PRISONER OF WAR

I ended the report of "THE LAST MISSION OF CREW 48", with "They already had their rifles levelled at me, as I'm sure they had spotted that bright blue flying suit, from below. They called out, "HALTEN"! I had been loose, in my desperate attempt to escape for about 45 minutes before I was captured. In a split second, I went from a proud American soldier, fighting for my Country, as well as our own lives, to the shock of being captured, and taken a prisoner of war! This was followed by the tribute paid by our Group Commander, Alvin E. Coons, Colonel, 455th. B. G., to Crew 48.

Immediately, as the three Germans gave the command for me to "HALTEN", I knew I was a prisoner of war. I dropped the small compass and escape kit on the ground, into the leaves and spruce needles in the shallow ditch. The next command was a harsh, "RAUS", with a motion for me to stand. When I stood, I held my hands forward, so they could see that I was not holding a weapon. The guard who seemed to be the youngest of the three, was holding his rifle and bayonet about three feet from me. He was shaking so violently, holding the trigger of his rifle, I felt that he would "accidentally" pull the trigger. The two other Germans came forward and picked up the scattered escape kit. All the time, the younger soldier was smiling. I'm sure it was not a smile of friendliness, but a smile of triumph. They told me to sit and pull my fur-lined winter flying boots off. They reached deep inside, in search of a knife or possibly the .45 automatic. When they were satisfied there was nothing inside the boots, they gave them back to me to put back on my feet. They called out the word "Raus" to me, and motioned for me to stand again. They "frisked" me over thoroughly, trying to find a .45 automatic. When they couldn't find and kind of weapon, they looked at each-other with a puzzled look. They went into a discussion, concerning the .45, I am sure, because they began talking together. I couldn't understand what they were saying, but the puzzled way they acted, while they were talking. They turned to me after their discussion and called out the word "schutzen". I thought I knew what they were asking, but I shrugged my shoulders, and indicated with my hands that I didn't know what they were asking. One of the Germans called out the word, "pistola", and pointed into my stomach with his finger, and indicated as if he were pulling a trigger. I knew it was time to quit playing "games", so I told them that I had no "pistola", holding my hands outwards, with the palms up. They understood this gesture, and went into another excited discussion between themselves. Even though I knew what they were asking, I was stalling for any time that they might use for the capture of any of the others of my crew. I was not playing games per-se, but I was certainly stalling for time , with these three. They seemed to be patient with our failure to communicate. One of the soldiers turned and pointed down the mountainside, then began going ahead of me down the mountain, with the others following. I tried to tell them of my injured groin and spine, but none of them seemed to have any interest, whatsoever in it. We got down the steepest slope, and walking was not as difficult. They were walking me toward the railroad station that I had seen while hanging in the parachute, going in the opposite direction from the way I was going in my futile effort to escape. We came upon a small stream of fast, clear, running water, which I was sure was coming from the melted snow in the

mountains. I stopped abruptly, and said "drink of water". All three of the German soldiers stopped also, and went to one of their discussions that I couldn't understand. This was the first time I heard the word, "nicht" (nix) that I remember. It simply meant no. I put up my protest, telling them in English that my throat was so dry, that I had to have a drink of water. My mouth was just as dry. ("Drink of water was very similiar to the German words, "Trink ? Vasser") They understood what I was telling them. One of the German soldiers told me that it would "machen sie kronk". (make you sick, I later found that they were trying to tell me.) One of the soldiers indicated this by going through the motions of throwing up. I didn't care, as I was so thirsty that the running clear water made me more thirsty than ever. As I kneeled to my knees to get a drink, in spite of their warning, one of the guards called out loudly and sternly to me, to stop me from drinking the water. I pointed to the water that was so close, and tried to say as sternly as he, "I've got to have a drink of water!" They had not taken their rifles from their shoulder, so I didn't think they would shoot me, for making my protest to them. I watched them, as they went into another discussion, looking intermittently to me. I had placed my hands, ready to bend on down and drink. When they saw I was so determined, they let me have the drink of water, whether it would make me sick, or not. As soon as they did give me the "go ahead" signal, I drank thirstily and filled my need for water. (It did not make me sick, and that wouldn't be the last drink of water that I had, while I was in Europe.) When I had all the water I needed, I stood. I was led along side the wide river that I could see so plainly from my parachute. We crossed a picturesque covered bridge, to the other side of the river. We were stopped as we reached the other side of the river, by another German soldier, who seemed to have more authority, than any of the three that I had been captured by. After a short discussion with the "three" he turned to me and asked in perfect English, "Are you English or Russian?" I answered,"I am an American". I could hear their excitement as they said, Aaaaah! Amerikanische". The ranking soldier, that could speak English, turned to me and said, "FOR YOU, THE WAR IS OVER". (Those were the first words that were told to every American.) He asked my name. I told him, Robert V. Black - Staff Sergeant - 18198910. He asked me where we were going to bomb. I simply told him, "I don't know". I thought an outright lie would be better than making him angry with another answer. He asked me how many men parachuted from the plane. I told him, "I don't know". Every question he asked, I answered with the same "I don't know". He asked me where I was from. I thought he was asking from where our base was. I answered his question, "Texas". All of the Germans who had gathered around, had understood, "Texas." They repeated, "Texas", and it seemed to break up the questioning. While most of the group were excitedly talking, one of the older Germans, who was small, and possibly in the lower ranks, told me that all of the others shot at me, as I came down, but he did not. He did not speak English, but he made made gestures to me, sort of secretly, and quietly, but he let me know that he didn't fire at me, while I was hanging in the parachute.

There was a house directly across the railroad track from the bridge. There were several men and women sitting on the doorsteps. All of them were sitting, and looking at me quietly, smiling. I secretely waved my hand at them. They secretely waved back. I thought, "THESE PEOPLE HAVE TO BE YUGOSLAVIAN PARTISANS". The guards soon marched me toward a house, in the

direction of the train station. I looked back at the people still sitting on the steps of the porch. They were still watching me, with interest. I looked at the name of the railroad station building, which was a lot like the rail stations in the U. S. The name "SAWADORF" was planted deeply into my mind, so I would never forget it. I was directed into an old house that hardly had any furniture. In the room they kept me, there was only a small table and chair, and one double bunk, with the same coarse weave of all the other mattresses, that I saw while I was a POW. I could see out of the wide, long window, to the outside. All of the German guards left me inside the room for about a half hour. During the time they were gone, a small girl, about the age of 8, or possibly ten, came to the window, and called, "American Soldier". I waved at her. She said, "I love you"! This was enough to let me know that I would immediately be in the Yugoslavian Partisans hands, if I could have possibly escaped. I'm sure the people sitting on the doorsteps of the house had sent her with that message. All was quiet, and I laid on the hard wooden bunk to rest my back and groin. As soon as the guards appeared, I was scolded by one of the guards for lying on the hard bunk. I got up and unzipped the front of the electric heated flying suit, and showed them the injury that was caused to my groin, by the parachute harness buckle. I indicated that my back was injured also. These injuries made no difference with them, they were certain I wouldn't lie on that bunk. Soon the English speaking German came in, and immediately asked me where my .45 was located. I simply told him that I didn't have a .45; but my fifty-caliber went down with the plane. It seemed hard for them to understand that I did not have a side-arm. A guard entered, bringing a bowl of what looked to be of thick potato soup. I looked at it, and told the German that could speak English that I was not hungry. He turned to the group of German soldiers, who had come into the room, which was about six or eight, and told them what I had said. They all laughed about it. He told me, with a serious look on his face, that "you will see the time when you will wish you had eaten that food". He was so correct. I saw the time only once, but it lasted for the full thirteen months that I was a prisoner. He began questioning me again. I would answer to him, "I don't know". He became agitated with me, and told me that he knew that I knew the answers to his questions. It especially anger him, when I would just tell him my name, rank and serial number. I told him that I was just an enlisted man, and we weren't supposed to know much of anything. He seemed to understand that answer, as that was the way it was in the German army. He asked me if I knew who the German soldiers were, that captured me. All three were in the room, and I pointed them out to him. The three seemed to be well pleased to be "recognized". I told the English speaking German that I had injured my groin and back, and asked him if I could lie on the bunk. He told me "yes", then turned to the Germans who were in the room, and talked with them, before he left the room. None of the Germans seemed to have any opposition to me lying on the bunk, after he talked with them, and left the room. In a short time, I could hear the sound of our bombers, as they were returning from the mission. I got up from the bunk, went to the window, and watched them, far above, approximately 21,000 feet. I watched them until they were out of sight. I thought to myself, "Oh, how I wish that I could be up there with you fellows!" When they were out of sight, I went back to the bunk and laid back down. The Germans who were in the room laughed at me, while I was watching the planes.

I ignored the Germans, as they were laughing at me. As I laid on the hard bunk, I began thinking about Mother, Daddy,my Sister and Brothers, and the "missing in action" letter that would soon be coming to them. I wished there could be some way that I could let them know that I was still alive, whether I would be alive by night, or not. I thought about my little "Buddy"-dog, that would be waiting at the tent for me. It always seemed that he knew, somehow that we had been going on these missions, even though I knew there was no way he could know. He always seemed so happy to see us "get back" from the previous missions, and gave me a "special" greeting. I wondered what crew would adopt him for their mascot. As I was lying on the hard bunk, getting as comfortable as I could, with my aching back and groin hurting, I dozed off to sleep. I was awakened by a train pulling into the station, and stopping. The English speaking German, and the three guards who captured me came to me, and I was told that I would be taking a trip, with the three guards that captured me, to be guarding me, while we were on the train. I thought to myself, "yeah, they will probably be getting a 3-day pass after we get to this destination." A German soldier came to the train before we got on, and gave me a tied up package, which was my parachute, the harness canopy, cut-off shroud-strings and the cover. This was my complete parachute that somebody had climbed the tree to retrieve. As I looked at the parachute cover, much to my surprise, I saw the following: Robert V Black 18198910 742 BS 455 BG. That had been stencilled long before, and I had not really looked at it very closely. My own Bomb Squadron had stencilled all of this "secret" information on the cover of my parachute before we left the U. S. As many times as I had put this parachute harness on, and carried the parachute, packed, I had never noticed this before. Just think, I had found myself in the predicament that day, to not reveal anything about the "outfit" that I was flying with, and they stencilled it on the parachute cover, and I had never noticed it, until now! I didn't know it, but this information would "come back" to me later, during the questioning. As we boarded the train, I took a "last look" at my Partisan friends, who were still sitting on the steps of the porch. I knew that neither they, nor I could relieve my predicament. We rode through some of the most beautiful mountainous countryside, that I have ever seen. There were many tunnels through the mountainous countryside. I never did get to see the name of the city that I was stopped in, for the night. I don't know for sure whether it was in Yugoslavia or Austria. I feel that the Germans were sure to get me far enough away from the Partisan country, as possible. When we, the guards and I, left the train, I was taken to a big Nazi headquarters. That is the reason that I feel that we had gone into Austria, because I don't believe that the Germans would set up a headquarters anywhere in Yugoslavia, such as I saw. When I was taken to the Nazi headquarters, I didn't see the guards again, that captured me. I'll just take it for granted that they would go on their 3-day pass, as a reward for capturing me.

I was turned over to some guards at this big headquarters building. As there had been, at Sawadorf, a double-bunk and some office furniture was in the room where they kept me. I tried to lie on the bunk, but was met with some loud and gruff sounding disapproval. I didn't try to press my luck here, as there was a different atmosphere than at Sawadorf. It seemed that these guards had the authority to kill me if, or when they wanted to do so. I just laid on the floor. I thought they were going to make me get up off the floor, but they left me alone, soon after I laid down.

