

PRISONER OF WAR DIARY

A Description of Life in a German Prison Camp

By

Thearl E. Mesecher - ASN^o 370431111 POW N^o 30261

Since my experiences as a combat soldier were similar to all other combat soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division, I will write only a brief account of the events immediately prior to my being taken a prisoner-of-war by the German Army near Fiad Pass in Tunisia, North Africa on February 17, 1943.

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FOREWORD

I have before me three battered notebooks. The first of them I bought for three cigarettes and a chocolate bar from a German prison guard at Friedrichoffen. The second I wheedled from the German post-mistress at still another prison camp at Luenberg.

The last, a little black book, Billa gave to me. Billa is dead. Why? Because of a war neither of us wanted, should Billa be dead? I also think of little Dorchen, Billa's sister, and Rudolph Voss, her father, Germans all, enemies of my country during the war, but God knows they had no quarrel with me, or I with them.

Dorchen writes me from Jaskow, from behind the iron curtain in Poland. Jaskow used to be a little German village a few miles from the Baltic Sea and not far from Danzig. I spent nearly two years there as a prisoner of war. Jaskow is no longer German, but it is still a prison although not from enemy soldiers. Writes Dorchen:

"Dear Thearl:

I have so often wished that I could hear from you. Mail service is not too good and you are silent. Did you get the letter that I wrote you Feb. 6? I sent it through the Polish Post Office.

Thearl, is there any way on earth that you can help me? You well know that I would not ask you for any aid or assistance, if I could go through this horrible thing alone. Lately it has been even worse, as many are at the end of their strength. My parents are old, full of worry and hunger. They do not have any desire to live. Already there are 38 dead in Jaskow and there were only 90 in the beginning.

My parents are so changed that you would never recognize them. They are fast becoming victims of these terrible times, and I cannot do anything to help them.

As a prisoner of war, Thearl, you had it very bad, in spite of the little we were able to do for you. But you could do it alone. You knew that your parents and loved ones were all right, in far-away America. I am watching my parents starve to death.

You know how we all felt about Hitler and the war. We couldn't help it. Could you?

Billa is dead. It was by a chance she took of her own free will. We are not asking you to help to the extent of endangering your life or violating the laws of your country or conscience.

Many are having typhus. Malnutrition is a dreaded enemy. Did Bulman deliver the food we sent to Lauenberg?

Herbert is still alive. He risked his life many times in caring for us as he promised you he would do. I send greetings from him and mom and dad.

And now, farewell:

Dora."

I also have a letter of later date from Dorchen's father. He was my foreman as I worked as a prisoner on a great farm near Jaskow.

In this country, years ago, we would have called him the village blacksmith. He signs his letters proudly, "Rudolph Voss, Schmiedemeister (mastersmith)." On Sundays in pre-Hitler days, he not only attended the village church on Sundays, but he was its pastor.

He feared God and kept his sanctuary holy. So it was, when he was ordered to open his services with a congregational chorus of "Heil Hitler", he refused. Only Almighty God, he declared, was honored in his church.

So, as an object lesson, Pastor Voss was removed from his pastorate, and confined in a detention camp for six months. The church was closed, and, at least until I left there in 1945, it remained closed. Germany could have no other God superior to Hitler.

He writes from Jaskow, December 18, 1946, as follows:

"Mr. Mesecher, our good friend Karl:

I, my wife, and youngest daughter, Dorchen, are still here in Jaskow, the place where you boys were prisoners of war. A year after you left, when the Poles took over, most of the Germans were forced to leave and were moved westward over the Oder. The greater portion left willingly under pressure of hunger.

As a blacksmith, I did not have a permit to leave and will probably remain here the rest of my life and let them make a Pole of me.

We have no newspapers to read, no radios, are cut off from the whole world. Conditions are enough to drive us mad.

Our Dorchen is very down-hearted and blue, says that if only you could come from America, you could do something to help us out of here and, knowing you as I do, I believe it too. It is not easy for a young girl to live here, see all this, and no future. Our beloved daughter Billa's life was sacrificed. Times have changed. Now we are the Gefangenen (prisoners). We have no rights, the Russians and Poles do with us as they please.

Our greatest need, a package, came, and the sender's name was Mesecher. It was a wonderful help and treat, something we are not able to get here now. We send our hearty thanks.

All the comfort and aid we receive here come from our earnest prayers to God. Such true friendship and trust as we have in you boys means much to us.

The Russians made short process of everything and so far as we can see there is no Germany (in future). As far as our future is concerned, you folks in America know more about that than we do. We are cut off entirely from the whole world and I would be very grateful if you would give me the American slant on things. What about the Russian and Polish rule? Please let me know what you think.

Wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. May God grant you good health and hearty greetings from our grateful family.

Rudolph Voss"

Gefangenen. It is a very expressive German word. No English word or phrase translates it simply. "Prisoners of War" doesn't quite do the job. In the German tongue, it means rather prisoners of fate, captives of circumstances under which the individual has no control.

I have wondered since I heard from Dorchen and Rudolph whether the whole world is not populated by "Gefangenen." I was one of many millions of Gefangenen in Germany during the war. Today I am free--perhaps. But, when will the world be free?

I have kept the record of what I saw happen during my service as a soldier and my prison years. It is the record of an ordinary American young man who sought no war, went when he was called, and did the best he could. It is not written in fancy language. My diary, which I began after I was captured, became in the end, an obsession to me. As I look back, I cannot imagine how I ever managed to retain my notebooks. I certainly would have been shot had they been discovered. Some items which I am now

including were too risky to record originally, but I am presenting the entire record from day to day just as I set it down in the beginning. I saw the war from both sides. I saw brave Americans die in battle as heroes. I saw many more brave Americans die as prisoners, and perhaps among them were many who were greater heroes than the wearers of the Congressional Medal of Honor. Our prisoners got no glory. Yet, thousands upon thousands died, miserably and heroically. Perhaps my record will help some to do them honor.

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This advance disorganized American troops and many units in more forward positions found themselves hopelessly trapped behind the German lines.

This was the case of fifteen men of the 168th Infantry Regiment, myself included. Naturally, there were many more, but one only knows the happenings in his immediate vicinity.

After much maneuvering in our desperate struggle to free ourselves, and becoming weak from lack of food and water, we came upon a lone arab who directed us toward a small peak in the Atlas Mountains

which he claimed was occupied by American troops.

We headed for this position as fast as our weakened conditions would permit. Soon we could see an American truck spotted upon a high knoll. We were sure that it was to act as a guide for us to their position.

A brief sense of security swept over us as we traveled in deployed formation toward it. We almost forgot our hunger and thirst as we gradually grew more careless, in our haste and anxiety.

We were snapped back to realization by the staccato chatter of machine gun fire in front and on both sides of us.

At the first burst of enemy fire, we flattened ourselves on the burning white sand. Our hearts pounding like hammers.

We had been betrayed. The American truck had been captured by the Germans and was spotted there as a decoy to lure disorganized small bands of American soldiers into this death trap.

After twenty-two months of training and combat, to end up in a position of this kind did not seem possible.

Fifteen men in the open like ducks on a pond against untold numbers in fox holes and dug-in gun positions. We could not back out as we could hear many motors directly to the rear. Probably tanks or armored cars. No one dared look. We were too busy with the things at hand.

They expected us to do something, hopeless as it may be, as seasoned troops always do. We threw everything at them we had, which

was very ineffective. The motors in the rear sounded pretty close now as the dreaded 88 millimeter shells began to burst around us.

We would fire a few rounds, get up and run a short distance, dive to the ground and fire again, thus trying to spread out and not all be blown to Kingdom Come by one artillery shell.

In our maneuvering, we managed to get into a small ravine. About out of ammunition, exhausted and weak from our marching with no food or water for over two days now, we sat down and waited for the artillery shell which will end it all. We felt we had done all that could be expected of us under present circumstances.

Here comes that fatal shell! It has quit whistling as the one that hits you always does.

No, too high. It went on over us to land with great concussion, throwing sand and rocks high into the air to fall upon us like hail stones. Our ears rang and our heads pounded violently.

They had overshot their mark, but the next one won't. I have learned through experience to respect the ability of the German gunners.

It seems like an eternity waiting for the next shell. What are they waiting for? It is their show. They know what waiting for execution will do to any man's nerves.

We had nearly forgotten the motors to our rear but are sharply reminded of their presence when an enemy light tank appears at the head of the ravine with heavy guns pointing directly at us in our crouched position. We had come a long way. We had a last-minute decision to make.

We can surrender and be prisoners of war for the duration, or die a hero's death by firing upon that tank.

Had there been a band, and had it struck up a patriotic military march, we probably would have fired. There was no band. We did not fire.

I am sorry for the man who does not realize defeat. His name is ever present upon the casualty lists.

We do not feel that we are mistreating the pledge made to comrades previously wounded, or the one we made as unfortunate buddies were laid in shallow sandy graves in the past few days. We do not feel that we have betrayed the people at home who wait with bated breath before the radio to hear the news commentator give the highlights of the day's activity abroad, and wonder what part their son, husband, or sweetheart has played All the while visioning him as a hero. We all cannot be heroes; everyone doesn't win. The man who marches home victoriously carrying the colors is very seldom the man who won the battle or war. The men who contributed most toward winning the war, in most cases, are the men whose graves we visit on Memorial Day. And, let's not forget the lad whose remains repose in a shallow, sandy, grave in the shadow of the Atlas Mountains. There are no markers for his grave. If there were, they would rate only a glance from passing Arab traders with camel caravans on their way across shifting desert sands to distant markets in busy cities where people will soon forget.

Many thoughts race through our minds as we walk to the tank with the large, black cross on each side and hand over our rifles, daggers, and other battle equipment. It gives one a sickening feeling to hand one's life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness to the enemy unconditionally.

We are marched back to the enemy's Battalion Command Post where we find many comrades. There are more arriving steadily. There are Infantry men, Artillery men, men from armoured outfits, Engineers and Medical units. Looks like they had captured the entire American Army.

Is our Command to blame for this, or is it just a part of war? We are arranged in a column of fives and started marching deep into German territory. There are approximately one thousand of us.

This marks the end of a military career and the beginning of God knows what. The American soldier -- nearly the highest paid, definitely the best dressed, best fed soldier in the world, demanding the respect of everyone where he has been -- is now beaten, helpless, worn-out and at the mercy of the enemy. He very plainly shows that he realizes his predicament. He is very thirsty and hungry with no water or food to be had. Very weak and tired, with perhaps many miles of hurried marching ahead of him.

Officers and enlisted men march in the same ranks. Officers and enlisted men alike fall out of the march to lie on the white sand more dead than alive, from exhaustion.

Keep your chins up pals; we were captured by troops of General Rommell, and no better soldiers ever marched in uniform. We must keep our morale at its peak if possible. We may need the added strength it seems to afford. It can't last forever. Neither can we. Captured on February seventeenth in one more day, I will have been overseas a year.

The guards in charge of our column are relieved every two or three hours by Comrades brought to our position by truck. It was evident that we were going to find out what rough going really was.

There was an almost continuous procession of tanks, armored cars, artillery and trucks going to the front. The amount of previously captured American equipment in this procession was amazing.

All were wearing the large black cross which was to become more familiar as time passed.

We marched from noon until very early morning of the next day before reaching another assembly area. After three or four hours' rest, we moved on. No water or food in sight.

One great advantage was that in all our training, we had carried heavy loads of battle equipment and now we carried nothing.

