

## Les Schrenk WWII Story (Combined stories written and provided courtesy of Les Schrenk)

Here are some of the memories I have of my childhood while growing up on a farm near Long Prairie, Minnesota.

As early as I can remember, my brother, Jerome, and I spent most of our time doing chores of various types around the farm. During our spare time in the summer we tried desperately hard to earn money by trapping gophers for the neighbors as they would pay us one cent for each gopher that we caught. We had trapped so many gophers that soon there were hardly any left to trap, but we would make the 5 to 10 mile walk each day checking our traps. We also helped our parents and the neighbors with the work in the fields and with threshing, etc.

Another of our projects was cutting cordwood. We were however very disappointed when we found out that the people uptown who were buying cordwood would only buy two cords of wood from each farmer because so many farmers were trying to sell wood. This of course was during the depression times.

One year we saw an ad in the newspaper stating that they would buy hawk and owl skins for 50 cents each, if they were properly skinned and suitable for taxidermy work. My brother and I started gathering hawk and owl skins and had 50 ready to sell only to learn that the person doing the advertising had gone out of business. We never did find another buyer.

There was a person in Long Prairie that was buying squirrel skins. It was late in the season when we learned about this and only managed to sell a few squirrel skins that season. The next season we again started to save squirrel hides and must have had between 200 and 300 squirrel hides when we learned that this fellow too had gone out of business and we were not able to find another buyer. However, this was not a total loss as our whole family liked to eat squirrel meat, and to this day it still is my favorite wild game.

We had much more success trapping weasel, skunk, mink, fox and raccoon. This we did in the winter and would often times break through the ice when checking our trap lines. We did make much more money trapping muskrats and mink. However, some years the season did not open for muskrats and we would then have to earn our money in other ways. Usually that meant we would hunt for rabbits. We found person that would pay 10 cents per rabbit. Rabbits were very hard to hunt once the snow got really deep. My father had a homemade pair of snowshoes that we would use. The snowshoes helped a lot, but it is very tiring walking long distances with them.

I had a happy childhood and exceptionally nice parents. Our parents always encouraged us and would help us in any way they could. They were very strict, but also very fair and they did believe in spankings. I remember getting quite a few spankings and I am sure I deserved every one that I received. When I was about to receive a spanking my mother would say "this will hurt me more than you" and I would of course try to convince her not to give me the spanking. Guess I wasn't very convincing.

My brother, Jerome, who is two years older than I convinced my parents that he be allowed to buy a rifle. Of course, as soon as he had a rifle, I wanted one too. I must have been about eight years old at the time. Our parents finally consented, but made it very clear that if we ever in any way misused our guns or shot anything that we were not supposed to our guns would be immediately taken away from us. We knew they meant it. One day my brother and (I) were sighting in our guns by shooting at a knot hole in an old abandoned corn crib. The building was not being used and we thought it was completely empty. We shot at the knot hole a number of times and then decided to go inside the corn crib to check our aim. We were very surprised to find a new garden rake leaning against the wall on the opposite side directly behind the area that we were shooting at. The rake handle was all splintered and we knew we would be in trouble and the guns would most certainly be taken away from us. In the distance walking towards us was my father. As our father came near he inquired what we were doing. Of course we knew that Dad would take a challenge like that as he always had in the past. We had said nothing about the rake handle behind the knot hole. After Dad shot a number of times he went inside the corn crib to check his aim. Dad was really surprised when he saw the rake handle and us kids sounded surprised too. Dad said don't worry about it, I will buy a new rake handle when I go uptown. Just don't tell Mom. That got us off the hook. We never told Dad what happened until several years later. His only comment was that he was booby trapped, and admitted that we had pulled one over on him.

Our father would always join us kids in playing any game, especially if we gave him a challenge, such as betting he couldn't hit a ball as far as we could, or run as fast as us.

I gained all my mechanical knowledge from helping my father repair machinery, tractors and automobiles. He also was a very good carpenter, did electrical work, cement work and was an excellent blacksmith. These are all things he did on the farm and I helped him with all of these things. He was a very good teacher and I really admire him.

My mother was a very kind person, and excellent cook and very good at telling stories. Children would love to sit around her listening to her stories, which she made up as she went along. Even in the last years of her life she would always have children of all ages at her house listening to her stories. She certainly had a way with children and had a knack of making children, even the unruly ones, behave. They were always there to help her. I remember my mother planting her garden and a 3 year old child wanted to help her. My mother gave the child some seed and told her to put 3 seeds in each hill. The little girl said she didn't know how much 3 was. My mother asked if she knew how many 2 were and the little girl said yes. My mother then told her to put 2 seeds in the hill and then put in 1 more - - my mother had help planting her beans. This was very typical of how my mother would react to children. She always had children helping her and she loved every minute of it. My mother always had children around her from pre-school children to children in high school. When she was in the nursing home the children often times would come to visit her. When she died, a number of children asked to be Mass servers at her funeral.

After I graduated from high school I enlisted in the United States Air Force on my 19th birthday. When I was sent overseas during the early part of World War II, I was based in England.



### My Itinerary

Nov. 16, 1942 Enlisted

Nov. 1942 Induction, Ft Snelling, St. Paul

Dec 1942 to March, 1943, Basic training, Kearns, Utah

March, to May, 1943, Mechanical Engineering training, Sheppard Field, Texas

June, July, 1943, Aerial Gunners Training, Tyndal Field, Florida

Aug. to Oct. 1943 Flight Training, Alexandria Air Base, Alexandria, LA

Nov. Dec 1943 Aircraft Crew Training, Hemel Hempstead, UK.

Jan to Feb, 22, 1944 Flew Bombing missions

Feb. 22, 1944 Shot down over Denmark

Feb. 23 to 24, 1944 Train to Dulag Luft, Frankfurt Au Mein, Germany

Feb 25 1944 Interrogation at Dulag Luft

Feb 25 to 28, 1944 Train to Stalag Luft 6, Heydekrug, East Prussia

Feb, 28 To July 15, 1944 Stalag Luft 6

July 15 to 18, 1944 Hold Of The coal Ship Insterburg, In transit, To Stettin, Poland

July 19, 1944 Hitler Youth Train to Grosse - tychow, Poland

July 20, 1944 to Feb. 6 1945 Stalag Luft 4

Feb 6 To May 3, 1945, Death March

The above dates are approximate, to the best of my recollection

The first day of my flight training I met Lt. Lavies. He was selecting his combat crew. He called several of us aside and asked each of us many questions about the B17s performance. I answered all questions correctly while the others did not. The pilot then asked me if I wished to join his crew and I said that I did. It was then that he told me that of his ten men crew there was only one position left, that being the ball turret.



Being that I had never flown in a B-17 or ever having been in a ball turret, I did not know what I was getting into. I found that I was much too large to fit in the turret.



This is a B-17E. Photo taken while training Aug. 1943  
Top Row L to R. (enlisted men)  
Neil BYETS, TOP TURRET  
LESTER SCHRENK, BALL TURRET  
JOHN WALCOTT, RADIO OPERATOR  
WILLIAM HARMON, LEFT WAIST GUN  
Vern SWINDLER, TAIL GUN.  
PETER QUASTELLA, R. WAIST GUN (NOT ON PHOTO)  
FRONT ROW (OFFICERS)  
WILLIAM R. LAVIAS, PILOT  
ELISAH YAGHAN, CO. PILOT  
FRANCIS PEACOCK, NAVIGATOR  
LT. MEAKIN, BOMBARDIER

I would imagine people who never flew combat, sometimes must be wondering what is meant when we use the terminology such as tail gun, nose gun, waist gun, top turret, etc.; these all

refer to gun positions throughout the airplane. There are two types of guns; one is a hand held gun, and this would be a single 50 caliber machine gun that is not power driven and would be swung on a pivot. A waist gun would be of this type, and is so named because it is waist high, with the operator standing upright. The other type of gun would be mounted in a turret and would be power driven, turrets always had two guns mounted side-by-side. They also were 50 caliber guns. The one I'm going to describe today is the ball turret, which is the turret which I used while flying combat. The ball turret was a big round ball 3 feet in diameter and mounted under the aircraft about halfway back. Needless to say it was very crowded inside and the two machine guns that one fired were right alongside one's body, they and the ammunition magazines took up a great portion of the turret. There also was a massive sophisticated, computerized gun sight that also took a good portion of the room. While operating the turret the operator would be in a fetal position. His knees would be bent almost tight against the chest and his elbows would be bent almost to their maximum. If the guns were pointing straight down he would be in more or less, an upright position, but if the guns were pointing at the horizon, he would be in a horizontal position laying on his back, still in a fetal position, While in combat he would be inside the turret for approximately 8 to 10 hours without ever leaving the turret. Conditions inside the turret were not that comfortable because the temperature would be anywhere from 40 below zero to 60 below zero, very crowded, also there would be a very strong wind blowing throughout the turret.

Most ball turret gunners were usually quite small, I was the exception, I weighed 185 pounds at the time, and also I was 5 ft. 11. The only way I could fit into the turret was by not wearing a flak jacket (this was a forerunner of the bulletproof vest) also by not wearing my heavy sheep lined flying jacket, or my heavy suit. To offset the cold, we wore an electrically heated suit, shoes and gloves. The heated suit was a God send, but like I have said before, I was much too large for the ball turret and therefore I could not wear my heavy flying suit. What I did wear was only the electric suit and a pair of coveralls over that. Also worn were electrically heated flight boots and gloves. On my head was just a flight cap (non-electric) which had a pair of ear phones sewn in. Around our neck was a small band with two microphones that picked up our voices. Now when all of these worked, it was just fine. We always joked saying that the heated suits must have been designed by the enemy. Not only were they poorly designed. They were also very unreliable.

The design was poor as I sat on a small steel seat. In the whole seat area there was not a single heating wire. My arms were bent at more than 45 degrees to operate the turret and in the arm portion of the suit there were so many heating wires to the point where I would have large red burns at the bend of my arms. I had to turn the heat to the maximum and would freeze in one portion of my body and literally burn in another.

The suit design was also very poor as it was wired in series. Just like the old time Christmas tree lights. When one bulb burned out, all would go out...the same with the suit. If a glove or a boot would burn out, all heat would go out in the gloves and boots.

It would happen like this:

All of a sudden one would feel a sharp burning sensation and next you would see a portion of your suit on fire. All one could do was to quickly pull that portion of the suit away from your body and put out the fire. From then on you had a painful blistered burn and no more heat. This happened to me on at least 3 missions that I clearly remember.

But also on many missions a glove or a boot would burn out. The gloves and boots burned out more often than the suit itself. After having this problem several times I did find a partial fix for this problem. I had taken an old pair of gloves and cut off part of the plug in wires, then I twisted the wires together and if one of the gloves or boots went out, I would use this plug in as a bypass. Of course the glove or boot that had burned out would stay cold, but much better than not having any heat at all.

After all it would be 50 to 60 degrees below zero and a stiff breeze flowing through the turret. There would also be no room to exercise to keep warm and you were not allowed to exit your gun position. On several missions the suit left me with no heat whatsoever. What saved me from freezing I believe was that in the heat of combat, sometimes I would actually be sweating.

Another bad design was the cord that was used for plugging in the suit. This cord was about 4 feet long and was attached in the waist area of the suit. The plug in was very large and could easily get entangled when bailing out. It should have had a detachable unit near the body. This it did not have and I am certain that this cost many fliers their life as just the difference of a second or two could mean life or death.

In the ball turret there was another problem. The plug in for the suit was under the steel seat. There was no way of even seeing it, it had to be plugged in by feel and then was designed that the whole plug had to be twisted in a lock position. Here again to unplug the suit, one had to feel for the plug-in and give it a twist to unlock it. To try to exit without doing so would have been futile. All this could have easily been avoided if the disconnect had been at the waist area. I can only imagine how many lives were lost with this poor design.

The earphones and the throat mike worked just fine. The throat mike picked up the vibrations on ones throat. This masked out all the engine noises and the voices were always very loud and clear.

Most airmen did not like to fly combat in the ball turret. This was for a very good reason; it was about the absolute worst place to make an escape in case your aircraft was shot down. This was due to a number of reasons; in the first place the turret was outside the aircraft. It was powered by an electric motor, which in turn drove a hydraulic pump which powered the turret. As a result, if either the electrical or hydraulic system were damaged, the turret operator would be trapped inside the turret with no chance of escape, also there are number of gears that drove the Turret which could also become damaged. There are cases in which the ball turret operator could not be released, and if the airplane was damaged so the landing gear could not be lowered, the person inside the turret would be crushed to death, this happened while Andy Rooney was in England reporting a news story. Also to escape from the turret there were any

amount of things necessary before one could leave. First the turret had to be in a neutral position, which meant the guns had to be pointing straight down. This was necessary so as to place the small escape hatch to be inside of the airplane. Next, as described, one had to unplug the heat suit cord which was in a very awkward place under the seat where one could not see it and you had to give it a twisting motion to remove it. This also meant trailing a long cord which could easily become tangled (It had a large plug on the trailing end), and prevent escape when time was critical. After I was captured I tried to break the cord, but found it to be impossible, I had to persuade a German to cut it off with an axe, as it always got in the way. One also had to remove the oxygen hose, your headset cord, and your microphone cord, undo 2 hatch bolts, and unbuckle ones safety belt, the next step was to crawl out of the small safety hatch which was about 24 inches across. The turret was so small that you could not wear a parachute inside the turret. So your next step would be to find your parachute, and in a wild pitching airplane it may not be at all where you had left it. It was a small parachute that fastened to your harness by 2 large clips. Next would be to try to find an escape hatch, leading from the airplane, but remember, all during your escape you would be without oxygen, also in most likelihood the airplane would be pitching and spinning wildly, and most of the time headed almost straight down, most were also on fire. You also hoped that your parachute was not hit by bullets or flak. There also were cases of sabotage, by German agents.

Oxygen masks were very uncomfortable to wear. But without them one would not live very long. They were made of neoprene rubber and covered the nose mouth and chin. They were always very cold and clammy. To keep them operating one would have to physically break the ice that would accumulate inside the mask. If you did not do this, it would slowly starve you of oxygen. Another common problem was that your oxygen hose was plugged in under your seat where you could not see it. I remember one time when I started to feel very groggy, and discovered that my oxygen hose was not connected. Outside of feeling groggy you had no indication if you are breathing oxygen or rarefied air. All crew members had to wear oxygen masks as no portion of the aircraft was pressurized. Also all windows and hatches were removed to allow firing of guns. So it was rather breezy. As I have stated the masks were very uncomfortable, as a result most crew members would remove their masks long before they reached the correct altitude (16000 feet). This of course would starve your body of oxygen and you would really feel it the next day by being extremely tired. This of course was very hard on you if you had to fly on consecutive days. The masks left a ring around your face due to frostbite.

I am sure many of you are wondering what you did in case you had to go to the bathroom; this was solved in many ways by various crewmen. What I had done was to find an old oxygen hose which was about an inch and a half in diameter and run it up and through one of the slots that discharged the spent shell casings, and on my first attempt I was not too successful. It worked just fine, except that I had the turret in the wrong position and I was sprayed by my own urine. It didn't take me to long to find out the correct position of the turret.

The ball turret did not have much protection from bullets, or shrapnel from flak guns, the only protection was a piece of glass about four inches thick and about 12 inches across. This piece

of glass was located between the two guns and was used as part of the sighting mechanism while firing the guns. The only other piece of protection was the steel seat on which one was sitting. The rest of the turret was made up of Plexiglas windows along with thin cast aluminum. None of which would have stopped even the smallest piece of shrapnel.

Due to the small size of the turret, it had a very limited amount of ammunition. We were always told to conserve as much ammunition as we could, and to fire only very short bursts. One danger of firing long bursts was not only to waste ammunition, but also to keep from burning up or melting the gun barrels. This was always a problem with many of the operators, and as a result, they would either run out of ammunition, or have the gun barrels so hot that they would jam. This very thing happened to one of the crewmen in our barracks. He burned up three sets of gun barrels, and as a result of it they grounded him permanently. He was so despondent over letting his crew down that he committed suicide, his name was Shorty Sweat, he was also a ball turret gunner, and I knew him well. I would always fire in very short bursts, and if I was running short on ammunition I would put the switch in an off position and only fire with one gun. When that would run out I would switch to the other gun, I came near to running out of ammunition, but never completely out. They would not allow us to fire tracer bullets because these caused the gun barrels to heat up even much more quickly; although, I think they would have been far more effective

Flight crews were a very close knit group; they never wanted to let fellow crew members down. One always felt more comfortable flying with your fellow crew members. In most cases even if you had a cold and could be excused from flying, you would continue to fly anyway. I can remember doing that myself.

Morale was very high even though losses were very heavy. At this point of the war, your goal was to fly 25 combat missions. This was the early part of the war and Germany still had control of the air and we did not have long-range fighters. So we had to fly to the target without a fighter escort; during the time I was flying I did not know of a single crew that managed to complete the 25 missions, although I'm sure that some did. Some of the men kept track of crew losses, and determined that the average missions flown at that time period was 6.3 missions before you were either killed or captured. I do not claim these to be official figures, but rather statistics figured out by fellow crew members, so I am not sure how accurate they are. And I'm sure that many men will disagree.

All power driven turrets had a sophisticated camming device that prevented hitting your own aircraft while you were firing your guns. This of course did not prevent you from hitting another aircraft in your group. In the heat of battle there were bullets, shrapnel, and pieces of the aircraft, both theirs as well as ours. There were thousands of spent shell casings littering the air. Mishaps were very common. When returning from a mission you could expect your airplane to have any number of holes, these could be less than an inch in diameter to very large gaping holes that you could easily crawl through. If the ground crew had time they would patch the larger holes, but only after repairing the major damage to keep the airplane flying, such as engine damage or control surface damage, etc. It was not uncommon to take off with an

airplane that was full of holes from a previous mission, also, propellers with small dents and nicks.

