TIME CHANGES ALL THINGS

Donald R. Amundson

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Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the help of my daughter-in-law, Elaine Amundson, for this I shall always be grateful.

To My P.O.W. Friends:

I have been frequently asked by my family and friends to write about some of my Prisoner of War experiences. I finally decided to do so.

In this narrative I have endeavored to give a true account of our treatment, including the hardships endured during the last three months of the War. The period of time known as the "black march".

Some will say I was not harsh enough in my reference to our German captors, or that I have not given a true picture of life in a German P.O.W. camp. I realize many camps were much worse than either Luft 4 or Luft 6. I also know many P.O.W.s were tortured and killed in other areas. I believe this was the exception and not the normal treatment for British and American Airmen.

According to the War Department figures, compiled after the War, only 1% of European P.O.W.s died after being captured. This figure compares with the over 40% reported in the Pacific Theatre.

In my story I have tried to show myself as a young airman who tried to do his best. In no way were we heroes. The heroes did not come home.

Many were like my pilot, Lt. Whitehead, who lies entombed in our plane on a mountain top somewhere between Albania and Yugoslavia. He stayed at the controls until all crew members had left the plane, for this act he lost his life. May our nation ever be grateful for men like him.

Don Amundson
Nampa, Idaho

YOUTH

One of the results of moving away from the town where I spent my youth is that in my mind, the town stays frozen in time. Buildings can burn, be destroyed or stand windowless and empty, but to me they are still as I remember them. In my mind's eye I see Evan's Store, across from the Post Office, piled high with crates of chickens. I can see the farmers' wives trading their chickens and eggs for groceries. I can almost hear the music from the bandstand parked in the center of the street. The air is filled with the smell of popcorn. It is coming from the machine in front of Larson's Café. I see a boy in a starched white shirt and pants running down the street with the freedom only a young boy has, and I realize that boy is me.

It is little wonder that the memories of Radcliffe, Iowa are so vivid to me. For sixteen years it was my world. It was my school and my friends.

I would roam all over town but my favorite haunt was A.B. Narland's Store, with the Iowa Traveling Library. It was here that my mind was opened up to the world. I would curl up in one of his massive leather office chairs and I would travel with Marco Polo. I would visit Africa with Osa Johnson and swim the Hellespont with Richard Helleburton. These are names of people who are not often remembered today, but in my youth they were important to me. I was fascinated with their travels. I wished nothing more than to emulate them.

I worked for A.B. Narland. I would help by sweeping his floor, building the fire in the store furnace, mowing his lawn and watching the store when he went fishing or to Des Moines. He showed me many acts of kindness. His last act, before I left Radcliffe, was to alter my suit for the freshman class program.

A large number of people living in Radcliffe were my relatives. I had many aunts, uncles and first and second cousins living there. My grandfather and his brothers left Norway for Wisconsin and then settled in Iowa. They broke the prairie sod and they raised their families. They lived and died in Radcliffe. I thought this was what I would do.

My grandparents on both sides of my family emigrated from Norway. My grandfather on my mother's side was Rasmus Knudslien. He was born in Oslo, Norway on December 12, 1862. In Norway he had been apprenticed to a wheelwright. In America he entered the carpenter trade. He built many churches and homes around Bode, Iowa. He was a proud man. He built his home, workshop and most of his tools. He loved his apple trees and birch trees. He planted them to remind him of Norway. His only disagreement with my grandmother was his insistence on keeping a case of beer in the basement. She was sure he would lose his soul for this act and he would surely go to hell.

My maternal grandmother's name was Kristiane Johnson Knudslien. She was born in Ostsimmer, Norway on March 27, 1861. Her father was a forester and they must have lived in the woods as their home had been built of logs. My grandparents came over on the same boat and landed in America on May 4, 1883. They had ten children. My mother

was Borghild Knudslien, their eighth child. Most of my aunts and uncles lived some distance away so our family was not close to them.

Left: Maternal Grandparents
Right: My Parents

We would visit our grandparents once a year, as they were quite elderly. We were a large family and I am sure we were a trial to them at every visit. The visits gave me a certain liking for Norwegian foods and much empathy and kinship for the Norwegian people. My grandmother never lost her love and longing for Norway. The mention of Norway would bring tears to her eyes. I am sure she would envy today's immigrants who visit Norway every year. My grandparents were never able to visit Norway again. My grandmother

died on February 9, 1947. My grandfather also died in 1947, just six weeks after the death of his wife.

My grandfather on my father's side was born in Odda, Norway on October 1, 1842. He was the ninth child in a family of ten. He came to America in 1870. Like many early immigrants he was following his older brothers who had settled in Wisconsin. In 1875 the brothers began moving to Iowa. They settled in the area around Radcliffe, Iowa where my grandfather farmed until his death in 1910.

I was told by one of my cousins, Maxine Severson, that my grandfather had gone back to Norway once or twice and in his Bible he tells of his trip to California in 1897. He suffered from asthma a possible reason for his wanderlust.
My grandmother on my father's side was named Oline Gertina Amundson. She was born in Madison, Wisconsin on January 21, 1852. She died on October 23, 1934. Her father was Enoc Olson, born Jan 23, 1820. He died in 1905.

My father was Omer Amundson. He was born May 27, 1890, and he was the eighth child in his family. He was twenty years old when his father died. None of the brothers were interested in farming so they sold the farm and moved their mother to town.

My uncle Edgar moved to Eagle Grove and was in the automobile business until he passed away in the late sixties. When he retired he was one of the oldest franchised dealers in the United States.

My uncle, A.C. Amundson, owned and operated a livery stable and a music store in Radcliffe. Before 1900 he was traveling to Illinois, buying and bringing cars back to Iowa to sell. He was very successful until the Depression when he was forced to sell everything but the music store. He sold his home and moved above the music store which he had been forced to close. In the thirties he opened a beer tavern and was modestly successful until he passed away in the early nineteen forties.

My father worked for his brother for a time and drove the drummers around the county when they arrived in town by train. At that time the Finn Hotel was open and many traveling men stayed there and needed transportation. Some of my father's friends commented on how they resented his having access to a car at a time when owning one was very unusual.

My father had many jobs. He had been a car salesman and a truck driver. He had also managed the Champlin Oil Bulk plant in Radlciffe. In the late 1930's he opened a pool hall. The Town Council had refused him a license. They believed pool would have a bad influence on the morality of Radcliffe. My father discovered that State law governed private clubs and these clubs did not require city licenses. He soon opened, "Omer's Clubroom," a private club. Dues were $1.00 with fifty cents to be played out in pool.

The Town Council was very upset. Not only was my father able to operate, he was also collecting an extra fifty cents from every new customer. The only inconvenience to my father was that he had to soap the windows so people could not see into the club. This

actually helped his business. Church members could be playing or watching pool, without other townspeople seeing them.

I was delivering newspapers, selling magazines, mowing lawns, doing anything to earn spending money. In the summer, we boys in town, would work for farmers detasseling seed corn. In the fall, farmers would hire groups of boys to pick up the corn missed or knocked down by the corn pickers. Usually we would be paid ten cents an hour and we would be given lunch and dinner.

On Sunday mornings during the winter, my father would leave fifteen cents and the keys to the pool hall on the kitchen table. This was to allow me to leave half of my newspapers in the pool hall while I was delivering the other half. It gave me a place to warm myself before completing my route. The fifteen cents was for a sweet roll and a cup of hot chocolate at Larson's Café.

I was surprised one day when my father informed us that he had sold the pool hall and had purchased a bowling alley in Marshalltown. He was planning on moving it to Forest City. I was very upset. This meant I would be leaving school with only a few weeks left in my first year of High School.

It was then decided that I would stay with my Aunt Carrie and Uncle A.C. until school ended. As I loved both dearly I was happy with their decision. Once school was out, I would leave for Forest City.

I left Radcliffe excited and eager to move to a larger town. Forest City was the size of Iowa Falls and to a boy from Radcliffe it was almost a city. The consequences of the move never entered my mind. I had no idea how fate would conspire to keep me from ever coming back to Radcliffe. I would never again see many of my friends and classmates.

I had attended school for nine years with the same classmates, and I had been confirmed in the Lutheran Church. All my memories as a youth were centered on Radcliffe. Now I can only look back with nostalgia. When I visit, I find that all my friends are either dead or have moved away. There is little left of the town I knew as a boy, but the memories continue to draw me back.

FOREST CITY AND IOWA FALLS

Forest City was a beautiful Iowa town. It was about the size of Iowa Falls and had a population of about 5000 people. Like Radcliffe it had been settled by Norwegian immigrants. It had a strong Lutheran heritage. It was home to Waldorf College, one of many small Lutheran Colleges scattered throughout the Midwest. (Now it is the home of Winnebago, an R.V. manufacturer. They took the name from the county in which Forest City is located. I am sure the new industries in the area, have changed the town beyond recognition.)

The bowling alleys were very profitable and as my father became more secure financially he wanted to expand. He was astute enough to see how the War might effect his business. More young men were leaving for the Army every day.

My father decided to close the bowling alley in Forest City and move it to Lake Mills. He was also going to have my uncle Charlie Knudslien build new alleys in Forest City. My father underestimated the time it would take to build them and he also underestimated the cost. If that was not enough the bowling alleys in Lake Mills were doing poorly.

We finally opened the new bowling alleys in Forest City, but they did poorly too. Both the young men at the College and those from the surrounding community had left for service.

I had been attending my second year of High School and during the summer had spent most of my time managing the Lake Mills alley. My father announced that he had sold the Forest City alleys and he was moving the Lake Mills alleys to Iowa Falls.

I was sorry to move. I loved the countryside around Forest City. The country was wooded and there were nearby lakes. The most important thing was that school was starting soon and we would be moving during the first two weeks of school.

In September we moved to Iowa Falls. School had started and I felt it was too late to enroll so I began to help my father by setting pins and taking his place when he had to leave.

After a couple of weeks I was approached by Tony Gentile of Gentiles Smoke Shop. He offered me a job in his business and I accepted. I started working for him at twelve dollars per week. I would work one week from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and the next week I would work from 12:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. The week I worked nights I was never through until 1:00 a.m. because the cleaning and stock keeping had to be done before closing for the night.

It was fun to work for Tony. He was only twenty-eight years old and he had a great personality. He had inherited a great deal of money and property from his father. I worked hard but not because of him. I always worked hard. In a little over a year he was

paying me twenty-two dollars per week. At that time the assistant manager at the J.C. Penney Store was making thirty dollars per month.

I shall always be grateful for the experience of working for Tony at the smoke shop. As the War progressed help was becoming harder to find and many days and weekends I was alone in the store. This taught me how to cope with any problem in the store. I learned how to merchandise showcases of pipes, wallets, cigarette lighters and magazines. I made and filled large glass containers with cheese and ham sandwiches and filled coolers with soda pop and beer. I would also wash and clean the display cases and booths. I never stopped working and I found that nothing could have prepared me better for a lifetime in the retail business.

I had wanted to enlist in the Army for some time, but my mother and father were against it. I finally prevailed and had their permission to enlist. I traveled to Des Moines and found that the enlistment office was closed. I returned to Iowa Falls feeling like a fool for having wasted the trip.

On February 14, 1943, my number in the draft was called and I reported for induction at the City Hall in Iowa Falls. The medical officer examining the inductees was our medical doctor from Radcliffe, Dr. Gaurd. When he saw me, he came over to greet me and ask about my family. He had delivered six or seven of my brothers and sisters. I am sure sometimes he was never paid for his services. He never turned people away that couldn't pay. He was a nice man and a great representative of the medical profession.

ARMY INDUCTION AND BASIC TRAINING

After our induction in Iowa Falls, we boarded a train to Camp Dodge. The first person I met on the train was an old friend, Arnold Espe. Arnold and I had grown up in Radcliffe and it was great to have a friend to share this new and exciting experience.

We were on the run the few days we were in Camp Dodge. They issued us new uniforms, and a barracks bag full of clothes. We sent our civilian clothes home. I still have Arnold's picture taken at the P.X. in his new uniform.

We began endless rounds of physicals, shots and tests. It was February 1943, one of the coldest on record. The only heat in the buildings was a small stove at one end. We were running around either nude or in shorts during our physicals and I had never been so cold. When I started shaking, one of the doctors came over and asked whether I didn't want to go into the service. I replied, that I did want to go into the service but I was just too cold. He pulled me out of line and led me into a small room that had a stove and was very warm. They brought me my clothes and told me to get dressed. I was amused later when thinking about what happened. I wondered what the doctor would have done if I'd said I was scared and that I wanted to go home.

Arnold and I soon parted. He went into the Tank Corps. and I went into the Air Corps. I think it was our physique that determined our assignments. I was very thin. Arnold had a more athletic build. I was sorry we couldn't stay together. I never saw him again. (After

service he went to College but he was never in Radcliffe when I visited. I would always ask how he was doing and was happy to learn he was a successful teacher.)

Picture of Arnold Espe in his new uniform, Fort Dodge 1943.

I was very happy to be assigned to the Air Corps. and we soon boarded a troop train for St. Petersburg, Florida. The train was a Pullman with an upper and lower berth. It was my first long train ride. I loved looking out the window at the scenery.

I will never forget our arrival in St. Petersburg. It was early one February morning and the sun had just come up as we left the train. We were wearing our woolen winter Army uniforms as we stepped out into a soft, warm Florida morning. We were met by a few young drill sergeants that lined us up as best they could. We had shouldered our barracks bags. Some of us had a hard time carrying them as we proceeded up the street. We were walking along the boardwalk trying to keep up but also looking at the ocean. Most of us were seeing the ocean for the first time.

We walked behind a wagon delivering milk. Two of the fellows ran up and each stole a quart from the back of the wagon. My first thought was that they must be from New York. (I don't know why I thought that except in those days I believed most people from New York were dishonest. Today when I look back on how ignorant and prejudiced I was it makes me ashamed.)

Soon we were assigned to our hotels. Our hotel was on the Gulf of Mexico. It was an old wooden building with four floors. The three top floors each had a long hall going down the center of the building with rooms on both sides. I believe there were six or eight men to a room. We slept on bunk beds. There was a restroom on each side of the hall. It contained a stool and wash basin. There were no bath facilities on the top three floors. On the first floor, facing the Gulf of Mexico, was a large communal shower, toilets and wash basins. There was one of these facilities on either side of the hall. It is possible one was originally intended for men and the other for women. At the time I wondered, how much the people on vacation paid for these sorry accommodations.

Before the training started we had to serve on K.P. I believe to most of us this was the most dreaded duty in the Army. They would wake us at 4:00 a.m. and march us to the mess hall, which was half a mile down the road. There we would be turned over to the mess sergeants and cooks. Who would assign the duties; mopping, scrubbing, dish washing, peeling potatoes, and washing out garbage cans. We had a short break after breakfast and then we would start preparing for lunch. We had a break after lunch, when the mess hall was closed for inspection. After dinner was served we had to clean for the

last time. We generally were through at about 7:00 p.m. The next morning it would start all over again. After a week you were worn out and hoped never again to serve K.P.

After we had served our week of K.P., our training started in earnest. Every morning after breakfast, we would be marched to the barracks. We would then be marched out to the field for calisthenics. This would last for about an hour. There was a large wooden stage with a young man standing there. He led us in pushups, sit-ups, jumps, and knee bends. We did this until some of the men dropped. When this would happen the men were just pulled to one side until they revived.

Calisthenics was followed by a march to the beach. We would be forced to sing loud and clear as we marched. If we were not loud enough our drill sergeant would make us run. We learned a lot of new songs. On the beach we would do close order drills. I can still hear, "Left flank, Right flank, To the rear march." I would hear this over and over again. I would hear it in my sleep.

Retreat or review was held every night. We were marched to our barracks around 4:00 p.m. to shower and change into our dress khakis. At 5:00 p.m. we were marched down the street singing, with our drill sergeant counting cadence. We would meet and join other companies as we approached the reviewing stands. The band would be playing as we marched past the stands. They were always crowded. Army and Navy officers and their wives would come from miles to watch the show. By the time we were dismissed, we were exhausted.

We were in Florida at the right time of the year. The end of February and March are cool in the morning and hot in the afternoon. The only time the heat or sun was uncomfortable was in the late afternoon. It was then, during calisthenics or standing on parade during retreat, that we really suffered.

We would march together for our shots, tests or lectures. We visited the dentist two or three times. The intelligence tests seemed to become more difficult to me. I think this was where they decided what schools I was qualified for and that type of testing stopped.

I thought the food was good, except for the fact that they served celery soup at every meal. We were sure the commanding officer's wife had a celery farm. I had a hard time eating their eggs. Those were bad. They always had a brown crust or were hard boiled. Creamed hamburger on toast wasn't bad even though it had a bad name.

I loved walking out on the pier, buying fresh orange juice and seeing the hotels that lined the beach. The sand seemed endless and the palm trees were very different from any trees in Iowa. It seemed the more of the United States I saw, the more I wanted to see. This is as true today as it was then.

We soon finished our basic training and I found I was on the posted list for gunnery school in Laredo, Texas.

Photo taken at Basic Training, September 25, 1943.

ARMY SCHOOLS AND FLIGHT TRAINING

Each new train ride was exciting. I wish I had been a more seasoned traveler. I would have been more aware of the States we were traveling through and would have noted the cities along the route. Looking out the windows, I watched the scenery as it passed. I noticed the amount of black people and how dark they were compared to the few blacks I had seen in Iowa. The black people standing along the tracks looked thin and malnourished.

The soil also seemed different. In some areas of Alabama and Mississippi it seemed to be nothing but red clay. Many poorly framed houses, little better than shacks, stood high off the ground. They were supported by posts. I believe this was done to protect them from flood waters. The land along the Gulf was as flat as a table with many rivers.

Before arriving in New Orleans we went through a forested area and a lumber town. Along the tracks were rail cars of small logs. There was sawdust and red clay soil everywhere. We stopped for a few minutes. It was late at night and most of us got off the train to exercise our legs. The air was hot and humid. All I could think of was how glad I was to be born in Iowa and not in the deep South.

We re-boarded the Pullman and it left town. The people alongside the tracks looked at us airmen with such envy. I thought at the time it was because we were traveling in such luxury. We had sleeping cars and an attached dining car. I later learned that the

differences were much more significant than the simple train ride. I learned of segregation; the separate restaurants, water fountains and rest rooms. I came to realize that there were two versions of America, ours and theirs.

We soon reached New Orleans. There we had a six hour layover while waiting for another train to take our car on to San Antonio.

New Orleans was an interesting city for a young man to visit. We hired a guide at the train station for a tour of the city. I can still picture him in his navy blue jacket, white straw hat and white cane with which he would stop traffic as we crossed the streets. We toured the many Catholic churches in the city. We toured the residential district showing the homes, gardens and metal lace work on their houses. All the homes were surrounded by high walls, and were very private. I was impressed with the history and the beauty of the buildings. We also toured Canal Street, the bars and the restaurants. We entered The Cave, now a bar, that had been used by the Pirate Jean Lafitte. I shall always remember Canal Street. It was the widest street I had ever seen.

Once again, we were on our way. We stopped briefly in San Antonio and in a few hours were in Laredo, Texas.

After being assigned our barracks we learned our first assignment was K.P. again. What a disappointment! A week of K.P. cured a person of ever wanting to be in the Army, but a week isn't forever, and we soon started our training.

After the week of K.P. we spent five weeks in training. The first two weeks were spent in classes. We learned to take apart a fifty caliber machine gun, blindfolded, while being timed. We had classes on aircraft recognition, demonstrations on parachute jumping, gas masks, and we were tested both physically and mentally.

The third week of training, we started flying. We had been issued our flight equipment. While in training, we wore a one piece flight suit and a leather jacket. We reported to the flight line dressed in our regalia. We thought we looked like fighter pilots.

Pictured with Bill Drey.

The building we reported to had a long counter where we picked up our thirty caliber ammunition. We had each been assigned a color and the tips of the ammunition had been painted with the assigned colors. On one wall there was a large scoreboard with our names and color displayed. In front of the building was a line of AT-6 planes. They were a single engine, open cockpit, two seater plane. As I came out of the building with my ammunition over my shoulder, I felt as if I were ten feet tall.

