After the Great Escape

Forced March to Liberation, 1945

Told by the P.O.W.s who lived it

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Compiled by Theresa Ripley

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This book is dedicated to remembering and honoring the past and trying to make a world that has peace and environmental sustainability for all.

Prologue

Sit back and experience another story of the WWII P.O.W.s of Stalag Luft III, better known as The Great Escape camp.

If you thought you knew their story because of the 1963 film or book by the same name, that was only part of it.

The great escape occurred in March 1944, but the end of war presented a totally different challenge to the 10,000 P.O.W.s kept at Stalag Luft III.

The Germans started the Forced March to evade the oncoming Russia troops. They left the camp on January 27, 1945, under brutal weather conditions and endured a long foot march, an even more horrendous train ride, to end up in a miserable place, Stalag VIIA, living under appalling conditions, where they stayed until Liberation Day on April 29, 1945. This is their story. It is a story of raw courage, fortitude, and ability to exist under extreme conditions.

One cannot tell the story of 10,000 men but the personal stories of a few in their own words will certainly make the reader more aware of the many sides of war.

1

Telling the Story Yet One More Time

Donald Emerson Phillips was a Prisoner of War in WWII in Germany at the camp that became famous for the great escape. He was also my uncle. I have tried to understand his P.O.W. story for years.

Will this be the last time I tell the story?

I do not know.

When did it start?

Perhaps it was the time I stayed with Uncle Don and Aunt Sally in the 1970's after my mother, Don's sister, died. I saw Don's self-complied life history notebook, two volumes. I looked through it with Don and came to the distinct impression that two things were monumental in his life: being a P.O.W. and running the Boston Marathon several times. I now have both volumes of that notebook.

It was also on that visit Don showed me his P.O.W. letters he had sent home to his parents, my grandparents. We went through a few of them together, some blacked out by German censors.

That was it, no big statements about P.O.W. life, just a whiff of what it meant to him.

It just sat in my brain.

In September 1995 Don is very ill with advanced colon cancer and living outside Phoenix. My husband and I are scheduled to do workshops in Phoenix. I contact and ask if we can visit them in Sun City West. I was not sure they would want visitors at this time. My journal on September 3 says it this way, "Sally Phillips called and said we could come down on September 15. I didn't know I'd be so pleased."

We did the workshop on September 15 and the next day took the Sun City Express out to see them both. Earlier in the year Don and Sally had attended the 50th Anniversary of the Stalag Luft III Ex-Prisoners of War Reunion and received two packets of material. They gave me one of them as we left.

The next day I called Sally before we left Arizona, "Don still bleeding" my journal notes. On the trip home I started reading the materials on the plane. Journal records, "Read P.O.W. material whole way home. POWERFUL."

That is an understatement. Don died December 29, 1995, after we made yet one more trip to Sun City West from Oregon.

I started to know the P.O.W. story better. Now 27 years later I know it even better as I've told it several ways and methods and various points in my life as I have changed over those 27 years.

The last time it was through an ebook. I was trying to finish the story and upload before Aunt Sally died. I was in the midst of medical treatments. She very ill. I made the upload on my last day of treatment; and when I returned from the treatment, the book was 'live' on Apple. That was January 10, 2012. The next few days uploaded the ebook to kindle and nook. Kindle was the place, if it was at all possible, Aunt Sally could see via her sister. Sally died before the week was up, not knowing this had happened, a story she wanted to be told so others would understand. "They deserve others to know" she told me often after Don died.

At this writing over 70,000 people have downloaded Don's story.

So why try to tell the story again?

There are some valid reasons. I learn something new about the facts each time I retell the story and more people are aware of the story and thus it might be passed on to future generations.

But deep down it is because doing so is renewing. The story is timeless...horrible circumstances, suffering, courage, and

an ending which is positive in all appearances, but we know, at least I now know, how much the story determines the rest of a person's life. They live their life from then on with few understanding the most trying times in their lives.

I find I can no longer read a story of horror without thinking…yes, they are suffering. I have tried to understand that in at least one story of person kind. I can relate better to those stories because now I try to go below the surface and think what is really happening and how will it affect them as they move on in life.

And then there is the future. I focus on climate issues and how they will change our world and what kind of training/ thinking does one need to move through those times already bringing suffering and will bring much more.

The answer is often found in how others have endured.

So, a decision is made, I will try to tell the story again. This time focusing on the end of the story and using the words of a small group of men who lived the story. Getting their involvement through their families in telling this story has been a pleasure and privilege.