There was a very good side of the ball turret. You had absolutely the best view of anyone in the whole airplane, you could turn the turret in a 360 degree circle during which time you could have the guns pointing straight down, or you could elevate them to well above horizontal. As a result you could see in any direction, both up and down. Whenever one of your fellow crew man were shot down you could watch his airplane to see how many people would bail out; sometimes you would follow his airplane all of the way to the ground without seeing a single parachute. When you knew the crew well, this really bothered; also one could clearly see the ground, see flashes of light, and puffs of the smoke from anti-aircraft batteries firing at you from the ground. Also, you could see numerous enemy fighter planes taking off from the ground as well as where the bombs exploded and the resulting fires set from the bombs. There never was a dull moment.

Despite all of this, the ball turret was my favorite position; I don't regret flying combat in it at all.

I loved flight training, and soon it was over. A quick trip on the Queen Mary found me in England. I was sent to the 92 Bomb Group, 327th Bomb Squadron. This was November 1, 1943.

All during the war all of England was in a blackout. Every house had to have blackout curtains so that no light would be emitted. If any light were visible, an air raid warden would come and make the residents black out any light. All activities outside also had to be performed in darkness. Cars and busses drove without headlights. All streets were dark. This was so German Bombers could not as easily find their targets. Many nights while I was there German Bombers and our night fighters were overhead. The chatter of machine Guns and ack, ack bursts cut the air. German Bombers had a very different sound than any of our planes.

Darkness plus all of the fog so prevalent during English winters can cause many problems.

On my first night in the nearby City of Northampton, POP 100,000, I went to the American Red Cross and inquired about a local bus to a ballroom dance. Once I reached my destination and entered the ballroom, for some reason I did not stay there, but went to a roller rink just next door. There I had a wonderful time and met several English Girls. At the end of the evening, I inquired as to which bus to return to the Red Cross, only to be told that all busses stopped running an hour before. I was at a loss, as I did not know my way back walking, and there also were no taxis. One of the girls said she was going my way, and she would be glad to walk with me. We walked quite a distance, when she exclaimed, "I must spend a penny, do you have a penny?" This was their way of saying that she wished to go to a restroom. I gave her the one pence coin to be used for the stall, and then waited for some time. When a young girl appeared, I took her arm and we continued walking for a while and then to my amazement I discovered that this was not the same girl that I started out with. I am sure that she too must

have known, but we were just too embarrassed to admit it. She walked me to my destination and I was too embarrassed to even ask for a date.

On our off time most airmen went to town. Many of them drank heavily, but that was not for me. I met a lovely English girl. We did occasionally go to a pub, but that was not the usual. Most of the time we either went to the cinema for a movie, which most likely was made in the USA.



Other times we spent with her family. She lived with her mother and dad along with her Grandma. We all got along well. She was 17 and worked at a local newspaper. We had a very nice time and she wrote to me all during my time spent as a POW. She helped make my life bearable and I owe much to her.

I faithfully wrote to my family twice a week and always assured them everything was just fine. We were not allowed to say anything about our missions. All mail was censored by the military. I was lucky as I received lots of mail from back home. This was a terrific boost in morale. Some men never got any mail.

Most airmen had a good luck charm. Some had certain routines and the like. As for myself, I believed in prayer. We were young and invincible and everyone thought that they would somehow beat the odds that were so heavily stacked against us. Everyone counted the missions they had credit for, which made them feel much closer to going home. I do not remember anyone talking of impending doom. Never did I have the least thoughts of not returning home alive.

I was with the 8th Army Air Force, 92nd Bomber Group, 327th Squadron based near Podington, England. I flew in a B-17 Bomber on combat missions over German targets during the early part of World War II from December 1943 to February 22, 1944.

Our barracks were steel Quonset huts, with cement floors. Each barrack held the enlisted men from four bomber crews for a total of twenty-four men. The only smell in the barracks that I can remember was that of a coal burning stove. The entire area smelled of burning coal and coal gas as the whole of England was heated by coal.

By morning the barracks had a cold feel even though the temperature in England was not that cold. The humidity was very high and it would be bone chilling. I had my bunk arranged just as I wanted it. I had a total of six English issue wool blankets. My pillow was topped off with my heavy sheep fleece lined flying jacket using the fleece portion for my pillow. This gave my bunk the smell of lanolin from the lambs' wool; a very pleasant smell.

Most men never made up their bunks. The floor most times had small coins around a bunk that had been used to play poker to pass the free time. However poker was never played when there was an alert for a mission as everyone retired early.

We watched the bulletin board daily, to see if there was an alert for a bombing mission the next morning. If there was, we went to bed as early as possible, because we knew that at three o'clock in the morning we would have a wake-up call. A man from the orderly room would come and very quietly awaken each airman that would be needed for a mission. At that time we would quickly get dressed in our flying gear. Now, to be awakened at 3 AM and getting dressed in a room where the fire had all but burned out did not appeal to me in the least. We dressed in almost silence and quickly made our way to the latrine to clean up. We then headed for the mess hall, which was about a three-quarter mile walk from the barracks. We each had to bring along our own knife, fork and spoon as the mess hall did not furnish them. The greeting we got when we entered the mess hall was of strong coffee and the smell of frying bacon. There was not much conversation during breakfast and most airmen would sit with their crew members. A special breakfast was always served before every mission. That was one time that we would get fresh eggs, other times we would get dehydrated eggs which didn't taste very good and always had a slightly slimy texture. We ate a very satisfying meal, because we knew that our next meal was a long way off, like 14 hours or more later.

After breakfast, we went to the enlisted men's briefing room. Security was very tight and the most time spent as briefing was spent being thoroughly checked at the door for security. We had to make positive identification of our crew before we were allowed to enter. Only after that would the briefing begin. Everyone was very quiet waiting to see where the mission would be. The briefing officer would unveil the map and a red ribbon would show the route to and from the target. The route to the target would never be in a straight line, but rather zig zagging back and forth. This was to throw the enemy off guard as to what the actual target would be. If we knew that the target was going to be a difficult one, there would be a very loud groan from the crews. Even before we started our missions one had a pretty good idea of how well the Germans would defend their city. The briefing officer would tell us what opposition we were expected to encounter, but that was all guesswork. They would always minimize the opposition. They would also tell us that we were expendable, that it was more important for us to hit the target, than to get back alive and they thoroughly meant that!! As you can see, they did not value life very much. I flew my first mission late December 1943 to bomb a Chemical plant at Ludwigshafen Germany. The 8th Air force lost 44 heavy bombers that day. Bad targets did have much intimidation, but we were young and invincible and never figured that the odds were not in our favor. As soon as briefing was finished, there were chaplains to give us our blessings. I think they did a great job and gave much confidence. I always spent time with them.

Another thing that mattered was the aircraft we would be flying. We knew which planes were fast and which were not. Some just always had some problem and some did not handle well. We all had our favorite planes. My favorite plane was Pot O Gold, the one we were shot down in. No one wanted to fly in a plane that was marginal.

After briefing, was a Jeep ride to the supply shop. Here they would issue each of us a parachute, an electrically heated suit, shoes and gloves. They would also give each of us an escape pouch, which contained French francs, a map, a compass, a candy bar, and a pack of gum. The money was for bribery, the candy was for food to nourish us if we were shot down. They always gave us French francs, because they said if they gave us German money then we could be accused of being a spy and shot. We were forbidden to carry any weapons, such as a pistol or knife, and we would be subject to court martial if we did.

Next, a Jeep ride to the gun shop. Here we would tell the operator what plane we were flying, and what position. Everyone had to then assemble guns in their position on the plane, then load the ammunition and make sure all was in working order. This was done in total darkness. Being a ball turret operator I had two guns to install and arm. This was always a very tricky maneuver. One could not get inside the turret while the airplane was on the ground, so part of the installation had to be done from the inside of the plane, and part from the outside.

After this was accomplished, we would sit and wait until we got word if we were actually going on the mission or if it would be scrubbed. At this point I could only hope that the mission would be scrubbed due to bad weather and that I could gain access to my bunk. If that happened I would return and sleep until 11 A.M. or so in time to get noon chow. I loved flying, but never wished to fly combat missions and was always glad when a mission was scrubbed.

All planes on the ground had very specific smells. One odor was the faint odor of fuel and another was of hydraulic fluid. We burned 100-octane fuel, which had a smell all of its own. If the control surfaces had been damaged and recently repaired, there would be a strong acetone odor. Acetone was a primary ingredient in repairing the fabric on the control surfaces. As soon as we were in the air those smells would subside as the windows were removed from the plane and there was a very strong breeze.

This was wintertime and most of the time the weather was very unfavorable. If they shot a green flare into the air, we knew we were on our way. If there was a red flare, we knew the mission was scrubbed, and we then would reverse the whole procedure taking the guns back to the gun shop, and returning all the supplies and head back to the barracks.

If there was a green flare, the pilot would start the engines, and taxi out to the runway. The sounds of starting a radial engine are like none other. They have a sound all of their own, and to this day I just love to hear them. Radial engines have a starter system that does not have a direct electrical connection, but consists of a small 4½ pound rapidly spinning flywheel that builds up inertia to the point of being capable of turning over the engine for some time. However, if during this time the engine does not start, then all must be shut down, and the procedure repeated all over.

Radial engines are very temperamental and usually do not start that easily. They make a slow grinding revolution that has a distinct whirr. During start times they backfire, cough, spit and at times even catch on fire. There always is a crewmember standing by with a fire extinguisher, just in case of fire. Many times the engine will fire for some time on just 1 or 2 cylinders before it manages to erupt into a powerful roar on all 9 cylinders. Each engine is started one at a time, and with 4 engines, this may take some time. Engine sounds change as the pilot puts each engine through various tests and changes the pitch on each propeller to see how well the engines adjust. When all engines are running one can just feel the power and it is a sight to behold. The sound of a four-engine piston powered bomber is like music to me. Combine that with a group of bombers flying in close formation is yet another thrill. The vibration and reverberation has a pleasant sound all its own. But alas, I fear that this sound has been lost to History, as there are not enough B-17s left to fly in a formation.

The pilot puts the engine through all sorts of tests to make certain all the engines are operating at their maximum. As the pilot changes the pitch of the propellers, the sound of the engines changes. I still love to hear these sounds and can remember them very clearly. Another thing that was nice to see was when all four engines are running and the pilot trims the propellers

(having all four engines rotate at the same r.p.m.). This gives the illusion of the propellers standing still at one point, but blurred with the propellers rotating. This is the same as a stage coach wheels when shown in a movie rotating backward when the stage coach is moving forward, except this was done with all four engines. Every pilot adjusted the four throttles so that each engine was operating at exactly the same r.p.m. This was done without exception.

During WW II bombers were routinely overloaded by two to four tons overweight. As a result many crashed on takeoff at the end of the runway and most times all of the crew were killed. Pilots were very careful to make sure the engines and propellers were operating properly for the takeoff. We always sweat out takeoff and were always thankful when we were airborne and gaining in altitude. Because of overloading with bombs we were shorted on fuel and often times on returning to our base in England some planes would go down in the English Channel for lack of enough fuel to return to base.

### **My Combat Missions**

Date	City	Target	Crews Lost
Dec 30, 1943	Ludwigshafen, Ger	I G Farben chemical Plant	44
Jan. 11 1944	Oschersleben, Ger	Aviation Plants	76
Jan. 29. 1944	Frankfurt Am Mein	Industrial Center	50
Jan 30, 1944	Brunswick Ger.	Aviation Plant	35
Feb. 4, 1944	Frankfurt Am Mein	Marshalling Yards	31
Feb. 5, 1944	Château dun FR.	Air base	13
Feb. 6, 1944	Nancy FR.	Air Base	14
Feb. 20, 1944	Leipzig, Ger.	Me 109, aircraft plants	29
Feb. 21, 1944	Hops ten, Ger.	Air Base	23
Feb. 22, 1944	Aalborg Denmark	Air Base	76

On the first mission we were to participate in, even after we were airborne, our plane could not keep up with the rest of the formation and we were forced to abort. This made us feel as if we had let our buddies down as this meant that there were fewer gunners to protect the formation. Unless a mission was completed, it was not counted as a mission.

There would be any number of airplanes nose to tail waiting to take off - the usual number being 21. At the time of takeoff, it still would be very early morning and totally dark. It was very hard to find the airplanes that we were supposed to form a formation with. To accomplish this each bomber group had their own marker flares. Our colors were green yellow green. We were flying completely without lights, and it was very hard to find the planes from your group. There were so many bomber groups in such a small area of Great Britain that there would be airplanes all over the sky and without the flares one would never know which plane to follow. Sometimes it would take over an hour just to form our formation. Even at this point, the mission could still be scrubbed. We flew in very tight formations, and sometimes when we were bucking a heavy wind or crosswind we would be jockeying all over the sky and collisions were not uncommon.

Once airborne, we would test fire our guns to make sure that they would fire correctly. It was so cold at the altitude we were flying at that it was necessary to have electric heaters on our guns to keep them from freezing.

All of the windows of the plane, from the bomb bay back to the tail, were removed to give free range for firing the machine guns. Needless to say there was a very strong wind blowing throughout the airplane at all times. The temperature was anywhere from -40 to -50 degrees, the same temperature inside as outside. At that altitude we had to wear oxygen masks, and as was explained earlier, these were very uncomfortable. Most crewmen had frostbite around the edge of the oxygen mask. Because of the humidity from breathing, the oxygen masks had a tendency to freeze and thereby cutting off the oxygen, so if one didn't check his oxygen mask periodically one could die from lack of oxygen.

Reiterating what was previously stated, a mission could last anywhere from 12 to 14 hours, and during this time we were not allowed to leave our post, because we could be attacked by enemy airplanes at any time. All during this time we had nothing to eat or drink. The electrical heated suits were very unreliable. On most missions some part or the whole heat suit would burn up, giving us big blisters, and then on the rest of the mission one had no heat whatsoever. Also in the ball turret one was so crowded that exercise was impossible. I was much too tall for this position, being 5-11, and weighed in at 185 pounds. With this height and weight I could not wear my heavy flying jacket or heavy flight pants. I also could neither wear a flak suit nor a steel helmet. When the heat suit malfunctioned, and this happened to me on 3 missions, I really had to brave the cold.

We were never given any more fuel than the minimum that was absolutely necessary for the mission. Rather than give us more fuel they preferred to load an extra bomb. With this, many airplanes went down in the English Channel out of fuel on their return to home base. This always sounded foolhardy to me. Many times the whole crew would be killed and a plane lost for the sake of carrying an extra bomb.

All bombs had a front and rear propeller that was a safety device. They would not explode until the bomb was dropped and the force of the wind would buzz off the propeller device. For safety reasons each of these propellers had a cotter pin so the propellers could not accidentally be removed. After takeoff a crewmember had to enter the bomb bay and physically remove all the pins. This necessitated reaching to the farther-most bomb and had to do it without a safety harness or a parachute, as there was not enough room. He had to hang on the rigging with one hand and remove the pins with the other. If he had fallen it would have been to his death, as the bomb bay doors would not have held his weight. If the mission was called back, the pins all had to be re-inserted before landing. We many times brought back a load of bombs when a mission was recalled.

During my tenure we dropped four types of bombs. The most common types were the 500# variety and also the 500# delayed action bomb, incendiary and fragmentation bombs. The first exploded on contact and would blow a hole about 30 feet across and 20 feet deep. The delayed action would not explode right away, but would explode anytime up to days later. Incendiary bombs would burn so hot that even water could not put out the fire. Fragmentation bombs would go off at ground level.

Bomber crews were a very tight knit group of men. Even if one was not feeling well he would go on a mission anyway. One always felt as if he were letting the rest of his crew down if he failed to go. We never wanted to be placed on another crew, as you trusted your fellow crewmen. At one point they used our bombardier as a fill in on another crew and that plane was shot down. I never saw him again. His name was Lt. Meakin.

When we were attacked there was a strong odor of cordite and the sound of bursting flak and shrapnel hitting the aircraft. There would be huge black bursts of flak. When the flak burst was very close there would be a bright red glow in the center of the puff and the entire airplane would quiver and the plane would be thrown in any direction. Most flak was 88 mm (3½ inch), but the larger ones were 155mm (5inch). I remember very well the first burst of flak that I saw. Flak bursts always came up in multiples of 3. All 3 were at our exact altitude and just a few feet in front of our port wing. Almost as soon as they appeared, the port wing cut the smoke puffs in half. This made me realize how close the bursts of flak were.

When the Germans first started firing, the smoke of the first flak burst was pink, followed by yellow, then black. I believe this was to test for range.

I cannot emphasize the sheer fear and intimidation to see the target area being blasted with so much flak as to make the formation ahead disappear into the black cloud. Then, the sound and fear hit me of hearing the bomb bay doors opening, feeling the plane noticeably slow down due to the excess wind drag from the open bomb bay, seeing numerous planes explode and go down, and then hear the bombardier say "we will have to make another pass as I couldn't get a good fix on the target." To go around to make another pass seemed like an eternity. When the bombs were dropped, the plane lurched skyward with the lessened weight. The bomb bay

doors would close, but we were far from being safe yet.

Another horrifying sound is when a bomber is hit and starts its final death dive. This is a terrible sound, one I do not like to remember. Once you have heard this sound you will never forget it. It is best described as a high pitched scream.