When I climbed into the plane, I shrunk back to my normal size. This would be my first plane ride. Mounted on the side of my seat was a thirty caliber machine gun. Over the radio the pilot told me what was expected of me. I was to stand up and holding onto the gun, fire at a ground silhouette target. We took off and flew a short time. When we were in the target area he informed me to be ready to fire. As I stood up in the plane, with nothing holding me except the gun, the pilot made a sharp turn and made a pass over the target area. I was so scared. I still wonder how I kept my wits about me and how I was able to fire, but fire I did. Somehow we flew back to the base and landed. After that initial flight, all other flights were a piece of cake.

Our target practice continued on two other planes. One was the AT-11, a smaller twin engine trainer. It had a thirty caliber machine gun mounted on a tripod in the waist of the plane. We were firing at targets being towed behind another plane. Next we trained on a larger plane, the AT-18. This plane had a turret mounted on it. Again we were firing at towed targets. I was lucky and had the required number of hits early. I gave my ammunition to other gunners who needed the same color I had been issued. Toward the last few days there were many gunners looking for extra ammunition, but it had to be the color they had been firing.

We practiced our gunnery skills with all types of weapons. We were always on some type of firing range. We shot .22 and .38 caliber revolvers, .45 pistols and .12 gauge shotguns. We shot skeet, trap and a form of both with our shotguns. We practiced from moving vehicles. We would be driven down a dirt road while we were standing on the back of a

truck. We would fire at clay pigeons that were coming from all directions. They tried to teach us how to track and lead a target.

The training base at Laredo was miles square. The land grew nothing but sagebrush, cactus and rattlesnakes. We had a large pit of snakes on the base. A cowboy who had been drafted, road the fence around the base on his horse. When he saw a snake he would put it in a sack, bring it back to the base, and throw it in the pit. In the evening he would entertain us by jumping into the pit, picking up one or two snakes, and showing us their fangs. Most of us had never seen a rattlesnake and we thought he was crazy to touch them.

I only visited Laredo once. It was a small border town on the Rio Grande River. Across a bridge was Nueva Laredo. This was ranching and cowboy country. How a cow could live and find anything here to eat was beyond me. I stopped at a café in Laredo and ordered a steak. It was served with refried beans, rice and tortillas. I knew nothing about salsa and it was years before I tried Mexican food again.

I graduated from gunnery school at the end of May and I was transferred to Buckley Field. I was given a ten day delay in route before having to report for duty so I left for home.

Having been gone for only three months things had not changed very much. I visited a few friends. My family was happy to see me, however my mind was far away and I was eager to return to duty.

United States Army

Air Forces Technical School

Be it known that

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS DONALD R. AMUNDSON, 37661211

has satisfactorily completed the prescribed

AIRCRAFT ARMORERS

(BOMBARDMENT)

course of instruction at the Air Forces Technical School.

In testimony whereof and by virtue of vested authority

I do confer upon him this

DIPLOMA

Given on this 17th *day of* August

in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and forty-three.

RAY M. SINNEN, Major, AC.

DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF ARMAMENT

Buckley Field was an Army training base in Denver, Colorado. Denver was known as being the best city for servicemen. This was very true. We spent every weekend either in the city or out in the mountains. I enjoyed Denver more than any other city.

During my training there we covered .20mm, .30 caliber, .50 caliber, bombs turrets, all types. The turrets on a B-24 were the Consolidated tail turret, Bendix ball turret and the Martin top turret. We learned how to operate them and we learned what made them work. We attended lectures on bombs and bomb detonators and learned how to arm them. I was assigned to operate the Consolidated tail turret and received my diploma on August 17, 1943. I was immediately reassigned to Clovis, New Mexico.

We boarded a train for Clovis, New Mexico. We always traveled by Pullman and ate in the dining car. We arrived in Albuquerque, New Mexico the next morning and had an eight hour layover. This allowed the railroad to switch us to another line and catch the train to Clovis.

We all left the train to see the town. We didn't go very far. The train station in Albuquerque had a Fred Harvey Restaurant and bar. Off the bar was a garden courtyard with a fountain in the center. At night, with soft lights, balmy summer air and pretty girls, we went no farther.

Anyone who saw the movie, "The Harvey Girls," will understand the reference. Their restaurants were said to only hire beautiful girls. I found this to be the case. We partied

from noon until 10:00 p.m., when the train pulled away. There were airmen running after the train as we left the station. They were left behind.

We reached Clovis the next morning. As my mother would have said, I was getting what I deserved. I stood in formation in the hot sun with a blinding headache. When we were assigned barracks, I went to Supply for a blanket, sheets and a pillow. I went to bed and slept the entire day and night.

The next morning we were told to go to one of the large hangers. When I arrived at the hanger, across one end was a large board on which my name was listed. I was now in the Fifteenth Air Force, 450 Bomb Group, 720 Squadron, assigned to Lt. Whitehead's crew.


HAURER
450
BOMB. GROUP
H
15
FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE

HISTORY OF THE 450TH BOMB GROUP

B-24 LIBERATOR
"COTTONTAILS"

The 450th Bomb Group was activated on 1 May 1943 at Gowan Field, Boise, Idaho. The group was then transferred to Clovis, New Mexico. After training, the group was transferred to Harrington, Kansas on 20 November 1943 in preparation for overseas movement.

The ground echelon stationed at Alamogordo, New Mexico left the United States from Newport News, Virginia on the liberty ship "Bret Hart" in December of 1943 and set up the base in Manduria, Italy. The German Luftwaffe sunk 18 Supply Ships in Bari Harbor, destroying most of the supplies available to the units of the 15th Air Force.

Flight crews took the southern route via South America and Africa, and arrived in Italy the latter part of December to find very little in the way of quarters, and much material was obtained from the Italian army and the English 8th Army.

Early in combat, the 450th were well known by the German Luftwaffe by the white rudders of their B-24's.

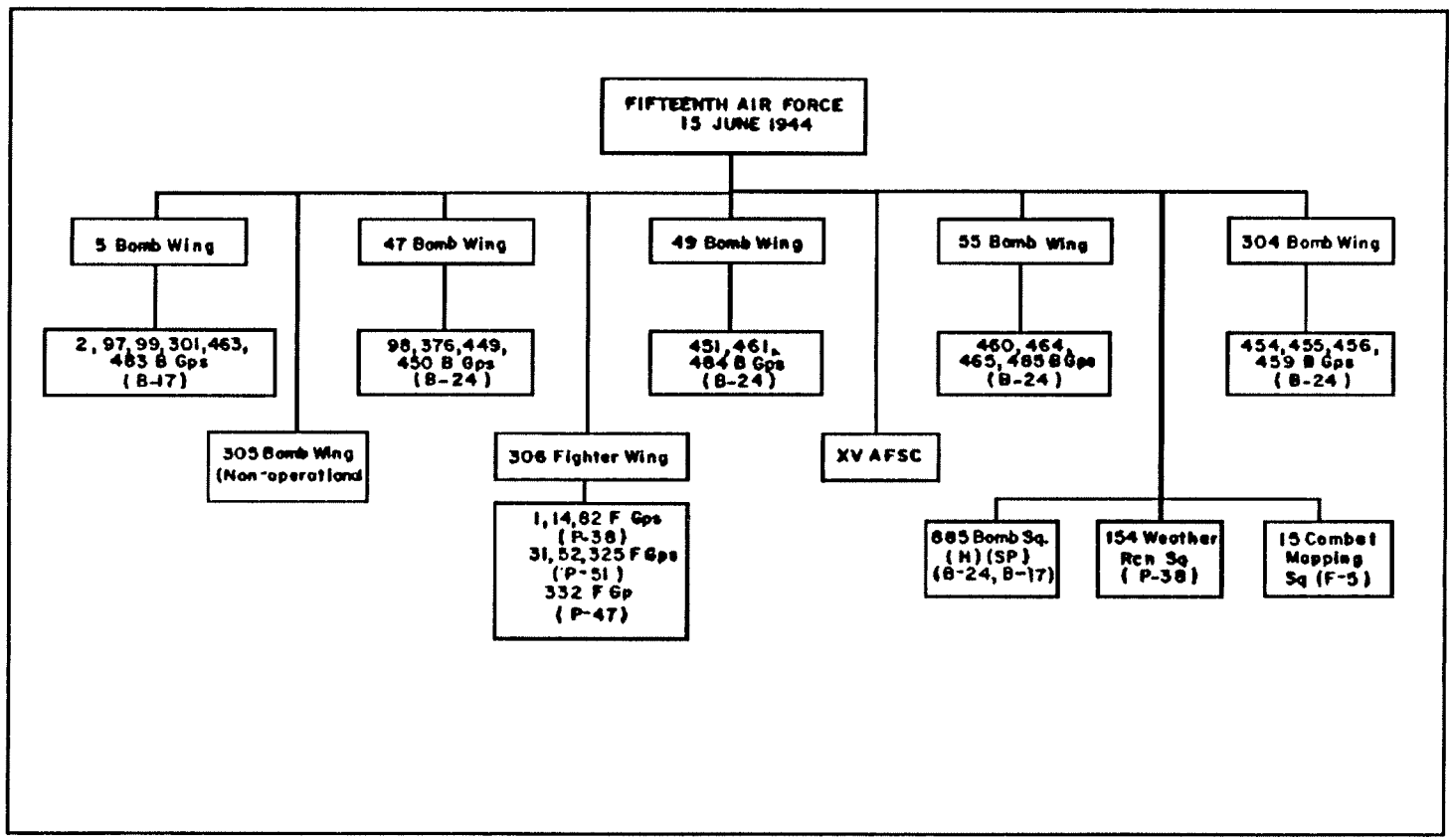
The first combat mission of the group was flown on 8 January 1944, and in the following months flew missions over Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, Albania, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, France, Germany and Austria.

The 450th participated in 265 raids including Ploesti oil fields, many missions over Germany, D-day operations over Southern France and many other strategic targets in Europe.

The group dropped a total of 15,000 tons of bombs on German held targets, and achieved a 59% accuracy percentage. 191 enemy fighters were destroyed by the group, with 38 probables.

The group was awarded two Distinguished Unit Citations during the operations of WWII, and achieved an enviable reputation for its actions during the war. Individual members were awarded 574 DFC'S, 379 Purple Hearts, 3023 Air Medals and 6469 OLC to the Air Medal.

The 450th Bomb Group arrived back to the United States from Italy at Commonwealth Pier Boston, Massachusetts on May 23, 1945 on the U.S.S. Wakefield with 6,000 Air Vets aboard. This was the first ship to arrive from the battle zone when the European war ended.


FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
15 JUNE 1944
5 Bomb Wing
2, 97, 99, 301, 463, 483 B Gps (B-17)
305 Bomb Wing (Non-operational)
47 Bomb Wing
98, 376, 449, 450 B Gps (B-24)
49 Bomb Wing
451, 461, 484 B Gps (B-24)
306 Fighter Wing
1, 14, 82 F Gps (P-38)
31, 52, 325 F Gps (P-51)
332 F Gp (P-47)
XV AFSC
55 Bomb Wing
460, 464, 465, 485 B Gps (B-24)
885 Bomb Sq. (H) (SP) (B-24, B-17)
154 Weather Rcn Sq (P-38)
304 Bomb Wing
454, 455, 456, 459 B Gps (B-24)
15 Combat Mapping Sq (F-5)

Installed on cemetery memorial wall, United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado, October 16, 1987.

Sixty-two B-24s took-off from Palm Beach, Florida with four extra crews. One aircraft crashed into the mountains en route, one survivor. A total of 660 men formed the original combat roster.

Original Crews	Survivors 132	Casualties 528
Replacement Crews	Survivors 244	Casualties 977
Total		Casualties 1505 (80%)

We were all happy to finally be assigned to a crew. We received our airplane and spent two days having all our equipment and clothing checked. Anything missing was replaced. After this processing we flew to our new base in Alamogordo, New Mexico

I was assigned to Lt. Ronald Whitehead's crew. The members of the crew were:

Pilot	Lt. Ronald Whitehead
Co-Pilot	Lt. James Pibb
Navigator	Lt. Joseph Brown
Bombardier	Lt. Thomas Lowen
Engineer	SSgt. Joe Goodman
Engineer	Sgt. Chester Kraska
Radio Operator	Sgt. John Sternberg
Armor	Sgt. Don Amundson
Armor	Sgt. Jack Means
Engineer	Sgt. Paul Young

Our training was very exciting. We had no duties other than flying. This meant we were in the air three out of four days. Sometimes we would practice flying in formation and other times we flew alone. Every day, directly after take off, we would fly over the white sands, an area that resembled the Sahara Desert. The sands were pure white with an undulated appearance. In the early morning sun it was both beautiful and mysterious. In a short time we were flying over El Paso.

We flew many night missions. On one of these missions we became lost. We had less than five minutes of gas left when we finally spotted a beacon. We landed, almost out of gas, at a little cadet training base at Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

The next day, a bad wind storm developed and we were forced to stay on an extra day before heading back to our base.

Our long flights either by day or at night were from El Paso to Denver. From Denver we would head toward Salt Lake City, we would swing over to Oklahoma City and then we would head back for home. By the time we landed we were exhausted. I never knew why flying had this effect on me. I don't know whether it was the noise, the vibration or the cold, but after five or six hours I had barely enough energy to remove my heavy flight suit. I always brought food on a long flight; candy bars, oranges, apples, any snack food. I would spend hours in my tail turret watching the planes in the formation or the scenery. In October of '43 the Rocky Mountains were covered with snow. I could turn my turret forty-five degrees, open the door at my back and look down, with nothing between me and the ground. I would throw out my garbage this way, orange peels, apple cores and candy wrappers.

On our days off, our crew would go into El Paso or Las Cruces, a resort area. We had no duties other than flying. We had free access to the firing range and could skeet shoot whenever we wanted. When we were not in the air our time was our own.

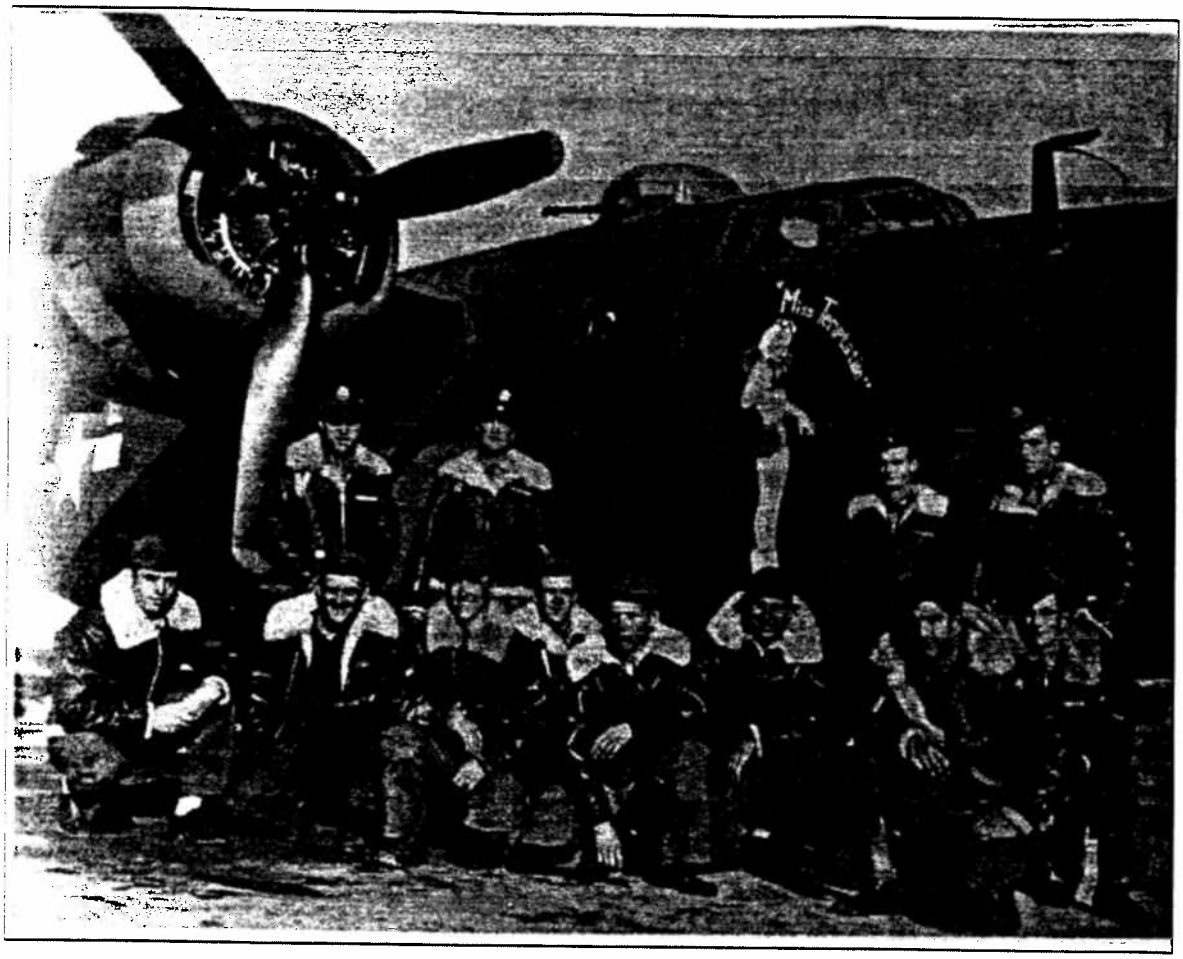
Looking back on those days we lived a very soft military life. We were all sergeants, drawing flight pay, which was fifty percent more added to our base pay. We wore our flight jackets to town, which was not dress standard. We were spoiled in many ways. Our food was excellent at our base.

Then in November our training ended. We were sorry to be leaving Alamogordo but looking forward to what lay ahead.

We now had an enormous affection for our plane. Before we left Alamogordo we had a beautiful girl painted on her. She was painted in the style of a Petty girl, an illustrator popular before the War. We called our plane, "Miss Temptation".

The end of November we flew to Harrington, Kansas. We only spent four or five days there. Our medical records were checked, all vaccinations were brought up to date and all of our equipment was inspected. Anything missing or not in good condition was replaced at no charge. Some of the dishonest airmen sent everything home and were issued replacements.

We each were issued an escape pack which included a machete, and a .45 caliber pistol with ammunition. What a mistake! We acted like a bunch of kids playing with pistols. We fired them at anything and everything from Kansas to Italy.



450 BOMB GROUP, 720 SQUADRON
Lt. Ronald Whitehead's Crew

Top Row Left	Lt. Brown	Navigator
	Lt. Bibbs	Co-Pilot
	Lt. Lowen	Bombardier
	Lt. Whitehead	Pilot
Bottom Row Left	S/Sgt. Goodman	1st Engineer
	Sgt. Young	Engineer
	Sgt. Kraska	Engineer
	Sgt. Sternberg	Radio Operator
	Sgt. Amundson	Armour
	T/Sgt. Plentice	Flight Chief Ground Personnel
	Sgt. Obrien	Crew Chief Ground Personnel
	Sgt. Means	Armour

OVERSEAS FLIGHT

At last we were on our way overseas. Before taking off, two new passengers were added to our crew; Sergeant O'Brien, our crew chief and Sergeant Plentice, our line chief. They were to accompany us overseas and were welcome additions to our crew.

The first leg of our journey overseas was to West Palm Beach, Florida. As we traveled, our pilot or navigator would always call our attention to any point of interest. I remember specifically his calling attention to the Okefenokee lake and swamp.

When we landed in Florida, the first thing I noticed was how soft the air felt. We had just come from Harrington, and the contrast between winter in Kansas and winter in Florida was remarkable. I thought this must be how the tropics felt.

The airfield was very active with Navy planes. There were many B-24s that the Navy was using for sub chasing in the Atlantic. They were called the PB4Y-1. We were seeing many other types of planes and uniforms, most were new to us. Even the food in the mess hall seemed different. It was lighter and included more fruit.

We stayed overnight. This was my first experience with mosquito netting over me at night. (I finally became used to mosquito netting by the time we reached Italy and no longer needed it.)

The next morning our plane was gassed up and we started out on the next leg of our trip. We headed toward Trinidad. This time our navigator pointed out the Everglades. It was miles of swamp. We were soon flying over the Ocean for the first time.

Every first gave me a bigger thrill, however as the mainland faded in the distance I couldn't help wondering whether I would come back. We had all been told that the life of a gunner in combat was figured in minutes. I said a prayer. I told God that I would trust in Him and not worry whether I would come back. That was His decision.

