

CAMP-OUT IN THE WOODS - AND - LIBERATION

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The morning of April 26th., we were awakened as usual at the crack of dawn. There was not the usual call of "Raus-Raus" (out-out), or the loud piercing whistle from the guards. We were shivering from the early morning dampness and cold air. It was cold, Cold, COLD. We were all shivering as we crawled from our make-shift shelter, already wearing our overcoats and all of our clothing, including our shoes. We had worn all of our clothing during the winter, on through our 18-day forced march. Some of us wrapped a blanket around us, over our overcoats. Our first decision was to build a fire, a big one, to get warm. Some of the other men had their fires already going. We gathered the small spruce needles, then piling the limbs on top. We then put the larger limbs on the top. We borrowed a few hot coals and dropped them down through the branches. We soon had a big and warming fire burning. It felt so good to begin to get warm again. As we were becoming warmer, we took our blankets from around us, and put them in our shelter. We kept feeding the fire for the warmth.

We began to wonder about our ration of bread, or any kind of food, as soon as we became warm. We did not receive a ration of bread, or any other kind of food from the Germans, from that day forward to the end of our capture. We lived, or existed, eight days without any food, whatsoever. We soon began exploring the "old friends" and acquaintances. As we walked through the woods, we could see that there were "lean-to" shelters similar to ours built everywhere. Some of the men were actually building log houses, of different sizes and shapes. One had obtained an axe; from where, I'll never know. We decided to go to the Inn river to get some drinking water. As we tried to cross the black-top road to reach the river, we were stopped by one of the guards, and wouldn't allow us to cross. It was clearly visible, that there was no water in the woods. Our first task at that time, was to find somebody who could speak enough German, and try to "reason" with the guards. After we found a man who spoke of the German language well enough, and had it settled, we went across the black-top road to the Inn river at our will. The banks of the Inn river was very steep and slippery, and the river was muddy, and swollen from its banks by the spring thaw. We were very hesitant to drink the muddy water, but we felt that we had no choice. In a short time, one of our men found a spring of fresh water, coming from the side of the steep hill, about one-quarter of the way to the river. We cleaned out the spruce needles and branches from it. After this was done, clear and cold water came flowing. We had found fresh water! The banks of the river was so very steep, that we had to help each-other, as we were climbing with our small tin-can of water. If you could get up the hill with a half can of water, you were lucky. The hill was more of a high bluff, than a regular hill. A good friend, Russell Howle, from the small town of Yantis, Texas, and I were helping each-other up the steep hill, with our can of water, when we spotted a dead soldier, lying on the ground, about twelve or fourteen feet above our spring. By his uniform, we agreed that he was an Italian soldier. He had completed the eighteen-day forced march, possibly from Stalag 17-B, probably without any food, only to die about three days later from starvation, only five days before our liberation. Russell and I looked at him for a short time, and talked between ourselves about it. Even he lay only 12' to 14' above the spring, we drank our water. Russell climbed up the hill, while I held the

water. He took the water, and sat it on the bank of the hill, and extended his arm to help me climb. We took once last glance at the dead Italian, and crossed the black-top road. The next time I went to get water, he had been removed from where he had been lying.

As we would go to the spring, we would look the terrain over. On the other side of the river, there looked to be very little rise of the river banks. It was a low plane, which looked to be nearly level for some distance, possibly for miles. We referred to the other side of the river as being the "low banks", and the side we were camping, as being the "high banks". We had a feeling of freedom that we had not felt, since our capture, even though the guards still held the rifles. They seemed to change their attitude, and not threaten us, as they had done for the many months of our capture. Some of our men found that the guards had a dread of being captured by the Americans, as we were being liberated. Some tried to "tease" them about it, and the guards would only turn away, and not hear their tormentors. They would keep walking away, as long as they were being followed. In seeing how all of the teasing was actually hurting these old men, I chose to not either tease or torment them. My feelings were that these old men were of age to be my grandfather. Another thing that impressed me about them, was the fact that they didn't have any food either. All of their possessions were carried on their backs, in knapsacks. None of them hardly ever removed their knapsack, as it seemed that they had a fear of somebody taking it. During the march, they carried their bottle of wine and bread in it. But in the woods, we didn't see them drinking any of their wine, or eating any bread. They were completely impoverished, the same as we Americans, as well as the other men of the various nationalities.

