Kierniesky, I heard, gave Headquarters the grid coordinates of the barn in which we housed the twelve wounded men and then destroyed the radio (Canavan).

.....there were some voices heard outside and the sounds of running around. Someone ran up to the basement window overhead and fired a rifle through it into our basement room. It must not have hit

anyone as no one made a sound. Then, something was tossed into the basement. I heard it bounce but wasn't sure what it was or where it was. Pebley was lying next to me. Then the grenade exploded. I was lying kind of on my side and the blast blew my legs up and wide apart. I felt a burning and stinging and numbness. I was scared to death! Then it seemed that everyone got up and started for the door. There was shouting outside, upstairs, and from those in the room. I shouted for help and heard the Fourth Platoon Sgt. work with someone else removing the firing pins from the mg's. I remember him saying that this business of dying for your country was lots of BS. And he was Regular Army! Someone came over to me and helped me get the sulpha pills out of the first aid pack attached to my web belt. I wrestled my canteen out, too, as I knew that sulpha should be taken with lots of water. I then called again for help amid all the confusion. My legs and backside still burned and stung. Things were very confused and hazy for me. I think the medic might have given me a morphine shot at some time. It was still dark as pitch and artillery could be heard in the distance. The GI's were being herded out of the house. Finally, I was carried outside. I remember hearing Denny Raymer's voice. I heard Captain Kierniesky as well (Norman).

...could not hear anything for a while. I was bleeding from nose and ears and hand, but I was more frightened and ashamed (Corbett).

It all came down in an alien surround within boundaries of dank, black concrete walls, ear-splitting explosions, crackling rifle fire, and shouted guttural Teutonic. At 3 in the morning. On December 4th. In a small town in northern Alsace.

Note:

* Should be Col. Fooks.

The Surrender

Tumbled out of the houses to the adjacent yards and roads, the Company, stunned in disbelief, hands clasped on tops of heads in the universal sign of surrender, stood apprehensively as their captors, machine pistols and rifles at the ready, swarmed around them.

The Germans quickly organized us outside of the cellar, separated the officers and non-coms from us and started to march us out of the village. One of the men in our Platoon spoke German and was made to yell into the cellar in English that anybody hiding in there had better come out because they were going to throw in more grenades. After a while we were put on trucks and buses and transported to a building several miles away. We were fed, allowed to rest, and received medical attention (Rawlings).

When they marched us away, I then realized there were many of us captured. There was not much talking going on. I remember I had a hand full of 30 caliber shells in my pocket and a German

change purse in my jacket pocket. As I was walking in the mud, I dropped the change and tramped on it. As we walked, our own artillery was firing over us - it was terrifying and I was glad there wasn't a short round (Baker).

As we came out of the cellar, Germans were shouting directions and motioning with their guns for us to group off to one side. When it appeared that no more were coming out, the Germans, instead of entering or throwing a grenade down the stairs, asked a group of us if there were wounded left downstairs. My impression (proved wrong later) was that there were a number hurt. I shouted "zer viel"—a lot.

The Germans evidently were prepared for wounded because they quickly got hold of a litter and some men (Americans or Germans or both) and went down into the cellar. There was sufficient light to see the fellows coming back from the cellar. (Moonlight or flares or lights—I don't remember). They were carrying only one severely wounded man.....I yelled there were more and got only "Nein-nein," from which I had to assume the rest were dead. I was only many months later that I heard that Cal had taken the full brunt of the grenade, possibly a concussion type rather than fragmentation, and no one else was severely wounded.

In what I remember was fairly good light, I could see that we were grouped in a clearing in front of two buildings or houses somewhat separated from each other, each containing perhaps two-stories. It is not clear to me, then or now, whether the upper floors of our house had evacuated before or after we came out of the cellar. Certainly, the Germans didn't seem to be concerned about their open position in front of our house. Of course, if the upper floors remained occupied, they had effectively positioned us in direct line of fire and where we could be seen by any of the house defenders (Holland).

After counting us, they marched us in a column of threes to the far end of the town. There we were under fire from our own artillery. Then we marched and (rode trucks?) to a nearby town and were held in a school building for the night. The next day we were interrogated and relieved of some of our cigarettes (Chambers).

After some time we walked from the house to a road maybe several hundred feet away. American artillery started falling on the left ridge, but we had to stay on the road lying down. When this let up we started walking, double file on each side of road. I don't know who I was with as it was too dark and of course we couldn't talk. We marched until dawn, whereupon

we entered an old farmer's house, hoping of course to be able to change clothing, sleep, and of course get something to eat. None of this happened!! (Caouette).

Put on bus. "For you the war is fertig." Fair treatment. Could not hear very well. Got aid for shrapnel in hand. Very crude. Hurt like hell (Corbett).

After one or two enlisted men wounded by grenades were carried to a German aid station we were marched and taken by bus to a small community in the rear where we were searched casually and questioned by (probably Battalion) intelligence officers. What they were interested in was our unit identification and getting us out of the forward areas (Goodlow).

They gathered those of us from the different houses together, and I remember our Captain trying to tell everyone that we were not to reveal that he was our Captain. He had removed his bars, probably left his helmet inside, and was afraid of what the Germans might do to the officers.....There probably wasn't more than 20 or 25 (Germans) all together. They marched us back into the center of town that night, and I remember being there as the Americans shelled the town (Gomben).

Julian Stricklin also speaks of being removed to a school building.

Some GI's took a door off the house and put me on it to carry me out of there. Mac, Percy Streater, John Canavan, Pete Gomben, and others helped to carry me. The ride was rough and the bearers had to stop now and again to shift their weight and to get better grips. I am very grateful for true buddies!(Norman).

Apparently the capture of elements of the Company occurred in domino fashion. The first groups were from the Second, Third, and Fourth Platoons. The First Platoon, when apprised of what was happening, felt it could not resist without endangering the lives of comrades, and so the Platoon left the house it had occupied with its hands in the air.

One of the Germans I had been shouting at came over and pulled me to some officers. I was told to stand before the second house (or between the two) and yell for the soldiers inside to surrender and come out of the building or they would open cannon fire. I saw no cannon, but the Germans were well armed with hand-held machine guns and most were carrying "potato mashers." (Evidently there was no firing, or even shouting—otherwise how could I have been heard?) I believe that those remaining in our house complied, coming out to increase the groups standing in the clearing. I don't know whether those in the second house came out. I was pushed back into one of the groups

and we were then herded into some sort of loose formations and walked into town. There we were broken into smaller groups and put on some vehicles (Holland).

I remember some of my thoughts in the first moments of captivity. Foremost I was glad to be alive. The prospects of being a prisoner-of-war was depressing but I felt a relief that the ordeal was over. I also remember being badly shaken by the experience in the basement and disturbed by why it ended so badly. I also remember thinking about escape but dazed and in the dark, I couldn't make a decision about my chances.

Tired, hungry, and depressed I remember walking along a village street for a few minutes and then along a steep road covered by a dense canopy of trees. At one point we passed several Germans just returning or going out on patrol. They stared menacingly at us but made no move to intervene. At the top of the hill, we approached a house and were ordered to stop. We were ordered to sit on the bank of the road adjacent to the house. Guards with rifles at the ready moved up and down the road.

After about an hour or so an ambulance arrived and I was ordered to get in. In the dim light I saw two German soldiers lying side by side in the

center section. I presumed they were dead for they made no sound or motion as I entered nor did they stir later during the trip. I took a seat along one side and took notice of a sour faced elderly man in a white coat sitting across from me. He wore a small arm band with a red cross on his left arm. I guessed that he was a civilian doctor. I believe several other G.I.'s were herded aboard. Then the door slammed and we took off (Samorajski).

Bob Kramer remembers a group of about 35 men being marched north on the rue de L'Ecole.

Two survivors referred to the Germans as wearing black uniforms. One spoke of the relative youth of some of the Germans. Two survivors wondered about rumors that the Company was "fingering" by local residents. With reference to that, this writer spoke with folk in Wingen sur Moder in May, 1989, and was amazed to discover that the fact the Company was in the town on December 3-4, 1944, was news to them! They knew the Germans grenaded several houses killing six or seven from local families that night, but laid the German action to their known cruel perversity.

The Interrogation

During the period of a person's initial shock at being, not wounded, but captured, a prisoner, the enemy focuses on trying to obtain any information from the captives that it may find useful to its own campaign. This interrogation by the Germans took place shortly after. In some ways, it mirrored those interrogations depicted in some Hollywood versions of combat. In other ways, it seemed to be merely perfunctory. Several survivors spoke of their experience:

We were moved to the rear immediately. But I cannot remember much about the events. Somewhere to the rear, we were taken into a building and interrogated. I cannot say with any certainty that all of Company A was taken to the same place; it seemed to me that the group should have been larger. At any rate, I was one of the last to get the treatment. With no sleep during the night and after having carried half of a 96 pound radio all the previous day, I was dead on my feet. I was told to write my name on one of two sheets of paper, according to what Company I was assigned. I just took one sheet and wrote my name.

There was a German captain standing by a window who was not paying much attention to me. The German sergeant at the table looked at the paper and then spoke my name, using the German pronunciation. This caused an immediate reaction from the captain who literally ran to the table and started speaking loudly. Although I was not, and never had been, fluent in German, I could understand him. But I did not answer until the sergeant translated it. As you might imagine, the questioning became intense and lengthy but I didn't know the reason for it. Most of the questions revolved around my place of birth, which the captain continued to harp about. When he finally gave up, I learned that his home was in the city of Detmold, the same city from which my family had emigrated in 1848. The name of Stockmeier was familiar to him. He apparently thought that I was a native of Germany and therefore was a traitor.

The intensity and the length of the questioning didn't add anything to my peace of mind (Stockmeier).

The next day I was brought before a German officer for interrogation. This was the only time I was questioned (Kramer).

We walked part of the night to a building; I did not know where I was. The Germans were good to us. They left us sit around all night and interrogated us one

by one. My turn came and I got the usual questions, name, rank and serial number. I told the interrogator this then he asked what my outfit was and for the name of the ship that I came over on and I said, You know I cannot tell you that," and he said, "Okay, I'm not trying to press you." I thought this was funny. I was then searched. I had a compass, bottle of Halizone tablets, my pay book, and pictures of my wife, mother, father and brothers. He took the compass and tablets and left me keep the rest (Baker).

Bill Watson remembers the German interrogation as being interested in our gas masks and wondering if our horses were equipped with them!

We were interrogated at which I think was their Regimental Headquarters and searched again. An English speaking officer asked if he could have a pack of cigarettes and I gave him two (MacDonald).

My next memories are of our arrival at some way station where there was more shuffling of us. Our group had no non-coms nor officers and no one from my squad. Here we gave up our wallets, papers and some personal effects and set up to be interrogated. I remember some of my interview, perhaps because of the excellent English of the interrogator, acquired, he said, in Chicago. He had one of my mother's

letters in which she had made mention of our three years spent in Moscow. I explained that I was only ten when we left Russia. He asked questions about the time we entered Wingen, where we had been the previous day, when we had reached France, the name of our ship, etc. I couldn't remember anything---I really couldn't. Later the interrogator spoke to the group, I suppose to show us how, in spite of our lack of cooperation, he had obtained a wealth of information. He told us where we trained, when we left New York, what ship we were on, when we arrived, and some other things--which we found very informative. Most of us plodders were too busy taking care of ourselves to note such details! (Holland)

Interrogation at each point. Little if any food. Sardines and tuna fish and black bread. Got mad at me for refusing to sign a roster sheet. Told them name, rank, and serial number. That got me a kick and hard (Corbett).

I believe the following day we were obliged to undergo interrogation which consisted of a lot of bluster, shouting, intermingled with kindness, offers of cigarettes, cajoling, threatening, warnings, screaming at us then becoming kind again, etc. The whole gamut of child psychology to make us tell things of which none of us

had the slightest idea (Canavan).

The first premonition of tough days ahead came when we were marched off for interrogation. Four of us were ushered into a large room. We faced two officers sitting behind large wooden desks. The room was cold and bare except for the desks. A couple of naked light bulbs glared overhead. Two guards stood at the rigid attention near the single door. There was silence for several minutes and then a contemptuous glance from one of the officers.

The first words were harsh and threatening. "You are prisoners of war. If you cooperate with us you will be treated kindly. If not, you will be sent to work in the coal mines. If you attempt escape and are caught, you will be shot!" Silence again. Then tough questions, "What was your unit? What was your mission? Who was your battalion commander?" In succession, the four of us replied with name, rank, and serial number and nothing more. The enraged interrogation officer shouted louder and louder. We remained silent. More shouts from the German side. "You will all die in the coal mines! You will never see your home again! You are the only prisoners who refused to talk!" More silence on our part. After what seemed like hours the guards were ordered to remove us from the room. As I walked out

the door, one of guards gave me a whack in the back with his rifle butt. It knocked me to the floor but in my humiliation, I felt that I had won a moral victory by irritating the guard. I picked myself up off the floor and joined my morose comrades. Don't let the bastards wear you down, I thought (Samorajski).

In some city somewhere along the way we were carefully searched and interrogated by (division?) intelligence. After I had been strip searched I was putting on my uniform when a German non-com came along and asked me my rank. After I told him he said, "You'll do, get your clothes on and come with me." He had me join a small group down the hall awaiting interrogation. While there I could hear some German bellowing in a room off the hall where an interrogation was going on. In a little while a G.I. I knew from the Co. D heavy machine gun unit that had been attached to us at the time we were captured came out. I asked him what all the ruckus was about and he said they wanted to know who Lt. Novak was and didn't believe that he didn't know. I knew he didn't know because Lt. Novak was a replacement artillery observer who had only been with us a day or two. When I went in for interrogation, I anticipated the same question but it didn't work out that way. There were 3 or 4 officers seated behind a big conference table and I stood across the table from them. One of

the officers started out saying, "I'll only ask you one question - answer it and you'll never have to answer another question while you're in Germany." I replied that the only information I could give was my name, rank, and serial number. He said, "Why?" I said, "According to the Geneva Convention." When I said G.C., he shot out of his chair and leaned across the table - I think he would have struck me if he could have reached me. He then went into a harangue - What did I know about the 100,000 civilians fire bombed to death in Hamburg. What about bombers called Murder, Inc.. What about our treatment of German POW's in Africa, calling and treating them as Huns. His finale was, "We've got a place for people like you; when we get done with you, you'll talk like a fish-wife (a word I'd never heard used before or since), now get out!" I wonder what the one question was that he was going to ask me (Goodlow).

