

FROM THE BOWELS OF HELL

WORLD WAR II

1944 - 1945

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I WANT TO DEDICATE THIS STORY TO MY WIFE, MY CHILDREN, MY GRANDCHILDREN, AND GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN WHO HELPED AND INSPIRED ME, AND WHOM I LOVE VERY MUCH.

I AM WRITING THIS STORY 48 YEARS LATER, STRICTLY FROM MY OWN KNOWLEDGE AND MEMORY. IF I HAVE MADE ANY MISTAKES WITH DATES OR SEQUENCES, CHARGE IT TO OLD-TIMERS DISEASE

## CONTENTS

### CHAPTERS

- 1 MY EARLY TRAINING
- 2 LANDING IN FRANCE
- 3 FIGHTING IN THE SAAR REGION
- 4 THE BATTLE OF BASTOGNE
- 5 EVASIVE ACTION
- 6 LIFE AS A P.O.W.
- 7 FREEDOM AND BACK TO THE STATES

## CHAPTER ONE

### MY EARLY TRAINING

In 1935 I had to quit school and go to work to help support my family. The Great Depression was still on.

In 1936 I was sixteen, so I joined the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). We wore uniforms, lived in wooden barracks and lived by Army rules and regulations. We worked as engineers, doing construction and forest work.

In 1937, with my parents' consent, I joined the Vermont National Guard.

In June of 1940 I joined the regular Army. It was with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, Troop B of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Horse Cavalry Regiment at Fort Ethan Allen in Vermont, where I took my "boots and saddle" training.

After I finished boot training, we rode our horses to Lake Champlain, put them on ferry-boats and crossed the lake to Plattsburgh, New York. We unloaded them and rode to Pine Camp, New York (what is known today as Fort Drum). We spent three weeks

on maneuvers, then rode our horses back to Fort Ethan Allen.

The fall of 1940 we were sent to Fort Meyers, Virginia, outside of Washington, D.C., and joined with the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron. We had to perform honor guards for funerals at Arlington Cemetery and train for combat. If you made orderly twice in one month at guard mount, you were chosen soldier of the month. Then you had the honor of walking guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. I had that privilege twice during my tour at Fort Meyers.

In 1941 they sent the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

In 1942 the Army took our horses away and sent the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron to form the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mechanized Cavalry. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron they sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, to form the 10<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. Our job was to take 10,000 draftees off of the street and make combat soldiers out of them. By 1943 we had done our job and had one of the finest fighting forces ready for combat overseas. That would not come until 1944, so our training continued. We were then sent to Camp Gordon, Georgia, to train until

the end of August. They then shipped us by rail to a port of embarkation in New York, where we stayed for two weeks while they made up a convoy.

Finally they took us down to port, put us on troop carriers, 10,000 plus, with our personal equipment. We did not even get out of the harbor when the ship we were on ran a sand bar. The ship was listing badly, so they had to off-load us and take us back to port and put us on another ship. By the time we were on this ship with all of our equipment, we were one and a half days behind the convoy. The Germans had submarines all over the Atlantic Ocean, so it was not safe to be out of convoy without a Navy escort. We were out on a limb until we caught up with the rests.

I was seasick all the way over. You had to pick the side of the ship that had the wind to your back. If the wind changed, you were a mess. All my buddies would laugh at me, but I didn't think it was funny. Oh, I wasn't the only one!

Once a week or so we would have "Abandon Ship" drill. Every unit on board knew what to do and where to go.

We were off the coast of England when German submarines hit our convoy. The Navy sub-chasers dropped depth charges. We were down in the galley having breakfast when they went off. We thought our ship was hit. You know, all the Abandon Ship drills that we had did not do a damn bit of good. I never saw so much panic and confusion. The Navy sank the subs, but not before they got one of our oil tankers. We joined some more ships from England and headed to Cherbourg, France.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LANDING IN FRANCE

The Germans had sunk so many ships in the harbor, even their own, that we had to off-load out in the ocean onto LCIs (Landing Craft for Infantry). The sea was very rough. They dropped nets over the side of the ship and the LCIs would come alongside. We had to climb down the nets with our steel helmet, weapons, and pack. When the waves brought the LCIs up, we were told to drop, but only a second or two delay would mean the difference between 5 feet and 20 feet. There were some broken legs.

When the LCIs got near shore, they would drop the front gate and you would walk off. Some operators would not get close enough and you would drop into the water up to your ears.

They loaded us onto trucks and took us to a staging area where we would draw our vehicles and equipment. When they came from the U.S., some of the personal equipment, such as duffle bags, were



lost over the sides of the LCIs. That meant that you had to draw new clothing and equipment.