While we were in the woods for eight days, it seems that my memory of things and events sort of ran together. There had to be something of a special event for me to remember the dates. Such a time was that one day, while crossing the narrow black-top road, I looked to my right. There was a wagon filled with potatoes, being guarded by one of the German Volksturm. I went to the wagon, and asked the old guard for some of the potatoes. Of course, he refused to give any to me. His answer was, "Nein, Nein" (No, No). I then tried to bribe him with the only few cigarettes that I had left. He must have been one of the fanatics, who would follow Hitler and his followers to their death. When I tried to bribe him with cigarettes, he gave me a very stern "NEIN, NEIN", and began to remove his rifle from his shoulder, by the shoulder-strap. I knew that I didn't have even the smallest chance of getting any of the potatoes. The next day, I went to check on the potato wagon again. It was empty, and the guard was gone. I was told that the Russian prisoners had taken all of them during the night. I thought about the fanatic old guard, that I tried to bribe the day before. If he were the one who was on guard, and his "watch" went on for the night, his being a fanatic to Hitler's movement to the end, his life had probably ended during the night. The hungry Russians would kill, for two or three potatoes, or a piece of bread. I saw a Russian who got shot, by only crossing the "warning wire", trying to retrieve a package of cigarettes, while we were in Stalag 17-B. The Germans left him, dead, inside the "warning wire", and didn't move him for three or four days. If a Russian would risk his life to the extent that they would be killed for a pack of cigarettes, they would certainly kill a guard for a few potatoes. It seemed that the Russians held very little value for a life, even their own.

The woods were filled with every nationality of prisoners. The Germans tried to keep us from mixing, but to no avail. There were Americans, English, Italians, Russians, Serbs, and any other nationality of soldiers, whose country opposed Germany, were held in the woods. I never went into an area that was for any other nationality, and hardly any others came into our portion of the woods, except the Russians. We had to keep close watch on our blankets and overcoats, because the Russians would take anything. They were mingling in our area constantly. Everywhere a Russian would go, in our area, you would continuously hear somebody shouting, "Raus Mit, Russki". (Out with (you) Russian"!) The Russian soldier would move on, but completely unafraid. We didn't trust the Russians, PERIOD. I don't know of any of the other soldiers that came into our area. I'm sure the Russians thought we would possibly have some food, and they would "liberate" it from us, if we turned our head. We didn't have anything except our blankets and overcoats. If it would get warm, during the day, we would remove our overcoats, and leave them at the shelter. There was always somebody watching at our area of camp.

Once, while we were in the woods, a friend, Bill Goode and I decided to go to the Inn river and take a bath. We had been dirty for months, not days, or weeks, MONTHS. The sun was shining, and it was unusually warm. When we got to the river, we pulled off our clothes, shoes, etc., and stepped into the icy-cold water, and began trying to take a bath. As we we dipped into the cold water, we knew that it had to be a short bath. The water was flowing directly from the mountains, as the snow was thawing. That was the last, and only time we tried to take a bath in the icy-cold river.

Every night was from cold to Very Cold. It made no difference whether the day had been sunny, cloudy, or a gloomy cloudy and drizzling day, or if the rain had fallen throughout the day; the nights were still cold. There was one night that I particularly remember. We crawled under our blankets, into our "lean-tos", as usual, wearing all of our clothing, including our shoes. We either wore our overcoat, or used it for a blanket. Our feet, and up to our knees, always stuck out of our "shelter". During the freezing night, it began raining, and we were soaked, under our blankets. Later, the sleet began falling, then the snow began for the rest of the night. When morning finally came, we had a layer of snow covering us, an inch or more thick. I'm sure hardly none of the men got any sleep. The branches of the trees were hanging full of snow, as well as our "shelter". We built a fire as soon as possible, to try to dry. Later in the day, it began to get warm. As the snow, in the trees began melting, the water dripped into our shelter, and everything was completely, and thoroughly saturated. We had an awful time trying to dry ourselves, clothes and blankets. If only we had a shelter-half, it would have helped keep us partially dry, and warmer. The German soldiers had their shelter-halves, long raincoats and heavier clothing than we, so they didn't get as soaked as we. I suppose that the only way we could have become more miserable, was for us to have had to slept in a fox-hole full of water.