2

The Men of Stalag Luft III

If someone has heard of Stalag Luft III it is usually because of the great escape which occurred in March 1944. The event was retold as a classic movie in 1963 called The Great Escape starring Steve McQueen, James Garner, and Richard Attenborough. Over time it is regarded as a favorite action movie and included an unforgettable motorcycle chase scene.

No doubt the great escape was an impressive event and probably the men who returned from Stalag Luft III after the war were asked if they were a part of the great escape as they aged and the movie became more popular. Most were not, as it was restricted to one part of the camp.

The better question to ask a returning Stalag Luft III P.O.W. was--were you a part of the Forced March?

If the answer was yes, you knew you were talking to a survivor of an ordeal. Few would talk about it.

Who was in the Forced March?

It was the 10,000 men who comprised the five compounds of Stalag Luft III. The camp was built starting in 1942 and eventually had 2000 men living in each area designated as East, Center, North, South, and West. Center Compound was mostly Americans. The veterans of Stalag Luft III said The Great Escape movie gave a good sense of the living conditions they faced. The design of each compound was 15 one-story barracks which were 10' x 15'. Each barrack housed triple-stacked bunks to hold 15 men and one stove.

All the men in Stalag Luft III were downed British and Allied airmen. It was operated by the German Luftwaffe. Compared to many P.O.W. camps it was considered a model of internment, and held to the Geneva Convention of 1929 of how to treat prisoners, but prison is prison. The men in Stalag Luft III were officers and the highest ranking officer was the person in charge. Enlisted air men went to other camps.

In mid January 1945 Red Cross parcels which included food arrived in the camp, and the Russian troops were advancing toward the Stalag Luft III to take it over. The senior Allied officers decided to put the prisoners on full rations for the first time in over four months so they might gain some calories for whatever was to come which had to include the possibility of a mass execution and the need to fight or the prospect of fleeing.

On the morning of January 27, 1945, the commandant received an order that the prisoners were not to be moved, later in the day the order was reversed. At 7 p.m. the

Germans said the camp would be evacuated. The prisoners were told they had to be ready to leave within the hour. This was an evacuation of 10,000 men, about 2000 per compound. As it turned out, the five compounds of Stalag Luft III left at various times. The first out was South Compound at 11 p.m. West Compound left at 12:30 a.m., followed by North Compounds at 3:45 a.m., then Center Compound left (Don's compound), and finally East Compound left at 6 a.m. Sunday morning.

Various accounts say it was the coldest winter of the last 30, 40, 50 years. Take your pick. It was cold.

It appeared they were not going to be executed, at least now, so forward was the only option. Some men built sleds, others stuffed themselves with food, others put on as many layers of clothes as they could. Would it be enough in snow that was already inches deep? As they passed out of the camp, each could take whatever they could still carry from the Red Cross store.

The P.O.W.s were unprepared for whatever was ahead because of months of confinement and undernourishment and inadequate clothing and poor physical condition in general either because of confinement or injuries from capture. How fortunate for the men in Center Compound that Col. Delmar Spivey was with them.

They leave the camp from late evening January 27, 1945, to early morning January 28.

3

Leaving Stalag Luft III

Justice and respect.

How do you do justice to an experience so long ago, and respect the people in the experience who can no longer speak for themselves. Some have written about their experience, but most did not.

Many of these men had been in the P.O.W. camp for several years, now they were leaving under these conditions.

It is a story of 10,000 men but focusing on a few will give a sense of the experience.

Albert Clark was part of the first American fighter unit in Europe. He was captured on July 26, 1942, and initially housed in North Compound. Clark was instrumental in the planning of the great escape, having the designation of Big S (for security). He was moved from North Compound before the escape occurred in March 1944 and ended up in South Compound. South Compound was the first camp

moved out on January 27, 1945, but that was not a particular advantage as there was heavy snow. It was their compound who had to face the conditions first.

Clark writes, ""“I won’t ever forget the exhilaration I felt as we trudged out the gate. I didn’t care where we were going; I was just so glad to be leaving that wretched camp. Several inches of hard-packed snow covered the ground, and more snow had begun to fall. As we walked past the North Camp we saw that Block 104, from which the tunnel Harry had been dug, was burning furiously. No one made any effort to control the flames, and rows of blackened chimneys stood out starkly in the night. I feel sure that the Brits had burned the block deliberately.” From *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story,* Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado.

The 2000 men in South Compound forged the way for the rest of the camp. It was night, a blizzard, and winds were unrelenting. They were pushed to their limits with inadequate clothing. There was a horse-drawn wagon to pick up those who could not go on.

Ernest Thorp was next out being housed in North Compound. He self-published his experience entitled *My Stretch in the Service* and gave permission to use his story in a letter written to Theresa on February 7, 2005. “Yes, you can use any of my comments in my diary. I wrote all of them at the time it happened or right after. My writing got very small in my original diary as I was afraid I wouldn’t have enough room….” His family have also given permission for this project.