I was so tired that I soon went to sleep, lying on the floor. I was awakened by a German soldier, as he kicked me with his boot, calling, "RAUS, RAUS!" I stood up, with my sore bones aching, especially my back and groin area. The guard guided me into another room, which I thought to be very nice. We went up a wide flight of stairs, which was nicely carpeted. We entered a very large room, on the second floor, with only one desk, which was carved, and very nice. Behind the desk, sat a high-ranking German officer, with several other officers, who looked to be "big-wigs", standing around. When I saw the grandeur of this officer, I made a special effort to hold my head and shoulders erect. I did not do this to make him feel more important, but to try to make the best impression possible, in favor of the United States Army Air Corps. Thinking about my blue electric flying suit and large fur-lined flying boots, I thought of how I would have to make this impression, other than my being so shabbily dressed. I had always worn my uniform proudly, with it being clean and pressed, and my shoes being shined. This was quite a contrast. We came to the front of the high-ranking officer, and the other well-dressed officers, I threw my head back, my body erect, and gave him a "snappy" salute. The German soldier that escorted me, saluted also. He was then dismissed. Under the rules of the Geneva Convention, we were required to salute the German officers. They expected it. Immediately after my salute, I went into a "parade rest" position. The high-ranking officer must have been a high General, as I felt that only the highest-ranking officers would be afforded such luxury! He sat in his chair, looking at me intently, before a word was said. I was studying him, and held eye-contact with him. He was dressed immaculately! I suppose he would have been considered "handsome" in "street clothes", and not wearing the uniform. His arms were resting on his desk, and the cape around his shoulders exposed his arms enough, that I could see the black swastika, in the white, round circle, on the red armband. This was the NAZI Party insignia. I would find out later, that very few Germans actually were members of the Nazi Party. It seemed that we both looked directly into each-others eyes for about five minutes. He broke eye-contact first, by turning and calling a German Soldier, who I found to be the interpepter. He went directly in front of the high-ranking officer, and gave a salute, saying "Jahwol, Herr, ??. I didn't uderstand the rank of the high ranking officer, as their rank was not called the same word, as ours. The high-ranking officer talked with the interpreter a short while. He saluted the officer again, with "Jahwol, Herr ??" He turned to me, and began questioning me, as the high-ranking officer had directed. All of his questions began, as a military nature. I answered him with, "Robert V. Black - Staff-Sergeant - 18198910!" The interpreter looked at me curiously for a few seconds, then told the officer my answer. The officer did not like my answer, but wanted me to answer his questions directly. He raised his voice to the interpreter, who looked to somewhat shaken, by me not giving a direct answer to his questions. He asked the questions, such as, "Where were you taking your bombs?" "What kind of Bomber were you flying in, and what was your position to fly?" "How many missions had you flown, and where were the bombs dropped?" All of the questions were of a military nature. I would just answer with my Name, Rank and Serial Number. I could see that the high-ranking German officer was not accustomed to being answered, as I was answering.

The high-ranking German officer got up from his chair, and paced angrily around his desk, talking to the other officers. He would intentionally throw his fancy cape back for me to see the red and black swastika arm-band, of the Nazi party. I had one thing in my favor; that being that I could not understand his angry words! He went back to his desk and pulled his Luger from his holster, laying it on top of the desk in front of him. As he sat down, the thought went through my mind, "He won't shoot me here, and stain that carpet!" He turned back to the interpreter and directed questions for him to ask me. When the military questions were asked, I told the interpreter to tell the officer, "As a military man of the United States Army, I am following rules as were set for me; following the Geneva Convention." I also told him that I didn't know if the German army had a code of conduct, or not, but to tell the high ranking officer that I was following my military orders. He told the officer what I had said. I was met with a direct eye-to-eye stare with him again. I wouldn't let my eyes break contact with his. I felt that this was the only "weapon" I had. He broke the eye-to-eye contact with me, first. As he began talking with the other officers around him, I talked with the interpreter, who in return, talked with me. I was careful to not talk about anything that could be of military importance. It was about midnight when they quit questioning me. I suppose that they thought they would finally "break me down", and I would begin answering their questions, but I did not. It seemed as if the German officer began to somewhat respect me, for not answering his questions, as I put my viewpoints to him as "military". I found that the Germans respected "military". If I had ever had any inkling that I would have been captured, I would have tried to learn more about the Geneva Convention. Possibly, the high-ranking German officer didn't know any more than I! I was running a "bluff", but I don't think the German officer ever suspected it! I was soon taken downstairs, with a young German guard put in charge of me. He directed me to the outside, following with a rifle in his hands. The night was very cold, and a full moon was shining so brightly, it seemed to cast my shadow on the black-top street. He followed me for nearly a mile, then directed me in an old building. I was put in a very small room. I had to find my way to the dark bunk inside the room. The bunk was home-made, with an excelsior mattress, that I found to be so "popular", in Germany. There was only one blanket to cover with, so I left my bright blue flying suit, and my fur-lined boots on, as the room was so cold! I went to sleep, thinking of all of the traumatic events that had happened to me in the past twenty hours! The memories of April 2, 1944 are just as vivid in my memory, as they were when they happened, nearly fifty-two years ago.

On April 3, 1944, I was awakened at dawn by the harsh German "drill sergeant" calling cadence, and giving orders to the small group of soldiers, he was drilling. It was cold! There were wide cracks in the walls, and I could see to the outside. I watched them, as they drilled, in "goose-step", holding their rifles to their shoulders, making the flank movements. The first thought that came to my mind, while watching their strange-kind of marching was, they are drilling for their "warm-up" before coming to get me for the firing squad. I knew the high-ranking officer was not satisfied with my answers that I had given during the interrogation. I watched them drill, through the crack in the wall, until they were dismissed, about thirty minutes later. Within about an hour, a German soldier appeared, opened the door, and gave me a slice of black German bread and a cup of imitation coffee. My thought then turned to, "At least they are going to give me a little food to eat before I go to the firing squad." I actually thought they were going to shoot me, and I had accepted that for a fact. I didn't have any fear, but

did think of my family back home. Those were my thoughts, as I ate the piece of black bread, and tried to drink the black "ersatz" (imitation) coffee. It was so terrible tasting, that I just couldn't drink it. I found out later, that the German coffee and tea were both made from parched grain. I never learned to drink it. After I ate the piece of bread, and "dismissed" myself from drinking the coffee, I laid back on the hard bunk, pulling the thin blanket over me, as well as I could. It was still cold. With the exception of the officers, they were so shabbily dressed! Their uniforms were made of thick wool. The pants were so baggy, that they could have fit anybody within the sizes of 28 to 50 waist, maybe more. They were held up with suspenders. The uniform coats were just as ill-fitting. They were held closely by a black leather belt. The buckles for the coats were made solid, with "GOTT MIT UNS" in raised letters. I was told later that meant "God With Us". We were taught to believe that Germans were athiests, after the war started. What a contrast to our uniforms! As I was lying on the hard bunk, the door to the small room was opened. Two German guards in BLACK uniforms called to me, "RAUS, RAUS"! When I got up, they directed me to go ahead of them, to a train station. A train was waiting. I didn't see the name of the town. I have wished that I had known the name of the town, or city, since. I found later, that these men, who were dressed in black, were "Storm-Troopers", or "SS-Troopers". We boarded the train, with the two of them sitting side-by-side, facing me. The seat beside me was vacant. The train soon pulled from the station. We were heading north, according to my "calculation". We were still in the high mountainous area, and there were many tunnels through the mountains. As we would go through the dark tunnels, the "SS-trooper" directly across from me, would kick me on the knee, to get his boot across the opening between the seats. This was to know if I were trying to escape. As I had a chance to look these two "SS-troopers" over, I could see that their black uniforms were "decorated" with their skull and crossbones, with two flashes of lightning, forming what appeared to be two S's. I could easily detect that the Trooper directly across from me would just like to have the "opportunity" to have killed me. I didn't give one to him. I learned later, that all of the German people, including the German Wermacht (Infantry) and the Luftwaffe (Air Corps) feared the "SS-troopers". I didn't fear them, but I learned to "despise" them. The "SS-Troopers were the ones who were chosen by Hitler's men to "breed the master race". Neither of the SS-troopers talked with each-other, nor did they make any kind of an attempt to talk to me. An elderly man came and sat beside me, after the train stopped at one of the stations. He didn't say anything to me for a while, but I noticed him glancing at that bright blue electric heated flying suit. I suppose his curiosity overcame him, as he turned and said something to me in German. I instantly, without thinking, asked him, "What was that?" He kind of winced , as he looked at me, then to the "SS-Troopers". He didn't say anything for a short time. He leaned toward me, and asked, "Are you English?" I told him, "No, I am an American." He had a fearful look on his face, as he glanced back and forth from me and the Storm-Troopers. He asked me, "What are you doing on this train?" I told him that I had been taken a prisoner. He talked excitedly to the SS-Troopers for a short while. When they didn't show any interest in what he was saying, he turned to talk with me. He could speak and understand English very well. As his curiosity began prying into Military business, I simply told him that I couldn't talk with him about that subject. He was quiet for a short while, then he turned to me and asked, "Do you see this suit I am wearing?" I looked at it,

and answered, "Yes." He said, "You can't buy a suit like this, any more. I got this suit in 1937, in New York." I asked him why he came back to Germany. He told me that he had come back when all of the Germans were called back to the "Fatherland" by Hitler. That was a new one, as I never had heard that the Germans had been called back to Germany by Hitler. I didn't tell him that, but remained silent. We were silent for a short while, when he proceeded to finish his story about his suit, and New York City. He continued, "No you can't buy a suit like this any more in New York. New York is all bombed out! All is kaput." I couldn't keep from telling him that New York had not been bombed, so I told him, "New York has not been bombed". He said, "Oh yes, it has, as I read about it in the newspapers." I didn't tell him that I had been in New York City only four months before, as that could reveal what could have been a military secret. I just let him think, as he wished to think about New York. But I secretly chuckled to myself. I recognized the suit that he was wearing as being what was called, "Herringbone-Twill". I had to wear a thick wool suit, from the same wool cloth. It was very thick, and in the summertime, I had to wear it to church. I couldn't sit still, it made me itch, so badly. It was actually a thick-woven wool, for winter. The old German man soon reached his destination. We gave our "good-byes and good-lucks" to each other. He got off the train, thinking that New York City had been bombed, destroyed, and all was "kaput." When we reached the city of Graz, Austria, I was told, "RAUS, RAUS" by the two "SS-troopers". They escorted me to the Talerhof Airdrome. After what seemed to be forever, the SS-troopers finally turned me over to a "friendly" Luftwaffe soldier. I was glad to get from the "hands" of the "SS-Troopers". I'm sure the Luftwaffe soldier was an Austrian. He put me in a cell at this airport. From the 455th. B. G. history, came the report from the February 25, 1944. It had been the fourth mission of the 455th. The 455th. lost one plane, and the 454th. lost five planes. I remembered that it had been a rough target. There had been very accurate flak, and we were attacked by fifteen to twenty planes. I had the dubious "opportunity" to see the damage that was done. There was a considerable amount of damage. The building that I was kept in, appeared to not have been hit. The thought came to my mind, that I hoped our 455th. didn't return to bomb this airdrome, while I was there! The guard brought some bread and thin soup to me. I asked him for a pencil and paper, so I could write a letter to my family, to let them know that I was alright. When I finally made him understand what I was asking for, he brought a sheet of paper and pencil to me. I sat down and wrote to my family members, to let them know that I was alright, and had been taken a prisoner of war. I didn't mention about my back and groin being injured, as I could tell them about that when I got home. In the meantime, I would not worry them about it. Of course, the letter never reached Mexia, Texas. I doubt if it ever left the city of Graz. While I had the pencil, I laid on one of the dirty mattresses, and printed my name, and home address. About a year later, a friend that I went to school with, by the name of Thomas Hall was at the same airport, after he had been shot down and taken prisoner. He saw my name and address, on the wall, and told me about it, after we both got back to the States. His address was the same route and city, but further away from Mexia. In case I didn't get to return home, after the war, Thomas Hall could tell my family members that I was at the same airdrome, as he saw my name. Things were very uneventful at Graz, for two days. I was in solitary confinement, with the guard coming only to give me a small amount of food, and some of their "ersatz" coffee and tea.