We spent the night in Trinidad and the next morning we left for Belem, Brazil. As we approached Belem we flew over the mouth of the Amazon River. The mouth was sixty to one hundred miles wide. It was the largest river in the world. It reached 4000 miles to the Andes Mountains and drained into an area the size of the United States. It was a jungle area that some explorers called the "Green Hell." I guessed that I now knew the reason for the machete in my parachute pack.

When we landed in Belem we were really aware we were in the tropics. It was a hot, humid heat. Everything seemed damp. We greased our guns daily. Our engineers and both our crew chief and line chief checked the plane daily. Anything that would rust, they greased.

Since leaving Harrington, Kansas we had been on an expense account. We were given seven dollars a day expense money. All bases we were landing at were part of the Air

Transport Command. Our beds cost one dollar and all meals were one dollar each. This left us with three dollars each day. We thought, what a great way to travel! We actually took a leisurely trip. According to my service record, we left the States on December 7 and arrived in Italy on December 28.

In Belem all the buildings were off the ground. All table legs in the mess hall were sitting in cans. They must have had a bug and snake problem. The base had a good P.X., a laundry and a sort of Beer Garden. I didn't spend much time there because I didn't drink beer, and there was no Coke, just some vile green soda.

The mess hall was immaculate with large bowls of fruit on every table. All windows were screened and open to the air. I thought, other than the humidity, the climate was pleasant.

The only problem was that everything either rusted or molded. The P.X. was out of cigarettes, except for Old Golds. The cigarettes they did have were molded. Fortunately, we had stocked up on many things before leaving the States. We had even brought a Christmas tree with us.

We went into the jungle one day to do some target shooting. We were carrying our .45 caliber pistols. Paul Young pointed to a leaf high in a tree, and said he was going to bring it down. He aimed, shot and the leaf came fluttering to the ground. I think that leaf was the only thing we ever hit when we shot with our pistols.

The native villages were out of bounds, but at night we visited them anyway. It was weird going through the jungle at night. We could hear the singing and noises from the Cantina. It sounded very romantic and exotic.

Our supercharger was out on our plane and we waited a week for parts before we could leave for Natal. We were fortunate both our line chief engineer and our plane's chief engineer were both outstanding mechanics. They watched and supervised all work done on the trip.

Once the plane was repaired we flew to Natal. The flight was over jungle and we were about two hundred miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean. Natal, although a tropical climate, was south of the Equator and was open to the Atlantic. It sits out on the curve of the continent. The people on the base seemed a little more energetic. They spoke Portuguese. They were an attractive people, and were similar in appearance to Mexicans.

We purchased some excellent boots at the P.X. I wore mine for dress. Both the P.X. and the stores off base were well stocked with merchandise. The prices were very low. The people permanently assigned to the base accused the airmen passing through of driving up the prices. We were accused of this at every stop on our trip.

We spent a lot of time in Brazil, nearly two weeks. This gave us time to shop. On one of our excursions someone offered to sell us a monkey. We purchased it and named it Joe, after our engineer. We also purchased two bottles of Cognac and four bottles of wine.

We had our Christmas tree and we had each picked up other souvenirs. We planned for a Christmas celebration far away from home.

While waiting for permission to continue our flight, we spent our time playing cards at the P.X. or in the N.C.O. Club.

Finally the weather cleared and we were permitted to resume our journey. This time we were headed to Dakar, West Africa. Prior to 1945 Dakar was the capitol of French West Africa. Now, since its independence, it is the capitol of Senegal. We were flying the shortest distance from South America to Africa, a journey of over fifteen hundred miles.

Our flight to Dakar was the first flight with our new co-pilot. Our former co-pilot had become sick and had been taken off our crew. He was grounded. The new man had been trained on B-17s and this was his first flight on a B-24. Our pilot spent most of the flight briefing him on the peculiarities of the B-24.

The flight, although long and boring, was uneventful until we came in for a landing. Our co-pilot was making his first landing. He misjudged the speed and came in too fast. He landed at a slight angle and nearly collapsed our landing gear. Our hydraulic brake line ruptured spraying oil all over the runway. We were listening to our intercom and we could hear our pilot during the landing and after we stopped taxiing. The relationship between these two men was a little cool for a day or two following this landing.

The first thing I noticed was that the runway was a steel mat. Suddenly the smell of Africa hit me. The stench was almost overpowering. I had never experienced anything like it. There is a saying that you can get used to anything, and after twenty-four hours I no longer noticed the smell.

We had been flying at an altitude of between eight and ten thousand feet. We had landed in an extremely hot climate. The change was always difficult to adjust to, and it took time to become acclimated.

Guards were posted on our plane and we were met by a truck that transported us the airport buildings. I was interested in the planes parked all around the airport. There seemed to be planes from all over the free world. The airport was full of flying officers. They were wearing uniforms of all nations. The officials were always in French uniforms as were the guards at our plane.

We were taken to our sleeping area. We had large rooms with two bunks in a room. Each room had large screened windows. They each had a ceiling fan, no carpets, bare floors, clean sheets and pillows. Above the bed was a canopy of netting. We had been warned to cover ourselves at night. The mess hall was more a cafeteria. It did not have a large selection of food but it was very clean.

The native people of West Africa were much darker than any Negro I had ever seen in the United States. They were everywhere on the base. They were guards, waiters, maids and

cooks. They filled all the menial jobs on the base. Any position of authority was filled by a white man.

Half of the crew went fishing with the natives. All they could talk about was the odd fish they caught. They used a native dugout boat and had a great time. I was sorry I'd missed it. I went to town and looked at the stores. I marveled at the way the women carried their parcels on their head. They all wanted to buy our monkey. We thought they wanted to eat him, so we refused to sell him. We used to kid around and tell people we were taking him to Italy to get him a job with an organ grinder.

We began to have problems with our monkey. He had learned to untie himself and whenever we were gone he would run amok. He loved cigarettes and in two minutes he could raise havoc with a carton. Our friends would pull out their .45 caliber pistols, point them at the monkey and threaten to shoot him.

We stayed in Dakar for two days for two reasons; we had our brakes and landing gear repaired, and the weather was bad. We waited another day to leave on our next flight to Marrakech. Although most of this trip was over the Sahara Desert the last section was over the Atlas Mountains. One of these mountains was over thirteen thousand feet high. As we weren't on oxygen, it was necessary to go through the pass approaching Marrakech. One of the planes in our group crashed into these mountains. Ten of the twelve crew members were killed in the crash. Fortunately, this was the only plane that was lost on the trip. Our crew had an uneventful flight to Marrakech, Morocco.

Every airfield was more exciting. Marrakech was no exception. There were many soldiers and airmen. They were everywhere and they were from all nations. It seemed I was living in an adventure story or taking part in a war news story. I marveled at the action around me. I was a part of this action.

I remember the tall black French Legionnaires guarding our plane. They were wearing the French tri-colors; the red and blue trimmed hat and coat, dirty white pants stagged at the calves and bare black callused feet. They would walk back and forth carrying what looked like an old gun. They were keeping the Arabs from stealing our parachutes and anything else from our plane.

All I remember of Marrakech the city, was my first impression. We approached it in a jeep and it looked like a large white fort sitting by itself in the white sand. The walls looked three stories high. They had no windows. The city looked impregnable. Nothing but white sand surrounded it.

We spent Christmas Eve here. We set up our tree and had some snack food. We opened our wine bottles and celebrated Christmas on the African continent.

The next day, we flew to Algiers. Every leg of the journey brought us closer to the War. Only three months earlier Italy had been invaded. Seven months earlier they had captured this area. We could still see war damage around us.

The airfield in Algiers was a beehive of activity. Although I did not know it at the time, this activity was the buildup for another invasion of Italy. There were fifteen groups under General Doolittle's command which made up the recently formed fifteenth air force. There were planes flying supplies, and there were bombers and fighters from all the allied countries. All were preparing for the invasion.

After landing and being shown where we were sleeping that night, we showered and went to Algiers. The only thing that interested us was the Casbah, the native quarter. We were interested only from the movie with Charles Boyer. We were disappointed. It was only a dirty marketplace. There was nothing mysterious about it. The part of Algiers we saw was poor and dirty.

The next morning we left for Italy. Our pilot pointed out Sicily as we flew over the island. Before long we landed at Manduria, a small village in the heel of the boot of Italy. What a poor land! The rocky soil looked like it would grow nothing more than rocks. There were a few olive trees, goats and vineyards.

The base had just been activated. We did have barracks and good beds. At first we had outside toilets and washed and shaved outside. There was a great deal of work in progress during the short time I was there.

The Germans had retreated north and the fighting was fierce south of Rome. The Italian Army had surrendered and there were many prisoners working on the base and in the area.

They ate in our mess hall. Where we drank water and juice, they had a large barrel of wine to drink. Nothing fancy they just dipped their tin cups into the barrel.

The war time currency was the lira. One hundred lira equaled one dollar. A gallon of red wine was one hundred lira.

I visited two towns of any size. Neither had any merchandise in their stores. There were no restaurants opened, only some small stores selling wine and some candies. The people had little food and no fuel. The Americans were bringing foodstuffs and fuel to the people.

Every day little donkeys would go by pulling two wheeled carts piled high with twigs, small branches, and anything that would burn. No matter how small the animal the man would ride on the cart.

FLYING COMBAT

"From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosened from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose."

We flew our first mission to Zara, Yugoslavia. We were bombing the installations in the city.

We were awakened at 4:00 a.m. Our crew went to breakfast as a group. The briefing was at 5:00 a.m. with take-off at 6:00 a.m. Our group commander was the flight leader and he began the briefing by showing us the route on the map. He called special attention to the fighter bases and the areas where we would likely encounter flak.

After we became airborne, our pilot joined the squadron. We proceeded up the Adriatic coast for about two hundred miles. About twenty miles from the shore we encountered heavy overcast and received the order to return to base. We turned back and salvoed our bombs in the Adriatic

---

Randall Jarrell, *The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner*

A pattern was established in which we would fly for three days and then get one day off. Many of our missions were scrubbed due to bad weather. We would be in the air for four to six hours each day. We would fly through flak and fighters yet, if we did not reach the target area, the mission would not count.

When we returned from our missions, we were always met by S.2 intelligence. They would interview us regarding; what we observed, where the bombs fell, and specific details regarding any planes that left the formation during the mission. While being debriefed the Red Cross would serve us donuts and coffee.

I only went on one mission with another crew. One morning, just after the briefing, a pilot came into the barracks and proceeded to walk up and down the room asking for someone to fly as a ball turret gunner for him. Nobody moved, they all rolled over and pretended to be asleep. Three or four minutes passed and I told him I would help. If I had not volunteered his crew would have been unable to make the mission. If unable to make the mission, it was likely his crew would have been disbanded. When I returned from the mission my officers and crew were waiting by my bunk. At first I thought they were worried about me, but I think they were more worried about what would happen to the crew if I failed to return.

Three of the four missions we flew were in northern Italy. We bombed; Pisa, Perugia, Arezzo, Guidonia. For three days we had been observing small ship convoys heading north in the Mediterranean Sea. On January 21, we observed a three hundred ship convoy

heading north. They had a thirty plane Spitfire escort and a balloon barrage. On January 22, we bombed the marshaling yard in Arezzo, Italy. We observed a hundred sip convoy steaming towards Rome. The convoy had a cover of P-38s, P-47s and Spitfires. One ship was on fire. We encountered no fighters, much flak that was not very accurate. No planes were hit.

We flew two missions as lead plane. Our Asst. Group Commander, Major Gideon flew as our pilot. (He later made full Colonel when our Group Commander, colonel Mills made General and took over a wing.)

Our last mission started much the same as all the others. We were at breakfast by 6:00 a.m., followed by a briefing at 7:00 a.m. and take-off at 8:00 a.m. During the briefing we were informed our 450th group Commander, Col. Mills, would lead the mission. The mission would include thirty-four planes. Our target was Sofia-Vratsa, Bulgaria, an airdrome. Our secondary target was, Skopje, Yugoslavia, a marshaling yard. We would be flying at 23,000 feet. We could expect heavy and accurate flak over either targets and many enemy fighters both ME-109s and FW-190s.

After the briefing we returned to our barracks to change into our flight gear. We all wore heated suits, boots and gloves. We also wore our fleece lined leather coats, pants and boots. These clothes and our parachutes made for a heavy load to carry out to the flight line. A small utility vehicle pulling a flat bed trailer drove by our barracks and picked up the crews.

As we arrived at the flight line the air was filled with the sound of over 120 engines being tested. Our ground line engineer was giving our plane a final check before our crew came aboard. Our pilot, Lt. Whitehead and co-pilot walked around the plane checking all areas before boarding. While this was happening, the crew loaded their equipment on board. We had been together since Clovis, New Mexico, we all knew our duties. I stowed my parachute aboard and proceeded into the bomb-bay to make sure none were armed. I then checked my turret, inspecting my two .50 caliber guns and ammunition. I made sure my heated suit and oxygen mask were operational.

As the plane began taxiing ready for take-off, all gunners assumed the crash position. Our backs were against the bomb-bay bulkhead, our feet were facing the rear of the plane. When we became airborne, we all went to our battle stations. We knew many planes had come under attack immediately after take-off. In a few minutes we were over the Adriatic Sea. Our pilot was maneuvering the plane into its designated spot in the formation. I was told to arm the bombs and I went forward into the bomb-bay. Standing on the narrow catwalk between the bombs I leaned out and pulled the pins in the detonators, thus arming the bomb. I entered my turret. By this time we were climbing and gaining altitude.
I turned my heated suit on, donned my oxygen mask and tried to relax, while still being alert. I was wishing the mission would turn out to be a milk run, little flak and no fighters.

We were flying north, parallel to the Albanian Coast. After about two hours, we made a 90 degree right turn. We had a short flight over Albania and then entered Yugoslavian air space. We were flying at our assigned altitude, 23,000 feet.

We began receiving small random bursts of flak, not very accurate, but still worrisome. We were on course to our primary target, Sofia, Bulgaria. When we were ten miles north of the Skopje-Prizren area we ran into very heavy and accurate flak. It was estimated to be at least eight batteries. We could hear pieces strike our plane, but we sustained very little damage.

Immediately after we were out of the flak, we were attacked by ten or fifteen ME-109s and FW-190s. They hedge-hopped though our group. They made only one pass before being chased off by our P-38 escort. In that short time, five planes were severely damaged and a tail gunner was killed.

We lost one engine during the attack and our pilot could not maintain enough air speed to stay in formation. When we split off from our group seven ME-109s came after us. These fighters had been waiting for us. In formation we had the protection of not only our ten guns but the ten guns on every plane in the formation, alone we were a sitting duck. They immediately began their attack. They made a frontal attack from 12 o'clock high. They would begin with a steep dive, fire and peel off, diving below us. The way they were attacking us gave me little opportunity to fire at them. I had only a momentary glimpse. I would fire a short burst and they were gone. The waist gunners had the same problem. Our nose and top turret gunners were doing the most damage to the enemy. When they would go into their steep dive after they had fired, our ball turret then had a target. We thought we had knocked down three, but they still kept coming.

We must have been under attack for twenty minutes. By this time our plane was seriously damaged and we had lost another engine. Over our radio I could hear where and when they were coming. I had no idea where they were. I could only fire when they were diving down and then I only had time for a short burst of fire. When they were coming I could only wait in tribulation expecting the plane to blow up at any time.

While firing I suddenly felt a blow to my left leg. At the same instant my left gun was damaged and the top of my turret blew off. I immediately tried to operate my right gun manually. It moved slowly but I was able to position it in such a way that I was able to fire in the direction they appeared. I kept firing in this fashion until the attack had ended.

We would have been shot out of the sky if our pilot had not reached cloud cover. This was the reason the fighters broke off the attack. When the battle ended the navigator, Lt. Brown, asked me to come out of the turret so he could bandage my leg. By this time I could feel that my left boot was full of blood. I wasn't feeling any pain, that came later. As I made my way out of my turret into the waist section I was astonished by how much damage the plane had sustained. I was amazed it was still flying. The three gunners and our photographer were in shock. Two of them were saying the Rosary aloud. I was lucky. I hadn't been aware of how devastating the attack had been and how close we all were to being killed.

Lt. Brown was there with the first aid kit. I removed my leather boot and then my heated boot. Both were full of blood, however I was lucky again. There were twenty or thirty

puncture wounds. They were about the size of my finger nail and had almost stopped bleeding. Before Lt. Brown could bandage my leg the pilot ordered us to bail out of the plane. Lt. Brown pointed to me and said, "You first." I slipped my leather boot over my foot, clipped on my parachute, and swung my legs out the waist windows. I hung on for a second. I was afraid I would hit the tail rudder if I flung myself too far from the window, so I just simply let go.

As I went tumbling through the air, I wondered if my chute would open. For days the silk had been working its way from under the cover and I had been pushing it back. As I reached for the ripcord my gloves prevented me from gripping the ring properly. It seemed to take forever for me to remove my glove and pull the ripcord. When I finally did, my chute opened beautifully. I breathed a deep sigh of relief and then I looked down.

I must have been ten or twelve thousand feet in the air when my chute opened. It seemed to take forever to drift downward. As I descended, I passed through a slight overcast and I could feel a mist in the air. I think this also contributed to my slow descent.
On looking the country over I could see I was going to land in a small valley with very rough terrain, some woods and brush. It looked like grazing land. I couldn't see any cultivation. A small river ran through the valley and I could see no houses.

It looked as if I would land either close to or in the river. Not being able to swim I tried to maneuver my chute so I would drift way from the river. I was able to do this and a

couple of minutes later I landed. I was surprised I didn't land harder. This was probably due to the damp chute.

When my chute opened my left boot was lost. Without the heated boot it was to loose to stay on my foot. Upon landing I removed my right leather boot and put it on my left foot. This way I had a heated boot on one foot and a leather boot on the other. This made it difficult to walk, but served the purpose.

I quickly hid my parachute in some bushes. I then ran and hid in a dry creek bed. I crawled under some brush. By now my leg was very painful. I opened my escape kit and removed the morphine bottle and needle. I inserted this into my thigh and I injected the pain killer. I am not sure it was morphine but it was a narcotic. I have no idea whether it helped or not.

When I first landed, I heard men shouting. This went on for some time. After two hours there was no more noise. I thought I would be better hidden by the river because there was more brush and woods there. It was getting dark so I moved there. Darkness came suddenly and with the darkness came a feeling of loneliness. I became more apprehensive and fearful of what was going to happen. Before long a great wave of desolation swept over me.

When I was at the depth of despair the 23rd Psalm came to me. I felt as if someone was talking to me and I began to repeat it in my mind. When I reached the words *"Yea though*

I walk through the valley in the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me thy rod, thy staff they comfort me" a great weight was lifted off my shoulders. All feelings of despair left me. For the first time that day I thanked God for saving me.

My leather flying suit was warm and I ate some chocolate from my escape pack. Before going to sleep I spent quite some time repeating in my mind poems, songs and bible passages I could remember. My last thought was that tomorrow I would try to contact Marshall Tito a Yugoslavian freedom fighter. I went to sleep.

CONFIDENTIAL

H E A D Q U A R T E R S
720TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (H) AAF
OFFICE OF THE SQUADRON COMMANDER
A.P.O. 520, U.S. ARMY

29 January 1944

Statement Surrounding disappearance of Missing Personnel.

On 24 January 1944, Sergeant Donald R. Amundson, 37661211, was the Ball Gunner on a B-24-H type aircraft (No. 42-7743), on a combat mission to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Sofia, Bulgaria.

The following is a statement concerning the disappearance of Sergeant Amundson and aircraft.

" On 24 January 1944, while on our way to bomb the Marshalling Yards at Sofia, Bulgaria, fighter planes attacked our formation at about 20,000 feet, time 1230, almost immediately afterward I saw the plane (No. 42-7743), in which Sergeant Amundson was the Tail Gunner leave the formation. As far as I could see nothing appeared to be wrong with the ship or the engines. The location of the plane (No. 42-7743), where it was last seen was 42°10'N-21°30'E."

" Being impossible to watch the ship and perform my duties as tail gunner on a B-24 type aircraft in the same formation, the probable fate of Sergeant Amundson cannot be determined."