As we marched on and on, we passed many vehicles which had been burned as a result of their being attacked on their way to the front. This brought a trace of a smile to the faces of the dusty and very weary American soldiers.

As we passed the numerous graves of enemy soldiers who had, perhaps, been less fortunate than we, I am sure there were no smiles

from my comrades or myself.

It probably sounds strange but one, who is, or has been, engaged in this business of legal murder, and does his very best while on the battlefield, finds it impossible to look upon the grave of the unfortunate enemy with anything else in mind than pity.

He also was a son, husband, or sweetheart of someone. He will be missed when he doesn't return the same as any one of us would, or perhaps, will be.

He probably had no personal grievance with the United States or any of its soldiers. He was an instrument or tool, the same as we. He was just unfortunate. It is a game of chance. There are many losers; winners are few.

We march on and on. God, will it never end? They are passing out and lying thick along the road now.

Someone spies water in a small ditch along the road. We all wade into it, trying to get a drink. It turns out to be Alkali water but many drank it in spite of the mud and brine. Many fell out of the column soon after, and I would rather not speak of their fate.

We swayed and stumbled as our pace grew slower by the hour.

I have been endurance tests while with the British Commandoes in Scotland. I thought I knew what an endurance test was like, but the American soldier was taking one now that he will never forget.

I glance occasionally at my buddy, a husky young man from Postville, Iowa. He seems to be taking it as well as any of us. He checks up on me at intervals but our smile or approval of each other's ability and stamina have gradually become a mere flick of an eyelash.

We both have a chance to trade our cigarette lighters for a small crust of dark Italian bread. Nothing will ever taste so good as it did. Since we had had no food at all for five days, these few crumbs really helped.

Shortly after dark, we stopped and were given all the clean, fresh water we could drink from a German tank truck. We then curled up together and though it was too cold to sleep, we rested the balance of the night.

We started marching very early the next morning. At noon we were given a small slice of German bread. This was the first food we had received from our captors.

Everyone was nearly a physical wreck.

Arabs flocked around selling cactus fried as hot cakes. They aren't at all palatable, but we were very hungry so business was good for the Arab peddlers.

We finally ended up in Sfax late that night. Maybe our long march is ended. It had better be if the Jerries are expecting to have any of us left.

We are placed in a wire enclosure near Sfax. There are no buildings, so we dig a hole to sleep in. This was because there was a

strong and very cold wind. The ground was damp and cold, also. We could not sleep but did manage to rest a little. After marching all day, it becomes very tiresome to walk around most of the night to keep warm.

Perhaps we asked for it, though. We could have chosen death in the desert. We had had the opportunity. Wonder how many times we will think of this before the war is finally over? Providing we live to see that time?

Again we receive a small piece of bread which only makes us more hungry.

We are next loaded into boxcars and sent from Sfax to Tunis. Here we are given a small helping of rice, two candied dates, and three cigarettes by the French Red Cross. May God bless the Red Cross workers of any nation.

February 23, 1943

Today we left Tunis by plane for Italy. I hope I shall never see Africa again.

The airport was bombed heavily by allied bombers. Killed many of my comrades and did much damage.

We flew over Mt. Vesuvius and landed at Naples, Italy. We were hauled to prison camp outside of Naples in Italian trucks.

The civilian population gazed at us in wonder and cheered wildly as we passed. They weren't cheering us as the English, Irish, and Scotch people did when we arrived. there. They were cheering

the Italian soldiers who stood guard over us with fixed bayonets. Women and children stood on the streets and threw stones at us. They shouted names at us in their native tongue. They were all true Italians at heart. They had been taught to hate us.

Children of three great countries had nearly worshipped us. Candy and chewing gum had been given to children all over the world by the American soldier. Children had followed him on the streets in great cities everywhere. He was a welcome guest in any home, large or small. He had had the admiration of women and children throughout his Army career. Here was his first realization that it was a serious business, not a game. He was among the common enemy. Hatred flashed in their eyes.

In the prison camp we slept on the ground. The nights seemed awfully cold, so we walked most of the time to keep warm.

The ration was about one-half cup of boiled cauliflower tops for lunch. About the same amount of macaroni each evening along with a small hard biscuit completed the meal. We were getting very hungry and losing much weight.

March 5, 1943

We were loaded into boxcars today and shipped to Germany. When a boxcar is loaded and sealed, it is not opened again until the destination is reached. The suffering on these trips is so great that one would nearly have to experience this sort of thing to realize its severity.

We arrived at Stalag 7A at Mooseburg near Munich, Germany

two days later.

Here we are put into barracks and the food is a little better. Very little, however. Here I met soldiers of every nation who has opposed Germany. Prisoners all.

Just saw several Russian prisoners brought in from the Russian Front. They have been marching for seventeen days. I have never seen men in such a condition. They are so starved that there is very little hope for them.

Prisoners are herded around by vicious Policy dogs.

We are being registered here and will probably be sent to different areas to work soon.

March 29, 1943

Today we left Stalag 7A by boxcar and arrived two days later at Stalag 5B at Villigen, Germany. This is near the world famous Black Forest. The food isn't so good here, but we do not expect to be here very long.

April 20, 1943

Left Stalag 5B today for a large construction job at Friederichoffen where the Graf Zeppelin was built. Here we live two hundred and fifty men in one barracks. The bunks are about two feet apart in double decks. We have mattresses of wood shavings.

At night our pants and shoes are taken from us. The shutters and doors are closed and locked. Police dogs prowl the area. There is no plumbing or no ventilation at all. The air becomes very

foul. There are no facilities for bathing or laundry.

Everyone has lice in abundance. The work is hard construction labor. We work six days per week. At this date, our daily routine is as follows: Roll call and to work at 7 A. M. One-half hour rest at noon while the guards have lunch. We return to the barracks at 6 P. M. At 7 P. M. we are given our only food which consists of a slice of dark bread and a thin soup which is a barley concoction with a few leaves of spinach added. Sometimes, we get about one pint; sometimes, not so much. After this comes roll call and orders for the next day. Punishment for any misbehavior comes at this time also. Now to bed, sleep if you can.

We have each lost twenty-five or thirty pounds of weight and are getting pretty weak.

May 9, 1943

Today is Mother's Day. It is the happiest day of my life - not necessarily because it is Mother's Day, but because today we received our first food parcels from the Red Cross. We have had all the food we dare eat at this time, and our first cigarette since March. I certainly hope the food parcels keep coming, as we were getting pretty weak.

Things look a little better for us at this time. Who knows, maybe we will get fat and lazy. I imagine the bayonet on the guard's rifle will take care of that.

In spite of our condition which doesn't seem too bad compared to conditions in the past, I have seen many things which I will not write now or ever. I certainly hope I can forget them.

July 26, 1943

It has been suggested that there has been too much sabotage committed here by American soldiers. For that reason, we are again loaded into boxcars and shipped to Stalag 2B at Hammerstien in northern Germany.

Four days in a boxcar so crowdded there isn't room to sit down. Jolted and bounced, night and day. Sickness, vomiting, diarrhea, foul air, no water or food. God, what more are we expected to stand?

At Hammerstien we are rationed one loaf of bread and one-quarter pound of margarine for five men. We received this amount every day.

August 1, 1943

We were taken by truck today to Lauenburg, Germany, which is a base camp. From there to a farm where we will work. There are only eleven of us here. My buddy and I managed to stick together. I am so glad. I don't know how I could get along without him. We all live in two small rooms in a wire enclosure. It reminds me of a squirrel cage.

Since it is the harvest season, we work from early morning until dark. Every available person is connected in some capacity with the war effort. Nearly all the home work and common labor jobs in

Germany are done by prisoners. Some are soldiers, and some are civilian prisoners.

While Germany occupies a country, they are at liberty to work any or all the population in any way they see fit. This is the first real slavery I have ever seen.

The food is very bad here. We have time only to work and sleep.

It is very cold and damp. The Baltic Sea is only about six miles away. We do not have adequate clothing for this climate. We only have one pair of trousers and one shirt. Also wooden shoes.

We have no razors or barber equipment. We have to keep ourselves as clean as possible. We have had no Red Cross parcels since leaving Friederichoffen, so that means very little food and no cigarettes or tobacco.

Polish men and women who are civilian prisoners work in the fields with us. They have no shoes and scarcely any other clothing. The older women do not seem to mind it so much, but I certainly feel sorry for the teen-age girls. They have hardly enough clothing to flap in the breeze.

I doubt if I shall ever forget how one little Polish girl cried when a make-shift strap of some sort gave way, exposing her in entirety to everyone present. The guard scolded her for taking time to repair it. They laughed as if it had been a part of a cheap burlesque. I am proud to say that no American soldier smiled or even acted as

if he noticed her misfortune. The American prisoner gained the respect of women prisoners all over Germany by conducting himself in this manner.

There are many German women and girls working with us. Dirty and unkempt as we are, I cannot help but notice the manner in which they compare us with their own soldiers. They associate themselves with us as closely as possible at every opportunity. This is strictly forbidden, however.

August 15, 1943

Today is my birthday. Hope I am home before the next one. We have had no mail yet.

August 22, 1943

We are working very hard now, trying to get the grain into the barns before the rains come. The food isn't substantial enough for us to work such long hours.

On the Sundays that we don't work, we are locked in our squirrel cage, and the guard goes home or to the nearest village. We are lucky to have enough water to drink, none to wash with. Some things one must endure are perhaps necessary or in some cases unavoidable. But a lack of even sufficient drinking water looks very much to me that they either do not wish to be bothered with us, or just want us to realize that we are prisoners.

They do not have adequate equipment to operate a farm of this size. Everything possible is done by hand.

In our country, we would not hold a dangerous criminal subject to such living conditions as we have here. There are more flies in our quarters and in the shed where our scant supply of food is kept, than one usually sees around a decaying carcass. I have not seen a piece of screen wire in this country.

August 29, 1943

Today we received our first Red Cross parcel since last June. Food, cigarettes and toilet articles. Boy, are we happy! My buddy received a food parcel from home which he shared with me. See what I mean by Buddy?

I also received my first mail from home, dated May 12th.

September 5, 1943

Sunday - we are not working today. We received another Red Cross food parcel. Our morale is very high as far as food is concerned.

It rains or rather drizzles about all the time now. We have never had a chance to dry our clothing as they are taken from us and put into a small room near the guards at night. This is done so we will not try to escape. In the morning, they are brought to us still wet.

Our only pair of trousers and one shirt are pretty well worn out. Hope we can get a jacket of some kind before winter.

We hear no news of the war, but our hopes are high. Occasionally we hear some German propoganda from which we can make a few deductions and get a rough idea what is going on.

The Red Cross food parcels were stopped some place.
Guess we can get along without them, though it is very hard to do.

September 19, 1943

Today received new trousers, shirts and shoes from the Red Cross. Regular U. S. Army issue. This solves the clothing problem. We are all very happy and thankful.

September 24, 1943

Any work project in Germany for prisoners is called a Kommando. Today we left this Kommando and were taken to another a few miles away. It is only two miles from the Baltic Sea on a point about thirty miles west of Danzig, Poland.

There are American prisoners here which brings our group to forty men in all. We live in one large room with a kitchen attached. One man remains in the Lager as a cook while the others do field work. His chore is keeping the place clean as there is very little to cook.

The work at this time is potato harvesting. It is the hardest work so far. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if we had more to eat, and they didn't drive us so hard.