We had to stay in the staging area for weeks. It was boring, hanging around waiting for our vehicles to come in. One day my buddy and I went for a walk down a country road by some farms. The people in that area did not like Americans. Anyway, I saw a girl milking a cow in a field. I thought I would ask her if I could milk it. Well, when I got near her and she saw me, she screamed, threw her pail of milk and ran for the house. I thought it was time to get gone.

A few days later, my buddy and I went to a small village. The French made some moonshine whiskey called Calvados. If you drank too much it would drive you crazy. Well, we got some and drank it. There was a small canal running town. It had a wall about three feet high on each side, built out of stone. The village people used to sit on it and smoke their pipes and talk. Well, we went over to the wall and there were a lot of people sitting on both sides of the canal. I looked down in the water and there were a lot of "dud" shells lying in

the bottom. I went over the wall and down to the water, picked up the shell and threw it up to my buddy. When I looked, there was not one person around except my buddy.

When I woke the next morning, I was in the squad tent with that dud under my head for a pillow. Everyone else was outside on the ground in their sleeping bags. I was still groggy when the company clerk came in and told me the Old Man wanted me at once. I went into his tent and saluted. Boy, did he give me a good a\_\_\_ chewing! He said he would not bust me because I was too valuable to him, but he restricted me to the area until we got to the front lines, to keep me out of trouble. He told me to get my buddy and two shovels and dig a 6x6x6 hole and bury it. Some of my men put a wooden cross on it which read "The Do-Do who buried the DUD." They had their laughs.

Well, the vehicles and equipment arrived and we were busy cleaning and loading. Everything shipped overseas was packed in causmoline, a heavy grease, to keep salt water from rusting it. It sure was hard to clean. We worked long and hard days

getting everything ready to go to the front. There was no more playing around and the fun was over.

In the last part of September we got our orders to move up to the front, around Metz, France. We thought we would go through Paris. Well, we did, way out in the suburbs, and I had been dreaming of seeing Paris. Oh, well, maybe next time. We got up near Metz and found the Americans had lost Metz back to the Germans. General Patton ordered the 10<sup>th</sup> Armored Division to go to Luxembourg City, Luxembourg. We got there and had to wait until they put down a pontoon bridge across the Moselle River.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FIGHTING IN THE SAAR REGION

In October we were ordered to cross the rivers and move down the Saar behind Metz. We did and the fighting was fierce. To see all the death and destruction, it sure didn't take long to harden the soul. From then on, it was them or me.

We fought our way to around Saarbrucken, Germany. There we held what ground we had taken until after Thanksgiving. I had lost my vehicle to a German 88 anti-tank gun, so my crew rode on the backs of other tanks and filled in wherever needed.

We were on this ridge and our reconnaissance platoon had gotten themselves pinned down in an open field about two thousand yards from our position. The Recon Platoon leaders called for "Willie Peter," which was smoke or white phosphorous. The Germans were in the woods just past their position. He wanted the cover of smoke so he could pull his platoon out of there. There was a 4.2 mortar platoon behind us and our 81mm mortar platoon was on the ridge. The 4.2mm was

busy with a fire mission and the Germans were dropping mortar shells on the ridge. The men were in shell holes, so no one was on the guns.

I ran down where the lieutenant was and helped him. We fired the mortar as fast as I could drop shells down the tube. The rest of the men saw us and got on their guns and started firing. The Recon Platoon picked up their wounded and got back without losing a man. We put the fire on the woods and the men from the Recon Platoon said they could hear the Germans screaming from phosphorous landing on their flesh. It will burn to the bone. After that, the Germans threatened to use gas on the Americans like they did in World War I. We kept on using phosphorous shells, but as far as I know the Germans didn't use gas.

We were bagged down, as it was a rainy spell for days, and cold. We didn't lose ground, but could not gain any. A lot of the men were getting sick. We spent Thanksgiving in the mud and water, but they managed to get up to our positions with hot chow--that made the men feel a lot better.

A week later the high command pulled our division off the lines and sent us back to France behind the Maginot line to get replacements for the men and equipment we had lost and to get some rest and relaxation. There were rumors around that we might get to Paris. Well, we got our replacements and resupplied our units, then we got orders for every sergeant to collect all personal articles and anything that had identification of the men or of the unit. We had to put them in special envelopes with our name, rank, and serial number. Then they gave us forms for everyone to update the next of kin records. I smelled a rat, but did not say anything because they had never done this before. We were thinking of Christmas, as it was halfway through December.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December we got orders to be ready to pull out. We got those orders at 0500 on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December not to go to Paris, but to Belgium. There goes my Paris again. We moved out at full speed and up to southern Luxembourg and were stopped. We billeted for the night.