/s/ Howard J. VerDuin,
/t/ Howard J. VerDuin,
Sgt - ASN- 36276762
720th Bomb Sq (H)
450th Bomb Gp (H)

" According to my observations, I certify that the above statement is correct."

/s/ John L. Polce,
/t/ JOHN L. POLCE,
2nd Lt., Air Corps.
Navigator,
720th Bomb Sq (H)
450th Bomb Gp (H)

A CERTIFIED TRUE EXTRACT COPY:

JOHN H. WELLS JR.,
1st Lt., Air Corps,
Adjutant.

Ex. 5

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Memorandum retrieved from personnel file. Notation made to correct error in description as ball gunner. I flew only one mission as a ball gunner.

DONALD AMUNDSON

Sgt. Donald Robert Amundson, son of Mr. and Mrs. Omer Amundson, has been reported missing in action over Yugoslavia since Jan. 24, according to the word received by his parents here yesterday.

Sgt. Amundson, one of a bomber crew, arrived in Africa at Christmas time and later went to Italy.

The last letter his parents received from him was written Jan. 13 and stated his bomber was flying from an Italian base.

He entered the service Febru-

MISSING IN ACTION.

Through the valley and shadow of Hope Deferred,
On the shore of the river Tears,
Comes the silent march of the Mothers of Men
With their lamps of hope and their cross of fears.
"Missing in action . . . we regret . . ."
But the lamp of their hope still burns,
And the days, and the weeks and the months go by
While the heart bowed down still yearns
With a voiceless prayer of a million souls
For the priceless gift of a written word.
The cross still clings, but the lamp still burns
In the valley and shadow of Hope Deferred.

—*N.E.H.*

Iowa Falls — Sgt. Donald R. Amundson, 20, has been reported missing in action over Yugoslavia since Jan. 24, according to word received by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Omer Amundson. He was a gunner on a B-24 bomber, and left the United States for foreign service late in 1943; he was inducted into service in February, 1943. He was in Africa a short time before going to Italy. The last letter his parents have received from him was written Jan. 13.

D. Amundson.

Word of five war casualties have reached Iowa Falls relatives this week.

Kenneth Liserman has been reported dead by the Navy Department and word has come from the War Department tell that Sgt. Donald Amundson and Lieut. Clyde V. Cassill are missing in action over enemy territory.

Brothers of two Iowa Falls resident, Sgt. Wayne J. Housken and S-Sgt. William H. Laughlin, have been repoprted wounded in action, both in the Italian war zone.

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12 FROM IOWA ARE MISSING

WASHINGTON, D. C. (AP) Names of 12 Iowans missing in action were announced by the war department Wednesday as follows:

In the European area —Second Lieutenant Harvey H. J. Jassen, Council Bluffs.

In the Mediterranean area — Staff Sergeant Homer J. Amos, Dubuque; Sergt. Donald R. Amundson, Iowa Falls; First Sergeant Gene P. Cosgrove, Des Moines; Pvt. (f.c.) Clarance P. Crangle, Cedar Falls; Second Lieutenant Richard E. Davis, Webster; Sergt. Wayne W. Hatcher, Davis City; Pvt. (f.c.) Wilbur M. Lewis, Ottumwa; Pvt. Sidney Pruce, Des Moines; Corp. James R. Rang, Dubuque; Technician Fourth Grade Raphael J. Schmitz, Waterloo, and Staff Sergeant Frederick W. Webb, Des Moines.

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

1201

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

SYMBOLS

DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LC = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

WT73 45 GOVT=WUX WASHINGTON DC FEB 29 114P

MRS. OMER A AMUNDSON=

615 FREMONT ST IOWAFALLS IOWA=

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON SERGEANT DONALD R AMUNDSON HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE TWENTY FOUR JANUARY OVER YUGOSLAVIA PERIOD IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED PERIOD=

ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.

101PM.

News clippings and Telegram saved by my mother.

Sgt. Donald Amundson

13 FROM IOWA ARE INTERNED

WASHINGTON, D. C. (AP)—Names of 13 Iowans interned by Germany were announced by the war department Monday as follows:

Lieut. Paul H. Alexander, Des Moines; Sergt. Donald R. Amundson, Iowa Falls; Sergt. William C. Fischer, Anamosa; Staff Sergeant Chester A. Gillen, Blakesburg; Pvt. John E. Harden, Tipton; Lieut. Harvey H. J. Jessen, Council Bluffs; Lieut. Albert C. Lichter, Algona; Second Lieutenant Warren E. Lins, Washington; Technician Fifth Grade Francis D. Nugent, Mason City; Sergt. Leslie Quinn, Des Moines; Second Lieutenant Marion W. Saffell, Des Moines;

Ia. Falls Soldier German Prisoner

(Courier Special Service)

Iowa Falls, Ia. — Sgt. Donald Robert Amundson, who was reported early this month as missing in action over Yugoslavia since Jan. 24, has been reported a prisoner of war in Germany.

His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Omer Amundson, have received two telegrams. One is from the adjutant general: It said: "Report just received through the International ed Cross states that your son, Sgt. Donald R. Amundson, is a prisoner of war of the German government. Letter of information follows from provost marshall general."

The second telegram is from the foreign broadcast intelligence service of the federal communications commission. It reads, "The name of Sgt. Donald Robert Amundson has been mentioned in an enemy broadcast as a prisoner in German hands. The purpose of such broadcasts is to gain listeners for the enemy propaganda which they contain, but the army is checking the accuracy of this information and will advise you as on as possible."

Good news came to Mr. and Mrs. Omer Amundson last week when they received a letter from their son, Sgt. Donald Amundson of the AAF, who is now a prisoner of the German government.

The letter reads: "You will be glad to know that I am all right and doing fine. I am a prisoner of war and being treated good. The food here is good so don't have to worry for I am safer now than I have been in a long time.

"I am now at a transit camp and will send my address as soon as I am sent to a permanent camp.

"To find out how to write me get in touch with the local Red Cross and they will supply you with all the information you will have to have.

"We received a large box from the Red Cross. It sure came in handy and we will also receive one box a week from them when we arrive in our permanent camp, so you can readily see there is little cause for worry."

Before this direct word came to the Amundsons, the local people had received 37 letters and cards from people all over the United States who had heard their son had been taken prisoner.

Mr. and Mrs. Omer A. Amundson received a telegram Friday from the adjutant general telling them that their son, Donald, who had been reported missing in a flight over Yugoslavia Jan. 24, is now a prisoner of war.

The telegram reads: "Report just received through International Red Cross states that your son, Sgt. Donald R. Amundson, is a prisonef of war of the German government. Letter of information follows from the provost marshal general".

A second telegram from the government to Mr. and Mrs. Amundson, this one from the Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service of the Federal Communications Commission, states:

"The name of Sgt. Donald R. Amundson has been mentioned in an enemy broadcast as a prisoner in German hands. The purpose of such broadcasts is to gain listeners for the enemy propaganda which they contain; but the Army is checking the accuracy of this information and will advise you as soon as posible."

DON ALD AMUNDSON

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Sgt. Amundson, one of a bomber crew, arrived in Africa at Christmas time and later went to Italy.

The last letter his parents received from him was written Jan. 13 and stated his bombar was flying from an Italian base.

He entered the service February 1943.

These were some of the short news stories that were appearing in the local papers during World War II. These were cut out and saved by my mother. Some were from the Iowa Falls Citizen, others from the Des Moines Register and Tribune.

WAR DEPARTMENT

THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE

WASHINGTON

mrb/mgm

IN REPLY REFER TO

AG 201 Amundson, Donald R.
(26 Feb 44) PC-N NATO15

4 March 1944.

Mrs. Omer A. Amundson,
615 Fremont Street,
Iowa Falls, Iowa.

Dear Mrs. Amundson:

This letter is to confirm my recent telegram in which you were regretfully informed that your son, Sergeant Donald R. Amundson, 37,661,211, Air Corps, has been reported missing in action over Yugoslavia since 24 January 1944.

I know that added distress is caused by failure to receive more information or details. Therefore, I wish to assure you that at any time additional information is received it will be transmitted to you without delay, and, if in the meantime no additional information is received, I will again communicate with you at the expiration of three months. Also, it is the policy of the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces upon receipt of the "Missing Air Crew Report" to convey to you any details that might be contained in that report.

The term "missing in action" is used only to indicate that the whereabouts or status of an individual is not immediately known. It is not intended to convey the impression that the case is closed. I wish to emphasize that every effort is exerted continuously to clear up the status of our personnel. Under war conditions this is a difficult task as you must readily realize. Experience has shown that many persons reported missing in action are subsequently reported as being prisoners of war. However, since we are entirely dependent upon governments with which we are at war to forward this information, the War Department is helpless to expedite these reports.

In order to relieve financial worry on the part of the dependents of military personnel being carried in a missing status, Congress enacted legislation which continues the pay, allowances and allotments of such persons until their status is definitely established.

Permit me to extend to you my heartfelt sympathy during this period of uncertainty.

Sincerely yours,

J. A. ULIO
Major General,
The Adjutant General.

The only mission I flew as a ball turret gunner was the mission I flew with a different crew.

CAPTURE

I awoke with a start. There was some noise that disturbed me. The river and the woods were shrouded by a thin fog. The trees and shrubs seem to drip with moisture. I could hear no sounds. Then suddenly, high on the mountain, I could hear a car or truck motor.

I arose and started walking along the river. It was still very early, five or six o'clock in the morning. After about thirty minutes of cautiously winding my way through the trees and undergrowth, I came to a clearing.

Ahead of me there stood a round hut. It had a sod roof and what looked like a sheepskin hanging in the doorway in place of a door. The hut had no chimney. There was smoke coming out of a hole in the roof. I very carefully went up to the door opening, looked in, and saw an old woman kneeling by a fire. She was stirring what appeared to be a corn meal mush. I made a noise which startled her momentarily. I was sure she had been told I was in the area because she did not appear frightened. I entered the hut and sat on the floor. There were no chairs, only a pallet with a sheepskin or two thrown over it. The hut had a dirt floor. It was very poor shelter for anyone. Years later, when thinking about this place, I came to the conclusion that it must have been a temporary shelter. I believe the hut was used while out in the mountains herding sheep or goats.

I asked the woman for water. I don't remember if I used "aqua" or "water" but she understood me and gave me water out of a container in the corner. I then unzipped my

left leg covering to look at my wounds. Using my bandages and the medical items in my escape kit, I proceeded to treat my wounds. She seemed to ask if I would like some of her food. I declined, I hoped politely. I then gave her some of the needles and other items in the escape kit.

I was only there for a few minutes when I mentioned General Marshall Tito. She showed no signs of understanding me. After leaving her I continued my walk in the same direction. I walked for an hour or so and covered the distance of about two miles. I came to the end of the valley and the sounds of traffic on a road above me became louder. I was sure that there would be homes nearby.

A short time later I came to a small cultivated field. This was the first sign of crop land I'd seen. Looking around, I noticed a very pretty home perched on the side of the mountain. The house resembled a Swiss chalet. There was a path leading up to the house and there were out buildings. I walked up to the front door and knocked. A middle aged man opened the door. I am sure he had been told I was in the area because he didn't seem surprised to see me. He invited me in by signs and actions. He brought me in to the fire and warmed a cup of goat's milk for me. It was flavored with pepper and other spices. Nothing was more welcomed.

As I rested they kept pointing toward what I assumed to be the road and saying, "Pisano". Having just been in Italy, I knew that meant friend. They must have thought I was German. I kept asking for Tito. Unable to make them understand, I left. As I was at a

loss for what to do, I looked for some place to hide. A short while later I came to a shed that looked as if it hadn't been used for a long time. I was tired so I went in and sat down in the corner.

Suddenly two men dashed in with their guns drawn. I jumped up and raised my hands. They approached me with more caution than I thought necessary. One of these men was a civilian. He reminded me of one of the constables from my hometown. The other man was a German soldier with rank no higher than P.F.C. They kept repeating, "Messer, Lugar". I knew Lugar was a gun and assumed Messer was a knife. I kept repeating, "No" to every question. After making certain that I was unarmed, they escorted me to their car. It was a very tiny car. I thought it looked like a Volkswagen. I would later find out it was Adolph Hitler's people's car.

If I had any doubts as to the type country I had fallen into, the ride we went on confirmed it. We drove through creek beds, up cow paths, and through pastures. We eventually reached a well-traveled road. I have no idea how long we drove but finally we reached our destination.

We stopped in front of a large three story stone building. It was located on crossroads, possibly to control traffic from all directions. It could have been there long before the war. We entered the building and I was taken into a small office to be interrogated.

A non-commissioned officer was sitting at a desk. I came to attention and stated my name, rank, and serial number. He spoke no English, and tried to ask me questions in German. I could only say that I was sorry I did not understand him. Finally in frustration, he resorted to pantomime. He would hold his hands out flat and repeat "Fleiger," and then "Boom, Boom," simulating a bomber. This went on for a short time. He gave up in disgust and decided to take me to his superior officer. This too was a non-commissioned officer who spoke no English. I again stated my name, rank and serial number. The results were the same.

He took me up a flight of stairs and into a large office. One wall of the room was covered with maps, across the room was a table and chairs. In the center of the room was a large desk with chairs in front of it. A large picture of Adolph Hitler hung on the wall behind the desk. A German Army Officer was sitting at the desk. He was a very handsome man, about forty years old.

I walked in and stood at attention. The officer looked up and said, "Sit down Sergeant, you must me tired. How is your wound?" I replied, that it had stopped bleeding and that it seemed better.

He spoke English with no German accent. As I listened to him I thought he must have been born in the United States. He continued to talk. "You are probably wondering about my ability to speak your language. I spent nine years in your country representing a German company. While there I married. My wife is an American. I was called home

because of the war. You are lucky. For you the war is over. You will be sent to a prison camp. Don't try to escape. The people in Germany are angry because of the bombing and sometimes attack airmen." He then explained that he wasn't interesting in interrogating me. "The American Army tells their Sergeants as little as the German Army tells theirs."

He asked me if I was hungry. When I answered, "yes" he said he was having lunch and would have me served also. The orderly served him a bowl of soup at his desk and served me a bowl at the table across the room. I finished mine first. He then asked me if I would like another, again I answered, "yes". I was given another. After eating that bowl, they brought in two dinner plates of food. By this time I could eat no more and they took the food away. After eating, he called a soldier and told him to have a doctor look at my leg before I was taken away.

(Fifty years later I can still remember every word he spoke and every gesture he made. He must have had a great fondness for America to have treated a young American airman with such kindness. I have often hoped he escaped the Russians when they overran the Balkans.)

I was taken to a doctor directly after the meal. The doctor that saw me treated me very courteously. He washed my leg to remove the dirt and blood and used some kind of powder to cover the wounds. He commented in English that it seemed to be healing and he would make a note to have it looked at again later. I was then taken by automobile to

Tirane, the capitol of Albania. I was held there overnight in company with ten or twelve other airmen.

We were all taken to the airport. There was a three engine passenger plane waiting, ready for takeoff. As we were being loaded onto the plane I noticed that they had placed a guard, armed with a machine gun, at each end of the plane. Two or three more guards were sitting with us in the seats. It was an interesting flight. I sat by a window. We never were over a thousand feet off the ground. We stayed well below the mountains. We were flying through the canyons and passes of a very rugged mountain terrain. I could tell, by the way the pilot wound his way through the mountains, that he knew this country very well. It was a short flight and in less than three hours we landed in Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

After landing we were loaded into a bus and taken into the city of Belgrade. The bus drove into the residential section of the city and then climbed up the hills overlooking the city. We stopped at a large home with many bedrooms. We were assigned two men to a bedroom. I was billeted with a gunner from Nebraska. His father was from Germany and the young man spoke fluent German. (He later acted as an interpreter for our Man of Confidence, Frank Paulas in both Stalag Luft Four and Six.)

Our stay in Belgrade was not unpleasant. We were there for only three or four days. We spent our time lying on our beds talking about our homes. We spoke of school, army service and family. We could look out our window and see the city of Belgrade. We could

see churches and domed mosques. Most of the roofs were tile. We could see the Danube river far below. No damage from bombing was apparent.

I think the food was brought in prepared. I also think our food and the guards' food was the same. Lunch and dinner were both light meals with one or two things on the plate. The meals were accompanied by both bread and their version of coffee.

I think our stay in Belgrade was to give the German Army time to arrange our transportation into Germany. On the last day of our stay they issued me a pair of Yugoslavian Army hob nailed shoes. (They were pure misery for six months, until I was given a pair of English Army shoes.) Each of us was issued toiletry supplies, towels and some clothes. We were each also given a large sausage, about eighteen inches long, and a loaf of black bread. We were then taken to the train station.

The train was a passenger train. The coaches had an aisle going down one side and compartments on the other side. These compartments could hold up to four passengers in comfort. I believe the guards were given leave after escorting us to Berlin because they assigned each of us a guard. My guard and I had a compartment to ourselves. The train car itself was also well guarded.

Other than being hungry, the trip was a fascinating experience. I felt as if I had been there before. As a boy, I had read about adventures and travels through the places I was now seeing. Through my readings, I'd dreamed of traveling with Hannibal over the Alps

and traveling through Gaul with Caesar. All the exciting dreams I had as a boy were coming to reality. Even being a prisoner couldn't take that away from me. The sights and sounds were thrilling.

The train moved through areas of small farms and hilly countryside. Our progress was slow due to damage done by bombing. The underground bridges and rail lines were the chief target of Marshall Titos' Army. Repair to the rail lines was underway and I could see that the labor was being done by Russian prisoners and other slave laborers. They were guarded by German soldiers as they worked.

The weather was cold and rainy. It was very similar to the weather in Italy and Albania. We seemed to bypass the larger cities. The smaller villages and towns we passed were interesting. I found interest in the homes and the buildings and in the way the men and women dressed. I found their dress unusual. The women all wore long dresses and covered their heads with a kerchief or scarf. They all wore shawls. Through the eyes of a boy from the Midwest, their appearance was quite different. I saw few cars in these towns and villages. The cars I did see were either military, or had soldiers driving them. Most of the vehicles were horse drawn.

A third of they way into our journey the train started to climb. We had left Bulgaria and had crossed into Austria. We were beginning our assent to cross the Alps. It was February 1, the middle of winter, and soon there was snow everywhere. The train did much switching and changing or adding engines as we climbed higher and higher.

We seemed to twist and turn, going around the mountains. At times I would look down two or three thousand feet at small villages, their church steeples pointing high in the sky. The view was like one seen on a picture postcard. We then entered what must have been the longest mountain tunnel in the world.

We soon arrived in Germany. Now the outside world took on a more frantic pace. When we stopped at a train station everyone seemed to be running. We could see the damage from our bombings. Everywhere forced labor was working on the rails. The soldiers guarding the slave laborers were older men. This became more apparent the longer I was a prisoner.

We now had many more delays, some due to track damage, some due to trains that had priority. We seemed to wait for hours before resuming our journey. By this time I had eaten both my bread and sausage. The only thing on my mind was food. My guard was still rationing his. At the time I was issued this food ration, I had no idea that it was to last me a week. I ate mine in three days and then starved for three days. About a day out of Frankfort we stopped at a small town and a kind German woman came aboard and gave both my guard and me a bowl of soup. Food never tasted so good. I am sure she knew we were airmen and with the bombing it took a lot of Christian charity for her to give me food.

INTERROGATION

We soon arrived in Frankfort am Main. Our trip to Frankfort had taken us over a week. We traveled over three countries before reaching German borders and we'd seen many new sites and much scenery. We also actually witnessed the damage done by our bombing. The slow progress we made on the trip proved the success of our air attacks. The Partisans and freedom fighters in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia had also played their part in disrupting rail traffic.

The Frankfort railroad complex was huge. The train station was a large cavernous building. The building must have covered a square block. The roof towered at least three stories above us. The passenger waiting area was in the far end of the building. We left our passenger train and we were herded into the station.

We were a motley group of airmen, unkempt and wearing all types of apparel. We were wearing whatever had been left us during the capture. The German government and newspapers had long portrayed us as gangsters. I am sure our appearance reinforced this image. We huddled in a corner sitting on the floor in what must have been the freight holding or storage area.