Germany still had superiority of the sky at this stage of the war. Our fighter planes could not escort us all the way to the target as they had to turn back because they couldn't carry enough fuel. We therefore suffered huge losses. It was not unusual to see several bombers go down at one time. I even saw the Germans ram our bombers. I do not know if this was intentional. They would come so close through our formation that one could see the expression on their faces, and strangely, they would wave as they passed by. The Germans always wore full dress German Luftwaffe uniforms, and one could even see the iron crosses some of their pilots wore. I can still see bombers explode. It was eerie to see parts of planes litter the sky. I remember a whole wing that had been blown off, and the engines were still running, it made lazy circles around the formation. When an airplane went down, if we were not busy fighting off enemy planes, I would follow the plane down to the ground, hoping to count as many parachutes as I could, but many times there were none. At times there would be all sorts of debris floating through the formation, propellers, landing gear, wings, and yes, even people being blown out with no parachutes.

In most positions of the plane, one could not wear a chute; there just was not enough room at their specific station of duty. This included all of the enlisted men and some of the officers. Most kept their parachutes as near their station as possible. My chute would not fit in the ball turret, so it was kept on the floor of the airplane near the ball turret. With the violent action of the plane, often times my parachute would not be where I left it.

In our group, the average number of missions flown was six and one third missions before the average crew was shot down. I did not know of a single crew that finished the magic figure of 25 missions. If they would have completed 25 missions, they would have been sent back to the States to help sell war bonds. During the time I was flying, the highest number of missions flown by any crew that I know of was 21, and on their next mission, they received a direct hit and were all killed. That crew was in our barracks, bunked next to me. Their airplane was called "Wilder N Hell" flown by Lt. Wilder, hence its name. They were all good friends of mine. Usually we knew the crew of any airplane that went down, and if we saw no parachutes it was a very sad day. Despite this, morale was always very high. I never had any doubt that I would not survive. Even after I became a POW, I never had a doubt. It was only after the war ended that I found out how many times my life hung in the balance. Several times I was almost shot while in captivity.

I should introduce my crew members. Lt. William Lavies, our Pilot; he was killed in action. Our remaining crew members: Lt. Elijah Vaughan- Co-pilot; Lt. Francis Peacock- Navigator; Lt. Robert Schuma-our fill in Bombardier; Sgt. Neil Byers-Top turret Operator; Sgt. John Walcott- Radio Operator; Sgt. William Harmon-R. Waist Gunner; Sgt. Peter Guastella-L.-Waist Gunner; Sgt. Vern Swindler-Tail Gunner; and myself, Sgt. Lester Schrenk- Ball Turret Operator.

During each mission our pilot would periodically call each crew member, and he would tell us all to check in. That was to make certain that we were not suffocating from lack of oxygen, or from being wounded. Our pilot was the nicest man I have ever known. He always took care of his men, even when we were on the ground, or going up town on a pass. He would always make sure that we were happy and OK. He even offered money to make sure that we had a good time, and was always a father figure. I never heard an angry word or complaint from him to the day he was killed. Even when he knew that we were doomed, he kept on reassuring us that all would be OK.

Flying in the ball turret, I had a perfect view, and never a dull moment. I could see German airplanes taking off on the ground; see the flak batteries firing at us and a split second later see the burst of flak. It made a loud noise, then you could hear the shrapnel hitting the airplane, and it sounded like large hail. If the burst was near it would flip the airplane violently. One burst of flak was so severe that it flipped us over, completely tearing out engine No.2, leaving a hole about 3 feet wide. However, even with the severe damage, this plane did bring us home. I could also see the bombs dropping towards the target and see them hit and explode. They would set off a shock wave, similar to dropping a stone in the water.

The enemy flak at and near the target was severe, and that was also the time one could expect to be attacked by enemy fighters. They would fly right through their own flak trying to knock us down before we could drop our bombs. I saw any number of them being shot down by their own AA fire. Were we scared? You're damn right we were scared. Who wouldn't be?

The Germans tried any number of defenses; one was to drop steel cable in front of our bombers so that we would become entangled. Another was to come from behind and to lob bazooka shells into the formation. It was at this time that they were trying a new jet airplane called the ME 262. The ME 262 had an extremely short range, not enough to reach our formation, so they would load the new plane piggy back on a JU 88 twin engine fighter, to gain altitude to above our formation. They would separate and the ME 262 would make one pass through the formation, firing as he passed. At the time the ME 262 was a very fast airplane, faster than any plane the Allies had. At this point the ME 262 would be out of fuel and would be forced to land. I never thought that this was very effective.

We always breathed a sigh of relief as we passed the coastlines, even more so when we were over England. Many times we were so badly shot up that we could not keep up with the formation. If you lagged behind you were very vulnerable to be attacked by German fighters, as you lacked the support that the other bombers gave you. At this time you had these options: drop down into the clouds and fly blind; if there were no clouds, the next option was to keep up with the formation as long as possible, then slow down and hope to join another group behind you and keep up with that group as long as possible; and the final option was to hit the deck and fly as low as possible, as low as 10 feet was not too uncommon.

At long last we would see our home field. What a relief to be able to take off the oxygen masks, also to get out of the turret and move about. If a crew shot a red flare, that meant they had wounded on board, giving them priority to land first and there would be an ambulance waiting for them. There would also be planes that would be badly damaged and would have to make crash landings, landing on their bellies with their wheels up.

We had 2 flight engineers on board, one was Neil Byers, the other was myself. We never trusted the landing gear to be down and locked, so either of us would hand crank the landing gear down. This was done because the mechanism could be damaged. We also helped the Pilot and Co-Pilot land the aircraft. We would constantly call off the air speed, and be ready to pull the emergency brakes in case of damage to the hydraulic system. In spite of being all shot up, our pilot always made a good landing. He was really a good pilot.

As soon as we landed we were taken to the debriefing room. Each crew would be asked many questions about the mission. They always wanted me to point out exactly where the bombs had hit. They also wanted to know what opposition we encountered, and where; also how many of our airplanes we saw go down, and did we see any parachutes.

Only after the debriefing, could we turn in our gear and then go to the mess hall. The next thing that we had to do was to walk back to the airplane, remove the guns and ammunition, take them back to the gun shop and thoroughly clean and oil the guns. Next we had to completely wipe off all traces of oil. If any oil remained, it would solidify at the low temperatures that we encountered while flying on the next mission. One never knew which airplane you would be flying your next mission. During my tenure we flew in at least 4 or 5 different aircraft due to the fact that some of the planes we returned in would be so badly shot up that they could not be repaired in time for the next mission, while others were so badly damaged that they would be scrapped and used for spare parts. Next, we would walk back to our barracks which was a walk across a very muddy field about 3/4 mile. Only then were we done for the day. This would be quite late in the evening.

As I have stated, there were 4 crews to each barracks. It was always very sad to return to the barracks and discover that one of the crews did not return; or to find that someone was killed or wounded. Two times there was a crew that did not make it back, then one day 2 crews did not return, which meant that half of the barracks were casualties. This happened 2 days before we did not return. The remaining crew was shot down within a week and all of their crew members were killed.

We were quite likely being called to fly again the next day. On the day we were shot down, we had flown 3 consecutive days with the same routine I described above. It was not only the lack of sleep that bothered, the lack of oxygen also is very hard on the system as it has a tendency to make one very tired in itself. The oxygen masks were so very uncomfortable that we always delayed putting them on until absolutely necessary when we felt groggy, and we also removed them much too early. We were always dog tired at the end of every mission, as it was an extremely long and stressful day.

The worst bombing mission I had during this period was on January 11, 1944. This was the bombing mission to Oschersleben, Germany. The target was to bomb a fighter assembly factory of A. O. Flugzeugwerke A/G. The reason this bombing mission was so bad, was that after we were airborne the weather turned unfavorable. The other bombing groups were called back, but our group did not receive the call back message. So, unbeknown to us, our group went on alone to bomb the target.

It was about this time that I felt a burning sensation on my leg. There was a small fire and I grabbed the area and put out the fire. It was a malfunction in my electric suit and from there on I had no more heat, also a painful burn on my leg and the temperature was -40 degrees and still many hours to go.

During this stage of the war, as stated previously, Germany had air superiority and our fighter escort was still short-range and could only accompany us part way. Consequently, the whole German Luftwaffe bore down on us as soon as our escort had to leave. Many of our bombers were shot down. Then, shortly before bombing the target there was a terrific loud explosion, and our entire aircraft was flipped upside-down. The entire rear half of engine No. 2 was blown off, and the propeller would not feather. This produced wild vibrations, to the point where one wondered if the wing would be ripped off. We continued on to bomb the target, and shortly thereafter there was another loud explosion, although this one was not quite as severe. I didn't think too much more about it until we reached the channel, whereupon the pilot called me to come up to the cockpit to give him a hand. Both the pilot and co-pilot were gripping the control column, and struggling to keep the plane from nosediving. They both had sweat running down their forehead, even though the temperature was well below zero. They had been wrestling with the control column ever since the second explosion. The pilot ask me and the other engineer to relieve them, as the force on the control column was very great. The

other engineer and I took over, during which time the pilots had time to recover. We found out later that the second explosion had ripped a hole, about three feet across, and had severed several of the control cables, and that caused some of the metal on the control surfaces to be bent so as to cause the aircraft to be in a diving mode.

We did not make it back to base that night as it was getting dark and fog was closing in. The pilot saw an airfield below, and said we would attempt a landing there. What we didn't know, was that the airfield was under construction. The pilot made a near-perfect landing, even with the damaged control surface, one engine out, and with a whirling, vibrating, unfeathered propeller.

We nearly collided with a pile of stumps that were on the runway, due to the fact that the runway was not completed. But at least we were safe on the ground. When we looked at the damage, there were 2 gaping holes, both were large enough to easily crawl through, also the whole aircraft was riddled with all sizes of holes.

My 10th and last mission, February 22, 1944, was to bomb the airfield at Aalborg Denmark. The 8th Air Force lost 76 bombers on this day.

As soon as we left the target, we headed west and over the North Sea to at least get away from the flak batteries. We were already 20 minutes from the nearest land and were over the English Channel, headed for home. The Germans were still attacking in force and a B-17 just to our right exploded and crashed into the sea. I knew right away that there would be no survivors.

About 2 minutes later there was a loud explosion in our plane and I saw a lot of fire coming out of our number 4 fuel tank. Then I heard the pilot ask the navigator (Peacock) for the nearest land, the navigator said 90 degrees dead East 20 minutes expected before land fall. I knew right then that we were on our way down. The pilot (Lavies) called the bombardier (Schuman) and told him to jettison the bombs. This was done because we had not dropped the bombs at the target area because of solid cloud cover, also it was necessary not to have bombs onboard when the plane would crash. He then said that he would lower the landing gear, a universal sign stating that we were surrendering. Some German pilots respected this, but most did not. We were fortunate on having a German pilot who did respect this and he followed us, but only following to make sure that we would not try an escape to neutral Sweden.

We were trailing a fire of about 30 feet and every few seconds there would be another explosion that would shake the whole plane. The explosions were so severe that they would completely blow out the fire, but then again would erupt into flames. This kept up for the full 20 minutes. I could see that a German JU88 was following well behind us, out of range and also slightly above us. At this time I asked the pilot to leave my turret; permission was granted so I exited the turret, located my parachute and snapped my chest pack parachute to my harness, and sat against a bulkhead waiting for what lie ahead. This saved my life; if I had been in the turret when the wing blew off, I never would have made it.

I do not remember anyone saying a word. Everything seemed routine. There was no panic and we all sat in silence just waiting for land fall. I do not remember being scared, but I must have been!! I do remember praying about the grief and agony that my poor parents would be going through. Never did I think that I would not make it through the ordeal that lay before me....I was very calm and very ready to jump just.

Just as I saw landfall approaching, I called on the intercom stating that I was bailing out and wishing everyone good luck. I did not hear anyone else doing this, nor did I receive an answer. There were 5 of the crewmen in the back of the plane that would jump out of the rear door of the plane: Swindler (tail Gun); Walcott (Radio); Harman ( Left waist gun); Guastella (Right waist gun); and myself (ball turret).

I started towards the rear exit door, but Guastella was ahead of me. He pulled the latch which jettisoned the door, but then when he stepped in the doorway, he froze and did not jump. Without hesitation, I raised my foot and gave him a boot in the rear with him flying out the door. I jumped next, waited a second to clear the plane and pulled the rip cord.....the chute did not deploy. I glanced down and found that the drogue chute had been caught in the covering and quickly pulled it out which deployed the main chute. When the main chute opened I cannot describe the violent sudden snap, but then a smooth decent thereafter. At first there was German gunfire from the ground some distance away. But this suddenly stopped. The JU88 that had been following us made several passes above us. I only saw the 5 parachutes that bailed out of the back of the plane. About this time I heard the very loud explosion where POG crashed --it appeared to be about 5 KM east of where I was. I did not see any lakes below me.

To this day I cannot imagine why the wing did not blow off sooner. If it had been even 10 seconds earlier, I would not be here today. The B-17s had a reputation of being a very tough airplane. This certainly turned out to be true with the one that we were flying. It was named "POT OF GOLD;" it was a B-17 Serial #42-31377 and this airplane most certainly saved my life. Just as we crossed the coast of Denmark there was a final explosion and the right wing blew off. We all managed to bail out successfully, except the pilot was killed when he landed in a lake. Lieutenant William Lavies was one of the best pilots I have ever known and I feel very indebted to him. The Danes tried to rescue him, but were denied by the Germans and he was left to die.

The Germans had been shooting at us from some distance away. As I neared the ground I could see German troops in the distance. I landed with such force that I was nearly stunned; it was in a field which had been plowed the fall before, frozen, but with above freezing temperature. The ground had a slightly muddy surface. The field was very rough and had pockets of muddy water. I was not badly hurt, perhaps strained muscles and numerous bumps, but luckily no broken bones or dislocated joints. I was very sore for a number of days after the fall. Lately I contacted the makers of my parachute and found that with the type parachute that I had the rate of descent would have been 13 miles per hour (22km).

I could see the Germans had formed a semi-circle around me and when I unsnapped my 'chute I deliberately stamped it into the muddy water thinking it would make it harder for the Germans to use it. The time was about 14:30 hours when we were captured. Although combat was very hard, the real trouble began upon being captured. For those who have never been a prisoner-of-war, they have no idea what it may be like.

By this time the Germans were close enough and were calling for me to raise my hands. There were dozens of guns pointing at me and as I did so they grabbed both of my arms asking if I had a pistol. I then made the mistake in answering them in German, as I thought that speaking in German would help me in some way. I told them that I did not have any. They frisked me and found that I did not have a weapon.

There was a small road nearby and a rather small car came by. They marched me to where the car was. There was a big sort of gas bag attached on the rear of the car and a German was putting what looked like wood chips in a compartment below the gas bag, then he sprinkled a white powder over the chips.

Just between the doors of the car, near the roof was an arm that lighted and said 'FORD.' I believe the arm was a turn signal. They placed me in the back seat alongside a German soldier. At this point I did not see any of my crew. We started on our way and shortly came to a hill, not that steep, but the car had very little power and when we were nearly to the top of the hill, the car came to a stop. The German backed back down the hill and came to a stop. He went out and again put on more chips and more powder, waited for some time and again started up the hill. This time we just barely did clear the top of the hill. I believe that we were going in an easterly direction and, after several turns in the road, we arrived at the German Headquarters (the Danish school house). I estimate that we had traveled perhaps 3 KM, but that is a rough guess. I remember clearly the big Swastika flag that flew on the flagpole; the first of many Swastika flags that I would see.

They took me inside and here was several of my crew; however, I do not remember how many or who they were. I do believe that there were 3 crewmembers; but not at all certain. During the next hour they brought in the rest of the crew except the pilot (Lavies) and the navigator (Peacock) so now there were 8 of our crew.

As they brought in a crew member they would take down each person's name rank and serial number. I do not recall that they asked any military questions. Also, they took one of our dog tags, leaving the other one. I remember when they brought in Swindler, the German said, 'Ja, we, too, had a man called Swindler, but last week we took him out and shot him!!!'

When they brought Byers in he told me that when he had landed there was a house nearby. Thinking that maybe the Danish underground would help him, he knocked on the door and was greeted by what appeared - a friend; she motioned for him to come in. She could not speak English, but gave him a cup of coffee. Then he saw her call on the telephone and he thought perhaps she was calling the underground for help. Instead, a few minutes later, he was picked

up by either the Danish police or by a German; I do not remember which one. I do remember that he was very disgusted and wished that he had not gone to that house and he called her a Nazi collaborator.

At about this time a high ranking German officer came; he looked us over at length, but I could not understand enough of what he said as to why he was there. I thought perhaps he was the German pilot who had shot us down and I would have liked to talk with him; but, I knew that I would not be allowed to do so.

About an hour or 2 later a German came to me with what I recognized as items belonging to the pilot. One was his wrist watch; another was his crash bracelet (a personal item many servicemen bought. It was worn around the wrist and had one's name engraved into it); another was his class ring. I looked at the items and said "No sir, I do not know who they belong to." The German then shoved me very angrily out the door to where a wagon was with a covered object. He pulled down the covers exposing the head of the pilot. I quickly touched his face and found it cold to the touch, but was quickly booted away and the German said "maybe that will refresh your memory." At this point I did identify the pilot as I knew he was dead.

This bothered me greatly and when they took me back inside I broke the sad news to the rest of the crew.

We stood there in stunned silence.