One of the American prisoners was shot by the guard a few days ago, so everyone of the rest is pretty much on the ball.

October 23, 1943

Boy, have the Jerries been giving us the works the past few days! Just like fighting fire -- some of us are getting pretty weak.

We just received another new American Army uniform. Also socks, shoes, toilet articles, towels, soap and the prize of prizes... a heavy overcoat. All this was from the American people through their Red Cross. May God bless them for this act.

November 11, 1943

Armistice Day -- The day marking the end of the last war. Wish it were marking the end of this one. Here I am twenty-five years later, a prisoner of the same people. I don't quite understand it. When any of the civilians of the village has work of his own, he is only allowed to do it on Sunday when he isn't at his regular duties. He grabs a few prisoners to help him. It is only a racket they are working, but the guards permit it so we are helpless to refuse.

According to the rules of the Geneva Committee governing prisoners of war, we are entitled to twenty-four hours per week to do our laundry or attend to things of a personal nature. The Jerries, however, recognize no rules other than those which they make themselves.

We go to work when it is still dark and return after it is again too dark to work.

It is very cold and damp. The conditions are terrible. How the war can last so long I cannot understand.

All the German people I come in contact with fully realize that they have lost the war and are beaten. They know and admit that Germany cannot possibly win.

Fear such as we have never known forces them to carry on.

They are very despondent and look and act more like prisoners than we do.

November 25, 1943

Thanksgiving Day in Germany. Since this is only an American holiday, the Germans do not recognize it as being more than just another day. Things in general are anything but pleasant. But we are very thankful for any one of a million things which we have today. Things we never realized were so important until we were deprived of them. We have seen so many people who were, or are, less fortunate than we.

We are thankful to be alive and enjoying good health. We are thankful that we are not starving as many people in Europe are today. We are thankful that we have warm clothing for the coming winter, that even as a prisoner we live in very little more fear than the average person around us, that in our own country we are not driven to work, to hunger, to a miserable existence of slavery and deprivation for a very meager fee and skimpy rations doled out of the hands of mighty Lords and Masters. Those great men of whom we are afraid to speak unfavorably except in whisper to only our closest friends, for fear of being reported to our superior by some neighbor craving some sort of favor. This would lead us to be punished by imprisonment and half-starved or anything else chosen by our superiors as suitable punishment for showing disrespect.

We are also very thankful that when this war is over, and if there are any of us still alive, we can return to a country where no one

recognizes any superior except God -- to a land where no man is superior to another.

Most of all though, we are thankful that the people in the United States aren't suffering as are many in the world today. That they have enough to eat and enough clothing, that they aren't subject to heavy bombing, that mighty armies aren't struggling in fierce combat across the peaceful plains of the middle west, that bombs and artillery aren't leveling our great cities to smoldering ruins, taking thousands of lives and leaving many homeless as well as badly maimed and crippled.

Every day is Thanksgiving day for me, but for the ones who seldom think as I do, I hope that this day they will pause for a moment to thank God for the things which we all so easily overlook and forget.

November 29, 1943

Our mattresses, whether wood shavings or straw, are always full of fleas. At times, they become very annoying. Many of the boys have had the flea bites become infected. They cause sores that spread rapidly, and are very hard to heal. Have had much trouble the past four days with an infected tooth.

I have been promised by the guard that he will take me to the dentist in Lauenburg tomorrow. I have always accused the American Army dentists of being rough. Tomorrow I can make a comparison.

November 30, 1943

One tooth extracted today. It is a very simple operation; they just lift it out. They do not use a needle first. Perhaps the shortage

of drugs had something to do with it. I am thoroughly convinced from this experience that there will be no more dental work for me in Germany.

December 6, 1943

It is dark when we go to work and dark when we quit. We work from seven-thirty A. M. to four P. M. We have one hour off at noon. Last summer we started to work at six-thirty and worked until eight, and sometimes ten, at night. We were allowed a half-hour rest at nine A. M. and again at four P. M.

The work is not always so hard, but one dares not stop one minute for anything. When we worked so many hours, it was very tiresome, but now the daylight hours are shorter, and it isn't so bad.

One does not get interested in work being done for the enemy, and this causes it to become more of a drudgery.

It is cloudy and raining most of the time. It has snowed several times this fall, but not very much at each time. There is always a damp, cold wind coming off the Baltic Sea. It is awfully muddy, and working conditions are bad.

December 7, 1943

Two years ago the Pearl Harbor attack. For two years, we have been in this war. It has taken us two years to gain the so-called upper hand. There are very few Germans who can deny that we have it today.

It has cost many lives, but let us not take it too seriously. There is still one who exercises control over all. He can, and will,

stop it before it gets too rough. It is just a price we must pay for the things we have.

Every individual in the United States today enjoys many things in everyday life that are, over a period of years, taken for granted. These same things are only dreamed of in other parts of the world. We all inherit such things merely by being sons of those great forefathers who struggled and fought to establish them for us. The very least we can do is fight and do all we can to preserve those things. That we did, and that we will always do. All the while, thanking God for the power, for the strength in material, men, and most of all, the spirit to defend our heritage for our everlasting faith in the fact that Right is Might.

We are taught the golden rule from childhood and when we are grown, we naturally carry on the policies we have adopted.

Since I have been captured, there is a passage of speech made by Pope Pius that gives me courage to carry on. I shall never forget it.

"Now, that for us the fighting is over, let us refrain from hating those whose duty it was to fight against us."

"God will never permit trials to become greater than the strength he will give us to overcome them."

We, most of us, feel that we are fighting for a great cause. We can win, and we will win. Let us hope, and pray, that it is soon, for the sake of the prisoner, naturally; for the sake of the soldiers at the front, or at least, away from home, and for the sake of our people at home, whether they are being dragged into the turmoil by constant bombing, or live in actual battle zones, or are just working and helping on the home

front, anxiously waiting for sons, husbands, or friends who are away, Eash has his or her individual place during a war.

May we come out of this conflict much wiser, much more contented with our lot, not nearly so anxious to rob our neighbor.

God said there would be wars. He knew that we would disagree in religious, financial, and political matters.

We struck back at the Pearl Harbor attackers. We will continue to strike until this menace has been dealt with justly.

We will stop the great warriors of Europe who have taken away from the people rights they had maintained for centuries. Sometimes I think the world expects this of us.

December 17, 1943

A new experience today - a rabbit drive. About one hundred civilians and forty prisoners encircled a large area. As we gradually close the circle, the chefs or large land owners, shoot the rabbits, deer, or hogs we drive ahead of us. There are many rabbits, deer, and wild timber hogs in Germany. After spending the day on this hunt, we are pretty well exhausted.

In counting the spoils, we have two hundred large, brown jack rabbits, one deer, and one hgg. The greater percent of this game goes to the Army. The common civilian, as well as the prisoner, gets nothing. The chef gets some, but I'm not sure what percent.

A land owner is the only one permitted to shoot any kind of wild game in Germany.

In other parts of this country, the farms are small, but up in Pommern Province, they are all very large. In fact, all of Northern Germany is this way.

This particular farm where I am working is about ten thousand acres. The adjoining ones are equally large and nearly all farms are five thousand or more acres. There is, however, much timber land.

The chef, or owner, has a large mansion surrounded by a small village. He owns every home in this village. The people work for him on this great farm and are about as much his property as the horses they work. They are rationed so much food and paid so much by him.

They are only allowed enough food to keep them alive and a place to sleep. Sometimes two or three families are crowded into one house. The living conditions are very unsanitary.

A few are selected as foreman and are forced to treat the others as slaves in order to hold their positions.

If one wishes to go to town for any reason, he must convince the chef that the trip is absolutely necessary. If one can manage to do this, he is then issued a permit to be absent from work. He must show this permit to authorities in order to buy a railroad ticket to the nearest place where his particular business could be taken care of.

This applies to men, women, and children alike. When a boy or girl reaches the age of sixteen, they must go to work. School is automatically finished at that time unless the boy or girl show signs of unusual

intelligence. In this care, their educational possibilities are nearly unlimited. The State bears the expense but reserves the right to choose their vocation.

The average child, however, becomes the property of the chef as soon as his bit of school is finished. He is then as suppressed and slave-like as his parents. The man, and no member of his family, is permitted to go elsewhere for employment.

These same people hate the Jew because he suppresses the common man. Yes, they hate a Capitalist but seem satisfied with this way of life.

Upon meeting, they do not greet each other in the manner that we would. They must say, "Heil Hitler." Also, they extend the right hand upward in a salute to the Nazi party. This is compulsory, and they are liable to prosecution if they fail to do so. There are those amongst them who would report anyone failing to show respect to the beloved party.

The chef seems to have very little to do with running his own farm. It is all done by a Government inspector who also lives on the farm. Every morning except Sunday, in most cases, there is a bell that rings. Work Call. The workers of the village gather . . . men, women, children, and the German guards with their prisoners.

The work orders of the day are issued to the Misterns, or bosses. These orders come from the Inspector as one scarcely ever sees the chef. Each foreman then selects the amount of laborers to do the particular job of work he is assigned for the day. The Inspector then spends

the day riding a horse around visiting the different labor groups.

Everyone is afraid of this man, and the foreman produces all he possibly can.

A prisoner does not rate very highly in the eyes of the Inspector who is usually a wounded German officer who is not physically fit for front line duty.

We are, in this manner, forced to do our best at whatever task we are assigned to. The guard's bayonet helps with the persuading in some cases. We are kept always aware of the fact that we are prisoners and have no rights at all.

December 26, 1943

Christmas Day, and indeed, a very strange one. Christmas Eve in the past has always been a night of nights. Last night I was surrounded by iron bars and a locked door. Somehow we do not seem to mind the bars or locks so much. After being out in the cold all day we are glad to stay indoors at night.

The German girls of the village singing "Silent Night" in the distance makes me a bit homesick or lonesome or something. I really thought I was too hardened by now to be affected by such things, but I guess that even a stone has tender spots.

Yesterday there arrived a special Christmas parcel from the American Red Cross. It was perfect in every detail. We gave some sugar, chocolate, and margarine to one of the German ladies, and she baked us many cakes. They were very good, and the boys appreciated

this act on her part.

We have enough food and clothing now since the American Red Cross is in full swing.

I also received eight letters from home yesterday. With everything we have had today, and knowing that everyone was all right at home, the day has nearly been a happy one.

I know I shall long remember this Christmas. We have hopes that the next one will be better.

We all this day join in giving thanks to God for our good fortune. That we did survive our engagements in combat. That mentally and physically, we are in fair condition. That we still have the strength and courage to face each day's tasks as they come, until the final day we again join the ranks of our American buddies to go home to the places and people we love. They have waited long for our return -- where we will be surrounded by friend instead of enemy.

We feel that the worst is over. Now we are only waiting for the final curtain, hoping and praying that it won't be long.

We have, in the past few months of our imprisonment, kept our hearts from becoming bitter with hatred for our captors. Let us all try to continue in this manner to the end. Hate is a terrible thing.

It would be pleasant to know, as this Christmas day of nineteen forty-three comes to an end, that the minds of our loved ones in far-away America were as trouble free as our own. We also hope that they are as strong physically and spiritually as we.

We do not feel that our asking for this very thing so many times has been in vain.

We do not feel that our request, however great or small, if asked in good faith, will go unheard.