Thorp was captured on August 4, 1944. Words from his diary.

"The 27th was the day the hammer fell and it was rumor no more. We were on the move and the war wasn't over by no means. It was a normal kriegy evening when at 9 p.m. a shout in the hall of the block gave us word to evacuate camp in 15 minutes. Boy! Speak of living in a panic. What a flap! Everyone was in everyone else's way getting ready. I had just made my pack the night before & had it packed. The last one in the room to do so as it turned out, tho we had till 2:30 a.m. before we left. A lot of fellows took advantage of the extra time to build sleds. At that we could take only what we could carry on our backs. Leaving the Vorlager we passed by the parcel store and drew as many as we wanted or what we could pack. It was cold, windy and snowy. Even early as it was there were German frauleins picking up what us guys had discarded already."

Now the stories from Center Compound as they left Stalag Luft III.

An excerpt from Delmar Spivey's self-published book, *POW Odyssey,* 1984, with permission from his grandson. Spivey was senior American officer at Center Compound and was captured August 12, 1943.

"It had snowed for several days and the weather was bitterly cold. We were having trouble keeping warm. We were having even more trouble keeping sane, due to the excitement caused by the nearness of the Russians. Rumors were so thick among the Germans that they frequently tried to verify them by talking with us. It was January 27, 1945,

General Vanaman, Colonel Jenkins, Colonel Hatcher, and I were having a lively game of bridge when, about nine o-clock, our camp officer rushed into the room and told us that we would have to leave within 30 minutes. This was the moment we had been anticipating for the past two years.

“I could scarcely believe what he was telling us. We were to march out on foot carrying nothing except clothing. Anyone attempting to escape would be shot; anyone falling out along the way would also be shot. I can still see General Vanaman standing up, looking the German squarely in the eye, and telling him to be prepared to shoot him first of all because he was sure he would be the first to fall by the wayside.

“.....Within the hour we were formed up on the parade ground with our packs on our backs, ready to go. After trembling in the snow, which was about a foot deep, for another 30 minutes, I ordered the men back into their barracks to await the final order to move out. The whole camp was in a state of complete hilarity. Big fires were started in all of the stoves, fueled by all the coal and bed boards in sight, plus all the extras the men could not carry with them. Many of the boys ate very heavy meals, trying to consume that which they could not carry away in their packs. Our doctor had very urgently warned against this, but they did it anyway. I am forced to admit that I bashed quite a bit myself.

“.....About 3:00 in the morning of January 28 we received orders to form up by blocks and to march out of the camp. We were counted as we went out. Each man was allowed to

take whatever he wanted from the Red Cross store as we passed it.

".....None of us knew what our destination would be. All we knew was that we were heading to the southwest down the corridor between the Russians on the east and British and Americans on the west. Seldom in history has there been such a nondescript, incongruous, motley looking array of people as those who left Stalag Luft III that morning.

".....We walked all the rest of the night and were in pretty good spirits, although many men had already discarded some of the articles they had hoped to save. Along the route we saw discarded improvised sleds, clothing, and food which had been abandoned by the Kriegies marching ahead of us. We at the rear did have the advantage of having the snow packed down for us. Marching three abreast, 10,000 people stretch out for an interminable distance.

"..... We walked approximately an hour-and-a-half, then rested for about ten minutes before resuming the march. No sooner had we gotten out of sight of the camp when we began to encounter German refugees fleeing the countryside in order not be overrun by the Russians. Each family had endeavored to take as much of its cherished belongs as was humanly possible."

The next words are from Vernon Burda whom Theresa met after Don Phillips died in 1995. At the time Burda lived in Wilsonville, Oregon, and Vern began educating Theresa on some aspects of life in Stalag Luft III. He also gave her an article he wrote entitled, "*I Saw Ten Thousand Men Cry*."

This is an excerpt from that article with permission to use from his family. He was in Center Compound. Burda was captured July 16, 1944.

“It was about January 16, 1945, when the Russians started their long-awaited winter offensive, as the temperature hit a new low for the winter. The Kriegies watched breathlessly as the Russians broke the back of German resistance and took Warsaw and Kracow and advanced on Posen and Breslau. Speculation was rife on whether we would be moving or not and betting odds were slightly in favor of not moving.

“I had a hunch we would be forced to walk, so I made overshoes out of a pair of wool socks with Klim tin soles, which I could tie over my shoes. I made heavy mittens by stuffing German toilet paper between layers of cloth and insulating my blankets with layers of toilet paper. A backpack was made by sewing one stocking on the top of a bag and one on the bottom and putting a belt as a strap between them.