The crushing realization that he had been captured slowly began to sink into the mind and spirit of the GI. The initial shock melded into a surprise, a "This can't have happened to me!" denial. But the reality was stark when it meant being rudely ordered around under the threat of rifles and machine pistols, having one's person violated by the groping fingers of alien searchers, being marched hither and yon without explanation, and then, when it was shouted at them, cast in a language unintelligible to most of the men. The reality was more apparent when it was equated with the lack of food or shelter. Many GI's felt as did Stuart Hood, "...in

particular the traumatic shock of capture, the uneasy feeling that we should not be alive, the sense of failure."¹

Sgt. Goodlow was later interrogated in a different setting after his arrival at Stalag XIIIA in Limburg. In the main, apparently, the questioning of survivors was matter-of-fact and not extensive.

Endnote: 8 The Interrogation

¹ Carlino. p. 9.

The Shock

Joe Klemyk remembers arriving at Stalag XIIA, Limburg, at around the 10th of December. Apparently, during the time from December 3 to the arrival, the Company no longer remained as one group and various survivors described different means of movement from the front area to Limburg. Common threads through these experiences included cold, hunger, exhaustion, dysentery, abuse, and occasional outright cruelty at the hands of the German guards and civilian onlookers. Some survivors rode trucks all or part of the way, others were sealed into boxcars and were taken by train, others walked a good bit of the way. And many were transported by all these means.

On one leg of (the) march, civilian women and old men came to the road and tried to throw hot water on prisoners. There were hundreds of POW's by that time of march. The "krauts" told the civilians that we were Air Force (Shore).

While going thru towns some citizens along the way would taunt us; they pulled a finger across their throat. We rode

40 & 8's to the first major camp. During air raids the train would stop and the guards would run for cover. There were several hundred other PW's assembled there (Chambers).

Walked through a large town, Frankfurt on Main, I think. Kids threw stones at us. Civilians looked confused. Krauts conduct getting worse. Searched and lost a lot of personal items (Corbett).

Cliff Shore remembers seeing from afar P-47's bombing and strafing Maginot Line positions as he trudged along.

The following days are blurred in my mind. I recall that on one march an SS trooper pulled a political prisoner out of a wagon and shot him, simply because a wounded or sick GI POW was being carried in the same wagon. We arrived at Stalag XIIA on December 10th. Somewhere during our march, I was treated by a German army medic for some huge blisters caused by the shoe-pacs I was wearing. After taking care of me, the medic berated me at some length in English for the deaths of German women and children due to bombings (Stockmeier).

Sometime during the morning I was marched into a large barn and there I joined a large group of prisoners, all I believe from Company A. It was the first time I realized that we had attached to us for the attack

a heavy machine gun squad from Company D and an artillery observer team. Apparently, they fell victims to the same circumstances as we did. Even more surprising was the fact that the company officers and NCO's were also present. The captain had a very haggard look and remained silent for the most part. For the others, there was subdued conversation, mostly about food and what happens next. There was also some half-hearted attempts to rehash the events of the previous night. I have no recollection of receiving any food, water or anything else from the Germans. We were guarded but largely ignored for the moment (Samorajski).

Water was available at farms - no food! Krauts were very demanding with instructions and relished shoving their gun butts at our legs & backs. Saw no citizens. At this point, food was the problem - We were still in our GI clothes, sand in our boots, tired, extremely weak and starting to have problems with dysentery.

Either 2nd or 3rd day we approached a small building where we were interrogated. A truck came out of nowhere with several pails of what turned out to be "SOUP." We had no utensils - we were told that in rear of building, there were some empty cans. We each grabbed a can, wiped the can with our clothing, then proceeded to have it filled with soup. Want to hear a "first" -

I still have that can in my RED CROSS box. HOW ABOUT THAT.

We then walked for about 10 days - thru mud, cold, snow, staying in various barns along the way. Still only soup.

We were indeed very sick, hungry, weak & simply discouraged. Where were we and when will this atrocity stop. One G.I. who had dysentery bad, was shot in the back of his head for falling out too often. This really cracked all of us up. We finally stopped in Kaiserslautern (we found this out later) in a long green one story building with the floor caved in. The soup here was so bad, we refused to eat it. They threatened us with no Hot soup until the cold soup (with maggots) was eaten. Seems impossible & inhuman and I don't to this day, know how, but we ate it. Shall never forget this.

From Kaiserslautern, we boarded box cars and traveled in unbelievable conditions for about ten days (Caouette).

At this time (Ed: the initial interrogation), I believe we were separated into smaller groups. A day or two after that, we were marched to the railroad yard and put into a box car. The trip lasted three days. We were allowed out of the box cars twice a day for food. This was always at a small railroad station. There

were many cars and prisoners. It was cold and snowy (Kramer).

The experience of the wounded GI carried out on a door was unique enough to be included here as a contrast to what occurred to most of the Company.

I was carried for some distance to what I assumed to be a Battalion aid station in a barn. I was laid out on a large pile of straw. The Kraut sanit ter examined me cursorily, took down my pants, tattered as they were, and told me and the GI's still there that my balls seemed to be intact. The GI's were taken away and later I was loaded into an ambulance along with some wounded Krauts and taken to a town. A house there was being used as a collection station. I was placed on an examining table and my pants were cut off me and discarded. The Kraut doctor (Arzt) had a deep, resonant voice and he worked quickly, giving directions in his rich baritone. I was bandaged with paper bandages, somewhat like crepe paper, and laid out on a rude mattress in a main floor room of a collecting area. Here, a Kraut in limited English, asked me my name and he also brought out a form purportedly from the International Red Cross. I can't recall how I responded to this. Then I was taken via another ambulance to a hospital in Zweibr cken. In a larger room in what was either a hospital or a large school house,

I was laid out on a hospital cot among a ward full of wounded Krauts. I don't recall what I was given to eat here. I think I stayed overnight. I do remember the high ceilings and rather limited light. And it was gray and raining outside. But in here, I was warm and dry but hurting.

My next move, shortly thereafter, was via ambulance again with other wounded Krauts to the railroad station. The weather was about the same. I recall planes swooping down and over the railroad station and rail yards area. Concern was apparent in the voices of the Sanitätskorps who were moving us. I was loaded on to a hospital train, with stretcher cots three high on each side. I recall the German beneath me was in bad shape and was about my age. He was in real pain.

I don't remember much of the train trip. I recall hearing that the train was crossing the Rhine at Worms. Through the window, I recall seeing bridge girders flitting by. Our meal was a bowl of hot cabbage soup. This was my first food in ages, it seemed. But the cabbage worked! I heard one of the German wounded ask a Sanitäter for "die Flasche." He brought a hospital-type urinal. I asked for one and the "Sani" (German term for

"Medic") growled and pointed to the end of the car, where, I assumed, the latrine to be located. I made my way out of the stretcher cot to the "Abort." I shat through the paper bandages, tore them off and put them down the toilet. I knew I had messed myself as well. But, what a relief! (Norman).

The process of separation of buddies, of splintering the cohesion built among Platoon and Squad members, of reducing the strengths of traditional chains of command, and of eroding those elements of social interchange commonly referred to as "civilizing" began during this period. Maslow's "motivational hierarchy" started to kick in. It can be safely said that all of the survivors were affected to some degree at some time during their captivity.

The Existence

Limburg, the site of Stalag XIIA, lies about 120 kilometers north and east of Kaiserslautern. Jim Caouette speaks of being loaded into boxcars for the trip to Limburg at Kaiserslautern. Frank Bell says he started his boxcar trip from St. Ingbert, near Saarbrücken. Apparently, the survivors made their way in varied groupings from a series of starting points. Pete Gomben spoke poignantly of this regrouping and intermingling with GI's from other outfits so that he finally found himself quite alone and separated from Company A buddies.

Those who stayed at Stalag XIIA for a short time appear to have carried away a limited impression of the camp and its facilities. A more graphic and sobering picture was painted by those who remained there. Two incidents of considerable impact, physically and emotionally, occurred at Stalag XIIA as well. And it was at XIIA that some members were siphoned off temporarily for another unique ordeal.

After a few days' march, we arrived at Stalag 12-A in Limburg, Germany, where we stayed in a large room with only straw on the floor. It was apparently an old warehouse near a railroad yard (Rawlings).

We were housed in barn-like buildings with broken windows. We slept on straw on the ground. There was no heat. The roof on our barracks was torn loose, and we had a dud lying beside the building (Wagoner).

Julian Stricklin mentioned that he received food there for the first time. He remembers canned cheese and bread.

Almost everyone recalls the incident with clothing. Most of these memories were painful.

At one camp they lined us up and said that we were going to have showers and be deloused. When we got out the other side, all we got back was our underwear and told to pick what ever clothing would fit out of a pile of discarded clothing. This was the way of taking our GI clothing and using it for their means.

I remember trying to find appropriate pieces out of this pile, and I imagine every piece I came up with was from a different country. I remember that the only shoes that I could find were some Dutch wooden shoes and I had those for a period before I came across a pair of British hobnail shoes in which the snow stuck and made walking very uncomfortable (Gomben).

I stayed in XIIIA for approximately 14 days (Dec 6 until Dec 18). On the morning of departure from XIIIA a group of us were taken into showers after depositing all our clothing on the ground prior to entering the showers. After drying off at the other end of the building, we exited the building and were confronted with a gigantic pile of nondescript, what looked like concentration camp clothing and were ordered to dress.

Naturally we refused, reminding our guards that behind enemy lines without a uniform we were subject to being shot as spies. The German sergeant insisted, even going as far as to a show of force from his troops. Again we refused. An officer was summoned by the sgt. and he inquired as to what the problem was and was apprised of the situation by the sergeant. The German officer turned to us and remarked, "All right, gentlemen you do not have to wear these clothes. However, we are going on an eight day road march so line up eight abreast." This action transpired in the coldest December in Germany in fifty years and we were hopping around naked trying to keep warm in one half inch of snow. Needless to say, we donned the clothing. I was subjected to wearing Dutch wooden clogs with black leather straps, Russian gray burlap pants with large letters "K.G." on each leg...."Kriegsgefangenen" (war

prisoner), heavy long john type underwear top over which I wore a French vest with "K.G." on the back and an olive drab French garrison cap with a large red tassel dangling from its front (Canavan).

At the time of capture, we had been having some awfully cold nights for a Texas boy. As a consequence, I was wearing two pairs of pants, two shirts (I believe), long-johns, snow-pacs (a rubberized boot) with two pairs of socks, muffler, the green army jacket, and the knit cap we wore under our helmets. Contrary to what I heard of the experiences of some of the other soldiers, our group was permitted to keep the clothes worn at time of capture. We also kept our canteen cups, but not the canteens. Somewhere, I lost my glasses. Some of the fellows kept their watches and personal items, such as razors, toothbrushes, forks and spoons. I'd left most of this with my pack (Holland).

After the shower, no uniform. Instead, a pair of ugly white pants and large, thick pullover shirt. The letters KG (for Kriegsgefangenen) were stenciled on front and back of my shirt. For footwear I was given wooden flats with a leather thong across the top. The jacket appeared to be an Yugoslavian Army issue and

much too small. It had large brass buttons against a background of green and blue cloth. My compatriots were being similarly attired. With rifles menacingly pointed at our heads, we shuffled forlornly back to the barracks (Samorajski).

Because we were wearing such ragged clothes, the people in the camp would not speak to us. One night, when I went to the latrine, I saw two Americans. I told them that I was an American; word spread and people finally started to speak to us. One day, two new prisoners were added to the group. They were suppose to be Americans who had been escaped for three weeks, but they were clean and freshly shaven. None of the P.O.W's talked around them because they were thought to be spies. After a while, the Germans came and got the new prisoners and were overheard being very angry with them for not having any information (Cupp).

The second incident still vivid in memories occurred during the time that groups of survivors were being dispatched to other Stalags throughout Germany.

The evening of December 23, 1944, while we were singing Christmas Carols, the lights went out, and flares were dropped into camp. The R. A. F. bombed the camp, making

a direct hit on the officers' barracks, killing 68 officers. They also hit the railroad yards. On the railroad, were other POW's from the Battle of the Bulge.This summer, I was in a farm store and talked to a fellow who had an Ex POW license on his car. (Iowa gives XPow license plates for 1 vehicle for \$15.00/yr. Missouri gives them free). He was at Limburg at the same time when the RAF bombed it. He was detailed the next morning, to help dig a trench right beside the barracks, where the officers were killed. They threw in pieces of bodies. Many of them got sick. They had a box of dog tags and he often wondered what happened to the dog tags (Wagoner).

My notes show a group of us boarded a train in Limburg on Dec. 23. After boarding, we stayed in the station for several hours during which time a raid reported to be by the RAF occurred. I understood the building at the prison where I had been staying was hit and there were casualties (perhaps members of the 103rd and 106th Division). I think Lt. Greenwood, Lt. Zakely, Capt. Kierniesky, and perhaps Lt. Henson (ED: not reported as MIA) were moved at the same time (Bell).

During my stay at Stalag 12A, British flares were dropped at the rail yard at the camp. Bombers came over and they dropped bombs at the edge of the camp and hit an

American officers POW barracks and killed 69 out of 70 officers. Later we had to clean the mess up. By this time I was pretty weak and couldn't pick up three whole bricks, so I had three half bricks and needless to say, I got slapped and a going-over from the German guard.

During the bombing a 14" x 14" timber fell from the ceiling in my barracks and just missed my head as I laid on the floor (Baker).

During the time at Stalag XIIIA, both Lt. Frank Bell and 1st/Sgt. John Goodlow were removed from the camp and sent to an interrogation center at Diez, a suburb to the west of Limburg.

...I was taken to what appeared to have been an old castle in the city, put in solitary, and then questioned. Entered solitary on Dec. 13, taken back on Dec 20 to Stalag (Bell).