About this time I decided that my escape kit would do me no good and, as the Germans still had not found it, I knew that soon they would and I did not wish for them to have it. So, I asked to go to the latrine to relieve myself. I flushed the maps down the drain and started to flush the French Franks that were in the escape kit down the drain. I must have tried flushing too quickly and the toilet plugged up. I then had no other choice but to tear up the remainder of the money and throw the remainder in the toilet bowl and ask the guard to take me back to the rest of the crew.

Very soon I heard loud German voices really giving some German Guard holy hell for not finding the kit and allowing me destroy it. I was led to a German officer and my whole body searched. They found my wallet which contained several British pounds and also some American bank notes. The German officer took all of the money and gave the empty wallet back to me. I demanded a receipt which provoked the officer. He demanded to know why I wanted a receipt. I answered "Because we are going to win the war and I will collect the money at war's end." This really made him mad.....He then said that I was a traitor to the Fatherland and that I would be shot. He told the Guard "Get this swine houndt out of my sight. We will deal with him later." I soon learned to try to hide my German ancestry and when a German would ask how I had learned German I would always say that I had learned it in school, but only took one year of learning as I did not wish them to know that my Grand Parents mostly did speak German. The one year was to explain that I did not know German that well. I never did take German in school.

When we were with the German Luftwaffe in Denmark we were not treated badly, although a German officer told us that Germany had signed the Geneva Convention; however, he said that that did not apply to the air force personnel as we were murderers of women and children and that we would be treated as such.

The lower German enlisted men would not believe that we were American. They said that America was not at war with Germany. When we convinced them that we were indeed American, they said that we must be mercenaries (paid soldieries, paid by the British).

I asked one of the guards if he would cut off the long cord that was attached to my electrically heated suit. It was very annoying to have it always in the way. He agreed but had much difficulty cutting it and finally resorted to an ax to chop it off and I thanked him for doing so. Why the makers of the suit never had a detachable cord must have cost many airmen their lives.

We were held right in the German Barracks and many of the German soldiers were getting ready to go to town. One was telling me that he had a Danish girlfriend that he planned to see that night. Soon evening came. I do not remember having anything to eat. They had us go to bed right alongside other Germans and I did have a restful night. I had been very tired so I slept until dawn when I was awakened. Again, we did not get a breakfast, but a kindly Danish man who must have been working for the Germans gave each of us some very hard brown bread and a slice of sausage for the trip on a German train taking us first to Hamburg and then on to Dulag Luft, which is near Frankfurt Germany. We were now in Germany not knowing what lay before us.

We arrived at Frankfort rail station, and quickly marched to Dulag Luft, just a short distance away.

Dulag Luft was a most horrible place; wounded airmen crying out in pain with every sort of injuries. Many were burned very badly; many asking us for help; but, the Germans marched us right by these men and locked us in a big room. They gave each of us a slice of bread smeared with some artificial jelly. We were all very hungry.

That night I suffered through my first air raid. The English were bombing the I G Farben chemical plant nearby. Some bombs hit Dulag Luft and several POWs were killed. I had dropped bombs on the same target 2 times previously and had no idea that perhaps we were killing our own POWs.

We spent a miserable scary night, but the next day was far worse. It was time for interrogation. Imagine a large room with hundreds of POWs; in the background one could hear screaming in pain, sounds of beatings, loud cursing and every sort of scary, frightening noises. A German Guard would take one Prisoner out at a time; he never came back. Waiting was endless and fear builds up within you. You are frightened that you cannot stand up to the torture you know

is coming.

I can clearly still see the Guard that came to get me. If Hollywood had picked him for the role, he would have fit perfectly. He was a short squatty man. The first thing one noticed was a huge scar on his left cheek which took out his left eye. His right arm was missing. In his left arm he held a German burp machine gun. With the barrel of the gun he would prod you in the direction to go. He ushered me into a room with a German Officer. I immediately drew to attention and gave the Officer a salute; stated my name, rank and serial number. He returned my salute and offered for me to sit. I replied "I wish to remain standing, Sir." He then offered a cigarette. I said "No thank you, Sir." He then went to a file and came back with a report and said "Ya Schrenk, we have been expecting you for some time." Then in my amazement he gave the names of my Parents, their address, that I was raised on a farm and had a brother and a sister. He then said "We know all about you, you appear not too badly wounded; I am sure that you would wish to have your loved ones know that you are OK." I said "Yes, Sir." He said "we do that through the Red Cross. Here, fill out this form," which he handed me. It had a big RED Cross across the top. I filled out the names and addresses of my parents. The rest I left blank, as they all were military questions, such as type of aircraft flown, intended target, briefings on other targets, and all sort of military information. When I handed it back, he slapped me and said, "Dumkoph, don't you think we know what type plane you were flying or what target you dropped bombs on?" He kept asking questions and I would repeat my name, rank and serial number, and that was all I would give. He would hit, kick, slap and tell me that I would be shot; at other times he would threaten me that I would be turned over to the Gestapo.

Another time he said I was a traitor, being of German descent and fighting against Germany. He said I would be treated as a traitor and be shot.

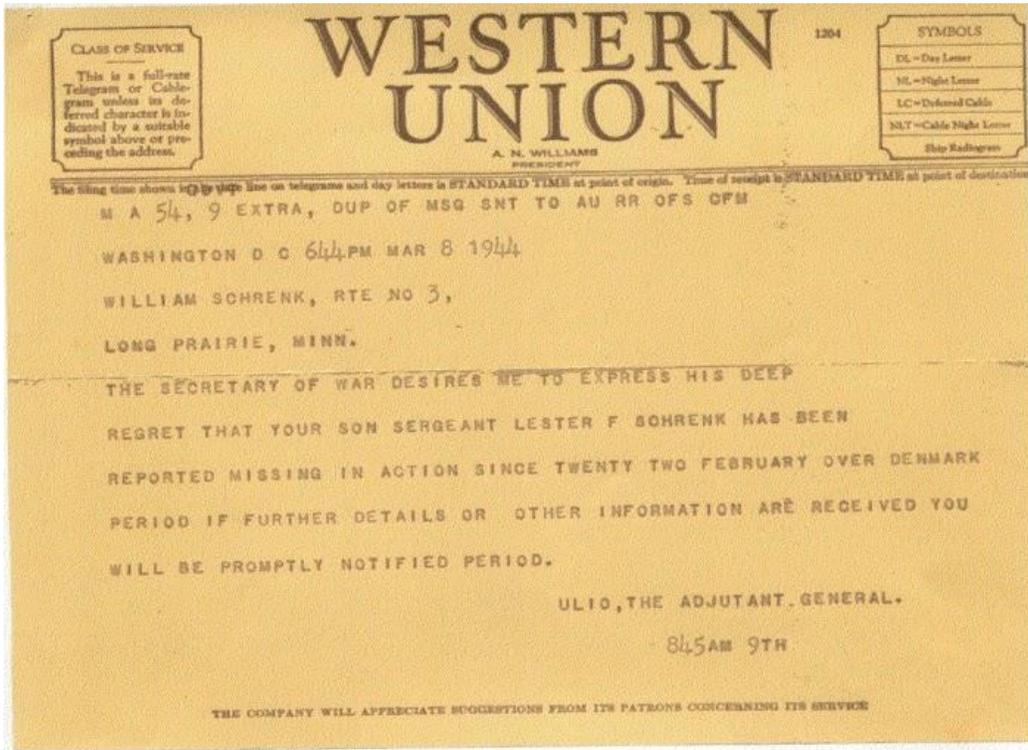
This kept on for about 20 minutes when at last the guard gave a kick to my pants and I flew out of the door. I breathed a big sigh of relief. I had stood up to the Germans and had not given in.

It was February, cold and snow on the ground. The Germans took away our flight boots and made us walk to the train station in our bare feet. They said it was to prevent escape, but it was miserable to say the least along with no food or water. They put us in a very crowded box car, but at least with so many of us in the boxcar, our body heat offered some relief from the cold. We were on this train for 4 or 5 days; I cannot remember. The only food we had was some watery soup made of dried peas. We still had the same clothing we were captured in, minus our boots, and were cold and very hungry.

When we arrived at our destination, it was a very small town in East Prussia, called Heydekrug; but better known to us as Stalag Luft 6.

Here they took away all of our remaining flight gear and gave us new clothing. Some of it was used and some new. It was a mixed bag, some being English, some American, but only one pair of trousers, socks and underwear; only bare essentials; no toothbrush, towels or other things we take for granted.

I then spent nearly 15 months in most inhumane conditions in a German POW camp.



# DECLASSIFIED

Authority: NND 735001

By: NARA NARA Date: 1973

Classification changed  
to RESTRICTED

E. A. BRADONAS, Lt. Col., AC  
by F. M. GIBSON, Capt., AC  
Date: Mar 15 1948

WAR DEPARTMENT  
HEADQUARTERS ARMY AIR FORCES  
WASHINGTON

DECLASSIFIED  
E.O. 12065, Sec. 3-402

NND 735072

By MM:MLL MARS, Date 9-14-79

**IMPORTANT:** This report will be compiled in triplicate by each Army Air Forces organization within 48 hours of the time an aircraft is officially reported missing.

- ORGANIZATION: Location AAF Station 109; Command or Air Force Eighth Air Force Group 92nd Bomb Gp (H); Squadron 327th Bomb Sq.; Detachment \_\_\_\_\_
- SPECIFY: Point of Departure AAF Station 109; Course Northeasterly  
Intended Destination Allberg, Denmark; Type of Mission Objective Bombing
- WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST SIGHTED Smooth, clear, undercast
- GIVE: (a) Date 22 Feb 44; Time 1445; and Location 57°15' N 08°15' E  
of last known whereabouts of missing aircraft.  
(b) Specify whether (  ) Last Sighted; ( ) Last contacted by Radio;  
( ) Forced Down; ( ) Seen to Crash; or ( ) Information not available.
- AIRCRAFT WAS LOST, OR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN LOST, AS A RESULT OF:  
(Check only one) (  ) Enemy Aircraft; ( ) Enemy Anti-Aircraft; ( )  
Other circumstances as follows: \_\_\_\_\_
- AIRCRAFT: Type, Model and Series B-17G; AAF Serial Number 42-31377
- ENGINES: Type, Model and Series R-1820-97; AAF Serial Number (a) SW-002976  
(b) SW-003181; (c) SW-003126; (d) SW-003134
- INSTALLED WEAPONS (Furnish below Make, Type and Serial Number)  
(a) KHW-684256; (b) KHW-684696; (c) COLT-749508; (d) COLT-949119  
(e) KHW-684340; (f) KHW-680552; (g) KHW-685240; (h) KHW-684606  
(i) KHW-683683; (j) KHW-684049; (k) KHW-684271; (l) KHW-684260  
(m) KHW-683243; (n) \_\_\_\_\_; (o) \_\_\_\_\_; (p) \_\_\_\_\_
- THE PERSONS LISTED BELOW WERE REPORTED AS: (a) Battle Casualty X  
(b) Non-Battle Casualty 0
- NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 10; Passengers 0; Total 10  
(Starting with pilot, furnish the following particulars: If more than 10 persons were aboard aircraft, list similar particulars on separate sheet and attach original to this form).

	NAME IN FULL (LAST NAME FIRST)	RANK	SERIAL NUMBER
<u>Co.</u>	Pilot <u>LAVIES, WILLIAM R.</u>	2nd Lt.	0-802123
<u>Co.</u>	Co-Pilot <u>VAUGHAN, ELIJAH C.</u>	2nd Lt.	0-808616
<u>Ev 30</u>	Navigator <u>PEACOCK, FRANCIS B.</u>	2nd Lt.	0-809708
<u>Ev 30</u>	Bombardier <u>SHUMAN, ROBERT S.</u>	2nd Lt.	0-748038
<u>Ev 30</u>	Top Turret Gnr. <u>BYERS, NEIL E.</u>	S/Sgt.	17032368
<u>Ev 30</u>	Ball Turret Gnr. <u>SCHRENK, LESTER F.</u>	Sgt.	17156397
<u>Ev 30</u>	R. Waist Gnr. <u>GUASTELLA, PETER (NMI)</u>	Sgt.	34200402
<u>Ev 30</u>	L. Waist Gnr. <u>HARMAN, WILLIAM E.</u>	Sgt.	35628336
<u>Ev 30</u>	Tail Gnr. <u>SWINDLER, VERN C.</u>	Sgt.	18045834
<u>Ev 30</u>	Radio Opr. & Gnr. <u>WALCOTT, JOHN J.</u>	S/Sgt.	33232019

- IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWN LEDGE OF AIRCRAFT, AND CHECK APPROPRIATE COLUMN TO INDICATE BASIS FOR SAME:

(OVER)



At Stalag Luft6 and later at Stalag Luft 4 we were allowed to write 4 post cards and 2 letters each month; all had to be written on prescribed lines and had to be written in block letters. One had to be very careful as what could be said and all of them had first to be censored by Germans. All incoming mail was censored first by Americans censors and then by German censors. Anything written in numbers was cut out with a razor blade. While others had a big black censor mark, most mail or packages from home never made it. I only receiver one package and it contained cookies. They were all broken, but it really lifted our morale to get anything from home. We always shared everything; we ate every crumb. Even reading other people's letters even love letters; some POWs did not receive even one letter. I was the first one to receive a letter and it was from my girlfriend in England. It had a bright lip imprint, and everyone got to read it. It was so good for morale.

My Mother sent numerous packages. She was allowed to send one every 60 days, which she did; but I only received one package. To this day, I think many Germans had a very good snack with packages from the USA.

One poor guy later received a letter from his wife. She wrote about German POWs held at a camp near her. She went to visit the camp, made friends with some of them and decided to give her husband's golf clubs to them, as she put it, "they were lonely and she wanted to give them something to do." She was sure that some German women would also visit us and treat us well, bake us cookies, perhaps even wash our clothes for us!

At that time we were starving, even eating the residue of cod fish after the oil was extracted, and then letting it spoil before giving it to us. There were no women anywhere near our camp, and even if there were, we were strictly forbidden to talk to them.

The poor guy was so upset with his wife, he was fit to be tied and of course the teasing he received was just as bad. I remember some of the teasing ran like this. "You had better be ready to also give up your fishing rod and deer rifle." "You are only jealous because that Kraut that got your clubs is a better golfer than you." "Just wait till your Wife lends him your car." Another wife wrote saying she was baking all the cookies she could; she was using all her sugar ration on cookies for the German POWs. She sent a pair of bedroom slippers, as she knew he used to enjoy his slippers while reading the morning paper. She inquired as to if the Germans were giving us newspapers written in English.

I had been a prisoner of war for over 6 months at Stalag Luft 6, Heydekrug, East Prussia. Here we were issued clothing, most of it used. Part of mine was American, the other part English, but that clothing was very inadequate, as the weather here was very cold. Food was very minimal. The Germans also had a habit of puncturing canned goods with a bayonet, leaving it to spoil, and then giving it to the prisoners. We were eating rotten fish that would bubble and ooze. Of course we got severe dysentery. We were constantly hungry, also suffering from the cold. We were so hungry that we would eat anything. I remember holding my nose, taking a bite and swallowing very quickly. There was a very large pink stone in the compound. It had a very salty taste. We used to pound and scrape bits off of this stone and eat it along with rotten fish. It was so salty that it would partially mask the taste. Like I said, this was a huge rock; half was gravel, half salt. By the time we left this camp, it had long ago been consumed.

The prison camp was very large; there were both British and American prisoners, but they were kept in separate compounds. There were approximately 50 people to a room. I was in room G-3.

We were made to stand in formation twice a day to be counted; sometimes it would be hours before they let us back into the barracks and it was very cold inside too. We always wore all of our clothing; sometimes in the middle of the night we were forced out by the dreaded SS

troops. They were very arrogant. If you did not have all of your clothing on while sleeping, you were made to go out as you were. We always slept with our shoes on. Beds were most uncomfortable. The mattress was a huge gunny sack, about 4 inches thick, filled with a small amount of wood shavings. The bed had a wooden frame and for supports there were 4 boards, running crosswise; each board was about 6 inches wide - one board for the head, another for the shoulders, hips and feet; very uncomfortable to say the least.

When the SS raided, we were out in the cold, standing in formation for hours, with snow on the ground, temperature could be below zero -- it didn't matter to them. When we were allowed back inside, everything was in shambles, mattresses slit open, and contents in one huge pile. If we had food, it was mixed in with the debris.

There was no sanitation in the rooms -- no running water, only a large bucket, which would be overflowing by morning. At 3 PM we had to place shutters on the windows, and the shutters could not be removed until 8 AM the next morning. No one was allowed to leave the rooms during this time. One day one of the men left about 10 minutes early and he was shot dead.

The latrine was quite a distance from our barracks, and it had only cold water. It is not too pleasant taking a bath in an unheated room with cold water. We were only allowed to bathe 2 times at this camp. It also was almost impossible to wash clothing. We had only one set of clothing, this included under clothing. If you washed any of your clothing, you went without until it dried. With no heat, and bitter cold, you can imagine.

We were supposed to receive Red Cross parcels, one parcel per week, to help with a very inadequate diet. We never did receive one parcel per week and each parcel had to be shared with 3 or 4 men, and many times up to 9 men had to share a single Red Cross parcel. Even with this there were many weeks with no parcel at all.

One of the German rations was bread, but it was no way near to what we think of bread. The only thing in common with the bread we think of is the shape of the loaf, and that it could be sliced.

The first thing was its weight. For an equal sized loaf of our bread, their bread would be about 5 to 6 times heavier. The color was very dark brown. It was made with no yeast, so it was almost solid.