“On Saturday, January 27, 1945, the Russians were knocking at the door of Breslau and Steinau. Then, like a bolt of lightening, at about 9:00 p.m., the order came: ‘Fall out for a forced march at 11:00 o’clock’-- in two hours.

“And the big flap started. Men rushed about making packs, bashing food, throwing away useless articles and preparing to move. Joe Doherty ran to the kitchen and started making a huge batch of fudge. It really seemed funny at the time.

“Everyone’s bowels moved about three or four times in the first hour. Boy, what excitement!!

“At the last moment, I decided to make a sled, and Shauer and I took four bed boards, used two as runners and two for the platform, and put tin on the runners.

“On January 28, at about 3:00 a.m., we fell out. It was about 20 degrees below zero and dark. We lined up, drew a Red Cross parcel per man, and left Stalag Luft III. The column of men was terrifically long, and we moved very slowly.

“Along the highway (Highway 99), we met the once mighty Wermacht Ski Troopers, all in white, and these Supermen were begging cigarettes from us as we passed. They were either 40 or 50 years old or young kids headed for the front.

“At 2:00 p.m. we reached Halbau….”

Don Phillips was also in Center Compound, captured September 6, 1943.

“Things went along in this manner until January 1945. At that time the Russian army was spearheading a drive toward Berlin, and our camp lay directly in its path. Through BBC reports on our secret radio facilities we knew they were within a few miles of us, and hoped to be liberated by them. Excitement ran high, rumors were rampant, and expectations of liberation and return to the USA had everyone keyed to fever pitch. No dice. On January 27th, in sub-zero weather, the German high command

ordered us south, on foot, carrying whatever food and clothing we felt we could struggle along with, and the camp was deserted in a matter of hours. We must have presented a strange sight to the German Luftwaffe above, for we were 10,000 or more, counting the German guards accompanying us, and our lines stretched for miles along the snowy roads as we struggled wearily along." From *Don's Great Escape: Life in a German POW Camp*, 2012.

Don only carried one piece of paper out of the camp. On one side of this paper was a line drawing of him completed in 1943 and on the other side of the paper he managed to make a log of his experience from January 28 to February 24, 1945. All of it is very faint, but these words can be made out at the beginning. "Jan. 28 Left Sagan...."

While living at Stalag Luft III Don was in a combine, living unit, with other P.O.W.s. Don lived in Center Compound, Block 44, Combine C. His combine started with 3 members (Don in the original group) and had as high as 14 members. All were from the U.S. These men stayed in contact after the war. Because of that some stories are known about their experiences on the Forced March to Liberation time.

One combine member, who remained a life-long friend with Don, was Verl Fisher, captured October 14, 1943. He states, "On January 28, 1945 @ 3 a.m. 2,000 prisoners were marched 3 abreast in a foot of snow, from Stalag Luft III. We didn't know our destination." Family's permission to use his words.

In a phone conversation with Theresa on January 31, 2005, Fisher stated he got a new pair of shoes when he left Stalag

Luft III, apparently from the accumulated Red Cross parcels. He said it was a BIG mistake and really emphasized that in the call. Another combine member kept notes in his *A Wartime Log*, published by The War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA. Others burned their *Log* to use as fuel to keep warm on the trek.

Yet another combine member made sure Theresa received a copy of Delmar Spivey's book, *POW Odyssey,* sent initially anonymously after Don died in 1995. After tracking down the benefactor he described he did not go on the Forced March, he was too ill. He went to Nuremberg and then later to Moosburg. Clearly he wanted the story passed on to the next generation.

Now we continue passing the story on to the next generations.

The night is cold, the trip very uncertain. What happens next to these 10,000 men?

Also on this day, January 27, 1945, Auschwitz was liberated. For these 10,000 men liberation was not to be soon. For now, they must endure.

4

January 28, 1945

Stalag Luft III had five compounds: South, West, North, Center, and East. Each had about 2000 men, and that is the order they left Stalag Luft III in January 1945. The experience of each compound during the Forced March was different. Not all experiences will be covered with our small number of P.O.W.s, but it gives a sense of the experience.

On the first day of the Forced March Albert Clark, who started out from South Compound, relays this in his book *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story*, Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado.

Clark states that after an hour or two of marching men began lightening their load.

“Along with several other items, I took out Carolyn’s wonderful letters that were all wrapped in a waterproof packet. I kissed them first and then threw them over my

shoulder. After the war, reading my own dull, sterile letters, I came to realize that I had discarded an irreplaceable treasure. Inspiring and loving, those letters reflected the great courage and devotion of my dear wife. She never mentioned her problems, the illnesses of the kids, or her difficulties trying to survive on a totally inadequate allotment.

