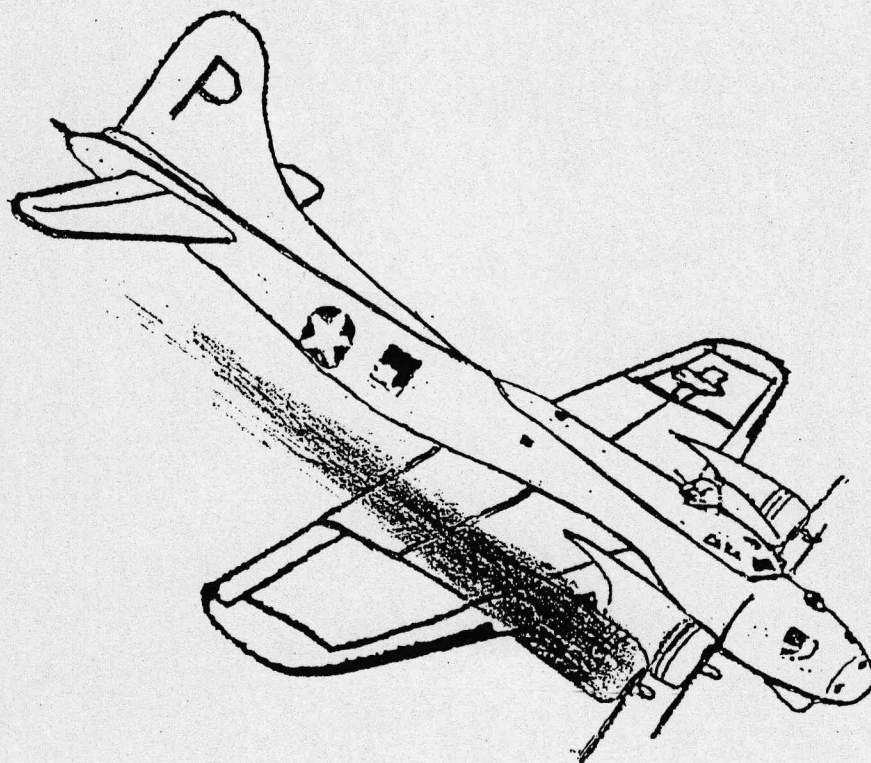


# SOME LIVED, SOME DIED IT WAS UNDERSTOOD



By

Mark B. Calnon

As told to

Betty McKeeth  
and  
Dorothy Hoffman

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of:

Bob B. Patterson -	Radio operator-gunner
Sam Lopez -	Ball turret gunner
Caesario G. Lendoiro -	Tail Gunner

The men in my crew who gave their lives.

## FOREWORD

This account was written at the suggestion of my children and a few friends. All events are as I now remember them after fifty years. Any inaccuracy is entirely unintentional and due to fading memories, and not intended to embellish or discredit any person or event.

I cannot say enough about my crew. Every pilot felt he had the best crew on the base. I was no different. We lived together, trained together, fought together, and went down together. Three gave their lives. A camaraderie developed that no one can understand who has not experienced it. Some lived, some died, it was understood.

As the pilot I never for a moment forgot my responsibility. Ten men's lives depended on me not making a fatal error. It made me humble to know nine men had that much faith in me.

The Author



October 9, 1943 and everything was going fine. We were flying in formation over the Baltic Sea, approaching the coast of Denmark. We had been to Anklam, Germany, which was about 60 miles northwest of Berlin, bombed an aircraft factory, and were on our way back to our base in England. Then disaster struck in the form of German fighters. In the next few minutes the course of our lives would be changed, and we would be left with memories that will remain with us the rest of our lives. Three men would be dead, three wounded, and four in a deep state of shock.

## CHAPTER I

### I ENTER THE MILITARY AND LEARN TO FLY

For me, it began September 4, 1941. The United States was about to enter World War II. The draft was in effect and my number was getting close. I thought if I volunteered, I might have some choice in what I would do. I knew I didn't want to be a foot soldier so I volunteered for the Army Air Corps.

I first went to Salt Lake City for induction, then on to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri. This was a boot camp and about all you did was drill, have KP and pick up cigarette butts. Here we were to get our military assignments. I don't remember anyone asking me what I wanted to do, or even having a choice. Soon some of us were told to move to a different barracks. No one seemed to know why we were selected or why we were there. In comparing our backgrounds, the only thing we could see that we had in common was that we all had college degrees. We were eventually told that we were to be assigned to weather forecasters' school. Soon most of the fellows were shipped out and the rest of us were told that all the forecasters' schools were full. They eventually decided to send us to air bases for in-service training.

I went to Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was extremely interesting work and very pleasant. We attended classes half a day and worked in the weather office half a day drawing weather maps. The weather squadron barracks was off by itself and no one ever bothered us. Since the weather office operated 24 hours a day, someone was always sleeping. We could trade shifts and get extra time off. While I thoroughly enjoyed the work, there was one problem - money! At that time a buck private made \$21.00 a month. I couldn't live in the manner in which I wished to live so I started looking for ways to make more money. I saw a poster that said, "Be a Flying Cadet for \$75.00 a month and \$300.00 when commissioned". I said, "That's for me", and signed up. I didn't know what was available but I did know that you had to be in a plane and

would draw flight pay.

I doubted that I could pass the physical for pilot training because I knew that one eye was not quite as strong as the other. The only other thing I could think of that I would be interested in was aerial photography, so I applied for that. I took the physical and when it was over, the flight surgeon asked me why I had applied for aerial photographer. I explained the situation and he said, "Your eyes are 20/20. Why don't you sign up for pilot training?" I said, "Fine. Sign me up."

My first stop was at pre-flight, in San Antonio, Texas. We were there a month. It was mostly military indoctrination, a few classes, such as elementary navigation, a little math, aptitude tests and drills. We were mostly confined to the post so only got to town a few times. I did get to see a little of San Antonio, such as the Alamo.

The next step was primary training in Tulsa, Oklahoma where I first started flying. Of all the places I was in, Tulsa was the best service man's town I was ever in. It was a large, wealthy oil city, and the cadets out at Spartan Flying School were the only military men in town. We were treated royally and there was nothing they wouldn't do for us. When you wanted to go to town you just stepped outside the gate and stood on the highway and the first car that came along took you to town. You did the same thing when you returned. I would be here two months.

I had never been in a plane before and didn't have the least idea what to do. In fact, the instructor had to show me how to fasten the safety belt. We flew Fairchild PT-19s which were open cockpit, low wing mono-planes. The student sat in front and the instructor sat in the rear seat.

At that period of time, hazing was allowed. You were there for two months and in the first month you were subjected to all the hazing the upper classmen wanted to give you. When you ate a meal you sat on the edge of the chair and ate a "square" meal, straight up, straight back. You never spoke. An upper classman sat at the head of the table, and if you wanted something passed, you said, "Please pass the butter, Sir." You never looked at him. You reached out to the side and things were handed to you. You always looked straight ahead. In the barracks, if they wanted to haze you, they would say, "On your ass". You would sit down on the floor, hold your feet up off the floor, hold your arms straight out in front of you and balance there as long as the upper classmen wanted you to. Some overdid it. It was unpleasant, uncomfortable and humiliating. Everyone said, "When I'm an upper classman, I'm going to beat the hell out of that guy". Of course, by then you forgot and forgave. Half the day you had classes, the other half you flew. Between classes you had to double time. This went on as long as you were an



underclassman.

There were several West Point graduates in our class. They received special treatment and no hazing. This we resented since we were all there for the same reason. They were no better at learning to fly than we were. However, this resentment was nothing compared to the absolute disdain we were to have later for the so-called "90 day Wonders". These were men sent to school for 90 days and commissioned 2nd Lieutenants. We had intensive training for 7 months for the same rank. All they ever did was shuffle papers, while most of us went into combat.

When you were flying it was just about as bad as when you were in the barracks, as the instructors were just as hard on you as the upper classmen. This was done intentionally, to see if you could operate under pressure. They would holler at you, swear at you, threaten you, and put all the pressure on you that they could. The one main threat was that they were always going to wash you out. At that time, sixty percent of the cadets were washed out, not because they couldn't take the pressure, but because the instructor felt they couldn't fly. Everything was based on co-ordination and judgement. If you were flying a plane straight ahead and were told to roll it from side to side, the nose had to be kept on a point, which meant you had to co-ordinate the ailerons and rudder. They would teach you how to get out of a spin. The instructor would say, "Give me a spin two and a half turns to the left", and you would pull the plane up, kick it into a left spin and go around two and a half times and bring it out. This meant two and a half times around, exactly, not two and three quarters or two and one quarter.

For many cadets, learning to fly was the dream of a lifetime. Many times, after a student came down, and had taken all the verbal beating, and the instructor was threatening to wash him out, he would come back to the barracks in tears. When I came down from one of these experiences and the instructor said I was going to be washed out, I would go back to the barracks and pack my bags because I didn't particularly care whether I flew or not.

Some of the cadets had already had flying lessons. I thought this would give them an advantage. The opposite was true. They didn't want you to know anything about flying. They would then have to unlearn your bad habits. One cadet with my instructor had already soloed and had a few hours flying time. He was the first one to get washed out.

After two months at Tulsa I went on to basic, which was at Enid, Oklahoma. There we flew the BT-13s and BT-19s, better known as the Vultee Vibrator. As a plane, I never liked it. It wasn't so hard to fly, but for me it was hard to land. When you came in for a landing, if you didn't hit just right it would bounce up in the air. I wasn't the only one

who had trouble. You could watch other students coming in and they would bounce up and down three or four times before they got it down on the runway.

In basic we began night flying, which proved to be quite an experience. We would leave the main base in daylight and fly to an auxiliary field where we waited until it got dark. The runway was a dirt field with faint lights marking each side at the so-called runway. You would take off, with the instructor in the back, circle the field once and land. This I did, making my usual bouncing landing. My instructor said, "Stop and let me out before you kill both of us". He got out and I continued the takeoffs and landings. Next day the students compared notes and found out every instructor did the same thing - once around and out. Later I think I knew the instructors' reasoning. With them in the back seat and it being dark, they could not see where you were going. In the daytime, they could look out the side and see the edge of the runway. At night, by the time a little light came by it was too late to do anything. I assume they were required to take the one ride. I never heard of an instructor going around the second time.

It was here that we first started formation flying. They would take three planes and you would fly in a "V" element with an instructor and a student in each plane. The instructor on the wing would put the plane close to the lead plane, then he would say, "Alright, take over". When you are in a plane three or four feet from another and the planes are bouncing around, and the instructor tells you to take over, the first thing you do is start easing away from the other plane. That's what makes the instructor mad. I remember I'd ease the plane away a little bit and he would hit the stick and the plane would go up on its side and over toward the other plane, just barely missing it, and he would put it in a tight formation again and say, "Now, damn it, Calnon, hold it there!". We did that several times and I got more nervous and shook up all the time. We went through that for an hour or so and went back and landed. When we landed the instructor said, "Well, Calnon, how did you like that?". I said, "I didn't. I don't have to take this crap. I was happy where I came from and I don't have to go through this". He said, "Oh, Calnon, go back to the barracks and sleep on it." That's all he said so apparently my reaction was not all that unusual. That was my introduction to formation flying.

After you got a little comfortable in flying formation, then the instructor and a student would be in the lead plane with a student alone on each wing. When the lead plane turns into you, you slow down a bit and get a little lower, but on the same plane. On the other side, the other plane speeds up and gets a little higher. The wings of all three planes are supposed to be on the same plane. When the lead plane turns into you, the tendency is to slow down too much and drop away.



I had an instructor who was kind of a hellion. We were forbidden to fly in or through the clouds as you never knew who was in there with you. When my instructor was in the lead plane and had a student on each wing and was out of sight of the field, he would take us up into the clouds. He would warn us to stay close to him. When you were in the clouds you had to have your wing practically touching his or you would lose sight of him. The purpose of this was that, when you were turning, you would not realize you were turning and you would stay right with him, just wingtip to wingtip. You wouldn't know how steep a turn you were in because you couldn't see the ground.

One day I went up to fly formation, and the student on the other wing was not his regular student and hadn't done this before. We went up into the clouds and I knew enough to stay in close to the instructor, but all of a sudden I realized that I couldn't see the student on the other wing. About that time I got a glimpse of movement behind me and I felt a crunch and the plane lurched. My first reaction was to look back, which I did. When I looked forward again, the instructor was gone. So here I was in the clouds by myself but with two other planes close by. When I couldn't see the instructor and the plane didn't go into a spin I figured I was still alright. I thought, "He is still ahead of me so I'll just push the throttle forward and catch up". I kept opening the throttle, hoping to catch up, not realizing that at that time I was in a turn, so when I opened the throttle it went into a dive. I kept staring ahead to make sure he didn't loom up in front of me. The first thing I knew, I was out of the clouds, headed almost straight down. I finally looked at the instruments and the air speed was above the red line and I was still going down. The first thing I thought of was, "I'm getting out of here". I slid back the canopy and started to climb out. Then I thought, "It's still under control and not spinning", so I climbed back in and looked at the altimeter and it was at 3,000 feet. I thought I would ride it down to 1,000 feet and then bail out. I tested all the controls and everything seemed to be alright. The only problem was that I was lost. The instructor knew where we were but I didn't. I came to a little town and buzzed the water tank to read the name on it. That told me where I was.

I headed back to the base and figured it must not be too bad as the plane was flying alright. I landed and thought maybe no one would notice. As I parked the plane, another plane came up along side with an instructor in it. I was sitting there filling out the Form I when the instructor cut his engine, looked over and said, "What in the hell did you do to that plane?". I figured it must be noticeable. I said, "Oh, we had a little problem up there". He said, "You go into Operations and report it. We got out and he came over to the plane. The other fellow's prop had cut through the bottom of the fuselage just in front of the tail wheel. That's where the control cables are. We held a string across the cut and

the prop came within an inch of the control cable. The odd part was that the other student didn't even know anything had happened. They told him to go out and look at the prop on his plane. So he and some of the brass went out and the prop was all nicked up. They said, "You hit him alright". I reported the accident and was told to go to the barracks.

The next day they called the other student and me in. We were called in individually. They asked me if we were up in the clouds. I said, "Oh, a little ways". They said, "How far were you?" I said, "Oh, not very far. Just as soon as this happened I came right out of them". Well, I found out that the other student said that it took him five minutes to get down out of the clouds. I was trying to protect the instructor. Anyway, they threw the book at him, grounded him, and I don't know what happened to him from then on. I know I had another instructor. The instructor did have a purpose, which was to teach us to fly close formation. He had the right idea but maybe wasn't doing it right. Later on I was to find out that in combat your main defense was to be in tight formation.