December 29, 1943

Today the rabbits that were killed on the drive twelve days ago were skinned and dressed. For twelve days they have been hanging in a warm room before even their heads were taken off. The Germans say the meat is better when seasoned, or tempered, this way.

The odor of them in their not-too-early stage of deterioration, was offensive, indeed.

We did not get any of them, anyway. This is only mentioned to show the quality of the food they have. One can guess from that what the prisoners' food would be like.

When a cow or hog dies from any cause, disease or otherwise, they are taken to another village and butchered. The meat is distributed amongst the prisoners. In a large camp at Friedrichoffen, we were issued a quarter of beef for five hundred men. The hoof had not been taken off. Neither had the horse shoe.

January 1, 1944

New Year's Day. Maybe the next year will bring something better for us.

February 17, 1944

Became a prisoner one year ago today. There have been many worries, a few happy moments this past year.

This next year should pass quickly as we are so very busy.

February 24, 1944

Have received one clothing package and two cigarette packages from home this past year. Cannot understand where the parcels mailed every sixty days are going. They are long overdue.

There were three packs of either "Raleigh" or "Old Gold" cigarettes in every Red Cross food parcel. The German authorities are taking them away from us. They claim it is because of the propaganda on the pack. The "Raleighs" have a war bond advertisement. The "Old Golds" have the following verse:

Freedom

Our heritage has always been freedom
 We cannot afford to relinquish it.
 Our armed forces will safeguard that heritage
 If we too, do our share to preserve it.

I suppose the entire food parcel will be next.

One certainly could not live long on the food the Germans issue with no help from the Red Cross. At least we could not do the work that is expected of us.

We have received Red Cross food parcels regularly since December first, and the food situation isn't bad at all.

April 2, 1944

There doesn't seem to be any news at all. We have been watching the Jerry civilians' morale get lower and lower. It has been very interesting to watch the attitude of the people around us. I have been told, and can well imagine, what it was like when they were winning the war.

It snows or rains almost continually and is very wet and muddy. We see the sun only a few minutes at a time. We worked outside all winter and never missed a day. It has not been so very cold, except a few days at a time. We have been fortunate to get through the winter with no serious illness. There is always a strong, damp wind, but Thank God, the winter is about over. Maybe summer, with its long hard hours of work will bring better weather and higher hopes.

April 9, 1944

Easter Sunday again in Germany.

One year ago today we were working about as hard as we are now, and nearly starving at the same time. Many did.

Today we have Red Cross food parcels and besides that, my buddie, DuWayne Bulman, and I have eggs, a lovely cake, and a number of other articles of food. This was a contribution from a love-sick German girl. I worked in a blacksmith shop with her father and allowed her to think I was in love with her and she was expecting to, some day, come to America with me. The entire family treat me as I were one of them, this being a very dangerous act on their part. The American prisoners seem as well satisfied at this time as one could expect prisoners to be.

I am thank ful for our good fortune today, in the face of such hardships and suffering throughout Europe. May I continue to keep the good faith that perhaps has brought me this good fortune.

Today saw fifty or sixty American B-17 bombers returning home after a daylight raid on Danzig. They were attacked by German Anti-Aircraft fire and fighter planes. Two of the planes were behind the formation, probably wounded from their previous engagement. At any rate, these two planes were attacked by the German fighters. There were several fighters, and though one was shot down, the action did not last long with the helpless bombers.

After part of their crews had hit the silk, they came down about a mile from where I was standing.

One went into a power dive. As it went out of our sight behind the timber line to crash on the rocky Baltic coast, there was one sight a soldier always notices and never forgets. The tail guns were still blazing as she crashed with a part of her unfortunate crew. The guns still in action as she plunged to earth, too badly wounded to carry on, her mission completed, shows us, at least, American courage. The kind it will take to win this war.

We hated to see this, naturally, but as the oily black cloud of smoke drifted Heavenward carrying the souls, we hope, of our unfortunate comrades, our morale became higher in spite of the lump in our throats. We knew that we must have losses.

We also knew that good, courageous men, brother Americans, supporters of the Stars and Stripes, were still in this war. We were beginning to think that America had forgotten us over here. And still, on this quiet Easter Sunday, we were not prepared for this sight. And though I have seen destruction, death and smoke from burning planes,

ships, cities, tankers, vehicles, and men, one must have the proper setting or they will produce a severe shock.

We know what they were thinking. We know how they felt. To them it means everything -- a fight to the finish.

To you at home with your comfortable surroundings, good food, radio, and Sunday paper, please try to remember it until the more fortunate ones get home. They did it for you.

The other plane made a forced landing in heavy timber and, of course, there were no survivors. Two men were taken prisoners from the first plane, and two or three from the second. They were, perhaps, the only ones who were able to ride a silky cloud to safety, or at least, imprisonment.

Now, as we look over in the direction of Danzig, we see the results of our unfortunate comrades' work. There is a great black smoke cloud on the horizon. Yes, we see it, fellows, and join you in saying. "It was worth it." Danzig is burning. Other planes will come to avenge you.

April 18, 1944

Today starts my fourth year in the service.

May 14, 1944

Sunday, and Mother's Day again.

One year ago on Mother's Day, the first American Red Cross parcel arrived. We were working very hard and nearly starving at that time. The parcels brought us new life, new hopes. It was the happiest

day of my life.

Today, a year later, we are still working very hard but have all the food and clothing we need. We are very lonely and depressed, but aren't actually suffering.

Through a misinterpretation of orders on the part of the guard, he took us to services in a German Church. He was supposed to take us to services conducted for prisoners by a prisoner chaplain, but we went to the wrong town. The services in the German Church were very like our own.

We aren't in the least happy here, but we are very thankful for our good fortune.

May 28, 1944

Today received six cartons of cigarettes and one food parcel from home. They were mailed in February. I guess all the others have been lost.

We went today, Sunday, to clean the grave of our unfortunate comrade, Jerome Donovan, who was shot last summer by a guard because he was too weak to work.

June 25, 1944

Very quiet this Sunday. There is a wedding in the village. One of my foreman's daughters is getting married. Quite an affair, these German weddings.

The sun comes up about five A. M. and sets about ten P. M. at this time of year. In winter it is dark from about three-thirty P. M. to seven-thirty A. M. We have one warm day and a dozen cold ones.

The sun scarcely ever shines. It rains or is cloudy nearly all the time. There is always a cold, damp wind. A heavy jacket isn't a bit too warm today.

There has been no news for weeks, so the war is going all right.

July 4, 1944

Would like to see some fireworks on this Independence Day, but was just another day's work. Sure hope we can get out of here before long. We have clothing and food. We aren't suffering for anything except freedom.

The working hours are long and hard. The boys quarrel a lot. Their morale slips a little at times when weather or working conditions get bad. A smile and pleasant word now would be worth a million dollars.

Many of the fellows are looking forward to big things when this war is finally over -- homes, wives, good jobs, automobiles, and many other things. I guess I have passed the stage where one plans on the future. I have, to a certain extent, now given up all hopes for anything more in life than a little more living comfort than I have here.

Above all, I want freedom.. I have no wife, no home, no job, no auto or any of the things the fellows speak of. If I can once again have my freedom in my own country, I will be satisfied.

My buddy and I confide in each other. Somehow, we manage to keep each other from cracking up. I never thought any man's nerves

could stand such a strain. There are many things I dare not write. To write anything in a diary is forbidden, so one must be careful.

July 22, 1944

Twelve cartons of cigarettes from home today. My buddy, Bulman, also got a good parcel. My parents had my address wrong, but everything seems to be o.k. now as my parcels are coming through.

The busy season is on now, and they are driving us like slaves. The work is very hard. The hours are long. Some of the boys around on the different Kommandos are cracking up and having to be returned to the Stalag. Nerves shot, or to us, stir happy. Bulman and I think we can sweat it out now, though the end really isn't in sight.

No man has really eaten until he has starved. No man has really been clean until he has felt lice nibbling and crawling upon him. No man has really lived until he has felt death near at hand.

Sometimes I'm afraid our parents, relatives, or friends will be disappointed in us when we get home because of the terrible disposition we are gradually adopting.

Right now, I would venture to say that not more than ten per cent of us will get home. The war isn't over yet and we, as prisoners, are in for trouble in the last days. There will be no food. Maybe marching, maybe forced into heavy action unarmed.

August 15, 1944

Another birthday for me in Germany. Thirty years old. Sometimes feel twice this age. Have been running a binder cutting grain.

A working day is from six A. M. until dark now during grain harvest - about fifteen hours. Seven days a week.

I had a lovely birthday cake this evening from my love-sick German girl friend. Had an awful time smuggling it into the lager. It really was worth the trouble, however.

August 27, 1944

Sunday -- One year ago our comrade, Jerome Donovan, was shot. Today we held a memorial service at his grave. A short sermon, prayers, taps, and the National Anthem. One of the boys from the Stalag band furnished the music. Everything was conducted in a military manner. The entire civilian population turned out and were very impressed.

September 17, 1944

Sunday -- Today I helped my civilian foreman dig potatoes. This was not compulsory but purely voluntary. This family, consisting of the old man, his wife, and two daughters, treat me as if I were one of them. They befriend me in every possible way, and it is very dangerous because it is strictly forbidden. They give me bread, butter, eggs, fruit, cake, fish, or anything they think I could use, and actually cannot spare it, as their ration isn't very much. They are afraid that I'm going hungry, when I actually have more food than they do at this time.

Before the war the old man was a minister but was ousted from the Church for Anti-Nazi activities. He treats all the American prisoners very well, but my working for him, and being about to bring

his lovely daughter back to "God's Country" with me, doesn't exactly go unnoticed by the rest of the family. Sometimes I'm a bit ashamed of myself, but when the Red Cross food parcels do not come, and my buddy and I get a little hungry, I forget it and carry on. I have made no promises but have allowed them to take perhaps a little too much for granted.

This old couple have lost two sons so far in the war, and the third is reported missing.

These people aren't allowed to even speak to prisoners. Above all, we weren't allowed to associate with their women. To go to one of their homes unaccompanied by a guard is unheard of.

When I volunteer to help this old man with his homework on Sunday, it looks pretty good to the guard. Actually, there is scarcely any, if any, work done. It is merely an excuse to have me over for Sunday dinner. And what a dinner! It is a continuous barrage of questions about America.

The girls are very clever in getting me alone with them, while the old man and lady smile their approval. I have learned to speak their language pretty well, and my activities are certainly bringing in the groceries.

People at home would, perhaps, disapprove of this shady business on my part, but some day, perhaps, I can make up for all of it.

This young girl is so sincere and honest that even though she be German, at times my conscience bothers me.

November 8, 1944

Two years ago, the beginning of the African campaign. My combat of weapons was short lived, but the continuous combat of nerves and minds produces a bit of battle fatigue, even under the best of conditions.

November 11, 1944

Armistice Day again. Still the war goes on. In the past few days, the "volksstraum" or home guard, has been organized. Men from sixteen to sixty take training every Sunday and are sworn to do anything asked of them, to defend their community from the hands of the advancing enemy. They are volunteers, but nearly at the point of bayonet. They resent this regimentation very much.

It looks very much to me as if Germany were beaten and just waiting or preparing a last stand against the knockout blow. Germany had an Army when we fought them in Africa, but by the looks of the soldiers coming on furlough from the front today, old men and young boys, I do not see how they can last much longer.

There have been continuous food parcels from the Red Cross throughout this past year, but now they are cut in half. We are told that they will probably stop entirely as the transportation for them is getting impossible.