On the third day at Talerhof Airdrome, the guard came to me with some "good news". He told me that there were a group of other Americans that had come in during the day, and asked if I would like to go see them. Of course, I told him that I would. He took me to a room, where about ten to fourteen other American airmen were being held. When he opened the door, and I entered, there was a "hush" came over the group of men, as they looked at me. One of the men said, "Be careful of what you say, men. We were told about something like this could happen." I looked at my fellow-airmen, and said, "Look fellows, I am an American, the same as you men." I recognized two of the men as having been in the 455th. I pointed at the two men and said, "You two men were in my outfit, I remember seeing both of you." I held out my hand and introduced myself to each of them. Finally, the ice was broken, and I was accepted as being a "fellow American". I had not been with "friends" for three days, and that seemed like a long time! The next day, we were put on the train, going to Frankfurt, Germany. We boarded the train, with three Americans, and one guard in each compartment. We were travelling "first class". In a town, where the train was stopped for a short time, the guard of our compartment got off the train, and brought back two mugs of beer. He drank one himself, and gave the other to the three of us to divide between us. That was probably the most friendly gesture that I would see, from a guard, while I was a prisoner-of-war. On Good Friday, April 7, the train pulled into the rail station in Frankfurt, Germany. All of the guards, except three, were given the Easter weekend off, upon our arrival at the rail station. There were eighteen Americans, waiting for the arrival of the trolley-car to take us from Frankfurt to Wetzlar. We were all looking, with amazement, at the extensive damage that was done by the bombers at Frankfurt. There was hardly a building standing, as far as we could see. As we were discussing the damage between us, about forty to fifty civilians began gathering. One small, gray-haired German, who I would estimate to be about seventy to seventy-five came closer in to us. There was one tall American , from California, that had the ugliest trimmed beard that I had ever seen to that time. The small gray-haired German came to the Californian, and stopped to look at him. Just as the German said, "LUFTGANGSTER", and looking up and down at the Californian, he said, "BOO!" to the older man. When he said this, the small German went into a temper tantrum! All of the forty or fifty civilians began to crowd in to us. The guard tried to keep them back, but they would not heed to the guards warning. Just at this time, the air raid alarm sounded. The civilians went to a shelter, and we were taken to another shelter. We could hear either the bombs exploding, or flak-guns firing. We couldn't detect which. When the trolley-car arrived at the train station, we were put on it, and taken to Wetzlar, for our interrogation. We unloaded from the trolley-car at our destination of DULAG LUFT. The three guards that had been with us, since we had left Graz, returned on the trolly-car. It seemed as they had begun to enjoy being with us. Any time that there was a group of G. I.'s, especially this group, with all of us being from eighteen to possibly in our mid-twenties, we were always laughing and joking with each-other, no matter how uncomfortable or unfortunate, or how bad the circumstances. We were taken over by the older guards, who were all older and more grumpy. All of our belongings were taken from us, including my wallet and contents, my 1942 Senior High School ring, from Mexia High. (They gave these back to me, after my stay at Dulag Luft was over.) Our pockets were searched, so we could have nothing, while we were confined in "solitary confinement". I found this experience to be very difficult.

We were each put in a small cell-room, which was only about 4' by 8', with there being a narrow "home-made" wooden frame bunk, and barely enough room for us to get from the front to the back of the room. The bunk was single-tier, with a thin layer of excelsior inside a loosely-woven bag. There was one thin blanket on the bunk. On the far end of the small room, was one "frosted" glass, which we couldn't open, or see through. Also, on that far end, sat two glass jugs, which would contain approximately a half-gallon of water. One jug was for drinking water, and the other was for our "waste" liquids. There was a handle on the inside of the room, beside the door. When we turned the handle from the inside, a "flag" would drop into the hall, as a signal that the waste water jug was full, and the other, which was to contain "fresh" water was empty. This "flag"was made of either thin wood, or metal, extending only about eight inches into the hall. This was all the "facilities of "luxury" that we had. If we needed to use the rest room for other purposes, other than empty one jug, and fill the other, we had to signal the guard with the flag. As we had just begun to sit on the commode, the guard would stand over us, calling, "Raus, Raus". These facilities were on the far end of the hall, from my cell-room.

Soon after I was put in the quiet room, of solitary confinement, an English-speaking German came to my room with an 8½ x 14-inch questionnaire form, to be filled out. He "cheerfully" explained, "Sgt. Black, I have this form for you to fill in all of the blanks; which is to let your family members and your buddies at your base know that you are safe and well." He added, "Be sure to fill in all the spaces, and I'll return and pick it up within a few minutes. You will then be sent to join your buddies, in another location." I could tell that he had memorized his talk, and that his "cheerfulness" was fake. He left the form with me. I filled in my name, rank and serial number. I read the remaining of the questionnaire, which included everything of my life's history. It began with when and where I was born; my Mother's and Father's name, as well as the names of siblings. It included my education; where I entered, and the date I entered; the branch of service; my training, and locations; when and where we left for our tour of overseas service; the bomb group; locations and numbers of missions we had flown, and if we were shot down by flak or fighters. This form also wanted us to make remarks concerning the skill of German fighter pilots, and the accuracy of the flak. In about an hour, he entered the room, still with that cheerful attitude. He asked me, "Sergeant, did you get your questionnaire filled?" Without making a remark, I handed the questionnaire to him, with only my NAME, RANK AND SERIAL NUMBER! He looked at the questionnaire, with the attitude of seemily being disappointed and said, "Oh Sergeant, you have not completed your questionnaire. We must know this information, to let your family members know, as well as your buddies at you base know that you are safe and well!" In a low voice, I told him, "I'm not telling you ANYTHING, but my name, rank and serial number." All of his cheerfulness immediately turned into a raging fit. He told me that they would take me out and shoot me for a spy, and report that I didn't have a "dog-tag." I just sat there, half-listening to him, as he had his raging fit, and didn't say anything else. He told me, "You will fill in this questionnaire, or else -----." He didn't finish to tell me again that I would be shot. He turned, and angrily left the small room. It was so quiet! I knew that they wouldn't have any qualms, or after-thoughts about shooting me. In fact, I sort of expected to be shot. If I had one penny, I wouldn't have given it for my chance to live!

I had no idea of the length of time that I would spend in solitary confinement. When the German interrogator left me, he was in a very nasty and angry mood with me. At the end of my solitary confinement, I had spent five days and nights, of my life, which were completely wasted. I settled back on the hard excelsior "bed", deep into thought. The thoughts of home went over and over in my mind. I felt "sorry" for my family members, as they probably would have gotten the telegram, telling that I was "missing in action" by this time. I remembered how much my mother and daddy didn't want me to volunteer. My daddy told me to "stay on the farm, and I probably wouldn't have to go." Probably, if I had not volunteered, I would have been drafted soon. They seemed to not understand, that I WANTED to go, and do my part for my Country. I was filled with patriotism, as well as were most of the "boys" my age. I remembered that my mother told me that she didn't want me to write and tell them how much I wanted out of the army. I told her to not worry, that I would not. I kept that promise, and I didn't ever write of any unpleasant experiences. I only told them a "part" of my prisoner of war experiences. After I volunteered for the Army Air Corps, I began wearing my uniform with both pride and patriotism. I studied hard, for the first time in my life, so I could qualify to fly with a combat crew. I felt that the combat crew with which I was assigned to fly was undoubtedly the bravest group of men that I could have ever asked to be assigned to fly with. If I'd had the choice of all the men in the Air Corps, I couldn't have "picked" a more brave and cooperating group of men. Through the repeated attacks of the German fighter planes, which riddled out plane with 7-MM and 20-MM fire, not one of our crew "lost it", but valiantly fought to the very end, when it seemed as if our plane would explode at any second, as it sharply descended toward the mountain range ahead. Our plane did explode prior to hitting the ground, in only six minutes after I sat at the camera hatch, to make my exit. This fact was confirmed by the good and brave people of Slovenia. I thought of my little Italian Shepherd dog, "Buddy". I wondered if he would adjust to another crew, and he would be "adopted." I have wondered who could have "adopted" him, and if any of them would pick him up, and put him in the warm bed, under the covers with them, on the cold nights. I had plenty time to think, and let my back and groin rest. The "food" at Dulag Luft, while we were in the solitary confinement consisted of only, for breakfast, only a half-piece of bread, sliced thin, with a thin layer of jelly. We had the awful "etsatz" coffee, which I never did like. For the noon "meal", we had a bowl of thin soup, which all of the solids could not fill a half-teaspoon, and a cup of ersatz tea, which was as bad as the coffee; For the night meal, we had a half-slice of bread (thinly sliced), with a thin spread of oleomargarine. We had either a cup of "ersatz" coffee or tea. That was all we ever got. So you could correctly assume that we were on a slice of bread and water diet. The soup was a red color, as if it could have been tomato soup, but I never saw a piece of tomato in it. I thought about that thick bowl of potato soup that I refused, because of not being hungry, at Sawadorf, Yugoslavia. We had frequent air raid alarms. I could not determine if there were bombs exploding near, or flak-guns were firing. We couldn't see out of the windows, but sometimes at night, the skies would be lit up like daytime. I'm sure that was from the flares being dropped, to spot the night targets. The Germans, supposedly, went to an air raid shelter, as they wouldn't answer the "signal", from our rooms during the raids. To occupy my mind, one day I began singing the songs that I knew the words. The guard came and opened the door to the room I was in, and angrily called out to me, "NIX ZINGING". It was so quiet, that I soon

went back to singing, very quietly. He came back and opened the door to the room, and unloaded with a whole mouthful of words, to let me know that he really meant, "NO SINGING" It seemed to be even quieter than ever. I soon learned, in order to get out of the room for a short time, and more often, I would pour some of my fresh water into the contaminated jug. I don't think the Germans ever caught on to that trick. Every time I got out of the room, I would walk slowly to take more time out of the room. Most of the time, the guard would call to me, "Raus, Mach schnell!" (telling me to walk faster.) One day, while I was going with the full jug, to empty, and fill the other with fresh water, I looked ahead and saw an old friend that I had gone to gunnery school with. His name was Aubrey Dekle. I know a broad smile, or grin of recognition came across my face. I went to him, holding the empty jug under my left arm, holding out my right hand to shake hands with him, I called out to him, "Hello, Dekle, old buddy. How are you doing?" I was scolded loudly by one of the guards, and the other removed his rifle from his shoulder, and let out with their "choice" words. Dekle only turned his eyes toward me, and never turned his head. We were both in Stalag 17-B together. I "kidded" him about that incident, and asked him, "Why didn't you stop and talk with me, while we were in the hall at Dulag Luft. I was lonesome?" He told me, "Yeah, you were about to get both of us killed." (I saw in the December, 1993 issue of the "Ex-POW bulletin that my friend, Dekle had died May 1, 1991. There was a list of fifteen other men from Stalag 17-B that had died also) Dekle was a few years older than I, and was married. I was young, and not married. The younger men were not as cautious as the older men. The night before my fifth day in solitary confinement, the Germans turned a dry and throat-parching heat into my room. The heat became so hot and dry that I could hardly breathe. I turned the knob from the inside my cell, and could hear it, as it fell, as a signal to the guard. He would not come to my cell to see what I wanted. I will always believe that they turned the heat into my cell, intententionally, in an attempt to force me into answering their questions. When the guard finally did come, I was almost gasping for breath. I have had a claustrophobic problem, since that time.

On the fifth day of my confinement, a guard came and opened the door to my cell, and called, "Raus, Raus". He directed me to an adjacent building to the one in which I was confined. I was directed to enter a door, which had been opened by the guard. There was a German soldier sitting behind the desk, that I was directed to stop, about twelve feet from, facing the German behind the desk. He began, "Sgt. Black, I see that you refuse to answer the questionnaire that you are required to answer, before we will release you from solitary confinement." As I stood, staring into the space between myself and his desk, he raised his voice loudly and shouted to me, "You don't have to answer anything to us. We know it all!" I looked at him, wondering what he would be coming up with, now. He leaned to the side of his desk, and brought up my PARACHUTE, still tied, as it was since I had not seen it on April 2nd.! He turned the parachute to where I could see the bold stencilled lettering: "ROBERT V BLACK 18198910 742 BS 455 BG"!! He reached behind for a book, as I stared at the white nylon parachute! The book had a big "15", on the cover. He turned to the 455th. Bomb Group, then on to the 742nd. Bomb Sqdn. and told me everything that I knew about the Group, except that our Commanding Officer had been promoted to Major. He then continued, "We just want you to confirm it!" I told him that he already had more information than I could give. I told him that I thought a sergeant's opinion would not make much difference. He dismissed me, and the guard escorted me back to "my" cell.