Two days after arriving at XIIIA two other E. M. and I were joined by Lt. Bell and marched a couple of miles from the Stalag to an ancient castle in Diez for questioning. We were placed in individual cells. Mine was to be my home for 10 days. It was about 6' x 12' and furnished with a cot, stool, and chamber pot. A window in the outside wall was so high that I could only see the upper stories of neighboring

buildings even when standing on my stool. A heavy wooden door at the hallway end had a peep hole through which guards could look into the room by moving a slide away from the hole. Every day a Slavic looking civilian would appear, make a few passes at the floor with a broom and empty the chamber pot. There was a chemical toilet at the end of the hall that was available during daylight upon request.

In the morning we were individually taken out of our cells and given an opportunity to wash in a wash basin placed on a bench located on a stairway landing. "Aufgain Wassen"(sic) seems to have been the command that covered this activity. The only meal I remember receiving each day was soup at noon but there must have been other food. Dozing on the cot and playing solitaire with a deck that I fashioned out of the pages of a 10 cent pocket notebook and pencil that I had been able to retain. We had no contact with the occupants of the other cells in this building. In addition to Lt. Bell I know that Capt. K. also spent some time in the castle. My cell was adjacent to the guards office and one day I heard one of the guards apparently talking on the phone saying "Kierniesky ist hier." On the 10th day I was taken down to an interrogator. His story was that one of the

purposes of the questioning was to be satisfied that they were dealing with soldiers and not saboteurs or agents provocateurs who were trained to escape and cause trouble behind the lines. My name, rank, and serial No. ploy was shot down in a hurry. Did I want to go back to the cell? Well no. So I decided to be as vague as I could while sounding plausible. The thrust of his questions seemed to be where was our 4th Army and what was its composition.

Shortly after the completion of this questioning I was marched back to XIIIA and placed in a barracks with a half dozen others G. I.'s who had been through the castle interrogation. Early that evening an air raid against an adjacent rail yard missed its objective in part. Holes were blown in the roof of our barracks and windows were blown out. An adjoining barracks suffered a direct hit and 22 G.I's were killed. Several wounded were brought into our barracks where they were worked on by medical personnel (French?) (Goodlow).

Bob Kramer of the Fourth Platoon has a son, Bob, Jr., who works in Germany for the Armed Forces Radio. Bob, Jr. visited the area around Limburg and found that the Stalag XIIIA is no more. Buildings and all are gone.

One inference from the uniform-taking at Stalag XIIIA was conveyed by

several who suggested that the uniforms taken were possibly taken by the Germans for use in the Ardennes offensive. One author stated, "Captured U. S. clothing, equipment, weapons, and vehicles are to be collected and reported for the equipment of the above special troops."¹

John Canavan remembers the showering and uniform loss taking place on the day he left XIIIA, December 18. The German Ardennes offensive actually began on December 16, however. The leader of the German Commando unit charged with the task of disrupting communications behind American lines, Oberstleutnant Otto Skorzeny, said that his unit gathered for training in early November, 1944. It was equipped with American jeeps and uniforms. The last of their sub-units went through the lines on December 19.² This raises some question over the eventual fate of the Company A enlisted men's uniforms.

Endnotes: 10 The Interrogation

¹ Milton Shulman, Defeat in the West. p. 239.

² ETHINT 12, An Interview with Obstlt Otto Skorzeny. Ardennes Offensive.
12 August 45, Office of the Chief of Military History. Passim.

The Transport

The number of POW's arriving from the scene of the Ardennes fighting meant that shipments out to other Stalags from Limburg were increased. One group of survivors arrived at its final destination, Stalag IIIB at Fürstenberg, during the last days of December, 1944. They did not all travel in one group, however. Joe Klemyk and Hugh MacDonald remember leaving in boxcars around the 22nd of December. Fred Stockmeier left around December 28. John Goodlow recalls arriving at IIIB on December 29.

Crows' flight distance from Limburg to Fürstenberg, located on the Oder River close to the then-German/Polish border, is about 700 km. Survivors said it took the German railroads some 5-6 days and nights to span this distance. Rail travel in Germany at that time was a hazardous and time-consuming enterprise. Train schedules were constantly interrupted by air raid warnings, particularly in and around larger cities with extensive rail yards. Bomb damage in these centers also delayed trains for untold hours. And rail traffic was heavy, transporting German service units to and from the Eastern and Western fronts along with refugees seeking safety from bombing raids on population and industrial centers. Trains stopped and started without notice. Rail cars and passengers were shunted from one train to another throughout the country.

Into this maelstrom of rail traffic were thrust POW's, fifty to eighty men per boxcar, many of them ill, with no space be minimally comfortable, with almost no food for the journey, with a bucket for a toilet, with no provisions for heat when traveling through the coldest winter in recent German history, and with car doors sealed shut.

At the conclusion of our march we ended up in a railroad yard with the famous 40 and 8 boxcars. Designed to hold 40 men and eight horses.

We were packed into the trains 80 men to a boxcar with a one gallon food can to serve as both urinal and commode. We traveled 5 days and 4 nights on meager rations (i.e. sour bread in portions of about 4 inches by 4 inches by 2 inches per man per day. On December 24 we tried at one stop begging water from the guards because it was Christmas Eve. We were laughed at and told to drink from the over-flowing one gallon feces and urine-filled can.

Planes...(ours) on one occasion strafed either us or the abutting road but it sure sounded like the bullets were hitting the train somewhere along the line (Canavan).

We were locked in box cars for three days and nights with a cup of coffee and a ring of bologna. In my box car, I got a severe case of frostbite. There were so many in the box car that we couldn't all sit down

at once (Baker).

A couple of days later a large contingent of P.O.W.'s from XIIA were transported to Stalag IIIB at Fürstenberg on the Oder River near the Polish border by boxcars. We reached IIIB on 12/29 after a train ride of 3 or 4 days. This train ride was not a Cook's Tour. There were benches nailed to the walls to be used as seats. We had no heat or lights or anything to drink. There was a small barred window (about 2' x 2') in one of the walls. A steel drum (42 gal.?) served as our latrine. It was placed near a door so that when it became full the excess fluid could run out beneath the door. I don't remember how many men the Germans placed in each car. After we got in the car rations for the trip were put in and the doors were closed and locked. It was still daylight outside but it was twilight inside. Here we had rations for a 3 or 4 day journey to be divided up - bread, jam and ground up meat (meat - I must be hallucinating). It must have been some kind of sausage. We got a count of the number of men in the car and moved them all to one end. First we whacked up the bread into the proper number of pieces making the sizes as equitable.

Three of us stayed in the middle of the car handing out the pieces as the G. I.'s moved from one end of the car to the other end. Then the meat was apportioned as well as possible and passed out as the men moved back to their

initial end of the car. Finally the jam was passed out on the last trip from one end of the car to the other. It couldn't have been perfectly equitable but nobody complained (Goodlow).

On December 22nd we were loaded into box cars for shipment to another Stalag. Fifty men to a car we could not all lay down at the same time. We ran out of food and water. Christmas Eve was not the greatest. Also we had no sanitary facilities after the first two days. Red Canavan and Eddie Gogolen were in my car. It was hell on wheels (MacDonald).

Left XIIIA about 12/22/44 and traveled by train. Not allowed to leave box cars even though we were under bombing or artillery fire. 50 men to a boxcar. I think it took 5 days to reach our next camp, Stalag IIIB (Fürstenburg). These were wooden barracks (Klemyk).

Stalag 12-A must have been the first processing point and may have been where we were interviewed. We had just experienced our first hunger, relieved somewhat by our first taste of black "brot." I believe we left there by box car, bound for Stalag III-A. These railroad cars were similar to the famous 40 & 8's we had ridden in France--the 40 being men and the 8 being an alter-

native of 8 cows. On this ride, however, we were jammed so as to barely have squatting room. There were numerous stops and changes of cars. Our rations were down to a quarter loaf for each two meals. Those who smoked had severe withdrawal problems--occasionally relieved by a passing guard who would hand in a lighted cigarette. The lucky man had his problems picking his friends to share a half or a draw.

It was probably on this trip that we spent a scary night in a railroad yard. The Germans decided to not leave us in the cars all night and brought us into the station. As I remember, most of us were herded into two main rooms. Right after we had lain down, an allied bombing attack began. We huddled up against the walls while the explosions rocked the building, bringing plaster, pieces of brick, etc. down on us. I suppose it lasted about 15 to 20 minutes. The next morning we were hustled with much "mach schnell" and "raus"'es back to the cars. I noticed in passing through the second room that a large beam had fallen but evidently in such a manner that no one was injured (Holland).

I was at XIIIA until December 28th when I (and others) traveled by boxcar for three days to Stalag IIIB at

Fürstenburg-am-Oder. At one time we were stopped in a rail yard when our fighters came over. The guards headed for cover but would not let us out. A train had pulled out ahead of us a few minutes earlier. The fighters found it. We had the pleasure of seeing it being pulled back into the yard completely shot up. I think it was on the night of December 23rd that there had been an air raid on the railroad junction, not too far from XIIIA. The pathfinder's flare apparently drifted over our camp. At any rate, we had 500 pounders dropping around us. A short distance from my building, there was a direct hit on a building housing American officers. I heard that 53 officers were killed in the blast (Stockmeier).

Luckenwalde, the site of Stalag IIIA, lies some 60 km. SSW of Berlin.

It will figure later into the evacuation of Stalag IIIB POW's.

Leonard Wagoner left Limburg on January 1, 1945, headed for Stalag IIIA. He stopped there for only a short while before being moved again to Stalag XIA at Altengrabow, some 70 km. west of Luckenwalde. This, too, was a short stop before he was again transferred to an Arbeitskommando in the general area.

About January 1st, we were loaded into boxcars again.

By this time, I had been pretty well separated from the Company A people. Again two stops a day, if we were lucky. I know that we spent one night in the outskirts

of Berlin. You could clearly see the bombs going off. This ride was much worse than the first since it was colder. Most of us suffered from frozen feet.

After five days, we arrived at Stalag 3A, Luckenwalde. Conditions were somewhat better here than at Limburg. We slept in wooden bunk beds, three high. We each had a straw mattress and a blanket. A latrine was outside and there was a faucet with cold running water. Our daily ration was a piece of sawdust bread, some carrot soup and a colored liquid called "coffee." This camp was inspected by the Red Cross on two or three occasions. On these days, there was meat in the soup and two or three small boiled potatoes. We never did receive Red Cross parcels (Kramer).

Stalag IVB was located at Mühlberg (Elbe), some 70 km. east of Leipzig and about 30 km. south of Torgau. Torgau was the place where the U. S. 69th Infantry Division linked up with the USSR's Fifth Guards Army on the 25th of April, 1945. IVB was the destination for several more Company A survivors. Julian Stricklin tersely described his journey from Limburg, "Put on train morning of 17th ending 25th December at Stalag 4B.No food, water, and not let out of boxcars at all."

David Chambers mentions his exposure to IVB, "Next (Stalag) was 4B at Muhlberg from 12/23 to 1/3/45. This was a large camp. A few days after Xmas it looked like the whole US Army was in the adjoining compound. We

were not allowed to converse with them, but it seemed to be a lot of high ranking officers. It turned out they were from the 106th."

The last camp, Stalag 4-B, was where I spent the remainder of the war. Soon after arriving there I came down with pneumonia on Christmas Eve, 1944, and spent about 10 days in the British infirmary. They had minimum if any supplies. My treatment consisted of a good cup of British tea. After I was out of the infirmary I saw several of the Company A personnel being shipped out for a work detail elsewhere. The only other Company A person other than myself was Bill Pebley who was still recovering from the grenade attack (Rawlings).

I believe it was two days after that when we arrived at stalag 4 B. There, the Germans unloaded the train. I was in the first group to get off the train to go take a shower. Many men were frozen to death, but there were two (maybe three) who were still alive. They were so cold that they could not even move their legs to walk, but the Germans were determined to give them showers, too. We told them to give them cold showers so that the shock from hot water would not kill them, but they gave them hot showers anyway, and they were killed. After we were given the showers, they gave us each a shot in the right side of the chest. The next day, none of us could move our right arms (Cupp).

Some of the times we would be marched through towns, and the people would show their distaste for us in various means. Some of the times we would be moved in box cars. They would be so many of us in a box car that you couldn't lie down flat. You either stood or kneeled or sat with your knees pulled up under (your) chin. The only latrine was a bucket that soon overflowed with the resulting discomfort....let me tell you, it gets cold in Germany. Some died in these box cars, but I suppose that the crowded conditions also helped to keep one another warm. I remember on one of the train trips, the train stopped and the soldiers ran for cover while American planes strafed. Luckily our car was not hit. We also saw the Germans moving soldiers, ammunition, and supplies in cars marked Red Cross.

I remember walking through some German countryside around Christmas with the frost standing out an inch or more in the wire fence. I remember being able to look in through windows and seeing Christmas trees decorated with paper ornaments (Gomben).

(ED: Pete Gomben went through several Stalags and eventually wound up on an Arbeitskommando out of, what we think was, Stalag IVF at Hartmannsdorf.)

Lt. Frank Bell was sent to Oflag 64 at Schubin, which is NE of Poznan in present-day Poland. He arrived there on December 31, 1944.

Jim Caouette remained at Stalag XIIIA in Limburg for reasons he expressed.

....What a hell hole. I worked for only a few days throwing bricks into a horse drawn wagon. Then I got sick and was unconscious for 5 days. Some American doctor took care of me. I had yellow jaundice, pneumonia, pleurisy and lung problems. The doctor kept me in a long, single story building that was called "The Hospital." I stayed there until some time in March.

Once arrived, the survivors settled in to dismal surroundings and living conditions, trying to maintain a minimal level of civilized existence in spite of it all. Many fell ill. Glimpses into this condition will be shared in subsequent sections.

The Stalag

After their initial interrogation and processing in the reception facility at Stalag XIIIA in Limburg, most of the Company A survivors were siphoned off to one of the mentioned Stalags; IIIB at Fürstenberg, IIIA at Luckenwalde, IVB at Mühlberg, XIIIA at Limburg, XIA at Altengrabow, and Oflag 64 at Schubin. Others passed through IVF at Hartmannsdorf. And, once the Germans began the evacuations in the face of Russian advances, many Company A survivors found themselves reshuffled into other of the listed Stalags.