During one of the warmer days, we took off our shoes and socks, and inspected our feet. They were in terrible condition. There was nothing we could do, as we had no medication. The blisters that came on our feet during the march had burst, leaving the skin very tender and hurting. We washed our only pair

of socks, and dried them with the camp fire. Our socks had holes in both the toes, feet and heels. After they were dried, we turned our socks over, wearing the tops under our feet, with the toes turned back under our toes. This helped somewhat, but I wouldn't want to make another march, with the socks upside-down, and the toes turned underneath my toes.

About mid-morning of May 1st., we could hear the words, "There are some of our tanks and trucks across the river". The words just echoed through the woods. I ran through the opening and across the black-top road. There were already hundreds of Americans standing on the "high banks" of the Inn river, looking into the "low banks", and into the valley below. As I reached the banks, and worked my way through, to see the excitement, there were five or six tanks and four or five jeeps and trucks winding their way through the valley below. There was a house and two or three barns in the valley, that we had seen before, as we would look across the Inn, for the past week. The tanks were winding their way around the house and barns. They would stop for only a short time, then move on, with the trucks and jeeps following a short distance behind. As we stood on the "high banks" we waved and shouted at them. We watched the "show" for about an hour, shouting and waving, then the trucks, jeeps and tanks disappeared from our view, as they went into the trees. The tanks didn't have to fire one round, as possibly the houses and barns were vacant. We wondered if they had seen us, and knew who we were. We found out later, that they had not seen, and didn't know there were any American prisoners-of-war in that area. Had they seen us, possibly they would have opened fire on us, as we would have been hard to recognize as American soldiers, especially with the distance of possibly a mile from them. There was also the fact, that our uniforms were from a varied mixture of nationalities, as we had to wear anything that we could obtain. We knew, without a doubt, that we would be liberated before dark. We would be getting good American G. I. food. We held our hopes high, that our liberators would be arriving at any time. We went back across the black-top road, and began to wait. Some of our men began taunting the old guards, but with their defeated look, I wouldn't take any part in the taunting and harassing. We waited impatiently on through the day, making several trips to look up and down the black-top. Night came, and there was no sight or sound of our liberators. It seemed that they had just disappeared. Our hopes disappeared, too, but our hunger lingered on.

The next day, on May 2, all of sudden, one single American jeep, with an American Captain, and one enlisted man, drove up to the woods. How good they looked, with their well-filled cheeks, and fresh-looking clean uniforms! The Captain told us that they were a part of an advanced unit of the Thirteenth Armored Division, of the Third Army. PATTONS' ARMY! The Captain simply told us that a German Captain, who commanded the old Volksturm unit, had come to him, and told him that he had several thousands of Americans, as well as about the same number of "allies and Russian" prisoners of war to release to him, and told him of our location. The Captain and the enlisted man gave all of their rations for the day, to a few of the hungry American P.O.W.'s, who were standing near them and their jeep. The American Captain told us that he was going to leave the German Volksturm to "protect" us. (fox guarding the chickens, was my thought!) They immediately got back into their jeep, and sped down the black-top road, leaving us 4,000 American POW's standing and watching them disappear, in disbelief. We were still prisoners-of-war, with