We were waiting for transportation to the Dulag Luft for processing. While waiting, we noticed increased activity at the entrance to the station. A large entourage of German Army officers entered. One or two of the men were Generals. A German soldier

approached our guard and informed him that General Rommel had just arrived. I found out later, in reading a biography of Rommel, that in January of that year he had returned to Frankfort for reassignment after home leave from his African Campaign. We were not close enough to see his face but the uniforms were impressive and our guards were thrilled and excited. When they left we were taken out and we boarded tram cars for the short trip to the Dulag Luft.

Dulag Luft

There were two stops for allied airmen before being assigned to a permanent camp. Both stops were in Frankfort. They were situated only 1635 yards from the main railroad station. The location was a target area. The Swiss Red Cross inspectors had lodged a protest with the German government for placing these camps where they were exposed to attacks from the air.

The first group of buildings a prisoner was taken to was Auswertestelle West. Translated this means Intelligence and Evaluation Center West. He was then transferred to the Dulag Luft short for Durchgansglageer, meaning through going camp, finally he was assigned to a Stalag Luft short for Stammlager, meaning permanent camp.

On reading Herman Goering's biography the author commented on Goering's insistence that the Air Force being responsible for interrogation and the prison camps, rather than the Army or the Gestapo. Hitler agreed to this. If this had not happened we could have been treated worse.

It did not seem long before we arrived at the interrogation center and were being processed. They first had us disrobe and they searched us. They removed all our personal belongings, jewelry and watches and escorted us to a separate room.

The room was about seven feet high, ten feet wide and thirteen feet deep. It contained a bed, a stool, and two blankets. The room was grimy, dirty and badly ventilated. It had a very evil smell.

I entered the room and could hear them lock the door. I then lay down on the bed, tired and apprehensive. Unable to sleep I lie there reciting poems, bible passages, songs, anything to keep my mind busy and to make time pass. I had no visitors that afternoon. Darkness fell and they brought me a slice of bread and some water. I lay down and must have slept awhile. Bombing started and the high windows in my room showed flashes of light as the bombs burst. The sound was deafening and I had to hold my hands over my ears. I lay on the floor praying. After a while the bombing stopped but it took me a long time to get back to sleep.

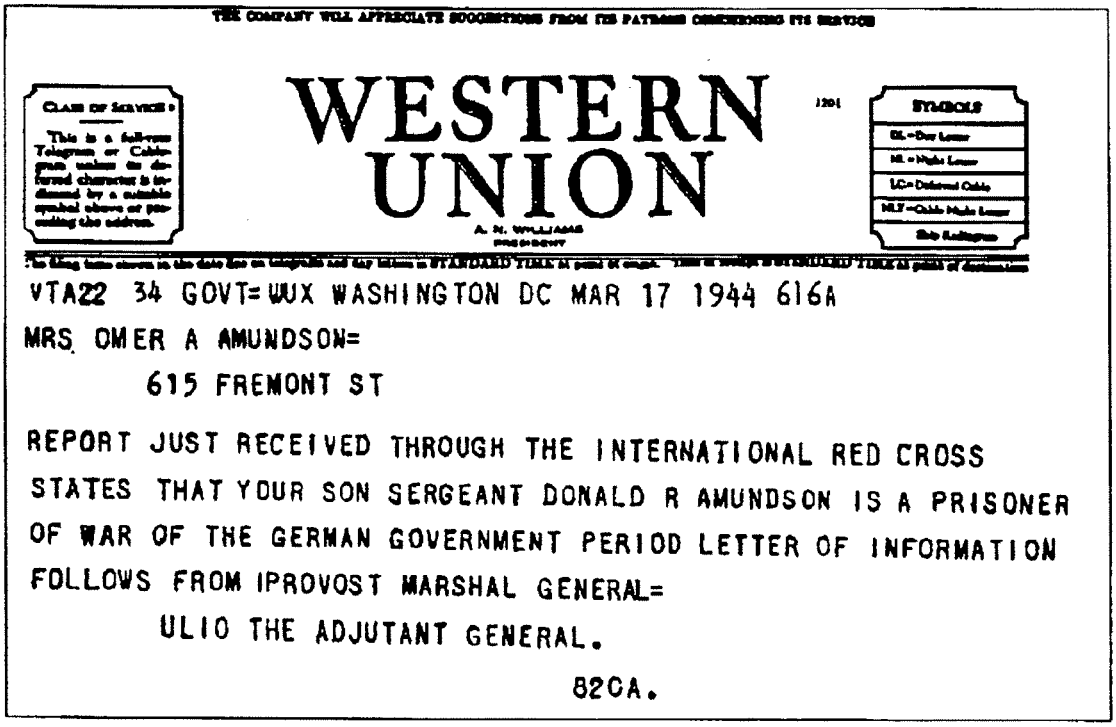
The next morning I was given a cup of their Eratz coffee and another slice of bread. Late that morning I had my first visit by an interrogator. He was a tall thin man who spoke English with an English accent. I stood at attention and stated my name, rank and serial number. He asked me many questions regarding my group, squadron, and type of plane. I always gave the same answer, "I am sorry sir I cannot answer that." He then informed

me that I was going to be there for a long time unless I answered his questions. He never threatened me with violence.

That night we were bombed again and it was as bad as the first night. I thought the building would collapse around me. I began to understand what the people were going through during our bombing raids. The next morning I again received my slice of bread and coffee. Later that morning the interrogator visited me again. This time he told me my group, squadron, pilot and squadron commander. He proceeded to boast about how good German Intelligence was and expressed his belief that only British Intelligence was comparable. He then told me I was being released to the Dulag Luft.

That afternoon I was taken over to the Dulag Luft. I was processed, given back my watch, and issued new clothes. I was given a British uniform and my hob nailed shoes. I wished they had kept the shoes. I was also given a Red Cross box that contained toilet articles and some clothing items.

The camp was run by the men themselves. The Man of Confidence, or camp commander, was the Colonel from the 449 Bomb Group that had been shot down earlier. The bunks were three high and the mattresses were the paper body bags used to bury soldiers. The bags were filled with wood shavings. I was there so short a time few things registered in my mind. Everything was so strange. Every night Frankfort was bombed. It was terrifying.



THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

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WESTERN UNION

1201

SYMBOLS
DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LC = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

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VTA22 34 GOVT=WUX WASHINGTON DC MAR 17 1944 616A

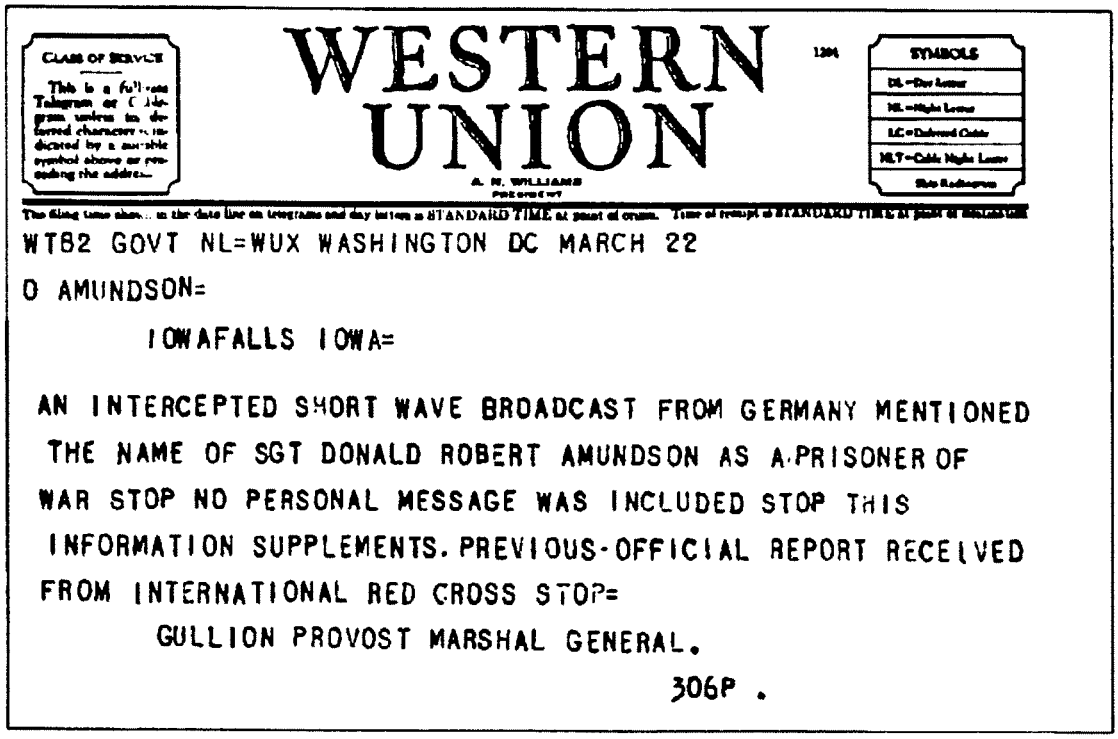
MRS OMER A AMUNDSON=

615 FREMONT ST

REPORT JUST RECEIVED THROUGH THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS STATES THAT YOUR SON SERGEANT DONALD R AMUNDSON IS A PRISONER OF WAR OF THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT PERIOD LETTER OF INFORMATION FOLLOWS FROM PROVOST MARSHAL GENERAL=

ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.

820A.



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WT82 GOVT NL=WUX WASHINGTON DC MARCH 22

O AMUNDSON=

IOWAFALLS IOWA=

AN INTERCEPTED SHORT WAVE BROADCAST FROM GERMANY MENTIONED THE NAME OF SGT DONALD ROBERT AMUNDSON AS A PRISONER OF WAR STOP NO PERSONAL MESSAGE WAS INCLUDED STOP THIS INFORMATION SUPPLEMENTS. PREVIOUS OFFICIAL REPORT RECEIVED FROM INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS STOP=

GULLION PROVOST MARSHAL GENERAL.

306P .

Telegrams received and saved by my mother.

WAR DEPARTMENT

ARMY SERVICE FORCES

OFFICE OF THE PROVOST MARSHAL GENERAL

WASHINGTON

24 April 1944

ASN 37 661 211

RE: Sgt. Donald R. Amundson
American Prisoner of War #1111,
Stalag Luft 6, Germany.
VIA: New York, New York.

Mrs. Omer A. Amundson
615 Fremont Street,
Iowa Falls, Iowa.

Dear Mrs. Amundson:

The Provost Marshal General directs me to inform you of the transfer of the above-named prisoner of war to the camp indicated.

You may attempt to communicate with him by following the inclosed mailing instructions.

One package label and two tobacco labels are inclosed with instructions for their use. Parcel labels are forwarded to the next of kin every sixty-days without application.

Further information will be forwarded as soon as it is received.

Sincerely yours,

Howard F. Bresee

Howard F. Bresee,
Colonel, C.M.P.,
Assistant Director,
Prisoner of War Division.

Incls:
Labels
Mailing Circular
Package Instructions
Tobacco Instructions

24-81266-4BC8

STALAG LUFT 6

On March 15, 1944, six weeks after I left the Frankfurt camp, it was completely destroyed during a bombing raid. The camp was then moved to Wetzler about thirty-three miles from Frankfurt.

While at the Dulag Luft, I met up with the engineer from our crew, Joe Goodman. He was the only crew member I ever saw again. It was then I learned that our pilot was killed and that our bombardier broke both legs when he parachuted. All other crew members had made it down safely. Joe and I teamed up for the fifteen months we were prisoners. No one could have had a better partner or buddy.

After a few days we were processed for shipment to Stalag Luft 6, near Heyderkrug, Lithuania. It was about forty kilometers from Tilset, the nearest city of any size.

This was a long train trip in wartime. We had to travel across Poland and then into Lithuania, all this while traveling in a boxcar. We were issued blankets and our Red Cross food parcel. We were given a loaf of black bread. As a child I had heard about the forty and eight boxcar. The forty stood for men, the eight for horses. I never expected to spend quite so much time in one.

We started our journey. The guards were in the front of the car with a small stove. A wire partition separated us from them. There was a locked door built into the partition.

There was straw in our end of the car, no beds. We were given a bucket of water for drinking. We had a portable toilet to use that was very simple and easy to empty. It was wall to wall people.

Every morning we were given their version of coffee. At night we were given a cup of potatoes. Sometimes we received a bowl of soup instead of the potatoes. I never knew where the food came from, but the guards ate much the same rations.

We stopped very often, sometimes for hours. We were never allowed off the train. There were no windows and we saw none of the scenery as we passed through Poland. We sat, talked, played cards and slept through a long boring trip.

We finally reached our destination. I had been on the road since my plane had been shot down. It had been three weeks, but it seemed like a year. The most disheartening aspect was that I had no idea how long prison life would be.

We were soon processed by the German camp officers. I was issued a German Prisoner of War dog tag. My official number was 1111. It was a very easy number to remember. We met our Man of Confidence, Francis Paulas, a very fine looking soldier who was well organized.

When I think of Stalag Luft Six, I remember our German camp commander, Oberst Hoermann Von Hoerbach. Oberst was the rank of colonel in our army. I am sure he was

over sixty years old. He had no flesh on his face but he was a striking looking man. He was every man's idea of a Prussian Army Colonel. He had high leather boots, and a long leather coat. He walked ram rod straight and with total arrogance. It was almost a goose step. He would walk out on our parade grounds during counting and inspection. Standing about forty feet in front of us he would call out, "*Goot Morgan Boys.*" We would shout our response in unison, "Good Morning Colonel."

The camp was a well-run camp, this was due mainly to our British fellow P.O.W.s. They had worked out a pretty good life style and we followed their lead. They had succeeded in making the camp bearable. They had accomplished this through organization and mutual respect with the Germans. Our group was the first group of Americans to arrive. At the time of our arrival the camp held at least one thousand British, it grew to hold over one thousand Americans as well.

The diversity of the British Air Force intrigued me. In our camp we had representatives from the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Royal South African Air Force and the Royal India Air Force. These were young men from all over the world, flying with the R.A.F.

We traded many things with them; clothes, books and food. They had been captured nearly four years earlier and had received many things from home. They enjoyed wearing items from the American uniform and we in turn enjoyed trading for items from their uniforms. Before long we were wearing a mixture of both country's uniforms.

It was a clean camp. We had a shower day once a week, and we had a day for washing clothes. We kept our persons and our rooms very clean. For this reason we had no problem with lice or fleas.

The barracks we were assigned to were of standard German construction. They were about forty by one hundred and thirty feet. Each barrack was separated into ten rooms and there was a pit latrine at one end of the building. Each room measured about sixteen by twenty-four feet. There were sixteen men to a room and we slept in double decked bunks. The mattresses we were given were actually the heavy paper body bags used for burying soldiers. These bags were filled with wood shavings.

Each room was furnished with a table, three or four short benches and a stove. The stove was two feet wide and three feet deep. It was solid brick and masonry and it had a large chimney made of the same materials. The stove would stay warm for hours after the fire had been extinguished. Nothing would burn when laid on top of the stove. So we would use the stove to dry our clothes.

At about eight o'clock every night all windows were shuttered. The lights would go out a short time later.

Each morning the men that worked in the kitchen came by with German coffee. This is a really vile drink. At noon they came by with a cup of thin soup. Our evening meal was a cup of potatoes, cooked in their skins. We were issued a loaf of bread once a week.

Sometimes we received the bread less often. We never received more bread. At times we were also given a small ration of cheese or jam. This was never more than one or two ounces of either.

The young men that seemed to suffer the most on our diet in this camp, were of large frame and were heavy when shot down. These men needed far more than the two thousand calories we were receiving. All of us had been receiving at least three to four thousand calories before we were shot down. I seemed to suffer less of a weight loss and was healthier than many others.

Each week we were issued Red Cross parcels. A man would be delegated to go over to the office and pick up the parcels for his room. The number of parcels he would be given would vary. Sometimes there would be one per man, but mostly it was one parcel to be shared by two men. When more than two men were sharing the parcel, the division of the items in the cans and boxes became a problem.

The main topic of conversation was not girls, but food. We thought about food and we dreamed about it. We would lie on our bunks at night and discuss what our first meal would be when we arrived home. We discussed what our mothers would cook for us. This discussion was never ending.

We had very few unfriendly arguments, but had many heated discussions. The topics would be varied. We discussed; science, literature, astrology and politics. We didn't

have books to prove either side of an argument so we would find someone who had been to college and take his word to settle any debate.

We attended chapel on Sunday. We had Bible class in our room. I took French classes and Bible classes in my room. The Catholic boys said the Rosary in the washroom every evening. Our two Padres were English as was our doctor. We should be ever grateful for those men, Rev. Anthony, Rev. T.J.E. Lynch, and Doctor, Captain R. Pollock R.A.M.C.

We played many games both indoors and outdoors. The R.A.F. had books and sporting equipment, that we used freely. We played ball. We usually played soccer or baseball. When we would hit the ball between the warning wire and the high fence, we would ask for and receive permission from the guard to retrieve the ball.

While in camp, I learned to play bridge from a professional. He wanted to play with someone who had card sense, yet knew nothing about bridge. I guess I qualified. He taught me the blackwood convention of bidding and we played daily. I also learned Chess, Pinochle, and Poker. Our chips were cigarettes. Everything in camp had a price in cigarettes.

During my imprisonment, I received two packages from home. One was a cigarette parcel. All of a sudden I was wealthy. I had eight or ten cartons to smoke or trade. My buddy, Joe was in seventh heaven. The other parcel I received was a food parcel. Both

parcels were received through the Red Cross and had been sent at my family's request. I have no idea what they cost. I only know that whatever the cost, they were worth it.

I had a funny experience with that food parcel from home. Among the many items it contained was a package of macaroni and cheese. I assured my buddy, Joe Goodman, that I knew how to cook it. I was sure that my mother had soaked it overnight, so I too soaked the macaroni. What a glutinous mess that turned out to be. We ate it anyway.

Tragedy was no stranger at Luft Six. One of the young men in our room was from Florida. He was always boasting about his job as a bouncer in a night club there. He often tried to impress us with what a tough person he was. He soon began to boast about how he was going to escape. I don't believe he wanted to carry it out, but in his boasting he trapped himself into it or risked losing face. We ended up helping him plan his escape. The escape committee assisted him and he checked into sick call. It was then arranged to have him checked into the hospital. There was only one fence to clear from there. The next morning we were told he was dead and was to be buried that day. I never saw him however, the burial detail (the Germans gave him a military funeral) reported he must have had his hands raised. He apparently was giving himself up when they shot him. This was possibly done as a lesson to the rest of us. The two bullets went through his sweater, but not his coat. His coat would have been open when he lifted his arms.

The camp was inspected twice while I was there. It was inspected once by the Y.M.C.A. and once by the Red Cross.

The length of time the camp had been active was the reason for the athletic equipment I mentioned earlier. I suspect this was true for the musical instruments as well. One of the fellows could play the clarinet like I had never heard before. They put on some shows. We always had to make our own entertainment. (I had an interesting thing happen to me years later when I was attending a dinner with Scottish food and entertainment. There were bagpipes and kilted dancers. The last dance was announced as the POW dance. They said it was first danced in Prison of War Camp in Germany. With all the Scot's we had walking around the compound in kilts I wondered if it was their dance.)

We received the news by radio. Every afternoon someone would come by with the latest news from BBC. We had traded for the radio and we had hidden it in a medicine ball. We did this in order to avoid detection by the guards. The guards often pulled surprise searches. Sometimes these searches took place in the middle of the night.

As time passed, we began to hear rumors that the Russians had driven the Germans from Stalingrad. We heard they were now attacking the Germans and driving them back. Their big push was to drive west into Poland and then North to the Baltic thereby isolating large areas. They would trap the German Armies by cutting their supply lines. They were successful in doing this, which made the Germans decide they needed to evacuate us. On July 15, we were moved from Stalag Luft 6.