There was another incident between me and my instructor that was amusing to me but not to him. It was common practice that when you were just flying and not doing maneuvers, to slide your canopy back and just sit there and let the wind whistle by. One day I was out with my instructor and we were just flying straight and level, probably returning to the base. I decided to slide my canopy back. As I did I heard loud profanity coming from the rear cockpit and not over my headset. I turned and looked at my instructor. Unbeknownst to me, he already had his canopy open. When I opened mine, the sudden draft going in my cockpit and out his, ripped his cap and headset off and they were long gone. When we landed he grumbled a little, but laughed it off. I figured he felt I had as much right to open my canopy as he did.

All cadet classes had some accidents, some tragic and some not. One day I was in ground school class when an officer came in and told everyone to go to the flight line, check out a plane and fly around for an hour. We soon learned a plane had crashed, killing both the student and instructor. They didn't want anyone losing their nerve so everyone was immediately in the air. However, as soon as we were in the air, we could see the smoke from the burning plane, which may have made matters worse.

Another time, two planes were attempting to land at the same time, one slightly above and behind the other. The tower apparently couldn't get their attention and they landed one on top of the other. The prop of the top plane knocked the canopy off the bottom plane. The fellow in the bottom plane said all he could remember was sitting there with a prop spinning inches from his head.



It was in basic that we were taught acrobatics. Many students were experimenting long before they had instructions. I didn't because they didn't appeal to me. They were uncomfortable because it threw you around in the cockpit and you would hang upside down and the dirt in the bottom of the plane would fall in your face. I just did the minimum I was required to do.

I guess I was not as adventuresome as many of the students. The most daring thing I did was fly under a bridge across a canyon. Even before my mid-air mishap I had been given enough thrills by my somewhat wild instructor. Before that mishap he had told us that when we were flying formation close to the ground, to stay slightly above him. We would go out on the desert and he would bounce his wheels off the ground. Other times he would fly between trees and we would skim the tops of them. It was not unusual to have leaves in your landing gear. I learned that some of the other students were exposed to these same thrills.

The instructors had a nice little racket going for them. Whenever a student fouled up he was given "points" depending on the seriousness of the infraction. At the end of training, the student had to pay a dollar for each point. The instructors then threw themselves a party. I contributed five dollars to the fund. I forgot to set the altimeter before taking off. It wasn't serious except I was flying with my instructor and he would notice my altitudes were slightly off. Some of the students had quite an investment in the fund.

All in all, my two months in basic training were pleasant but certainly not uneventful. The underclassmen were still hazed, but not nearly as much as in primary. I understand soon afterward all hazing was stopped.

After basic we were to go to advanced flying school. We had our choice of going to a single engine school to be fighter pilots or to twin engine school and fly bombers. I took the twin engine because I felt a little safer with that extra engine. My twin engine school was at Lubbock, Texas. My instructor was a former airline pilot who had been recalled to active duty. He was rather unhappy being called back into active duty with a reduction in pay and having to put up with us students. He was an extremely likeable fellow and his first name was Jack. He always had a smile on his face so we nicknamed him "Smiling Jack". If you remember, there was a "Smiling Jack" who was a pilot in one of the comic strips at that time. We even called him that to his face and he didn't seem to mind.

In advanced we flew AT-17s and AT-9s. The AT-17 was a real stable plane. The AT-9 had a problem. It had a very small wing and you landed and took off at 120 miles per hour, which is pretty fast for a student. With such a small wing, it didn't give you any warning when it stalled. If you landed



a bit slow, you were gone before you could recover. We lost several students in this plane and I understand that after our class graduated they quit using it as a trainer and started training pilots in it who were going to fly the B-26. The B-26 was also notorious for having a small wing.

Smiling Jack brought this fact home to me one day when we were in the AT-9. We always practiced emergency procedures in case we had to bail out. This involved immediately touching all the switches and emergency handles involved in bailing out. This day Smiling Jack called "Emergency!", and I immediately went through the procedure. He said, "That was fine, but by then you'd be six feet under".

I enjoyed advanced much more than basic. However, I did have a couple of interesting experiences. After you were checked out in the planes, you not only flew with your instructor, but would fly with each other. One day you would be the pilot and another student would be the co-pilot. The next day it would be just the opposite. In planes where there is both a pilot and co-pilot, the pilot is always the commander. The co-pilot only touches controls and switches as the pilot says. The co-pilot does not make any comment on what the pilot is doing or how he is flying, even if he knows it's wrong. If you see he is going to make a hard landing, all you can do is grit your teeth and brace yourself. This day I was the co-pilot and I did only what the pilot said. The pilot's responsibility is to check the controls, make sure everything is working right and do all the inspections. We taxied out to the end of the runway to take off. When you are taxiing you don't use the ailerons or the rudder. You steer the plane by using the engines and the brakes. We taxied to the end of the runway and started to take off. We were about halfway down the runway and I glanced down and the control lock, which is on the co-pilot's side, was still on. All of our controls were locked. I gave the wheel a quick pop forward, which released the bar, and got it out just as we were at the end of the runway and ready to get into the air. The first thing the pilot said was, "Oh my God! Don't tell Smiling Jack about this!"

The other experience was a similar situation. I was the co-pilot and was not making any comments. We were flying at night and when you came back to the field to land, you circled the field at 500 feet. We came back to the field and started circling and the pilot kept letting down and letting down. I was watching the altimeter and we got to 500 feet and kept going down. He seemed to be glancing at the altimeter but was still letting down. Eventually I noticed us coming up on little red lights and flying over them. Finally, I could stand it no longer. I said, "Don't you think we're a shade low?" He looked down and said the same thing, "Oh my God!", and pulled it up. The little red lights were tail lights on cars on the highway that we were passing over. The only explanation I can give for his misjudgment was that he forgot

for a moment that the altimeter is set for sea level, so when you are on the ground your altimeter reads the altitude of your field, and when you are in the air, your altimeter still reads sea level and not how far off the ground you are.

In advanced we spent considerable time flying in formation. By now I was used to it and actually found it quite enjoyable. One of Smiling Jack's other students had trouble gauging his speed when catching up with the lead plane to get into formation. As a result, he would zoom right on past the lead plane. Smiling Jack said, "You're going to kill yourself doing that". I understand later that's exactly what happened. It was the only time I heard Smiling Jack reprimand a student.

After two months of advanced training we got our wings and were commissioned Second Lieutenants. I graduated in the class of 42-H. I had finally reached my goal - I was in the money. I would now make \$300 a month plus flight pay. A far cry from \$21 a month. Time would tell whether the greed was worth what I was to go through.

## CHAPTER II

### I EARN MY WINGS

Now I made a bad choice. At that time, pilots were real scarce and we had our choice of going into any kind of service that required pilots. The smart ones took the ferry command. That was safe and you ferried planes all around the country and around the world. I wanted to get back to the West Coast Command. Well, I chose that and it was a mistake. I wound up at Victorville, California, flying student bombardiers around. Victorville was the end of the world. It was clear out in the desert, about 30 miles from San Bernardino, the closest town, which didn't have much to offer in the first place. We flew AT-7s and all we did was take student bombardiers up, let them drop a few practice bombs, go back to the base and get another student and repeat the thing. There was another classmate of mine who was assigned there at the same time. He felt the same way that I did. We made no bones of what we thought of Victorville, flying student bombardiers, and particularly the Air Force. All we did was bitch, bitch, bitch and it wasn't long before we were out of there.

When you fouled up a little you were sent to a tactical group. They sent us to Salt Lake City for reassignment. They, in turn, sent us to a B-17 group at Great Falls, Montana. This particular group was just starting training to go overseas. They had moved from Ephrata, Washington to Great

Falls. This was in the middle of winter and why they moved, I don't know. At Great Falls the temperature was 40 degrees below zero and they kept having trouble starting the engines. This continued for a week or so and then they moved the whole group back to Ephrata.

Ephrata was a small town about 150 miles west of Spokane. Conditions there were quite primitive as they were just developing the base. In fact, there were not even any barracks there yet. The officers of a crew lived in a small hut heated with a coal stove. Their enlisted men lived together in a similar hut. The so-called streets were so muddy a truck would come by and take you to the flight line.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE B-17 BOMBER - QUEEN OF THE SKIES

It was here that I first became acquainted with a B-17. As it happened, one of my classmates was already in the group. He took me through my first B-17 and I swore at the time that one man could never get that thing off the ground. My, it seemed big! It took forever to walk from the waist through the radio room, through the bomb bay to the cockpit. The cockpit seemed completely filled with instruments.

I was assigned as co-pilot to one of the crews. Then we started training on what was called "first phase". First phase is more or less getting the pilots and crews working together. You do a lot of orientation flying, a little practice bombing, a little air to ground gunnery, and basically getting the pilot to know the plane.

After finishing first phase they send you to another base for second phase. When this group started to move on they called me in and said that I was being held back to be first pilot and would be given a crew. I strenuously objected because after you fly with a group of fellows for a while you become close and want to go on with them. I objected, but to no avail. At the time, I assumed one of the reasons they were holding me back was that I had accumulated more flying time than the other co-pilots because of Victorville, and I was a couple years older than many of them. So I was given my own crew, except for a navigator. They were short of navigators at that time. So I went through first phase training again as a first pilot with my own crew. The group was now called the Nendel Group. Nendel was a Major and was our commanding officer. He would take us through training until we left for overseas, then he would return and start another group through.



A couple of events happened at Ephrata that I will always remember. One night several of us were in Spokane on pass. We were in a night club when several other fellows from the group came in. They looked at us and seemed to be surprised. They came to our table and said to me, "I thought you were killed last night". I knew I had a distant cousin with the name Calnon. It seems he had just been assigned to our group and that night they had taken several pilots up on an orientation flight. The plane crashed, killing all aboard. Since I had been with the group for some time, when they saw that uncommon name, some assumed I was the one.

We had several fatal plane crashes while I was at Ephrata. One night two planes got confused on the runways. One took off not knowing there was another plane on the same runway. The tower didn't realize where the second plane was. Both crews were killed.

Another time, while flying at night the weather suddenly turned bad and one plane didn't return. The next day the rest of us searched the area. The plane had crashed into a mountain, killing the crew.

Another event was to have lifelong results. One of the other pilots and I ran around together. He had met a girl in Spokane and they decided to get married. He asked me to be his best man, which I was happy to do. While that ended our running around together, we continued with our training and friendship. Upon completing training, we would go to separate assignments, but a few months later would be thrown together again under very different circumstances.

We next went to Redmond, Oregon for our second phase training. It was here that we would learn to fly formation as a group. Here we got our navigator so now we had our full crew. This was made up of:

Pilot - Mark B. Calnon  
Co-pilot - V. Dale Barnes  
Navigator - Ted Harold Kusler  
Bombardier - Lowell C. Hasler  
Engineer and top turret gunner - John J. Rolleri  
Radio operator and radio gunner - Bob B. Patterson  
Ball turret gunner - Sam Lopez  
Tail gunner - Caesario G. Lendoiro  
Asst. radio operator and waist gunner - John A. McGettigan  
Asst. engineer and waist gunner - Robert M. Hendrickson.

There was nothing wrong with Redmond other than it was rather isolated, as was Ephrata. It was beautiful country. The base was an old CCC camp that had been made into an air base. The thing I remember about Redmond was that when you taxied down to the end of the runway to take off, there was a little rise in the runway so you couldn't see the other end.

When you took off, you went over a little rise and down the other side and up. Redmond was about 10 or 15 miles from Bend, which was a beautiful town.

Most of the training at Redmond was navigation flights, getting the navigator and pilot working together. We would fly over Crater Lake and the Sisters Mountains, taking full advantage of the beautiful country. On one of our navigation flights we were to fly from Redmond to Ely, Nevada. Ted, our navigator, was supposed to take us there and we were to call in on the radio, then return to Redmond. We took off early in the morning, however, when we got over Ely I called in and couldn't get anyone so we turned around and started back. It suddenly dawned on me, "I'm not too far from home". I called Ted and said, "Give me a heading to Boise. I'm going to buzz my home". He gave me a heading and we headed for Meridian. I buzzed my home a couple of times, and afterwards I asked my brother what he thought was coming. He said it sounded just like a truck and he ran outside to see us come back the second time.

I made two passes and the thing I was trying to avoid was any trees or power lines, thinking they would be the highest objects there. However, they weren't. The highest things were the poles on the hay derricks sticking up in the air. After the passes we headed back to Redmond. Of course we were late and the squadron commander was waiting for me. He said, "You're a little late, aren't you?". I said, "Oh yeah, we got off course a little. He said, " You live over that way, don't you?" I said, "Oh no, I live clear up in Idaho." Whether he knew what had happened or not I don't know, but I assume he did because Gowan Field was close with B-17s based there and it would have been no problem for someone to read the numbers off the tail of the plane and report.

At the end of the training period at Redmond, we went to Seattle and picked up a brand new B-17. This was the plane we would take overseas and we thought would take into combat. The main difference between the new planes and the ones we were flying was that the new planes had a chin gun turret and Tokyo tanks which gave the planes much longer range. These were the B-17Gs and had not yet gone into combat.

Our next step was Phase Three which would get us prepared to fly overseas. We all loaded up in our brand new B-17 and headed to Scott Field, Missouri. I didn't appreciate the reception I got there. The weather was extremely hot and I was told afterwards the temperature over the runways was about 120 degrees, which created thermals coming off the asphalt. I tried to land the plane and got down on the runway where I wanted, at the speed I wanted, pulled back on the wheel to let it stall and up we went in the air again. I pushed the wheel forward and got it down again and just about got it landed and up in the air we went again. By now we were well below the stalling speed and still about 10 feet in the air. Finally I

did get it landed. After we landed we watched some of the other planes from our group come in and saw them do the same thing. It was amusing to know what was going to happen and then watch it happen. It was a little scary to be well below the stalling speed and still ten feet in the air.

At Scott Field the pilots were checked out for instrument flying and other skills, medical records checked, and we were issued our overseas equipment. The barracks we were assigned to was suffocating and had been condemned. We were assigned there because they said we wouldn't be there long anyway.

During this time the enlisted men received promotions. According to the Geneva Convention, if you are taken prisoner, anyone below the rank of Staff Sergeant could be made to work. Staff Sergeants and above could be made to supervise but not work. This should have told us what our fate might be. Consequently, all my enlisted men were automatically made Staff Sergeants. Some of them went from Buck Private to Staff Sergeant overnight.