"We walked until about midmorning. It became apparent that the goons had made no plans for the march, since there were no arrangements to stop where we could find shelter and hot water....

"I believe we walked until about dark and then stopped at another farm cluster where we obtained hot water. After eating some of our rations, we bedded down wherever we could."

From Ernest Thorp's self-published *My Stretch in the Service 1943-1945*. Thorp started out from North Compound. "Marched for 25 kilos then stopped in Halbau for lunch and a two hour rest. Thought we would stay there but the Germans rooted us out acting pretty tough. Dragged for 10 more kilos and after a 4 hr. wait in the weather, cold & hungry we got shelter on a barn-haymow. I slept pretty comfortable. My new shoes were wearing blisters on my feet."

A letter to Theresa from Ernest on March 20, 2005. "At first I stayed at the front of our column but as time went on my ill fitting shoes began to slow me up. My original shoes I left in the North Sea, the German's gave me a pair on Helgoland

which I wore out. The Red Cross gave me a pair of regular G.I. shoes but not the right size, hence the discomfort.

“I was surprised at 3 a.m. to see the German women and kids waiting along the road to pick up discarded cans of Klim, Spam, heavier items in a R.C. parcel. Something you would have fought for before the march. We would stop for a few minutes each hour. You begin to see other PW’s laying by the road apparently too exhausted to go along.

“We stopped a Halbau for lunch, rest 2 hrs in a shed full of discarded clothes. I picked out a pair of RAF trousers and put them over my GI pants. Later I was glad I did..."

Now the men of Center Compound.

First the words of Col. Spivey who was Senior American Office of the compound from his self-published book, *POW Odyssey*, 1984.

“Before noontime of January 28 nearly everyone had sobered up to the point where he realized that his very existence depended upon many things, including the whim of the Germans and upon keeping his wits about him every moment.

“Before noontime General Vanaman had persuaded the German major in charge of us that it was essential for him, Vanaman, to set the pace and determine the number of minutes we would walk and the number we would rest….We had great difficulty keeping the men from lying down in the snow during the halts. Those who did so became stiff and were much worse off than those who

continued to move about, keeping their blood circulating. It was bitter cold and it snowed throughout the first day of the march. We finally drew up in the center of town named Halbau, where we were told we would spend the night."

A German sergeant, respected by Spivey, got permission to stay in the town over the objections of the mayor of the town. Spivey then goes on with his commentary.

"....I knew if we had to remain outdoors all night many of us would freeze to death in spite of the anything we could do. I urged Popeye (the sergeant) to try to find a place where we could keep out of the wind and snow....In about 30 minutes he was back, glowing with pride because he had found a tremendous church which would hold all 2000 of us. What was more the church was heated! I had my doubts that any such church existed in Germany, much less in a town the size of the one we were in. However, we marched up to the gates of a Lutheran Church-beautiful and peaceful in the untrampled white snow. All German churches are beautiful, but this one looked so tranquil that it seemed almost a sacrilege for the tired, unhappy, cursing Americans to enter. But enter we did. The rear end of the column was the first to enter the church because our course of march had been reversed in order to reach it. At a glance not more than 600 or 700 of us could possibly get in, even if we didn't sit down. Cold, miserable Kriegies jammed every nook and corner. No one was allowed to lie down since he would occupy too much space. The pews were crowded as tightly as possible with men in sitting or standing positions. The balconies, steps, and every place was full of humanity....Some men built rough shelters on the lee side of the building, and still there were a couple of

hundred who could not find places to get under cover. By this time it was pitch dark. I was so numb I had no feeling at all. The Lutheran minister appeared and was most kind and considerate. He could not find the German major so Popeye took it upon himself to permit those still without shelter to use the parochial school connected with the church, which the padre had generously offered....My feet were like blocks of ice and remained that way for the rest of the night. They were badly frostbitten."

Comments from Vernon Burda from his article entitled *I Saw Ten Thousand Men Cry*.

"At 2 p.m. we reached Halbau, which we found contained mostly French forced laborers. The weather was freezing, and several of us already had frostbitten feet and hands. We were finally put up-about 2000 of us-in a church which had a capacity of 500. It was so crowded that we all had to sleep in shifts, and it was very, very cold. We ate a late meal of cold meat and crackers."

Don Phillips comments on the one piece of paper he carried "walked to Halbau, slept in church, crypt, walked 16 km."