the German guards still holding their rifles. We were still hungry, as we had no food, except for the three or four men who got the rations from the Captain and the enlisted man. We waited on through the day. During the late afternoon, a large 6 x 6 G. I. truck backed into the opening of the woods. The truck was filled to the top of the truck, with large G. I. food rations. The driver and passenger of the truck began handing out the large boxes of food. The first men in line got a large box, and happily returned to their area. I was a long way back in the line of 4,000 men, and watched the supply of food as it got smaller, and smaller. I was about the fortieth man from the back of the truck, when the last box of food was handed down. The driver of the truck called out, "that's all, boys", then the two men got in the truck and roared down the black-top, away from the woods. I am sure that the large boxes were to be distributed among all of us, but I never did see anybody, who got a box, dividing it with anybody else. They kept it all for themselves, or their group of men. There could have been a ration for at least 12 men, for a meal, if it had been correctly distributed. I stood for a short while, and watched the poor and starving Americans, as they left to go back into the woods, without any food, I actually cried for them, as I looked at the disappointed look on their faces. My crying was not for myself, but for those men that I was watching. Their faces and body were so poor and thin. Our faces was becoming to have a grayish-blue complexion, as the poor men from Mauthausen. The ones of us who were old enough to grow a beard, had a long beard, and shaggy hair, like old men. I was one of those who didn't grow a thick beard, as I had just "celebrated" my birthday the month before. I was 22 years of age, and having some "indian blood", I would never have a thick beard. Maybe tomorrow, we would get some food, and not have to spend another night in the woods. The words, "maybe tomorrow" was what had kept us alive for our whole duration we spent in the prisoner-of-war camp. I had been a prisoner for exactly thirteen months, and one day. Many had been prisoners had been there much longer, and some not as long. We crawled under our "shelter" and pulled our blankets and overcoats over us for the night.

May 3, we woke up again with the anticipation of being liberated. The old Volksturm guards shared their fire with us, and began to be more friendly with us. We stacked wood on the fire, and brought it to a large blazing, and warming fire. We stood around the fire and warmed, and waited until it began to get warm. I decided that I would "scout" around the country-side. I told Bob Matthews and Bob Leonhard of my decision. They told me that they were going down the black-top road. Maybe between the three of us, we could find food. The old German guards didn't oppose to hardly anything we wanted to do, it seemed, except to give their rifle and knapsack to us. I am sure that their Captain had given them that order. As I walked along through the woods, going in the opposite direction from the river, I came into an opening, about two miles from our camp. Through the opening, I saw a farm-house and barn. I began to approach the barn, and heard voices on the opposite side. I walked around the barn, and saw several prisoners, of all nationalities, in a circle. Inside the circle, I saw one lone hen, trying to escape from them. I hastened my step, to a near-run. I saw a stick about four feet long, just ahead of me, on the ground, in my path. I reached down and grabbed the stick, then ran into an opening in the circle of men. I raised the stick over my shoulder, ready to strike, as I joined the circle of men. Just as I filled the vacant space, the chicken made a wild run to attempt to get through. I hit the chicken with a sound blow, then grabbed her and pulled her head off, then dropped her to the ground to flop and leap, as she died. I kept only

a half-step behind. As she leaped and flopped, one of the Americans asked, "don't you want that chicken?" I looked at the man, and answered, "H--- yes, why do you think I killed her?" As the disappointed men moved away, I happily picked up my chicken, for the walk back to camp. As I walked to our area, I pulled the feathers out, and had removed the intestines, and threw them away. The chicken was ready to cook, as I reached our camping area. I triumphantly produced my chicken to our friends, and announced, "We will all eat, now!" I borrowed a large pan from a friend to cook her in. I built a good fire in front of our shelter, so I could watch her cook. It seems that I boiled the hen for more than an hour, trying several times to cut into her, but she was too tough. I boiled her longer. As I kept boiling, I kept a good fire burning. She just wouldn't get tender enough to begin to cut. That old hen must have been as old as the Volksturm guards! I kept watching for Bob Matthews and Bob Leonhard to return, as I was getting concerned about them. We were told that there some SS-troopers still in the woods, anywhere. They would kill anybody on sight, especially Americans. Matthews and Leonhard didn't appear, as I kept watching for them. All at once, I heard the yells and cheers coming from the opening of the woods: "HERE THEY ARE, TO LIBERATE US!" I immediately turned and left my chicken cooking. I had to see the excitement that we had waited long, to see!