STALAG LUFT 4

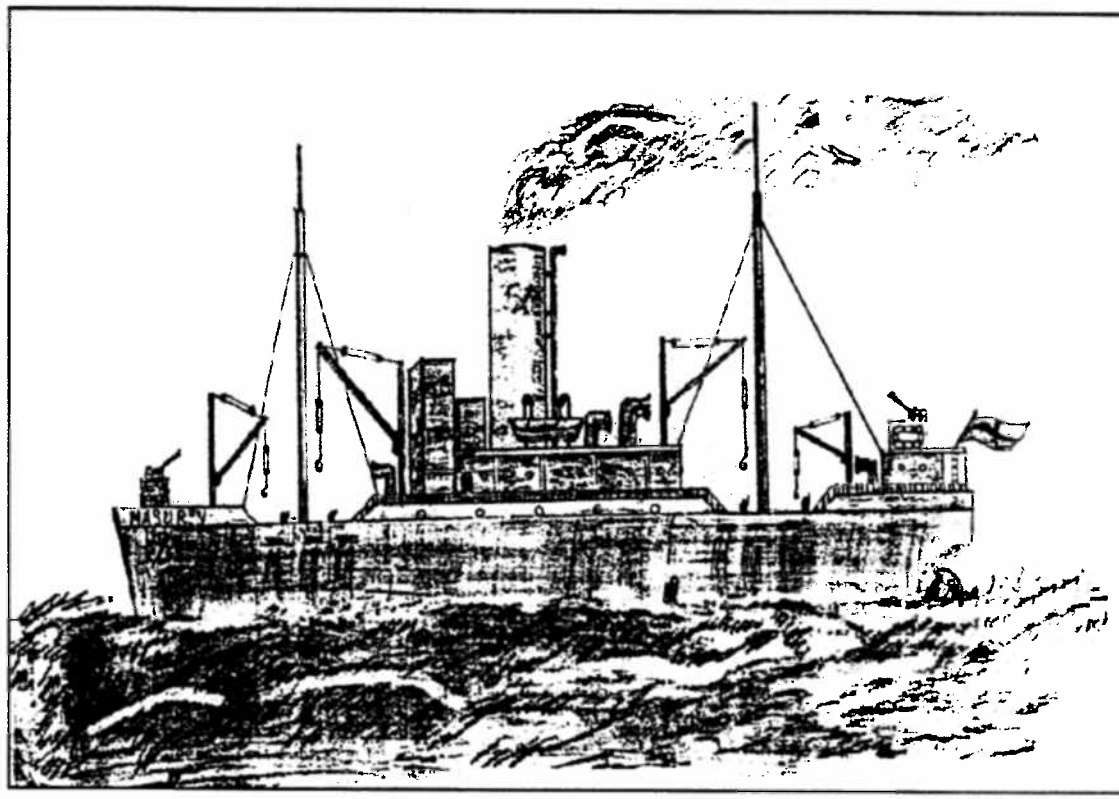
The R.A.F. boys had spent most of their prison of war incarceration at Stalag Luft Six. They had been captured at Dunkirk. Their capture had occurred between the end of May and the beginning of June 1940. They had managed to survive and they kept very active. When we first arrived the food had been adequate. Many had lost a great amount of weight but most of us still had the energy for sports and other forms of exercise. At the end of May 1944 our Red Cross parcel shipments had stopped. Now our food rations were being curtailed. This made it easier to leave Stalag Luft Six, even though it was a trip into the unknown.

Joe Goodman and I rolled all our spare clothes, underwear, and extra cigarettes up in our blankets. We folded our blankets in half and tied the ends. This enabled us to slide our blanket over our head and one shoulder and carry it as a simple pack.

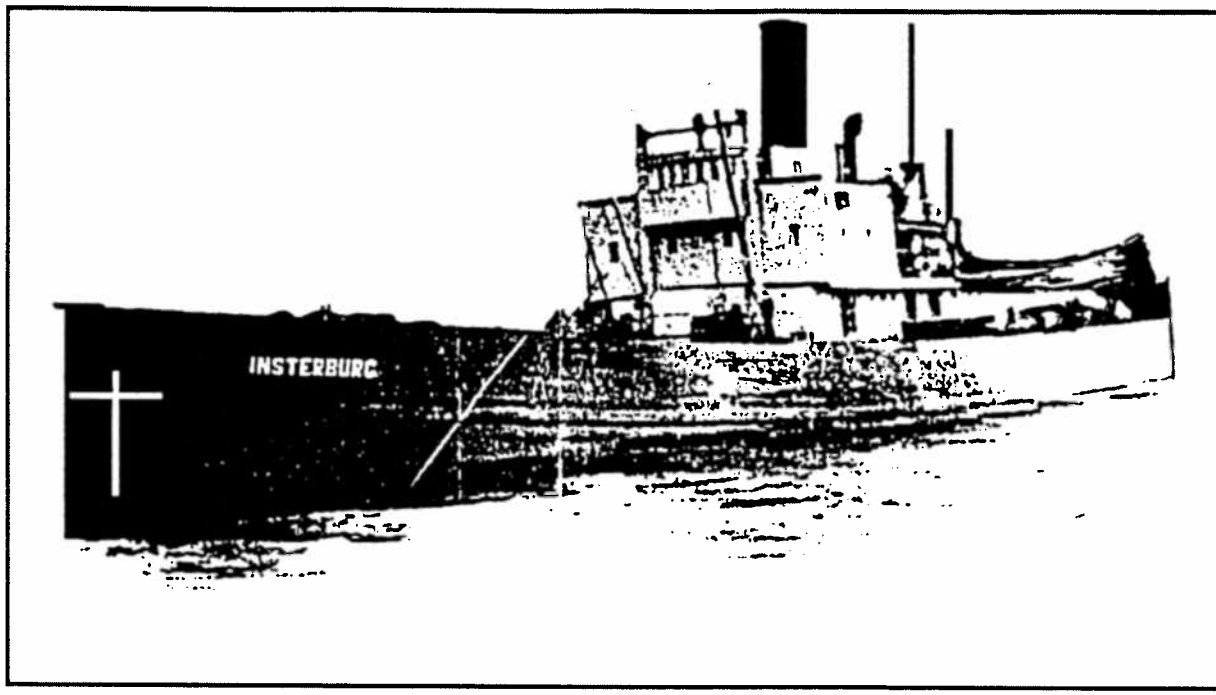
We were taken to Memel, also known as Klaipeda, a small Baltic port in Lithuania. The town was interesting. There were many wooden three and four story buildings that faced the Baltic Sea. In the past these buildings were trading houses used for commerce.

The townspeople gawked at us. Many of the men had trousers that ballooned in the legs and were small around the ankles. Some wore wooden shoes. It reminded me of Holland. It was July and the weather was warm in the sun, but cool in the shade. As we had worn most of the clothes we owned we all were quite warm.

We lined up and prepared to board a ship. There seemed to be some confusion as to the name of the ship we sailed. Some said it was the Masuren and others the Insterburg, both sailed these waters during the War.



This picture was drawn by George Silverman one week after sailing the Baltic Sea. As you are able to see, the ships name was Masuren. George Silverman, Portland, Maine, Stalag Luft IV, 8th Air Force, 100 Bomb Group, 351st Squadron.



Photograph of the Insterburg provided by Des Dunphy who was transported on this vessel from July 15 to July 18, 1944.

The two ships resembled each other. They probably were both designed to carry coal or ore. The boat was about 195 feet long. The hold we climbed into was thirty feet or more deep. A metal ladder gave access into the hold. No smoking was allowed. Joe and I were among the first to board. We moved over to the side of the ship so as not to be crowded. That way we could lean against the side of the boat. We sat on the damp, dirty ship's keel. We could feel the throb of the engines and the movement of the propeller shaft.

We were allowed to climb the ladder and go topside to relieve ourselves or for water. The difficulty was in making your way across the many men sitting or lying down in the path. There was a lot of shouting and swearing every time someone made the trip.

A tragedy occurred while aboard the ship. A young man named Getz, we called him Getzy, had been acting very strange. He had been acting strange for quite a while. One day, while playing ball at the camp, he ran past the warning wire and started to climb the fence. He called the guards names as he climbed the fence and he shouted at them to shoot him. The guards had called down to us to go over and get him, which we did. They kept him in the hospital and we had not seen Getzy until we were evacuated by boat. While on the boat, he asked to go topside to relieve himself. On deck he ran to the rail and jumped overboard. The ship hardly slowed. We knew he would not last long in the middle of the Baltic Sea.

We went into the hold of the ship on July 15, and came out on July, 18. We disembarked at Sweinmundy. We walked down the gangplank to the dock and were moved onto a ferry boat for transportation across the bay. The ferry docked near the railroad tracks where a group of familiar boxcars was waiting. It seemed like the same cars we were on six months earlier. The primary difference was that the guards were under the command of a red headed major. He proved to be a cruel and sadistic person.

On boarding the boxcar we were handcuffed. I was handcuffed to Joe, my buddy. After ensuring that each person was handcuffed to another, the guards locked us in the boxcar.

They observed us through a screen and then they sat back and relaxed. We then tried to find a comfortable position. We found this almost impossible while handcuffed. After a few tries we found that the key to open cans would flip the lock on the cuffs, if inserted a certain way. We proceeded to unlock all the cuffs.

This worked, but every hour or so the guard would notice that someone was uncuffed and we would all have to hold our hands out for inspection. After everything calmed down we would then unlock the cuffs again. We spent about three days locked in the boxcar. We traveled intermittently. Sometimes we stopped for most of the day.

The train stopped in the woods away from the station at Grosstychow. Stalag Luft Four was located at Grosstychow, Pomerania, Poland. The Germans had located the camp in the forest, possibly to keep the Polish people away. We made sure our handcuffs were on as we jumped from the boxcar. We were surprised to be met by a company of Hitler's youth. They all had fixed bayonets and barking dogs. Older soldiers were also milling around.

We were lined up and our red headed Major gave the order to start. We started walking when the Major gave the order to run. He rode a bicycle back and forth, up and down the road. He shouted orders to, "stick the laggard". The young Germans were reluctant to follow this order. One young boy, about fifteen or sixteen years old, was running beside Joe and me when the Major shouted to him and then slashed at him with his pistol. The boy fell to the ground and got up crying. In English he said s

to us, "See what they do, run, run!" Joe and I ran. We were fast and we threw the blanket rolls, holding all of our possessions. In a few minutes we were in the front. We ran for four and a half miles. It's now somewhat amusing that someone that scared, with a bayonet at his back could run that far and that fast. (I hope the young man, the one that was knocked down, in some way survived.)

We finally reached our destination, Stalag Luft Four. When we reached a holding area or open field in front of the camp, we were told to sit. Anyone who got off his knees would be shot. They placed machine guns on all four corners of the field. Guards were also walking the perimeter. Given the situation, we never stood. We had thrown our blankets away so we were forced to sleep on the ground without anything to keep us warm.

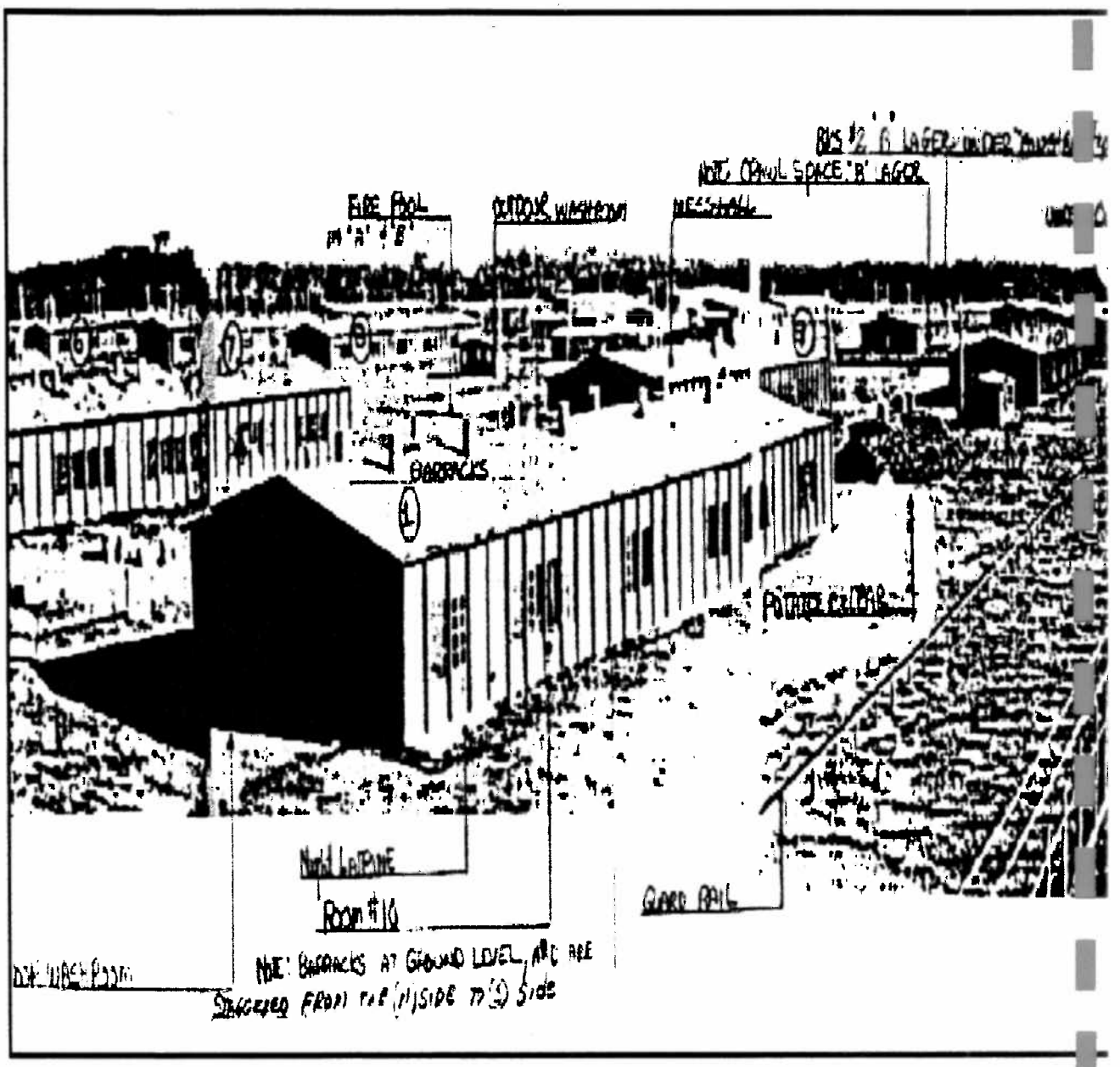
We had fellows that swore, that the day they were liberated the Major would be shot. Nine months later, I was told he was shot, I was also told he wasn't shot. Like so many things, you can believe either.

The next morning we were checked in and issued a Red Cross box with toilet articles; towels, soap and a blanket. We were taken to our barracks and we soon found that our man of confidence was again, Tech. Sergeant, Francis Paulas. He was a good manager and had cordial relations with the Germans.

The camp was about a mile and a half square. There were four lagers for housing prisoners as well as the Vor Lager which consisted of a hospital administration building

and post office. Each lager had ten barracks for prisoners, a mess hall, and quarters for our man of confidence and his staff. The camp was similar to Stalag Luft Six with the warning wire, the high fence, the roll of barbed wire and then another fence. The guard towers around the compound were all equipped with machine guns and spotlights. After dark, guards with dogs were used to patrol the compounds.

The barracks in Stalag Luft Four were not much different from the ones at Stalag Luft Six. At one end was our indoor washroom and night latrine. There were about twelve rooms. Each of which was furnished with a stove, a table and several benches. We had eight bunk beds and sixteen men to a room. There were five slats on the bed and the mattress was a heavy reinforced paper bag stuffed with wood shavings. In Stalag Six we had been allowed to renew the stuffing, but that would never be the case here.



Information provided by Joe O'Donnell, November 23, 1990

By this time Joe and I were old timers and had developed a pretty good sense of handling our Red Cross food. We rationed very carefully so our bread and Red Cross parcels would last as long as possible. Some P.O.W.s would go through their Red Cross ration in two or three days and have nothing left.

We would make preparations for our breakfast in the evening. We would take two or three prunes or some raisins, and we would place them in a can of water and powdered milk. We would mix the fruit thoroughly and let it set overnight. The next morning the fruit would have enlarged to three or four times its original size. We would have that for breakfast, along with a cup of coffee. The coffee we made was weak so the supply would last. We would sometimes receive a can of hard biscuits in our Red Cross parcels. These too we would let soak overnight and would have for breakfast.

We were allowed a seventh of a loaf of bread a day, or a loaf a week. We learned to cut a slice of bread an eighth of an inch thick in order to get as many slices as possible out of a loaf. The bread would be delivered on a flatbed wagon and stacked like cordwood. At first it tasted like sawdust, but after six months it was beginning to taste good. We would put butter or jam on the bread. We never put both.

For lunch we would have a thin watery soup. Sometimes it would be a vegetable soup, but it was mostly potatoes and kohlrabi. I only saw a piece of meat in our soup, once. The most welcomed sound was, "seconds". We would sometimes get seconds if there was soup left after all the barracks had been served.

At night we generally were delivered a cup of potatoes that had been boiled in their skins. When we had butter and salt, we would use it. If something was given to us by the Germans, such as strong cheese, it could always be traded. Our favorite meal was barley. It was cooked as a porridge and was sometimes served in the evenings in place of potatoes.

Before lights out, we would heat a can of water on the stove and make tea or coffee and have a thin slice of bread.

Most of the P.O.W.s, while lamenting the poor food, never gave credit to Francis Paulas for the work he did in both Luft Six and Luft Four. As our man of confidence, he had the difficult task of dealing with the Germans. He also had to manage the camp. This included the staff that cooked and delivered the food to our barracks; the German coffee in the morning, soup for lunch and potatoes at night. He also supervised the distribution of the bread ration, the Red Cross parcels and the German cheese or jam that we received once a month. The last two parcels we received were in such small quantities that it was a real problem to try to give something to everyone.

In the morning, after the shutters were taken off the windows, we were allowed outside. Joe and I would make it a practice to walk around the lager twice. We would then read or join in some game, cards or Chess. We would also take part in a study group. We found that after six months it was important to keep busy. This kept us from developing a melancholy mood. The mood seemed to effect everyone. My mind always went back to a

childhood poem that I had memorized. "Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone. The sad old earth must borrow it's mirth, but has trouble enough of its own." Poetry or the Bible gave me sustenance and courage in times of crisis. Everyone had this need at one time or another.

At night the boys of the Catholic faith would gather in the washroom to say the Rosary, just as they had at Luft Six. We the Protestants, had Bible study and prayer in our room. Years later, while working with the J.C. Penney Co. in Oxnard California, I met the young man that conducted our prayer meetings. He was now a minister and had been transferred to Santa Barbara California. He informed me that the Bible he had carried all through the Prisoner of War experience was now in the Texas State Museum. I carried my New Testament that I received from the YMCA with books we were sent. I lost it after I was liberated.

One of the best things that happened to me was when I ran across someone not only from Iowa, but from my hometown of Radcliffe. It was Howard Linn, a distant relative and friend. Howard had come to Stalag Luft Four shortly before our group arrived. The companionship made life a little more bearable for both of us. We would reminisce by the hour sitting on either his bunk or mine. We would talk about our mutual friends, food our mothers used to cook and what we would do after the War. It helped time pass and gave us a chance to forget where we were for a little while.

Luft Four was also a clean camp. We had no trouble with fleas or lice. We kept our persons and barracks clean in order to prevent those problems. We had no trouble getting soap and washing our clothes. We had been issued some R.A.F. clothes and had traded for some others. They were a less finished wool. This made them a little thicker and also warmer. We'd only had field jackets and had no heavy winter clothes. Due to our proximity to the Baltic Sea, which acted as a climate moderator, the weather was never too severe so we didn't suffer much from the cold.

We had a barber shop where you could get a hair cut. We went through a phase of crew cuts, mohawks and shaved heads. Some just let their hair grow. We had all types of beard and mustaches. We had no girls to impress so we could just groom ourselves to suit ourselves.

Every once in a while something would happen that would break the monotony. A German electrician was working on the wires above the guard towers when something happened and he was electrocuted. When they took him away, some of the POWs cheered. The guards became angry and made menacing gestures with their guns. This stopped the cheering. We also had and ME-109 fly into the ground by the camp.

A tragic thing that happened during my stay in Luft Four was the slaying of the young man who had been billeted with me in the villa we had stayed at in Belgrade. His death was such an unnecessary waste of life.

At Christmas we were given a special Red Cross food parcel. We had a Christmas program and would sing carols and stay up late on Christmas Eve. The Germans left the lights on later that night for us. Howard Linn and I talked for a long time about our families and our past Christmas'. It wasn't the lack of food that hurt the most. It was being in a strange land, far from family and home and not knowing whether you would ever get back home. At Christmas this hurt a little more.