I had understood that before going overseas all first pilots would be made First Lieutenants. In inquiring about it, I was informed that the paperwork had gotten fouled up and we would get our promotions when we were assigned to a base overseas. When we got overseas and inquired about it, the answer was, "You will get it after you fly a few missions". Their philosophy, I'm sure, was, "Why promote a dead man?" In other words, everyone knew ahead of time what was going to happen to the plane and its crew.

A bright moment did happen at Scott Field. One night we were in the barracks and had just gone to bed. The light from a street lamp shone in Dale's (co-pilot) face and he couldn't get to sleep. He gets out his 45 Automatic and shoots the street light out. In a moment a captain stormed into the barracks wanting to know who fired that shot. Of course none of us had heard anything.

#### CHAPTER IV

#### OFF TO MERRY OLD ENGLAND - AND COMBAT!

After about a week or so we started overseas. The first leg was flying to Presque Isle, Maine, and from Presque Isle to Gander, Newfoundland. From Gander we were to fly across the Atlantic Ocean to Preswick, Scotland.

When we got to Gander the weather was bad. We were briefed on the flight over the ocean. We would go out and sit in the plane and wait for permission to take off. The weather



would close in and we would be called back in to wait for the weather to clear. This happened several times and eventually we went out and the weather cleared for about 15 minutes and they said, "Take off!". We weren't more than two or three hundred feet in the air before we saw the last of the North American Continent that we would see for a couple of years. I know what was going on in my mind at the time and I wondered if the same thing was going on in the other fellows' minds. I wondered if I would ever see it again.

We took off around 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon and would fly all night and it would be well into daylight when we would reach Scotland. I think it took around thirteen hours. Flying across the ocean the weather was extremely rough and we were merely told there would be clouds all the way but nothing about how rough it would be, or any icing conditions. As it kept getting rougher and rougher I would try to climb a few thousand feet higher to get over it, and when nothing happened would go lower and still couldn't out of it, so I decided just to put up with it. I had the plane on automatic pilot so all I was doing was just sitting there watching the instruments. I assumed the other crew members were asleep, other than Ted, the navigator. It kept getting rougher and rougher so I decided I would try once more to go higher. I flipped off the automatic pilot and as I did so the nose of the plane dropped straight down and at the same time the air speed indicator went to zero. We had iced up. The automatic pilot was keeping it up but if I hadn't turned it off when I did, the weight of the ice would soon have overpowered it and we would have gone down. The reason the air speed indicator went back to zero was that it is controlled by the Pitot tube, and it had frozen up. Air going in the Pitot tube causes the airspeed indicator to register.

I got the plane leveled out manually and turned on the de-icer boots and the Pitot tube heater. I shone my flashlight out the side of the plane and could see chunks of ice starting to break off of the leading edge of the wing. I was mad to think that they had not alerted us that there would be icing conditions. If they had, I would have been watching for it. At night you can't see your wings so you don't see the ice build up. The ice came off and the Pitot tube thawed out so we were back to normal again. Occasionally, in groups flying over the ocean, a plane would be lost and I assume this is what happened to them. Needless to say, I flew the plane manually the rest of the flight.

We flew all night and as it started getting light the next morning we couldn't tell when we were over land because we were still above the clouds. Eventually, once in a while I could look down through the clouds and see land so I knew we had made it safely across. At the time, although Ted was navigating, I had the radio compass on. This is an instrument that you tune to the frequency of the field you are headed for and if you keep the needle centered it will take you straight

to the field. When you get over the field the needle turns and points down. All of a sudden the needle turned and pointed down, which indicated that we were over the field. Since we were above the clouds and couldn't see anything, all we knew was that the field was down there someplace. We could hear the control tower talking to other planes so we knew planes were landing. The problem was going down through the clouds knowing that other planes were doing the same thing. All we could do was hold our breath and go down through them so we did. It wasn't long till we could see the field and landed and everything was all right.

The thing that impressed me about Scotland was the language. The Scottish brogue just fascinated me. We now wondered what was coming next.

The first thing they did was to take our plane away from us. It was a brand new plane and the one we thought we would be taking into combat and we didn't even get it to England! We found that this was a large base where they modified planes. Before they went into combat they took off the de-icer boots and did any modification on guns, mounts, or anything that needed to be changed. Our whole group landed safely and it was here that Lowell caused a little ruckus. They were assembling us to move us out and I was aware that for some reason they were holding our crew back. Come to find out, Lowell was holding something out on them. He had been issued a tachometer, which is used with the bomb sight. He thought he might need it later and tried to keep it. It soon became obvious we weren't about to leave there unless he handed it over. He eventually he did and we were on our way again.

From Scotland we were put on a train to England. There the crew was split up and the officers went to an orientation school and the enlisted men went to a gunnery school. The officers were briefed on what to expect in combat, what the procedures were, and how to conduct yourself. We were there probably a week or so. We were then assigned to a bomb group. We were assigned to the 384th Bomb Group which flew out of Grafton-Underwood. Here the crew was reunited. We were replacements for crews that had been shot down.

The first thing you realized when you got into a combat group was that the fun and games were over and you were in the big leagues. Here they played for keeps. The first time I went out and watched the group return from a mission, there were planes missing and I watched them remove a dead crewman from one of the planes. So I knew the glamour was over.

We did a little orientation flying around England, particularly at night. At night there were no lights anywhere. All of England was blacked out and you flew with no navigation lights on. The runway lights were not visible until you were about five hundred feet above the ground. One

night we were flying and all of a sudden a small glow zipped overhead. It was the exhaust of another plane.

One incident happened over England that I only vaguely remember, but both Lowell and Ted laugh about it, so it must have happened. It left both of them with red faces.

According to their stories, while we were still new and inexperienced, we were leading the group in a practice mission around England. The squadron commander, who was a major, was riding with us and was in charge of the exercise. At one time he called down to Lowell and told him to engage the bombsight so we could turn on the automatic pilot. (The automatic pilot controls the plane through the bombsight and won't work if it is not engaged.) But Lowell had a problem - he didn't have a bombsight. He figured this was only a practice mission and we wouldn't be dropping any bombs so we wouldn't need one and he hadn't checked one out.

Ted was navigating and apparently hadn't brought along enough maps. The first thing he realized was that we had flown off his maps. Here we were leading a bomb group and were lost somewhere over England. He finally got us located and took us back to our base. He said after we landed the group navigator was waiting for him and said, "Why didn't you land the first time you went over?"

Years later, Ted was to ask me if I got chewed out over the incident. I hadn't and maybe it was because the major was sitting right beside me and he didn't know we were lost either.

The British had a unique way of locating yourself if you got lost at night. They had radio stations all over England that had a range of only about twenty miles. If you were lost, you called over your radio and any station hearing you knew you were within twenty miles of them. You told them what base you wanted to go to and they would give you a heading.

It didn't take long to get into combat. The procedure was that the first pilot went on one mission as co-pilot with an experienced crew. From then on he was a veteran. It happened that I found one of my old flying classmates in this group. Since I knew I would go on one mission as co-pilot, I asked him if I could go with him. However, he had no choice in the matter. It happened that on the mission I did go on as co-pilot, this friend was on the same mission and I knew where he was in the formation. The first mission really makes an impression on you because it wasn't until I walked up through the bomb bay into the cockpit that I realized that this thing was for real. I looked at the bomb bay and it was full of 500 lb. bombs instead of the blue 100 lb. practice bomb. The normal load for a B-17 was twelve 500 lb. bombs or six 1000 lb. bombs.



Our mission was over France, and when we got over France I looked out over the countryside and everything was peaceful and green. But the first thing I knew here came the German fighters. The first ones I saw came right through the formation and you realize they are trying to kill you. These first fighters, as they came through the formation, took out my friend so the very first B-17 I saw shot down had my friend in it. If I had been co-pilot with him I wouldn't have made even one mission.

The mission itself was not too eventful although we did get our windshield shot out. The pilot decided when we got back to England to leave the formation and land at a British air base. I don't know why, because all we did was land, look the plane over, have tea, and take off again. By the time we got back to our base it was dark and my crew was waiting for me. The first thing they thought when our plane didn't come back was that we weren't even going to get our first mission together.

As soon as we got to the combat area we got a startling revelation. This was one war that we were not going to come out of. The losses were tremendous. We were required to fly 25 combat missions and then could go home. We found out that the average crew lasted about five or six missions. We would be average. Many crews got shot down on their very first mission. One crew in our group was assigned to the base one day, flew their first mission the next day and were shot down. They didn't even get their bags unpacked. Many groups would go out and only half the planes come back. Other times they would lose only one or two and of course, sometimes none. In one case, a group of 27 planes went out and only one came back. The only question was how and when it will come. It never dawned on me that we would be someplace in the middle. I never dreamed of being taken prisoner. I thought it would be all or none. When you see planes going down you never knew what happened to the crew afterwards. When the plane explodes you are pretty sure what happened. But once you see planes going down and crews bailing out you don't think about what happened to them afterwards. During the war the Air Force lost over 50,000 men.

Our reception by the English was somewhat less than cordial. I think a lot of it had to do with the amount of money the Americans had to spend and I'm sure there was a certain amount of braggadocio. However, the English were quick to take advantage of the money situation. You could be standing in line to go into a theater and when you got up to the ticket office the cashier would raise the price. You point out what the price was posted and they would say, "Either pay or get out of line". One time we were in London and decided to take a taxi someplace. We were in the middle of the block and hailed the taxi and when we got in, there was a doorman from a hotel clear at the end of the block who was standing there holding on to the door and leaning into the car

and wouldn't leave until we tipped him. The English statement was that the Americans were "over-fed, over-paid, over-sexed and over here". They had barrage balloons that were raised every night over London to keep German planes from coming low over the city. The American response was "cut the rope and let the damned island sink".

We started flying missions as a crew realizing that the law of averages was against us and probably sooner or later time would run out. There was some resentment that many of the fellows stayed safely at the base with no risk whatsoever. Of the millions of men in all the services, a very small percentage actually did the fighting. We realized that it takes millions of men to support the combat men. Somehow it just didn't seem fair. I found out this same feeling was in the ground forces. The men on the front lines resented the men behind the lines. The question was, "Who is behind the lines?" The answer, "Any son-of-a-bitch whose foxhole is farther back than mine".

A Bomb Group was comprised of four squadrons at one base. In combat the group would put up three squadrons of six planes each, a lead squadron, a high squadron, and a low squadron. This made eighteen planes to a group, however more planes were added later in the war. They would then put three groups together to make a wing. A wing was considered the smallest element that could take on combat. As in the group formation, the wing was composed of a lead group, a high group, and a low group. Each group was separated by a thousand feet in altitude. The most vulnerable part of the formation was high squadron, high group, as we were to later learn to our dismay. Flying in this tight box the fire power was concentrated through a depth of three thousand feet.

Getting ready for a mission was an interesting procedure. Officers slept in one quonset hut and the enlisted men in another. Officers on the same crew slept on cots side by side, as did the enlisted men. At headquarters, they knew which bed each crewman was in. An enlisted man would come and wake up the crew and tell them they were flying that day. He tells you what time breakfast is and what time briefing is. You get up and do whatever is necessary, particularly shaving, to make sure your oxygen mask fits properly. You have breakfast, then go to the briefing room and are checked in. On the wall is a large map of Europe with a curtain over it. The curtain is drawn back revealing a string stretching from your base in England along your flight path to the target and your route home. They show you pictures of the target, where it is, and what kind of weather to expect. They estimate how many fighters you could encounter and where the heaviest concentrations of flak are. You are given your position in the formation, the order in which to taxi out, the time to start the engines, the time to start taxiing, and your takeoff time. You then go down to the flight line and get your equipment.



A truck takes you to your plane where you check with your crew to make sure everyone knows what's going on. The crew gets in the plane and you wait until the prescribed time and start the engines. At the prescribed time, the first plane starts taxiing and you watch for your place in line to get in your spot to taxi out. You taxi out to the runway and stop and wait for takeoff time, and it was at this time that I did my most thinking. You look around and see that long line of planes and you know that some of them are not coming back. You wonder which ones it would be. In your own mind you know it could be you, but you have to think it will be the other fellow. Then one day it is you. I have been asked if I did a lot of praying. The answer is "Yes" and "No". My only prayer was, "Regardless of what happens, give me the strength to face it". This prayer was to be answered many times in the months to come.

Each plane has a ground crew and it is their responsibility to keep the plane flying, and they take great pride in their plane. You get to know them quite well, but they make it a point not to get too friendly because they know that it could be a short friendship. When the group returns from a mission everyone is out watching and counting the planes as they come back. It was disheartening to taxi past a hard stand and see the ground crew standing there and you know their plane didn't come back. However, in the next day or two they would have another plane and another crew. That was just a fact of life.

At this early stage of the war we had no fighter escort. What fighters we did have could go only part way with us and then had to return. The German fighters also knew this so they merely waited until our fighters went home and then we fought them all the way to the target and back to where our escort picked us up again. This was really worse than no escort at all because the German fighters could concentrate more on us a shorter length of time. Going to the target, as the time approached for our escort to leave, we could look ahead and see German fighters waiting for us. They looked like a swarm of mosquitoes.

There is one story Lowell tells on himself. After the group is airborne it is assembled with two other groups to form a wing. When you know you are committed to the mission and no chance of turning back because of weather, the bombardier comes up through the cockpit and into the bomb bay and arms the bombs. Lowell tells that one time he couldn't quite reach a bomb so he stepped on the bomb bay door. When we got back to the base he mentioned this to someone and they said, "Don't you know those doors open with 160 lb. weight?" Of course he didn't have his chute on.

The actual combat over Europe was only one of the many dangers you faced. Planes would occasionally crash on takeoff, being so heavily loaded with bombs, gas, and



ammunition. Weather caused many accidents. It could be cloudy and rainy. With hundreds of planes assembling over a relatively small area, collisions were inevitable. While I never saw one, there are stories of seeing fellows falling out of these planes. They had no chutes on as no one wore his chute.

While the temperatures in the cockpit and nose were not too bad, in the waist it was almost unbearably cold. The waist windows were open so the guns could extend out. Most missions were flown at 25,000 feet, and at that altitude the temperature in the waist could get to 60 degrees below zero. Frostbite was common and oxygen masks could freeze up.

We flew several missions as a crew and nothing eventful happened. However, on October 8, 1943, our luck began to change. Our target that day was Bremen, which is quite far inside Germany and was a very large industrial area. We were briefed that we would see lots of fighters and there would be heavy anti-aircraft fire around the target. Just before we got to the target Dale tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the No. 3 engine. There was black smoke coming out of it. I told him to feather it, which he did. When you feather an engine, it is turned off and the prop feathered (turned into the wind). A pilot's greatest fear is that when an engine is hit, the oil line will be severed and the prop won't feather. I breathed a sigh of relief as I saw the propeller stop turning and gradually turn into the wind. If you can't feather the propeller it will keep windmilling and you lose air speed which knocks you out of the formation. This is fatal.