Accounts written about the night in the church range from awful to miserable. The church is quite small. To look at the exterior of the church, it is impossible to imagine 2000 men being inside. Many of the men were sick and they were packed in the church, meaning any movement would mean stepping on other men. Many had taken off layers of their clothing in hopes they could get it warmed overnight before resuming the march. To go to the toilet meant

stepping over men to get outside and vomit and diarrhea were a part of the scene.

After the war the POWS of Center Compound had a plaque commissioned for the church in gratitude for the shelter the first night of the march. The memorial reads, "Dedicated To the Glory of God Donated by grateful American Air Force POW's Stalag Luft III who found shelter here during the night of January 28, 1945."

As this story moves forward the name of German Sergeant, Popeye, will continue to be a part of the story. In Don's life scrapbook he has a picture of Popeye at the 20th P.O.W. reunion in 1965 in Dayton, Ohio. By the picture Don put these words.

"Who's this? Looks like a wealthy German industrialist, right? That's just what he is, now, but you'd remember him as Sgt. Schultz, better know as Popeye, the former guard at Stalag Luft III, who used to count noses at Appel twice a day. As you'll recall, he was totally unlike his TV counterpart on 'Hogan's Heroes.' He was the man responsible for finding us housing each night on the cold forced march from Sagan in January '45, and a great job he did. All of us pitched in our dollars to have him flown over for the reunion. Now owns a plumbing fixture manufacturing plant in Germany."

Schultz was not the real name of Popeye, but clearly he made a positive impression on these men of Center Compound and was never forgotten.

In reading accounts of other compounds, it was the combination of Popeye and Spivey who saved many in Center Compound from even more misery. It was wretched, but it was even worse for other Compounds, some who walked two nights in a row in the blizzard conditions.

5

January 29 & 30, 1945

We continue the many-man view of the Forced March from three of the Stalag Luft III Compounds. Each Compound of 2000 men tried to stay together in the Forced March. They do not know it at this time, but they will be traveling a very long distance from Sagan (currently Zagan in Poland) to near Munich, Germany, which is about 580 km. (360 miles) if you were traveling by car.

Albert Clark was in South Compound, first out of Stalag Luft III on January 27, 1945.

A POW reunion publication (*The Longest Mission,* The Association of Former Prisoners of Stalag Luft III, 1995) stated South Compound covered 34.5 miles in 27 hours with one four-hour stop and a few died. The same publication gave this description.

“British Paratroop Chaplain Murdo MacDonald, who marched with the South Compound, wrote in his memoirs:

‘On the second night out, Lt. Jenkins, an All-American football player, decided to die. I heard the summons passed along the straggling line: ‘Padre Mac, you’re wanted.’ Retracing my footsteps, I found Jenkins on his back in the snow. He insisted on giving me what remained of his scanty rations. I stayed with him till he died, closed his eyes and ran to catch up with the main column, three miles away. The summons came again and again.’”

In Clark’s book, “The first night we walked and the second night we rested. On the third night we walked again and were getting very tired and cold.” Clark goes on to describe an event of getting a kriegie who was not rational back on his feet. From *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story,* Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado.

South Compound probably has the best intact history of any of the compounds because of the record keeping encouraged by Clark and the tenacity of his men to get those records through the Forced March to Liberation and get them back to the U.S. It is a marvel that this happened. The sense of duty to history at this time and the will to get it back was extraordinary. One officer actually carried on his back the written accounts of each capture of the 2000 prisoners of South Compound. Others carried other aspects of their P.O.W. life in the camp. They wanted their history to be remembered.

That is the purpose of this effort as well.

Clark was instrumental in making sure that history had a permanent home. Eventually Clark became Superintendent

of the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he started the Stalag Luft III Collection in 1974. All of his P.O.W. materials are there as well as Delmar Spivey and Donald Phillips.

Back to the march with the rest of the P.O.W.s

From Ernest Thorp's *My Stretch in the Service 1943-1945*. Thorp started out from North Compound--remember his feet are hurting.

"The next day we marched for 33 kms. Much travel, refugees and military even if we were off of the main roads. Was excellent but not my choice in seeing Germany. Rosy cheeked children & frauleins lined the roads with hot drinks for the guards. We were a motley looking bunch. No uniformity whatsoever the room all split up. I paired with Derrick and helped him out all I could. 200 of us finally ended up in a French prison outside of Muskau back in timber. We were really dragging too when we got there. Even tho I traded shoes with one of the orderlies my feet were covered up with large goose egg blisters. On the 30th we rested all day being housed in a factory. Took a hot shower, went on sick call and the French doctor said I was a very sad case. He put me down for transport then broke my blisters, peeled them and placed iodine on the raw flesh. Just about more than I could bear. My left foot was the worse. Blisters on my shoulders from my RAF shirt haversack but it sure served its purpose. I had on all the clothes I could wear and every pocket was full."