After the war, I saw the list of ingredients. The bread contained about 1/3 sawdust, and the balance was mostly rye flour and also some sort of vegetable, like ground rutabagas. Surprisingly, the taste was not that bad. We looked forward to receiving it. Most rations were a loaf of bread to six men, and issued at approximately once a week when I first was captured. Near the end of the war, the rations dwindled to almost nothing. This was one staple we could

hoard, and we never ate it all at once, but rather saved it for such times that the Germans would withhold rations. Withholding rations happened often, like when someone would do something stupid, such as one day when someone desecrated a photo of Hitler; also, when the Allies would have a big victory, or when we were on the march, or on the ship when we would not have anything else to eat for days. The bread was so firm that it could be sliced as thin as 1/8 inch, and this we did. It is surprising how such a small piece of bread could partially take away the hunger pangs, which we had constantly all the days of our imprisonment. The bread we received almost always had something wrong with it, like an unbaked center; some had big cracks from drying out, but we made it do, and it filled in when we would have suffered more without it.

We arrived at this compound around the first of March. In early July the Germans decided to evacuate the camp because the Russian offensive was on and they were nearing our camp. We were not allowed to go out of our barracks at night. Also, all windows had a solid shutter placed over the window, but we could see flashes of light in the Eastern sky through the cracks in the shutters; also, clearly hear the distant sound of artillery. The Germans now had two choices; let the Russians liberate us, or evacuate the camp.

The United States and Germany had both signed the Geneva Convention document, promising to obey rules governing humane treatment of prisoners of war. However, when we were captured, the Germans informed us that we were not to be governed by this treaty, and again, as they put it, "You are Luft (air) gangsters, killers of women and children. And you will be treated as such."

Now In WW2, bombing was not too accurate. There was always very heavy antiaircraft fire that would explode all around, battering the plane; bursts would violently rock the plane and there was no way the bombardier could accurately aim his bombs. I will admit that a lot of bombs completely missed their target. Many did fall on civilian targets. As a result of this, nearly every family suffered in some way. Most had someone, such as a relative, or friend, killed in bombing raids, or had their houses destroyed, pets killed, or were just scared out of their wits.

Unless you have been subjected to a bombing raid, there is just no explaining just how awful they were. While I was at Dulag Luft awaiting interrogation, there was a British air raid. Six POWs were killed that night. The Germans deliberately placed this camp right next to a big Chemical plant. I had dropped bombs there myself.

To say that we airmen were hated is to put it mildly. Fliers that were unlucky enough to be captured by civilians, were most often clubbed to death, or thrown in the bomb fires alive. My crew was lucky; we were captured by the German Military; although later, we were spit on,

taunted, also had water thrown on us. One POW was at a train station, when someone pushed him into the path of a train. He was killed.

On about July 18, 1944 they marched us out of camp to waiting 40 and 8 boxcars. They started to load us at about 10:30 AM on a hot July day. They jammed us into the box cars; when the car was full, they would jab the men in the door with bayonets forcing more and more men into each car. At this camp there were about 10,000 POWs. Soon the doors were slammed shut and we were almost in total darkness. The only light came from cracks around the door and a few near the roof. The heat soon became unbearable. We were so crowded that we all had to remain standing. We had no food and were very desperate for water. Everyone was suffering from severe dysentery from our poor diet. We had also been starved since our capture and were very weak from lack of food. No food or water was given and we remained at this siding for the rest of the day. The train started moving well after dark.

The next morning we were unloaded at the seaport at Memel, Lithuania. We were then marched to 2 ships; one being the Masuren, the other was named Insterberg. These ships had been used for hauling coal. They loaded about 5,000 of us into each ship. The only way to get down into the hold of the ship was by a long makeshift ladder. I had a very make shift parcel containing my meager belongings. I also had several tin cans hanging by metal strips around my neck. These cans were our eating utensils and drinking cup and without them one would not be able to obtain food or water. As each man neared the ladder, he was forced to throw his pack down into the hold. All this time the Germans would be shouting and cursing, also at times jabbing with a bayonet. Again, we were jammed so tightly in the ship's hold that there was only standing room with not a chance of sitting. The only ventilation was through the very small hatch we had come down through. The air soon became foul. Everything was covered with coal dust; there was about 6 inches of coal dust on the floor. This trip lasted most of 4 days. The only sanitation was a bucket lowered from the deck. With everyone suffering from severe dysentery, and so many men, the bucket did not reach most of the men. They had to relieve themselves where they stood. As soon as the bucket was full, it was raised by a rope and dumped overboard. When it was again lowered, it was full with our drinking water. Yes, the same bucket. Again, most men never did get a drink. I was lucky; I once got a small drink.

Another problem -- all the time I was a POW we never had any toilet paper, or anything that could be used as such. With severe dysentery, this caused many problems and made us live like animals.

We docked at the Port of Stettin, Poland, and were again loaded into box cars. This time I was forced to put on my overcoat, even though it was very hot. Then they also shackled us to another POW in pairs with iron shackles on our arms. Here the German guards were very young Marines. I could speak German and asked some of them how old they were. They were

all 13 and 14 years old. This trip only lasted overnight, but was also very uncomfortable, but a lot better than in the hold of the coal ship.

We reached a small Polish town called Grosse-Ty-Chow. Here we were met by a red-headed German Hauptman (Captain) called Pickett. He started to tell us that this was indeed our lucky day, that today we would receive not one, but two Red Cross parcels. I could hardly believe my ears. We had never received a full Red Cross parcel, but had to share with anywhere from four and even up to nine men from a single parcel. We were still shackled, and had our overcoats on, but sure enough they gave us two parcels each. Just as soon as the last parcel was handed out I heard the Hauptman shout out an order to affix bayonets. Then they unleashed a number of very vicious dogs. The German Officer was shouting orders to bayonet us, also at times to shoot us. He was exciting the Guards calling us murderers of women and children. We started to run as fast as we could, but being shackled and having a parcel under each arm in the heat of the day while wearing an overcoat, and being in a much weakened condition this was not an easy task. We were jabbed with bayonets, bitten by the vicious dogs and all the time being cursed with the German officer barking out orders to shoot us. This German officer Pickett was so infuriated his reddish complexion was almost the same color as his red hair. This treatment kept on for what seemed an eternity and the run lasted for a distance of 3 miles, until we reached the gates of Stalag Luft 4; there, they gathered us in a meadow just outside of the camp. We were completely exhausted, as we had been already starved for six months, and now had been completely without food for the past 5 days and no drinking water (except the small sip of water on the ship). There was a water pump nearby. The Germans taunted us by pumping water, sometimes filling a cup with water and throwing it in our direction just to taunt us. We still had our overcoats on and were still shackled, very hungry and even more desperate for water. Many of the POWs were suffering from dog bites and bayonet wounds. The sun was shining brightly and it was very hot. The Germans kept taunting us with pumping and wasting water. Soon we started to taunt them right back. Someone started to sing GOD BLESS AMERICA and we all joined in with singing. This infuriated the Germans to no end. We were in such miserable condition and yet we had the courage to taunt them right back.

One by one a German would remove our shackles, and then we were taken in what we called the strip search. I don't know how I managed, but during the run I had somehow kept from dropping both my Red Cross Parcels. Nearly everyone had dropped both of theirs; a few had managed to keep one. It was very hard keeping them as the shackles bit into one's wrist and with the thrashing of your partners arm, the flesh was torn and bleeding and very painful.

When it was my turn for the strip search I was confronted with the most brutal guard we had named HAM HANDS. He stood at 6 foot 7, very hunched over, with overly large hands. I had been booted, kicked and slapped by him before so I knew what lay in store for me. He snarled

at me and grabbed both Red Cross parcels. I spoke to him in German and I wouldn't let go, but told him that they were from the Red Cross and therefore were mine!! He took out his Luger (Pistol) and wham, hit me on top of my head, again taking the parcels; again I said they were mine. Again he hit me even harder. I sank to the floor, regained myself and again refused to let him take the parcels. This went on and he hit me with the butt of his pistol 5 times. At last I saw there was no use. My head was a bloody mess, and if I kept on, he would have killed me. So the last time I allowed him to take the parcels. As soon as his back was turned, I picked up my belongings and ran out the other side of the door where the POWs that had already been searched were. I knew Ham Hands would come after me and quickly hid among the rest of the men. I lay on the ground pretending to be asleep, hiding my bloody head under my overcoat. I saw Ham Hands come out, pistol in hand, looking for me. If he had found me, I would have been shot. He looked for me for some time, cursing in German, but finally gave up and returned inside. In dashing out the door I was not strip searched and therefore the poems that we had written at Stalag Luft 6 would have been taken away and destroyed, instead were saved and even survived the Death March, and I have them as souvenirs even to this day.

It was near dark before they allowed us to enter the Compound at Stalag Luft IV, and here we could at last get a drink of water. When we entered the Barracks, there was a very small pile of carrots. When the carrots were doled out, my portion was 2 small carrots the size of my little finger. That was the only food we received after 5 days. I was so hungry that I ate the carrots, leaves and all. We were crowded 24 men to a room, which was meant to house 12. I was at this camp for another 6 months.

The only thing one could do was to take a sponge bath with either a stocking or some other piece of clothing to be used as a wash cloth. Food at this camp was even more inadequate than at the last camp. The rooms were very crowded and were meant to accommodate 12 men. Instead there were twenty-four men to each room. They also had the same rules that you had to barricade yourself into the room each night.

The only form of entertainment was walking around the compound, which I did daily; but, being in a weakened condition, even that was hard to do. There were no provisions for heat, not even one stove in this building, only body heat.

I am going to mention the slave labor.

Most of the slave laborers were Russian, and it was the Russian prisoners that I got to know the best. We were not allowed to talk with them, nor were they with us, so all our contacts were when no German guards were visible. Looking back, I believe that the slaves knew that they were doomed, so they really did not value their lives, but rather tried to give the Germans as many problems as they could. The Germans in turn, hated the Russians, but were kept from

killing them, because if they did, then they would have to do the hard, dirty labor themselves. The Russian that I knew best and became friends with was Ivan. We would speak in German, as he did not know English and I did not know Russian. One day I asked Ivan how old he was as he looked so young. He said 16 and went on to say that at age 14 the Russian Bolsheviks had come to his village, shot his mother and father and they took him forcing him to join the Russian army. He was captured at Stalingrad, and brought here as a slave. One day Ivan brought a small wooden puzzle that he had made and gave it to me. I carried and hid this puzzle from the Germans. If the Germans had found it, they would have taken it. I still have that puzzle today. Every time I look at it, I think of my friend Ivan. I have grave doubts that he survived the war!



There are several incidents showing just how stubborn the Russians were. In one incident, they were atop a roof repairing it. Night was coming; the German Guard blew his whistle, for the Russians to come down. The Russians all run to the other side of the roof and as much as the Germans tried, they would not come down. At long last, the Germans were forced to climb atop of the roof, fixed their bayonets, and chase the Russians off. As soon as they were down, they all scattered and hid. The Germans had to round them up one by one. I often wonder what punishment they received!

In another incident, the Germans were expanding the camp, by adding a huge tent. The Russians were to build bunk beds 4 tiers high. One day when Germans were not looking, I sneaked into the tent. What I found was that the Russian had driven in as many as 20 to 30 nails on the end of a 2x4 and no nails anywhere else on the 2x4. If even the least pressure had been applied to any of the bunks, they would have collapsed.

The above two incidents happened at Stalag Luft 6.

This next was at Stalag Luft 4. . . . .

It was bitter cold. Our latrines were slit trenches, which had to be pumped out almost daily. This was done by Russian slaves. They had a machine that they would do this with. It was mounted on a wagon, and pulled with a team of oxen. It consisted of a large tank, and atop was a huge iron valve which looked a lot like a manhole cover. On the back of the tank was a large hose which extended into the latrine ditch. There was a pump like device mounted alongside the tank. They would pump a gasoline mixture spray into the tank. Then they would light it and there would be a loud explosion. The manhole cover would fly up, and then clamp down and this would cause a vacuum. The sewage would be sucked into the tank. Now, this worked very nice, until one day when the Russians decided to sabotage it. The German Guard was not paying too much attention; the Russians started to pump the gasoline mixture, and did not stop, but just kept pumping for the longest time. When the German Guard realized what was happening, it was too late. The first Russian pumped all the harder, the second Russian lit a match. There was a very loud explosion, and the tank split wide open. We were standing in formation a few feet away and everyone was sprayed with a good dose of sewage. The next day, both of the Russians were back, this time pumping by hand.

Things went relatively well, until January. At this time, one could hear cannon fire in the distance. The Russians were again closing in, and again the Germans decided to evacuate the camp. We took the few belongings that we had, and on February 6, 1945, we set out on foot. The weather was beastly cold, and our clothing was most inadequate. We had been wearing the same set of clothing for over a year. The only footwear that we had was a worn out pair of shoes, and a pair of stockings that was completely worn out. At the most on this March the Germans gave us one meal a day, but there were many days that we received no food at all. In the morning, the Germans would give us a cup of hot water, and for this we would have to stand in line, out in the cold, sometimes up to an hour. The Germans would march us during the day and, if we were very lucky, they would let us sleep in a barn for the night. The only covering we had was one very thin blanket. We would use the buddy system, and sleep real close to each other sharing each other's blanket and body heat. We were always cold. I cannot say what the temperature was as we had no way of knowing, but this was northern Germany, along the Baltic. Later on we found that the winter of 44- 45 was one of the coldest on record.

The food was most inadequate; we were so weak that we could hardly walk. The typical meal we would receive at night would consist of a potato. The German farmers had provisions for boiling potatoes for their pigs. They would scoop potatoes that still had dirt on them into the hog cooker, cook the potatoes, just as they came from the field. When we received the potatoes, they would be very overcooked, and if they came from near the bottom of the cooker, there would be as much dirt mixed in with the potatoes as potato itself. We would be lucky to get the equivalent of one potato. It turned into a watery mess of potatoes, dirt, and water. Another kind of meal was clover, boiled in water so as to make a type of soup. Maggots and insects were commonplace, and we were so hungry that one would consume everything in its entirety.

If we did receive meat it would be from bomb victims, perhaps beef, pork, sheep, horses and even dogs. If the weather had been warm; well,... we ate it anyway,

Looking back, I think my lowest ebb was on a day in either late March or early April. Days became blurred, and we lost sense of time - never seeing a calendar. Anyway on this day, the Germans got us up very early. We stood in line to get a cup of hot water. That would be the only thing we would receive all day. We started on our march. Snow had fallen - there was about 7 to 8 inches on the ground. The road we were on was a secondary road. The road was constructed of field rocks, laid side by side. This type of surface is very hard to walk on. Each time your foot came down, it is forced into another angle and, with the snow, it made you slip all over. When walking on this type road, the muscles in your legs and feet would take a beating and at the end of the day one would be in a great deal of pain. Soon the snow turned to a freezing rain. We had no rain gear of any type, and were soon wet to the skin. The Germans kept us marching until 11 o'clock at night. They had us stop in a clearing and told us to bed down for the night. I remember scraping the snow off of a spot, trying to get to the bare ground where four of my friends and I spent the night. As I mentioned before, we would all huddle together as close as we could sharing each other's blanket. When we awoke the next morning, we found our blankets frozen to the ground; we pried as best we could with our table knives, so as not to tear the blanket.

We were over-joyed when we saw them hand out Red Cross parcels that cold morning. The ration was only one parcel, shared by 9 men, but at last we had a little to eat.

Trying to share food, when there is no way of evenly dividing, was solved in a fair way. First the food was placed in 9 piles. Due to the fact that one shared unit may be a can, and another a jar of jelly, made no difference. The amount could not be divided evenly. The next step was to find sticks, or even pine needles, which were broken into nine pairs, making certain that no two pairs were the same length. Next we placed half a pair of the sticks atop each pile of food. The remaining pairs of sticks were held behind one person's back and each man drew one and

matched it to his allotted food. Each food parcel only weighed 4 pounds. There was not too much to divide. Most parcels came from the USA, but the best ones came from Canada, or New Zealand. The parcels from the US had problems. The US parcels contained margarine, made from animal fat, and the seal on the margarine container was not good and the margarine would be very rancid. Sure, we ate it anyway. The instant coffee would always be all dried up and would be a sticky glob about the size of a nut on the bottom of the bottle. The US Red Cross parcels also contained a bar of soap, which in our situation was of little or no use. The space taken up by the instant coffee and soap could have been better used for high energy food. If only they would have filled the whole carton with K rations, we would have had so much extra food value. Things like crackers are fine, but when one is starved, one needs high energy foods. As for dividing food, I can honestly say, I never heard any one complain about how the food was divided, as it was always done as fairly as possible.

The only article of winter clothing that we had was an overcoat. Perhaps at this time I should list all the clothing that we had:

- 1 pair shoes, worn to having large holes
- 1 pair stockings (so worn out that most of the foot was gone)
- 1 Pair trousers
- 1 Pair boxer shorts
- 1 army shirt
- 1 Royal Air Force cotton jacket
- 1 pair knit gloves
- 1 Army overcoat
- 1 knit army cap
- 1 Army blanket
- string to bind the blanket for carrying
- A set of knife, fork and spoon



- Numerous tin cans for preparing and eating food out of
- A parcel in which to carry items such as food
- I also had contraband note paper
- 1 small puzzle, made by my Russian Friend
- 1 pencil, about 1-1/2 inches long
- 1 American Dog tag
- 1 German POW Dog Tag

We were so infested with lice and fleas, that on any break, one would see any number of POWs remove an item of clothing and proceed to remove lice and lice eggs. As for the fleas, their eggs were so small that they were impossible to see. The lice were found at the base of any hair root and when they were full of blood, they were the size of a pencil eraser. I literally pulled hair out of my privates trying to discourage them. We also had bed bugs, but I only observed a few.