We all realize that we will get very hungry before this thing is over, but we are never quite ready to start dieting. I am very glad now, that I have allowed my lovely German girl to build air castles. Maybe my buddy and myself will be able to take it.

Wish I could get a girl for the rest of the fellows. Perhaps they are gentlemen and wouldn't stoop to such deceitfulness, at least until they had gone without food for several days.

The German civilians are starving in these bombed cities. Little consideration is shown for prisoners in a country that has elected to fight a losing battle to the last man.

The German civilian has a terrible fear of this Nazi party. There are stool pigeons amongst them always. They also fear the enemy soldiers as they grind across their country in large tanks and fly over their heads in untold numbers, spreading death and destruction throughout the land. They are all afraid of the Russian soldiers very much. Now their propaganda system tries, as the American troops get closer, to paint them as gangsters, murderers, and anything that would instill fear of them into the hearts of the German public.

The propaganda points out now that the American soldiers will murder innocent women and children. He will rape, plunder for valuables, and burn everything inflammable. At first it was only the "Luft Gangsters" or Air Corps that were so bad. Now, as the ground troops draw closer, they become demons overnight.

With clothing from the Red Cross, we dress much nicer than any civilian or soldier around here. We are, even during working hours, as clean and neat as possible.

Sometimes one will slip us a bit of forbidden information about the war. We, in turn, will hand him a cigarette or if we are

befriended by any of the ladies, we usually pay off with a bit of soap, or chocolate. We usually have a little candy or gum, and the children think we are quite all right. We have a terrible black market in operation and since we control the items in demand, we sometimes put them at a terrible disadvantage.

We never fail to respect the older ladies as we would in our own home town.

Our general good manners and cleanliness are known and respected in every part of Germany where American prisoners are held. When they read or hear their own propaganda, they look at us, and it all becomes very deceiving. We have planned it this way, along with fictitious tales of truck loads of food following the front with their orders to feed the hungry civilian population.

Not one man, woman or child in this village, or any village where Americans are kept, are afraid of us or our comrades on the front. Perhaps, they will be very surprised, but we will wait and see.

A very small percent deserve to be treated other than as enemy. A few of them have befriended us from the day we arrived. The balance though, are of a very cruel nature. They cannot be singled out or separated so it would be impossible to show any leniency on their behalf.

When we work, we are too busy to talk. When we aren't working, we are locked in the lager. But, the average civilian starts a conversation at every opportunity.

I, personally, do not have a guard where I work. My civilian foreman has taken full responsibility of me.

There is not a possible chance of escape from here, and we aren't guarded very closely. We are out on a point in the Baltic Sea with three companies of guards besides Gestapo and civilian police behind us.

November 19, 1944

Winter again is here, The same cold, wet weather. We have just had our first snow.

Last summer came bringing better weather and higher hopes. Now, winter is here again, bringing bad weather and very little hopes.

We found out last winter that a pair of galoshes and a pair of gloves would be worth a million dollars. We did not have them then. By writing home, we could have had them sent. We were all too sure that the war would be over by now. We were entirely too optimistic. We will pay for it the balance of the winter.

It looks like the Red Cross food parcels will be discontinued any time now. With winter coming, this will be a bit rough.

My foreman's wife just showed me a notice of the death of her third and last son on the Russian front. They invited me to dinner this evening, and sent all the food I could carry to the lager for my buddy.

November 30, 1944

Thanksgiving Day again. We are very thankful that we aren't starving yet and that our health and spirit in general is holding up pretty well. We look around us and see a million things to be thankful for.

December 7, 1944

Three years ago today the Pearl Harbor attack. Since that day, the United States has received many severe blows. She has also dealt many severe blows.

I never thought I would be here this long. A prisoner is always a bit anxious. I try to keep from thinking about the war too much. It is progressing so terribly slow that, at times, I wonder if there really is a war going on. Of course, five minutes on the front would thoroughly convince me, I'm sure.

We work all week from before daylight until way after dark and wash our clothing on Sunday. It is a very tiresome routine week after week, month after month, summer and winter.

Time is very heavy on our hands. Everyone is very irritable. Working conditions and weather could not possibly be worse. It rains continually. Mud is knee-deep. Rations are very poor.

We managed to get by last winter because we were so sure it would be the last one. Now we are going through another, and according to what news we can gather, it looks like we will see all of this one here.

The boys on the front are really roughing it. I have a brother out there, and I'm worried about him.

Some of the boys show signs of cracking up a little. I'm going to try hard to keep from letting it get me down. If one ever slips once, or gets in the rut, he is beaten and usually doesn't last long.

I have lost lots of weight and am very nervous - smoking too much perhaps.

If the Jerry authorities ever find this diary, my worries will be over, as this sort of business would be strictly forbidden, along with many things I have previously mentioned. Perhaps, I can continue to keep it hidden.

Nearly anyone can stand the work here, at least for a while. Nearly anyone can go hungry, at least half the time. But, to be locked in the same small room with thirty to fifty men always the same men! We eat, sleep, bathe, chop wood, or wash clothes in this same room. There is some fighting and quarreling, as everyone is very irritable. We are always together, either working, or locked in this room.

We don't mind the bars on the windows, or lock on the door.

We don't mind being pretty hungry for a good meal.

We don't mind being a bit homesick or lonesome. A pleasant word would mean everything right now.

We don't mind doing our laundry in a rusty pail every Sunday.

We don't mind the working in a downpour all day, with no fuel for the lager stove when we return.

We don't mind an officer of the German Army coming around every few days and cursing everyone in the room, threatening to stop our rations completely unless we do more work, or kicking the boys around like dogs, or making a man work in the rain who is so sick he faints.

We don't mind listening to enemy propoganda or being called

swine, or being followed continually by a man in a green suit with a rifle and bayonet.

We don't mind any (one) thing forever, or all of them for a while. But, to have all of them over a period of weeks, months, years, it produces a mental strain that sometimes is nearly unbearable. It is unbearable for some.

In case some of us do get home again, I hope people will not hate us for the disposition we will have developed as a result of this lovely place.

December 17, 1944

Sunday again and very cold. There are a few inches of snow on frozen ground. It is either very wet with mud knee-deep, or very cold. Our lager is awfully cold, even when we have fuel. Our fuel is water-soaked stumps we gather out of the timber.

Next weekend is Christmas. Wonder what Santa Claus will bring me? Christmas is the same in Germany as in our country.

December 25, 1944

Last night was Christmas Eve. It was not quite so lonely as the one last year. I really enjoyed myself. Nearly every one of the boys were at the home of one of the many girls in the village.

I went over to see the foreman's daughter, Dora. Had a lovely meal. Heard some lovely music on the radio broadcast from London. The old folks went to bed very early. If the controller over this district had come around inspecting, we would all have gotten in very serious trouble, and the guard would have been court-martialed.

Today has been very enjoyable also. I have had the best food, thanks to the Red Cross and Dora.

The lager is decorated just as we would a ballroom at home. We have a beautiful Christmas Tree with real decorations from the Red Cross.

We are indeed fortunate because I know that there are prisoners whom the Red Cross cannot reach, who aren't registered with them, as a result of negligence on the part of the Germans. It really took us a long time to get things established this way. Our buddies on the front aren't so well off as we. God, what I would give to divide all this with them.

Our guard is an old man who is in sympathy with us, and that is probably responsible for his letting us get away with some of the forbidden things we do.

Things have been too perfect. I'm afraid trouble is brewing.

January 1, 1945

New Year's Day. Just another day ... had a nice weekend, however. It looks like the war will last forever. I'm afraid it won't quit. I shouldn't complain but I know things won't always be this way. They will be much worse, and soon, I'm afraid.

January 13, 1945

Another rabbit drive today. I became very ill and managed to miss this one. Collecting these rabbits feeds the German soldiers on the front. They got eighty-three. Not so well as last year. Hope

the blasted Krauts get hungry and quit fighting.

January 16, 1945

The daylight hours are longer now, so consequently the working hours are, too.

Time is getting very heavy again. It's usually a bad sign.

January 22, 1945

Transferred today to another working Kommando. It is directly on the Polish border, not far from Danzig. There are fewer men here, but everything else is generally the same as the last place.

I don't mind the change in work, but I sure miss my buddy. Also, Dora and her mother, to say the least of the groceries they supplied me with. Hope my buddy doesn't get too hungry, now that I'm not there to kiss this German girl and bring home the groceries.

I'm certainly a dead duck if the Jerries ever find this diary.

January 28, 1945

Sunday again, and very cold. It has been snowing and blowing for days. I have been out with a snow shoveling crew today. The drifts are very deep. Railroad and highway transportation is nearly halted.

I certainly miss Bulman, my buddy. Somehow we managed to keep each other's morale up. We became as close as brothers since all our soldier days have been together. I also miss Dora and her mother and the good food.

One of the boys just attempted suicide by cutting both his wrists with razor blades. I will not mention his name, just in case

this diary should get home. He would want it this way. At one time the Jerries kept our blades for us, to avoid this sort of thing. I suppose they will again now.

This sort of thing is common among prisoners. Some try one way, some try another, Usually successful. Others force the Guard to shoot them, while others just crack up, or go stir happy. A few feeble attempts to escape are made. It is nearly impossible from here. The terrible loneliness of prison life, or hunger, is generally the reason. Occasionally, family troubles at home prompts this sort of action.

We have been helping the civilians prepare wagons for evacuation. before the advancing Russian front. Evacuees come through every day now, in wagons, sleds, or on foot.

I am thankful that my people aren't having to do this in far-away America. The wind howls, the snow gets deeper and deeper. My God, when will it all end?

February 2, 1945

The roads are pretty clear now, and the evacuees are coming in droves. One must see it to realize the suffering -- hungry men, women, and children. If they don't find feed for the horses, they aren't going far.

As I sit here tonight, it is so comforting to know that my loved ones in far-away America aren't preparing to flee their comfortable homes before a mighty oncoming army, leaving all but a very few necessities behind, and having no place of safety to go.

No one who has not been the front can realize the destruction and suffering, as the enemy blasts everything into submission.

I have seen some of the most beautiful places completely demolished in only a few minutes.

I see humanity in a much different way than I used to. I understand the German language very well, but I will be so glad to hear some English spoken again. I am with other Americans, but Army slang and English are very different.

This lonely life is so terribly depressing, but at that, I suppose we prisoners are fortunate.

February 4, 1945

We get no Red Cross food parcels now at all. The western front has the transportation cut off, or else the Jerry is too busy to bother with us. Our buddies out there are giving them something to think about. The war is coming home to them and they are having a hard time seeing the glory in war that is supposed to be there. It seems to be a little different when the other side fights back. This waiting, and hoping, is very tiresome. Wonder how my brother is doing out there. I don't want anything to happen to him, naturally, but he would probably never be registered in Switzerland or get any Red Cross aid. He would probably be marched for days without food, as the transportation problem is serious. I hope he is killed if capture is the alternative.

February 11, 1945

Sunday again and a more beautiful day I have never seen. It is warm as spring.

Last night the village was full of refugees from east Prussia. Ragged, dirty people, rickety wagons, and hungry horses. Men, women, and children. They don't know where they are going. They are just going, and are getting pretty hungry. Soon they will be starving as their journey is just starting. The mighty Russian front comes grinding forward.

We hear the distant rumble; occasionally the larger windows rattle. At night the eastern sky is very ruddy. The noise is a little more south than it was. For two years I have been patiently waiting to hear those sounds. They are comrades. Yes. But we are in front of those guns, too.