Other camps that I was at in their order. 2D Starrgard, arrived 1/22/45; 2A New Brandenburg, arrived 2/7/45; 2B Bremerforde, arrived 2/22/45; 10C Westertimke, arrived 4/15/45 (Baker).

For several, this was only a way station on the way to Arbeitskommandos located in Czechoslovakia or in German Saxony near Dresden and Chemnitz.

Life in Stalags has been chronicled in detail by many former POW's, members of almost all of the Allied Forces. Some Company A reminiscences include the following:

Oflag 64 was well organized. I was checked out by a member of the Class of '38 from VPI (the same college I attended) to make sure I was not a German "plant." Classes of various types were organized. Health was good and Red Cross parcels were received weekly. Several games were organized and exercising was encouraged (Bell).

Max Schmeling, the boxer, visited IIIB one evening. I got his autograph on a 20 mark note. Later on the long march to IIIA, I managed to get into the tap room of a gasthaus where we were being sheltered overnight. The barkeep gave me a funny look when he saw me but must have thought that my money was as good as anyone else's (Stockmeier).

A bit of wry, gallows-type humor surfaced at Stalag IVB, Bill Watson recalled. A German general, visiting the Stalag, was interested in the ages of the newly captured GI's. The wise GI's all answered, "20." Soon, the general caught on and he smiled in return.

There were several interesting happenings during my stay at Stalag IV-B. For one thing, I received a new pair of army boots and a complete uniform except for pants. Pants apparently were in short supply and anyway, I had become accustomed to the pair I had on. So once again, I took on the appear-

ance of a G. I. and even began to feel like one.

Food continued to be in very short supply but strangely - I didn't feel as hungry as before. There was also a hospital of sorts, a small library and a chapel which was run by an American Prisoner-of-War chaplain.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the camp was that there was a Russian Prisoner-of-War compound next to ours. My knowledge of Polish was a blessing. I discovered that we could communicate with each other through the fence and I soon became an exchange agent, swapping American cigarettes for loaves of bread. I remember our first exchange as a very nervous affair. After the deal was struck, there was a great deal of haggling about who would make the first move of throwing the exchange item over the fence. Finally, it looked like we would have to go first or no deal. So with a hope and a prayer, I sailed a package of cigarettes over the fence. To my dismay, there was a wild scramble for the prize on the Russian side. After a minute or two however, the dust settled and a loaf of bread sailed into our compound. I was in business.

As far as I could tell, the Russian prisoners received the same food ration that we did. The prison guards, however, seemed to be much meaner with the Russians than with us. We quickly learned that if we tried to speak in German to the guards we would frequently get a response and perhaps even a smile. With the Germans and Russians it was all hate and no quarters asked. Further, the Russians were not signators to the Geneva Convention and hence, no help from the International Red Cross. Thus the lucrative trade in bread and cigarettes and whatever else we could manage to swap. I remember one deal involving a G. I. who swapped his wrist watch for three loaves of bread.

The Russian prisoners also seemed more emotional than we were. Shouting and fist fights were fairly common occurrences in the Russian compound. They also appeared disorganized whereas we were inclined to act as a group. Perhaps they were hungrier than we were or had been held prisoner for a longer time (Samorajski).

Rations as issued by the Germans at both 3B (Fürstenberg) and 3A (Luckenwalde) followed the same pattern and volume. A loaf of bread at the evening meal to be split among a varied number of prisoners, could be 7, 8, or 9, and sometimes a spread (either ersatz butter or jam). The morning

ration was coffee carried to the barracks by G. I.'s, the coffee being in a large wooden wash tub. We would try to save a bit of bread from the night before to go with the coffee. At noon we received the day's main rations; soup was carried to the barracks in a metal vat and potatoes (boiled and jacketed) on a blanket. The G. I. who ladled out the coffee and soup had a rough job but he always seemed to come out even - nobody short and no seconds. The potatoes were parcelled out to groups of 10 or 12. The group then arranged them in rows on a table as equitably as could be done by eye. Then the group would line up and pass down the table selecting whatever row struck an individual's fancy. At both 3B and 3A there were infrequent distributions of International Red Cross (Swiss, the Argentine, Scandinavian countries) rations mostly cheese. American Red Cross parcels which weighed about 10 lbs. were varied in contents cigarettes, coffee, powdered milk, canned salmon, crackers, a D bar if there were no cigarettes. At 3B Red Cross parcels were distributed every other week at best to be split between 2 persons. At 3A distribution of R. C. parcels was more frequent, a parcel per person and frequently every week. The neighboring community of Jüterbog (Jitterbug to us) was said to be a storage center

for R. C. parcels. At times the Germans would punch holes in the cans in these parcels before handing them out. The justification for this was that they could not be saved for an escape attempt (Goodlow).

Once we arrived at the stalag, (III-A) we were assigned to barracks. Evidently, this stalag had been recently converted from permanent German army use--possibly cavalry. We were among the first "Kriegers" to take occupancy. Each building consisted of two barracks-type rooms separated from each other by a latrine room. Two hundred men per room.

The bunks were upper and lower, single, made of planks, and may have had straw-filled burlap mattresses. We were each issued a 3' by 5' blanket. It was very cold. I don't remember any type of stove. It was immediately apparent to us all that our warmth would have to come from body heat. As did most others, Al and I slept each night, spoon-fashion, in the lower bunk. This way we could have one blanket on our feet and legs and the other on our upper body. We either slept in our clothes or used our jackets as additional cover.

There was sufficient space on one side of the room to line up the 200 men in rows of four. The first day this line-up was accomplished by the Germans using much yelling and pushing. Those who spoke any German were asked to step forward. From these men I was appointed barracks chief, in spite of my poor vocabulary. A second soldier, who spoke good Yiddish (but, as it turned out, not good German), was appointed my interpreter. It was evident the the Germans intended to pretty much let us fend for ourselves except for the daily line-up for "Appell"—roll call. When anything of importance was to be conveyed to us, an officer or two would appear. Otherwise, we saw only the guards, mostly old men or very young boys, and a corporal, who appeared at appell.

Appell was quite a headache. It was called nearly every day on some schedule they had, but we had little clue. The idea was simple—all the Germans had to do was get us into the prescribed line-up and count us. But each time there were those in the latrine, those in the sack, and those wandering from one side of the line-up to the other side, or trying to replace a friend. This caused annoyance to the Germans which brought forth much screaming and threats, which my interpreter passed on to me and I to the assemblage. As time wore on, we grew tired of having to wait in line, having some sick ones pulled

out of bed, and the screaming. We started cooperating and tracing down or explaining each miscount in order to get them on their way.

Food, as we came to find out, was "adequate." We had a hot soup each day and some "brot" and ersatz coffee. Sometimes potatoes, which those who knew said were seed-potatoes and showed that the Germans were hard-up for food. The coffee was made from some type of grain about the size of lead BB's. I preferred the grounds, since they chewed well and seemed like food (Holland).

Some of our biggest problems during captivity in the winter months was no food, no water, and no heat. All we had was body heat. Once we went out to gather dead branches to make hot water, but when we arrived back at camp, the Krauts took the wood from us. We only had three showers in about six months. Once, I went to the Russian Compound to trade a cigarette for a potato. On the way back to my compound there was another guard on duty. I thought he was going to shoot me but I was able to give him a cigarette to get back in.

Once, we were kept in a dungeon and a Kraut came in with a long pan and someone said, Oh, boy, chocolate cake." What a surprise to find it was blood sausage! (Baker).

In spite of German efforts to isolate POW's from the citizenry and to control their access to news or information other than that "geprüft" by the Germans themselves, a surprising news network existed in almost all the Stalags.

In smaller installations, this was not always the case. In one small hospital some distance from the main Stalag, news consisted of an occasional Zwölf Uhr Blatt or B. Z. Am Mittag smuggled in by a sympathetic German guard.

At 3A we had an almost daily clandestine service we referred to as Ping Pong. A messenger would bring a typewritten transcript of the previous day's BBC radio news broadcast and leave it in the barracks to be read by somebody with a loud voice—no problem with that, we had 4 or 5 First Sgts. in our barracks. The messengers would return in a little while, pick up the paper and go on to the next barracks. Never did know how they managed to receive the broadcast and get it typed (Goodlow).

Hugh MacDonald was responsible for a time for carrying the news from barrack to barrack at Stalag IIIA.

As one could imagine, life in the Stalag—men crowded together in unheated buildings, sleeping often in vermin-infested bedclothing, little access to hot water or adequate soap for personal cleanliness, unsanitary and primitive latrines, totally inadequate diets void of any semblance of necessary nutritive balance or sufficiency, hazardous working conditions, and minimal

outpatient care--saw many Company A survivors in the hospital.

Jim Caouette spoke of five days of unconsciousness at XIIA when he suffered from yellow jaundice, pneumonia, pleurisy, and lung problems. He remembers a doctor's removing fluid from his lungs without medication, a time when he couldn't remember what had gone on, and witnessing fifteen deaths among the POW's for lack of medication. He was hospitalized until March, 1945. Photographs in his possession of the "hospital" at XIIA bear a striking resemblance to pictures of Dachau and Bergen-Belsen.

I was out of the infirmary only a week or two when I was back in with what they diagnosed as diphtheria. German guards carried me on a stretcher outside the camp to a French lazaret where there were about a dozen other POWs in isolation for various diseases. Scared the hell out of me. However, I seem to have recovered, and a couple of weeks later walked back to camp under guard (Rawlings).

The next Stalag was 11A at Altengrabow. I spent a week or two in the barracks similar to the one at Luckenwalde. After that time, I was sent to the POW hospital. Our compound consisted of two barracks. The barracks housed about forty men, all Americans. The barracks next to us housed Polish prisoners. Each of us had a cot and there was a small pot belly stove.

I had developed a growth on my neck and it was hard to swallow. This became progressively worse. I had trouble even swallowing liquids. Finally, I was operated on by a British doctor. He had been captured in North Africa. After that I could at least eat what was offered. We had the usual, bread, coffee, and carrot soup. We did get a tin of something from a Red Cross parcel and five cigarettes a week (Kramer).

I got sent to the hospital again, my left foot was in bad shape from frost bite. The American doctor wanted to amputate my toes, but the German doctor said, "No," just to keep rubbing my foot. I found out later that the American doctor was an obstetrician and I was not having a baby (MacDonald).

I wound up at a former children's or old folks home then set up as Reserve Lazaret 104, out of Stalag IIIB, in the town of Spremberg, some 16 km. south of Cottbus, which itself is about 90 km. south of Berlin. The lazaret was situated on the banks of the Spree River and housed some 30 Americans and about three times that number of French in a compound of four buildings arranged around a courtyard. Five American medics from the 34th and 1st Armored Divisions, caught at

Faid Pass in North Africa, were the primary caregivers to the Americans there.

The German medical staff, assisted by the Americans, removed most of the shrapnel from my backside and legs, but permitted shrapnel in my foot to heal in. I remained at this lazaret until evacuated by the Germans in the face of the advancing Russians around the middle of February, 1945. A later stay in the lazaret at Stalag IVB concerned the removal of the troublesome shrapnel in my right foot. I still can recall lying on two benches pushed together, the British medic placing a wad of cotton over my nose and dripping ether on it, counting to 7, and waking later with my foot bandaged (Norman).

In spite of this existence in Stalags and hospitals, replete with the suffering and hardship described, a certain spirit of muted optimism was apparent. The American forces were coming! The Russians were coming!

The Arbeitskommando

Several Company A survivors have written of their time in Arbeitskommandos, or work gangs. Prisoner of war Privates and Privates First Class were expected to work for the Germans. Officers and non-coms did not work. Non-coms could volunteer for work gangs but only as supervisors. Few did.

The Geneva Convention specifies the types of work POW's can do. It proscribes work related to the fighting or to defense industries. This was most loosely interpreted by the labor-shy Germans who used French POW's in varieties of defense industry, for example.

Short time later was sent with about 100 men to work camp (railroad) to a town in Czechoslovakia between Dresden and Prague. Living conditions were bad but warm. Picked up coal along the railroad. Francis Quindlen was here, also (Shore).

From there (ED: Altengrabow), we were moved to Salzwedel (ED: some 150 km. WNW of Berlin), which is on the Iron Curtain line, on a work detail, repairing the German railroads (Wagoner).

Then we moved in a group of about 200 men to Stammlager 4B, located near the town of Bohm Kamnitz, Czechoslovakia. At this point most of the men were strange to me. Since I had been in "A" Company for a very short time, I didn't know many men.

Here we were forced to work. We would arise at 4AM, have a bowl of rutabaga and kohlrabi soup, march 5 miles in the mountains to a site which was being hollowed out for the future of the 3rd Reich. They would blast in tunnels and we would load ore cars, push them to the side of the mountain and dump. We worked 9 hours, no lunch, no break, walk the 5 miles back to the barracks, have another bowl of soup and a chunk of bread, pick off fleas and lice for an hour, then go to bed. We had 2 showers in the total time we were held. This was very hard on the older men; we lost a lot of them. We had about 1/2 of a red cross parcel while there. We traded cigarettes for food when we could (Chambers).

Left Stalag 4B and went to 4G work camp. Dug ditches for water lines (16 ft. deep). Lived in wooden buildings, straw mattresses, and one blanket for two men. 1st part of Jan. 45. No civilians in area. Frozen feet at this time. 4G was 22 km. from Dresden. Was in Dresden cleaning streets in February (Stricklin).

Bill Watson's Arbeitskommando was located on the Elbe River, some 21 km. from Dresden. His group was engaged first in digging a ditch to hold a new water line being run into the camp. Later, they were at work on a large construction project at the river's edge that was purported to be a type of atomic energy plant.

Our first Work Kommando occurred a few days after we arrived in Czechoslovakia. I was among a group of about eight that was marched to a small town to help dismantle a small factory. We were accompanied by a single guard with whom we talked as we walked for several miles along a small narrow path in the country. Visibility was limited because snow was falling lightly and it was cold. It was the first time that I thought about escape. There was only one-ass-hole German with a rifle between me and freedom but it was too darn cold and too far to go.