Next morning at daylight on the 18<sup>th</sup> we lined up in this town. There were people watching us. There was a girl standing by her door and smiling. I jumped down and made motions with my hands that I wanted to wash my face. She said, "Nix," or something. One of my men said she had no soap, so I told them to throw me some. She took me into her kitchen and I washed in the sink. She had three little kids. I watched them and they were frying potato peelings on the stove. I grabbed a pillow case that was on the chair and ran out. She must have thought I was stealing it. I told the men to put anything they did not want into the pillow case. I went from tank to tank. The case was almost full. I took it back into her and told her to take it, with motions. She hugged me and the kids hugged my legs. Just then my men yelled, "Hey Sergeant, we're moving!" I ran out, jumped up and looked back. They were waving and tears were on their faces. I said to my self, "At least they will have something for Christmas."

From my radio I could tell what was happening and I didn't like the sound of it. There

had been a major breakthrough in Belgium. There were three or four divisions of the German army heading toward Bastogne, Belgium.

We were ordered to Bastogne. I was in Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion of Combat Command B of the 10<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, which was commanded by Colonel Roberts, and my battalion commander was Lieutenant Colonel Cherry. When we got to Bastogne on the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup> it was dark and the roads were blocked by units going to the rear and units of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division trying to get into Bastogne.

The officers were called to headquarters to get their orders. It seems that they had split the Command B into three teams—one team was to go north to Noville, one team to go to Wiltz, and our unit-team, Cherry, was to go east toward Longvilly.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BATTLE OF BASTOGNE AND BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Colonel Cherry had ordered an advance guard, which consisted of a recon platoon, to go to Longvilly. They were ordered to go to the road junction at Donnage, about four miles past Longvilly, and to see what was up there. Three tanks and the mortar platoon were to reinforce a unit from the 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Division at the road junction, one mile past Longvilly. When we got to the junction there was no one there. During the night there was a lot of tanks and vehicles going to the rear and it made the going slow for us. There was a lot of confusion and panic among those going to the rear. As we were going up, we could hear German armor to the right of us going west, as we were going east.

Battalion headquarters was to be around Margrette, but they never got there, Neffe was as far as they got. The Germans had taken Margrette. That meant that we were cut off at Longvilly road junction. It was still dark, but way after

midnight, so we set up the defense of the road junction the best we could. On December 19<sup>th</sup>, at first light, we changed some positions. The lieutenant sent me up on a ridge to the south of our position to see where all the German armor was going. I got to the top with my field glasses and I knew then what was happening. It was open terrain all the way to a dirt road that ran along a forest. I had never seen so many German tanks and infantry in one area. The roads and fields were so muddy that they were having a hard time trying to move ahead to the west. That was where they were going all night. I could not figure out why they took the muddy dirt road when the road we were on was hard top all the way to Bastogne. It wasn't until later that I found out.

While I was watching from the ridge, I noticed one tank and infantry heading toward the road junction that we were holding, traveling on a farm road. On the main dirt road there was a column of tank and infantry breaking off from the main body and spreading out in wide formation, heading toward Longvilly, which was one mile west of my position.

I ran down and told the lieutenant what was happening. He told me to take a reel of wire and a field phone and to go back up and keep him informed. When the German tank and infantry to my left got close to the road junction it was knocked out by a tank and bazooka. Their infantry was killed by machine gun fire.

The unit that was to the right was having slow progress in the mud, so the lieutenant decided to send some mortar shells their way. It would not do much harm to the tanks, but it gave the infantry hell and it stopped the advance. By that time we were getting low on ammunition, so he ordered me back to his position.

One of our men saw a light armored vehicle and infantry coming from Longvilly on the same side of the ridge we were on. We opened fire with a bazooka, .50-caliber and .30-caliber machine guns. We fired so fast that our barrels got red hot and our guns jammed, but we knocked out that unit.

East of the road junction we saw two people coming across a field. I put my glasses on them and they were what looked like Americans, so the

lieutenant told us to hold our fire. When they got to us, there was a colonel and a corporal. The colonel was shell-shocked and panicky. He could not tell us anything, but the corporal told us that our recon platoon had run into a German armored division and was wiped out. That German division had gone northeast, which would have put them toward Noville. That was where our other team was. The colonel was having an affect on our men, so I told the lieutenant that he had to do something. He took the colonel to his command half-track and gave him a bottle of whiskey. We never heard from him again. He had lost his whole regiment.

The lieutenant asked battalion to withdraw, but they said that we were doing a good job and for us to hold on and to go on radio silence. From then on we did not know what was going on with the rest of the battalion.

Across the brook, in an open field, there was an airplane like a Piper Cub that was used for recon or forward observers. The lieutenant decided that he would not leave it for the Germans, so he sent some of us with gas and we burned it.

It sounds like I was always cool, calm, and collected, but, believe me, I was far from it. The adrenaline was flowing and I was scared. Knowing you were sent into a position to be sacrificed and knowing the odds were against you, it was hard for me not to show it, but I tried my best. I guess that is why the lieutenant picked me to carry out the missions that he sent us on--if he only knew.