Yesterday, a German girl twenty-four years old, escaped from a civilian concentration camp about five miles away, and came here. When she was questioned as to why she walked so stiffly, she explained that both lower limbs had been frozen. There was no fuel in the camp, and she was starving. The authorities do not feed the civilian prisoners enough to keep them alive very long. She was so weak she could hardly stand up. She went to the chef's kitchen, and asked for food. She was given no food, but was locked in a potato cellar, and the guard was called. She was dragged from this cellar by him, beaten until she could not stand up, and then shot. She was better off dead! A life of this kind is not worth enduring the hardships.

Today four more came and were likewise locked up. They were starving, and when the guards came, they caught them trying to steal two or three raw potatoes apiece. This was a terrible crime in

the eyes of the two well-fed, well-dressed Gestapo. For punishment they were beaten over the heads with heavy clubs and stomped into the barnyard mud and filth. Their screams could be heard for a half mile, at least. They looked longingly at our lager, but we could not help them against armed guards and besides, we were locked in. I am very proud to be an enemy of any government that inflicts such brutal punishment upon its people, German people. I can well imagine what they did in occupied countries. The suffering one must witness is so much greater than the suffering one must endure as a prisoner.

I have seen cruelty amongst men until I'm, to a certain extent, accustomed to it. But I'm sure, I could never become accustomed to this brutality and cruelty with women. We just aren't savage enough, I guess. Even a dog will not fight or abuse one of the opposite sex. Perhaps then, I'm in doubt as to what category these followers of Hitler should be placed in.

I wish every woman in the United States could see what I have seen today. As long as there is one American alive, they will never be mistreated as these women were. But I do wish there were some way for them to know what they have and appreciate those boys who worship them.

I have seen women of many nations, Irish, Scotch, English, French, Italian, German, Polish, Russian, Dutch, Belgian, Norwegian, and perhaps others suffer in such a manner, that it is nearly unbelievable. In the civilian prisons here in Germany, one can be prepared to see

cruelty at its worst.

I have seen women slave laborers working with large picks on the railroads, driving oxen, barefooted in snow and ice, starving, victims of legal murder, bare children in the forest with no shelter, or fire in January.

I sometimes wonder if this will have a hardening or seasoning effect upon me, or will make me more tender toward women. I will not have to worry about that if the Jerry ever finds this diary.

In the timber where we are working now, it is very quiet, and the sounds of the advancing front are plainly audible. Actually though, the sounds seem straight south of us.

News just came in that the main Stalag has been abandoned. It looks like the Russians have driven across from Danzig and up to stettin. If that is the truth, we are surrounded, trapped on this point. We are out of contact with the rest of the world. Maybe it won't be long now. Seeing so much suffering is getting on my nerves a bit.

February 13, 1945

The steady roar of the front is much closer now. Many French prisoners have been liberated by the Russian Army. Many are evacuated with, or ahead of, the civilians. I, personally, hope we are liberated here on this spot. That may be complicated.

If we are evacuated or driven ahead of the front, sooner or later in our surrounded position, we will probably be forced into a last stand along with thousands of civilians. There will be no quarters or

food, and very little consideration would be shown for prisoners by either side in this sort of situation. Prisoners are of no value now to either side.

The village is full of refugees now and more coming. We continue to work every day as if nothing were happening.

February 17, 1945

I became a prisoner two years ago today. Things sure have happened in my young life the past two years.

We brought all our tools in from the timber this Saturday evening, and that is something we have never done before.

The Russian artillery has everything on the place vibrating and is getting closer by the hour.

Something is going to break, and very soon, too. Everyone is so tense. I sure miss my buddy.

February 18, 1945

Sunday. Three years ago today I sailed from New York. Three years overseas is a long time. Wonder what it is like back home. Sounds strange, back home. I have nearly forgotten home.

Awakened at four o'clock this morning. Packed only a little of our personal items and food, and taken to Lauenburg, to our company headquarters thirty kilometers away. The entire company, consisting of sixteen hundred prisoners, all American, took only a blanket and what food we could carry, and started marching west, accompanied by nervous, heavily armed guards.

No one has any idea how far, or how long we will be marching. It looks like the beginning of the end. The road is full of wagons and people walking. This is the dreaded march I have expected for so long.

February 21, 1945

Have walked eighty kilometers so far. Sleeping in barns, very crowded. Eating from our packs. When the food we are carrying gives out, we are through, as I do not see where any more would come from.

The guards know no more of our destination than we do. They eat with the farmers where we stop at night. Their food isn't so good, either.

My buddy and I are together again. He brought me a roll of cooked sausage, a cake, bread and butter, also a souvenir, and love and best wishes from Dora and her mother.

February 24, 1945

Saturday. We have hiked one hundred and forty-five kilometers. Our packs containing food and a few cigarettes seem very heavy but are getting lighter entirely too fast.

We will certainly be hurting when this food gives out. The roads are packed to capacity. Horses, dead from starvation, are lying along the road. Every few minutes we pass one. I'm afraid we will see people the same way before long. It isn't too cold, but very wet and muddy. The boys' feet are getting in pretty bad shape. We are all carrying a little too much weight, but food is not to be had without carrying

it with us. This, however, isn't half as bad as what will come when our food is gone.

February 26, 1945

We have marched more than two hundred kilometers to date. It has been raining, and a terrific wind is blowing in off the Baltic Sea. We are marching west along the coast.

My feet are in terrible shape, and my buddy is having stomach trouble. I have nearly died several times the past two years from eating this soggy, black bread, and I know just how he feels.

Tonight we are soaking wet, cold, tired, and hungry, and the war goes on. God, give us strength to stand it. We must stand it now.

We just refused the raw, and very bloody ground horse meat for our meal. I was expecting that, as they are thick along the road. I am sure that the next time, we will be hungry enough to eat it.

Russian prisoners have been known to eat fellow prisoners when they died. So far I have never known of an American being hungry enough to do this. I hope I never shall.

We cannot steal food on these farms where we stop because there is nothing to steal. Besides, we are guarded too closely. They have nothing to give us, and we could not carry enough with us to last forever.

February 28, 1945

Have marched about two hundred and sixty kilometers to date.

The roads are cobblestones and mud. It is terrible walking. We are getting a bit hungry. Our food is about all gone now. My feet are getting awfully sore. I have no extra socks. It is too cold to remove one's shoes at night and besides, our feet are so swollen, we could never get them back on.

Horse flesh isn't so bad if it hasn't been dead too long. Would be better if we could cook, or even heat it a little, but fire is prohibited.

March 6, 1945

Have walked about three hundred and fifteen kilometers. Have laid over a day a couple of times because the roads were too crowded with evacuees.

Have been issued a loaf of hard sour bread, also a pound of margarine for twenty-five men. We also had a small handful of raw, horseflesh sausage. Blood sausage. Where they got live blood beats me because I know where the horse came from.

We slept in the open field on the frozen ground on one of the coldest nights we had.

We were issued a Red Cross food parcel for three men today. It did not last long because we were so darn hungry. It did help a little.

Someone occasionally trades a pack of cigarettes for a loaf of bread, but it is very hard to do. We are kept away from civilians and guarded closely. The average civilian has little more than we do.

Usually, the bread comes from the guard who steals it from our bread ration and sells it to us for cigarettes. There are no

cigarettes in Germany, and they are at a great premium. We could buy our way across this country with what few we have if there weren't so many of us. Naturally, the bread goes to the highest bidder.

Soap, tobacco, or coffee are the best trade items.

I hope this hike is over soon as my buddy and I are getting awfully weak. We have very little water. Warm food, or a warm drink, is something one could only dream of having. In summer it would not be quite so bad.

Another night in the open field would about finish me up. One hates to give up now, after sweating out two years in this place.

March 16, 1945

Have come about five hundred kilometers now. The measured distance is on the main roads, but we travel on the small, crooked, country roads, and actually walk much farther than this measured distance. The signs along the roads, especially direction signs at cross roads, enable me to tabulate the mileage.

We just got a very small loaf of hard bread for three men. It helped a little but certainly will not supply the energy we are burning up. We are getting so weak now that even the barns seem cold. We do, occasionally, get a chance to steal a raw potato or carrot on the farms where we stay overnight. One more time some horse flesh blood sausage. it was decayed badly this time.

A very few Canadian Red Cross food parcels were split up among us, but this was a very small ration.

Fires of any kind are strictly forbidden. A hot drink of plain water would sure help.

Bulman and I have taken a Scotch lad and an English one with us. They were lost from another column. Bill and Scotty are swell fellows. Hope we can keep them with us.

March 20, 1945

We marched forty kilometers today (twenty-five miles). We have covered about six hundred kilometers to date. We lay over a day now occasionally because the roads are so full.

With a group this large; we stand for hours morning and night, waiting for our slice of sour bread, if we get any, usually don't, or waiting to be counted in or out of the large barns we sleep in.

We either stand in line or march from daylight until dark. We are getting awfully weak, and many of the boys cannot go much farther.

There are many marching columns such as ours, and all the barns in this section are full every night.

There is no water all day on the road. In the barns, there are only a couple of men allowed out to carry water under guard. There is only half enough to drink, and none to wash or shave.

We are very dirty, very tired, very hungry and weak. The lice which nearly everyone has in abundance are all but driving us mad. We certainly cannot carry on much farther at this rate.

March 25, 1945

We have walked about six hundred and eighty kilometers at this time.

A few times we have gotten a small piece of bread which is only enough to make us hungrier, but rations are scarce for the thousand of civilian evacuees, and we are only prisoners.

We hear bombing night and day and see lots of air activity. We walk around most large cities to avoid being caught in a raid.

I saw a B-17 bomber go down just now. There were two men bailed out and one chute didn't stay open. Perhaps flak got it.

The weather has been fine the past few days. We are very weak and hungry, also dirty. The lice are eating us alive. God, such filth. I never dreamed I could get so dirty. Sure wish I knew how much longer this will last. I'm afraid I cannot go on much farther.

I just had a chunk of raw horse meat for dinner. It smelled pretty rough, as the sun has been very warm the past few days. It tasted pretty good and was tender, but a bit too bloody.

When animals die a natural death, they do not bleed as when they are butchered properly.

March 28, 1945

About seven hundred fifty kilometers now. We are very hungry and weak. I must have been a powerhouse to begin with, or I could never have taken this.

March 30, 1945

We have covered a distance of seven hundred and eighty

kilometers. We are in a camp now on a large airport. A very dangerous position with the air full of American bombers. We have no food here, or no beds, but we do have decent barracks.

April 1, 1945

Easter Sunday again. Today we were issued one small loaf of bread for nine men for three days. We are locked inside a wire enclosure and are starving. The lice are making us so miserable we can hardly stand it.

My buddy and I are broken out all over with a rash that feels like poison ivy. Our diet, or the lice, is responsible for this. I'm afraid we cannot endure this combination of physical torture very much longer.

As we were sitting in our barracks a few hours ago, there came a loud roar of motors, the familiar clatter of fifty caliber machine gun fire and slugs started tearing through our barracks. We dived to the floor. The planes climbed and dove, and hell really broke loose. We had no trenches to go into, so we sweat it out here until they leave, but they are no more than out of hearing distance when the unmistakable moan of heavy bombers comes to our ears.