While in all camps, I was never physically abused. In other camps they never bothered to harass us but in this camp they did everything possible to make life miserable. They had long counts on the parade ground during the winter. We would stand out there getting colder and colder with each minute, while they stood conferring with each other. We believed this was done on purpose. In the middle of the night we would be awakened by our lights coming on and we would hear a curt order to get out of bed and line up in the hall. We would all be counted and checked while a couple of goons would proceed to ransack our rooms, throwing everything on the floor. They would toss our food, bed clothing, mattresses, and clothes and then empty a coal bucket and water pail over everything. When they were finished they would walk out and shut off the lights, leaving us to clean up in the dark. The only two people that we really hated at this camp were the red headed captain of the guards and a guard named, "Big Stoop". "Big Stoop" was a large ungainly man that seemed to take the lead during the night raids that destroyed our belongings.

We received some mail and packages but as time went on there was less mail. In the winter, just before we left the camp, the mail stopped. The Russians were now in Poland. The Americans were on the French German border and the English were coming through Belgium. I was amazed that with Germany caught in this vise, that the soldiers at our camp were still trying to cope with us and our problems.

We had a radio hidden and we received news from the BBC. We gave regular news briefs at each barracks. We were careful to make sure no Germans were within listening range. We also had our rumors. No one knew where they started, but they were always passed as the truth. When the rumor started that we were going to leave the camp and go on a long march, No one believed it.

A few days later we were told our group would be leaving on February 6. Some groups left on the February 4, others on February 5. Joe and I packed all of our spare clothes. food and cigarettes in our blankets. We again rolled the blankets, folded them and tied the ends. We were ready to go. Everyone was happy to be leaving the camp, little knowing the privations and misery ahead.

This time of year along the Baltic, in both Poland and Germany, it was typical coastal weather. It was a damp cold with a mixture of snow and rain. For the first three weeks we saw little sunshine. The German guards had their long winter wool coats. They

seemed to keep them warm and dry. The most we had to keep off the elements was a sweater, a field jacket and a knit cap.

The first day, we stopped at a farm and we slept in the barn. It was warm and had good hay or straw. The next day, it rained off and on all day. Toward the evening it turned to snow. We kept walking. We walked almost 40 kilometers that day. At about 10 o'clock that night the German officers parked two or three cars with their lights shining onto an open field. The field was wet and muddy and we were told to march into the field and bed down for the night. We were appalled. No amount of argument by our group had any effect. There was no other place for us to go.

We lay down as a group, spoon fashion. We spread a blanket on the ground to soak up as much water as it could and then we lay down on the wet blanket. We placed the other blankets over us. The body heat emitted from the person in back and the body heat from the person in front, eventually helped us to warm each other. We were tired and we slept. It snowed during the night so in the morning we brushed off the snow. It wasn't as wet as it would have been had it rained all night.

We walked all the next day. It had stopped raining and we got partially dry. That night we again reached a farm with a large barn. Thank God for the hay. During the night it dried much of our clothes and the blankets dried. We were fed potatoes and given German coffee.

After these first three nights, all the following days ran together. From the barns to the bare ground all the days passed. All I can do is give some impressions I received of Poland and Germany as we marched.

THE BLACK MARCH

I have no idea where the term "The Black March" came from but it was a fitting name. Most of the time we marched in a black cloud of despair.

We walked when they told us to walk. We ate what we were given to eat and we slept where they told us to sleep. The lack of food began to tell on us. As we became weaker our health deteriorated. Many of us were suffering from the flu, still others had dysentery. We would sleep on the ground with no protection from the elements. We were half starving and covered with fleas and lice. Two things kept us going. One was the fear of what our captors would do to us if we fell out or quit. The other was the responsibility we felt to the others. We felt that by continuing on we were giving our friends support.

The walks were grueling. Sometimes we would walk fifteen or more kilometers in the rain or snow. It was then, when we were all at the point of complete collapse from exhaustion, that someone would start singing. It would start as a weak and quivering sound and would gradually become stronger as we all joined. Memories of home and loved ones would strengthen us. For a few kilometers our steps would become lighter, and our shoulders would straighten. This always amazed our guards.

We would walk two to four days and then rest for a day. Our layover was always at some farm with a large barn for us to use for sleep. I was amazed at the size of the farms. We would walk two or three miles along one field. When we came to the buildings there

would be a large manor house, two or three stories high. The houses all seemed to be built in an English Tudor style. There would also be two or three very mean cottages or huts for the workers.

There was no livestock at any farms where we stayed. All the livestock had been sent to Germany. The farms were equipped with large cookers which had been used to prepare their silage to feed the livestock. The Germans used these to cook potatoes for us. I am sure we ate the seed potatoes and kohlrabi from every farm.

We slept in many barns. The barns were all well made. They were mostly brick and very large in size. The straw or hay in these barns was most welcome. Our blankets and clothes would become wet and damp. The straw or hay besides giving us needed warmth would also dry our garments during the night.

As I walked along the road past these huge farms I realized the owners of these farms lived in the cities. They were very wealthy people. I realized this was the reason my grandparents left the old country to come to America. They came for land and for the dream of owning their own farm. I remembered how beautiful Iowa was with its small farms. I thought of how my grandparents' dreams had been fulfilled. Little did I realize that in my lifetime this land too would change to larger farms, corporate farms. It only took us four generations for the dream to pass.

By now the only people working the farms were slave laborers. We were always thirsty as we walked by them and we would ask for water. The laborers or peasants would hurry and bring us water. On our layovers we had no trouble getting water for drinking or washing. It didn't help too much with the lice or fleas as our clothes were covered with them. If it was a sunny day we would take off our shirts and pants and pick the fleas off our bodies. Years later, watching the monkeys in the zoo, I thought how much we must have looked like them.

We walked out of Pomerania, Poland into the Mecklenberg area in Germany. I noticed that the farms became smaller. I became very ill about this time. I really thought I was going to die. Joe helped me as much as he could. I finally went to the doctor traveling with us. He was an American flight surgeon, Dr. Capt. McKee. He was very busy and overworked. When I approached him about riding on the wagon that carried our sick, he became very angry. He said that I was pretending to be sick. He told me to get in line and not bother him. He made me so angry and sick at heart that I went back in line. I told my friend Joe what he had said and Joe helped me until the next day, when we reached an old prison camp. For the first time in two months, I went to bed in a real bed. That evening we were served a thin soup made of spinach or some other green. It settled my stomach and I started to feel better. We stayed there about three days when they marched us about five kilometers to a delousing station. There we showered and our clothes were deloused.

When we continued walking, we were near the Baltic Sea and we received some cans of sardines. They were very welcome. We had been receiving a bread ration but few potatoes. We ate mostly watery soup. We now were beginning to see civilians fleeing west. They were carrying odd things. I saw one man with his belongings, including a rocking chair, strapped to his back. People were pulling carts. There were no cars except military vehicles and these had odd burners on the back. They were either gas or steam driven.

I shall never forget seeing a nation in its death. Every face showed every emotion, shock, sorrow, and resignation. I was too sick to feel much sorrow for them and the impact of what I was seeing really didn't register until years later.

By now it was spring. The April weather was warm and the sun was shining most of the time. Our guards were finding Red Cross parcels about every two weeks. We would divide them among three or four men. I think the warm weather and being deloused helped.

Many planes would fly overhead as we walked. Only once were we close to being strafed. The incident occurred one afternoon when a group of fighters, that had been flying cover for a bombing mission, were on their way home. One of the planes left formation, came down and made a pass over us. We took the ditch. Apparently he could see we were P.O.W.s so he rejoined his group and flew past. We climbed out of the ditch and resumed marching.

On another day a lone B-24 flew over us. We noticed the left engine was on fire. As we watched the fire spread, first to the other wing and then back to the tail. We waited and held our breath. The plane continued to fly. It looked like a flying cross or a flaming arrow as it flew across the sky. We counted the chutes as they opened. We were all counting aloud. There were only five parachutes. I remember hoping that the other five crew members were dead and were not being burned alive. (Sometimes when I am walking along and a plane goes overhead, I have a flashback. I can still see that plane flying across the sky and again I remember counting the chutes.)

We had been hearing gun fire and bombing for the previous two weeks. That told us that we were only a few miles ahead of the Russians. On May 3, we were walking down the road, much like we had been doing for the last three months. Suddenly we were surrounded from all directions by Army tanks. A British soldier lifted his head out of the tank and said, "Take their guns fellows, your free!" He pointed west and told us the front was eight miles in that direction. He cautioned us to stay on the highway as there were pockets of resistance in the woods. All the fellows in the tanks threw us gum and candy.

LIBERATION

When the tank commander pointed the direction to the front lines, Joe and I started walking. The road soon became a thoroughfare. People seemed to be going in all directions. Slave or forced laborers, prisoners of war, men from every country in Europe were trying to find their way back home. The Russians and the Poles were headed east, French, Belgium, British and Americans were headed west, and the Norwegians and Danes were going north. All were happy and exuberant with their new freedom.

We met two Yugoslavian men, farm laborers, walking down the road. They were carrying four bottles of wine. We stopped to talk to them. They were headed in the other direction and as we left them they gave us a bottle of their wine. Joe didn't want to drink it. He thought it was poisoned. I told him he was crazy. I tried to open the bottle but we had no knife or any other way to open the bottle. I stopped some other men and asked for a Messer. These men were Polish and not only did they have a knife, but they would not take it back when we tried to return it. We finally opened the bottle and drank the wine.

We were proceeding on our way when we met a German man on a bicycle. I seized the bicycle by the handle bars and took it away from him. It must have been the wine. I then showed Joe that I could ride the bike even in my condition. We came to the Elbe River. The Army engineers had just installed a pontoon bridge across the river. I tried to ride the bicycle across the bridge and nearly went into the river. After crossing the river, I threw the bicycle in the bushes and Joe and I continued walking.

The Third Army was crossing the Elbe and it traveled past us all day. There were thousands of tanks, trucks jeeps and ambulances. They were traveling as units. Just when I thought they had all gone by, another unit would approach. I had no idea that an army had so many vehicles attached to it.

As we walked, we noticed that the homes all had a round hole in the front of them. These holes came from cannon shells. When we went around to the rear we found that the entire back of the house was blown away. It looked as if the tanks had come up the road and shelled every home that might house an enemy.

Joe and I made our way toward our front lines. We noted the destruction everywhere we looked. What gave me an eerie feeling was the missing population. They had fled and their houses were empty. We entered one house and noticed that the owners had left taking only their bedding. Everything else in the house was just as they had left it. The pantry had all their home canned fruit and what looked like canned rabbit. We silently left the home, just as we had found it.

I found the homes very interesting. Many were build like our duplexes. They used one side as their home and the other side as a barn. They kept livestock in their barns; chickens, rabbits and possibly a cow. It must have taken a lot of work to keep the area clean. One thing that we all had noticed was the cleanliness of Germany.

We stopped at a small airfield that the RCAF was using. We had lunch at their mess hall and hitched a ride to the P.O.W. processing center. There we were deloused and given an all new American uniform. They sewed patches and stripes and gave us ribbons and wings. They paid us each five pounds, about twenty dollars, and gave us a carton of cigarettes, two packs of life savers, two packs of gum and some candy bars.

Joe Goodman was at the airfield and was offered a ride from the processing center to the States. This was not an opportunity to be missed. He asked me if I minded if he left me and he then accepted the offer of the flight home. I did mind but I told Joe that I didn't. After he left I missed him. That was the last time I saw him and I often wonder what happened to him. I wish him much success wherever he is. He was a good partner and a good friend.

I was given leave for two days and I went to Brussels. I arrived there on V.E. Day, May 5, 1945. The city was bursting with joy. The lights were on for the first time in six years and the streets were packed with people. I was trapped in a crowd on a street leading to the City Hall. The street mob pushed in one direction for thirty or forty yards and then the mob would push in the opposite direction. I was afraid of falling down and being trampled. Somehow I slid off on a side street and went to a bar. A serviceman could not buy a drink that night. Everyone wanted to treat you. When I left the bar the lights were playing on the bell tower of Brussels City Hall. I went back to my hotel room and for the first time in many months I had a good night's sleep.

The next day, I was up early and went to breakfast. I stopped at a small bakery, bought a roll and ordered a cup of coffee. They brought me a small cup of cappuccino. I thought, what a terrible cup of coffee! I spent the day sightseeing. Brussels was a beautiful city. It had sustained little damage from the War and the people were friendly. I saw the parks and churches around the city. The streets around the City Hall were lined with three story houses which I learned were guild halls for tradesmen. Some of these halls had been there since the sixteenth century. I didn't miss not having anyone with me because most of my friends would not have cared to see the things that interested me. The next day, I caught a troop train for Camp Lucky Strike, in France.

We played Poker all the way to camp Lucky Strike. I don't remember how much I won, but it was something over $100. I found use for this money later. When we reached the camp, it was chaos. There must have been 50,000 P.O.W.s milling around. In one area they were serving egg nog from huge pots. The waiting lines were two blocks long. In another area some Canadian soldiers were serving tea with cream and sugar. It was a really horrible brew. I tried it all.

Tents had been set up for shelter and large mess halls were serving food. While I was there, General Eisenhower gave a short talk. He was standing on a box by the mess hall. It was from there that he informed us that we would all be receiving a promotion in rank. We would also receive back pay and special consideration on reassignment. After his speech he stepped down from the box, entered the mess hall and had dinner with us. We thought he was just great. I'll never forget how he spoke. It was as if he really cared

about what had happened to us. He was in some way trying to make us feel that the nation appreciated us.

I was waiting for some indication regarding what I was supposed to do. I had no sooner been assigned a bed when the word spread like wildfire that the Eighth Air Force was sending planes from all groups to bring their own men back to their bases. This was great news, but all of the Fifteenth Air Force asked, "What about us?" We were then informed that the Air Force would fly all other airmen to England for leave before going home. All we needed to do was request this.

I had always wanted to see England and this was my chance. It never entered my mind that my parents would be worried about me and would wish for me to hurry home. I requested the leave and on that same day I was on a flight to England.

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WESTERN UNION

1891

A. R. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

SYMBOLS

DL = Day Letter
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The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

WTA42 20 GOVT=WASHINGTON DC MAY 29 1945 1250A

MRS OMER A AMUNDSON=

615 FREMONT ST IOWAFALLS IOWA=

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON SGT AMUNDSON DONALD R RETURNED TO MILITARY CONTROL=

J A ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.

821A.

LONDON LEAVE

We landed at an airport near London and we were met by buses that took us to our London hotel. Our driver was unfamiliar with the city and was soon lost. He stopped twice to ask directions. The second time he stopped he was in front of a pub. The airman sitting next to me suggested that we go into the pub and have a drink while our driver was receiving directions. We entered the bar. Ten minutes later when we left the bar, our bus was nowhere in sight. Our newly issued clothes and all our personal items were on the bus. We never did find out where they went.

We caught a taxi and asked him to take us to a hotel for American servicemen. We checked into the hotel and were each given a room. After checking in, I went out and bought shaving cream and a razor. I returned to my hotel and went to bed.

The next morning I tried to trace my barracks bag. I finally was sent to a supply depot in the heart of London. I went in, showed my orders and explained what happened. The supply sergeant issued me all new clothes, another five pounds, a carton of cigarettes, gum, life savers and candy bars. I thought this was great. I went back there three more times in ten days. I signed my name for these items and when I arrived home I reported the amount I had been given. This amount was deducted from the money the government paid me.

The hotel that I had checked into was for American servicemen. On the second floor there was a large open balcony that had tables, chairs a stage and a donut machine. At the other end of the room there was a counter with a grill for making hamburgers. A woman was there and she was tending a series of waffle irons. All of these items were very inexpensive. I think they cost maybe five cents. They had coffee, cokes and other types of soft drinks. We P.O.W. airmen went from one line to the other. When we received our donut, while eating it, we would stand in line for our waffle or hamburger. I was always hungry and it was a fun place to be.

Every morning there was a list of tours, shows or other types of entertainment available. All I had to do was to sign up for whatever I wanted. If a ticket was required they would hand me one. I went to see Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne in a play. I went to the Ballet and I attended a music hall review. There were many things to do. I met a girl working at the hotel and we took in a show and dinner. We went to her home by way of the underground. We call them subways. For a boy who grew up in Radcliffe, Iowa this was a heady experience.

I must have taken three or four tours. I took some tours over and over again. I already knew many things I wanted to see and I learned that seeing them once was not always enough. There was often too much to see and comprehend in only one visit.
We visited No. 10 Downing Street, where the Prime Minister lived. I never saw Sir Winston but his residence was not very impressive. It looked like an alley, maybe a little

wider. There were two guards standing by the door. The tour did not go down the street but instead stood at one end. It was one of the least impressive sights in London.

We saw Buckingham Palace, now that was impressive! It was the first palace I'd ever seen. We watched the changing of the guard. I'd always enjoyed pageantry and seeing the Palace and the guards were wishes from long ago now fulfilled. We crossed London Bridge many times. Every time we crossed the bridge, the game and the song of it falling down ran through my head.

We saw the Tower of London. It had a long history as a prison and a place where many executions occurred. It was a large castle and we were allowed to walk around the grounds. Most of the buildings were closed to tours. The bombing had made it necessary to remove many of the valuable items.

We visited Westminster Abbey. This is where all the British Monarchs are crowned. I was impressed with the Poets Corner where some of England's most famous poets are buried. It is such a magnificent building. No words can describe it. They built these buildings so large and so beautiful to show man how insignificant he is when standing and worshipping God.

We toured many buildings designed my Sir Christopher Wren. One of his most famous buildings is Saint Paul's Cathedral. When I visited the Cathedral, part of it still showed the damage done by a bomb during the War. It had not yet been repaired. We were

shown the whispering gallery where the voice carries almost the length of the room due to the acoustical qualities the gallery possesses. Many famous military heroes were buried at this Cathedral. I was interested in the many fine carvings in St. Paul's. One of particular interest for me was of John Donne, one of my favorite poets. He was also the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral when he died.

We toured the home of Charles Dickens, the Old Curiosity Shoppe, the Royal Academy of Art and the British Museum. I visited many other places that I can no longer remember.

I loved to walk around London and visit the many places that we never visited on our tours. There was a street of nothing but book stalls. There were larger stores too, some two or three stories high, filled with nothing but books. I spent the afternoon on this street and I purchased three books of poetry. All were leather bound and fit in a shirt pocket.

London had beautiful parks all very close to my hotel. It was interesting to visit them and listen to the radicals talk. They would bring a box to stand on and begin to expound some weird program or idea. No matter how outlandish these speakers, the London Bobby never bothered them.

I spent ten days in London, overstaying my leave by three days. For a young man, twenty-one years old, it was a fantastic leave. I spent my days seeing the city as a tourist. I spent my nights in the Soho district, around Piccadilly Circus. This was the theater district.

There were all types of entertainment, restaurants and bars. The streets were packed with servicemen from all over the world; Free French, Norwegian, Polish, Canadian, and Australian men. There were men from all over the British Empire. As Americans we were somewhat resented. As an insult we were referred to as the "over boys," over sexed and over paid. We did drive up prices. Most young American airmen were making ten times the money of any soldier of equal rank in the British Army.

I had many interesting experiences in London. One of my most interesting was a night in Soho. It was about nine o'clock and I was sitting at a table in the Brasserie at Lions Corner House. It was located just off Piccadilly Circus. When I entered the bar it was almost empty. I seated myself at an empty table and order a Gin and Lemon. A few minutes after I sat down the theater let out and every table was taken. Soon an attractive woman entered the bar. I was the only person sitting at my table and she approached me and asked if she might join me. I was more than willing. She was about thirty years old and very well dressed.

The waitress came to take her order and she ordered a Gin and Tonic. I paid for it and commented that I was sorry none of the bars had Scotch. She then said that the private clubs had all the Scotch. She asked where I was stationed and we talked about many things. She was a member of a private club and offered to take me there.