The work site was a riot. There appeared to be several different categories of people including male and female civilian displaced persons (D.P.'s) who I believe were Czechs. We were told not to try to speak with each other. The women seemed to be working hard all the time but the male D.P.'s screwed off at every chance. The German civilians were constantly chasing after the slackers trying to get them to work. Fascinated, we sat back and watched. Not for long, fairly soon a loud

mouthed German was screaming at us pointing to a bunch of heavy machinery in the snow. A couple of us walked over and grabbed a hold. No matter what we did, the damn thing wouldn't budge. Our German pusher began to scream. He kept yelling at us, "Schweinhund." We tried again but still no luck. Then a couple of women edged over. They delivered a few vicious kicks which I presume freed the iron blob from the frozen ground beneath. Then to our amazement, they lifted the machine out of the snow and carried it about fifty feet to a flat bottomed truck (Samorajski)

....then, the Germans took a group of us to Czechoslovakia to work in a junkyard. There, we stayed in a church and slept in homemade beds. I do not recall how long we were there. When we left, we went to a camp on a mountain thirty kilometers down the Elbe River from Dresden Germany. We could see the Russians across the river, and, at night, we could see the artillery fire from where they were attacking Dresden. The first work we did was helping to dig tunnels under a mountain. They would not let us in the tunnels; we were only suppose to take care of the dirt after it was brought out by cart. We were told that they were building an underground Benzine (synthetic gas) plant. The U. S. Airforce dropped pamphlets saying that they knew what was

going on there and that they would bomb it if they did not stop working.

Next, they took us up on the Elbe River where we helped dig a ditch for a ten inch pipeline that they welded together. We were not told what it was for but assumed it was a gas line (Cupp).

I went back through several stalags and was eventually sent on a work party to a small town about 20 or 30 miles from Chemnitz. We lived on the second or third floor of a factory in one town and took a 4 or 5 a.m. train every day to work in a factory in another town (Sankt Igidien). There were probably 20 or 30 of us.

For awhile I helped a red-headed German who had deliveries to make around town, and I would ride with him. Once in a while he even took me into a restaurant for a bowl of soup. For the most part, the German people that we worked with showed no resentment to us and were quite friendly. It was amusing to see them talk behind the backs of their bosses and German army officers. They knew that both the Americans and Russians were coming and their biggest concern was that the Americans would get there

first. It was during one of my stays in the stalag that the prisoners from the Bulge came in and all they knew was that the Germans had broken through the lines (Gomben).

That day (ED: that President Roosevelt died) we buried the second man that died of starvation. We buried both of them behind the barracks. We buried them in their blankets and put up a cross made of pine on each of their graves. (I only know for sure about these two graves. There may have been more.) (Cupp).

Gaunt and haggard, disheveled, pinched and pale visaged, outwardly dispirited, but quietly resolute, the POW held a firm conviction that eventual victory was close at hand.

The Air Raids

At times during the winter of 1944-1945, all of Germany seemed to be an enormous bullseye for the USAF and the RAF. Many of the survivors remembered the RAF raid at Limburg and viewed further raids throughout Germany with mixed emotions. It seemed that nowhere in that country could one escape from the "Vier Alarm," the four ascending and descending siren blasts that warned of planes approaching the general area. Then, as planes grew nearer, the "Flieger Alarm" sounded. This was a constantly rising and falling siren.

Then, in the evening, all lights were doused. We could feel and hear the ground shake when bombs dropped on Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Merseberg, Halle, and closer. Once in late January-early February, planes bombed Cottbus. This time, we could hear the bombs whistling as they fell. The door rattled, the windows rattled, and the blackout curtain leaped over the water bucket on the shelf by the window (Norman, at Spremberg).

This part of Germany seemed to be a point at which

our planes changed course when bombing cities in central Germany as there was much air traffic on some days. There must have been something attractive to night bombers as well. We had about 40 nights in a row when there was bombing close enough to really rattle the windows (Stockmeier, at Luckenwalde).

One day, the evening roll call at Stalag IV-B was a little different. We had been standing silent in ranks for about one hour when suddenly, we heard the sound of an airplane overhead. We turned to look. Above us we saw a P-47 Thunderbolt approaching from the east. As it approached the camp site a German antiaircraft battery began to fire. The gun was either within the Stalag or just a few yards outside the fence. Tracers streaked up into the sky. The pilot, made a sharp turn and barreled up into the sky. A loud cheer emerged from the ranks as he made good his escape (Samorajski).

The next-scariest thing was being strafed by American P-51's, resulting in several fatalities in the camp. Thereafter we built large POW letters on the assembly field with stones....We saw a lot of American and British air force action nearby.

Several times fighter planes strafed trains, etc., resulting in great explosions. It was breathtaking to watch the large formations of bombers night and day, and we could hear and feel the rumble from bombings, particularly what we thought was the raid on Dresden. Several bombers were knocked down, and once an airman parachuted and landed right outside the camp. The guards walked out and brought him in (Rawlings, at Mühlberg).

Bill Watson remembered vividly the bombing of Dresden around the middle of February, 1945. The fires from burning Dresden lit up the sky as if it were daylight. Later, the skies were filled with swirling ashes, burned papers, and black smoke from the conflagration.

P-51's escorting Flying Fortresses swooped low around Stalag IVB that spring and shot up a wood-collecting detail of PW's as they were returning from a nearby wood lot. At one time, they strafed the camp, killing a GI PW who was lying on his bunk in a barrack close by (Norman, at Mühlberg).

Both Dave Chambers and Julian Stricklin observed US and British bombing when in work camps within 30 miles of Dresden. Jim Caouette saw and heard bombs dropping on Nuremberg.

We changed trains in Chemnitz and went on to Hartmanns-

dorf. It was somewhere in this area either on the way to or from Hartmannsdorf that we traveled in the evening. Train travel was always slow with many stops and starts and transfers from one train to another. Much of this was due to the air raids. Suddenly, we heard the "Vier Alarm" and the train ground to a halt and all the lights went out. The bombers could then be heard overhead and soon their loads were falling on Chemnitz. Flashes of light danced on the horizon and distant rumbles shook the train. This time there were civilians in our compartment along with us (all trains were very crowded) and the women sobbed and shivered as we GI PW's tried to comfort them (Norman, Chemnitz).

At Döbeln, while changing trains, Cal Norman and his group of about a dozen PW's, were herded out of the Bahnhof when the "Flieger Alarm" sounded and then weren't permitted to enter the shelter in the immediate area. Luckily, Döbeln wasn't the target that time.

I think it was at Hartmannsdorf (Stalag IVF) where the LSR (Luftschutzraum) was in the cellar. Some British soldiers introduced us to a song as the all clear sounded after an air raid. "Oh, the air raid's passed, kiss my ass, fuck Mussolini!"(Norman, at Hartmannsdorf)

Evidence of the damage inflicted by the raids was all too apparent to POW's working on repair gangs. Bob Kramer reported seeing some of damaged Berlin when

held overnight on a train on the outskirts of the city in early January.
And Jim Caouette will not forget our Air Force's bombing the train he was riding.

The German Military

Germany, at that time, was an armed camp. On those rare occasions when POW's were transported in regular passenger cars rather than boxcars, they saw Wehrmacht "Landzers" often, both on the trains and in the railroad stations. German soldiers very often traveled with their full kit, including rifles. In addition to the Wehrmacht, servicemen in pale blue, the Luftwaffe, were ubiquitous.

.....I recall seeing on several occasions the flak railroad wagons on trains going by. The guns looked like the German equivalent of our quad mounted .50 caliber machine guns. The guns were mounted on gondola cars with sandbag revetments and Luftwaffe gun crews. Many of the crew looked even younger than I (Norman).

Julian Stricklin saw German tanks in Dresden and Jim Caouette observed rocket launching platforms from which the V bombs were sent on their way to England. This was the time, too, when the vaunted German jet plane came into view. Now and again one might note the swift and noisy passage of the Me 262 across the sky.

German military (were) around railroad station. Troop and hospital trains coming through often (Shore).

Around April 1, Bill Watson observed a German jet plane attacking a low-flying B-24. The jet shot the bomber in half and the escorting US fighters didn't have a chance to get a shot off in reply.

We were rather close to a training air base (at Spremberg). One day we heard a Stuka coming over low and noisily. Its engine quit abruptly. Later, Ken, the US medic, said you could see clouds of black, oily smoke billowing up from where it had crashed nearby (Norman).

Those who were working or existing in small towns also had a chance to watch the Hitler Jugend at work, drilling and practicing tactics with the panzer-faust. They would march, signals would be given, and they'd scatter into firing positions.

Close to the end, other kinds of military activity could be seen.

Late in the day along about 4/22 a small German unit set up a line of resistance to the advancing Russians just outside the P. O. W. camp (Goodlow).

One day, for some reason, we were released early from work and slowly made our way back to camp. It was a warm, sunny day in late May. As we ap-

proached a road junction we saw a small collection of young boys and old men. Some appeared to be in uniform and most bore arms of a sort, hunting rifles or ugly looking bazooka launchers. It was the Volksturm reporting for duty. Young boys and old men called-up to save Germany.

At one point in our journey (ED: to find the US forces), Bill and I were called over by two German officers seated in the patio of a small house. We saluted and stood at attention. The senior officer, a captain, asked us to sit down. "Are you Americans?" the captain asked. "Amerikanischer Kriegsgefangener," I responded. "Where are you going?" he continued in English. "To rejoin our unit if possible," I answered. He gestured toward the road and said, "That's my unit going by over there." What I saw were two long columns of Infantry, kids about 15 or 16 years of age. Their tired steps and glazed eyes spoke of recent combat. We sat in silence for a few minutes. Then we stood up, wished them good luck, saluted, and returned to freedom road (Samorajski).

And, of course, always in our company, ever in our line of sight, and so often within earshot, stood, marched, walked, and paced the eternal Posten in his feldgrau.

The Evacuation

Soon after Christmas, 1944, German problems on the Eastern Front compounded, and grudging hints of this percolated through German newspapers and via radio news. The Russians were shouldering their way through Poland, the Baltic States, and East Prussia. German news "doublespeak", "pinched off," "enclosed," and "diverted" the Russian forces which, inexorably, rumbled west. German anxieties about the status of their "for ransom" POW's also rose. Those POW's first affected were those held in the East. Because all forms of transport were heavily overloaded and constantly threatened by Allied air forces, the Germans settled most often on road marches to extricate their prisoners and send them west.

Evacuation marches were often ordered with little advanced warning. POW's gathered what minimal possessions they had and loaded as much transportable food into improvised back packs and onto sleds and wagons for the trek. Winter, too, with subfreezing temperatures, icy winds, snow, and sleet wreaked much hardship on poorly clad, emaciated Americans. Interestingly, those often suffering as much under these conditions were the German "Posten," many of them overage, minimally physically fit, and suffering the effects of war wounds or illness.

We were evacuated by foot from Oflag 64 (ED: near Schubin in Poland) on January 21 because the Russians had begun their offensive from the east. We spent nights in farms and were fed bread or soup. I developed a bad case of diarrhea and I was allowed to leave the column at Ruhnorr after traveling 220 km. by foot (according to my notes). I was put on the train at Ruhnorr on Feb 5 and arrived at a stalag at Luckenwalde on Feb.10. (This is a few km. south of Berlin and we traveled through Berlin to get there-- what a mess!) When we left Oflag 64, the local citizens were hitting the road also to move west ahead of the Russians - in wagons, walking, etc. German trucks were struggling along, too, burning coke as fuel in some instances (Bell).

The next large evacuation in which Company A survivors were involved was from Stalag IIIB at Fürstenberg on the Oder River.

On January 31st we were marched out of Fürstenberg, apparently due to the approach of the Russians..... On the many marches we made, the treatment by civilians was good. The exceptions were generally younger men and older children. At one overnight stop a German family actually sneaked me into their house and gave me fresh milk, their war-time coffee, and coffee cake. What really impressed me was that their

son-in-law, a sergeant in the army, was home on leave from the Russian front and was recovering from a wound. He was not overly warm and friendly but at least he made no trouble. One morning we were lined up in a school yard in preparation to moving out. A very small boy looked us over carefully. Then he pulled on the guard's rifle butt and told him to shoot all of us.....After walking for eight days we arrived at Stalag IIIA, Luckenwalde (Stockmeier).

.....about Feb. 1 when a Russian offensive forced the Germans to march us about 75 miles west to Stalag IIIA at Luckenwalde about 20 miles south of Berlin. This march took several days. The first day we started at dusk and walked all night without stopping. The following day what had been a solid mass of prisoners on the road was broken up by horse mounted Feld Gendarmerie into groups of 200 or 300 and marched all day. That night was spent in a large barn loaded with unthreshed wheat. Successive nights were spent in a loft over a farm machine shop, in a dairy barn loft, an abandoned building in a former artillery training area and in a tank factory. The distances covered each day were not excessive and the weather had moderated.

While on this march at some time during the day we

would be formed up into a column of 5 and marched past a wagon at roadside containing our days ration. The end man in each rank would be handed the days ration to be distributed among the 5 people in his rank. The ration could be a can of cheese or a loaf of bread, never both. Water could usually be found at our over-night stops. At our first nights stop I managed to fill a coffee can with wheat kernels. Another day when passing through a small town I acquired an onion at the cost of a cigarette from an elderly German entrepreneur who sat by an open window in his house with his onions lined up on his windowsill. At one of the farms I was given a sugar beet by a French farm worker who was loading them into a wagon. The gourmet item on this journey was probably acquired by the G. I. who climbed down from the hay loft in the dairy barn we stayed in one night and stripped the dairy cows on the floor below (Goodlow).

Marched out early February. Marched 50 km. the first night. Saw an American shot on march by Kraut M.P. (Corbett).

On February 7 we were marched out of camp in advance of the Russians. We were on the road for eight days. Not too bad we slept in barns

mostly. The German civilians were very nice to us. We arrived at Stalag 3A at Luckenwalde S.W. of Potsdam. We slept in huge tents. 400 men to a tent. Eddie Gogolin was my bunkie. We all lost weight (MacDonald).

Joe Klemyk's notes indicated he left Stalag IIIB on January 31 and arrived at Stalag IIIA at Luckenwalde on February 8. John Canavan was one of several whose original trek to Luckenwalde was only a pause in a long, seemingly endless series of marches. He stayed at Stalag IIIA for only about 5 days and then marched again for another 4 days to Stalag 483-C. He continues:

We then went on another road march trying to stay ahead of the advancing Russians. On this march the line was stretched very thin and at one turn in the road four of us melted into the woods. We became part of a refugee column for about four days.