We knew they were going to bomb this airport because the strafing planes were setting the stage for it. We have no air raid shelters. Just flat ground and our barracks. The boys dash wildly here and there. There is no use running because there is no place to go.

As Bulman, Scotty, Bill and I stand in the doorway and watch the formation of tiny, silvery crosses come gliding smoothly along toward us, we know that by an Act of God only could we possibly escape the tons

of explosives that would be hurled down upon us in the next few minutes.

It was a beautiful, clear day, and the planes were very high.

As the Jerry flak guns opened up around us, the barracks shook and our ears rang.

Between barrages of the Ack-Ack we could hear only our hearts beating. As the formation got nearly over us, I was relieved because I thought they would surely have started bombing at the end of the runway. At this very instant came the tiny familiar whistle which we all recognized at the same time. We dove to the ground as this innocent whistle gradually developed into a blood-curdling scream, as the heavy bombs began rocking the world around us. Closer and closer they came, pounding harder, and harder. The entire world seemed to be jumping and bouncing. Many of the boys' noses started bleeding, or the hands came off their wrist watches. All our heads pounded violently. It was done. The flak guns silent, the raid was over. Besides being weak from hunger, sick, dirty, and covered with lice, everyone is so nervous that, I'm sure, I have never seen men in such a condition.

We all fully realize that we are sunk, but I certainly hate to give up now.

April 6, 1945

They have promised us that we will move away from here before we get another raid. The last one certainly did a lot of damage.

I'm so weak that I cannot stand up any length of time now. My legs just won't take it. About everyone is in the same condition. I don't see how we will be strong enough to march out of here. At any time now,

the boys are going to start blacking out (fainting from starvation) on a large scale.

I would never have sweat our the past two years if I had known this. One man just asked another what he was going to do when he got home. That is about the most stupid question I could think of at this time. I do not think there is one man here who can take another week of this. Many are getting that horrible look on their faces.. I have seen it on the faces of starving Russian prisoners.

Just had another air raid alert. I feel as if I had been drunk.

April 9, 1945

We moved from this airport, which is about seventy kilometers from Hanover at Celle, and the next day it was bombed and strafed until it would have been impossible for any of us to live through it.

We have marched about forty kilometers back east. Where we go from here beats me. It seems that the American front is crowding hard.

Have been issued one loaf of bread for eleven men. The civilian ration is one pound per week. It is very hard on the stomach, but so is starvation.

The Jerries have no rations to give us, and it looks like the end is about here.

Filth, lice, and this terrible rash, along with hunger and forced marching, against the speed of our American buddies coming. Some race, But I don't want to bet on it.

April 11, 1945

Have come back about ninety kilometers now east and south. The front follows us closely. The thunderous roar of it can be heard day and night. Sometimes we can steal two or three small potatoes. They are used for hog feed. The only feed for stock in Germany is potatoes, rutabegas, or straw.

The danger, as the front nears, is not so feared as this starvation which is slowly, but surely, coming.

April 13, 1945

About one hundred and forty kilometers now. All night marching.

We were nearly liberated last night. The guards abandoned us, but came back again and forced us on.

It seems that the American troops have driven to the Elbe River on both sides of us, and the Jerries are trying to get us across before they close the gap. There is plenty of war going on around us, and things are really popping.

They are marching us hard now every night, and I'm beginning to stagger very much. If I make it until morning, I'll be very lucky. One cannot fall out of the march because the S. S. troops are everywhere, and one would be shot on sight.

With my buddies in about the same condition, we try every way imaginable to keep each other going. Just as we were about ready to drop and give up, we stopped for a few minutes -- the entire column.

I think the commander is checking on possibilities of getting us across the river.

Bulman and I seize this opportunity and evade the guards.

We slipped into a barn and soon the column left without us.

We heard later that the commander and the guards abandoned the column and made a dash for the river. The guards were changed several times on the march, so they would naturally have strength enough for the dash to freedom.

The column of prisoners went back to a village about a half mile from the barn where my buddy and I were hiding.

When morning came, we made ourselves very much at home, keeping an eye open at all times for the S. S. troops that were in the timber around us. We must not be found here, or we will be shot. A young German girl here has fed us a lovely breakfast and is already secretly dreaming of going home with us, providing she can keep us hidden and fed until the American comrades arrive. That is the surest hand I have, and I had better play it to the end. My buddy smiles his approval.

Friday, April 13, 1945

The battle is raging very hot all around us, but there is no activity at this spot. If we are found by the retreating troops, we will be shot at once.

If they continue resisting, we will be lucky to survive the battle, as our troops move in, even if the retreating Jerries don't find us.

There doesn't seem to be a very heavy defense set up here at this point so perhaps they will not resist too heavily.

I can see, from my hiding place, this village where the balance of the column have been hiding. They are, at this moment, lined up in

the road at the point of the bayonet, in the hands of the S. S. Troops.

Tough luck lads. They will now be marched, or shot. The column only numbers four to five hundred men at this time.

Well, look who is here! A tiny American artillery observation plane just flew over. He is dipping his wings in recognition. He has spotted the column in the hands of the S. S. troops. There will be no Artillery shells land here. Boy! What a relief! Just like a cold drink on a very hot day. We were too weak to try a break through, and the past few hours looked like the finish for us at any time. Now, perhaps, we have a chance, providing we can avoid being discovered by the prowling S. S. troops.

The tiny plane swooped and dived over the column of American prisoners, and the S. S. guards scatter like rabbits. Two start toward the rear on a motorcycle. The plane flies low over them, firing at them with an army pistol. What kind of war is this, anyway? It seems that one rider has been hit, as they dive from the cycle and fire rifles at the plane. Things are happening fast and furious around here now. American planes are straffing heavily a short distance to our rear, but do not know just what it is.

I have just seen the sight of sights. In the center of this small village sets a tank the size of a battleship. I have never seen such a machine before in my life. On the side is a large white star. The helmeted figure climbing out of the open turret, as the American prisoners swarm around waving and yelling, is grinning like a school boy. It is too

far to see all this, but I know it because a Yank just naturally grins at a time like this.

If this is a reconnaissance tank, the others will be up quickly. It has drawn very little, if any, fire.

We run to the village as fast as our weakened condition will permit. Two Yanks walk up the road to meet us, grinning as I knew they would be. To grasp the hands of our comrades, whom we had waited for for over two years, is something I shall never forget.

They assured us that the village was full of tanks and half-tracks, and that rucks were on the way up after us. As we walked around smoking our first cigarette for weeks, and happily shaking hands, there were tears streaking their dusty, unshaven faces, as well as our own.

They forced the German ladies of the village to fry eggs for us while we were waiting for the trucks to arrive.

Soon the trucks arrive and we are loaded on. We wave a last goodbye to the boys who saved us, and face the west for the first time. Once again we are rolling -- toward home -- a three years' dream come true.

For the first time since my capture, I see that it was worth it. Thank God for the strength and courage.

At another village way behind the lines, we eat a good supper and sleep in a feather bed in a lovely home, after the civilians had been ousted. We are on the other end of the gun once again.

We are next taken to a large airport near Hanover. The prisoners of all nations are coming in by thousands as the front gradually liberates them.

They are being shipped out by plane every day. It must have been a little too much for me because I have wound up in the hospital. They are treating me for an old wound. I thought it had healed up. I had forgotten about it. I don't know how long I'll be here. I really don't care now that I'm on this side again.

My nerves aren't very steady, and I'm very weak. I think I can take anything now, but it seems that I'm so tired. I'm not going to worry or plan anything.

My buddy and I will be separated here. Bulman will go on home. I sure wish I could stay with him, but perhaps it's better this way, as he worries about me too much. I certainly hope he can hold up until he gets home. No one can ever be closer to me than he has been. We have always been together. Training, fighting, on leave in foreign cities, in prison, working and starving. After four years, two fellows in good times and bad, get pretty well acquainted.

April 18, 1945

Four years ago today I became a soldier in the American Army. I set out to see what it was all about. Now, as I lay here in this hospital and look out the window on a battle-torn countryside, it isn't real, or doesn't seem real. I feel as if I were returned from the dead. In fact, I was "The Living Dead."

I am in no hurry to get home. I don't want to see any friends. I have no plans for the future, no hopes or desires. I am very tired, and about finished, I guess. When I am given food, it is all right. When no food is given, that is all right. When I was captured over two years ago, I weighed one hundred and sixty pounds. Today, I weight one hundred, even.

Today Bulman went to France. I certainly feel all alone. I am contented to lie here any length of time, as the weather is beautiful here in western Germany. I am getting enough to eat most of the time. I will get more when my condition will stand it.

Have just been transferred from the 105th General Hospital to the 93rd Evacuation Hospital on the airport at Hanover. I will leave here soon for some place. The beginning of the painful, tiresome, but happy road back.

April 19, 1945

Flew today from Hildershime, Germany to Paris, France. Hundreds of the liberated prisoners need medical attention as well as wounded men just off the Front. The hospitals are crowded and very busy.

I am in St. Marcel, the largest hospital in Paris. I can walk again, and have a few articles of clothing and have drawn a partial payment.

The ward surgeon insists that I take a pass and see Paris a bit. I do not care about seeing Paris. It's New York that I want to see.

I suppose that I have a little too much time to think while I'm hanging around here. My nerves are very jumpy. Our own planes overhead make me very nervous.

In the past two years we learned to regard allied planes as enemy, and never even noticed the German planes that flew over us.

Everything seems so noisy. A dropped tin tray, a sharp whistle, a rumble of food carts in the hall, the flap of a window blind, the click of a cigarette lighter, and thousands of sounds unnoticeable to nearly everyone else, paralyze me at times, as they are sharp reminders of various things that, in the past spelled danger.

We weren't afraid then because our nerves were never given a chance to relax. At no time were we ever completely free of nervous tension.

Now it is reproduced in harmless noises. Thank God, I am here. I did survive it all. If I could only relax and quit living the entire panorama over and over again.

If I could quit comparing the click of a cigarette lighter with that of an angry guard releasing the safety on his rifle. The rumble in the halls with sounds made by distant bombing or artillery.

Instead of always being on the alert to jump and move fast at the first harsh command, if I could only relax. There will be no harsh command. The American nurses are so gentle, so kind. They are as nearly worn out as I am. They understand so well how we feel.

It isn't fear of death that makes us so jittery. God knows that no man with two years of P. O. W. life behind him is afraid of death.

Many have chosen it in preference to existing in prison. It is the dread of the nauseating, weak feeling that always follows high nervous tension, excitement. In the very best conditions of prison life, we were never at ease. Always out of a clear sky came the worst storms.

We also feared that, before the war was finally over, we would probably be marched, starved, and used for armor plating by our captors, against anything our comrades chose to throw at them. If we could survive this until our liberation by either of the Allies, we would be lucky.

Sunday, April 30, 1945

Today went on a tour of Paris conducted for the hospital patients by the American Red Cross. Many points of interest were: Notre Dame, Jail where St. Louis was held prisoner and finally beheaded. I saw the apparatus used for this. I also saw the tomb of the unknown soldier with the everlasting light, the tomb of Napoleon, the Eiffel Tower, the original Statue of Liberty, the world-famous opera, hundreds of buildings and monuments of Old Gothic Architecture, some dated back to early seventeenth century.

Throughout this diary I have often mentioned the American Red Cross. May I, at this time, briefly review my personal past experiences with them?

I was hospitalized in a British Hospital No. 90 in Algiers, Algeria with a severe throat infection. This was in January of Nineteen Forty-Three.