Just as I got to the opening of the woods, the large 6 x 6 "G. I." truck was backing into the opening. The men were jumping from the back of the truck, with their rifles poised, and ready. The second truck backed into the area. It was empty. A captain and enlisted man drove in, and stopped. There was just too much to watch at the same time! It was a sight that I will never forget, and can't describe. The men were well-fed, and well dressed in their battle dress uniforms, with their canteens and extra ammunition. They were magnificent, being lean and looked to be well-trained for any combat. They were as you would expect "Pattons' men to be". There was one tall PFC that especially caught my eyes. I found out later that he was from South Carolina, I found out later. He was directly in front of me, as I reached the location, where I wanted to be. He went directly to the old Volksturm guard, ahead of me. The old guard looked as he were actually frozen to the ground. He was so afraid, that he could not move. The tall PFC roughly grabbed his rifle from his shoulder, and threw it to the ground. He reached, and grabbed the old mans' much-coveted knapsack, and threw it to the ground, also. He pushed him toward the group of old guards, who were already lining into formation, behind the truck. The old man reached and grabbed his knapsack by the strap, and began pulling it, as he was trying to run for the formation. The PFC glanced around and saw this, as he was going for another guard. He ran back and pulled the knapsack from him again, and threw it about ten feet away. He then placed a well-aimed onto the back-side of the old man, then shoved him toward the formation, and shouted to him, "I told you to leave that d----- bag there!" The old man began crying. I feel that it was more from fear, than from hurt. The old man looked at us Americans, who were just being liberated and whimpered, "kamerade". One of the newly being freed Americans, whom I knew from my own experience, had taken so much abuse from the Germans, went and grabbed him by the lapels of his uniform, and answered, "Don't call me comrade, you ----. He pushed the old man himself. I went and looked into the bag, as I felt there must be some food. There was nothing of special importance in it. There were only a safety razor, a

few pictures (probably of his family), and a few items of underclothing. There were no items of any value, but it could have been all of the possessions that he owned.

I went to the formation, after all of the German Volkstrum had been put into formation, just in time to hear the German Captain, that I had never seen before, tell the U. S. Captain, "We treated your men with respect, and under the rules of the Geneva Convention. I demand that you do the same to my men!" The American Captain answered him loudly, truthfully and directly, "Respect, Hell, where is the food for these men?" He indicated toward all of us, sweeping his arms toward all of us. The German Captain meekly answered, "there is no food". The American Captain demanded of the German Captain, "Do you call it respect, to let these men starve to death; look at them. How long has it been since these men have eaten?" The German meekly answered, "I don't know." One of the newly liberated Americans stepped forward to the Captain, and told him of the length of time that we had nothing to eat: "We have been in the woods eight days, without a bite of food to eat. We were on the march, of a distance of approximately two hundred miles, with only one loaf of bread daily, to be divided between seven men. Some of the men told me that they had received a cup of boiled barley, but the group of men that I was with didn't get any of the barley. That is all of the food we have had in twenty-six days, Captain. Then before that, we were only on a slowly starvation diet." The American Captain looked at the man who answered him, in disbelief. He then looked around to all of us starving men. I am sure that we all had a look that made the captain believe the answer of the American soldier, who had answered him so truthfully. He then turned his scorn and anger to the German captain, and "dressed him down good", as we would have said. Our American Captain ordered the German Captain, and all of his old Volkstrum on the back of the two trucks, along with our "heroes of the Thirteenth Armored Division", who had just liberated us. The two trucks and the Captains' jeep roared out of sight, along the narrow black-top road. It was such a glorious day for all of us! We returned to our "lean-to's" in the woods. I went to my campfire, to check on my chicken. MY CHICKEN WAS GONE! Somebody stole my chicken while I was at the clearing, watching all of the excitement. They had stolen the pan that I had borrowed, too. I went to the friend, who let me borrow it, and told him about it. He simply said, "That's alright, I don't suppose I'll need it any more, anyhow." What a relief it was to me, but I'm sure he was right.