As I laid back on the hard bunk, I began thinking to myself, "What can I do or say, which would not be of any military importance?" "I have to get out of here." As I lay in the quietness of the room, I could hear the man in the room, on the other side of the wall. I had heard him before, but he has always been so quiet, that it seemed he must have been tip-toeing around in his room. I knocked quietly on the wall. Everything became so still and quiet from his room! I knocked again, very quietly. He answered with a quiet knock. I asked him, nearly whispering, through the wall, "Are you an American?" His answer was a quiet, "No, I am Canadian." I whispered, "How long have you been in here?" He whispered back, "Thirty days." THIRTY DAYS, I thought to myself. I'll go stark raving crazy, if I have to stay in here for another twenty-five days! Neither of us talked again. We both realized that we were putting ourselves in danger of being shot, if the Germans would hear us trying to communicate with each-other through the wall. As I lay there, thinking about the long days ahead of me, the door opened with a "Raus-Raus". My first thought was that the Germans had heard the two of us, as we were talking through the wall! As I went through my opened cell door, I glanced at his door, to see if they were taking him out, at the same time. His door was closed. I was marched out of the building, through the outside area, among other buildings. All at once, I could see ahead, a compound actually filled with Americans!! I recognized them by their O. D. uniforms, and some of them were wearing their A-2 flying jackets. I was guided through a gate, which another guard had opened. I was actually in the compound with other Americans that had been shot down and captured! For the first time since I was captured, I felt as if the Germans would not shoot me. That date was April 12, 1944.

Nobody will ever realize the trauma of losing his freedom, and being among the enemy that you know would actually "invite" themselves to kill you, unless you have been there and have experienced it. Being among my fellow American-Airmen gave me a sense of a liberation. I have never been able to express my feelings and opinion to anybody, as to the value of their freedom. It seems that everybody has to learn from their own experience. Even though I had a feeling of LIBERATION, I would have more than a year of being a prisoner of war but I was among my fellow American-Airmen.

I went into a barracks , and as well as I can remember, I was greeted by an American officer, who helped me find a vacant bunk, and gave a blanket to me for the night. I was taken to a sort of a supply room. There I was issued a new pair of O. D. pants, and an O. D. shirt. I was issued some clean socks and underwear. I had to "settle" for a pair of German made, hob-nail shoes, as their supply was very limited. I was given a G. I. overcoat, also. I gladly gave them my BRIGHT BLUE electric heated flying suit. The person who designed that suit did not take into consideration, that the bright blue could be seen for miles, by the enemy. An O. D. color would have been perfect, for the flying suit, as well as the parachute. I'll never understand why they selected BRIGHT BLUE for the electric suit, or white for the parachute. I had to turn in my fur-lined flying boots. I had something more than a half-piece of bread, that night. That night, there was a light inside the barracks for a short while. I went to my bunk that night, among friends. That was a good feeling. The stockade, at Dulag Luft was run more "American" style. I went to bed that night with the thought, "tomorrow is another day."

The morning of Thursday, April 13, I was awakened by the pleasant voices of American airmen, instead of the gruff and abrupt call of the German guards. I don't remember what we had to eat for breakfast, but I'm sure it was more than the 1/2-slice of bread that I had been getting for the past five days. Within less than two weeks, I had learned to appreciate the importance of food, and had made a vow and promise to never waste it. Also, I learned the importance of never have developed the habit of smoking, or the use of tobacco, in any way. During the morning, I was with two men, in the stockade area, who found some dried cabbage leaves, and the two of them rolled the leaves into "cigarettes". They asked a guard for a match to light their "cigarettes". The guard glanced nervously around, to see if he was being watched secretly by another guard. When he was satisfied that he was not being watched, he slipped two matches to each of the men to light their "cabbage-leaf cigarettes". When they got their cabbage-leaf cigarettes lit, they complained about them not tasting like "tobacco". We all laughed about it, but I made another vow and promise to myself. I would never use tobacco in any form. I have kept that promise.

I don't remember the exact date that we were all "herded" like cattle, and packed inside small boxcars. Our trip was not known, when we were loaded, but we went from Frankfurt, Germany to Krems, Austria. There were between thirty and forty men packed in about two-thirds of each boxcar. The other one-third, the three guards had roped off, for themselves. There was a tall wood-burning stove in the middle of the boxcar, but it was never lit, simply because we didn't have any wood to burn in it. There was hay placed thinly over the floor, for our "comfort". As the train pulled out, I was standing close to the large sliding door, where a five gallon can was put for our waste. The first night, I worked my way to the stove and stood up all night, leaning over the stove. There was not enough room for all of us to lie down. With my spine being injured, as well as my groin, I was hurting all night. When daybreak came, a friend that I had known, and had training with, in the U. S., awoke and asked me if I had been standing all of the night. When I told him "yes", he told me to come over and lie down in the place where he was. When I tried to lie down, two of the other men had already moved into the space, in their sleep, that I was going to take. I just laid on the top of each of them, and they both moved over, without awakening. There was one young airman who had a large and deep hole shot into his right thigh. The hole was about the size of a saucer. He had not received any medical treatment, and the whole wound was exposed. The dried blood had "pasted" the frayed cloth around his wound, to his leg. He was in a lot of pain. He stretched his injured leg under the rope that the guards had roped off for themselves. As he stretched his leg under the rope, one of the guards proceeded to yell, "RAUS, RAUS" at him, for him to move his leg from under the rope. He tried to move his leg back from under the rope, but there was so little room, and he was in so much pain to do so. The other two guards talked with the old stingy, and selfish guard. Between the three of them, it was decided he could leave his injured leg under the rope. I don't know what happened to the young man, who was injured so badly. I knew he had needed medical attention fast, or he would probably lose his whole leg. As for the stingy and selfish guard, it is a shame that he could not have been one of our guards, when we were liberated. I'm sure that he would have been "properly dealt" with. I have tried to forget my wrath for some of these so called, "men", but while I write this, it comes back so vividly! I could never forget it!

I soon began standing close to the small opening, which was about 8 or 10 inches high, and about 24 inches long. There was a piece of barbed wire stretched and stapled across it, to keep us from escaping. (How could we have escaped through a hole that size, with it being about six feet from the floor?) I stayed close to the opening both day and night, so I could breathe fresh air. The terrible stench from the five-gallon can was almost unbearable. The can had become full in a short time, and splashed on the men who were either sitting or lying close to it. The German guards wouldn't empty it while we were stopped, as we were always on a rail siding. They couldn't pour it out while the train was travelling, because they were afraid to open the door, while the rail car was rocking, as it was in motion. Also, there was the problem that it would blow back inside the car. We were in a "catch-22" situation, so we had to live with it.

We travelled during the day-time, but at night we were stopped, in order for the trains that were hauling German war materials could safely travel during the darkness of the night. One night we were stopped at a rail-siding, when the British bombers came over and bombed the rail yards that we were setting. First, the sirens began to sound, making the most mournful sounds of wailing. In a very short time, the bombers dropped their flares, in order to see their target. I was standing at the small opening at the end of the boxcar. The guards opened the sliding door, and went to the air raid shelter. I could see everything from my "ring-side stand". The flak-guns began firing, and the bombs began dropping and exploding at the same time. I was told that our train was hit, but I don't know of any injuries to any of the Americans who were "trapped" and locked inside the boxcars, while the cowardly guards made their dash to the shelter. The bombs shook the ground and rail tracks. The explosions were deafening! The flares and fires lit the night, as if it were in the day-time, with the sun shining! This was the only time we were in a night-time bombing raid, during the trip. After the "all clear" sirens were sounded, the cowardly guards came back and opened the sliding door, and climbed back into the rail cars. We let them know of their cowardly act, by cheering and clapping our hands for them, as if they had been heroes.

On the day we went through Salzburg, I was standing by the small opening of the boxcar. We passed by a huge amphitheater, with the seating carved into the side of the mountain. It could have been the amphitheater that music-lovers came to the annual festivals, before and after WW-2. All of this part of Austria was beautiful, even from the small opening of the boxcar!

After we had been riding for three or four days and nights, we finally reached Krems. We were glad to get out of the crowded and stinking boxcar. Stalag 17-B was about seven miles from Krems. We had to make this part of the trip by foot. Before we could go into the Stalag 17-B gates, we were stopped at the "shower-house", and given a "De-Lousing". We were not allowed to take a shower after being sprayed. I wonder what kind of poison we were sprayed with????

We entered Stalag 17-B gates, and were assigned temporary bunks, until the "new compound" could be opened. The Germans had moved the Russians out of this compound, and had sprayed it for a "de-lousing", too. I was assigned to a bunk in Barracks 39-B. The men in that barracks knew we were coming, and had prepared some food for us! I still appreciate this generous gesture, as I found that food was scarce in Stalag 17-B, too. This was nothing new to us, by now.

After we entered the camp, we were required to go have our picture taken, and receive "dog-tags". My number was 106357. Two photos were taken, with two men sitting side-by-side. After they had taken two poses, a front view and a side view, they cut the picture in half. I was sitting by Aubrey Dekle when they took our photo. When it was time to take our side view, Dekle didn't turn his head as much as they wanted. They called gruffly, for him to turn his head. Not understanding what they were saying, and not turning his head, the "photographer", a German guard, walked to him and twisted his head toward me, as they wanted him to do. To me, it was amusing. When they snapped the photo, I was laughing at him. I look "very happy" with the big smile on my face. I still have the photo showing me laughing at him. I have long lost the straight-forward photo. We both had to hold a small black-board under our chins, with our names and prisoner-of-war numbers. This way, the Germans could have a double check, our photo, with the dog-tag, and us with the dog-tag, in our possession.

I was issued two German blankets. Both of them were very thin. One had to be sewn to a table cloth to keep it from tearing apart. I was issued a new G. I. blanket, also. I was given an aluminum spoon, which the handle soon broke. I had to wait for several months before I got another spoon. I was not given a bowl to eat from, or a pan to cook or heat water. They said they were "out" of them. I had to use a "Klim" can to eat from. (Klim is milk spelled backwards, and was the brand of the milk.) The word "Klim" is still used, when a group of POW's are together. I used the Klim can to eat from, as well as to heat water to mix coffee. Incidentally, a Klim can is the same size as the old-type one-pound coffee can. Everybody had to make their own cup to drink from. The Germans did not issue a "china" cup. The cup was made from a one-pound oleo can, which was in the Red Cross parcels, with a "home-made" handle on it.

We received a Red Cross parcel, after we got to Stalag 17-B. I didn't know how long it was supposed to have lasted. One of my newly-made friends advised me to "go easy" on that parcel, as it had to last a week. When the Red Cross parcels were AVAILABLE, we were issued our parcels on Fridays. The Germans kept the parcels, and they were the only ones who had a key. Many times the storage house was broken into, food, cigarettes and chocolate bars were takenfrom them. We knew the Germans were the ones stealing our food. We made our frequent protests. We were told they would "look into it." We never would hear anything from it, but we KNEW it had to be the Germans, themselves. When we ran out of parcels, they would tell us, "Your bombers bombed the rail yards." There was no doubt that some of them were bombed, but not to the extent they claimed. As the Germans would issue the parcels to us, they would take their banonet and puncture every tin-can that was in the parcel. They told us that we would use it for "escape materials". There were seven pounds of food in the parcels, which contained: Oleo; Powdered Coffee; Liver Pate'; "Klim"; Jam or Jelly; Graham Cracker-; Salmon or Tuna; Semi-Sweet Chocolate Bar; Sugar Cubes; Spam or Corn Beef; 5 Pkgs. Cigarettes. I can't think of any other item.

A parcel that I especially remember was a "Christmas" parcel, that we received for Christmas, 1944. It was a Canadian parcel, containing turkey and trimmings, and fruit-cake. I thought it was a "bonus" parcel for Christmas, and we would be getting a "regular" parcel on Friday, if they were available. I ate practically all the delicious food. This was NO BONUS parcel, and we didn't get a parcel on Friday. I had to "fast" the rest of the week, until parcels were issued again!

I am not sure of the exact date we arrived at Stalag 17-B. It was either on April 16th., or April 18th. The first question that I was asked after we had introduced ourselves was, "When is the invasion going to be?" I asked "What invasion". I had the understanding that we would just bomb Germany into submission, and the war would end after that. I had been flying my goal to be thirty-five. I was not "included" on any invasion plans. Later the number of missions was increased to fifty. On August 22, 1944, the 455th. Bomb Group had completed the hundreth mission. By the time the one-hundredth mission was completed, there were fifty-two B-24's lost and 520 men were either killed in action, or taken as prisoners of war. Many of the original had completed their tour of duty, and had gone back to the States. Many replacement crews had joined the Group, to take place of the ones that were either shot down, killed, or completing their tours.