We marched across Germany from one camp to another. Once we started with 1,000 men and ended up with 800. The men died on the way or were bayoneted as they lay in the snow. Some were put on the mule driven cart and probably froze to death. We were all cold and fed about 1 percent above starvation.

Somewhere in Northern Germany, while walking through a

town and nearly frozen and terribly hungry, a little old Polish lady came out of her house with a tub of mush and I was lucky to get a tin of it. She may have saved my life and I still bless her (Baker).

The Executive Officer, 1st Lt. Tom Zakely, spent most of his time in Germany on the move. His train was bombed by the British. From this time on, he was marched back and forth until liberated.

Julian Stricklin was caught in similar circumstances. His kommando was force marched away from advancing Russians near the end of March and continued to march back and forth to the war's end, around May 12.

As John Canavan mentioned earlier, his stop at Stalag IIIA was brief. It appeared that the influx of POW's from eastern camps now put so much pressure on the IIIA that now some of its inhabitants had to "hit the road."

At that time the Germans were moving prisoners away from the Russian front. It seemed that every day or two another group of Americans were marched into camp. All had walked several days or weeks. The camp was becoming extremely crowded. One day the whole barracks was lined up and marched out of camp. This march lasted three days. We walked by day and slept in barns at night. The next Stalag was IIA at Altengrabow. I spent a week or two in a barracks similar to the one at Luckenwalde (Kramer).

David Chambers experience was unique in that it combined the German's desire to move POW's away from the Russians and led to his eventual liberation.

On May 8th, the commandant of Stalag 4B marched us away from the camp toward the West. The Russians bombed and strafed the thousands of refugees; there was no defensive action. After the first or second day we reached the Elbe River. From here it was mostly every man for himself. We boarded a train at Teplice-Schonau on 5/12 and rode to a town where we met an outpost of the 9th armored (maybe 12th). (Chambers).

The Germans then marched us two days and nights. When we came to a town, the townspeople left. Two Russian planes shot at the column of P.O.W.'s one time. They only made one sweep, and I told a man that we should get at one end or the other because the Russians would aim for the middle if they came back, and we would be less likely to be shot; we got to the back of the column. That night the whole column ate a total of eight horses. (The Germans got the livers.) (Cupp).

Several portents of an impending move were in the air. One day, our medics, returning from a walk in the area, said they had run onto a column of USAF officers being

evacuated from Stalag Luft III at Sagan. This was on February first....Later, one of the lazarett guards from Cottbus came back with stories of trainloads of refugees from the east being transported in boxcars and flatcars and open gondolas. He told of the dead being piled up by the railroad tracks in Cottbus.....The town of Forst, some 19 km. east of Cottbus, was close to the front line. We left in open trucks bound south on February 18. After an overnight stop at Ruhland, we were placed aboard a boxcar and continued south. We stopped in the rail yards at Dresden and the guards wouldn't let us go into or near the station for water or the lavatory. They said the city had been hard hit by bombs and they feared a reaction against American uniforms by the citizenry.....On March 4, after short stays at a lazaret in Hohenstein-Ernstthal and Stalag IVF at Hartmannsdorf, we arrived at Stalag IVB (Norman).

That spring, each day brought news of oncoming Allied forces. They couldn't come fast enough! But there were hardships and anxieties still. The Red Cross parcel distribution ground to a halt. No transport, the Germans said. To counter this loss, some white Red Cross vans did get through to Stalag IVB, however, to spread a bit more than optimism. Then there were the rumors that Hitler planned to wreak a final revenge on the POW's by slaughtering them. Plans for our own safety in this event were fashioned in each camp. Finally, for those being held in the eastern regions of Germany, the Russian armies' hospitality toward freed POW's was an unknown.

The Liberation

Spring was definitely here now. The damp, penetrating cold and perpetual rain of late winter had almost disappeared. Light green winter wheat carpeted surrounding farms. Tractors chugged in distant fields, leaving in their wake ripples of freshly turned earth. But this spring, as constant as the calendar, was different. Not only was nature awakening, but the prospects for an end to this prison existence and a return to our "own" were stirring.

Most of the Company A survivors were being held in eastern and central Germany. This meant that liberation would possibly come later and often at the hands of our Russian Allies. This occurred in a variety of ways.

Four of us were sleeping in a barn and were awakened by a German officer brandishing a gun. He turned the gun over to us in order for us to capture him. He then led us to a Stalag XIA, Altengrabow, where a few days later we were picked up by American Army trucks. We were taken to a railroad depot, traveled by train to Hildesheim airport, Germany, fed, deloused, showered, given uniforms and flown by C-47 to the French Coast

and taken by train to camp "Lucky Strike." (Canavan).

We did receive news reports thru the grapevine. The situation for the Germans was deteriorating rapidly. All of the guards had been replaced by the home guard (Old timers). They all knew the war was over. Details left the camp compound and roamed the countryside hunting for food. It was discovered that a huge warehouse outside of camp was loaded with Red Cross food parcels. We could have left the camp at any time. We were advised by our officers not to go. We were behind the German lines which were on the East bank of the Elbe River. The Americans had stopped on the West bank and were waiting for the Russians. A truce was arranged and I was taken out of camp on an American truck.

I left on May 3, 1945 in the second truck of a small convoy. The GI's were from the 84th Infantry Division. The drivers were not allowed to be armed. We found out later that all of the drivers had guns and grenades hidden in the truck cabs. When we were ready to cross the Elbe River, the armed German guard got off the truck. He then proceeded to trade his pistol for a carton of cigarettes. The bridge had been erected by the Americans. On the other side of the river was a convoy that must have stretched for a mile. They were to evacuate all prisoners from the hospital area and the American, French, and

British prisoners from the main camp (Kramer).

Bob Kramer also included a newspaper clipping that stated, "Allied airborne reconnaissance teams were parachuted near a German concentration camp.....
..Six teams were dropped near Altengrabow after an escaped prisoner had reported that it was being used as a center for prisoners from five other camps."

Nearby, at Stalag IIIA, Luckenwalde, a similar story was being played out. John Goodlow earlier reported a small German combat unit preparing for battle just outside the camp.

The following morning they and the prison guard personnel were gone and the Russians were passing by. A noticeable percentage were Asiatics. Our officers moved into the enlisted men's compound and ordered us to stay put and out of the Russians way. After a few days we were moved to quarters at the Adolph Hitler lager. Deluxe but after a few days its sanitary system broke down and we went back, on foot of course, to IIIA. Rations under the Russians remained the same as under the Germans except that there were no Red Cross parcels. On 5/6 or 7 a convoy of G. I. trucks took us to the east bank of the Elbe river opposite Schönebeck on the west bank which we reached by walking across a very damaged railroad bridge. We were bathed, dusted

with D.D.T., issued new uniforms and in a few days trucked to Hildesheim and flown from there to Camp Lucky Strike where I had the pleasure of seeing General Eisenhower (Goodlow).

I was liberated by the Russian army approximately 2 weeks before V-E Day and we stayed at the stalag for the remainder of the war. I don't remember any Company A personnel at Luckenwalde - they continued with the group and I think they would up in Southern Germany, and they may have been liberated by Gen. Patton when he liberated his son-in-law. We were flown out by C47's and spent several days near Le Havre waiting for a boat (Bell).

The Stalag was liberated by the Russians on April 21, 1945, and we were on our own. We foraged the area for food. On May 6th trucks from the 9th Army came in to pick us up. We crossed the Elbe at Magdeburg. We arrived at Hildesheim, Germany on May 7th and we had a physical (MacDonald).

(ED: Mac, as a forager, found a warehouse full of lentils nearby and these were cooked up for the daily ration. To this day, Mac says, he can't look a lentil in the eye!).

Post-liberation relations with the Russians were interesting, to say the least. They were very slow in organizing any sort of repatriation of POW's except for their very own. The Russian POW's were quickly formed up and marched East to a doubtful future. This led to some interesting experiences.

Met the Russians on 5/2/45. Tagged along with Russians till I left on my own to find U. S. Troops. I left Russians without them knowing it and I didn't want to tag along like I was a prisoner and see how they were treating the German civilians (Klemyk).

The Russian Army liberated the camp on April 22, 1945 (without any shooting as the SS had withdrawn during the night) with much fanfare including having a tank smash down the gate into the Russian compound.

Life with the Russians was interesting and unsettling, what with their willingness to shoot first and ask questions later. One day several of us went into town and found a bank open for withdrawals. So we withdrew several hundred thousand post-WW I marks. Due to the lack of supplies, we were sent to the Adolph Hitler Lager, an officers rest camp, south of Luckenwalde. But they couldn't supply us there, either. So we went back to the camp a few days later. Meanwhile, we had liberated a captive cow from a

German farmer and put it out of its miserable existence on this earth. The steaks were surprisingly good, perhaps because they were the first fresh meat that we had had for a long time.

Back at camp we (our clique) decided that enough was enough. The Russians wanted to take us out by way of Odessa and the Black Sea but we did not agree. As far as we knew, the Russians were about to link up with the American forces about 30 miles away. Our patience ran out and we started out (May 4th) on our own to find the American troops (Stockmeier).

Fred Stockmeier's adventures with the Russians are interesting and entertaining. His comments add some credence to the circulated rumor that the Russians were loath to release Allied POW's until they could be assured that all their nationals, POW's and forced laborers, were returned to them. He finally made it to the American forces at Bitterfeld on the River Mulde.

Russian tanks on April 22. We were urged to join the march to Berlin...Wandered around with a guy who spoke Polish. Started walking east. Had various experiences with Russians, both good and bad. Saw an American 6 x 6 going west loaded with GI's. Hopped aboard. Got to Barby on the Elbe May 5, 1945 (Corbett).

Farther to the south, about 20 km. beyond Torgau, site of the Allied-Russian

forces linkup at the Elbe River, lay Stalag IVB, at Mühlberg.

On April 23, 1945, we stood formation, and it was announced that the guards had slipped away during the night. Discipline was maintained and we went about our usual business --- morning reveille, breakfast, exercise, etc. --- until several hours later when a Russian squad on horseback rode into camp.

The American and British men in charge of us were able to maintain the camp discipline and we remained intact as a unit until several days later the Russians marched us to Riesa to a major POW gathering point. In the meantime, while we were still at Stalag 4-B, an American officer and small detachment in a truck had come into the camp to survey the situation. They told us to remain together for the time being. We were still at Riesa when V-E Day occurred, and the Russians celebrated by shooting off everything they had. We were getting restless, and it appeared that the Russians were not taking any steps to get us back to the American lines, so five of us walked away, stole German bicycles, and pedalled for several days back to the American lines and the 69th Division. We were greeted warmly, fed, de-loused, cleaned up, examined, re-clothed, and flown out to Camp Lucky Strike...
..at Le Havre, France (Rawlings).

A few days before (the) war ended, the "krauts" said they would take us to the Elbe River and Americans because the Russians were coming. The "krauts" also said the Americans and Russians were going to fight.

During the first night the German guards disappeared. The next morning Russian troops were all around. The "krauts" had taken our uniforms after capture...gave us other uniforms. Francis Quindlen and I were still together. When we told the Russians we were Americans they would not believe us. They said "Americans big - grand." There were so many prisoners and misplaced people along the road. After several days we arrived in Prague. Czechoslovakia people along the way tried their best to help all; set up "Red Cross" facilities, etc. In Prague we heard we should go to Plzen (Pilsen). We walked and rode on outside of a train to Plzen. There we met Americans at Plzen airport. Day or two later C-47 came in and took us to Camp Lucky Strike (Shore).

The Russians came during daylight, as I recall. They came through the hospital, ward by ward. A colonel, dark-haired, with a wide face and pleasant smile, greeted us all with a handshake. This was on April 23.

The first days after our liberation were much like the others. Several of the French went scrounging in

the surround and one day brought back a pig which they proceeded to dress out in our ward! We had pork chops that evening.

A few days later (after the able bodied marched out to Riesa), trucks were laid on for the "kranken" and we started the ride to Riesa. Parts of the city were damaged and the bridge over the Elbe was gone but much of the city was as it had been. We were trucked to a kaserne now used to house our ilk. It differed from US Army camps in that the barracks were multi-storied and were permanent structures of concrete and stucco. There must have been eight to twelve such buildings along with warehouses and shops and garage buildings as well.

Stories were rife about GI's slipping away to rejoin the US Army. We heard that Army trucks drove to Oschatz and picked up fellows trying to get back to their units. We heard that trucks were coming to Riesa tomorrow, Friday, Sunday, any day (!) to take us back to US lines. And each day, nothing happened except more stories. So, we gathered what intelligence we could muster and decided to leave Riesa and the Russians and get to the Americans if they weren't coming for us. This would be difficult as the main gate was closed and guarded at night and no one received

permission to depart Riesa at any other time. So, one dark night we slipped through a break in the fence trundling a baby buggy filled with our meager possessions and groped our way through the darkness to the road leading west.

We walked past seeming miles of destroyed vehicles beside the road. Wagons, cars, trucks of every description, abandoned, burned, blown apart, lined the way. Shortly after finding the road, we encountered a couple of Russian soldiers who were drunk, friendly, and had just left some women. We "tovaritched" a good deal and then continued on our way.

Once on our way again at daylight, we hitched a ride on a Russian truck and rode all the way to Würzen. The bridge over the Mulde River was blown but there was enough of it still usable so that a footbridge of sorts had been thrown up among the twisted and broken girders. I remember a tall, red-headed GI from the 69th Division who directed us to a gathering point where trucks took us to the airstrip at Halle.

We flew first to Rheims in France and then boarded a hospital train which took us to St. Valery en Caux, between Dieppe and Le Havre, and then to Camp Lucky Strike (Norman).

Those Company A survivors in other camps and in Arbeitskommandos were liberated during the same general time period.

Was force marched from Russian troops to U. S. troops.
Back and forth from end of March to Wars end, May 12.
Got 1 piece of bread every night, slept in barns and
anything Krauts could find & guard. Was in Leipzig
April when President died. Was released to troops
of 69th Div on May 12 somewhere around Halle air
force base. Several Co. A men were still together-
about 20 or 25 (Stricklin).