The lieutenant was thinking about the alternatives he had, because he gave me six men and told me to go west on an upper farm road that went through town and to go to the high ridge that was about a mile and a half from town. We went from house to house looking for Germans. When we didn't find any, we stayed on the dirt road and continued west. When we got to within 200 yards of the woods, the fog had settled in, and we ran into a German machine gun and some tanks. I lost one of my men. I told the rest to crawl into the ditch that ran along the road, on their bellies, until we were out of the line of fire. I brought up the rear. When we got back to Longvilly I told the

lieutenant, whom we had met with some men, that there was no way through the German lines.

The lieutenant had captured a young German who was hiding in a chicken house. The chickens were squawking and it alerted the men and they found him. The worst part was he was wearing American galoshes, tanker pants, and a knit cap under his helmet. He did wear a German coat. When I saw that, I went berserk. I pulled my .45 and was going to shoot him, but the lieutenant stepped in front of me and slapped my face, which brought me around. The lieutenant knew that I had just lost one of my best buddies, so he took me down the road and talked to me, which helped to calm me down.

It was getting dark, so we all went back to our vehicles. The lieutenant had pulled them off the road junction, back across the brook, in the open field next to the town. He had lined them up to a big stone wall that ringed the town. There were thick trees along both sides of the brook all the way to the main hard top road. I didn't like the way we were lined up broadside to the road, even if there were trees, but he was the lieutenant, so we

settled in for the night, or the end, because we knew that the Germans would make this move after dark. We had men on every vehicle with .50-caliber and .30-caliber machine guns and rifles zeroed in on the bank of the brook, and we waited, which was the worst time. About midnight they came through the woods into the brook and were yelling like Indians. We opened fire on them. You could hear men scream out. We kept up the fire until the Germans had flares bursting above our heads and shell bursts above us, which sent shrapnel down on us. German 88's were firing into the trees, some were knocking down the trees and some were finding their mark. We were losing one vehicle after another. We yelled for the men to hit the ground and go up the hill out of the light of the flares.

We gathered the men that we could find and started for the woods that were up the top of the hill. On the way up we could hear German armor rolling through the road junction we had left. Some were going north and some were going into Longvilly, toward Bastogne. I don't know all that

history says about it, but I know that we did the best that we could.

When we got to the woods, we checked all of the men and counted to make sure that there was no Germans among us. We counted 19 men out of about 35, and that colonel wasn't with us. I know that the half-track that he was in was hit bad.

On December 20<sup>th</sup> we stayed in the edge of the woods in a perimeter defense until early light. We alerted the men because we heard Germans talking on our right. They came along a trail through the woods. They were walking broadside to us. When they were all in our view, the lieutenant yelled, "Fire!" They didn't know what hit them, but some managed to fire back and we lost one more man. Three Germans got away. When it was all over, I yelled for the lieutenant, but we looked all over and the lieutenant and platoon sergeant were gone. A year later I found out that they had gotten back to Bastogne, but were killed by a shell.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### EVASIVE ACTION

I knew those three Germans got away and that we could not stay there because they would bring back a stronger force.

I formed the men up and started. As we crossed the trail, I got a quick count of 17 Germans. We went into this planted pine forest and headed toward our friendly fire which was northwest. We had to take it slow, and when we heard Germans, we had to stop or sidetrack.

We had traveled from about 0700 to 1600 and it was getting dark, with very thick fog. We went until I found a good spot on a knoll. I put the men in a circle facing out. It was a tight circle, arms-length between each man. Every other man could sleep for four hours. I told the men, "No snoring!" I went to sleep with the first bunch. Someone woke me and said that I was snoring. That was a laugh-breaking my own orders.

We woke everyone at early light. That was December 21<sup>st</sup>. We were cold and wet from the heavy

fog. We started in the same direction. We had gone about a mile when I heard steel banging and heard talking. We were too far away to tell what it was, but I was hoping that it was ours. We crept closer, only to run into German tanks, and I could tell the language, so we backed off and started following a ridge that ran north and south. If I was right, we should go to the right toward the Noville rail junction. We kept going, but every time we tried to turn left, we would run into the German line. It seems that they had taken over that ridge that ran from Margrette north to Noville, so we stayed in a small valley running the same direction.

The fog was still ground level and thick. It was about 0900 on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December when I looked ahead and it seemed to be lighter. I knew we were coming to an open field and out of the woods. We ran into a big stone wall that ran up a hill to the west. I told the men to stay by the wall, and I took one man with me. We had gone almost to the top of the ridge when I almost ran into a Tiger tank. Then I heard low voices that I knew were

Germans on the other side of that tank. My heart was pounding, but my feet were moving. I don't know why they didn't hear us. We went back to where the rest were and followed the stone wall to the east until we came to a thick pine forest on the other side of the wall. We got over the wall and went into the woods. They were very thick and the branches were close to the ground. It was a good place to hide out and rest.