As I stated, I was assigned to be in Barracks 39-B when I got to Stalag 17-B. I had become good friends with Harold Britton his "combine" buddy, Miller. Britton and Miller were instrumental in preparing food as a "welcome" to us. Undoubtedly, they had saved back their own food in order to give us the welcome party. Everybody seemed be comparatively happy was my first impression, when I arrived. But we were greeted by more of the "outgoing" men, but the ones that were having what was known as "mental problems" more or less stayed to themselves. Not only did the confinement, but the lack of food, cold weather, and lack of medical attention contributed to these problems. Some of the men who were married got "Dear John" letters, that his wife had found "somebody else". To compound the problems, men were receiving letters from either their wife, or girl-friends telling of attending dances that were being held for the German soldiers who had been sent to the U. S. These women just "took it for granted" that we were treated with the same respect and dignity. But this was far from being true. Within more than a year, I saw only three women, from a distance. Two of the women were laborers, working in a cornfield. The other was a German nurse, who was standing in the doorway of a hospital, as we marched to the showers, where we were stopped and given a "de-lousing" before the Germans would allow us to enter the camp. I received only three showers in the thirteen months of captivity. I did see the fourth woman, when we were on the "march". She was a Russian woman, with whom I traded some cigarettes for some apples. With all of who were confined in Stalag 17-B, being non-commission officers, we weren't allowed to work on any of the farms. So, our "social life" was nil.

My favorite past-time was to get out of the barracks, and walk to explore the other compounds and barracks, in the camp. One day, as I was walking betwen the fences, on a road that seperated one group of barracks from the other, I heard a very familiar voice call to me, "Hey Blackie". I instantly recognized the voice being that of our tail-turret gunner, Robert F. Matthews. He was sitting in a window opening of one of the old barracks. We both rushed and warmly greeted each-other. The first question I asked was, "What are you doing here." I found that these words were asked, who had been acquainted before meeting again at Stalag 17-B, many times before and afterwards. It was sure good to see Bob. I had lost account of all of the men on our crew after we had been shot down. He told that Bob Leonhard was in this camp, also. We both went together and saw Bob Leonhard, and had a "mini-reunion." I was told that Lts. Patterson and Gottlieb had been captured also, and that

they had all been together until they had reached Dulag Luft. We later found that the two Officers had been sent to Luft 1, at Barth Germany. It was an officers camp in the Baltic Sea area, which was far north, in Germany. I had no "satisfaction"that the other four members of my crew were captured, but it did kind of "soothe" my feelings, as I had the feeling that I had been the only one of my crew that had been captured. We didn't find out until later, that five of our crew-members, with the helpful aid of the Yugoslavian Partisans, had escaped and had made it back to our base, in Italy.

On April 27th., the "new compound", which was four double-barracks, was opened. I was assigned to barracks 31-B. Bob Leonhard and Bob Matthews were assigned to barracks 32-B. After about six months, I was given permission to move to 32-B, in order that the three of us crew-members could be together again. We were in a "combine" together for a short time, but I broke up the combine, as I had become so independent with my eating habits. When we received our Red Cross parcels, and I was always hungry. When I wanted to eat, I didn't want to wait for the clock. Matthews and Leonhard had more tolerant eating habits. I still traded my "better brand" cigarettes for inferior brands, with them. I wouldn't be smoking, anyhow. (That is, if I should happen to get the "better brands".) At least the "three Bobs" were together, in the same barracks. (Bob Matthews, Bob Leonhard and Bob Black) The three "Bills" got back to Italy together. (Bill Pardoe, Bill Costello and Bill Roberts) I would consider that the "three Bills" were more furtunate than the "three Bobs".

The new compound was made up principally with most of the "new kriegies". (The word "Kriegie" was derived from the German word, "Kriegsgefangener", which meant "Prisoner of War". A "New Kreigie" was a prisoner of war that did not spend the previous winter in Stalag 17-B). Some of the "old kriegies" actually resented the "new kriegies", because we had not spent the winter of 1943-44 at Stalag 17-B. This could only be settled by only saying, "We were flying during the winter of 1943-44 to try to get you out of here!" There was always the joking and bantering between the crew-members of the B-17, "Flying Fortress", and the crew members of the B-24, "Liberator". As I have looked back, I think that many of the people, any 4-engine bomber was called a "flying Fortress", whether it had been a B-17 or B-24. The B-24 had a smaller wing surface, which was called the "Davis Wing". It could carry a a bomb load faster and higher than the B-17. The B-17 was a prettier shaped plane, and was undoubtedly a safer plane, as it had a much larger wing surface where was attached to the fuselage. It has been known to stay airborne with only one inboard engine operating. The B-24 could hardly stay airborne with two engines operating. They HAD to be on opposite sides of the fuselage, or it would possibly go into a downward spin. The only argument that we, as B-24 crew-men could use against the B-17 crew-men was, "It took a brave man to fly in the B-24!" That would always bring a good laugh between the opposing crew-members. These kinds of friendly arguments kept us laughing with each-other. The Germans could not understand us Americans having a good sense of humor and laughing among ourselves, even being in bad situations, while we were prisoners-of-war. We hardly ever saw a German soldier smiling or laughing. they seemed to lack the personality to do so. They always seemed to be afraid of each-other, and to have suspicion, instead of trust.

The German bread was very poor in quality, as well as in the quantity. Five days a week we received one loaf to be divided between five men. Two days a week , a loaf was to be divided between seven men. Many times, there was no bread. The bread contained a large amount of sawdust. Potatoes was the best food that the Germans gave to us. But most of the times, they boiled the potatoes so long that they disintergrated into a gritty mush. They didn't wash the dirt off the potatoes before cooking them. Many of the potatoes had rotted places about half-way through. We received carrots, boiled and unpeeled. I suppose that Rutabaga and Kalarabe turnips were the vegetables that we received the most. They were cut into slices of about a half-inch, but they never did cook tender. They always tasted raw. Occasionally, we would get some boiled barley. Everything was cooked as a single vegetable. There was no seasoning added. During the winter months, when no vegetables were harvested, we were given dehydrated soup. This soup had large worms in it, cooked in the soup. We were given boiled dehydrated cabbage. Often we were given dehydrated cabbage that was not cooked. It was all stuck together. When we pulled it apart, it was mildewed inside. For breakfast, we always had hot water. Many of the evenings just hot water was brought to us. This water was intended for coffee, from our Red Cross parcels. There was no other way we could get additional food, as we were not allowed to go out of the gate, to work. The water, which was the "A" and the "B" ends of the barracks for a long time during the daytime, and always during the night. During the cold freezing weather, we had to keep a supply of water in some "Klim" cans, setting on our bunks, in order to have drinking water.

The outside pit toilets always had a terrible scent. Occasionally, the Germans would have Russians bring the "honey-wagon", and pump some of it out, when it began to overflow. There were pit toilets on each end of the barracks, but they were hardly ever used, because the men that were sleeping closely to them could not stand the stench. The toilet conditions were terrible.

Stalag 17-B was located on the 49-degree latitude, or the same latitude as the United States and Canadian border. The temperature would fall far below 0 many times during the winter. The winter of 1944-45 was the coldest winter in the records, in Europe. The heater, which was located in the middle of each end of the "A" and "B" was never used, except when there was some Red Cross cardboard boxes that could be burned. The Germans didn't furnish and wood or coal for us. Stalag 17-B was north of the Alpine Forelands, and south of the Granite Plateau, among the Alps. I had only the two thin blankets and the G. I. blanket. I also used my overcoat to cover with. Many nights, we went to sleep shivering, and woke up shivering. I suppose we had shivered all the night.

As I write this, I find that I have "blocked out" as many of the unpleasant experiences from my mind, as I could possibly could have done. But there is not a day that that I have lived since, that I would not be reminded of these unpleasant experiences, in some way. Some days are worse than others. I just can not stand food to be wasted. We go out to eat often. I can't help from looking at a plate more than half filled with food, that will be wasted. I will not say anything to the wasteful people, but it enters my mind, and sticks. I never take anything in my plate that I do not plan to eat. Many people will take food, knowing that they will not eat it, then get up and leave from their table, leaving more food than they have eaten.

There were many pranks that we would "pull" on the German guards. One such prank, that I don't think that the Germans ever "caught-onto" was during roll call, while they had each barracks lined up seperately, five-deep, they would count the lines of five and multiply it by the numbers of rows they counted. Several times one of the men from the back row would crouch low, and run to the far end of the line, and be counted again, as one extra man. There was usually two guards counting. After the one man had run from the other end of the line, there was one man extra counted. The two guards would go into a "conference" together, trying to figure out why there was an extra man. They would go back to count again. The one man would crouch low and run back to where he had originally been. The guards would count and multiply again. This count, if the man chose to run to the other end again, there would be an extra man again. He would hardly ever do this the third count, but would stand in place, to allow the German guards count the correct number of men that were supposed to have been in the barracks. When they counted the correct number the third count, they were still puzzled as to why they had not counted the correct number the first two times they counted. This trick was done only on bright and sunny days, as we wanted to get the roll over quickly, on the days the weather was bad. Another "neat" trick that was done occasionally, was for one man to line up with a different barracks than his own. One of the barracks would lack one man having enough, while the other barrack had one man too many. The guards would go into their conference to solve this problem. A normal person wouldn't think of such foolish things happening to puzzle the guards, but they DID happen.

One of the best tricks that was ever pulled, was done by a Jewish man by the name of Sydney Goldberg. He was in barracks 31-B. Syd was completely bald, and didn't have a hair on his head. He told us that the Germans had sprayed his head with a disinfectant poisonous spray that caused all of his hair to fall out. He asked one of the "kriegie-artists" to paint a likeness of Hitler on back of his head. This artist was eager to comply. He painted the black hair, as Hitler had kept his hair combed, a small "Hitler-mustache," eyes and mouth, to a near perfection. He got one of the men to button his overcoat on backwards, and put an old cap on backwards. He then stood in the front line, sixth row, facing the opposite way. The German guard began audibly counting the rows of the American prisoners: Ein, Zwei, Drei,Fimf, Fimf, ACH!, ACH!, ACH!, MY GOTT IM HIMMELL, VOSS IST LOSS??? (One, Two, Three, Four, Five, ACH!, ACH!, ACH!, MY GOD IN HEAVEN, WHAT IS WRONG?)

There were always tunnels being dug by some of the American G. I.'s, even though they were always found by two German guards, who seemed to have nothing to do but "look" for tunnels. One of the guard's name was Schultz. He could speak and understand English very well. We didn't know the other guard's name who worked for Schultz, but we called him "Abie, the Mole". He actually looked like a ferret. These two worked together most of the time, walking around each of the barracks, with an instrument that would detect if a hole had been dug underground, or out from under any of the barracks. At night, Schultz would sneak into any of the barracks. You could hear his heavy old hob-nailed boots, as they made a different "clomping" sound than shoes made, as he walked over the old worn wooden floors. We knew when he was sneaking around to try to hear any conversation, or listen to hear the sound of a tunnel being dug, or listening for anybody who might be listening to a radio. Both Schultz and Abie the Mole knew that we didn't trust them, when they were around. One day, they found a tunnel, soon after they had dug from under the end of Barracks 32-A. Schultz and Abie were both in the tunnel to bring out any shovels,

dirty clothing, or anything they could confiscate. A small guard, whose overcoat nearly touched the ground, holding a rifle that was nearly as long as he was tall, was left to guard over the tunnel where it came out from under the barracks. He had some French pictures that had occupied his mind, as he was showing them to some of the American G. I.'s, who had gathered around him. I spotted a large block of concrete that was laying on the ground, about the location where I thought the tunnel could be. I picked up this block of concrete to about shoulder-high, then slammed it into the ground. It would have weighed between sixty and seventy pounds. I looked around to see if a German guard was watching. Everything looked alright, so I lifted it about shoulder-high again, then slammed it the second time. I backed up again, to look and see if everything was still clear, when out of the barracks door Schultz came charging, like an angry bull. I walked away innocently, and glanced back over my shoulder. Boy, was schultz ever angry! He chased all of the American G. I.'s away. I turned and innocently watched all of his anger, as he was yelling something at the Americans, and scattered them. He yelled something at the small "pint-sized" guard, and he put his pictures away. After Schultz had angrily gone back to his work in the tunnel, the G. I. 's began gathering around the small guard. He grabbed his rifle by the shoulder-sling, and looked as if he would use it. At the same time he grabbed for his shoulder sling, he yelled, "RAUS, RAUS" at the Americans who were trying to gather around him again. I don't know how much damage that concrete block did to the inside of the tunnel. It must have done some damage, because it sure scared Schultz!! I laughed to myself as I walked away, among the other G. I.'s. I looked back at the small guard, and thought: "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, GOOD WORK, BLACK!!"