The Germans had a no fraternization ban, and they were not allowed to talk to us unless it was Military. However, I was the interpreter of our group so many times that did not apply to me. One day a very old guard was walking beside me. I asked him his age. He replied that he was 81 years old. He was complaining that he was too old to be expected to be in the army. He was carrying part of a heavy machine gun. I offered to help him carry it. He looked very surprised that I would make such an offer but he declined. I believe this incident may have saved my life.

Stealing food was punishable by death. One could be shot on the spot. One night while the Germans were placing us in an empty barn, I noticed some leek (a type of onion) growing alongside the barn. Later in the evening, I went outside to go to the latrine. Instead I knelt down and started to dig the leek out of the frozen ground. All of a sudden I heard the slam of a rifle bolt right behind my head. I turned to see this 81 year old guard. He demanded to know what I was doing. I replied in German that I was very hungry. I am certain that he recognized me. He replied "yes, me too". He did not shoot me, but gave me a kick in the rear and sent me back into the barn.

As I stated, we were forced to sleep outside in the elements, which posed one type of problem; sleeping in barns had yet another. Barns were always very crowded. It was next to impossible to find a spot to bed down. As soon as they had you indoors, they would close the doors, resulting in pitch black. Another was with dysentery being so bad, there was always someone crawling over people to get out, or back in. Coming back in was another problem, in a large dark area, it was next to impossible to find the place where your bed was. Then too the barns in most cases had animals housed in them prior to your arrival, the floor could be littered with animal droppings.

Dysentery was so bad that one could not remove his clothing in time. We were positively filthy. Most of the time there was not sufficient water even for drinking. You never had a chance to wash, brush your teeth, or to shave. At most, we would remove one piece of clothing and proceed to pick off the lice and lice eggs.

Believe it or not, even at this stage, there was still humor. One of my buddies was complaining about something; I told him that he never had it so good. After all he was getting paid at the rate of \$2.25 a day for not working, also was provided with a roof over his head, and even a Red Cross parcel about once a month. One thing some of us would do was to spread a wild rumor, like some great allied victory, then wait to see how long it would be before we again picked up that rumor, also to see just how much had been added to it.

When we were on the march we must have been some sorry looking group. All of us had tin cans hanging from our necks, always 2, most of the time 3 or 4. That was the only utensils we had for eating or drinking. The handles were made from the narrow strip of tin used to seal the powdered milk that was in the American Red Cross parcels. We also had handmade stoves used for cooking. Some of the men made very elaborate stoves complete with small blowers to flame the wood that we would pick up along the way. Many times the Germans would not allow us to have a fire. Then we would have to eat whatever we had either cold or raw. A good portion of my diet was frozen sugar beets found along the way that had fallen off of wagons on their way to market. Eating frozen sugar beets caused severe dysentery. We knew this would happen, but it was eat or starve. Along with all of the cans hanging about our necks, we were in severe rags -- the same clothes that we had now worn for well over a year, with never a change.

We hardly ever had a chance to wash. The last sponge bath that I had was over 3 months, and that was taken with cold water in an unheated latrine in January, so we were extremely filthy. The same was true for brushing our teeth or shaving. I had never worn a beard or mustache. Now, however, I had an unkempt mob of hair on my face, as did everyone else. Our clothes were all soiled with the constant dysentery, no toilet tissue, and dysentery so bad, that you could not drop your pants quickly enough. I can only imagine how we must have looked or smelled. This, along with the fleas and lice, must have made it hard for the English that liberated us to even come near.

Also, we had all made makeshift bags that carried all of our meagre belongings. I still have many items that I carried all of the way on the march. Our group only had one blanket each. Many of the other groups were lucky enough to have two blankets. It seemed like the Germans hated the POWs from Stalag 6, more than the other groups. The other groups also received many more Red Cross parcels. I think Red Cross parcels went to feed our German Guards. The German rations were very meagre as well. I remember finding a flat piece of tin. I used this for

frying potatoes. I made a potato grater out of the top of a can, punching holes in the can. In this way I could make a form of potato pancakes

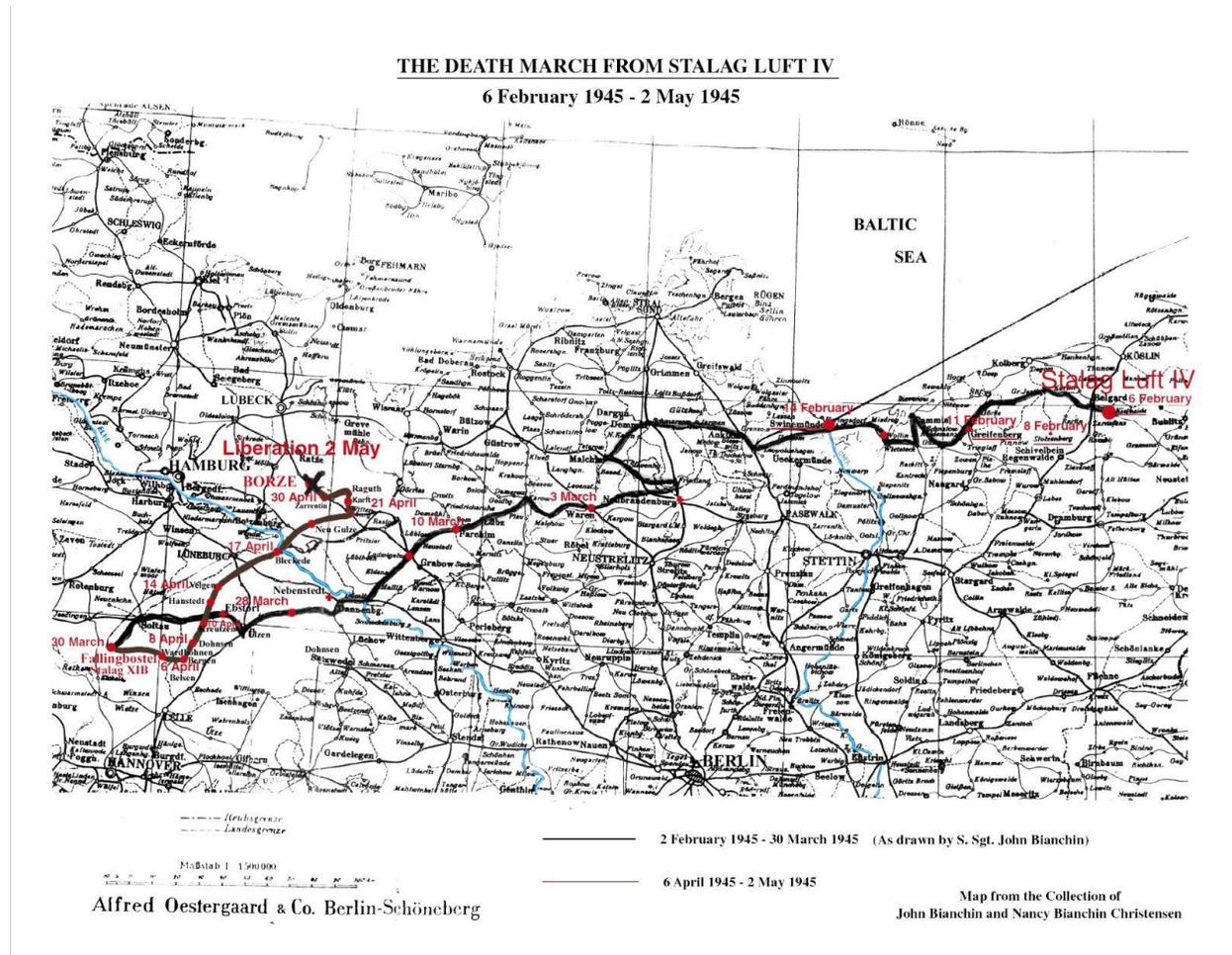
We tried to eat snow, but the Germans prevented this. We drank water from ditches, and men also relieved themselves in these same ditches. Thirst can drive one to extremes. The cold, the hunger, the thirst, the filth, and the dysentery all took their toll. All during the time we were prisoners, we did not have toilet paper. At this point it was really bad and there was nothing we could do for sanitation. We were told to chew on bits of charcoal to alleviate dysentery. This did help, but with the diet we had, dysentery was a never ending problem.

During the time the Germans were marching us, if a prisoner could not keep up with the group, a German guard would drop back, one would hear a rifle shot, and soon the guard would rejoin the formation, this time without the prisoner. This happened very often. Another thing that bothered a great deal is the fact that we were filthy with lice and fleas. Fleas can be miserable; you can feel them crawl all over your body, kicking as they go. However, lice are a real danger as they carry all sorts of diseases.

During the march, my feet, legs and knees gave me more and more problems. Often I would find that I had again suffered from frost bite; also, the muscles in my legs would tighten up and would give me much pain; my knees were always very sore. It was hard to stand up; much more effort was needed to walk. All during the march, I did not dare to remove my shoes, my feet were swollen to the point where I feared that if I did remove my shoes, that I would not be able to get them back on. Also in the bitter cold, there would be no reason to remove one's shoes; we had absolutely nothing to treat our feet with; not even another pair of stockings to put on. The stockings that I did have on were worn to the point of not having the foot portion left. Also, the shoes were English combat shoes, and were constructed with metal cleats across the soles, which was very bad. The metal conducted cold to the inside of the shoes, and the metal made the shoes very unstable on the cobblestone rocks we were forced to march on. The cobblestone rocks were round field stones, resulting in one's foot to slide. At the end of the day, one's ankles would be very sore. The shoes were all worn out, and had big holes worn completely through. The shoes that I was given were already well worn when I received them, and I wore them for another 14 plus months.

During this march we walked, or mostly staggered, for a distance estimated to be between 600 to 800 miles. Some of the prisoners in the earlier marches were more fortunate than my group and were placed in various prison camps along the way.

My group marched the entire length of the march, the longest of any of the groups for a total of 86 days.



We were liberated by the English Eighth Army on May 3, 1945. Experts later estimated the march to be between 600 to 800 miles across northern Poland and Northern Germany, many times back tracking between the Allied and Russian lines so as to avoid capture by the Allied forces. Most of the German guards were from the Eastern Front on leave and had permanent visible wounds. Some of the guards were as young as 12 years and the oldest was 81 years old. The 12-year-old guards belonged to the Hitler Youth, were from all branches of the German military and were very arrogant. However, the most arrogant and cruel were the German SS Troops.

We were always in the extreme cold, never had a chance to remove any clothing; we all suffered from frostbite, blisters, severe dysentery, hunger, lack of water, very inadequate clothing, and badly in need of a bath. We were so weak that we could hardly walk at all.

Everyone suffered from trench foot. In my case it was so bad the trench foot reached to the tops of my shoes but there was nothing we could do. We never had a chance to remove our shoes. Dr. Leslie Caplan (Major Caplan) was with our group for a very short time. He tried to do his best for us but, with the situation as it was, there was not much he could do. He did suggest that we eat a bit of charcoal in an attempt to alleviate the dysentery.

Of the various groups in this march, we were the very last group to be liberated. On May 3, 1945, we were liberated by the English Eighth Army. They treated us very well. At long last we had a chance to bathe, and the English gave us their English uniforms to wear. During the war the English army was rationed and only received the allowed 2 meals a day. The English shared their rations with us and were very generous despite there being such a large number of men in our group. At this time my weight was approximately 100 pounds.

We were with the English Army about a week and a half. The American officials for some reason did not come to take us back. The English told us several times that they had notified the Americans a number of times and that they would pick us up at any time. This never happened. Finally in desperation, the English called for the Royal Air Force to come to evacuate us. They flew us to Brussels, Belgium. The Americans had no provision for us at all, and the next day they took us to Camp Lucky Strike, which was in northern France. Here again, the Americans had absolutely no provision for us. Also, they had no American uniforms to give us so we remained dressed in our English army uniforms. We could not help but notice that all the German prisoners of war in this American camp were wearing American uniforms, but they had none for us. Also, we were sleeping in a tent, with only one blanket. The weather was very cold and we could not use the buddy system to keep warm. We were confined to the immediate area. There was no entertainment and absolutely nothing to do, but we did get very good food. They could not tell us how long it would be before a ship would come to take us back to the United States. This went on for over two weeks. I, for one, was very disappointed.

It was at this time that I learned that the army had again not given me the increase in rank that I was entitled to. This goes back to when I, and others, were in flight training. My M.O.S. (duties as an aerial engineer) called for a rank of Staff Sergeant or higher. I was only a Sergeant. They did not give us the promotions, but promised to give them when we finished training. This never happened. Next, they promised the increase in rank when we were sent overseas. Then the increases in rank were promised when we flew combat. This also never happened. Finally, at long last, my name appeared on the bulletin board stating that I would be promoted to S/Sgt. on February 23, 1944. I was shot down on February 22, 1944, the day before my promotion was to be effective. Now, they tell me my promotion did not go through because I was "detached from my unit." This was not corrected and I feel cheated as I did not receive the increase in rank or the increase in pay I should have had during my flying days and days of my captivity. (Finally,

at the time of my discharge I received the increase in rank effective 2 days before my discharge without back pay.) To this day I feel cheated.

One day an American plane landed and I told the guys back at the tent that I had had it. I was going to see if I could hitch hike a plane ride back to England. I approached the pilot, still in my English uniform, and asked him if he was going back to England. Of course he assumed that I was English, and asked if all my papers were in order for my trip back to England. Of course I told him, "yes sir." I didn't have a paper to my name. He took me to England and I made it back to my old Air Force Base, which was in Podington, England. Much to my dismay I found the base closed. I did, however, see army personnel in the distance. As I approached him, I recognized him. He was now a Major and he said to me, "Don't I know you?" I replied "Yes Sir, you do; you and I used to ride on the same bus when we were going to Northampton on leave. Often I would sit with you, and we would have a conversation while on our way." He replied, "What are you doing in that uniform?" I gave him the whole story, and his reply was, "Good Lord, if you are caught in that uniform, they could charge you with desertion and you could be court martialed. Can you come back tomorrow?" I said "Certainly, Sir." The next day I returned and he had a complete uniform for me. Also, he said he saw the finance officer and he had obtained a partial payment of \$200 for me. He certainly turned out to be a friend in need.

At this time during my stay in England I stayed at a Red Cross Service Center that had sleeping facilities. The Red Cross assumed that I was on leave and asked no questions.

When the rest of my friends who were back in France learned what I had done, they, too, managed to hitch hike a ride to England. There must have been approximately 100 former prisoners of war that came to England the same way I did. After several weeks, we all decided it was time to go home. We decided the best thing to do was to go in mass to the military police. We told them our story.

Needless to say, they were not too happy, but there wasn't much they could do. All they could do was to send us to Southampton so they could put us on the next ship going back to the United States. About a week later we were on board a LST bound for Norfolk, VA. I arrived home the last part of July 1945. All I wanted to do was to recuperate.

I was captured on February 22, 1944; liberated on May 3, 1945. When I was shot down I weighed 185 pounds; at liberation I weighed less than a hundred.

After arriving home I found that my parents had a telegram dated March 8, 1944, by the War Department stating that I had been missing in action as of February 22, 1944, but they did not receive further word that I was a prisoner of war until well into May 1944.

After being discharged I had no trouble blending back in to civilian life. Years went by and in 1998 I bought my first computer. With the internet, I found a painting of our plane and the actual German pilot's report so now I had the name of the German Pilot, Hans Hermann Muller.



Flug							Bemerkungen
		Landung		Flugbauer	Kilometer		
Tag	Tageszeit	Ort	Tag				
1944 22.2.	12 <sup>55</sup>	Grove	22.2.	15 <sup>02</sup>	152	920	Abschuss einer Boe (1 Abs. nachträglich durch OK 13. + 14. Abschuss)
"	14 <sup>48</sup>	Westerland	"	18 <sup>45</sup>	57	340	
23.2.	11 <sup>15</sup>	Grove	23.2.	11 <sup>47</sup>	32	190	
24.2.	11 <sup>46</sup>	"	24.2.	12 <sup>06</sup>	20		
"	13 <sup>40</sup>	"	"	15 <sup>29</sup>	109	650	Abschuss einer Boeing Treffer in l. Fläche, Rumpf 15. Abschuss
25.2.	10 <sup>18</sup>	Stade	25.2.	11 <sup>11</sup>	61	360	
"	15 <sup>51</sup>	Grove	"	16 <sup>24</sup>	28	190	
28.2.	14 <sup>18</sup>	Westerland	28.2.	14 <sup>49</sup>	31	190	
29.2.	18 <sup>29</sup>	"	29.2.	18 <sup>42</sup>	13		
2.3.	12 <sup>40</sup>	"	2.3.	13 <sup>05</sup>	25	150	
4.3.	15 <sup>59</sup>	"	4.3.	14 <sup>15</sup>	46	460	
5.3.	14 <sup>04</sup>	"	5.3.	14 <sup>42</sup>	35	240	
					634	3660	

Luftgaukommando XI  
Teil

Abschüsse vom 29.2. bis 194

Lfd. Nr.	Ortsbezeichnung	Uhrzeit	Typ	Abschluß durch	Verbleib der Besatzung	Bergung		Bemerkungen bez. Meldung RLM-Datag-Sonstige
						Kommando Flächenbereich	Fliegerhaubt	
3 A 6 1	Adresse Ulten n. n. Braunsilusty	14 <sup>50</sup>	Boeing 350	Fl + Toung.	2 Tote 8 Zef.	lyh	Witzguck	BATB Ki. A. Matimale in Quart. auf der Kleinfeld K. F. 10000 Der bestmögliche größten Bereich sein schwenkplan Voraussetzungen im Jahre 238002, abstrahieren a
2	3 km. n. n. Körlin 24 km. n. n. Thiesfeld	15 <sup>15</sup>	Spring 100%	?	9 Gef. 1 Toter	Freiland	Thiesfeld	
KA 7	3 km. n. Sötkingen	13 <sup>59</sup>	Boeing 98%	?	5 Zef. 2 Tote 3 Tote	"	Sötking	Ki. Kopf v.
4	Roof Abwehrk. l. n. n. Osnabrück	14 <sup>52</sup>	Spring 100%		von abgefragt		gef. v. Schiller VII	

I was also able to contact the land owners of where our plane crashed. They asked for us to come and visit them. This we did in April of 2008. Danish TV covered the entire event and made a 23 minute documentary during the filming. This film aired all over Europe, but not in the USA.