I put the men in a circle perimeter and waited for the fog to lift. We were in position about fifteen, twenty minutes. I was kneeling behind a tree, trying to see through the branches. The fog was so thick I could hardly see my hand with my arm stretched out. I heard some scuffing and leather squeaking and I could hear someone breathing, then I got that familiar odor of a German uniform when it is wet. The adrenaline started flowing. My heart was pounding so loud that I could hear it in my ears. The hair on my head was prickly. I kept on breathing, because if you hold your breath, it will make you cough. It seemed like an eternity, but was only seconds, when a cool breeze came

through and lifted the fog a little. There he was, crouched, looking at me straight into my eyes. I will always remember the horrible look on his face. His eyes were so big. My reaction was faster than his and it cost him his life. The rest started shooting and I don't know if they had a target or were shooting at sound. You could hear the Germans running back over the wall. They started yelling and it sounded like they thought they were being fired on by their own.

I went around north through the woods a little ways and the fog started to lift. It was a little after 1000 hours. I could see a clear-cut line about 75-yards wide. It was a power line. On the other side was a small strip of hard woods, not too thick, but it had lots of fallen logs and stumps. I went back and moved the men almost to the clearing, but stayed in the thick pines for cover. We could see the tanks on the ridge to the west, but also could hear a lot of armor to the east. I knew they were on a road by the way they were rolling. I figured that it was the road from Longvilly to Noville.

We were so close, yet so far from our own lines. The terrain around the front of us was all open, after you got past the strip of hard wood. The fighting was fierce down at the bottom by a railroad junction and the road to Noville. It was our other team from the 10<sup>th</sup> Armored and units from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. The Germans had tanks and infantry all around that amphitheater between us and our own lines.

I decided to hold the men in the woods a while longer. I sat against a tree, thinking what options I had, and studied the terrain around us. On the other side of the hard woods were open fields with huge shell craters, which would be good cover for the men. They were like free fox holes, only much bigger. All of a sudden, one of my men kicked my foot and pointed. There was a squad of Germans coming in the open, along the edge of the woods. They were getting close, when one of my men coughed. The first in line dropped to all fours and had some kind of machine gun or burp gun strapped to his back. The second man never touched the gun. We opened up on them and the only one to

get away was a soldier who had a red cross on his chest and back. God was on his side.

I knew we had to move. I took two men with me and told the other sergeant to split up the men. When we got across, they were to follow, one group at a time. I took the two men and dashed across the open strip as fast as we could go. When we got into the hard woods, we fell behind some logs. At the same second, someone opened up with a machine gun. One man was hit in the hip and the other had a broken forearm. One bullet hit my steel helmet right between the eyes, but the angle was just right so it knocked my helmet off. It sounded like a bomb had hit my head.

We opened up on a pile of brush, where we saw some smoke, and it stopped him. The other men came across the open. I knew I had to get the wounded into one of those craters, so I told the men to spit up and go for the craters. I helped one wounded man and another sergeant helped the other to get to the first crater. I told the men to pick one man in each hole to take care of any potato mashers that came their way and throw them out.

I told the men that I had to stay with the wounded, but anyone that wanted to take a chance and go over the rim, they could. One man said he was going to try it. I wished him good luck and he went over. We could not see him, but machine gun bullets and tracers were going over our heads. It was not long before grenades started coming. We picked them up and threw them out. We fire our weapons until we ran out of ammo.

I had to patch up the wounded, for they were bleeding badly. I gave them each a "horse pill" to keep down the infection, and I gave them each half of my canteen of water. No one else seemed to have any. I had a large bittersweet chocolate bar and divided it in half and gave it to the wounded. I didn't have enough for everyone, but I knew we were all hungry because we had not eaten anything since the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>.

It was getting dark and I could see infantry moving around the rim of the field and along the stone wall to the east and west. We were surrounded, and we were out of ammo, so I told the men to take their weapons apart and throw them, and

we buried some in the hole. I wished the men good luck and took a piece of white cloth that I had picked up from my pocket. That was the only white thing we had because all the clothing we were issued was olive drab. I tied it to my carbine barrel, then stood up and yelled, "Comrade!" Then I realized that I had a piece of weapon in my hand, so I sat back down and took the rag off, threw the barrel, and stood back up with just the rag in my hand. I waved it and yelled, "Comrade," again.

It didn't take long for the Germans to close in on us. They came from every direction. There seemed to be a thousand of them. I thought, "Boy, it took a lot of Krauts to take a few Americans."