Toward the late afternoon, we were told that we were going to be moving into a large Aluminum factory, at Braunau, by foot. We would be together for food, we were told! But Bob Leonhard and Bob Matthews were not back to the woods, yet. None of us had anything to pack, except our blankets and overcoats. So most of the Americans were moving out of the woods toward Braunau, as soon as possible. In hardly no time, there were very few Americans left in the woods. The Russians began moving in fast, pilfering anything they could find. There were very few Americans left, as I have already stated, but I thought that I had to stay for Matthews and Leonhard. We called to the Russians, "Raus Mit Russki". They just came in closer. They

began to look as if they were ready to attack us, I hurriedly gathered our blankets under my arms, along with the overcoats, and left the woods in a hurry. As I left the woods, I thought to myself, "Those Russians would kill a man for his overcoats and blankets, especially if they thought we would have any food." When I reached the black-top road, I put everything down on it, and began to try to bundle it all together, so I could take it into the factory. As I was working in the middle of the black-top road, I heard a voice call from nearly a mile down the road, "HEY, BLACKIE". (Some of the crew members called me "Blackie") I looked down the road and recognized the two men to be Matthews and Leonhard. What a relief! I called as loudly as I could, "Come on, Come on". They didn't seem to understand the emergency that we were about to get into, so I called to them, "Run, Run, all of our men are going to Braunau, and nearly all of them are already gone". When they got to me, I told them about the pilfering Russians, and that we would have to move in a hurry. Then I told them that we were moving to an aluminum factory, in Braunau, in case they didn't hear me from the distance. We walked about three or four miles, and dark closed in on us early, as it had become very cloudy. In a short distance, after it became dark, it began raining very hard. Ahead, we could see a farmhouse, just to the left of the black-top. We went on the farmhouse porch, and knocked, to see if we could come inside, out of the rain. A German woman, about 25 or 30 years of age, came to the door and opened it, and said, "Komen Sie", which meant for us to come inside. As soon as we got inside the house, we could hear American voices coming from the back part of the house. She guided us into the kitchen. She was heating water on the stove, for us all to make coffee from a large can of powdered can of coffee, which undoubtedly came from one of the G. I. trucks, during their bringing some food to us. Leonhard and Matthews had found some sugar, on their excursion. There was also a very large box of C-ration cookies on the table. We were told by the other Americans, who were already there, to feel free to drink as much coffee, and eat as many cookies as we wished! We had a good, and happy party until about midnight, when one of the men went to the door, and reported back to us that it had quit raining, and we should get on the road toward Braunau. The women didn't want us to leave, in fear of the Russians, but we told them that we had to go on into Braunau. (There were three women, in all, after we got into the kitchen.) All of the unused coffee, sugar and C-ration cookies were left with the women for their use, after we left. We all left the farm house, thanking the women for their hospitality, in warming the water, and letting us come in their warm and dry house, until the rain was over. These women expressed their great fear of the Russians who were in the woods. Our group of possibly over twelve went on into the Aluminum factory, arriving there after 3:00 A. M. The aluminum factory was a huge building. There were enough lights for us to see where we could find a space for the rest of the night.

The next morning, on April 4, we were awakened by the old familiar sound that we had heard back in the States. The familiar call of "CHOW CALL" rang throughout the building, and we were ready. I remember that we had scrambled dry powdered eggs, bacon or sausage, coffee and WHITE BREAD. I remember the first bite that I took of the white bread. It was fresh, and it was just the same as "angel-food cake", it was so soft. It seemed so soft that there seemed to be no "substance" to it, as we were so accustomed to the black German bread.