There were some men who I have been considered as "miracles of World War-2." I consider Archie M. Thomas to be one of them. He was then, while we were in Stalag 17-B, and he still is one of my best friends. He lives in Elkhart, TX. Archie was assigned to the Eighth Air Force, in England. The first time I saw Archie, we were going out to one of the frequent roll calls. Had "PALESTINE, TEXAS" printed on the back of his field jacket. Palestine, being only sixty miles from my home-town of Mexia, got my interest. I was about ten feet behind him, and called out, "Palestine, Texas" loudly enough that I was sure that he could hear. Archie turned around, smiling. His face was burned so badly in the plane fire, that it was charred black. At first, I had the feeling that I wished I had not said anything. But we became close friends. As the time went by, his face began to heal, and the charred burns began to heal. We would visit with each-other often. Archie was a quiet man, and sometimes there was not much conversation. We would sit on the side of one of our bunks, or walk around the compounds together, sometimes in silence. It seemed that we did not need to talk, but just somebody being together seemed to be enough. Within the thirteen months, the burns of his face cleared into an olive complexion, with no scars. He told me the story of how he was shot down. His plane was hit by a direct blow of exploding flak inside the plane, causing an instant explosion and flash fire. The plane plunged immediately toward the ground below, with such a force, that all of the crew members were penned helplessly against the plane. Archie miraculously struggled to the camera hatch door, and managed to pry it upen just far enough that he could manage to squeeze out. Just as he got out, he pulled the rip-cord of his parachute. The parachute opened, just a split-second before he hit the ground. He was knocked unconcious. When he "came to" he was on the ground, and the wind was

pulling him along the ground, with his parachute still open. He was the only man to get out of the plane, as the other crew-members died, as the plane dived into the ground. I don't want to get Archie's story wrong, but the way I remember, children were following him, and hitting at him with sticks and rocks. Before he could be killed by the angry civilians, the German soldiers appeared and captured him, taking him as a prisoner of war. After the war was over, Archie went to college and got his degree in Theology. He worked and retired with Rockwell, International, making materials and instruments for NASA. After retiring, he chose to go back to college and to pursue his studies. He has worked many hours, as a volunteer, at the V. A. hospital. Along with his studies, he has followed Geneology. He is a man that has never drank or smoked. He is a miracle, in many ways. Judge for yourself, as you read this. I have always had high regard and respect for Archie Thomas. I consider it to be a privilege to have had our friendship to continue for more than fifty years!

I have written of my friend, Jack Ross before, but I feel that he deserves a few lines in this "Prisoner of War" section. I was sitting on the side of my bunk, in the barracks, when Jack came and asked if my name was "Black", and if I were from Mexia, Texas. When I answered in the affirmative, he introduced himself to be Jack Ross, Mrs. Don Quillen's son, and the brother of two girls that I was acquainted with, at Mexia High School. He was the kind of person that you would like instantly, because of his winning personality. His smile would make his eyes sort of light up and sparkle. As we became better acquainted, we visited and talked many times. He told me that he had injured himself in the left groin, when his parachute opened, but did not elaborate. I had injured my right groin similiarly, in the same way, except not as seriously. Getting letters to and from Stalag 17-B was very slow, and unpredictable. Jack was concerned, as the others of us, about his family at Mexia, after they received the "Missing in Action" telegram. As I wrote to my family on one of the few postcards received, "I see Jack Ross often. He is Mrs. Quillen's son. He is O. K." As soon as my mother received the postcard, she went to talk with Mrs. Quillen, as Jack was still missing in action. Nothing had come in the way of news, that Jack had been taken a prisoner-of-war. I am sure this releived Mrs. Quillen's mind. Later, when either of us received a letter from "home", we shared it with the other. I respected Jack as a brave and true American "fellow Airman". He more than performed the duties that he was sent to do. He had completed twenty-five combat missions that he was required to fly. He was waiting at his air base , in England, for a plane to take him home. He had earned the Distinguished Flying Cross; the Air Medal, with three oak leaf clusters the European Theater of Operations Ribbon, with three Battle Stars; the Presidential Unit Citation and other medals and honors. When he was asked to fly one more mission, he accepted, as one man was needed to put one more plane in the air to bomb Germany. The mission, which was his twenty-sixth, was nearly completed, as they had already dropped their bombs, and were on their way back to England. Jack told me that he could see the English Channel, and across it to their destination, England. The plane was hit, and disabled too disabled to fly. The crew had to parachute into the Netherlands, which was still held by the Germans. Jack was captured and spent thirteen months as a prisoner-of-war. Either Jack or I had an old pair of dull, cheap and worn pair of scissors, so we "traded" haircuts. These old scissors were so dull that instead cutting the hair, they more or less,"PINCHED" it into. We gave each-other some terrible haircuts, but we weren't going anywhere, so it made no difference as to how it looked. After we both got back to the States, we laughed at our haircuts.

There were some very good musicians in Stalag 17-B. The Y.M.C.A. had sent musical instruments to the camp, for our entertainment, during the long and restless days. The two of my own crew-members, Bob Matthews and Bob Leonhard played in one of the bands. Bob Matthews played the drums, while Leonhard played the clarinet. (if I remember correctly.) There was another band that played for the "Cardboard Playhouse" Theater. This was an old empty barracks that was vacant, and the Germans allowed it to be used for that purpose. Old Red Cross boxes were arranged for "props" for the stage. The men who put on the shows were the "Kriegies", who were prisoners also. The theater was usually packed by the "Kriegie" audience. Many times, the German officials or guards would attend some of the "shows". They seemed to enjoy them, as well as the Americans. The Germans had installed "speakers" in the barracks, which were furnished by the Y.M.C.A. Several records would be played during the afternoons, when the Germans would leave the electricity on, inside the camp. However, they had a "nasty" habit of keeping not only the electricity, but the water kept turned off much of the day, and every night. During holidays, such as Christmas, songs, "I'll be Home For Christmas, White Christmas" "Blue Christmas", and others would be played. Other songs,"I'll Be Back In A Year","Blue Danube", Lily Marlene", "Sentimental Journey","Where or When" were the most polular. Glenn Miller arrangements were the most popular. There were probably between forty and fifty records in the camp. The Germans used the speaker system as a punishment to us, and would not let it be turned on for days when they didn't like anything we did as a group. During the first of 1945, we heard that a new song, by Bing Crosby was the number one hit in the U. S. It was "Don't Fence Me In", which was very appropriate for us. We did not hear this tune until we were back in the U. S., but we found that it didn't apply to us POW's, but a young pony who wanted to run in the wild. I suppose my favorite was, Where or When".

Our family at home was allowed to send one box of food, which could not be over a certain size and weight. In the thirten months that I was a prisoner-of-war, I didn't receive one package. My mother and sister would send a package each month to me, but for some reason didn't reach me. My sister made a game of it, and would buy food all month to send me. She told me later that she enjoyed doing this, thinking all of the time I would be getting everything. It seemed that some of the boys would get two or three packages each month. I never could understand this. I sometimes still wonder if some of the Red Cross employees would change some of the names on the boxes, before they were sent from New York. I'll never know, but I'll always have my suspicion.

We could hear the unmistakedly sounds of rifle fire many times, anywhere in the camp, or other compounds. There were always the danger of any of us being hit by a wildly fired bullet, or a bullet which was meant for somebody else. We knew too, that at any time any of the guards would possibly fire into any of the compounds, because his family had been killed by bombing missions. So we didn't have to necessarily provoke a guard, for him to shoot. One night, there were three men trying to escape during the snow. The guard saw them, and began firing wildly into them. Two of the men made it back to the barracks, with one being shot. The third was hit so badly, that he couldn't make it back to the barracks. When the German soldiers heard the firing, they ran to see what was happening. Upon finding the injured man lying in the snow, he emptied his Luger into him, with the injured man begging him to not shoot. There was

a G. I. that was lying in his bunk, asleep. One of the guard's bullets came through the barracks wall, and killed him. A man never had any kind of a secure feeling, while we were a prisoner-of-war. There was the ever-danger of the guards that might suddenly get angry with any of the other prisoners. He would grab his pistol and begin firing. We didn't have much of this, though.

We had been into Stalag 17-B, when one night, I was lying in my bunk asleep. I was awakened suddenly by one of our men that jumped from the top bunk, to the floor, just at my head. As this wasn't enough to startle anybody, he yelled, "THEY'RE BOMBING US!!" I jumped from my bunk and began pulling my shoes on as quickly as possible, and grabbed my overcoat, put it under my arm and went to the air raid trench. The trench was only about 50-feet long, which was very inadequate for the approximately one-thousand men of the compound. The flak was already shooting and bursting overhead, as I was trying to find a space in the brightly-lighted trench. A friend, Henry De Boer, from Michigan, looked up and saw me, and said, "Here's a small space, Black!" I slipped into the trench by him, with the flak-guns wildly shooting overhead. Instead of me trying to put my overcoat on, I put it over our heads and told him, "This might keep the flak from dropping on our heads!" These two gestures between the two of us could have been the cause that we were good friends, even after we came back to the States. There was a bright flare, which was dropped at each corner of the camp. We didn't know if this could be a flare marking the target to bomb, or, where NOT to bomb. No bomb hit inside any of the camp, that I ever heard, but one did hit and explode just outside the barbed wire fence. We heard that they were bombing an "underground" airport, which was located only 1½ miles from our camp. This was only one of the many times that bombs would hit and explode in our close vicinity. The next day, after the raid was held, on the airport 1½ miles from our camp, the boys had obtained shovels, and were digging air raid trenches that would hold more men. After the invasion, the Germans prohibited us from leaving the barracks at night, so that didn't help any in any nighttime bombing missions. We never found the reason for the four red flares.

We had been getting rumors of the many Jews that the Germans were killing. If fact, they tried to pursude us to "Point out" the Americans who were Jews. Naturally, we did not cooperate with them, in their dirty scheme. We all had friends, who were Jews, and had been on crews with Jewish men. They were fighting the Germans for the same cause that we were. Except for the Japs, the German people were hated as being the most evil people in the world. We had heard the rumors that there were Jewish extermination camps, but we surely did not know the extent. There were rumors that Hitler had given orders for the American flyers to be killed. One of the Americans had been told by one of the German guards of this plan. We were very skeptical, in going to the shower-house, after we heard about this. We had heard that the exterminations were being held in the showers. We knew, just as well, that the Germans could set up several machine gun nests during the night, and shoot us, while the roll calls were being had, more possibly during the morning roll call. We heard later, that it was not only the American flyers, but ALL prisoners of war, which included the American ground troops, as well as the English, Russians, Italians, etc. This rumor was ACTUALLY TRUE, as it was confirmed, after we got back home. Hitler did give the order to kill all of the prisoners of war, but his Mistress, Eva Braun didn't pass it on to the ones who were to carry it out.

March 1st. was my birthday, as I was twenty-two, in 1945. Our American Air Force gave me the best birthday party that I could expect, except a liberation! Early on March 1st., the P-38's began to appear, and "buzzed" our camp, back and forth. They were just "playing" and having a good time doing it. When would "wiggle" their wings" in recognition, as they passed. We went wild with joy, as they were close enough for us to see them. We jumped up and down and waved at them, ignoring the guards in the towers. About forty-five minutes leter, a Group of B-24's came over, at a seemingly lower level than I had ever seen them bomb before. They came directly over our camp, with their bomb-bay doors open, and were heading directly at Krems, which was only seven miles from us. We could see the bombs as they were falling from the B-24's, from the time they left the bomb-bays on to the time they went behind the hill, between us and Krems. Then you would hear the loud explosions, and see the black smoke, as they hit the target! They were actually "PLASTERING" Krems. Unknowing, to us, there had been a large oil and fuel storage at Krems. This was no secret to the Air Force, though, as they were hitting, and knocking it out today! WHAT A BIRTHDAY PARTY! Many of the men were crowded into the air raid trenches, but not me, nor many of the other men. Many of the men were up on top of the barracks, waving and cheering our planes! I sort of kept on the opposite side of the old outside toilet, which was made of bricks, so I would not be in line of fire, if the German guards did decide to shoot into the crowd of cheering G. I.'s. I was sure that some of the families of the guards lived in Krems. The Germans were pouring the 88-MM and 20-MM cannons at them! We heard later from the German guards that twelve tankers were hit. I never heard about an American plane being hit. It really was a big "birthday" party. I couldn't have expected anything better! The wind was blowing pretty hard, so the smoke cleared from the skies before night. What a day! I was wondering if the 455th. was the Group.