Remembering "Pilot Lavies"

During the filming we found one of the control handles from my turret and also the Identification plate complete with the plane's serial number.



At an interview I had stated that I knew the name of the German pilot who had shot us down and that I was searching for him with no success. A very nice person, Nikolaj Bojer, overheard me and said that he would help me find him. Nikolaj spent the next 4 years searching for the German pilot, making many phone calls to Germany, searching German archives, at one point being told that this man was dead; then, a final call telling the name could not be given as it was classified information. Nikolaj still did not give up. He again called, only this time stating that an American wished to put flowers on Hans Herman Mueller's gravesite for saving his life. At this request, the man said I will help you find him and a few days later giving him a phone number to call. Nikolaj called this number and a woman answered; Nikolaj again stated that an American wished to lay flowers on her husband's grave. The woman said, he is not dead, he is sitting by my side, do you wish to talk with him??

Nikolaj sent the pilot's address to me and I sat down and wrote a very friendly letter to him:

*"Mr. Hans Herman Mueller:*

*For years I have been trying to find you so that I could thank you for saving my life and the lives of our crew.*

*On 22 February, 1944, you shot down our B-17 with your JU88. Our mission that day was to bomb the airfield at Aalborg, Denmark. On our way back about 160 Km west of Thisted, Denmark, we were hit by your aircraft, badly damaged and on fire.*

*On that day, even though we were foes, you stopped firing and even escorted our plane on its 20 minute flight back to the coast of Denmark. Here the wing of our plane blew off and we bailed out . Unfortunately the pilot of our plane was killed.*

*My wish to this day has been that somehow I would be able to contact you and become friends. Yes, during the war we were mortal enemies, but then, each of us were fighting for our countries and both fighting of what we believed was right. Now all of that is behind us.*

*With the help of my Danish friends trying to find you we have found you little by little. First your name, then the log of your shoot down, your war victories , where you lived and where born, also your photo.*

*Now I would like to get to know you much better, Be it in person, by letters, emails, or even through a mutual friend, to give you my thanks and gratitude for being a gentleman and not only saving my life, but the lives of my crew. I owe you much!!!"*



Next, I served 5 years as Colonel and Chief of Staff of the German Air Force Training Command. Then I retired April 1980.

Since ten years I live together with my wife (66 years married) in the wonderful town of Heidelberg.

If you ever had an opportunity to visit Heidelberg I would be very glad to meet you.

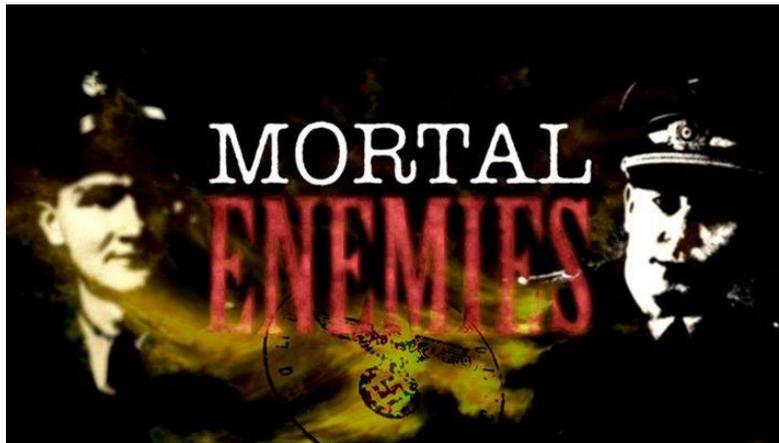
With best regards to you and your family

Most sincerely

Heinz Hermann Müller

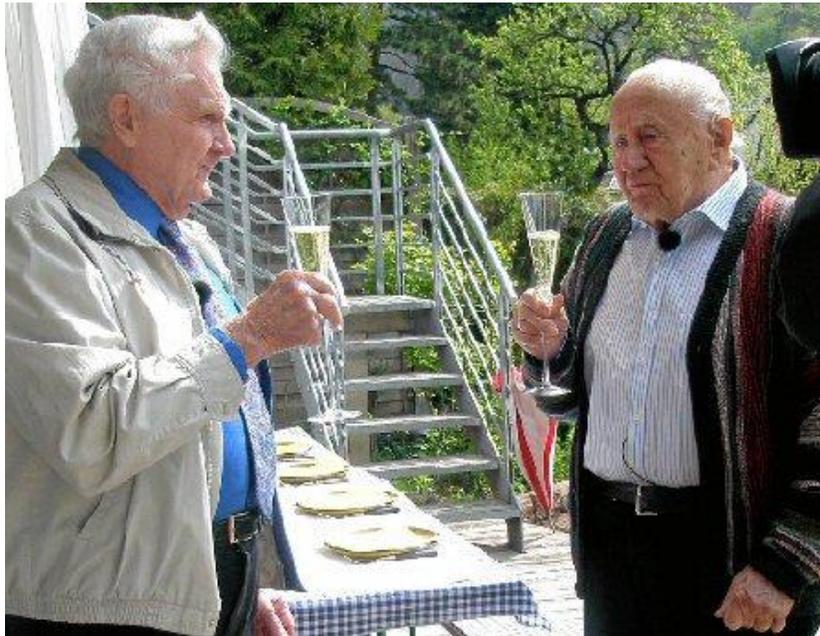


Several letters later and HHM invited us to come visit him in Heidelberg. In April 2012 we did just that. Danish TV again covered the event and made a 28-minute documentary of our meeting. The documentary is called "Mortal Enemies;" it has aired all over Europe, but never aired in the US.



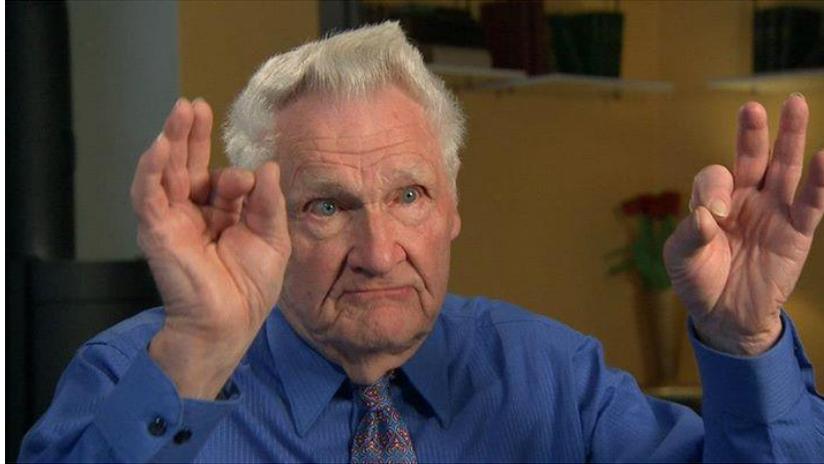
We got along just great and HHM remembered in great detail shooting both our plane and the plane that I saw go down just before our plane even though the event happened over 68 years ago.

He invited us to his home and here I saw his achievement medals. His medals made mine look sick; he had earned 3 Iron crosses, one incrustated in gold. He had shot down 16 allied bombers. He told us that he also had been shot down and was severely wounded, but he was lucky as he landed in German territory behind enemy lines and was rescued by Germans.









The entire event was covered by a Danish film crew making a documentary for TV. A meeting was arranged at City Hall with the Deputy Mayor of Heidelberg to welcome us to Heidelberg. Here were 8 various news media including World News and other newspapers and also TV film crews to welcome us. I have never seen so many flash photos in my life. It was endless.

Next was an interview by the Deputy Mayor of both Hans Hermann and myself. I found it most enjoyable. The Deputy Mayor gave me a very nice book of the sights of Heidelberg. He was very nice and really did make us feel welcome.

Next Hans Hermann and his wife Lydia took us to a top notch restaurant for a dinner and as always at any event, beer flowed freely. It was most enjoyable. Later they gave us a tour of the old section of Heidelberg. It was wonderful.

The next day we were invited for a boat cruise on the Neckar River to view the sights and old castles along the way; endless sights we could only have imagined, and either Hans Hermann, his Daughter Birgit or his Grand Daughter Daniela were there to explain the points of interest; each of them had a charm of their own. Also, language was never a problem. Hans Hermann then, again, treated us to a full dinner and beer while on the boat.

By this time strangers would approach us and wish to shake our hand and to indicate that they had read the story in the newspapers. Always the feeling was positive. Everyone was most friendly. This happened dozens of times while we were in the Heidelberg area. It made us feel like celebrities.

Before leaving Heidelberg, Hans Hermann and Lydia again invited us to their house for what she called a snack, but which was more like a 5-course meal.

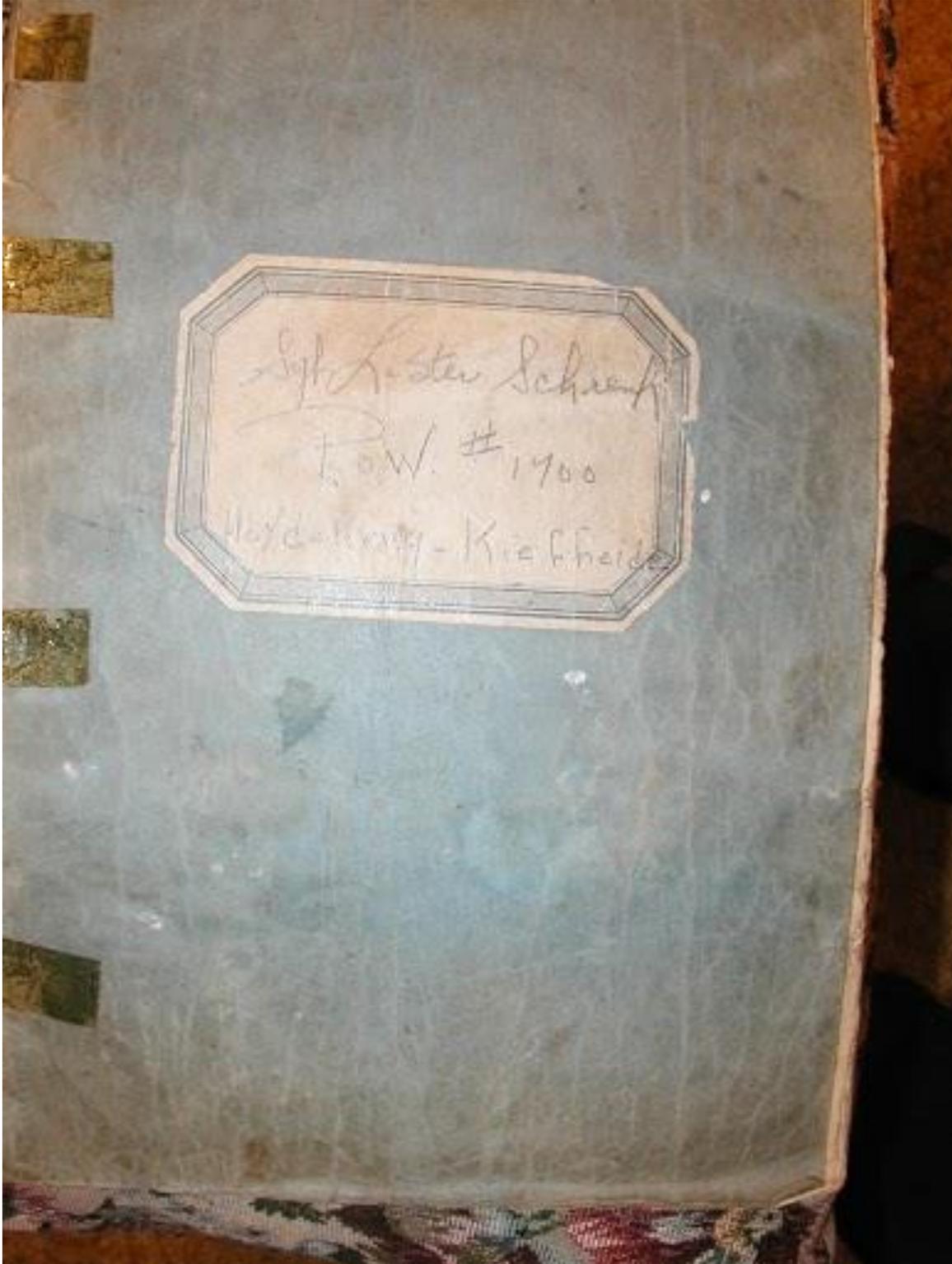
Saying goodbye was very hard. Neither of us wanted to part. We had become very good friends and sadly said goodbye. We are still exchanging letters; he now in 92 years old and still very sharp and able bodied.

I have often been asked if I shot down any enemy aircraft. The real truth is that I really don't know. You must remember, that on each bomber there were a total of thirteen guns, manned by 8 gunners. In each squadron there were anywhere from 20 to 27 aircraft that were shooting at the same attacking aircraft. When the Germans attacked in force, the attacking aircraft were only a few hundred yards apart. Consequently, when you were shooting at an aircraft there was another one following closely behind. You would shoot a short burst and immediately swing your guns towards the second aircraft. You absolutely did not have time to see what happened to the aircraft you had just been shooting at. Also, with many guns shooting at the same aircraft, how can it be determined who shot the fatal blow? Also, the German pilots flew right through their own flak bursts. I saw any number of German planes shot down by their own flak. The air would be black with bursts of flak, also falling aircraft, both theirs and ours, parts of planes as well as bodies, thrown out without parachutes. ETC. As I have stated, I have shot at any number of German aircraft but have no idea if I have completely missed or scored on any of them.

I have been asked if I ever regretted enlisting. My answer is this: I know first-hand what it is like to lose one's freedom. I am very glad that I was able to defend my Country. God Bless America.

I am often asked if I had all to do over, would I again volunteer for military service, even if I knew that I would have the same ordeal to go through. Yes, most certainly I would. Freedom is worth fighting for. I lost my freedom for the 15 months while I was a prisoner of war. Also, I saw firsthand how they treated their slave labor, tearing families apart and working people to death with no regard and compassion for other people. Slavery exists in many parts of the world even today. The price of freedom is very high. However, the price of freedom is never too high to fight for. There is just too much at stake.

Some poems from Les's POW notebook:



### **Clipped Wings**

Clipped wings and I,  
gazing into the blue above.  
Just you and I,  
looking into the sky we love.  
I sit and sigh,  
wondering why  
we have been chosen for this.  
Our buddies who fly  
don't realize  
all the pleasures we miss.  
But somehow we too  
will soon be in the blue again;  
and surely our wings  
will be mended again.  
The storm clouds will fade;  
they'll all pass away;  
the world will be peaceful once more.  
That wonderful day,  
clipped wings, we waiting for.

### **Beyond the Sunset**

And now at last the day is done,  
a thousand flaming banners flung.  
Along the course, the steady sun  
has furrowed through the sky.

Behind the valley and the hills,  
beyond the sky, the sunset fills,  
I see a greater light that thrills,  
a certain torch held high.

Those eyes that ever search the sea  
now dim for you, and you, and me,  
will radiant and smiling be  
the day our ships sails by.

### **Dear Draft Dodger**

I'm writing this short letter  
and every word is true.  
Don't look away, Dear Draft Dodger.  
You, it's addressed to you.  
You feel at ease and in no danger,  
back in your old home town.  
You've cooked up some spiteful story  
so the draft board won't let you down.  
You never think of real men  
who leave home towns every day.  
You think only of their girl friends

that you can take while they're away.  
You sit at home and read the paper;  
You jump and yell when we win.  
Just where do you get that "we" stuff?  
This war will be won by men.  
Well, that's all, Mister Slacker.  
I suppose your face is red.  
American is no place for your kind  
and I mean every word I've said.  
So in closing, Dear Draft Dodger,  
just remember what I say:  
Keep away from my girlfriend,  
for I'm coming back some day!

## "A BURST OF FLAK"

You're FLYING IN the AIR So blue  
The FLAK it Comes So STRIGHT AND TRUE  
it hits Your PLANE it drives You back  
AND the CAUSE of it ALL, A BURST OF FLAK.