They took us across the stone wall to an open field to the east. They put us in a tight circle and they had machine guns around us. I said a quick prayer and said out loud, "I think this is as far as we go." I had heard on my radio what they did to the men that they had captured at Malmody. They gunned them down in a field, too. But a German lieutenant said, in plain English, "No, this is not the end. You are our prisoners." I told



him that I had two wounded men back in the hole, but when I turned around they were on the ground, so the lieutenant said something in German and medics brought two stretchers. We put them on them. The lieutenant told me we had to carry our own or they would be shot.

That was the short end of our combat tour. But the worst was yet to come.

## CHAPTER SIX

### LIFE AS A P.O.W.

We carried our wounded to the east, to Bonnage, Belgium. It was around midnight when we got there. They took the wounded to a hospital and we didn't see them until the next fall, back in the States. They took the rest of us to a big building and we slept on the floor until morning.

When we woke there was a lot of snow on the ground. They lined us up in front of the building for a count and started asking questions. I yelled, "Name, rank, and serial number!" A German sergeant slapped me side of the head with his rifle. Then a colonel came and yelled at the sergeant and he put a hand on my shoulder and took me to his office. They tried every trick in the book to get us to talk. It was still, "Name, rank, and serial number." Finally they gave up and put guards on us and started to march us to the rear.

The first interrogation camp they took us to was Dasburg, Germany. They separated the officers from the NCO's, and privates from the rest. At that camp they were professionals at interrogation.

They gave us cards to fill out, so that they could notify our next of kin. And there was a lot of questions, like our address, but the only thing that we put down was name, rank, and serial number. They took me into one office with a major. He started asking about my life at home, but still: name, rank, and serial number. He then had a plate of food brought in. It looked so good to me. He said if I would help him, he would see that I was treated right. Still: name, rank, and serial number, even if it had been days since I had much to eat. He got mad and had me taken back to my pen. They kept us there that night.

Next day was the 24<sup>th</sup> of December. They marched us back toward Prum, Germany. We came to this town that was on the way. It was Christmas Eve. They took some of us into a big hall. They made us set up tables and chairs. They were going to have a Christmas party for the officers. There was all this good stuff to eat and drink, but they would not give us anything. That was torture.

They took us to the other side of town and put us in a big town jail. The townspeople did bring

us something to eat. That was the first good meal that we'd had in days. They must have been God-fearing people because they wished us "Merry Christmas" in German. That would be the last kindness we would see until we were liberated.

The next morning at daybreak they lined us up, counted, and then marched us on. It was Christmas morning. The sky was clear and there was a lot of snow on the ground and it was very cold; after the sun came up, it started to warm up. By then, there were hundreds of prisoners in the column. They took us on a road where the terrain was all open. It was farm country.

At about noon a whole squadron of American planes started diving at us. There were some 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne men and they tried to write USA in the snow by running. Some were killed by the planes strafing and dropping personnel bombs. One of my men was hit in the leg. There were a lot killed and wounded. I was in a sand pit when a plane came at me. I would run to the bank where he was coming from and the bullets would go over my head and hit

in the dirt. When he turned and came back, I would run to the other bank. Finally, they left.

Well, the Germans made us leave fast. They were afraid that the planes would come back. They wouldn't let us pick up our wounded. They took us to a Catholic hospital. I guess they figured the planes wouldn't hit a hospital.

Months later, when I was at Camp Lucky Strike, I saw an old *Stars and Stripes* newspaper that the military put out. There was an article about a squadron of planes that had strafed American prisoners on Christmas Day. They regretted it. They knew when they had their films developed from their guns.

A German officer told us we could go back and get our wounded. I checked to make sure that we were all there, except for the one that was hit in the leg. I took two men and a stretcher and we went back and we found him. I thought he would lose his leg. We took him back to the hospital and that was the last time I saw him until 1990.

The next day they marched us on to Prum, Germany. It was a railhead and there was a big,

long freight house. That is where they put us. At night they would take us out and we had to carry prefabricated barracks to the top of a mountain. There were six men to each section. It was way below zero and I froze my hands and feet, like a lot of others did. My feet were swollen so bad that I could not get my shoes on, so I wrapped them in burlap. After a few days, I could get my shoes on again.

They marched us to a big town called Gerolstein. It was a huge railhead. They took us across the river to a bombed-out factory. It had a high fence around it. That was the first big prison camp and the worst that we would be in. The buildings that they kept us in had two floors. The first floor was a warehouse that had bins built from the floor to the ceiling. The men slept in the bins. Upstairs was all open. The walls were good, but the roof had bomb holes in it. The snow would come through.

There was no sanitary facilities. They put 55-gallon drums upstairs and downstairs for the men to relieve themselves. The stench was awful.