In one town before the 12th the Russians entered and
we were quite concerned for our safety, but it
turned out OK. We stayed in a Czech house for a
night (another man and I). They begged us to stay
the next morning; they were deathly afraid of the
Russians (Chambers).

Liberated April 17th in Nuremberg. As I recall,
no Company A men were here. I think we were all
separated while I was sick in Limburg. Met my life-
long friend on April 3rd- he was captured on D-Day.
We were de-liced for the 1st time - all hair removed -
Received 1st Red Cross parcel (Caouette).

...the British 2nd Army liberated us and kept us in

their army for two weeks. We wore their uniforms, hobnail shoes and all. We had tea and cookies at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., along with three meals a day. It was great after eating grass soup, turnips, marrow out of bones, raw potatoes, and some kinds of tea (I think made from tree leaves).

We were at 10C near Westertimke where we were liberated. No Company A men that I can remember. All the guards left us the day before liberation. We planned to walk to our own lines, but decided it might be too risky. The next day, 4/28/45, to the best of my recollection, the British Army took over the camp.

Wht a joyous day! We saw white bread for the first time in six months. It brought tears to my eyes when we got that bread. There was a German mortar squad on the hill outside of camp who fired a couple of rounds toward us. I don't think anyone was seriously hurt. What a JOY! (Baker).

We did not know how the war was going until, lo and behold, one time we heard shelling in the distance. Then when the freight yards started to get strafed and bombed, we realized that the Americans were not too far away. The shelling seemed to come closer day by day. The last day we did not go to

work and I remember looking towards the center of town from the living quarters window and all of a sudden, I saw a scout car and tanks move into the city square. You cannot imagine what a joyous sight that was for all of us. Just a short time later, we were released and on our way home (Gomben, at St. Egidien).

On April 13, 1945, the American army was near enough that our German guards handed their guns to us. In Salzwedel, there were 600-700 Jewish girls on the railroad, who had just come in, they were freed, too. From Salzwedel, we were taken to Hannover, Germany, where I was deloused, showered, and got clean clothes for the first time since I was captured, 5 1/2 months earlier. From Hannover, I was flown on a C47 to Le Havre, France. We landed in a bomb hole at the airport and tore off a propeller (Wagoner).

Liberation came slowly for Bill Watson and Thad Samorajski. They were marched hither and yon from early May until overrun by Russians on May 7. At one time, the column of PW's marched intermingled with the German Wehrmacht, and all were strafed by Russian planes as a result. Several PW's were killed in the encounter.

The day of liberation started on a high note - the farmer brought us some apples. We ate them, seeds and all. It was warm and sunny as we descended from

the hay loft and took to the road. It was a steep downhill course covered by huge trees. We passed a sign. It read "Nach Praga - 57 km," if memory serves me correctly. We hadn't gone very far when we heard the sound of engines behind us. We stepped out of the road to make way. It was a convoy of trucks coming down the hill. They had a familiar American look. We held our breath. Our eyes bulged. Was this the moment of liberation? Yes, by God, it was. It was the Russian army roaring past at about 50 miles an hour. Bill leapt into the air with joy. One of the trucks stopped. "Amerikanski?" someone asked. "Da," I answered, "Amerikanski soldati z navoli." Out of the truck flew a huge loaf of Russian bread and a brown tin of canned meat. Our days of famine were over.

We sat by the side of the road and ate as more Russian trucks rolled past. We shoved chunks of bread and meat into our mouths. The first few bites were sheer ecstasy but soon we became violently ill. Our shrunken stomachs were not ready for culinary largess. It would be a long time before we could indulge in normal eating (Samorajski).

We moved on and came to a Russian controlled town. No one could pass through except Americans. We stayed all night in a hotel . Then we traveled

toward the American front. It took a total of eight days and nights from the time when we were first told that the war was over before we ever saw another American. The first Americans that we saw would not stop for us because we looked so bad. The next time we saw a jeep, we got in the road and blocked it so they would have to stop. There was a Lieutenant from an armored outfit in the jeep, and he would not salute us until we proved we were Americans. I showed him my dog tags to prove we were. The Lieutenant could not find any place to put us; so he took us to his outfit and fed us. The, he put us in a french house with a guard, and we stayed there all night. The next day, they put us on a truck and hauled us to a town where they kept P.O.W.'s. We stayed a few days, then they put us on a truck and hauled us to an airstrip in Riggensburg, Germany (Cupp).

Free, relatively clean, decently uniformed, with time on our hands, next steps were to wait out space on ships sailing stateside or to continue the fight for better health in Army medical facilities on the Continent and in Britain.

The Condition

Despite stories of recently liberated POW's scarfing down dozens of doughnuts and then dropping dead, Company A survivors turned to their convalescence and rebuilding with purpose. There was much physical deterioration that needed restoring. John Canavan lost 27 pounds. Hugh MacDonald was down to 110 pounds. Jim Caouette weighed 110 pounds. Julian Stricklin weighed 180 pounds on December 4, 1944 and on May 5, 1945, he weighed in at 91 pounds. Cal Norman lost about 20 pounds from a slim frame. Bill Watson went from 175 to 124 pounds and Mel Baker dropped from 175 to 130 pounds.

We all lost a lot of weight; we could not sit down on a hard surface. My broken arm was never treated; I cannot straighten it today (Chambers).

I first went to a field hospital and then to a series of hospitals. I weighed in at 92 pounds. I do believe that at one time my weight was less than that. The last hospital in Europe was in Paris. From there it was a flight to New York via the Azores and Newfoundland. I spent from late May to December at the Army

Hospital in Cambridge, Ohio or on leave (Kramer).

After that, we could eat anytime we wanted to, but we had to take a big capsule everytime we did. We were there (ED: Camp Lucky Strike) for thirty days because we were not healthy enough to survive a boat trip across the ocean (Cupp).

To what extent the months of severe privation, stress, and physical injury have affected health over the past 46 years is difficult to assess. But this is something all survivors have had to endure.

The Stories

Throughout this experience, there were times, incidents, or thoughts that made more than a fleeting impression on one. Some were sad and gripping, some were lighthearted in spite of everything, and some defy categories. Here are a few that stand out in the material provided.

Some miles on our way (ED: Toward the American lines), we met some GI's coming back; they said that a Russian machine gun had opened up on them. No one was hit. We talked it over and decided to go on. By this time our group had grown in size and probably numbered well over fifty. We formed two lines on either side of the road so that we could hit the ditch, if necessary. Strange as it may seem, we walked right past the machine gun nest with the Russians giving us friendly greetings.

Once we were beyond them, the large group began to break up as the guys went looking for food. Our clique held together. Several miles further we were overtaken by a tractor and wagon with two Russkies on the tractor and two British POW's on the wagon. We

hitched a ride. A few minutes later we came over the crest of a hill and found that we had caught up to the shooting war again. A stubborn tank crew was "doing and dying" for the Fatherland. Our driver tried to stop but somehow the tractor and wagon became separated and we went tearing down the hill for a short distance before crashing into a tree. One of our men tried to jump and caught his leg between the tree and the wagon box. His leg was broken.

The tractor finally got stopped; the two Russkies came back; by sign language we got them to understand that one man had a broken leg. They walked away but quickly came back with a board which they broke in two. Using it they fashioned a splint and bound up the leg as if they did it every day. Then they stopped a truck and with much loud talk made the driver turn around. We were motioned to get aboard. We were taken to a hospital in a nearby town. We told the German people that we wanted them to take good care of our friends until we could return for him in a day or two. I made doubly certain that they accepted us as Americans. The truck driver began to get unpleasant, insisting that we get back on the truck. When we did so he took us back to the scene of the accident, dropping

us off, and left us there. At least the local shooting had stopped by that time.

At one point of our scenic tour, we found a river blocking our path. The Krauts had blown both the road bridge and the rail bridge. Fortunately enough of the rail bridge held together that we were able to climb down the wreckage, work our way across the gap, and climb up on the other side. (Stockmeier).

In a small town outside of Potsdam, we were talking to a Russian guard and, as GI's will do, bragging about our weapons. We said our rifle fired 8 shots without reloading. The Russian, who had an old bolt action rifle, thought a bit, then put his rifle to his shoulder and shot and hit an old German man walking down the street, then said, "Well, mine kills!" (Corbett).

We stopped later on the first day of travel at Ruhland (ED: During an evacuation from oncoming Russians in February). We pulled off the road by a large barn where we were to spend the night.... Some fifty yards away, some concentration camp inmates were building a tank barricade across the main road. They were dressed in the striped pants

and jacket and wore wooden clogs. I recall seeing one SS German guard strike one inmate with his rifle butt and knock him down. The inmate rose and stood at attention and clicked the heels of his clogs together. The guard did lots of shouting. At the same time, some Wehrmacht soldiers involved with our escorts...said the inmates were Czech Jews. And some remarked that the guards weren't such worthy fellows.Later, our own guard did permit one or two of the concentration camp inmates to sneak around the back of the barn to beg for food. We gave them some chunks of bread and cigarettes (Norman).

On my personal file (for the Germans), I listed my occupation as "farmer." I thought I'd get on the farm detail. No such luck. Actually, I worked in a machine shop and that detail I didn't want (Klemyk).

In the northern part of Germany as we POW's were walking through the fields and woods out to next camp, a camp friend (A Yugoslavian) gave me his Stradavarius violin and said, "I'm too weak to carry it, you take it back to America." I carried it for awhile and couldn't handle it myself so I left it at the base of a tree. When I got home, I found out it was well worth \$120,000! Oh well.

I saw many things like Hitler's train, Germany's Political

Prisoners in their striped suits and at one place they would dump them out of the little rail carts right unto the ground. I saw one place where they marched people into a building for a shower and someone said it was a gas chamber (Baker).

We had another interesting day and half of little adventures before we got to the American forces. We spent one night with Russian troops who included an officer who had been the City Commissar of Stalingrad. He spoke a bit of German so we were able to communicate to some extent. He made certain that we were well fed. A large bowl of potato and dumpling soup was placed on the table. Each of us was given a spoon and we ate out of the common bowl. We were concerned about having a safe place to spend the night. He said that we could not stay in the same building but we could have any house we wanted. So we took the one next door. It had been ransacked. On the second floor we found a bed but no springs or mattress. We found enough boards to fit between the rails and called it our bed. Five of us slept on that thing. During the night we were rudely awakened by a machine gun cutting loose right under the window. None of us breathed, let alone moved. But nothing more happened. About ten minutes later we began to breathe again.

The next day we were almost adopted by a group of ex-political prisoners who insisted on giving us little cigars and other goodies. We thought that we were good at liberating things but these political prisoners were masters of the art (Stockmeier).

We traveled by passenger train through Chemnitz to Hartmannsdorf and Stalag IVF. It was on this trip that the train was crowded and when we stopped at stations on the way, German civilians would often attempt to enter our compartments (third class, old fashioned compartments with doors to the outside and to an inside aisle). The guards would not permit anyone to enter. I believe there were two or three guards with rifles and one non-com in charge of us. At one stop a German entered the compartment, was told he could not stay, and, as he left, gave us the "thumbs up" sign! (Norman).

At roll-call one morning, we were told that we would be taken out of camp for showers and a wash of clothes. We eyed each other with the usual suspicion of any news we ever received from the Krauts and lined up for yet another head count in front of the gate. Apparently satisfied with the count, the gate opened and out the camp we went accompanied by a complement of guards. We traveled several miles,

along an isolated road, eventually ending up at the site of a huge castle. I remember hiking up a very steep cobblestone street eventually passing through a massive gate and into a courtyard. The view from the castle was astonishing. On one side a vertical cliff of several thousand feet, at the bottom of which was a fairly large river, the Elbe perhaps.

Beyond the courtyard was a cluster of large buildings, all surrounded by a very high wall with parapets. We were ushered into a small building and to our astonishment, we found hot showers and facilities to wash and steam our clothes. It was luxury on a very grand scale. We had till 4 o'clock before we had to leave.

After we washed and dressed again in our newly laundered clothes, we were left to wander around the courtyard. It was a warm sunny day and I began to feel civilized. I was standing near the gate gazing out toward the countryside when I heard footsteps behind me. I turned and met the eyes of a smartly dressed soldier wearing a pair of highly polished black boots. "I bet you're thinking about escape," he said in nearly perfect English. "Not from this spot," I answered and began to closely examine his uniform. He told me that he was Russian Guards Officer Prisoner-of-War. He further informed me that the castle served as a Prisoner-of-War camp for officers, mostly from the Polish army. I told him I

spoke Polish. He offered to take me to their quarters. I was surprised at what I found.

The room I entered contained about two hundred individuals. The quarters were clean and the officers were dressed in pressed uniforms and appeared in good health. There was a smell of disinfectant in the air. They were very happy to see me, an American and speaking Polish. They were starved for news about the war. They had heard of German successes at the Battle of the Bulge and were in deep despair. They had been prisoners for over 5 years.

They invited me to a table for soup and bread. I remember the soup as being very hot and very good. After lunch we talked for hours. At one point, one of the officers turned towards me and asked in fairly good English what was my name and where I was from. I answered, "Tadeusz Samorajski, and I'm from Shelburne, Massachusetts. "My God," he answered. "I knew your father." He explained that he once lived in Miller's Falls, Massachusetts for several years before returning to Poland and lived next door to my uncle whom we visited on occasion. It was a very unusual coincidence (Samorajski).

The army did nothing to prepare us for being prisoners.

The days and nights in the box car was one of the lowest points in my life, but I must say all of us helped each other. We sang "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve that I will always remember (MacDonald).

We traveled in the direction we had been going in, and ended up in Poland. We were beckoned by some Polish people to come into their apartment. We finally decided to go in, and they let us know that if anyone came to the door, we were to open it, not them. Someone did come and we did as we were told. It was some Russians, but we were Americans, and they did not harm us. We watched them as they went from apartment to apartment, and if there were Polish people in an apartment, the Russians wrecked the place throwing everything, including people. into the streets. During our stay there, we could go anywhere in the town, and the Russians would give us any food we wanted. The Polish people would even cook it for us. However, they would not eat until we left. For two days, the Russians marched dairy cattle out of the town. They took with them everything they could get: bicycles, carts full of belongings, and anything else they could push, pull, or haul (Cupp).