Now to the men of Center Compound.

First the words of Col. Delmar Spivey from his self-published book, *POW Odyssey*. We start where we left off at the Lutheran church in Halbau.

"Early the next morning, January 29, the German guards prodded us, blowing their whistles and screaming that it was time to get moving. People had been up all night, fires had been built in the churchyard, cooking had been going on, and no one had gotten much rest. What's more, we were so scattered that it seemed almost impossible to get organized again. The Germans were ready to give up. I called a squadron commander's meeting. Word was passed around that we were to march within fifteen minutes and the order of the blocks was announced. As we marched out the Germans tried to count us but there was so much confusion that I finally persuaded Popeye (German sergeant) to let us do our own counting. It took us a full hour-and-half to get under way because we could not find all of the Kriegies. We had to search every tomb, crypt, and corner of the whole parish in order to round them up. Popeye and I had a little conference sitting in a ditch full of snow. He determined that we could not last long if we continued to have nights like the one just past, so he and one of his men took off on confiscated bicycles and headed out in the direction in which we were marching. As we moved out I noticed that somehow during the night and during our wait in the street the previous afternoon that many of the boys had acquired small sleds. There must have been 500 of them. God only knows where they came from but it seems the whole town had turned out to do a little trading. At the advice of the German guards we had set up rigid black market prices for everything, and trading was controlled throughout the march. For instance, for the

price of two cigarettes I bought myself a beautiful knife from a Frenchmen who was working in one of the factories which we passed on the outskirts of the town.

“I was delighted to see that all the men were able to march after our night at the church. Some were limping from frostbitten feet and blisters, but everybody was able to move. The German guards had occupied the two horse-drawn wagons bringing up the rear of the our column. Originally these wagons had been intended to take care of the guards’ extra equipment and to serve as ambulances for those who could no longer walk. At noontime the next day we halted just beyond a fairly impressive looking German airdrome, devoid of airplanes but guarded by German soldiers.

“Our noonday meal was good because we took a full hour to prepare and eat it. We halted on the lee side of a big German forest where twigs could be found. Soon a whole series of little fires was burning along the roadside to warm hands and feet and in some instances to make hot chocolate or Nescafe coffee. Popeye sent one of his guides to a nearby German farmhouse and had a tremendous pot of boiling water brought out for our use. It was wonderful to taste hot coffee and to eat our more bulky food such as Prim, Spam, and sardines. Each person was his own boss as to how much and what he ate. All had been properly coached.

“By three o’clock in the afternoon we had reached our destination for the day–a tremendous farm run by a German count and his hundreds of slave laborers. We were put up in three huge barns filled with hay. Popeye had

arranged for the big kitchen serving the chateau to furnish hot water for the boys to make coffee. It wasn't long before they had managed to dicker with the Poles running the kitchen to furnish not only hot water but also hot soup and boiled potatoes. The brisk trading continued far into the night. No one knew where the Poles were getting the potatoes but they kept bringing them in at the set price of eight for one cigarette.

"The German who owned and ran the farm, and also his wife, were most cordial to General Vanaman and to those of us whom he considered to be on the General's staff. We were allowed to come into one of the guest rooms to wash our faces and hands and to clean up. We were also told that we might spend the night in guest rooms. That did not come to pass, however. The farm owner later told us that he had been ordered to move us back into the barn to make room for some women and children who were fleeing the Russians.

"This second night, January 29-30, was bitter cold, but the hay was an excellent place to keep warm. Our great fear was that someone would have a yen to smoke, so we set up our own guards throughout the three barns and kept constantly reminding everyone not to strike a match. This was the first night I had slept in a barn since I was a boy and I must admit that I was looking forward to getting some sleep after the past 48 hours without any worth mentioning. I remember taking my shoes off and placing them above my head in order to be able to find them in the pitch black dark the following morning. I then put on all of the dry socks I had, rolling up in my greatcoat, and promptly fell asleep. We slept spoon-style, four or five

together, head to foot. Next morning I woke up as stiff as my shoes, which were solidly frozen. That was the last night I did so foolish a thing as not to put my shoes in bed with me."

Comments from Vernon Burda from his article entitled *I Saw Ten Thousand Men Cry*.

"We left Halbau at dawn, cold stiff and hungry. We walked past Freiweldau. It had a long hill in town, and we were all so weak that we had trouble making it. From there on, we hit flat farmland, and the wind and cold blew right through us. We finally came to a small village where we were put up in a one-story barn. The only reason we got this stop was the fact that we had General Vanaman along with us.