I was more than happy to accompany her and told her so. We left the bar and called a cab. We seemed to have gone a mile or two when the cab stopped in front of a wooden,

four story building. We entered the building and walked up two flights of stairs. We walked down the hall and she knocked at the door. A peep hole opened and a mulatto girl said hello and called the girl by name. As we entered, she asked me to sign the register, which I did. We then entered a large barroom. We walked over to the bar and I purchased each of us a drink. I could hear music. The only other person at the bar was a black American master sergeant. I began talking to the sergeant. We had been talking for a moment or two when the girl with me excused herself and went into the dance hall. I walked over to watch the dancing. I was shocked. Every man there was black and they all spoke with a British accent. I got out of there quickly, called a cab and went back to my hotel room. They are probably still wondering what happened to that white kid.

A few days later I went to Victoria Station and showed my leave papers to an American serviceman who was issuing tickets and advising American P.O.W.s regarding which train to take. My ticket was to an old military camp a few miles from Bournemouth and not too far from Southampton. I liked the English trains with their separate compartments. It was a short and enjoyable ride.

After checking in, I was told I could go to Bournemouth. I was told a notice would be posted if any transportation to the States became available. It was now over two weeks since V.E. Day and I was eager to leave for home. I checked into the hotel at Bournemouth, walked down to the pier and onto the beach. At that time the town was not very large and it did not take long to see all of it. I spent the night at the pub and went

to bed early. The next morning we received the call. All repatriated allied military personnel, (RAMPs) were to report to base for transportation to the U.S.

I joined the line boarding the buses. A sailor asked me if I knew the type of boat that would be taking us home. I answered, "no" and asked what kind of boat it was. He said there were thirty L.S.T, craft in Portsmouth, and they were ready to leave. He told me how small these craft were, how long it would take and how rough the voyage would be. I stepped out of line and went back to the hotel.

The next day, there was another call. This time I boarded the bus and we left for Southampton. There I boarded, the Thomas Beery, a liner from the Cuban mail line. It was a large ship and as we boarded they asked for volunteers to help out during the voyage. I stepped forward to volunteer. It was the best thing I ever did.

AMERICA

I was told to follow two young men. They showed me the part of the ship that would be my concern. The job I was given aboard ship was to guard the food lockers. These were large refrigerated rooms that held the fruits, vegetables and meats. The lockers were located along a wide aisle. On one side of the aisle was the lockers, the other side had windows that looked down to the water.

The boys gave up one of the bunks in their cabin to me. The boys were great. I still have pictures of them. We worked different shifts and it was easy to share the space. We ate in the dining room where the tourists formerly ate. We used white table cloths, china and glassware. At each meal we had a choice of main course. What a trip! All the other men were in the hold sleeping three and four bunks deep and eating their meals from an Army mess kit.

We pulled into New York Harbor and passed the Statue of Liberty. I said a prayer of thanks to God. I told Him when we left West Palm Beach, that I put my fate in His hands. I did not think I would ever return home. It was June 22, 1945. It had been one year, six months and sixteen days since I'd left. It seemed like a lifetime.

What a good feeling when I stepped ashore at Camp Shanks, New Jersey. We were loaded on a troop train the next day. Our destination was Fort Sheridan, Illinois. We arrived there on June 24. We were processed and were on our way home on June 25.

While at Fort Sheridan I made friends with an airman from Iowa. He wanted to spend a night in Chicago and I agreed. We checked into the Parker House Hotel and went out on the town. We spent most of the night on a street that was a mile of bars and strip shows. It must have been where the cowboys and cattlemen ended up when they brought their livestock to the packing houses. We ended the night on this street and took two show girls home at about 4 o'clock in the morning. (I should have caught the first train out when I received my orders.)

I arrived in Iowa Falls on June 27. Everyone was happy to see me, but I was highly censured for being so late. Over and over again I was told that Howard Linn had been home for almost a month. My family wanted to know where I had been. When I told them of all my travels and all the sightseeing I had done, they thought I was crazy for wasting all that time. After all these years I am still not sorry for the detour I took before heading for home.

I was on leave for sixty days. I received my back pay and proceeded to spend it. I visited my sister Ruth and stayed with her for a few days. I then visited my Aunt Carrie in Radcliffe, Iowa. I was happy when my leave ended. After a while, partying begins to become stale.

I reported in at AAF Redistribution Station #2 in Miami, Florida. I spent most of the time there being tested both mentally and physically. After two weeks, I received orders

transferring me to Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas. On September 6, I was transferred to Greensboro, North Carolina. This was an Officers Separation Depot.

DEMOBILIZATION

On arrival at the Officers Separation Center I was assigned to the office handling the final disposition of discharge forms. The staff in the office consisted of; civilian typists and a WAC who was responsible for handling the finger printing and signing of the discharge forms. My duties consisted of signing the discharge forms with the name of the officer who had been assigned to the position I was temporarily filling. He was a pilot who had an accident and had suffered severe burns on his face. He did not want to appear in public.

After signing the discharge papers, I would give them to my commanding officer, Lt. Col. Odea Evans. He would then sign these forms and appear at the afternoon ceremony where he would hand distribute them.

It was a very easy assignment. By noon I had finished my assignment and was through for the day. The only exception to this was when a full colonel was being discharged. A colonel was allowed to pick up his discharge form at his convenience. When this happened, both Colonel Evans and I were forced to wait until the colonel appeared, sometime in the afternoon.

I made friends with another sergeant. His father was Henry Ford's manager of his agricultural operations. He was driving a new, 1942 Ford convertible. We spent each

evening driving to different cities for dinners and shows. It was such an easy life that I hated to let it go.

I enjoyed my assignment so much that even after I became discharge eligible I continued to stay in the Army. I stayed for an additional two months. Just before Thanksgiving I decided to ask for my release from service. I walked my papers through the various offices and was discharged on the same day. I decided to go home for Thanksgiving.

My younger brother was stationed in the Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. I decided to spend Thanksgiving with him rather than continuing home. When I arrived in St. Louis, and went out to the Jefferson Barracks, I learned that my brother had taken leave and had gone home for the weekend. I stayed in St. Louis overnight and then proceeded home.

On arriving home, I found my father had moved to Ackley, Iowa and had purchased a lease on a café that had gone out of business. My father was not any more successful than the previous operators had been. He was going to have to close the business and move again.

This prompted me to decide to reenlist. When I informed my mother on my intentions to return to service, she was distraught. Her reaction caused me to change my mind.

IOWA TO IDAHO

Don Thompson owned "Thompson's Pool Hall." He had been expanding by opening two new businesses; Iowa Falls Distributing and the Blue Room. The Blue Room was a glorified bar or tavern. He needed help and offered me $200 a month to work for him. This was a lot of money in 1945, so I went to work for him. I detested the job. I didn't drink beer and thought that anyone who sat in a tavern all afternoon or night was not really someone I wanted as an associate. I no sooner started working there than I wanted to leave.

My father was still having a difficult time supporting the family. It seemed like every day he would come by and ask me for money, which I gave him. I was supporting myself and living in a boarding house. I could see that I had to do something.

My opportunity came when a group of young people, my age, came to town selling pictures for a photo studio in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The week they were in the area I played pool with them and we became acquainted. They asked me to join them on a trip out west.

After very little thought, I decided to join them. I quit my job and gave my father the little money I had left in my bank account. I left town.

I spent four months with them and we had a fantastic time. We would stay in an area for a week or more and cover the surrounding towns going door to door selling pictures. We would sell a coupon for $1.00. A week later the photographer and his wife would come to town and take the pictures. Two or three weeks after that our proof passer would come to town, show the pictures, and take the orders. It was a very lucrative business for the owners and the fellows running the crew. The rest of us only made expenses.

When we reached Idaho, I fell in love with the state. The Sawtooth National Forest, the high mountains and the clear rivers were new to me. The flat valleys with their productive farms and friendly people were all reasons I could never forget the state.

When we reached Medford, Oregon my friend Don Helm and I decided we had traveled long enough. He had family living in Medford so we left the group and went looking for work.

I saw an advertisement for a person at the local J.C. Penney Store. I applied for the job and I was hired. I worked there for seven years. I spent a total of sixteen years with the J.C. Penney Company.

I met my wife George and was married while in Medford. I was then transferred to Eugene, Oregon where I worked for almost three years before being transferred to Oxnard, California. From Oxnard I was transferred to Willits, California.

After two years as store manager I resigned from J.C. Penney and decided to go into Real Estate. Two years later I joined R.H. Macys. I was with them for twenty-four years before retiring in 1988.

George and I were very fortunate to have found each other. We both love books, art, travel, and our home. We were blessed with three sons and a daughter. We now have five grandsons and a great-granddaughter.

I am very proud of all my children. All three of my sons were in the service and my daughter's son also followed in this family tradition. I believe this is a small price to pay for living in America. My oldest son was in the 82nd Airborne. He made thirty-two jumps and went into Santo Domingo when we invaded that island. My middle son served two tours in Vietnam and my youngest son served four years in the Marine Corps. My oldest grandson served five and half years in the Army. They are all good men. I hope my four younger grandsons do as well.

When I was ready to retire, my daughter and her husband were living in Nampa, Idaho. I could never forget the beauty of Idaho. We visited the State and George fell in love with it too. We decided to retire here. I had my wife visit my daughter and the two of them found a home for us to spend our retirement. She made a wise choice and after eight years we feel that we belong here.

I keep active with the Church, the American Legion and the Sons of Norway. We seem to be busier now than we were before I retired. We live two miles out of town, there is farming all around. Sometimes I feel like I am back in Iowa, that is until I look up at the mountains.

I feel the Lord has blessed me in many ways; in my spouse, my children, and their children. I have been fortunate in my choice of career, in having the health to stay active, and in having the means to enjoy my life. It has been a long trip from my boyhood in Radcliffe, Iowa to Nampa, Idaho, but I would not change any part of it.

WORLD WAR II

Army, Air Corps, Navy and Marines	
Captured " Interned	130,201
Died While POW	14,072
Returned to U.S. Military Control	116,129
Alive on Jan. 1, 1977	95,844
Alive on Jan. 1, 1979	93,128

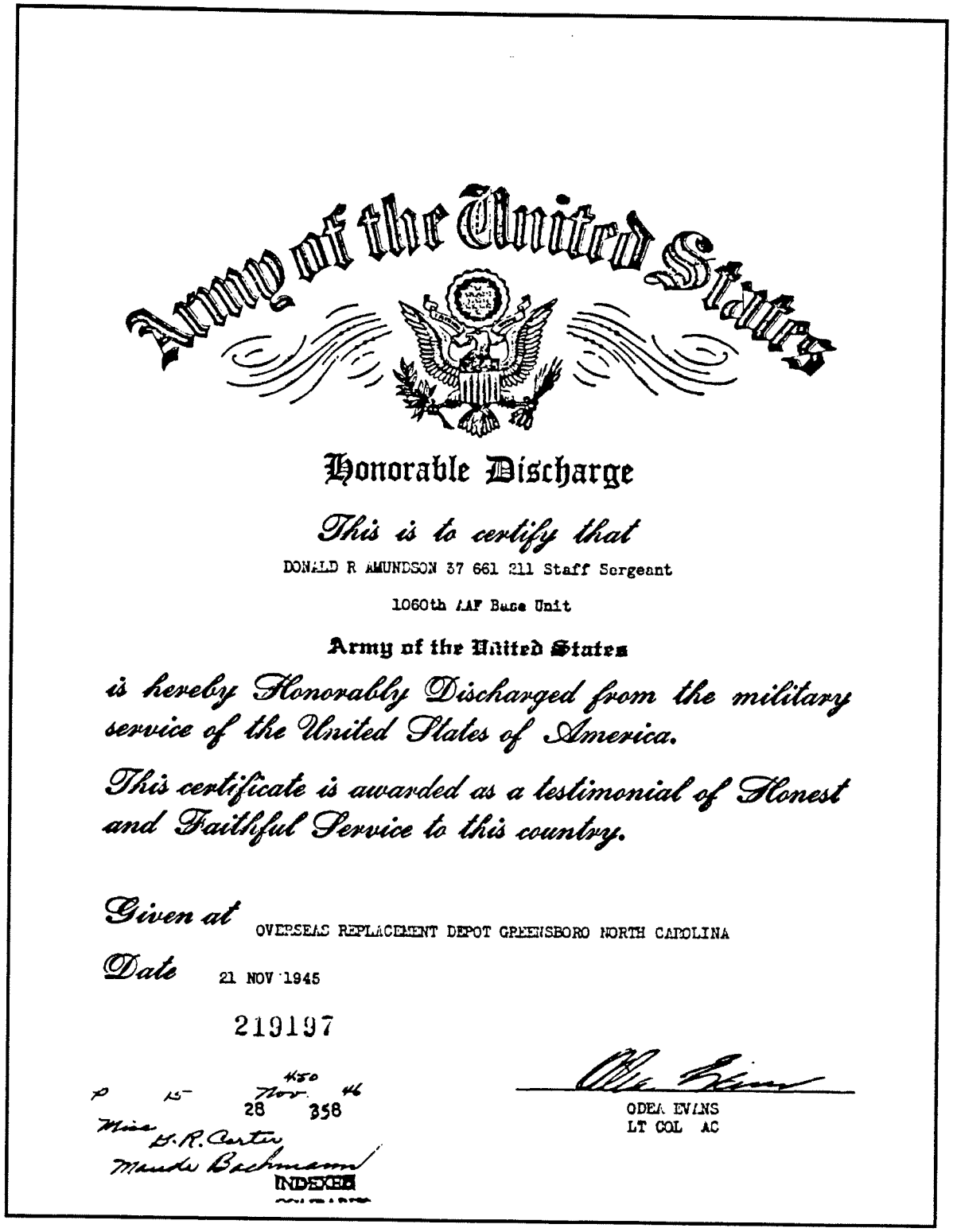
ARMY & AIR CORPS

Philippine Islands (Dec. 7, 1941)

	Total	ETO/Medit.	Pacific	Other	May 10, 1942)
Captured and Interned	124,079	93,941	27,465	2,673	(25,580)
Died While POW	12,653	1,121	11,107	425	(10,650)
Returned to U.S. Military Control	111,426	92,820	16,358	2,248	(14,930)
Number of Returnees:					
Alive on Jan. 1, 1977	92,251	77,868	12,497	1,886	(11,406)
Alive on Jan. 1, 1979	89,666	75,789	12,041	1,836	(10,990)

NAVY & MARINE CORPS

	Total	Navy	Marine Corps.
Captured & Int"d	6,122	3,848	2,274
Died While POW	1,419	901	518
Returned to U. S. Military Control	4,703	2,947	1,756
Number of Returnees:			
Alive on Jan. 1, 1977	3,593	1,855	1,738
Alive on Jan. 1, 1979	3,462	1,787	1,675



Army of the United States

Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

DONALD R AMUNDSON 37 661 211 Staff Sergeant

1060th AAF Base Unit

Army of the United States

is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military service of the United States of America.

This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service to this country.

Given at OVERSEAS REPLACEMENT DEPOT GREENSBORO NORTH CAROLINA

Date 21 NOV 1945

219197

P 45 Nov 46
28 358
Miss D.R. Carter
Maude Bachmann
INDEXED

ODEA EVANS
LT COL AC

Honorable Discharge received November 21, 1945.

ARMY AIR FORCES

Certificate of Appreciation

FOR WAR SERVICE

TO

DONALD R. AMUNDSON

I CANNOT *meet you personally to thank you for a job well done; nor can I hope to put in written words the great hope I have for your success in future life.*

Together we built the striking force that swept the Luftwaffe from the skies and broke the German power to resist. The total might of that striking force was then unleashed upon the Japanese. Although you no longer play an active military part, the contribution you made to the Air Forces was essential in making us the greatest team in the world.

The ties that bound us under stress of combat must not be broken in peacetime. Together we share the responsibility for guarding our country in the air. We who stay will never forget the part you have played while in uniform. We know you will continue to play a comparable role as a civilian. As our ways part, let me wish you God speed and the best of luck on your road in life. Our gratitude and respect go with you.

H. H. Arnold

COMMANDING GENERAL
ARMY AIR FORCES

Recognition received for military service.

10/21/44

AMUNDSON	DONALD	R	37661211	Sgt
AC				
15 AF		520	138 I	14 March 44
AIR MEDAL			NO	
MAJ. GEN. TWINING				

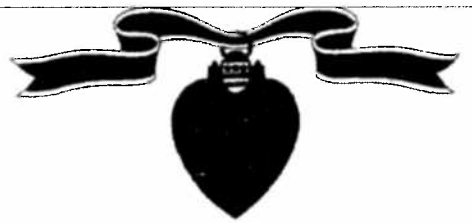
For meritorious achievement in aerial flight while participating in sustained operational activities against the enemy from 10 January to 19 January 1944.

Home address:
621½ Washington Ave., Iowa Falls, Iowa

WD, AGO Form No. 479
1 October 1943

To: Records Section
Decorations & Awards Br., AGO

Medal received March 14, 1944.



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AUTHORIZED BY ORDER OF
GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON, AUGUST 7, 1782
HAS AWARDED

THE PURPLE HEART

TO
Staff Sergeant Donald R. Amundson, 37661211
Air Corps, Army of the United States
FOR
WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION
European Theater of Operations
World War II

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS 10th DAY OF April 19 50

E. E. Thiebaud
Colonel, USAF
Air Adjutant General

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

W. Stuart Symington
SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

War's end brought relief to former POW

Dick Selby/Press-Tribune

Although not an avid chess player prior to his capture by Germans troops, Don Amundson mastered the game during his time as a prisoner of war. Today, Amundson still harbors an intense love for the game, despite the memories of his time in captivity.

P.O.W.-RELEASE

Don Amundson was 21 and in Brussels, Belgium, when the war ended. His B-24 was shot down in January 1944, and he was a prisoner of war until May 5, 1945. Amundson, 72, lives in Nampa.

With a new uniform and $20 in his pocket, Don Amundson was ready to go to town.

Three days before, he was a prisoner of war completing a 500-mile march from Poland to Germany. An English tank outfit liberated the group on a road near the Elbe River.

Now in Brussels, he saw excitement cross over the city like a bolt of lightning. The town was ready to explode with joy. The war was over.

Amundson started the day eating. He had lived with constant hunger since he was shot down in January 1944. He bought coffee that was too strong and a roll that wasn't sweet enough. He bought fresh fruit from stands, deep red strawberries and juicy apples — the kind that hadn't touched his palate for a year.

From a vendor in the park he sampled ice cream. He saw the sights, city hall and churches, a tourist on the prowl, moving freely.

That night the city lights blazed for the first time in years. Bells rang, crowds burst into song. The streets were jammed as tightly as a fresh pack of cigarettes. Amundson, caught on one street, was swept forward as people pushed 30 feet one way. An unknown tide responded by moving the crowd back 60 feet. A human tug of war.

He escaped on to a side street and entered bars jammed less uniformly than the streets. People handed him drinks under screaming lights. Everywhere music and noise.

The world opened before him on one balmy night, and he couldn't get his fill.

Amundson returned to the hotel and slept in a real bed, feeling true comfort for the first time since joining the war.

This was a front page story in the Idaho Press Tribune, Sunday May 7, 1995. The headline read, "V.E. Day 50 Years Ago". There were five smaller articles on other people. I believe my article was this large because I was a P.O.W.

Photos taken during my furloughs by my good friend Lucille Miller, at this time she was a librarian in Iowa Falls, a few years earlier she was my fourth grade teacher. Her letters and pictures were always appreciated, we corresponded for over fifty years.

Iowa Falls Library
where I spent many happy hours.

Radcliffe School
at this time both grade and high school, now only a grade school.

has recently arrived in Italy, where he is now serving in the crew of an Army bomber.

He tells of the interesting time he has had since leaving the United States in a letter written Dec. 29. On the bomber, which the crew flew to the Mediterranean area was a Christmas tree, which they carried with them from Harrington, Kan.

In Africa for Christmas, they set up the tree and sat around it visiting and enjoying the thought of the turkeys cooking in the mess hall. They got the turkey all right and ice cream, too.

Something of the route the bomber followed in getting to the war area may be deduced from the letter. "I bought a new pair of boots and two pair of mocasins in South America. They sure come in handy.

"We have a monkey as a mascot on our ship. While we were in Africa, we were riding in a jeep when the driver asked us if we knew who it (the monkey) belonged to .

"Joe, our first engineer, said he didn't know, but if the driver was tired of carrying him around, Joe would relieve him of the monk. So we got him.

"We named him Joe in honor of our engineer and we sure have been having fun with him. He is sitting around us now chewing