I am not sure of the month, but it seemed that it was in September, the Germans brought an American G. I., into our camp for the night. The rumor was, that he was unloading some stolen French wine, somewhere in Germany, and decided to pull a cork from one of the bottles, and began "sampling" it. The "sampling" grew so much, that he got drunk. The Germans had sentenced him to 6 months solitary confinement, then he would get six more months. The first six months was Military, and the second was Civilian. He got with our camp leaders that night, and told them of his predicament. Our camp leaders soon decided to "hide" him from the Germans. There was a tunnel that had been started between barracks 31A and 31B, down through the concrete of the floor, under a large "dutch-oven" stove. I heard that this was the place that he was kept for the first night. Through "instant" roll calls, which were frequent, after he couldn't be found, he would hide in top of the latrine in the attic-flooring, I have been told. The Germans kept us out of the barracks for two days, without our shirts being on, because I was told that he either had a birth-mark or tatoo on his shoulder. He was well-hidden, as they looked for two days, having us to go through the number and picture check line several times. The second time we were forced into our "two-day picnic", as it became known to be, the Germans brought wagons into the barracks area, of each compound, and loaded everything that was left inside the barracks, which included any food, blankets or any extra clothing, that had not been taken from the barracks. They brought in their German Shepherd dogs, as well as their Doberman's to sniff in

all into the barracks for anybody. Their dogs were taken into all areas of the outside area to sniff, too. They just couldn't find this man. He was later named the "Grey-Ghost", and still carries this name today. In fact, I saw the "Grey-Ghost" two years ago at the convention of Stalag 17-B, which was held in San Antonio. He had stayed in the Air Force, and made it a career. The Germans never found the "Grey Ghost". We were there from September to April, before we were marched out ahead of the Russians, and with our help, he evaded the Germans more than six months. They "pulled surprise" or "instant" roll calls and picture checks very often, in an attempt to find him, but he always evaded. I'm sure that it was with the help that we gave him, also, even though I didn't know if I had ever seen him, until nearly two years ago. I was told that one of the American G. I.'s told one of the more "friendlier" German guards that we could hide a German tank inside the camp, if they would just bring one in, turn it over to us, and give an hour for us to hide it. I believe the Germans believed that, too! At least they didn't bring one of their tanks in to see!

July 4th., 1944 was really a wild day, as we celebrated our American holiday, on German soil! The band had a big concert, and the "Table Toppers" put on a stage show. All through that day, it seemed as if the Germans thought we were going to start trouble. Three Wehrmacht guards were brought in to guard us. There were wild games of baseball, boxing, track wrestling. One of the German guards, called "Turk" tried to break it all up, and stop it. A German captain, "Poletti" (An Italian name) told them to leave us alone, and let us have our holiday. It seemed that the Germans enjoyed all of it, after that. I'm sure there were many tired muscles and bones after that day was over. Major Beaumont, the doctor of Stalag 17-B (who didn't have medication to do his duties as a doctor) sent a message that we were real Americans and he was proud of us. We showed our partiotism in the face of the enemy in his own country. It was NOT WHAT WAS done, but WHERE IT WAS DONE! Camp Leader Kenneth Joe Kurtenbach read an inspiring poem to the group.

One day, when there were no clouds, we could hear and see a Group, or possibly two Groups of B-24's as it seemed as if they had begun their I. P. (Initial Point, where the Bomb Run was made directly to the target, with no waivering or flak evasion.) It seemed that the I. P. was always made at the bend of the Danube River. If that was truly the case, it would carry them directly over our Stalag 17-B camp. An this particular day, the flak seemed to be very intense. All at once, we saw a B-24 that must have received a direct hit in the right wing. There seemed to be no fire, but the wing seperated from the fuselage. We watched both the fuselage and wing, as they both spun downward toward the ground below. We watched for parachutes, eagerly. But there was not one parachute seen to open. Ten men were penned into the plane, helpless, as it spun toward the earth. This mission seemed to be heading for Vienna. I do not remember the date.

The Germans called for roll calls very often, in an attempt to find the Gray Ghost. The Roll Calls involved picture and dog tag checks. I am sure that the SS-Troopers and Gestapo were involved with this search. If they could have found the "Gray Ghost" I would not have seen him nearly two years ago. I am sure they would have taken him out of the camp, away from other Americans, and would have killed him.

We had received quite a number of books from the States. I'm sure the books reached us through the Y.M.C.A. There being 4,256 men to read these books, our library was always somewhat limited, on the numbers of books for us to read. I read only two or three of the books, because of the very limited time we had to read them, before we had to turn them back into our "library". We had some "classes" that were held for our advancement in knowledge. I don't remember the exact classes, but the ones I do remember were Spanish, French, German and Math. I know the man that taught Spanish very well. He lives in Houston, and is a very good friend of mine. His name is John Gutierrez. John was only 18 years of age when he was captured. When the war was over, he returned to Houston and received his degree in Petroleum Engineering. When he retired a few years ago, he was the Chief Corrosion Engineer of Houston Natural Gas Company. He had a very successful career with HNG. Helmuth Roeder was the Camp Interpreter in Stalag 17-B. I think Roeder was the German instructor, but I am not sure. Roeder lived in Houston for several years after WW-2, but several years ago he retired and moved to the family ranch, at Weimer, Texas. I see him occasionally.

When the July 20, 1944 attempt to assasinate Hitler failed, we received the "news" almost immediately. The guards became very nervous and jittery. They must have received a strict order to salute with a "Heil Hitler" salute. Our camp leaders made a protest to the Germans of their officers returning our military salute with a "Heil Hitler". I never did like to salute a German officer, anyhow. I always made an about face, and go another way, if I was going to approach a German officer. I was more adamant about my feelings of saluting them, than ever after they began giving their "Heil Hitler" salute. At roll call, our barracks leaders always had to report our "All Present and Accounted For", after his salute. So they were forced to salute the Germans. The German enlisted men had to salute their officers with the "Heil Hitler". We detested this. Sometimes these salutes would be in a half-hearted way. They would hold their elbow by their side, and lift their forearm, with their palm forward, for their sloppy salute. I always had the feeling that when I was giving a salute, that it should be a "snappy" one.

The day of the news that the invasion had occurred, it was really hard for us to believe. There had been so many false rumors that the invasion had begun, that it was hard to believe, when it actually occurred. When we were convinced that it was actually true, we were elated! We noticed the Germans had become very nervous. They began giving us new orders. Nobody was to go out of the barracks after dark, and we were to go into the barracks during the frequent air raids, by our own planes. (We later were not required to do this.) Even though the warning was placed just inside the "warning wire", (which was one single wire stapled on top of a post, about two feet high.) they would read it to us regularly, as our added warning to the order, "Warning - Anybody touching the Warning Wire will be shot without warning!" They would always read it, with it sounding like: "Varnung, Those Touching the Warnug Vire Vill be Shot Vithout Varnug!". To agitate the Germans, as a group, we would give a loud applause, and cheer, "YEAAAAAA!". This would make them very angry. We could see them seething, but this was our goal. We could do this as a group, but one man doing it, would probably be shot. We were ordered to not leave the barracks, even for our night-time emergencies at the rest room. They would turn the lights off early, if they even turned them on, for the evenings. They conserved the water more greedily. The ones that were

digging tunnels were told that they would be shot, if they were caught doing this again. Everything became more tense, in general.

Having the crystal set radios was strictly forbidden by the Germans. Even though the Germans were the only ones who could bring the materials in for them to be made, they kept a constant search for these sets, to confiscate them. It would have been impossible to have estimated the numbers of radios that were in the camp. There was one radio operator, in every six enlisted men of the crew, so it could be closely have been estimated that there were approximately 700 radio operators in the camp. However, I doubt is there were over 150 sets in the camp. In order to obtain the materials and earphones for the sets, the men would trade their cigarettes or chocolate, from their Red Cross parcels to the Germans, then assemble them. There was the problem of having a place in the barracks, to hide them from the Germans. At night, the men who had the crystal sets would listen to BBC, compile the information that they heard, and the next day, the "newscaster" read it to each barracks. That is the way we had contact with the "outside world". Hearing the "News" was always our hightlight of the day. When the news was good, several of us would follow the "newscaster" to other barracks, to hear it again. Some of the "newscasters" became as good as some of the NBC or CBS broadcasters, in the States. There were always G. I.'s who posted themselves on each end of the barracks and in the windows to watch for the German guards, to protect our valuable newscaster. The news consisted mostly of the advances (or losses) of the troops, and the general progress of the war. We were always interested in the bombing targets, and of the "plastering" the Germans were taking. Occasionally, we would hear of some important news on our "home front". There could be a man sleeping in the bunk just next to you, and you may never know that he could have a crystal set. I slept head-to-head to a man in Barracks 32-B. He had a set, and I never knew it until one night he called my name, and when I answered, he asked if I would like to hear some good music from Vienna. When I answered, "Of course, I would", he handed me the earsets, and I listened to several Viennenese waltzes for about an hour. I had no idea that he had a crystal set before that particular time, and we were sleeping head-to-head.

The food situation was even more critical after the invasion began. The railroads were used more and more for the German war effort. Our bombing of the railyards became more and more intense, causing the parcels from the Red Cross to be bombed more and more. One day, while I was out in the compound area, I saw a black cat that had strayed into our compound. My first thought was, "FOOD". The cat was solid black, with one of his front legs broken, where it just dangled by the skin, as he walked. I made an attempt to lure him to me by calling to him softly, "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty", Being a German cat, my calling in English, "Kitty-kitty" to him meant nothing but danger. He made a mad dash, and I began chasing him, trying to catch him. He went under the warning wire, and through the other fences, so I had to stop my chase. I watched for that cat many times after that but never did see him again. I was with a good friend, who had been in Stalag 17-B with me, a few years ago. He made the mention of a "cat is not too bad eating, if you are hungry enough!" My mind immediately went to that cat that I chased. I asked him if "his" cat was black, and had a crippled front leg, he answered "yes!" I told him, "You are the rascal that killed "my" cat", then I told him of my attempt to catch him. I asked him if the cat was "good", and what it tasted like. He told me that after he killed him, and skinned him, he was tough, but at least it was something filling, and to eat.

The Russian compound was next to ours. There was a warning wire on our side, and theirs, also. Between the warning wires, was the same fencing as it was to the outside, which was two high fences, with the barbed wire being spaced only about six inches apart. The two fences were spaced about ten feet apart, with barbed wire entanglements between. There was at least a space of sixty to seventy feet, between their compound and ours. The Russian POW's were taken out, and worked on the farms, by the Germans. As they got back into 17-B, they always had onions, or possibly a sack of beans, that they could trade to us for our cigarettes that we received in our Red Cross parcels. (When we received them, which was not regularly.) In trading, it was hard to sail a package of cigarettes through the air, sixty or seventy feet distance, without it catching the wind wrong, and turning it into a downward plunge, before it was across their warning wire. The Germans kept close watch over all of our trading, as they didn't want us trading with the Russians. They simply didn't want the Russians to have any cigarettes. One day, while the trading was taking place, a Russian jumped across the warning wire, and ran to get a package of cigarettes that failed to make it across, and had fallen short. The German guard in the tower, raised his rifle and shot the Russian, and killed him. He was between the high fence and the warning wire. The Germans let him lay between the fences for about two or three days, as a lesson to us, and try to prevent us from trading. It did stop our trading for about a week. But after his dead body was removed, we began trading, after a short while.