Now another problem came up. With only three engines we had trouble keeping up with the formation. I called down to Lowell and told him to salvo the bombs, which he did. My only thought now was to get over the target so we could head home before something else went wrong. I wondered how far we were from the target. I looked ahead and got my answer. There was a big, black cloud of flak all over the area. I thought how ironic it was that we would have to fly through it but had no bombs. We flew through it with no apparent damage. After we got through it and the group dropped their bombs we again had a problem. Now that the other planes didn't have their bombs and with us having only three engines, we couldn't keep up with them again. All I could do was keep pushing the throttles forward. Occasionally I would glance at the instruments and the essential instruments were all above the red line. However, I had no choice. To drop out of the formation would have been fatal, so the only alternative was to run the engines wide open as long as they would last. The mission lasted six hours, so the engines were pushed beyond their limits for three hours.

I was never so glad to see the white cliffs of Dover as we returned to England. My first thought was that the engines

may go out anytime and I thought of landing at an RAF base since they were all over the coast. However, since the three engines seemed to be running all right I thought, "We'll keep going until the engines do go out because they won't all go out at once, and if another one goes out we can still find a base where we can land".

We made it to our base and although I had never landed a B-17 with only three engines, I anticipated no problem. We came in for a landing, which seemed to be proper, but the instant we hit the runway there was a thump and we veered off to the right and headed across the field toward the flight line. I knew what was wrong, we had a flat tire. My first fear was the plane ground looping so I opened the No. 4 engine wide open.

The brakes are applied by pushing on the top of the rudder pedals. However, when you are landing, your feet are on the floor pushing the rudder to steer the plane. With the plane bouncing across the field and, being taken by surprise, I had trouble getting my feet to the top of the pedals. I eventually got the plane stopped. Later on I asked both Lowell and Ted, who were in the nose, what their thoughts were when they realized we were off the runway. Both had the same answer. They said they looked ahead and saw everyone on the flight line scatter. Before we could even get out of the plane the ground crew was out there assessing the damage and all the work they would have to do. I do not know when the engine got hit. It could have been by fighters on the way in. The tire would have been hit from below, going through the flak. By the time we got out and examined the plane a truck was there to take us to the briefing room. Since I had run the other three engines above the red line for several hours and one was shot out, I'm sure they had to replace all four engines. I found out later that on that mission 27 B-17s were lost and of those that returned, 75% were damaged, so it was quite a costly raid.

After that experience I thought we would stand down for a few days since our plane was damaged. But the next morning around 4:00 o'clock, the sergeant came around, woke us up and said, "You're flying today".

Our target that day was Anklem, Germany. It was an aircraft factory and this was to be the longest mission that had been flown up to that day. As I remember, it was to take about eight hours.

Normally, bombing missions were flown at 25,000 feet. However, our planes were B-17Fs, which did not have Tokyo tanks. It took lots of gas to climb to that altitude with a full bomb load, let alone fly that distance. Consequently we would fly at 14,000 feet and even then couldn't carry enough gas. The solution was to carry extra gas in a bomb bay tank. As gas was used, Rollerli would transfer the extra gas to the

main tanks. Lowell would then drop the bomb bay tank. Of course, this meant we could carry only half a bomb load. They tried to give us some comfort by saying we would be too low for the regular flak guns. However, this didn't solve the fighter problem.

The day before, on our mission to Bremen, we had encountered lots of fighters. However, they seemed to be concentrating on other planes in the wing. Consequently, the gunners got lots of shooting in and about ran out of ammunition. When the crew assembled at the plane this morning, I found the gunners had piled box after box of extra ammunition in the waist. They weren't going to run out this time. I made them unload most of it or I would never have gotten the plane off the ground. Ammunition is extremely heavy and the waist is the worst place for extra weight. The planes are already loaded to capacity with gas and bombs.

Anklem was about 60 miles northwest of Berlin. Our route was to fly out over the North Sea, across Denmark, across the Baltic Sea and down into Germany to Anklem. We would come back by the same route. No bombers had flown that route before so there were few fighters in the area. However, by the time we came back they had plenty of time to move fighters up there and they were waiting for us. We bombed the target and headed out over the Baltic Sea again. I began to feel a little more at ease because I had been told that German fighters didn't like to fight over water any better than we did. We were approaching the coast of Denmark when the fighters hit us. My first thought was, "Why are they on us now? We're still over water". They made one or two passes and I felt the plane get hit. At the same time, one of the fellows in the waist called and said, "McGettigan has been hit!" When we got hit the right rudder pedal jammed clear to the floor so I assume we were hit in the waist or in the tail on the rudder or maybe both. With the rudder pedal jammed to the floor we were in trouble. When this happened we went into a skid, in other words, flying sideways. Flying this way we could no longer keep up with the formation and the first thing we knew, we were by ourselves. I've never had such a sinking feeling in my life as when I watched the formation pull away from us.

Both Dale and I together could not keep the plane flying forward. Once we were out of the formation the fighters concentrated on us. We kept getting hit and apparently most of it was in the waist. By now we were over land and were having more difficulty keeping the plane somewhat level. I was later to learn that the plane was on fire, and the one thing you worry about is that it will blow up.

We held the plane level as long as we could after I gave the order to bail out. After I thought everyone had time to get out I told Dale to go and that was a mistake. When he let loose of the wheel I could barely hold the plane by myself.



I should have had him stay until I had my chute on. When I let loose it went into a wing-over and into a flat spin. From then on everything started going wrong.

We had flak suits on and the first thing I did was to pull the cord which was supposed to let the flak suit fall off at my shoulders. It didn't fall. I had to reach up and unsnap the little snaps one at a time. Your parachute is under the seat so I reached down and got my parachute. There is a top and bottom to it so I held it in front of me and read the top to make sure I got it on right. I remember thinking that this was no time to panic. If you put your chute on upside down it can give you an awful jerk, in fact it can make a soprano out of you. All this time I was being thrown around, since the plane was in a spin.

I unsnapped my seat belt and turned around to bail out the bomb bay. The bomb bay is where the pilot, co-pilot, engineer and radio operator are to bail out. The engineer (Rolleri) is to pull an emergency cord and the bomb bay doors are to drop open. However, when I turned around they were still closed. I didn't know why they weren't open or where Rolleri was. The next exit was out the nose so I went down through the trap door into the nose, and as I got down there I looked forward and there was Dale still sitting at the opening so I realized I must have done things quite fast, but as I looked, he went out. All this time the plane was spinning but I got to the nose hatch and bailed out.

I have read that when you think in the next few moments you could die, your life flashes before your eyes. Not so! At that particular moment, my past life was the least of my worries. All I could think of was, "Get the hell out of here".

I fell as long as I thought I should and was about to pull the rip cord when I thought I could still hear the plane. I kicked myself over on my back and looked up and there was the plane right above me, coming down in a flat spin. I could see flames coming out of one engine. I knew that if I didn't pull the rip cord what would happen, so my only alternative was to wait as long as possible. When I did pull the rip cord, the opening of the chute slowed me down enough that the plane caught up with me and as the wing went by me it was only about 10 feet away. I watched the plane as it went by and it immediately stopped turning, indicating it had hit the ground, and I noticed the wing was on a house.

I took one swing and hit the ground. That's how close I was to the ground. Just before the plane hit, I saw a man run out of the house. Since the plane was on fire I'm sure it burned the house down. However, it didn't explode. There was some brush between me and the plane so I couldn't see the plane any more but I heard all this banging and thought I was being shot at. What I realized later was that it was

ammunition going off in the plane.

My first thought was to hide since we all carried escape kits. I hid my parachute and saw a row of brush or trees and thought I would run up there and hide. When I got there I found they lined a road and a soldier was just standing there waiting for me.

The first thing he asked was if I had a pistol, which I didn't. He motioned me to start down the road, which I did. He started taking me into a little village nearby. I still had ESCAPE on my mind because I still had my escape kit. He was armed with a small 25 caliber automatic but did not have it out. I thought if I saw a place I could run to and get out of sight real quick I could hit him hard enough so that I'd have time to hide and try to get away. About that time a civilian came down the road on a bicycle. He stopped and asked me, in English, where I lived in the United States. I think I told him California. He said, "I used to live in Indiana". I asked him just where this area was and he said, very dramatically, "You are in Deutschland!" Then he said, "Vor YOU der var iss ofer." I was later to find out that this was a standard statement to many downed fliers.

One reason escape had been on my mind was that while I knew we were over Denmark, I also knew we were over that portion of Denmark that Germany had annexed early in the war and many civilians were not friendly to the Germans. My hope would be someone not friendly to the Germans would help me. However, after the dramatic statement by the civilian, that hope quickly vanished.

The soldier took me to a village and all I remember was that we were in an enclosure outside a building I think was a jail. Soon they brought in Dale and Lowell as well as members of other crews that had been shot down in the area. When Lowell saw me he asked me if I was all right. I said I was and he said, "You have blood all over your face." The only thing I can think of is that it happened when I slammed into the ground. Dale was all right but Lowell had a badly sprained ankle from hitting the ground. Later on they brought in Rolleri on a stretcher. He was really shot up. He was splattered from head to foot with shrapnel.

Years later I was to learn what happened to some of the other crew members. Ted was the first one out. He went out the nose hatch. He was to tell years later that he got to the nose hatch, was about to jump, and remembered he had forgotten his cap, so he went back and got it and bailed out. Of course his cap was the first thing he lost. He remembers watching the plane go down and seeing it on fire. He was taken to another village and we were not to see him again until we got to Frankfurt. He said the Germans told him there were three bodies in the plane. Ted was first picked up by civilians who were somewhat hostile and shoved him around some. A soldier

eventually showed up and "rescued" him.

Rolleri was to tell me years later how he got out. When I gave the order to bail out he immediately pulled the wire to open the bomb bay doors. They were damaged and wouldn't open. He said he could see the ground through the doors. He started to walk across the catwalk to the waist to bail out and apparently was hit while in the bomb bay. He couldn't squeeze between the bomb racks because of his chute and tried to swing around them. He fell off the catwalk onto the bomb bay doors, which opened and let him out. Of course he had his parachute on. He said when the bomb bay doors wouldn't open, Patterson, radio operator-gunner, was standing at the door of the radio room waiting to go out the bomb bay. He said Patterson was standing there holding his chest as if wounded. He could have just been holding onto his chute, but his face was bloody. Rolleri said he motioned for Patterson to go back to the waist to bail out and he acknowledged the signal and that is when Rolleri started across the catwalk.

I was to learn years later that when Patterson reached the waist he was killed immediately. When he fell, he fell on top of McGettigan, who was already wounded, and knocked McGettigan's headset off. As a result, McGettigan did not hear the order to bail out. He was in the plane when it crashed, but managed to crawl out to where the Germans could reach him.

I don't know what went on in the waist but from the time of the first report that McGettigan had been hit, there was no communication from the waist whatsoever.

The three that were killed were Patterson, Lopez and Lendoiro. Hendrickson, the other waist gunner, was wounded but managed to bail out. Two planes from our group were shot down that day. Lowell tells me that just before we went down he saw the other plane leave the formation. They were never heard of again so either they were hit and blew up or crashed into the Baltic Sea, so none of them got out.

There were several of us in this little yard. Soldiers were guarding us and would change guards every once in a while. It was an eerie feeling to see a soldier come out and put a shell in the barrel of his gun. I don't think they knew what to do with us. Up to that time there had been no antagonism shown against us.

We were to learn later that it depended on who picked you up as to what your experience might be. If the Luftwaffe picked you up, you were all right. If the Wiermach picked you up, you were probably all right. If the S.S. troops picked you up, you could be in trouble. If the Gestapo picked you up, you were in deep trouble, and if the civilians got to you, it could be fatal. Later on we were to hear crews that were shot down over Berlin tell about walking down the streets and



seeing some of their crew hanging from street lamps. The Luftwaffe picked all of us up.

We spent the night in a cell and the next day were put on a train. We had no idea where we were going. The train had compartments in it and they put five or six of us in a compartment with a guard, so the trip was not too uncomfortable.

I remember having a little time then to think about what had happened to me. One of the first things that came to mind, in realizing that I was now a prisoner of war, was that my mother would get that dreaded telegram saying that I was missing in action. She would have no way of knowing that I was still alive and still had some hope. I'm sure the other fellows were thinking the same thing.

It has always bothered me to think of the way things happened. All the enlisted men were killed or wounded. None of the officers were even hurt. This is a hard thing to explain to their mothers. It all depended on where you were in the plane. All the hits were in the back half of the plane and the wing. The enlisted men are in the waist, while the officers are in the cockpit and the nose. Rolleri was even all right until he left the cockpit. It was just one of those fortunes of war. As Ted has always said, "It could just as well have been the other way". In fact I have a picture in which the cockpit forward has just been blown away. The engines are still running. The pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, and engineer are gone.

We eventually found out that we were on our way to Dulag Luft, which was outside of Frankfurt, Germany. This was an interrogation center where all flying officers were sent for interrogation.

The trip down was uneventful but on the way we went through Hamburg, which was a big industrial area. The British had been bombing it for most of the war and you can't imagine the devastation. You could look out both sides of the train and as far as you could see there was nothing but shells of buildings. The railroad yards were blown up but the Germans seemed to be able to keep one rail line open. On each side of the tracks, for miles there was nothing but absolute devastation. You wondered how anyone could have survived there.

We arrived at the Frankfurt railroad station and I remember all I could think of was, "I want to get out of here", because we had been bombing Frankfurt for some time. However, I don't remember seeing any bomb damage at that time. They took us out to Dulag Luft and put everyone in solitary confinement. They looked like jail cells. As I remember, there weren't even any windows in them. There was kind of a table where you could lie down, but there was no bed, no

blankets, no nothing. They would take you outside and interrogate you one at a time. I remember being taken outside and the weather was real nice. I sat down at a table with an interrogator across from me who spoke perfect English. The first thing he did was give me a form to fill out. We were only allowed to give our name, rank and Serial No. He handed me the form and said to fill it out. It said across the top, INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS. He said if I filled it out the Red Cross would know where I was and what happened to me. I looked at it and it started out real innocent, your name, rank, Serial No., where you were born and some other minor questions. The farther you went down, the more interesting the questions got. What kind of plane were you flying, where were you in the formation, what was the most vulnerable part of the formation. When I saw these questions I handed the form back to him and said, "That's as far as I can go". He stood up, pulled out his pistol and pointed it at me and said, "I can shoot you right now. No one knows where you are or what's happened to you. I want the rest of this filled out right now". I really didn't think he would do anything. I don't know what I would have done if I had seen him shoot someone. All I said was, "You're an officer and I'm an officer. You know what I can tell you and what I can't." I found out later the gun threat was a common practice to try to intimidate you. It still was an uneasy feeling. He said there was no reason for me not to tell him these things because they knew all about me anyway. Naturally I didn't believe him so he proved it. He told me where I was born, where I got my training, and even told me that we didn't have a navigator until we were in the second phase of training.