After our delicious breakfast, the announcement was made that all of us were to sign in on the roster, for their record, as well as for our future flight, by plane, to Le Harve, France. We were told to read the bulletin board several times a day, to see if our name would be on it. I am not sure of the number of times we were told to read the bulletin board, but we read it several times daily, as we were instructed. We were told, also, to not touch, or take any of the hand tools in the huge building, as everything was owned by an American. We wondered who the rich American could be, for there was no damage, any place, in the building. We were told that we could go anywhere we wished, but keep close to the building. We were soon "on our own", to do anything or go anywhere within the building. It surely was a huge building, as there was plenty of room for all of us 4,000 former prisoners-of-war. I remember stepping outside the building only once, before it was time for me to board the truck and trailer. One of the most amazing things that I remember so well, is the hunger we had felt for such a long time, but now we "filled" with food before we wanted to stop eating. We were told that it was because our empty stomach had shrunk so much, that we couldn't eat very much. We had three meals a day, for the first time since any of us left our home base. It had been thirteen months since I had eaten three meals a day, but for some of the men, it was over three years. With us eating three meals a day, we hardly ever became hungry before it was time to eat again. There was also "snacks" of cookies and coffee available, any time we wanted to eat. Man-O-Man, this was paradise!

The large 6 x 6 trucks, pulling long trailers, driven by black men, began to pull to the door of the huge building, as the names of men began to appear on the bulletin board. We began reading the bulletin board more often, in anticipation that our name would be listed. Each man was told to throw their overcoat and blankets in a pile, before boarding the trailers, as we wouldn't be needing them any more. It seemed odd that somebody did not have to "guard" the overcoats and blankets.

May 8, 1945 was "Victory Day", and the war was won in Europe. It seems that it was the same day that my name appeared on the bulletin board, to "board" the long trailer for our trip from the aluminum factory. As I lined up to get on the trailer, I threw my overcoat and blankets in the pile, that was becoming quite large, and higher. I "boarded" the trailer, and sat down. As soon as the long trailer was loaded, with approximately 50 to 60 men, the driver "revved up" the engine in the 6 x 6 G. I. truck. We cheered, and waved happily at the group who were lined up for the next truck and trailer. How good it felt to be riding, for the first time, with a full stomach, instead of "trudging" along, with the intense hunger! The driver pulled on the narrow black-top road, turned left, then stopped. We looked ahead to see what was causing the delay. There was another truck and trailer filled with men crossing a long "pontoon" bridge, across the Inn river. The bridge had been built by one of the Engineering outfits. As soon as the truck in front got completely across, "our" driver slowly and carefully proceeded to cross the long "pontoon" bridge. He drove very slowly. When we were a short distance on the bridge, we could look over the sides of the trailer, in which we were riding, and see the reason. The weight of the truck and trailer, with all of us men, was so heavy, that water was nearly over the bottoms of the tires of both the truck and trailer. We held our breath, and just hoped that one of the cables holding the

"pontoon" bridge wouldn't break, or the anchors for the cables wouldn't pull out. As we crossed, the "pontoons" were submerged completely out of sight, under the muddy water. We breathed more easily after we reached the other side of the bridge.

A short distance ahead, we could see a dozen, or more, C-46 transport planes waiting. The driver pulled along-side one of the two-engine planes, and stopped. As we went by the driver we complimented, and thanked him for our safe trip across the bridge. He was a good and careful driver, and we told him so, as we left the long trailer and truck. We went directly to our waiting plane, and began to "climb aboard". As I passed one of the crew members of the plane, I asked, "Where do you keep the parachutes?" The airman laughed and said, "What parachutes?; you won't need a 'chute aboard this plane." I told him that a parachute had saved my life, just over thirteen months earlier. I saw that I was getting nowhere, in my attempt to get a parachute, so I boarded the plane, but with sort of a reluctance. As soon as the plane seats were all filled, the side door was closed. The pilot started the engines, and "taxied" from the parking place. He lined up at the end of the run-way, and as soon as the plane ahead cleared the runway, our pilot "revved-up" the two engines, holding the brakes. When the engines reached the correct RPM, he released the brakes, and we surged forward. The plane was soon airborne, and we were on our way to Le Harve, France.

"OFF WE GO, INTO THE WIDE BLUE YONDER, CLIMBING HIGH INTO THE SKY.....!!".