At one village the Russian Major in charge offered us food, which we took. As we got ready to walk on,

a Russian soldier told us to help ourselves to any bicycle that we might find. So we did. Not too far down the road, I had a flat tire. The other fellows went on while I cut off the flat. I caught up with them at the crossroads of the next village. They were with several women and pointing in my direction. Before I got to them, they took off again but didn't go too far before stopping.

Meanwhile, the German women stopped me and asked to be taken along so they would be safe from the Russians. When I said that this couldn't be done, one woman became almost hysterical and grabbed the handlebars. I really had to tear loose from her. Meanwhile, my so-called friends were laughing their heads off (Stockmeier).

A large crowd of people were milling about including a number of Russian soldiers.....
.....Out on the road, some Russian soldiers had captured a German army truck and were giving the German soldiers a really bad time. My eyes finally came to rest on a body lying under a small tree near the barn. He was dressed in a military uniform. I walked over to have a look. It was an American G.I.

I looked at the face. It looked like a recent death. There was no sign of blood from a head wound, just the gaunt face of starvation. A Russian officer walked over and stood by my side. His language was Russian but I understood every word. "It's a pity," he said. "The war ended officially just one hour ago. He nearly made it." (Samorajski).

Life with the Russians in a small village close by the German-Czech border was a bit like Danny Kaye's "Inspector General" with Bill Watson and Thad Samorajski acting as mayor and city council all in one. In late May, in a liberated Opel, they made their way to and through Chemnitz and to the American lines.

Jerry Mulvaney recalls watching the televised Winter Olympics a few years ago when, suddenly, he was caught up by the televised scene. He recognized the canal and streets of a small town in East Germany, St. Egidien, where he had labored on an Arbeitskommando. It seemed that one East German skating star was from that small town and this brief bit was a profile of her that was inserted in the television coverage.

Innumerable tales, personal, poignant, bitter, painful - some never to be recalled or related to others, are a portion of this legacy, this common experience that we shared.

The Others

But the entire company didn't "go down." Reference was made in The Background to those wounded who were retrieved by Battalion elements a few days later. And the numbers "104 EM and 4 Officers" MIA didn't equate to the total Company strength. Where were the others?

Some fellows, for reasons of illness and recuperation, remained back with Battalion in a rest/recuperation area. Russ O'Brien, Al Taber, and George Tyree from the First Platoon were three such. The Company kitchen, supply, and transport were also in the rear.

In a letter to 1st Sgt. John Goodlow after V-E Day, Cpl. Fred Hennig, the Company A clerk, noted that two Company A men were listed as KIA at Wingen; Shue and Forrest. He also wrote that Lt. Henson and eighteen other EM were back with the kitchen and supply. Sgt. Hamelin, with Brett, Deeb, and Orisik, made up some of the fifty three Company A men who were then accounted for.

During this time, some of the wounded were cared for in a forester's home closer to the ridge. Clarence Bunecicky recalled in conversation with several survivors that Lt. Zakely had sent him to help gather the wounded from the road area, to assist them to the forester's house, and to tend

to them there. He recalls being finally "discovered" by Battalion patrols around December 6, 1945.

Bob Norton, one of the wounded, remembered being suspicious of the owner of the building in which he was sheltered, thinking he might let the Germans know they were there. So, all of the wounded who were able to kept a close eye on his comings and goings.

Merlin Dubbelde and a half dozen others were on the extreme right flank of the Company position and were told to guard a crossroad there. The Company moved into Wingen during the night without notifying this group at the crossroad. Later that evening, they experienced a heavy artillery barrage and Sgt. Bob Fraser was seriously wounded. The next morning, Merlin and another GI made their way back to the Company CP and found only a telephone and a telephone wire. Later, a patrol from Company C came investigating and assisted in the evacuation of some of the wounded. Merlin tells of being interrogated intensively by Col. Fooks.

Thad Samorajski recounted a grim vignette drawn from the dark anxiety-filled hours just prior to moving into Wingen.

At about 8 pm the troops began to move forward. The words "moving out" spread down the line. It was pitch black and I barely caught the words from someone on my left. "We are moving out," I whispered to the man on my right. "I ain't going," was his curt response. I whispered the words again, "Moving out." After a brief struggle with

my own feelings, I stumbled out after the group of men moving ahead of me in the dark. I was the last in the line of troops advancing on Wingen. I have often wondered about the fate of those who stayed behind and even my own had I stayed with them. Should I have ordered them to follow?

Frank Corbett related a similar story, "My gunner fell asleep in foxhole, I think."

Speculation about others not identified as wounded, as caring for the wounded, or as ordered to post crossroads and then forgotten suggests fields for further inquiry.

Lee Reese, Fourth Platoon, was one of several who were wounded earlier in November and who were recovering in military hospitals in France and England. Lee rejoined Company A in early February, 1945. Bob Norton rejoined the Division in March of 1945.

The Reflections

One overriding question in the minds of the survivors, re-echoed in their recollections, was, as Ed Rawlings expressed it, "Whose decision was it to enter Wingen after dark is something that has bothered me for a long time. Relatively green troops, through a forested area after a full-day's activity, coming down a mountain in the dark to attack a heavily-fortified enemy encampment does not seem very smart."

Thad Samorajski pondered this and suggested:

It may well be that the captain believed that the Germans had retreated from Wingen. If so - why didn't he send in a patrol to find out? If, on the other hand, he believed that the Germans still occupied Wingen, why didn't he deploy his three rifle platoons on line as skirmishers with the fourth platoon providing covering fire. Specific objectives should also have been assigned for each platoon. Unfortunately, the only directive issued was, "Move out." Accordingly, Company A stumbled out into the dark.

In answer to this question, Hugh MacDonald opined that the decision was

Col. Fooks's. John Goodlow confirmed this by recording that a telephone line had been laid from Battalion during the afternoon. At dusk, Capt. Kierniesky was on the phone and after a couple of "Yes, sir's", he gave the command to move into the village in platoon sequence...

Other questions cropped up as well. Charles Holland, Jr. wrote:

As I write this, I have some other thoughts. Could there have been another door in the cellar which would have allowed us to escape to the upper floors? Were there any soldiers in the cellar of the other building trapped in the same claustrophobic darkness and having but seconds to decide whether to risk more grenades rolled through the window, or to rush the door and charge outside, and then to have another choice offered--to surrender? Was there one or more other occupied houses? Did the Germans have time to handle more houses? I had the later impression that we were captured by a typical rear-guard detail left by the main body of Germans retreating from the town.

After all the questions and memories, however ugly and searing, are dredged up and set into language that hopes to convey emotion and action and to recapture the sense of experiences long past, what then? Several thoughts course through one's being that might be worth sharing.

First, the record, at least in the minds of the participants, has been set

straight. This is not "revisionist" history but an attempt to add true, gritty, personal facts to a story that was incomplete until now.

Second, the story stands as a tribute to the indomitable spirit of a group of men who drew personal strength from a variety of sources to withstand critical deprivation and ever present danger in the face of what James Brady described; "Being killed was the horror you knew or thought you knew; being taken prisoner was the unknown, and that was always worse."¹

Third, this episode again illustrates tactical lessons yet unlearned by the minds of much of the military. The time, the setting, the lack of adequate intelligence, the failure to employ basic defensive concepts, the willingness to seek "comfort" over security - all play in the minds of the survivors. Where were the Battalion and Regimental officers who ordered the move? James Gavin speaks to this with general officers in mind. It could serve as advice to field grade officers as well. "...the general belongs as close to the scene of action as circumstances will allow, the fact is that very few generals behave this way."² With reference to intelligence and knowledge of the arena for battle, Gavin continues, "There can be no question that the place for the general in battle is where he can see the battle and get the odor of it in his nostrils. First of all, troops should not be given missions that are beyond the possibility of their achievement.....The general responsible should....go to the scene of the action and see to it that the attack is being carried out effectively."³ Where was the Battalion commander? Where was the Regimental commander? Could their presence, their first hand knowledge have made a difference?

Fourth, the survivors have left a story that completes a picture and still raises questions of an analogous nature. The account, however grim, is left to family and friends as a reawakened memorial to a dim past. For the survivors, it reconfirms individual memories, fills in blanks when reading the recollections of others, and adds to that store of knowledge of a time and event gone by.

Endnotes: 22 The Reflections

¹ James Brady, The Coldest War: A Memoir of Korea. New York: Orion Books, 1990. p. 225.

² James M. Gavin, On To Berlin: Battles of an Airborne Commander 1943-1946. New York: Viking Press, 1978. p. 252.

APPENDIX I

4230 S. E. Ogden Street

Portland, Oregon 97206

June 15, 1990

Several A Company, 398th Infantry colleagues who were caught up in the December 3, 1944, debacle, are interested in tapping the collective memories of those of us still around to attempt to reconstruct those events and what ensued over the following months. Any formal, official records and histories are sketchy, to say the least. So we would have to rely upon what we can recall, given suggestions and maps of the areas to stir memories.

Brendan Phibbs, in his excellent account of his experiences as a surgeon with the 12th Armored entitled The Other Side of Time, says, "Name any object and you'll see it."¹ We hope our suggestions will facilitate your recall.

But before we invest in time, effort, and postage, we'd like some indication from you of your willingness to devote some time and head-scratching to reconstructing that time period and recording what happened to you. Why do this? We'd like to quote Phibbs again:

We have a Division (12th Armored) Association and a monthly newsletter that keeps us all writing and talking and meeting, but in every issue the

"In Memoriam" list grows longer and with it the knowledge that we'll soon be washed over the edge of history, remote as Gustav Adolphus' prayerful gunners or the legions of Julian the Apostate. What we were and what we did, at our best, and what happened around us, is slipping out of knowledge. That's a pity. Please, young people, listen to us before we leave.²

Would appreciate your response on the enclosed post card.

Sincerely,

Cal "Pinky" Norman

First Platoon

¹Little, Brown & Company, 1987, p. 5.

²The Other Side of Time, Little, Brown & Company, 1987, p. viii-ix.

APPENDIX II

The following survivors contributed their recollections to this account and granted written permission for their words to be quoted in the manuscript:

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Melvin Baker | Robert Kramer |
| Frank Bell | Hugh MacDonald |
| John Canavan | Ed Rawlings |
| Bertrand "Jim" Caouette | Lee Reese |
| David Chambers | Thaddeus Samorajski |
| Frank Corbett | Cliff Shore |
| Peter Gomben | Fred Stockmeier (375 FAB) |
| John Goodlow | Julian Stricklin |
| Joseph Klemyk | Leonard Wagoner |
| Charles Holland, Jr. | William Watson |
| Louis Cupp | |

Also contacted:

| | |
|--------------------|----------------|
| Clarence Bunecicky | William Taylor |
| Merlin Dubbelde | Russell Wolfe |
| Jerry Mulvaney | Bob Norton |
| William Pebley | Elton Vinson |

APPENDIX III

This instrument was printed with space for response after each of the prompting questions.

Dear _____,

Thanks for your willingness to share memories with colleagues of past years.

As you respond to these questions, which, hopefully, will trigger memory, write what you recall. Add, lump together, rearrange any way you want to.

And, if memory is still too painful, just slide on by to other items.

Please identify your platoon_____ and squad_____ and leaders of each. Platoon Leader_____.

Squad Leader_____.

1. Can you describe the December 3, 1944, route along the ridges from Zittersheim, or Lohr, to the edge of Wingen sur Moder? Weather?

Countryside? Action? See Map No. 1.

2. Recall the company's arrival at the nose of the ridge line just to the south of the town. What could you see of the town? What did you do?

Enemy action? Time spans for this?

3. How did the company's movement into Wingen sur Moder unfold as you remember it? Time? Enemy fire? Our wounded? Orders you recall

receiving or hearing? From whom? Routes taken into town? See Maps No. 1 and No. 2.

4. Describe the entry into Wingen sur Moder. Who went where? What orders were heard? Houses entered; describe arrangements. Others you were with? Who did what? Etc.

5. Recall in sequence the events that followed. What did you hear of the

Krauts? Any ideas of the time these events unfolded? Action of the Krauts? Of us? How did you receive the surrender as it developed? Who really surrendered to whom? Where were the lookouts or guards?

6. Describe the Krauts' organization of the company's assembly and departure. What route taken away from the town? Formation? Guards? Incidents that occurred that you still remember vividly? What did you hear from others?

7. Describe the night's march out. With whom? Routes taken? Town names recalled? See Maps No. 1 and 2. Transportation provided? Food/water provided? Rest stops: where? Guards' conduct? Care of the walking wounded? The essence of conversation en route. Weather?

7.5 What happened to the heavy machine gun squad from D Company? What happened to the artillery observer team?

8. First day of your march. Date _____. Routes? Town names recalled. Food/water provided. Krauts' conduct? Your care? Attitudes of any observing citizens? Weather? Etc.

9. Second day - same.

10. Third day - same.

11. Etc. to end of march.

12. Were any companions siphoned off on the way? Who? Where? Why?

13. First stop at a stalag. Which one? Where? With whom? Your physical condition then? Camp layout and living conditions.

14. Describe other camps in the same fashion. Transport/marches along the way. Location? Dates? Significant or unusual events? Other A Company men who were with you?

15. Work Kommandos? Where? What types of work? How many PW's involved? Work and living conditions? Treatment by civilians? Dates. Your health

at this time.

16. Observed activity of the German military in the neighborhood.

17. Can you recall any U. S. or British Air Force action nearby? Targets? When?

18. Evacuation from approaching Russian or Allied forces? When? To where? How transported? Conditions along the way.

19. The circumstances surrounding your liberation. When? Where? By what forces, units? Company A men still around with you - who? Repatriation how? To where? Your health at this point? Weight loss?

20. Significant or unusual events during this period (capture to liberation) that still live in your memory?

21. Anything else to enrich this story?

22. As you recall, whose decision was it to enter Wingen sur Moder after dark?

23. Where were the balance of Company A personnel who were not captured?

24. Why did some remain in the rear at a rest area?

25. Remember these questions are only designed to aid your recall. Add pages, organize your own account, share whatever your memory provides. If you've already written out some of this personal history that you'd be willing to share, please send a copy along. Please return your story in the enclosed envelope. Someday the compiled results will be shared.

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