Colonel Spivey, who was the Senior American Officer in our compound, later would write of his experience here. He was on a secret mission when he was shot down. When he got to Dulag Luft and wouldn't answer the questions, they told him about his wife and family, that his son would have a birthday in a couple of days, and even told him the purpose of the secret mission which he was on. Everyone reported this same experience. How they got all this information, I'll never know.

Here at Dulag Luft I was to see how some other kinds of prisoners were treated. One day I was looking out through the fence and they were bringing a work detail down the road. I don't know whether they were political prisoners, Jews, Poles, Russians, or what, but anyway, just outside our camp was a garbage pile where they had thrown out cans. As the prisoners got close to it, they all made a bee-line for it. They started picking up the cans and running their fingers around the inside to get any scrap of food or juice that was left in them. This indicated how hungry they were.

I was at Frankfurt probably a week or so and it came time to move us to the main prison camp. They took everyone outside and divided us into two groups. Dale, Lowell and I

were in one group and we could see Ted in the other group. We couldn't understand why the two groups. In talking among the fellows in our group we soon discovered that the fellows in the other group were all navigators so we assumed there was some reason in wanting to keep the navigators there. This proved to be true, in talking to Ted in later years. He said what they wanted out of him was what a "Gee Box" was. A "Gee Box" was a new type of radar equipment that the Americans were to start using for bombing and navigation. Ted told them that it was a piece of equipment that the pilots used and that he didn't know anything about it. They kept him in isolation there for another two or three weeks with very little food and continual interrogation. They slapped him around some, but otherwise he was all right. They asked him if he wasn't German (Kusler). He said he was and they asked how much the British were paying him to fly for them. Eventually he was sent on to the main prison camp where he joined us at Stalag Luft III.

## CHAPTER V

### STALAG LUFT III - PRISON CAMP

I have to admit that my mind is a total blank on the trip from Frankfurt to Stalag Luft III. Lowell tells me they loaded us into boxcars and that's the way we went. Stalag Luft III was located about 90 miles southeast of Berlin at Sagan, which was in Poland. It was a camp for Allied flying officers only. There were two camps for flying officers. One was at Barth, which was up close to the Baltic Sea and the other one was at Sagan.

At this time I cannot remember any hostility from the civilians. All this would change later. At this time the Germans were winning the war. After the war many Germans said they never did go along with Hitler. Don't you believe it! As long as Germany was winning, the people were solidly behind him.

When we got to Stalag Luft III, Lowell, Dale and I were still together. We were taken into a compound where we were greeted by Colonel Spivey, the Senior American Officer. The SAO was determined by who had the most rank. Colonel Spivey told us what we were to expect and emphasized to us that, while we were in a bad situation, we should make the best of it. If we all tried to get along, things would be better for everyone.



Stalag Luft III was made up of five compounds, North, South, East, West, and Center. We were in Center Compound. At that time there were both American and British officers with some Australians and Canadians in Center Compound. As they got more American prisoners, the British and others were moved to a different compound and eventually there was nothing but Americans in Center Compound. Stalag Luft III would eventually house 10,000 Allied flying officers, with about 2,000 men per compound.

When they brought a new group of prisoners into a compound most of the other prisoners were lined up inside the camp to see who was coming. They were looking for friends either that they had trained with or were with their group, and generally they found someone. The first ones I met were the officers of the plane I was co-pilot with while training at Ephrata, Washington. They went into combat earlier and were shot down earlier. In fact, I was there only about a week, myself, when here came one of my friends. It was the pilot I had gone through training with and at whose wedding I was best man. He maintains the first thing I said to him was, "What took you so long?"

I found out later that each prisoner brought into camp had to be identified by someone else in camp. Of course the reason for this was to keep the Germans from running in a stooge. You can imagine the kind of information they could have gotten from visiting with prisoners about how they were shot down, what they should have done and what they shouldn't have done. The way they identified everyone was to find someone in your group that remembered you, or someone that remembered you from some other place. The problem was that some of the crews got shot down on their first mission and consequently no one from that group knew them. I was later to learn that the only way they could identify some prisoners was to find someone from their same state or town and start comparing stories.

New prisoners coming into the barracks or a combine were still somewhat in a state of shock. They couldn't wait to tell everyone how they got shot down. This was old stuff to the older prisoners, as each one had his own story. In time these new stories became boring. They became known as "There I Was" stories, since that was the way they generally started out. To show disdain while a story was being told, someone (behind the teller's back) would go through the motions of playing a violin. This was a way of saying, "Same old song, second verse". However, in the years after the war, the excitement of telling how you were shot down would return to all of us. Again it would be "And there I was, 30,000 ft., two engines on fire, parachute shot up, fighters all around," and on and on.

Center Compound was composed of eleven long barracks, a couple of cook houses, a building used for a theater and an

open area used as an athletic field, plus several latrines. After the orientation by Colonel Spivey we were assigned a barracks and a combine. The barracks were long buildings with a partition across the center and would eventually hold about 100 men on each side.

The barracks were divided into what we called combines. The bunk beds were formed into little squares on each side of an aisle. In each square was a table with a couple of benches. There were about six or eight of these combines to a barracks. When I got there, there were eight men to a combine. When we left, there were fourteen. They just kept adding another bunk on top. This was your living group. You would all eat together, get your Red Cross parcels together, and live together as a family.

Each barracks, which we called a "block", had a block commander who was the senior officer. Each one of the combines had a man who we called the "combine fuhrer". This was the order of command. If information was to be passed down, the SAO would call in the block commanders and give them the information. The block commanders would then in turn go back to their blocks and pass it on to the combine fuhrers who would then pass it on to the men in their combines.

At the front end of the block there was a small room on each side. One room was used for cooking and the other was a night latrine which was always odorous and very unsanitary, but you could not go outside at night for any reason. When it got dark you could have lights on but had to close the blackout shutters and no one left the building. About 10:00 o'clock all the lights had to be out and then you could open the blackout shutters.

The first year at Stalag Luft III was not too bad. We had adequate food, not because of the Germans, but because of the International Red Cross. The Red Cross sent in food parcels. There were twelve pounds of food in each parcel and each man got a parcel a week. These parcels came mainly from the United States, Canada and England. In the parcels were such things as Spam, corned beef, powdered milk, dried fruits, instant coffee, cookies, crackers, margarine, butter, cigarettes and a few other things. The Germans occasionally gave us food. We would get soup a couple of times a week, weevil and all, boiled potatoes, dirt and all, and occasionally sauerkraut and bread. The bread was a dark, heavy bread and we maintained that it had sawdust in it, which I think was later confirmed. The best way to eat the bread was to slice it quite thin and then toast it on the stove. With a little butter and jam it was quite edible. The one thing the Germans gave us that I could never eat, regardless of how hungry I was, was blood sausage. It was exactly what it sounds like, made out of pure blood. There were very few of the fellows that could even force it down.

Each man was given a bowl, knife, fork and spoon. He was given two light blankets and a sheet and pillow. In the bunk was a mattress filled with straw, lice, fleas, the whole works.

The Red Cross parcels were issued once a week and the Germans opened each one and punctured all the cans that had anything perishable in them. This was to prevent hoarding, in case you were planning an escape. The men in each combine would pool their parcels because they were all eating together anyway. It was customary to take turns cooking on the little cook stove in the kitchen. The Germans allocated us so many briquettes of coal a day and the fire would be started in the morning. Each combine had about a half hour on the stove sometime during the day.

In most combines everyone took their turn cooking. However, in our combine we happened to have a fellow who liked to cook, so the agreement was that he would do the cooking and we would do the dishes. We eventually had lots of pans to cook in, and plates, because we would take the empty tin cans and make pans out of them.

It was amazing what some of the fellows who liked to cook could do with the food, particularly making pies and cakes. To make pies, they would grate up the crackers for the crust and then with milk, margarine, dried fruit and a chocolate D-Bar, make a very acceptable pie. Cakes were the same way. With crumbs, the D-Bar and raisins, you could make a real nice cake. Of course the icing was no problem, with the powdered milk, butter and D-Bar. You might think that these cakes would be heavy but they weren't. Many of the fellows would receive tooth powder in their parcels from home. Tooth powder is basically baking soda, so by adding a substantial amount, the cake really raised. Of course the flavor of most of the pies and cakes was chocolate because of the D-Bars.

Our basic treatment by the Germans was not too bad. In general they lived up to the Geneva Convention. The officers lived much better than the Air Force enlisted men and the Air Force enlisted men lived better than the ground troop prisoners of war. Our camp was nothing like the concentration camps you read about. The Luftwaffe guarded and took care of the Air Force prisoners and the Wehrmacht took care of the ground troop prisoners. There was considerable jealousy between the two groups. If the Luftwaffe heard of an American Air Force prisoner at any other place, they immediately went and got him. One time they brought in some American officers who had wound up in Buchenwald concentration camp. As soon as the Luftwaffe heard about it they immediately went down and brought them up to Stalag Luft III. It was at this time we heard about the concentration camps. They told of the gas chambers and the ovens. They watched as the Germans marched Jews and others to their deaths.



The International Red Cross and the YMCA made life as easy for us as they possibly could. They brought in athletic equipment, books, musical instruments, paper and other items to make life more tolerable. Of Course there were the life saving food parcels. There were classes conducted, as among that many prisoners you would find teachers and college professors. They conducted classes in business, foreign languages, accounting, mathematics and almost any subject they could find a teacher and reference books for. These classes were conducted at what we called SAGAN U.

The International Red Cross and the YMCA belonged to what was called "The Protective Powers". This was an organization made up of representatives from neutral countries, mainly Switzerland and Sweden. These representatives were allowed to travel around Germany and inspect POW camps in accordance with the Geneva Convention. They acted on behalf of the POWs.

When a representative would come into a camp he would meet with the Senior Allied Officer in each compound. The Senior Officer would bring up any complaints or gripes he might have as to our treatment. The representative would then go to the Germans with the complaints. Sometimes he could get things changed, many times not. Our Senior Officer could also ask for material things to be sent in. The representative would do what he could along this line as they were already sending in food parcels, books, athletic equipment, etc.

Since Stalag Luft III was only about 90 miles from Berlin, at night you could not only see, but also feel the actual bombing of Berlin. The British bombed it by night and the Americans by day. At night you could look in that direction and see the glow in the sky from the fires. When the British would drop some of their 16,000 lb. blockbuster bombs you could actually feel the earth shake.

There were two kinds of guards that would come into the camp. There were the regular soldiers who were armed, and what we called "ferrets" who were unarmed. The ferrets were dressed in coveralls and they just wandered around the camp. Their purpose was to snoop, listen to conversations, and see if they could discover any tunnels being dug. Any German guard, we referred to as a "goon". You and I know what our interpretation of a goon is. The Germans asked what a goon was and were told that "goon" stood for "German officer or non-com". They accepted that and took no offense. Whenever a guard or ferret would come into a block, the first prisoner to see him would holler, "Goon in the block!" This meant for anyone who was doing anything he shouldn't be, to quit, and not carry on any conversation that he didn't want overheard. The Germans took no offense at this, and occasionally as they entered the block they would holler out, "Goon in the block!"

Colonel Spivey, in his book, tells of an incident with the ferrets, which we thought hilarious. The barracks were

all built two or three feet off the ground. This way the ferrets could crawl under the buildings and listen to conversations or see if they could discover any tunnels being dug. As Col. Spivey tells it, he was sitting in his room and he noticed the prisoners in one block kept running to the cookhouse and carrying back pitchers of boiling water. He couldn't imagine what they were doing. He said he would have liked to think they were just being nice little kriegies and were scrubbing out their barracks but he knew that was too good to be true. Before long the head ferret came bursting into his room chattering but Col. Spivey couldn't understand what he was saying. He knew there was something going on over in that barracks. He went over and found that the prisoners had discovered a ferret under the floor and they were pouring boiling water on him through the cracks in the floor. They had men stationed around the outside with pitchers of boiling water so he couldn't get out. Since the ferrets weren't armed, there was nothing he could do. Col. Spivey finally had to put a stop to it.

Another story with the guards happened in another compound. There was a certain prisoner officer who the Germans knew was involved in escape activities. In order to try to catch him in some of these activities, they assigned a goon to follow him every place he went in the compound. When the prisoners saw this happening they all got behind the goon and followed him around. Needless to say, they soon had a conga line going around the compound. This soon put a stop to the tailing.

There were other amusing events now and then that broke up the otherwise monotonous life. On Christmas morning we were somewhat startled by some fellows yelling "Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas" louder than necessary. We went out and here were a couple of fellows drunker than skunks. They had been hoarding the dried fruit in their Red Cross parcels and had fermented it. They figured Christmas was the time to break it out. I'm sure it was potent and didn't take much to get them blind drunk. It so happened that the Germans had a "honey wagon" in the compound cleaning out a latrine. A team of horses was hitched to the wagon. The fellows jumped on the horses and were going to have a horse race. It took the Germans some time to get the situation under control. Then one of the fellows with a cup of booze in his hand, stepped over the warning rail and headed for a guard tower. He wanted to give the guard a drink. He started climbing the barbed wire fence which was ten or twelve feet high. When he got to the top, he teetered around and fell on the other side. Now he was outside the camp, which was a no-no. Some Germans on the other side picked him up and started him back up the fence. He got to the top and fell over on our side again. This time some of his buddies ran over to him and dragged him back across the warning rail before he could do any more damage. The guard in the tower took it all in good spirits as there was no potential of an escape. He would have been

within his rights to have shot, the minute the prisoner stepped over the warning rail.

There is a story of an event in one of the other compounds where there were both American and British prisoners. They shared everything but the American barracks were on one side of the compound and the British on the other. On the 4th of July, the British looked over at the American side and here came the fifes and drums so symbolic of the Revolutionary War. Behind them came the Americans. The Colonies were attacking the British. The Americans marched around the British barracks and then broke out the liquor they had brought along and invited the British to celebrate the 4th of July with them. It seems all compounds soon learned how to make liquor.

Life was extremely monotonous. There was a so-called library. The YMCA had gotten in quite a few paperback books and you could check these out. Also, many of the men attended the classes that I've mentioned and of course there were athletics. The other pastime was to walk around the perimeter hour after hour. I wish I had a nickel for every lap Lowell and I made around that perimeter.