During the cold winter, the Russians began dying. I don't know if it had been from the cold weather, or starvation. Daily, they were carrying as many as eight or ten dead Russians by our compound, on the outside of our fence. The "cemetery" was in an area of a small clump of trees which grew, and had a vacant space, which was used to bury the dead men, whether it be Russian, American, English, etc., when they died. They rolled the Russians in brown paper, and put them on crude, improvised stretchers, made of two long tree saplings, with ropes criss-crossing, for the body to lay on. When so many had begun to die, we became concerned about the reason. The Germans told us that there was a typhus epidemic in their compound. They didn't want us to know the truth, about them starving to death, or letting them freeze, without enough cover, during the below zero winter weather. The reason that I feel that the Germans were not telling us the truth, of the typhus, is that we were "living" only sixty or seventy feet from them, and there was no typhus outbreak in our compound. When the Americans died, the Germans did have the decency to furnish a wooden box to bury them. Most of the Americans that died, was shot by the Germans, for some reason or another. There were other nationalities in Stalag 17-B, which I was told to be English, Yugoslavian, French, Italians, Russians, and of course, Americans. The weather was so miserably cold, that it is impossible for me to explain. As I have previously stated, there was NO heat, as we would breathe, either inside or outside the barracks, a vapor cloud would form, as we breathed. The cold wind would just blow through the old barracks, which was made with black tar-paper on the outside. Frost would form, in the ceilings, and when the barracks leaked, before it started freezing, an icicle would form from the ceiling, down toward our bed. The water that we had put in our cans to drink, would freeze over solid. There was nothing to do except to go and lie in the beds, covered up, as well as we could. I had only one G. I. blanket, and two thin German blankets. The old excelsior-filled

mattresses were only about an inch thick, and would let the cold air blow from under, as it would blow on top of us. There were eight men sleeping in the double tiered, double bunks, with about 165 men being on each end of each barracks, which was open. There is no way that I can describe extremely cold, or extremely hunger. Most of the winter, there was lots of snow and ice on the ground. Many times, when it snowed, the wind would blow it away, before it could stick to the ground.

All of the Americans were kept in a compound, seperate from the other nationalities. We were not allowed to go outside the main gate, except for the "de-lousing", and to take one of the three showers that I had in the thirteen months that I had, while I was a prisoner. Sometimes, after they sprayed us with the POISON, for de-lousing, we were not allowed to take a shower. I know the poison was strong enough to kill the bugs that were so prevalent, and could cause so much misery as they would bite. The Germans had the NASTY habit of taking electric clippers and clip our hair so short, that it was nearly shaven. None of us liked to have our hair clipped as closely as they did, as we needed it for warmth! One of the times I remember especially, was when the Germans notified us that they were going to take us to the shower and de-lousing building, on the hill, for our usual de-lousing. This was the LAST TIME that they would attempt to clip our hair so closely, as we were ready for them. Some of the "boys" took some oleomargarine (that came in the Red Cross parcel) and rubbed a generous amount on their heads. Then before they were to have their hair clipped, they filled it with gritty sand. Within only a few "haircuts", the electric clippers became so dull that they just wouldn't cut the hair, but would just slip through and pull the hair, instead of cut. The Germans were dumfounded, until they found the oleo and sand still in the hair! They became enraged at us, for our "mean trick". They threatened to shoot us, for doing this, but that was not the first or the last time we got that threat.

When the Red Cross food parcels were available, they were "issued" on Fridays. When I write "issued", I mean that the Germans actually "issued" these parcels to us, as if it were their own food. As I have previously written, every can of canned food was punctured by a guard, with his bayonet. The tuna or salmon, depending on which the parcel contained, was the food that was eaten on Friday afternoons, after we received our parcels. The reason for the fish-food being eaten first, was because it would ruin in a very short time after it was punctured. So we HAD to eat it, or trade it. Since everybody was eating the tuna or salmon on Fridays, you could hardly trade either kind of fish. Nobody would try to keep it for the next day. After the parcels were received, there was always a bedlam of hustle-bustle , of the Kriegies trading food. We who did not smoke, and had received a "better" brand of cigarettes, would trade them for food. Many did not drink the powdered coffee. So, coffee, along with some other item was usually traded for "Klim", by most of these men. If any of the food was not punctured, by oversite of one of the German guard, that can of food could be traded for a premium. Everything was valued by the "D-Bar", the semi-sweet chocolate bar. Five packages of good cigarettes were usually worth a ½-D-Bar. A can of "Klim" was worth one D-Bar; one can powdered coffee was usually worth ½-D-Bar, etc. Most of us tried to "ration" ourselves, so the parcel would last for the full week. There were a few who would sit down, with his parcel, and not get up until he had eaten the whole seven pounds.

The boredom, intense hunger and extremely cold weather caused many of the G. I.'s have mental and nervous problems. There was too much idle time, without anything to do. I found myself to be in this group, in having mental and nerve problems. It was hard to keep sanity, in spite of how hard you tried. If we could have worked on farms, so we could have gotten outside the Stalag 17-B gates, it would have been a big boost to the morale of all of us. I do not mean working in aircraft factories, railyards, or any kind of work that would boost the Germans war effort. I mean farm work, where we could get outside the fences and have more to eat, and get away from the boredom. One of the men, who slept directly across the aisle from me, in barracks 31-B was badly affected by problems. For some reason, he liked me; possibly because I could understand his situation. He would walk up to me, with a blank stare, and say, "giddle, giddle, giddle". I would simply ask him how he was doing, but not get any kind of answer but, "giddle, giddle, giddle!" I felt sorry for him, but I could not help him, any way, except to be kind to him. He was a good man, and I have wondered if he had ever regained his sanity. There was another man, who lived in a different barracks, that was admitted to the German army hospital, on top of the hill from Stalag 17-B. He was having intense nerve problems. On one particular day, after he had been in the hospital for a while, he began yelling and screaming, "I'm going home, I'm going home". He jumped from his bunk, through the window toward the fence, yelling,"I'm going home, I'm going home!" I was told that the German guard called to him to "Halten", but he kept going toward the fence. When he reached the fence, he kept yelling, and climbing. The guard shot and killed him when he was about half-way up the fence. I know that there are men who had been POW's, who would have gladly traded their days of work, for our days of idleness and boredom. This is rightfully so, especially for the men who POW's in Japan. The American POW's were not worked as men, in Japan; they were worked as slaves. I found this to be true, after my return to the States. These men should be doubly-compensated for their slave-work. I feel that the United States should see that they are justly compensated, even if it should have to come from the U. S. Treasury! I'm afraid this will never happen. In about 1952, the U. S. Government signed away all of the rights of the prisoners of war of Japan. So it should be our own government who should have to pay these men!

We found the Luftwaffe (Air Corps.) soldiers to be better to us, in general, than the Wermacht (Infantry). We detested the SS-Troopers ("Storm-Troopers"). We knew that they wanted a chance to kill us, by their "hated-glare" that they would look at us. They didn't come into our camp very often; only the times when the regular guards found us to be hard to handle. The much-hated Gestapo were just that: They were MUCH HATED. Some of the Gestapo were in the Nazi Party, but some were not. The Nazi Party members wore their red arm-band, with the black swastika in the round white back-ground, with much pride. The Gestapo wanted the "opportunity" to kill us, same as the SS-Troopers. In fact, they were eager to do so. The leaders of our own country now refers to only the leaders of Germany, and not the people of Germany, who followed Hitler so faithfully, as "NAZIS". The people, in Germany, were not necessarily NAZIS, or in "The Party", but they most certainly did follow and backed the leaders of Germany to the bitter end. Only Hitler's elite, and "hand-picked", were in the

the NAZI PARTY. It just "burns my butt" to hear of the leaders of our country to refer to them as "Nazi's." As I have stated, there were very few German people who were Nazis, but practically ALL of the German people followed Hitler and his leaders, and were eager to do so. Of course, we all know the Jews were strictly an exception. The German civilians killed many American airmen, after they were shot down. It was customary with the German civilians to hang these men on the lamp-posts, on the town square, in their protest to the Americans, and our bombings. There were many Americans (Not just several) Americans that actually saw their own crew-members hanging on the lamp-posts. All American airmen were known to be "Luftgangsters". (Air Gangsters) "Herr" Goebbels was the propaganda minister of Germany, and it seemed that all of the people in Germany believed him, and his very effective propaganda. Goebbels spread the propaganda that all of the American airmen were "Gangsters from the Chicago area". I'm sure it was hard for the Germans to really believe that there were American flyers from other areas.

The thought was ever-present in our minds, as to how we would be accepted if and when we got back home. Would they understand why we were taken a prisoner-of-war? We thought often of how we would have to "clean up" our language, and be accepted into the society with others, who had not been seperated from the female sex. I never did let my vocabulary become as polluted as some of the men. But we just never hardly saw a woman. I remember that one day, when two women were working outside the fence of Stalag 17-B, in a corn field. There were rows of men lined up at the warning wire, watching them, and trying to call their "greetings" across the fences. How could we fit into society again? How could we make people understand us? How could we understand and accept others? Could they understand understand how hard we fought in our futile attempt to not be shot down, and captured? We doubted that we could make them understand. We found that there were comparatively few that did understand, or even want to understand. We found that the soldiers that were engaged in the most intense battles were the ones who understood the best. We, who had been prisoners-of-war still sort of "cling together", in a common bond, and understand each-other better, no matter where we were prisoners. We have both empathy and sympathy for others who had similar experiences.

There were guard towers at every corner of each compound, with one guard in each tower. The guard would often shine a bright search-light, at night along the fences, into the compounds, and onto the barracks walls, intermittently, at irregular intervals. There were guards walking on the outside often, along side the fences, between the towers. Some of the German guards would lead a German Shepherd dog, walking beside him. Only during the frequent night air raids, the stroung search-lights were not turned on. After the invasion, if any of the prisoners were outside the barracks, for any reason, the German guards would shoot, until he was either killed, or back in the barracks. We had strict orders to stay inside the barracks at night, no matter how closely the bombs were exploding.

Our Medical staff was headed by Major Fred Beaumont, who with three other doctors, and nine enlisted men tried to take care of 4256 enlisted airmen. There was a long line every day, so I had to be feeling very bad to stand in the line for "sick call". I did go on "sick call" only twice during the thirteen months during my confinement. It was not that I didn't need to, but

I knew there were men who needed medical attention much more than I needed it. Once, I went for a bad case of dysentary. The other time, I went for a bad cold. I would swear that the same medication, which was a brown pill, about twice the size of an aspirin, was given for both problems. Major Beaumont was captured at Kasserine Pass, North Africa. There was one doctor, who was incognito, and posed as S/Sgt. Harry Vosic, a gunner. He was actually Dr. Reuben Rabinovitch, a famous French doctor. He joined the Stalag 17-B group, at Stalag 7-A, while the Americans and French still were mixed and mingling together. Vosic's story is an interesting story, within itself. Only occasionally, he went to the 17-B medical facilities to offer help. He was Jewish, and wanted to keep a low profile, so he wouldn't be recognized.

Stalag 17-B was a well organized camp, as far as our American Camp leaders and the Military organization, was concerned. S/Sgt. Kenneth Joe Kurtenbach was the Camp Leader (or Spokesperson), Charles Belmer was the Camp Adjutant, Helmuth V. Roeder was the Camp Interpreter, Joe Dillard was the Man of Confidence. Each of the "A" and "B" ends of the barracks had a Barracks Leader, that reported to the Camp Leaders. If I remember correctly, there were eighteen barracks in the American side of the camp. I am sure that there was never anything done, as "Unbecoming as an American". It would have been recorded and reported after the war was over. There was never one incident reported, to my knowledge. I never saw, or heard of any American striking another, in anger. The German Camp Commander was "Kommandant Oberst (Colonel) Kühn." He was a Wermacht (Infantry) soldier. He was a "fierce" looking old man, who always seemed to be showing his teeth, as an angry bull-dog. I was told that he was a WW-1 soldier. He seemed to always resent us Americans, who were always laughing and joking, even at the worst part of our internment, hunger and cold weather. As I have stated before, it seemed that all of the German soldiers resented our laughing and joking. It seemed to me, as if they thought it was a weakness in us. Looking back, the "sense of humor" that we had, could have been our strength.

Father Stephen Kane was a prisoner-of-war in Stalag 17-B. I do not know where, or how, he was captured. He was a Catholic Priest, who held Catholic Services, as well as Protestant Services. His services was available for the Jewish men, who asked for his help. Everybody held the highest regard and respect for Father Kane. He died May 1, 1978.