Everyone had diarrhea. It was so unsanitary. There was no place to wash or take a shower. You can't imagine how we were after one month in these conditions. One of my men was from a wealthy family in Oklahoma. They had oil wells on their property, so he never wanted for anything in his life. To put him in a situation like that was more than he could stand, so he gave up. I tried to give him my rations. I would go out on work details and bring back what I could find, but he would not eat. Finally he got so weak that he caught pneumonia. Two days later they took him out. The next day they said he had died.

It was so hard to keep your mind from turning your body into an animal. You had to pray to God often to keep your mind sane.

Our rations consisted of a piece of black bread with cattle molasses on it, one in the morning, and a can of soup made out of either grass or turnips or sugar beets. Sometimes, if you were lucky, they would put potato peelings in the soup for the night meal. We all carried a tin can, with a wire bail

for a handle, hooked to our clothes. That was our eating and drinking utensil.

They used to take us out on work detail. Sometimes we had to work on the railroad after the American bombers came over. Sometimes we had to go up to the mountain and chop wood for the bakery. Then, if we were lucky, we would get some extra bread. Sometimes we would go help some farmers. One time two men and myself went to a farm where the owner was sick. The guards would go into the house to get warm and we would go into the barn. I would milk our cans full of warm milk while they watched out for the guards.

One day they had us across town cleaning up debris that was from American bombings. Then the bombers came back and dropped incendiary bombs. Our guards ran for their bomb shelters. We would run and try to find something to eat. I found this sausage plant and grabbed some links and put them down my pants legs that were tucked in my boots. Then I went up the street after the bombers were gone. There were a lot of buildings on fire and all the guards were still in their shelters.



I came up to a woman who was screaming and rocking her arms and she pointed to this house. I ran up the stairs and into the first room. The house was on fire and I heard a baby crying. I found it on a bed. I grabbed a blanket that was starting to burn. I wrapped the baby in it and ran down the steps and gave the baby to the mother. There was an SS colonel coming toward us on the run. The woman must have told him what had happened, because he took the blanket that had been around the child and put it around my shoulders. I nodded and walked to where my buddy was standing by a crater that was still burning. We stood there when a SS sergeant came up to us. He grabbed the blanket and grabbed a hold of my nose and twisted and called me a Jew swine. I tried to get his hand off my nose. He up and kicked with his knee into my groin. I went down in pain. I saw him draw his Luger and point it at me. I knew I was going to die. Then I heard a loud command. he gave the sergeant a chewing and the sergeant went up the road almost on a run. When no one was looking, I kicked the blanket into the crater. I did not want

that to happen again. Then the guards came and took us back to camp.

I still had the sausage in my pants legs. When I got back to camp, I watched the line that the guards were searching—every other man. I counted the man ahead of me and I was all right. When I got to the guards, they motioned me to go on. My heart went back down from my throat. If they had caught me, they would have shot me right there. We lived in those conditions for a month.

One day there was one man so sick he could not get out of his bin. We were called out for count. The SS sergeant that was in charge went in and told the man to get out, but he couldn't. The damn sergeant shot him.

The first of February they moved us out and marched us toward Frankfurt, Germany. We were so glad to get out of that hell hole. The German guards would take us ten or fifteen miles and then new guards would take over. That is the way they did all the way to Frankfurt. At night they would put us in big buildings and we would sleep on cement floors. Boy, was it cold! We were getting

body lice and head lice and crabs. You had to dig all the time. It was enough to drive you crazy.

We got to Frankfurt and they took us about five miles past to a town called Offenbach, where there was a large prison camp. They had one section for the Russians, one for the Americans, and one section for men from India. The conditions were much better. We could wash and take showers. The water was cold, but, with German G.I. soap, you could get clean. We had disposed of our underwear because they were not salvageable. We washed out our shirt one day, then our pants the next. And we kept our burlap blankets, so we had something to keep us warm. Every day we had a delousing session. You would kill a thousand and tomorrow there would be ten thousand more on you.

We had straw to sleep on. All the barracks had cement floors, but it was a lot better than the last hell hole we were in. The food was always the same. We used to go through the fence to the Indians' section and talk to the Indians that could speak English.

The Germans would march us down to Frankfurt railroads and put us on cattle cars by the hundreds, and they would leave us there. I guess they thought that if they sent word that there were hundreds of Americans in the rail cars that the high command would not send the bombers. At that time was when the sanitary conditions were very bad. We would be packed into the cars so tightly that we hardly had room to sit down, and we had to stay all day and sometimes all night, without food or water. When your shoes wore out, they would give you wooden shoes like the Dutch wore. It was an awful sound to hear hundreds of wooden shoes hitting the frozen ground.

We stayed in that prison camp until the first week of March. Then they took us up to Bergen Belsen. They had taken all the Jews from there and we stayed there until the first of April. When they took us out, they sent us to Coxhaven on the North Sea. As we were leaving, we saw them bringing the Jews back in. They had black and white striped clothing. Those poor people! You

could not tell the men from the women or the girls from the boys. They were only skin over bones.