In some of the compounds the Germans would take a small group of prisoners out for walks. Accompanied by a guard they could walk around the countryside. You gave your word of honor that you would not try to escape. This was always honored.

We were counted twice a day, morning and night. This was called appel. Everyone would fall out and line up four abreast. The Germans would count us and their count had to be the exact number that were in camp. When they were finished counting they would report to the German komandant and he in turn would report to Col. Spivey. Sometimes there was a little tomfoolery going on. The British were very good at this. They would confuse the count by stepping back and forth or by holding up a dummy in the line. They particularly did this if they were trying to get someone out of camp and he was hiding for the moment, and they were trying to make the count come out right until the man could escape.

The camp was extremely well organized, thanks to Col. Spivey and other senior officers. There were committees for everything. There was a security committee, escape committee, parcel committee, recreation and entertainment committee, etc.

One thing we had been told was that if you were ever captured it was your duty to escape. The person who thought that up was never a prisoner or war. In the first place, you not only stood the chance of getting shot, but what could a person do in the middle of Germany, not knowing the language, not knowing the customs, and not knowing where to go. So your chances of a successful escape were anywhere from nil to



absolutely none. But there were always plans. If you had a plan for escape you went to the escape committee and presented your plan. If they thought it had an iota of a chance of succeeding, you were given permission to try. The reason this procedure was followed was to keep everyone from trying to escape and getting someone shot.

The most popular method of trying to escape was tunneling out. There were always tunnels being dug. The Germans knew this and, while they were always on the lookout for tunnels, they mostly wrote it off as something to keep the prisoners occupied and yet no real threat. Tunneling was real easy because the soil was sandy. The problem was that it was always caving in. Another problem was what to do with the dirt. There were some pretty ingenious ideas on this, too. To shore up the tunnels, they were always coming into your barracks and stealing bed boards off your bunk. Eventually you had barely enough boards to hold your mattress. Getting rid of the dirt was really a problem because any time the Germans saw fresh dirt they knew there was a tunnel being dug. Then there was a search to find the tunnel. One way of finding a tunnel was to drive a heavy wagon between the warning rail and the barbed wire. This would generally cave in a tunnel if it got that far. Another way of finding a tunnel was that the Germans would line up between the warning rail and the barbed wire with long steel probes. They would probe down to see if they could hit the tunnel. This got to be quite a joke, as the prisoners would stand along the warning rail and holler at the Germans and say, "Hey, Fritz, just a little bit over to your right there." "Hans, just a little bit behind you. You missed it." It got to be quite a joke and the Germans took it good naturedly, too.

Getting rid of the dirt was a real problem. One method involved throwing it in the latrine until it started filling the latrine up. Of course this was also to the detriment of the prisoners. It would be put above the ceilings until the boards gave way. Another way was to put it in the gardens. The Germans would loan us shovels and hoes to plant gardens along the outside of our barracks. The YMCA provided the seeds. The prisoners would start spading up the ground and the fellows digging the tunnel would keep bringing dirt and put it on the gardens and the fellows would spade it in. This worked fine until the garden got six or eight inches higher than the surrounding ground. Then it was look for the tunnel again. The tools that were used in the gardens were always given out on parole. In other words, the prisoners guaranteed they would not use them to dig tunnels and this was never done. The most effective way to get rid of the dirt proved to be by taking a shirt and running the sleeves down your pant legs with a string on the bottom running up your pant legs. The sleeves were filled with dirt and the men would walk around the perimeter and release the dirt. The men walking behind them would scuff it in the ground.

I might explain the warning rail. It was a wooden rail about a foot high and was about 30 ft. from the barbed wire. The space in between was "no man's land" and you never stepped over the rail. If you did, you were shot. If a ball went over there, you would go down to a corner, get a burlap sack that had a target on the back and drape it over your shoulders. Then get the attention of the guard in the tower and he would motion you to get the ball.

The walking perimeter was just on the camp side of the warning rail. The first winter, the YMCA sent in ice skates and hockey sticks. No good kriegie ever lets anything go to waste, so the prisoners diked up an area in the athletic field, and then by bucket brigade, poured water in it until there was a skating rink. As I remember that year, just as we got a little ice, we had a thaw and that was the end of the skating rink. The second year, the winter was much worse and we did the same thing. We did get a skating rink going and had ice hockey games between the different blocks.

The most impressive man I ever ran across in my life was at Stalag Luft III. He was a prisoner just like the rest of us, and was a minister by profession. He was Padre Murdough MacDonald. He was a Scotsman and was a paratrooper in the British army. He was wounded and captured and sent to Stalag Luft III. Since he was a minister, he continued his profession in the prison camp. He was in the British compound but would occasionally come to Center Compound for Sunday service. Whenever he came for Sunday service, you had to stand in line to get into the theater because he was so popular. I can say, beyond a doubt, he was the most inspiring speaker I have ever heard. Since the war he has been invited to all of our Stalag Luft III reunions to come as a speaker. He has an American wife and always attends.

We did get mail and were able to send out mail but the Germans gave us the forms which we had to use. They gave us three letters and four postcards a month. They were lined and we could only write on the lines and in pencil. Of course they were censored so there was not much you could say other than, "I am fine and hope you are the same".

We were also able to receive parcels from home. Our parents or beneficiaries were given an official label by our government and only people who had that label could send a package. It could weigh no more than 12 lbs. and the government recommended what you put in it. Of course, your folks could give the labels to friends and they could send you a package. Some of the packages were pretty mashed up but always appreciated.

Early in the war we needed clothes and toilet articles. I remember writing my folks toward the end of the war that if you couldn't eat it, don't send it. It took about two to four months for a letter to get from the states to us.

All compounds had their own newspaper. Ours was generally one or two sheets that was put up on the bulletin board. It contained information that the fellows received from home, as well as things that were going on in camp. It also had cartoons depicting our situation. Our newspaper was called the Kriegie Times. Another compound had the Kriegie Clarion, another, the Gefangenen Gazette. The prisoners called themselves "Kriegies". This was short for "kriegsgefangenen", which is "prisoner of war" in German.

On the wall in the kitchen in our barracks was a large map of Germany. There was a string stretched across it depicting the Russian Front and the Western Front according to the German newspapers. Of course we got reports of the war's progress from our radio and could see where the actual fronts were.

By our own orders, we were not to talk to the Germans. If they came up to us and started talking, that was fine, but we didn't start a conversation with them. The reason for that was that many of the guards and ferrets could be bribed, so there were individual prisoners that were designated to do all the bribing and bartering with the Germans. If you wanted something, you would let one of these men know and they would get it for you. I had them get me a knife at one time, which I used to cut up tin cans to make into pans for cooking. This is the way the escape committee got materials for planned escapes. They would bribe the guards and get things like train tickets, passes that they wanted to copy, German money, maps or about anything that you could use in an escape.

And of course there were lots of ideas on how to escape. One fellow climbed down in the "honey wagon" when they were cleaning out the latrine, but they found him when they got to the gate. If you tried hiding in wagons that had brush in them, the Germans would probe them with their bayonets. The escape committee could make civilian clothes for you or even German uniforms. One way of making a civilian suit was to take a uniform, put shaving cream on it and shave it. This would give you a slick material. One unique idea of escape was that one group found out that the Germans were deathly afraid of Russian lice. There were some Russians that were camped outside our camp and did labor in the camp. One prisoner wore a German uniform that had been made for him, and took eight or ten prisoners and walked up to the gate and told the guard he had to take them over to the delousing center because they had Russian lice. The guard let them through, so they got outside the wire and made a break for the woods. They were only free for a little while because in two or three hours they were all picked up.

The British were the masters of escape ideas. They frequently got fellows outside the camp but generally they were recaptured soon. We were in the Center Compound and just over the fence was the East Compound which had British



prisoners in it. One morning we woke up to hear all kinds of confusion over there. There were shouts, and shots being fired. We found out later that some British had escaped. The Germans tried to line them up for appel but the British wouldn't line up properly. They didn't want them to know how many had gotten out, and to give the escapees as long as possible to get away. The guards started banging a few heads around and firing shots in the air so of course they eventually got the job done. What had happened was the British had dug a tunnel and, I understand that three men went out the first night and three the second. Three of them were picked up immediately, but the other three did get home.

This, of course, was not the great escape that you hear about, but a minor one. The way the British dug this tunnel was that they built an exercise horse that has bars on it and you jump back and forth over it for exercise. They built the sides down to the ground and it was large enough to hold a man inside. Each morning they would take it out to the athletic field and set it down on an exact spot. The guy inside would start digging and throw the dirt up inside the horse. Later, when the British went back for tea or lunch, the guy digging would cover over the hole and the British would take the horse back to their barracks and empty the dirt. Afterwards they would take it back to the same spot and the guy would dig some more. They would do this off and on throughout the day. Before dark they would take it out and get their digger out. The tunnel took months to dig but it was successful and I understand there was a book written about it, called The Trojan Horse.

The most famous escape was what later became known as THE GREAT ESCAPE. There were books written about it and a movie made. This happened in the North Compound, which was all British. They had the most elaborate tunnel systems and plans imaginable. Their theory was that they would start digging three tunnels and if one was discovered they had two others to go. They did discover at least one of them. Their tunnels were called "Tom", "Dick" and "Harry" and each started from a different location. The one that was successful was "Harry". It went out under a stove. It was solid under the stove so it was hard to discover that there was digging going on. This tunnel went 30 feet straight down. It had to be this deep to avoid caving in and also to avoid listening devices. It was shored up with bed boards and any other kind of boards they could scrounge. The tunnel had air shafts and bellows to pump air down to the men. It had a little trolley that ran on tracks to move the dirt and even had lights. In one of the books I have it tells how they got the wire. It seemed that a couple of German laborers came into the camp to work on the P.A. system and they had a couple of rolls of wire. The first thing you knew, someone stole one of the rolls. The Germans went back to report it and when they got back, the second roll was gone. When they reported this, they were shot.

This tunnel was successful. The night they made their escape, they found out the tunnel was about 20 feet short of the woods where they planned it to come up. They did get 76 men out, but all but three were captured. Fifty of them were shot. Their bodies were cremated and their ashes brought back to the camp as a reminder to the other prisoners. Today there is a memorial at the Stalag Luft III site in honor of these men. A circular was immediately sent around to all the compounds saying that digging tunnels and trying to escape was no longer a game. This did put a little damper on some of the escape ideas.

Three of the fellows did get home. At one of our Stalag Luft III reunions, one of the fellows that made it back was there. He has also written a book about his experiences. He was a Hollander, so he spoke the language fluently. When he got out of the tunnel there was an air raid alert, and when there was an alert, everyone was supposed to be in a shelter. He was in the woods and some Germans found him and asked him what he was doing there. He said he was a Dutch laborer and needed to get to the railroad station. They said, "Fine. Jump in and we'll take you there". So they took him to the railroad station. He was smart enough to know not to get on the train there, so went on to another town about 20 miles away and got on the train and eventually made his way to Holland where he had underground friends. They, through the "underground", managed to work him to the south and finally into Spain. He eventually made it back to England and flew Spitfires for the British again.

You could get almost everything you needed if you had a good idea to escape. This included maps and compasses. To make a compass, you took a phonograph record and melted it down to form the case. You took a phonograph needle and imbedded it in the center for the spindle. You took a razor blade and splintered it and magnetized the splinter with another magnet and you had your needle. I have always been amazed that, of the ten thousand prisoners that eventually wound up at Stalag Luft III, the Germans were never able to plant a stooge who could tip them off to tunnel digging and escape activities. And there was never a case of a prisoner tipping the Germans off in order to receive better treatment.

Escape plans did continue, but more precautions taken. One precaution was to have a man watching the gate. He would count each German in and out. This way they knew exactly how many Germans there were in the compound at any given time.

There is one story I have read of an unusual "escape". Occasionally, a POW would have a mental breakdown. As the story goes, this English POW kept acting stranger and stranger and was obviously losing his mind. He was repatriated. Later his buddies received a letter from him asking, "Who's crazy now?"

We did everything possible to make life bearable and to while away the time. I learned to play Bridge and would play all day long. Got pretty good, too.

Groups of fellows would get together and put on musical productions and plays. There were men who had been professionals in these fields as civilians. They found they could rent costumes from Berlin for their plays. Some of the fellows made real good looking "women" in dresses. Some men were gifted enough to write entire plays.

At all productions, the German brass were invited and would sit in the front row. One original play was written making fun of the Germans. Needless to say, that play had a very short run. The plays and musicals were repeated several times in order for everyone to get to see them.

Fellows were always building gadgets to occupy the time. There were lots of mice around so it was a challenge to build a better mousetrap. One fellow made a guillotine using a razor blade. It worked.

One time we were sitting in our combine and got into a small argument about a scene in the movie "All Quiet On The Western Front". In the scene, one fellow drew a circle on the side of the shell hole and spit and hit the center. The argument was, who did the spitting. At that time, Jimmie Fidler was a popular Hollywood columnist. One of the fellows said he would donate a letter form and ask him. Months later we got a personal letter from Jimmie Fidler, answering our question. He went on to praise us for what we were doing for our country, and thanked us all. (I lost the argument.)

A common pastime was to grow beards to see what we would look like. There were full beards, goatees, mutton chops and Hitler mustaches, as well as handle bar mustaches. I had heard that if you shaved your head, your hair would come back thicker. Since my hair was thinning, I tried it. It didn't help.

The winter of 1943 was not too bad in the prison camp. The weather was not too severe and we got adequate food with the Red Cross food parcels. This was a far cry from what would be happening a year later.

Christmas was observed as best as possible under the circumstances. The spirit was there as each combine tried to decorate their combine. A Christmas tree could be made out of a weed. Tinsel and stars could be made from tin foil from cigarette packages and miniature packages were made with bits of colored paper. In addition, our combine had signs with "Merry Christmas" in as many languages as we could find anyone to tell us how to say it. We must have gotten some wrong information on one sign because when the goons saw it they would point and start laughing. We never did learn what was



wrong with it.

On Christmas Day, the Germans, in what I suppose was what they thought was a magnanimous gesture, said there would be only one appel. Col. Spivey, in his book, said the attitude of the men was, "The good old sons-of-bitches".

We even got special Christmas Red Cross food parcels. They had canned turkey, fruit cake and lots of goodies.