Perhaps three hours after I arrived there came a Representative of the American Red Cross to see me. She was an English-speaking French girl. She brought cigarettes, chewing gum, shaving necessities, writing material, and offered nearly everything that I could use or would need.

Later when I was captured by the enemy in February of the same year, I was in a very helpless predicament. Many of my buddies and I nearly starved before we were transported into Germany, were registered, our registration sent to Geneva, Switzerland to the International Red Cross, and food parcels were shipped to us. The first parcels arrived May ninth, forty-three.

We were stripped of most of our clothing when we were captured. At strenuous construction work the clothing we were allowed to keep were soon worn out. We were dirty, as hardly enough water to drink was available. Nearly every man was covered with lice, and we were all weak and hungry. Very hungry. The Germans gave us a bit of soup every evening and a small piece of hard bread.

The food parcels we received from the Red Cross would not supply the American prisoners as fast as they were coming in. We thought they were capturing the entire American Army.

The Red Cross next sent soap, tooth powder and towels.

All summer the going was rough. The German food ration got worse. Our clothing was patch upon patch, with the help of sewing kits from the Red Cross.

Because of too much sabotage being done in connection with

this construction, we were sent to a punishment camp in Northern Germany. It finally turned out to be a good deal, but at the time we dreaded it. Especially, the four day box car ride.

Here in northern Germany, we began worrying very much about the cold hard winter that was coming. Then, in September, nineteen forty-three, came clothing, good American Army uniforms, overcoats, and shoes. In fact, everything in wearing apparel. This certainly saved the day. With very little clothing, and poor quarters to live in with the rain, or snow, or else temperatures far below zero, these uniforms were a God send, a life saver.

We had been getting just enough food parcels to keep us alive. During the first part of December we received a large shipment of food parcels. Then came a special Christmas parcel. It contained everything a lonesome, homesick, hungry, soldier could ask for, except Mom and the girl friend. A perfect ending for nineteen forty-three. Thank God and the American Red Cross.

Throughout the year of forty-four, we, in my Stalag "2-B", received a food parcel from the Red Cross every week and more clothing. We also received sport equipment and reading materials from the Y. M. C. A. We were very thankful for this.

At the beginning of the holiday season of forty-four, we received a large shipment of food parcels. Then, another special Christmas parcel, even nicer than the one the year before. Also, an assortment of beautiful decorations for our tree, and, shall we say barracks? It sounds

better at this time of year than "lager", or in English, just plain jail, or prison.

The windows were artividiially frosted. The bars were wrapped in such a manner that their ugly usefulness was changed into a design of holiday beauty. The interior was a beautiful replica of a ballroom on Main Street in any of our home towns.

Our tree was powdered a shining silver, hung with bright colored ornaments. We placed it in a window, and the German civilians came for miles around to see it. I am sure there was not one more beautiful in all Germany.

Usually, the interior of a lager, or prison, is very dull, dark, and has very little appearance, other than something lifeless, dead, forgotten, dreary, as only a prison can be. But, on this lovely Christmas, the last we shall spend in captivity, it is a splash of vivid color. It is gaudy as the shop windows. Our home, and we are proud of it.

In our Class A uniforms, we look as well as any soldier in Europe, and better than the greater per cent.

We have all the food we can eat and cigarettes or pipe and tobacco for those who prefer them. We hold a Christmas Eve service with the aid of Bibles and hymn books.

Yes, we had everything, along with the Season's Greetings from our own beloved Red Cross, provider of it all.

In February, nineteen forty-five, we were forced to march. Across Germany we came, from east to west. For about three months

this lasted. There were thousands of civilian evacuees also, running from the advancing Russian front. There was very little food available, even for the civilians. We were only prisoners.

We starved, suffered from exposure, struggled for existence in the hands of our merciless captors. The splendid mail service, which the Red Cross had always operated for us, had been stopped. There was absolutely no connection with the outside world. Twice we received a few food parcels from them. These were divided among us. I am so sure, that because of these two occasions, I am alive today to write these few words in their behalf. Without these food parcels, there would have been hundreds who could not have lived through this terrible march in my group alone, and I know that many other groups experienced the same, or possibly worse.

Men in sections who could not be reached by the Red Cross, or men who had not been registered, did not fare so well as we. This was usually prisoners of less than six months.

After we were liberated by our American buddies, we were taken by truck to the rear of the front lines. The very first sight that came to our tired, bloodshot eyes was the world-famous sign of the Crimson Cross in all its glory. A phonograph, playing American's latest music, and beautiful, but tired American girls, serving hot coffee and doughnuts, handing a pack of cigarettes and matches to every one of us.

I will not try to explain how much we all appreciated this noble attempt on their part to feed us as we came into the area by the

thousands. The place was packed with soldiers of all nations and more arriving in large truck convoys steadily, as the advancing front gradually liberated one prison after another.

As I walked in a line which, in single file, would have reached more than a mile, passed the truck, I received my coffee, doughnuts and cigarettes. Last, but perhaps the most helpful item, was the friendly, but dreadfully tired smile of the Red Cross girl. There is nothing more refreshing in a foreign country than an American smile. The smile of our own girl in blue, wearing the sign of distinction we recognize as the difference between life and death. The war prisoners' dream, and God's gift to mankind in need -- the American Red Cross.

I have been in several hospitals since my liberation and in or near all of them were the Red Cross girls. They are helping everyone in any way possible -- contacting our parents, sending cablegrams, writing if we aren't able, trying to supply all necessities, trying to make our lives more bearable.

In the cities of occupied Europe, they serve meals. They charge for them too, but not much more than enough to pay expenses. Their not charging is only in a case of emergency. Generally speaking, with a few exceptions, a man on leave is seldom in such a state that it would become an emergency. They run a very good loan service for men who run short of funds and are in need of quick cash.

They furnish, free of charge, maps and guides for sightseers. I have found them, a Mother in time of need, and a sister, and good companion, when all is well.

There will be a few exceptions, naturally; but I am pretty sure that few soldiers who were actually in need of any of their many services have found them asleep on the job.

I know, beyond any shadow of doubt, that I am voicing the sentiment of thousands, when I say that a lump comes into my throat, perhaps my eyes are a trifle damp, when I see the girls, the symbol of American love, courage, and generosity, proudly wearing the faded, but cheery, Crimson Cross. If they were decorated for courage in the face of hardships, many would have a chain of medals reaching into eternity.

In addition to serving American Prisoners of War in Germany, many soldiers of other nations were kept alive only by American Red Cross.

Certainly we all know that our parents at home, organizations of one kind or another, or the United States government, did donate the money to enable the Red Cross to do all these things. That should be understood, since these millions of dollars must come from somewhere. But no one, except they themselves, donated the time the patience, the courage, the cheerfulness, of these lovely American girls in blue, carrying the Red Cross aid to the boys they love, from the heat of the jungle to the frozen north.

Mesecher

May 8, 1945

The European War is over. Nearly everyone is celebrating in one way or another. Whistles, bells, shouting, drinking, dancing, and laughing. How happy they all seem.

As I sit here in this hospital ward, awaiting my release and transportation home, I look out the window and into another ward. There are those familiar bars on the windows, the kind I looked through for so long. The boys behind these bars are amongst friends, still their eyes convey they many horrible things that must be racing madly through their minds. Yes, this is the psychopathic ward. As the fireworks boom and the planes roar and dive overhead, these boys grasp the bars and wonder what it is all about.

If this war for peace is only worth all this, instead of gaining a lease lend peace as the other one did for us.

May 12, 1945

Have just been moved from this hospital in Paris to a large evacuation processing camp near Le Havre. Have been here two days. There is approximately sixty thousand in this camp. All I have seen were ex P.O.W.'s. The mess lines are very long. Will be glad to leave here, as it is so crowded, and my nerves are pretty shaky yet.

May 15, 1945

Have been issued some clothing. Food is pretty good. Just takes hours of standing in line to get it. This processing is very slow, or maybe we are in a hurry to get home.

May 19, 1945

Loaded on the U. S. S. Jackson at Le Havre. It doesn't look too bad. The ship is a tiny craft compared to some I have been on. There are only three hundred and fifteen of us, all ex-prisoners. We are crowded into a very small compartment. This crowding and pushing around would not be bad if we were in good physical condition.

We do realize that it cannot be helped, as everyone is trying to get us home as soon as possible. In spite of the fact that we are all very nervous and easily excited, we will cooperate in every way possible. It is going to be a long, hard voyage, and our patience is about exhausted. Maybe, after we get on the high seas and likely good and sick, we will be more contented. This tiny tub will probably do everything but turn hand-springs. Three hundred men cannot hold it down very well.

May 20, 1945

Today we are off the coast of England at Southampton. It is raining as usual. They are making up a large convoy. Don't know when we will shove off. This promises to be a very slow trip.

Friday, May 25, 1945

Have been at sea about four days now. The weather hasn't been too bad or the sea very rough. The ship being empty is probably responsible, but it rides much rougher than any I have been on before.

Somehow, I cannot appreciate the fact that I am going home. It does not seem real. For the past three years I have thought, what a great time that will be, when we turn and once again face the west. It

seems that we have been away so long. Many of us did not expect to ever get back again. One does not entirely give up all hopes, but it certainly looks doubtful at times.

After we were captured, our conversation with fellow prisoners was usually something of yesterday or today -- seldom of tomorrow. We had every reason to believe that in our predicament, it was possible to survive this crisis, but not probable. After one is there and sees the situation as it really is, it seems a waste of time to look into the future very far. I have seen the graves of many brave young Americans who said, "Yes, I'm going home." That is the proper spirit. But, sometimes in one's own mind, it is a bit different. Yes, it all seems like a dream. I have lived this unnatural life for so long that I will never believe it until I get there.

Sometimes I wonder why. In the past there has been a why for everything.

After what I have seen, I hope I never have sons sailing these same seas in a few years on their way to liberate Europe again.

May 30, 1945

Memorial Day, or Heroes' Day. We certainly can appreciate the significance of it today, while it's true meaning is fresh on our minds.

The weather is beautiful. The men have been sun-bathing on the decks until late this evening when we ran into a very heavy fog. It is continuing on into the night.

June 4, 1945

Our ship was met in New York Harbor by a small craft with a W. A. C. band playing. It was a very beautiful sight. We all appreciated this welcome. We were met on the docks, and given coffee and doughnuts by the Red Cross. Next we were taken by rail to Camp Kilmer in New Jersey.

June 7, 1945

Taken by rail today to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. Boy, this high speed travel is making me dizzy. I'm more accustomed to walking.

June 12, 1945

Arrived by rail in Des Moines. After four years the place and people have changed a little, perhaps not as much as I have. Well, I'm home at last. Now, for a sixty day rest. Thank God for everything. Tonight I remember the boys who didn't make it. I must learn to smile again.

August 22, 1945

I spent last week in the beautiful Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas, at the expense of Uncle Sam. It was lovely.

I was discharged from the Army at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas yesterday.. Today, I am home again. I am wearing civilian clothing. They feel funny to me. I probably feel funny to them.

I will now try to pick up the loose ends and carry on where I left off when Uncle Sam called.

Through my experiences, I see life in general much differently than I did at one time. At any time in later life when things look a little discouraging, I'm sure that I can find pages to read in this diary that will make them look much easier to overcome.

I would not accept any price whatsoever for my experiences the past four years; but I do not care for any more of them just now.

Thearl Mesecher