We got to the last prison camp that we would be in. It was a propaganda camp. They had nine clean barracks and a big, long latrine with hot water. The food was the same as always. You would eat turnip soup and it was so bitter in your stomach that it would come up. But the next day you would try it again. Once they gave us a Red Cross parcel. It was enough for two people a week. My buddy and I would watch each other, so that it would last.

It was in April and the weather was changing, so it made us feel good. The war was going good for the Allies. We could hear heavy artillery firing, so we knew they were getting closer. One day a plane came over our camp and dropped leaflets telling us to dig a long trench and stay inside the camp. It was from the British. We cheered and were so happy. We dug the trench. I don't know where we got the strength, but we did it.

We waited and every day they were getting closer. On the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April the

shells were landing outside of the camp. We all went to the trench. The British army, with tanks and infantry, was driving the Germans toward the sea. We got up on the bank of the trench and cheered and watched. The regular German guards had left, but there were a few old men in the home guard at the camp. A tank came smashing down the front gate and all the old German guards got together in the yard with their hands over their heads. Then more British came and we were free.

We hugged each other and laughed and cried. The British must have thought we were a pitiful sight.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### FREEDOM AND BACK TO THE STATES

The British gave us a flag and we put up Old Glory and they took us back to a delousing camp that they had set up, because they knew we were there. We had all the hair shaved off our bodies, then they put us in this gas chamber—"Not like the Germans used." It was to kill the bugs and eggs. Then we took a hot shower with a special soap, and then they sprayed us with a solution.

They had taken all our rags and put them in a pile and put gas on them and set them on fire. They gave us new British uniforms—hobnail shoes, spots, pants and shirt, a short jacket, and a beret. We looked like every other British soldier. Then they took us back of the lines and they would not give us solid foods. They gave us tea and hot broth to drink. We did not like the idea, but it was for our own good. Then every day they increased the food. Finally, we would get solid food. Our strength was coming back.

They took us to an airport, put us on a C-47 cargo plane and took us back to Brussels, Belgium. They gave us partial pay and let us call home. Then they gave us a choice to either fly to Camp Lucky Strike in France on the coast or make our own way, as long as we got there by May 25<sup>th</sup>. So I chose to hitchhike.

May 7<sup>th</sup> I was in a small Belgian town when the war ended. The people were dancing in the streets, hugging everyone, and they gave me some flowers. They thought I was British. Well, I headed for France and Paris. I couldn't wait to see Paris. I got to a town north of Paris. It was an MP (military police) town. There was a line formed for chow, so I went to the mess sergeant and said, "Hey, Sergeant, any chance of getting some chow?" Well, these two-bit MP's took me by the arms and said, "Come with us." They took me to their headquarters and told the colonel that they had a deserter. I tried to explain to them how I got the British uniform and what happened to me, but they would not listen. They kept me in a cell overnight. The next morning they asked me where by



dog tags were. I told them that the Germans took everything. I begged them to call Brussels, Belgium, to the British headquarters there. They put me back in the cell. Later they came and let me out and the colonel told me he was very sorry. He told a captain to get a staff car and take me to Camp Lucky Strike. I told him I would rather go on my way, but he would not have any part of it. He said that he had to see that I got there safely, after what they did. He told the captain to stop at a restaurant and feed me whatever I wanted. He treated me like a king, but I never got to see Paris. When we stopped to eat, he would tell the other officers about me. They shook my hand and wished me luck. We got to camp and I thanked him. It was not his fault I didn't get to see Paris.

They put me through another delousing and they burned my British uniform and gave me a new duffle bag full of clothes. Then they took me to an intelligence headquarters and I went through a debriefing session with a major. He asked me every question in the book about my capture and my stay in prison camps. I had to fill out a lot of forms.

It lasted over four hours. When he was through with me, he said, "You know, you are a disgrace to your uniform for letting yourself and your men get captured." It seemed like he had stuck a bayonet into my stomach. I started shaking and walked out without saluting. And that would eat at me for the rest of my life.

After we put on some weight, they sent us back to the States. They sent me to Miami Beach to recuperate. I stayed there most of the summer in a big hotel and did not have to do anything except to go to the doctor once a week. I swam and laid on the beach. But I didn't like it there. I kept asking to be sent out for duty. Late in the summer they sent me to Fort Knox, Kentucky, until November. I was a drill instructor for recruits.

I got my discharge that last part of November, 1945.

Then, in 1956, I joined the Vermont National Guard and stayed in for twenty-two years, trying to prove that I was not a disgrace to my country and to teach the men not to make the mistakes that I made.

I retired in 1979 with twenty-eight years  
credit.

THE END

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