One Christmas, I'm not sure if it was 1943 or 1944, an event happened that made a deep impression on me. As I have mentioned, anyone outside their barracks after "lights out" was subject to be shot. This Christmas Eve some of the fellows with musical instruments got permission from the Germans to go outside for a few minutes with their instruments. As a result, a few minutes after "lights out", across the cold night air came the strains of "Silent Night". It never sounded so beautiful before and never will again. The Germans turned the spotlights off in their guard towers, talking in the barracks ceased, and for a moment there did seem to be peace on earth. I'm sure most of the prisoners' thoughts were of home and their loved ones, as mine were.

I have no patience with people who complain of being lonely at Christmas time. These people don't know what lonely is until they have been thousands of miles from home, in a hostile environment, not knowing what the future holds, or if they have a future.

At one time the pilots were offered an opportunity to get out of the prison camp. The Germans distributed flyers offering freedom to anyone willing to fly for the Luftwaffe. They were assured they would only fly against the Russians. After the war they would be returned to the United States. There were no takers.

There was always the friendly argument in camp that has continued to this day. Which was the better plane, the B-17 or the B-24. It is true the B-17 got most of the glory and recognition. There were more B-24s built, they flew faster, and could carry a bigger bomb load. The B-17 was more involved early in the war when losses were extremely heavy. It could take heavier damage than the B-24, which caught on fire easier. Also, you could ditch the B-17 in water, which was almost impossible with the B-24. Men who flew both planes said the B-17 was easier to fly, particularly at high altitudes. They said you flew the B-17 and drove the B-24. There was no question the B-17 was the better looking plane. The B-17 was neat and trim while the B-24 looked clumsy and awkward. The B-17 men said the B-24 was the crate they shipped the B-17 over in. Because of the enormous tail, the B-17 was affectionately referred to as "The Big-Ass Bird". Some B-24 men thought the B-17 men thought they were better pilots than the B-24 pilots. Not true. However, we will

argue till our last breath that we had the better plane. Any pilot that flew any kind of plane in combat had everyone's respect. Toward the end of the war some B-24 groups were converted to B-17s, strengthening our arguments.

While Stalag Luft III was for Allied flying officers only, there were some enlisted men there. This came about at the insistence of the British officers. The British were insistent that they be allowed to have enlisted men as orderlies. Col. Spivey took advantage and insisted that the Americans have orderlies, too. This was not an act of servitude or even a need. Col. Spivey realized that the enlisted men's prison camps were much worse than the officers'. By working for us they would live as well as we did. This was the Colonel's way of helping as many enlisted men as he could.

The orderlies certainly were not overworked. Each combine would sweep the dirt out into the main aisle and the orderlies would sweep the aisle. They also worked in the cook house heating water that was dispensed twice a day. They would cook anything the Germans gave us, such as potatoes and soup. In return, they lived and ate the same as the officers. If one of the orderlies felt he didn't have to work, all the colonel had to say was, "Alright, you can go back to your own camp".

Just outside Stalag Luft III was a Russian compound. The Russian POWs were not treated nearly as well as were the Americans and British. The Germans were having trouble with the Russians coming out of their barracks at night. One night the Germans turned two guard dogs loose in the compound. The next morning the pelts were hanging on the fence. The Russians said they were delicious.

During 1944 more rank came into the camp. General Vanaman was assigned to Center Compound. There was lots of speculation on how a General would get shot down and why he was flying in the first place. He was in the Air Force but not a flying officer. It turned out he was on an intelligence mission as an observer. The Germans were going to send him to a prison camp where other captured Generals were and where they received special treatment. However, the General insisted that he be sent to a prison camp with the other flying officers. When he came into Center Compound, we now had someone who outranked Col. Spivey. General Vanaman, by protocol, should be our Senior American Officer. However he insisted that nothing be changed and Col. Spivey remained our SAO.

From the very beginning of my stay at Stalag Luft III it was apparent that somewhere in the compound was a hidden radio. About every day we would get a report from BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation. For some reason the report was called "gen". Someone would come to the block and if

there were no Germans around, everyone would gather in one combine and it would be read. Someone always stood guard at the door to make sure no German came near. The gen would be passed from block to block. Sometimes it was incomplete, or none at all, indicating they were interrupted while receiving it. A prisoner would occasionally get caught with it on him. So we knew the Germans also knew there was a radio in the compound. I could never understand why it was not discovered. The Germans frequently pulled surprise searches and completely ransacked each combine. They would sometimes come before anyone was up and a guard would stand in each combine and watch you dress to make sure you didn't hide anything. I thought they would have found the radio sooner or later. Col. Spivey, in his book on Center Compound, told where it was. To me, it was the most ingenious idea I heard of.

It seems a prisoner was quite sick and was taken to the so-called hospital in the vorlager. The vorlager was an area inside the main camp where, among other things, was the cooler (jail), and where the Red Cross parcels were kept. When they got ready to return him to the main compound, he happened to walk by a table with a radio on it that the guards used. He picked up the radio and put it under his coat. The minute he got into the compound it was immediately taken apart and the parts distributed all over the compound. By the time the Germans organized a search, the parts were securely hidden.

In each combine was a table with legs made of 4x4s. The top of one leg was hollowed out enough to accommodate the radio. The speaker was used as a head phone. Two nails were driven through the table to the radio, with the heads slightly protruding. The wires from the radio were attached to the bottom of the nails. To use the radio, all that was necessary was to hook two wires from the light socket to the nail heads.

I understand there was a diary kept of Center Compound. Three men kept every third word. It could then be put together after the war. Even if one part was lost, it could probably be reassembled.

Col. Spivey was in every sense of the word an officer and a gentleman. He did everything he could to make life as pleasant as possible under the circumstances. Two different times the Germans asked him for names of all the Jews in camp. Each time, his answer was, "There are no Jews here. We are all Americans".

Col. Spivey showed he was human in many ways. He recalls one incident I remember very well. Just over our fence in the vorlager was a barracks which housed the German girls censors. One day fellows seemed to be congregating at the fence. Naturally everyone stopped to see what was going on and what the shouting was about. The girls were out at the side of their barracks sunbathing and the fellows were shouting at them. The girls were enjoying it as much as the men. Since



they all spoke English, they knew what was being said. However, as I remember, there was really nothing vulgar said. Soon Col. Spivey showed up and ordered the men to disperse. As he tells it himself, "I ordered the men to leave, and took one long last look myself before going to the kommandant and insisting the girls do their sunbathing somewhere else."

By the end of 1944, the camp was getting very crowded. We now had fourteen men in our little combine. Red Cross parcel rations had been cut in half to make them last, since no one knew what the future held. I had already spent my second Christmas as a prisoner and was getting impatient.

Beginning in January, 1945, we knew something was going to happen, and soon. The Russians were fast approaching Stalag Luft III. We could hear the guns and knew that something would have to change.

There were three things that could happen to us. They could abandon us to the Russians, they could liquidate the camp, or they could move us. The senior officers in each compound had gotten together and made plans for each one of the contingencies. As it happened, the last one was the one used. This we were prepared for.

The order had been given that every man would make a backpack. Most of us made them out of a shirt, sewing up the front and using the arms for shoulder straps. They were inspected for strength, and if not strong enough, were made over again. Every man had a pack and we were told to start hoarding food, particularly high energy food like the raisins and D-Bars, and keep cigarettes for barter.

We were to learn after the war that the order had come down to liquidate the camp. Later on during our imprisonment the order came again, but fortunately, cooler heads prevailed.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MARCH

As we could hear the front getting closer we knew that something was imminent. About 9:00 o'clock at night, the word went around to be ready to move in 30 minutes. Everyone got their packs out and loaded up what they could carry, and waited. It was snowing, with about a foot of snow on the ground, and extremely cold. We fell out several times to start moving, then were told to go back to the barracks, so we would go back and wait.

Finally, about 3:00 o'clock in the morning of January 28, 1945, we started moving. As we went through the vorlager they brought out all the Red Cross parcels that were left and we were told to take anything that we wanted. Here again, we took mostly concentrated food and things that we might barter. The rest was left in the snow and I understand there were about 50,000 Red Cross parcels left behind. After we finished picking them over, the Germans were scrounging for anything that was left, which was alright with us, because if they didn't get it the Russians would.

Some of the guards at that time were what was called the Volkstrum, which were older men in their 40s and 50s. They were too old for active duty but could be used as guards. I remember standing out there in the snow, getting ready to go, and telling Lowell I didn't know where we were going or how long it would take us to get there, but I bet I would be on my feet longer than those fellows, which proved to be the case.

The first few days of the march were very miserable. There was snow on the ground and it continued to snow most of the time. Soon the guards had put their packs on wagons. At that moment we were in better shape than most of them. In fact, I couldn't help feeling sorry for the older guards. If you remember seeing pictures of Washington's army at Valley Forge, you can realize what these guards looked like after a couple of days. Their feet were wrapped in blankets and they were more miserable than we were.

Most of us were in pretty good shape. I had a good pair of shoes and most of us had army overcoats. A lot of the fellows did get frostbitten. I had an English overseas hat, which didn't help much, but at least was some protection. In stories that I have read about the march there were indications that the temperature was anywhere from 13 degrees below zero to 40 below. I assume it was somewhere in between, but it was extremely cold. After a few days many of the guards had fallen out. At times there were no guards in sight.

There were many instances of compassion on the march. Prisoners who were having trouble walking would be helped by fellow prisoners. You would occasionally see a prisoner lying along the side of the road in the snow. You asked what would happen to them and were told they would be picked up by wagons. As far as I know, they were. There were cases of prisoners helping the guards carry their packs and in some cases, even carrying their rifles.

The road was filled with civilian refugees getting away from the Russians. Most of them had all their belongings on a wagon pulled by a couple of scrawny horses. They tell one story of a little girl refugee whose hands were frostbitten. One of the prisoners gave her his gloves.

One time as we were marching down the road we approached



an area where I noticed the fellows seemed to be stopping for just an instant and then going on. As we got to this area, there were four women standing in the snow in flimsy dresses. They had hot water and would pour you a cup of hot water as you went by. Almost everyone had a tin can cup and Nescafe. I can honestly say this was the best cup of coffee I ever had. As I got colder and colder I remember making a vow that if I ever got warm again I would never complain about the heat and I have kept that vow.

When we left Stalag Luft III early that morning, we marched the rest of the night and all the next day. At this time there were 10,000 prisoners in Stalag Luft III and I understand we were strung out for about 10 miles. We marched by compounds and by barracks, four abreast. That night we came to a little town of Halbau. Since it was still snowing and extremely cold, the problem was to try to get us in out of the cold. We came to a church which was built for about 600, and our compound got in that church, plus a few little adjoining buildings, all two thousand of us. We were packed in so tight you could hardly lie down. Men were on the pews, under the pews, in the aisles, and around the altar. Col. Spivey stayed up by the altar. But at least we were out of the cold. You can imagine what the church looked like when we left the next morning. The men were wet, cold and some sick.

Years later I was to find out that Center Compound raised money to completely redo the chancellory in the church and put in a stained glass window. There is an inscription which reads, "Dedicated to the Glory of God. Donated by grateful American Air Force POWs, Stalag Luft III, who found shelter here during the night of January 28, 1945."

The next morning we started out again, with snow on the ground and extremely cold. When we left Stalag Luft III some of the fellows had made sleds out of benches and tables. Along the road now we continually saw slave laborers. They would come out to see us and of course were friendly to us. We soon found out that for a few cigarettes they would run back and quickly make you a sled. Lowell and I did a little bartering and soon both of us had a sled to put our packs on.

We marched all that day and that night stayed in barns. The one we were in was an enormous barn and was full of hay. Again, we were at least out of the weather. We would eat a little of our food that we had brought along. The Germans were talked into letting us stay there for a couple of days to rest. Then we started out again.

We marched all that day and that night stayed in a brick factory which was heaven because they had all the furnaces going and the group I was in ended upstairs. There were flues up there with steel plates over them. The plates were so hot



you could heat some of your food on them. We stayed here for a couple of days. I think all together we were out eight days.

We had been ordered not to try to escape. It would have been pointless because where would you go with little food, no chance of help, not knowing the language, and in the dead of winter. You had a good chance of getting shot. There were plenty of opportunities to escape and some did, but they didn't get far.

When we got ready to leave the brick factory the weather had changed and the snow had melted so the weather was somewhat nicer. This brought on another problem, at least for the Germans who owned the brick factory. When the snow melted the sleds weren't usable any more so some of the prisoners went around and removed the wheels or anything round off the valves to make wheels for their sleds. Before we moved on we were held up and the Germans went down the line and took back their wheels, which I suppose was the right thing to do.

One day when the column stopped to rest there were several Hitler Youth standing there, armed with small .25 caliber automatics. They started crossing across the line of prisoners, shoving everyone aside. (They were probably ten to twelve years old.) Your first reaction was to slap them down. I remember Lowell saying, "Don't touch them, don't touch them!" It was obvious that all they wanted was an excuse to shoot someone.

We marched on to a town called Spremburg and that's where we were loaded into boxcars for our train ride. This is where things started going from bad to worse. They loaded us in the famous forty and eight boxcars and put sixty to seventy in a car. As you can imagine, you could hardly sit down, much less lie down. A lot of the men were sick. When necessary you could try to work your way over to the door and the guard would let you hang out the door to relieve yourself. We were several days on the train and of course under the worst possible conditions.

Once in a while they would stop the train and let us out, but these stops were few and far between. Dale now tells of the time he was squatting beside a colonel. The colonel said, "We may not be doing any fighting, but we're sure shittin' all over Germany".

Our biggest fear was that we would be strafed by our own planes. Fortunately, this didn't happen.

## CHAPTER VII

### MOOSBURG - STALAG 7A

They moved us to a town called Moosburg, which is about 30 miles north of Munich. This was Stalag 7A and would be our prison camp till the end of the war. They brought in prisoners by the thousands and eventually there would be 125,000 prisoners here, of all nationalities. Food was practically nonexistent and we were living in the most crowded conditions imaginable. Some of the men were living in tents and there would be a couple of water faucets for several hundred men. Ted was housed in one of these tents.

Conditions were extremely poor, with practically no food and there was actually nothing to do. We were so crowded there was very little room to even walk around. One ingenious thing we discovered there was the use of blowers. They were made out of tin cans and worked like a forge in a blacksmith shop. There was a little fan enclosed in a housing that sat under a fire pot made out of another tin can. A string was used as a belt that ran from the fan to a wooden wheel with a crank on it. By using twigs, weeds, or pieces of paper you could get a hot fire for a few minutes. You could heat water hot enough for a cup of coffee or warm up any food if you had any. Lowell and I traded for a blower.

One thing that bothered me was that right in the center of camp they set up a machine gun emplacement and that gun only shot one way and that was into the camp. There was no way it could be used to defend the camp. This was where our long vigil began. It was now about the middle of February. There was seldom any food. Once in a while we would get a Red Cross food parcel to divide up among a good many men. The guards were Weirmach, just off the Russian front and they were using them here as a form of R & R. They had no patience whatsoever. In fact, they were just looking for an excuse to shoot someone. There was no mail and nothing to do but just sit and wait.