The FIGHTERS Come in With BLOODY THIRST  
To Give You A TASTE OF 20 mm. BURST  
it KNOCKS Your buddies on their back  
AND the CAUSE of it ALL WAS A BURST OF FLAK

You GRAB Your chute AND head For the door  
CAUSE Your PLANE is disabled Wounded & SORE  
You hit the SILK AND All Goes black.  
AND The CAUSE of it ALL WAS A BURST OF FLAK

You FALL through the AIR AND All is Quiet  
Your SHIP Goes down, THAT FAITHFUL old Kite  
then You hit the GROUND With Resounding WACK  
AND the CAUSE of it ALL WAS A BURST OF FLAK

The FARMERS Come over the hill  
With blood in their eyes AND Ready to KILL  
They LIFT You up AND Give You A CRACK  
AND the CAUSE of it ALL WAS A BURST OF FLAK

They GATHER Your CREW AND MARCH You THRU TOWN  
So the People CAN WATCH You With A FROWN  
then they PUT You in JAIL, A DIRTY old SHACK  
AND the CAUSE of it ALL WAS A BURST OF FLAK

DULAG LUFF is the NAME of the Next DIRTY old hole  
Where they TORTURE Your MIND to See WHAT You KNOW  
but the YANKS Refuse With WIT AND TACT  
AND the CAUSE of it ALL WAS A BURST OF FLAK

(CONT. ON Page 33)

3  
THEN YOU GO TO A ENCIRCLED OLD PRISON CAMP  
AND YOUR ONLY FRIEND IS A RED CROSS STAMP  
YOU SLEEP ON BOARDS WHICH HURT YOUR BACK  
AND THE CAUSE OF IT ALL IS A BURST OF FLAK

WE SIT AND THINK OF OUR GIRLS SO TRUE  
AND OF OUR BOYS STILL FLYING IN THE BLUE  
OF PILLOWS AND SHEETS THAT MAKE UP OUR SACK  
AND WHERE WE'LL NEVER HEAR THAT BURST OF FLAK

### "THOUGHTS OF A P.O.W."

THERE'S BARBED WIRE AROUND US & GUNS BY THE SCORE,  
THE THOUGHTS OF ESCAPE ARE STILL AS BEFORE.  
OUR THOUGHTS ARE OF HOME, OF LOVE ONES WE MISS,  
A LONGING FOR SOMEONE WE USED TO KISS.  
THAT SOMEONE IS WAITING, SAME AS BEFORE,  
BUT WE HAVN'T HEARD FROM HER, ON MONTHS BY SCORE.  
WE DREAM BY NIGHT AND YES THRU THE DAY,  
BUT OUR DREAMS ARE ALWAYS, FAR AWAY.  
THAT OUR DREAMS'LL COME TRUE - WE HAVN'T A DOUBT.  
THE GATES 'LL BE OPEN, WE'LL BE THERE TO GO OUT.  
WE'LL COME MARCHING HOME, WHEN THAT DAY IS HERE.  
YES, WE'LL COME MARCHING HOME,  
WE'LL HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR.  
THE WORST PART IS OVER, A FEW WON'T COME BACK  
THEY WERE TAKEN BY BULLETS, FROM FIGHTERS AND FLAK.  
BUT WE WHO ARE LEFT, WILL COME HOME TO STAY,  
AND BE WITH YOU BY YOUR SIDE TO START A NEW DAY.

### "Gods Minute"

I HAVE ONLY JUST A MINUTE, ONLY 60 SECONDS IN IT,  
FORCED UPON ME, CAN'T REFUSE IT, DIDN'T SEEK IT,  
DIDN'T CHOOSE IT, BUT ITS UP TO ME TO USE IT,  
GIVE ACCOUNT IF I ABUSE IT, SUFFER IF I LOSE IT.  
JUST A TINY LITTLE MINUTE, BUT ETERNITY IS IN IT.

## "GUNNERS DAY"

A GUNNERS DAY is Never done  
UP AT DAWN before the SUN  
With the ROAR of ENGINES in HIS head  
Wishing he had STAYED in bed

Chow AT FOUR Fried eggs AND SUCH  
WONT have TIME TO eat So much  
BRIEFING AT FIVE - THE CREWS ALL THERE  
AND EVER ANXIOUS TO be UP IN THE AIR

See TO YOUR chute, AMMUNITION AND GUNS  
FOR THE BOYS KNOW ITS NOT FOR FUN  
JERRY WILL be THERE high UP IN THE blue  
WAITING FOR someone, maybe YOU

TAKEOFF AT SIX, maybe SIXTHIRTY  
HOPE NO ones GOT A GUN THATS DIRTY  
FORM WITH THE GROUP AT 1200 FT.  
See THAT FORMATION, THEY REALLY look Neat

PUT ON YOUR MASK, THE AIRS GETTING THIN  
OFF TO BATTLE Some WITH A GRIN  
WE'RE OVER THE WATER. NOW TEST YOUR GUNS  
ENEMY COAST - here Comes the Fun

FLAK AT SIX, FLAK AT TWELVE  
LOOK OUT BOYS, THEY'RE GIVING us hell  
HERE Comes, THE FIGHTERS, COMING IN LOW  
MAYBE THEY'RE OURS, dont SHOOT TILL YOU KNOW

P51<sup>S</sup> AND P38<sup>S</sup>  
OUR ESCORT is here THEY'RE NEVER LATE  
THEY'RE FIGHTING FOOLS each MAN AND HIS SHIP  
THERE NEVER WAS A JERRY THEY COULDN'T WHIP

(CONT. ON PAGE 39)

THE AIRS GETTING COLD, JUST FIFTY BELOW  
TURN UP YOUR HEAT SO YOU DONT FREEZE A TOE  
A SHARP LOOKOUT BOYS THE TARGETS NEAR  
WE DONT CARE TO MEET THE ENEMY HERE

THERES THE TARGET WITH PLENTY OF FLAM  
BOMBS AWAY!!! NOW WE TURN BACK  
COMING OUT OF THE SUN, THERES AN ENEMY SHIP  
AIM TRUE BOYS, WE STILL GOT MORE TRIPS

THERE GOES ONE DOWN ANOTHER ONE TOO  
OUR FIGHTERS ARE BUSY TO SEE NONE GET THRU.  
THERES FLAMES IN THE SKY AS ANOTHER GOES DOWN  
THE PILOT BAILS OUT, HE MAKES IT SAFE TO THE GROUND

THEN IN OUR TAIL THE GUNS START TO ROAR  
THERES BLOOD ON HIS GUNS AND HE SHOOTS NO MORE  
YOUR SHIP IS HIT BUT STILL FLIES THRU THE AIR  
YOU THINK OF YOUR LOVED ONES AND WISPER A PRAYER

WE'VE BEEN UP SIX HOURS, TWO MORE TO GO  
THO WE'RE DOING TOO IT SEEMS VERY SLOW  
SMOKE FROM THE TARGET LEAPS INTO THE SKY  
WE'LL SHOW THESE DAMMED JERRIES WE KNOW HOW TO FLY

ENGLAND AT LAST THE GUNNERS LEARN  
WE THINK OF OUR BUDDIES WHO'LL NOT RETURN  
WE'RE OVER THE FIELD, THE CREW GIVES A SIGH  
WE'VE FINISHED ANOTHER TO DO OR TO DIE  
WHEELS TOUCH THE GROUND WITH A SCREECH AND A BUMP  
OUR SHIP BROUGHT US BACK, WE'RE OVER THE HUMP

WE'RE TIRED, DIRTY, THIRSTY AND SORE  
THE SUNS GONE DOWN AN HOUR BEFORE  
FIRST CLEAN YOUR GUNS - AND DO IT GOOD BOYS  
FOR THAT GUN IS LIKE HIS MINE OR YOURS.

(CONT. ON PAGE 41)

A SANDWICH AND COFFEE YOUR CHUTE TO TURN IN.  
DOWN TO THE BRIEFING ROOM TO TURN YOUR GIN.  
Two MEALS A DAY, BOTH IN THE NIGHT  
GETS ON YOUR NERVES, BUT YOU'RE STILL READY TO FIGHT.

The MESS HALL IS WARM IN THE COLD OF NIGHT  
YOU SIT DOWN TO EAT AND TALK BETWEEN BITES  
YOU TALK OF FIGHTERS OURS AND THEIRS TOO  
AND OF THE BOYS THAT DIDN'T GET THRU.

OF SHIPS GOING DOWN EXPLODING IN AIR  
THE BULLETS THAT MISSED YOUR HEAD BY A HAIR  
SHIPS FULL OF HOLES, GUESS JOES IN BED  
HE HAS A FLAK FRAGMENT LODGED IN HIS HEAD

THEN OFF TO YOUR SACK AT NINE OR TEN  
A LETTER FROM HOME ANOTHER FROM BEN  
I LOVE YOU SHE WROTE, AND YOU KNOW YOU WON  
AND A GUNNERS DAY IS NEVER DONE.

### "HEAVENLY FORMATION"

THEIR'S A FORMATION OF BOMBERS  
FLYING HIGH ON THE HEAVEN TO SHORE  
MY SKIPPER IS IN THAT FORMATION  
TO DROP BOMBS ON CITIES NO MORE  
THEY CARRY NO BOMB LOAD UP IN HEAVEN  
NO BOMBS ARE NEEDED THERE  
THEY HAVE AN ESCORT OF ANGELS  
WITH SILVERY WINGS SO FAIR  
THERE IS A BRIEFING EACH MORNING  
ON A TARGETS THATS NOT ABOVE  
THEY ALWAYS FULFILL THEIR ASSIGNMENTS  
TO SAVE THE SOULS OF THE ONE THEY LOVE  
HE FLYS ON THE HEAVENLY SKY WAYS  
LOOKS OUT ON THE SCENES BELOW  
HE PILOTS A FLYING FORTRESS  
BY THE NAME OF "POT O' GOLD"

### "MY Weekly Letter"

A thought of love A word of cheer,  
MY Weekly Message To Some one dear.  
A line of words from MY heart Comes stealing  
To let her know just how I'm feeling.

I write about the weather, and say I'm well,  
but there's so many things I cannot tell.  
I talk about old things, and how I miss her,  
and hope to come back once more to kiss her.

She doesn't know what I'm going through,  
it would be mighty hard if she only knew  
the long hard days just sitting here,  
Alone with MY thoughts, and MY heart full of fear.

### "MY Buddie"

they say he died in glory  
What ever that may be.  
If dying in flame is glory  
then that's not for me.

In the briefing room that morning  
he sat with clear eyes and heart  
Just one of those quitters  
determined to do his part.

MY buddie had the guts alright  
he sought neither fame nor glory  
he knew he had a job to do  
his crew all felt the same

But death had the final word  
and in its log it wrote his name  
for MY buddie died that fateful morn  
in glory and a burial in flame.

28  
"Aint We All In This Bloody Thing Together?"

It's the old army game, we're buddies of a feather,  
and it's share and share alike, be it wine or be it weather.  
What's yours is mine, and what's mine aint worth a mention  
aint we all in this bloody thing together?  
Oh you dont have to cry, when Johnny burns a tie,  
or a buddy reads your mail, for together we shall die.  
So open up your parcel and pass around the sweets.  
The army dont sit down and watch a man while he eats  
at the Post or on a hike, we share and share alike.  
Be it love, be it lead, be it leather,  
So spill out the box boy and dont be a Pike,  
aint we all in this bloody thing together?  
So you dont want to share, so you dont think it fair  
and to hell with the boys, well thats fine,  
but you'll fine, bye and bye, when it comes turn to die,  
that death plays no favorites on the line.  
For its share, share, share alike there,  
and you aint gonna ask a buddy whether  
he is he, and you are you: in that final rendezvous.  
For we've all in this bloody thing together.  
So its butts on the chow and its butts on the gal,  
and im gonna wear your britches out to dine.  
For its all an even swap, even when your going out the top  
and every mans a buddy on the line.

"That Yesterday"

That night you kissed me and said goodbye,  
since then my darling, I have wondered why  
God ever let them take you away,  
breaking my heart that yesterday.  
You brightened the hour of my love sublime,  
like a sun ray from heaven you always shine.  
I talk to your picture, it smiles in return,  
go to the movies, still for you I yearn.  
I long for your kisses, your voice so gay  
making love to me darling, that yesterday.

### "Barbed Wire Hotel"

In Hydekrug East Prussia  
Theres a beautiful spot,  
Also a barbed wire hotel.  
Where you can get your meals hot  
A 1/4<sup>th</sup> of a loaf of bread per day  
A bowl of fresh Getman stew,  
A small chunk of horse meat  
A cup of weak English brew,  
All this will come free,  
It wont cost a cent  
Your meals and your lodgings  
Will both go with the rent,  
If you want to visit  
This hotel thats so neat  
Fly a mission over Germany  
Where flak and fighters are so fleet,  
You'll meet a bet lieutenant Volz,  
You'll know him well,  
For he's the assistant manager  
of this barbed wire hotel.

### "Paddling Picture"

I've traveled the roads of England  
Crossed valleys and dell,  
I've smiled at the quaint English customs  
I've forgotten Hamlet and dell,  
I've tasted hot beer and cider  
in country from border to toe,  
And harked to the tales the rovers have spun,  
in tavern with lights burning low.  
I've ambled through Cotswald and Pennine,  
Shook dust of the moors from my feet,  
I've breathed the sigh of the travelers,  
With a sadness I could not disclose,  
I've traveled, aye, from sunset to dusk  
On a steed ever trusty and true.

## "Bombing Raid"

The Cottage was a thatched one  
The inside clean and neat  
And inside a mother was rocking  
A cradle at her feet.

Outside night had fallen  
And all was peace and quiet  
When suddenly the sirens  
Came waiking thru the night.

People ran for shelter  
Children cried with fear  
For all knew what it meant  
As the planes came roaring near.

The guns barked out their warning  
And searchlights cut the sky  
But there seemed only one purpose  
To the bombers way up high.

Then suddenly above the roar  
Of the ackack guns  
Came the whistling of the bombs  
Dropped by the callous huns.

In the cottage all was quiet  
And at the bottom of the stairs  
Kneelt that mother and her baby,  
As she softly said her prayers.

As she looked toward the heavens  
Her eyes shawn full of faith  
As she softly said her prayers to God above  
Please keep my child safe.

(CONT. ON Page 23)

He has ALREADY lost his daddy  
Who lost his life IN FRANCE.  
So IF I die TONITE dear LORD  
Please Give MY child A CHANCE.

Although her cheeks were wet with tears,  
her voice WAS full of pride  
As she whispered MAY God Bless You  
As the bombs still dropped outside.

Although the cottage stood  
outside the town alone  
A bomb CRASHED THRU the ROOF  
of the peaceful little home.

When the raid was over  
and the bombers had gone home  
they reached the ruined cottage  
and heard a baby cry.

They found her beneath the ruins  
that brave young soldier's wife  
only to find that her dead body  
had saved her babies life.

So when you are in action  
and feel you are AFRAID  
Just think what that mother died for  
when Jerry made that raid.

#### "Mother's Prayer"

Please don't send MY boy to Dulag,  
He didn't do any harm,  
he didn't fly that bomb bet,  
he just went along for the ride.

## "I'm Tired"

I'm tired of bullets guns and war.

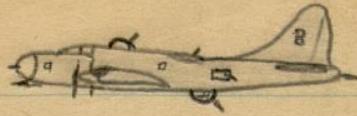
I'm tired of Planes and engines roar.

I'm tired of war and all its strife.

I'm tired of all its senseless waste of life.

For when the toll is taken and Peace is bought,  
it may come again, just to Naught.

"Please Lord, let tomorrows Peace endure,  
let our sons and daughters feel secure,  
thy will was done, I've done my best,  
Now Lord, I'm tired, Please let me rest."



## "Lightning"

Oh Hedy Hamann is a beautiful gal  
and MacClint Carroll is too.

But you'll find, if you query, A different theory  
amongst any bomber crew.

For the loveliest thing one could sing,

this side of the heavenly gates,  
is no blonde or brunette of the Holly wood set,  
but an escort of P-38's.

Yes, in the days that have passed, when the  
Tables were massed

with glasses of scotch or champagne,  
it's quite true that the sight was a thing to delight  
us, without upon seeing no paid.

But, no longer the same, now a days in this game,  
when we head north from messina straights,  
take the sparkling wine - every time, just make mine  
an escort of P-38's.

Byron, Shelly, and Keats ran a dozen dead hearts  
describing the view from the hills,  
of the valleys in May when the winds gently sweep  
an army of bright daffodils.

Take the daffodils, Byron; the wild flowers, Shelly;  
Yours is Myrtle, Frieda Keats

Just reserve me those curies, American beauties,  
an escort of P-38's.

# LIGHTNING

11

Sure, we're braver than hell; on the ground, all  
is swell -

in the air is A different story.

We swear out the track through the fighters & flak;

We're willing to split up the glory.

Well, they, they wouldn't reject us, so

heaven protect us,

and, until all this shooting abates,

Give us courage to fight 'em - and

one other small item -

an escort of P-38's.

## "Kriegsgefangener Kelly"

Kelly get your barracks bag  
The shipping list is here  
We're sailing on the first tide  
for home and yester year

But Kelly stripped no muscle  
to join the homing flock  
he was parked before a tiny stove  
beside his Red Cross box

Kelly we're a sailing  
the bitter way is done  
it's off to the States boy  
the sweetheart and the sun

But Kelly turned a deaf ear  
his stubbornness undeft  
"I should sail for anywhere  
with all those groceries left."

He's a sad tale, they say those days  
along the downy streets  
of Kriegsgefangener Kelly  
And some loved adventure,  
but some loved curly locks  
And Kriegsgefangener Kelly  
loved his Red Cross box.

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I still get a thrill out of visiting a restored B-17 and always go directly to the ball turret and wonder just how I fit in that small 3-foot ball. I would love to again get back into the ball turret for one last ride, but alas, there is too much of me to ever have that experience again. But I can dream, can't I ????

Maybe not riding in the ball turret again but how about flying a helicopter!!