Quite often we would see formations of B-17s going over and bombing Munich. We couldn't help but think that we blazed the way for them. We paid the price and were still paying. At least they were still up there carrying on where we left off. At that time planes could roam all over Germany with very little fighter opposition. In fact, after the war I talked with gunners who had flown thirty missions or more and had never fired a shot at an enemy aircraft. It also made you a little wistful that they were headed back to England for a nice meal and a warm bed, and we didn't even know where our next meal was coming from or if there would be one.

The one thing I remember about Moosburg was that we were always cold and hungry. One time I saw Lowell with his shirt off. I could count his ribs. I looked down and I could count my ribs, too. Of course we were nothing like some of the prisoners in the concentration camps. While I could not get weighed immediately, in one of my letters home I wrote that my

waist measurement was 28 inches. It was 32 inches when I was shot down.

After weeks of this it began telling on the prisoners. Our tiers of bunks were so tight together you could barely walk between them. A fellow in the bunk next to mine cut his wrists one night and committed suicide. He just couldn't take it any more and the ironic part was that he only had to tough it out a few more weeks and it would have been over.

I might mention that the state of mind was something that you always thought of, even when we were at Stalag Luft III. If a fellow was acting a little strange and you thought maybe he was losing his mind, the expression was that he had "gone around the bend". If you were sitting around with other fellows and someone started acting a little strange, it was a common expression to ask, "How does it look around there?" As things got worse at Moosburg this happened more all the time. One of our chaplains was to write in his book that he was finding it harder all the time to believe the things he was preaching to the men.

In spite of the conditions, morale remained quite high. You had to have hope and faith. I remember thinking that I could put up with this if I was sure I would come out alive at the end.

After the war a YMCA representative who visited the camps, told how hope remained high even under the worst conditions. He tells of walking into a room at a camp and on the wall was a large painting depicting the camp with its barbed wire and guard towers. It showed the sun rising and at the bottom was the question, "How much longer?" Across the room on the opposite wall was the same painting with the sun going down. Under it was the statement, "One day closer".

By now we considered ourselves old time kriegies, having been prisoners about a year and a half. We were put in our place one day when there was a British work detail just outside our fence. They asked how long we had been captured. We somewhat smugly told them a year and a half. We asked how long they had been in and they said, "We were picked up at Dunkirk", which meant four years.

I think the longer I was in, the more determined I was that I was going to survive. I felt almost belligerent. They could shoot me, but I wasn't going to let myself die.

Toward the end of April we knew the end was coming one way or the other because once again we could hear the guns of the front as the Americans approached us. Here again the question was "What is going to happen when the Americans get here? Will the Germans let us be retaken, or what will happen", because there was no way they could move 125,000 prisoners even if there was any place to take them. The thing



you thought about all the time, at least I did, was that after you had gone through all this, how would it end? The human body and mind can stand an awful lot if you know that it is going to come out alright in the end, but it bothered me to think that here I had gone through all this and may not live to see it out.

The weather was fairly decent at that moment and we used to sit outside the barracks listening to the war and watching our planes going over. Our fighter planes would buzz the camp and dip their wings so we knew that they knew we were there. One morning we had listened all night and could hear tanks and trucks going up and down the road. However, we didn't know which way they were going. We didn't know whether they were retreating or getting in front to defend the camp.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LIBERATION AND HOME

On the morning of April 29, we went out to listen to the war again and there was not a sound, so we knew that something was wrong. We looked up at the guard towers and there were no guards. About 9:00 o'clock that morning a P-51 circled the camp and then started strafing on the east side of the camp. At about the same time, to put it mildly, all hell broke loose. Guns started firing from all sides, and for three hours we sat in "no man's land" with the Americans on one side of us and the Germans on the other, all shooting at each other. We could see Moosburg, it was just to the South of us, and we could look down there and see the Germans firing back. In fact, there was a church with a belfry and you could see them firing from the belfry. Occasionally there would be stray shells come into camp and I have heard there was one prisoner killed and a few injured. Ted recalls seeing bullet holes coming through their tent.

When the shooting started we all got inside real quick. At about noon I happened to be looking down toward Moosburg and I saw the Nazi flag in the courtyard come down and the American flag go up. It was beautiful. About that same time an American tank crashed through the gate and drove up the street. I knew then that finally, "vor me der vor vas ofer".

When the tank came in, the prisoners swarmed over it so it could hardly move. It came in to see if there were any Germans in the camp. They told us that outside the gate the Germans had put up quite a fight and there were quite a few casualties. Some of our guards had told the SS troops they were going to surrender and threw down their guns. The SS said "No you're not", and shot them. We were liberated by the

Fourteenth Cavalry of Patten's Third Army.

After the war we were to learn that the night before the attack, the senior Allied officers and the German komandant went out to meet the Americans. The Germans wanted to declare the prison camp a neutral zone until they could decide what to do with us. The Americans said, "Nothing doing. We'll give you until 9:00 o'clock tomorrow morning to surrender the camp or we're coming through". The Germans refused and everyone returned to camp. Consequently, at 9:00 o'clock the next morning the push began.

Now that we were safe again, the first thing that Lowell and I did was get out our blower, and ate up what food we had. All of a sudden we realized we weren't hungry any more, and all it took was just to know that we were safe and that we would be fed in time.

We were given orders to stay in camp, in fact the Americans put guards on the gate to keep us in. They were still fighting a war and they didn't want POWs running around. On the other hand, we wanted to get outside the camp and do a little looting and running around the countryside. We stayed in camp a couple of days, but what irritated us was that other kinds of prisoners who were not confined by barbed wire, were already chasing around the countryside. One day Lowell and I went down to the gate and were talking to the guards, and we looked on the other side of the fence and here were some of our prisoners on the outside. We asked the guard to let us through the gate. He said, "Oh, no, no one goes out this gate". We said, "Well those guys are out". He said, "There's a hole down there in the fence and that's how they're going out". So we found the hole and got outside, ourselves.

Once outside it wasn't long before we got hold of a car and then another experience was about to happen. Years later, at one of our Stalag Luft III reunions, three of the four of us that were in the car, got to talking about this episode, and each of us has an entirely different version of how we got the car. None of the stories are even close, but we all remember what happened from then on.

I maintain that the car was coming down the road toward us, driven by a civilian. We stopped him and kicked him out and took the car. Lowell's version was that we were at a road block and it was sitting off to one side, having been confiscated, and the GIs gave it to us.

The third fellow said that we went up to a German farmhouse and that they were real scared of us, thinking that we were Russians. The car was there, and a motorcycle. He said three of us took the car and he got on the motorcycle. He said, "Don't you remember, as I tried to start it someone said it might be booby trapped, but it was too late".

Anyway, he said he rode the motorcycle along beside us until it ran out of gas, and then he ran it off into the ditch and got in with us. The funny part is, I remember some of each one of the stories. I remember being at a road block and talking to the GIs. I also remember going up to the farmhouse and seeing the scared civilians, and seem to remember a little bit about a motorcycle.

We all agree we took the car down to a GI ordinance depot and they filled it up with gas. It had very little brake so they put in some brake fluid and one of the GIs said, "You don't have a spare tire". He went out in back and took one off a wrecked car and gave us the spare and sent us on our way. The fourth man in the car was an MP who had been captured and spoke a little German.

We started driving around the country and drove into a little village and the civilians soon gathered around us, talking real excitedly. Pretty soon the fellow who spoke German said, "Let's get the hell outta here. This place hasn't been taken yet". We had occasionally heard firing going on and they had bypassed this place and would come back later to clean it up.

We decided to go to Munich, about 30 miles away. We all remember the things we saw on the way to Munich. Some not very pleasant. You can't imagine the condition of the city. It had been bombed continuously. The people had been living down in holes left in the rubble and walked around like zombies. There was so much rubble in the streets you could barely drive through. It was hard to realize what these people had gone through. We drove around for a while and the only thing that made us feel good was that we saw truckload after truckload of German prisoners being brought in, and at least it made us feel good to see that now the shoe was on the other foot.

Of course the war was winding down and they were taking prisoners by the thousands. We were driving around when an MP stopped us and motioned us into a courtyard and told us he was taking the car away from us. They were still fighting a war and had orders to stop anyone that might be interfering with the progress. So here we were, thirty miles from Moosburg and no way of getting back and they were supposed to be flying the prisoners out any day. The fellow who had been an MP went back and had a long talk with the MP and finally talked him into letting us go. We made a beeline back to Moosburg. We had enough sight seeing.

When we got back to camp we found out that General Patton had come into camp that day. The fellows that saw him say that he came in the staff car, with his pearl handled guns, and gave a speech on how he appreciated all the airmen had done and he was going to get us right out of there.

When we got back to camp some Canadians wanted the car.



We wouldn't give it to them so they tore all the wiring out of it so we couldn't use it any more.

Lowell and I were wandering around the countryside when we came upon a building that had a room in it maybe 12 or 14 ft. square and it was stacked full of captured German rifles. We decided here was a good place to get a souvenir so we started sorting guns. I had narrowed my choice down to two rifles but couldn't decide which I wanted. Lowell had already found the gun he wanted. At that moment word came that the planes were coming in to fly us out, so we immediately left and I figured I might as well take both guns with me and then later on I would decide which one I wanted and throw the other one away. As it happened, I got home with both rifles. It wasn't any more inconvenient to carry two than one. On the ship on the way home Lowell threw his overboard because he figured he could never get it home anyway. Any captured enemy equipment belonged to the government and not to any individual.

They brought in transport planes and landed them in a big pasture, and flew us to an area outside of LeHavre, France. It was a camp called Lucky Strike. It was an enormous camp and had been used as a disembarkation camp when they brought troops over from the States.

While at Stalag Luft III, many fellows received clothes in their packages from home. One fellow received the shirt and pants of the uniform we called "greens". He liked cigarettes more than he did the uniform so I traded him a substantial number of cigarettes for it. I swore that when I walked out of the prison camp a free man I would go out in a new uniform. As a result, I guarded it with my life and even carried it on the march when I could have used the space for food. I proudly put it on when they flew us out of Moosburg and was probably the best dressed prisoner there. When we got to Camp Lucky Strike, the first thing they did was take our clothes away, and dusted us from head to foot with DDT to get rid of the lice. We then were issued enlisted men OD uniforms. That was what I was to wear home. I wore my new uniform one day.

At Camp Lucky Strike they had representatives from all the bomb and fighter groups. You were to find your group and report in. You were then reclaimed back into the Air Force.

I was sitting in our tent one day when Lowell came bursting in, saying, "Look who I found!" Here he had Rolleri. Rolleri was the engineer who had fallen out through the bomb bay doors. He had been wounded but was in real good shape and of course we were all glad to see each other. It was at Camp Lucky Strike that Rolleri gave me the greatest compliment I have ever received in my life. He said that when we got back to the states we would be put in B-29s and sent to the Pacific. He said, "You, being the pilot, will have some

choice in your crew. Would you ask if I could be your engineer again?" Words almost failed me as I considered what he'd been through with me. He had gotten shot up and had been a prisoner of war for over a year and a half. He was willing to take the chance again. I assured him that I would.

The war in Europe ended while I was at Camp Lucky Strike. It meant little to me, as the war ended for me April 29th at Moosburg.

From Camp Lucky Strike they loaded us on ships and sent us home. It took about 10 days to get home because we were in a convoy. The last three days we were in a storm and practically all the men on the ship were seasick. I found that if I stayed up on deck and watched the ship roll, I was all right. But the minute I went down below, I really got seasick. In fact, the weather was so bad that as the ship would go up and down in the swells, the propellers would come out of the water and beat the air. It was not a very comforting feeling.

When we reached the States they put us on a train and sent us home. There we got a 30 day leave and then another 30 days at an R & R Center. I went to Santa Monica, California, and other fellows went to resorts in their part of the country. While I was at Santa Monica, they informed me that I would indeed be put in a B-29 and sent to the South Pacific. This was not the most pleasant thought in the world, as I felt I had done my part. However, I could see their logic. With thousands of trained men coming back, all of whom were combat veterans, why spend all the time and money training new men when you had thousands of experienced men.

The war ended while I was still in Santa Monica. Then I had my choice of staying in the service or being discharged. I was tempted to stay in the service and see what it was like in peace time, and I did enjoy the flying. However, I decided I had had all the military and all the war I wanted, so I opted for the discharge, effective December of 1945.

It was now time to continue the life that was interrupted four years earlier. I was now a civilian again and could get back to a normal life.

Dale, Lowell, Ted and I were together at Stalag Luft III and Moosburg. Lowell and I remained in the original combine we were first assigned to. We were side by side on the march and the only face I can distinctly remember on the march. From the moment we were shot down until the war ended we were seldom more than a stone's throw apart. When we parted at the end of the war, it was like parting with a family member.

I have often said that I wouldn't take a million dollars for my experiences, but on the other hand, I wouldn't want to do it again for a million dollars. I think that I am a

stronger person because of my experiences. I found that I could endure hardship and face adversity when things look hopeless.

On the cemetery wall of the U.S. Air Force Academy is a Stalag Luft III memorial plaque. It reads, "IN MEMORY OF THOSE BRAVE AIRMEN WHO WERE HELD AS PRISONERS OF WAR IN STALAG LUFT III, GERMANY , DURING WORLD WAR II. THEIR UNFALTERING BELIEF IN FREEDOM WAS TESTED BY SACRIFICES UNKNOWN TO MOST." I think that says it all.



## EPILOGUE

After the war we went our separate ways. Rolleri and I corresponded until around 1960 when he died of a heart attack. McGettigan, who was repatriated because of his wounds, died in 1975 of lung cancer. Contact was never made with Hendrickson. Patterson, Lopez, and Lendioro gave their lives. Dale Barnes lives in Texas, Lowell Hasler in Indiana, and Ted Kusler in Arizona.

Lowell and I also corresponded after the war. Stalag Luft III had been having reunions and there was to be one in Seattle, Washington in 1985. We decided if we both went we would at least know someone. While there, who should we run into but Dale. The first thing we asked was, "Does anyone know where Kusler is?" No one knew. We also found one fellow who was in our combine and several in our barracks.

The next reunion was to be in 1990. In the meantime we had located Ted through a POW magazine. He was contacted and the four of us got together at the 1990 reunion for the first time in forty five years.

We still meet at reunions and reminisce. For me it has been the highlight of the year. While we talk mostly of the good times and the exciting times we had together, we will never forget the bad.