"It was so crowded that all of us could not sleep at the same time, so some would walk around while others slept. Still, there was bitter cold and no German food. We were eating Red Cross food, cold, and it gave a lot of the fellows loose bowels.

"The General talked the Germans into letting us stay here for one extra day, in order to dry out socks and shoes and to rest. We would dry out socks by putting them next to our bodies while we slept. We fixed our shoes, packs, and mittens here. We also did a little trading with the German civilians. We traded cigarettes and soap for onions, hot water, and brew."

Don Phillips comments on the one piece of paper carried by him stated, "March to _____. Slept in deserted barn 18 km." Don did not fill in the name of where they were,

apparently he did not know the name of the town at the time.

Reading several accounts of men in this phase of the Forced March they are visceral of just how sick they were. One finishes reading the accounts and can feel the physical and emotional agony. Clearly many were very sick, and others could only keep going with the help of fellow P.O.W.s. Some note the encouragement of Col. Spivey marching up and down the column giving encouragement. Spivey was about the twice the age of the men under him. German civilians were on the march as well trying to evade the Russians. This meant the same roads had babies, mothers, old men all going where, they probably did not know, but they were going away from where they were with what they could carry.

One kriegie said he just kept saying this phrase over and over to himself. “I’m one step nearer to home, and I am going to take another….”

6

January 31-February 2, 1945

We continue the many-man view of the Forced March in the same order in which they left the camp.

Albert Clark was in South Compound, first out of Stalag Luft III. From *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story*, Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado.

"The pause had come just as we were entering the town of Muskau. We stood in the cold for almost two hours while the goons searched for shelter. The obvious solution was a large factory that made ceramic, glass, and earthenware. Most of the employees were French and Polish. There were numerous buildings in this facility, all offering shelter and warmth. The blast furnace was burning, and once the manager opened the gate we staggered into the compound and entered a number of the buildings. Many men collapsed without even taking off their packs. The wait in

the cold had produced some frostbite, and we were in urgent need of rest."

"...Rojo and I finally bedded down on the concrete floor of a large area full of machines used for shaping earthenware taps and spigots. The next morning we moved with the sled to another building where there was a modern washroom with hot water. We all cleaned up and shaved, and that night we slept warm for the first time since leaving Sagan."

From Ernest Thorp's self-published *My Stretch in the Service 1943-1945*. Thorp started out from North Compound.

"On the 31st the Americans and British were split up. The USA boys marched off first but 4 of us stayed behind as casualties. 1st of Feb. we got issued a 1/2 R.C. parcel then late in the afternoon we got carried into Muskau in a rough riding wagon. Taken to a barron's barn where the rest of the North Comp. was. They marched out that night. Harvey and Looper decided they could go on with them. Mac, Nilley and I didn't. So we bedded down in another stable, steam heat, hot water and plenty of straw with 60 other casuals."

Ernest Thorp from a letter to Theresa March 20, 2005, about this time frame in the march.

"...We moved on after much shouting and gunfire by the guards, dragged on in the snow then stopped and waited 4 hours to get some shelter, one POW, a Captain kept walking back and forth along the column, 'Keep your feet moving,' 'Don't stand still!' 'Eat some of your cubes for

energy' I don't know how he did it but credit has to be given to him to keep us alert.

"Finally I got placed in a haymow in a barn. I slept fairly well despite a fellow POW who kept shaking so bad and practically burrowed in the hay to get under me for warmth. When I woke up and looked down the German farmer was feeding his livestock.

"I paired up with one of my roommates in Sagan a big Englishman and he begin to fail on the next day I had to help him and he almost dropped out.

"I didn't think I did much but later out of service he gave me credit for saving his life. I did trade shoes with one of the enlisted men it was too late. My feet were covered with blisters big as goose eggs...

"The next day on Feb lst I had to say goodbye to Les Ford, roommate and one of my best friends in Luft III. The Germans departed the RAF people from the AAC. The RAF headed to the NW of Germany & we to the South. We casualties were put in a fine stable, lights, straw, and running hot water, steam heat. I did get dysentery from the water and passed out as well. This was in front of a German guard who paid no attention to me. I finally come too cleaned myself up and laid in the straw...."

Now the men from Center Compound.

First the words of Col. Spivey from his self-published book, *POW Odyssey*. You have probably noted the use of the word 'boys' and now 'youngsters.' For a man almost twice the age

of his charges, he kept up physically and marched more than any of them did.

“During the fourth day of our march, January 31, many of the youngsters were beginning to realize that there wasn’t much future in wandering out into the German countryside in the dead of winter. They tightened their belts and began conserving the little remaining food they had. I was very tired and irritable, and many times caught myself snapping at the men when I should have been encouraging them. My relations with General Vanaman were similarly affected. In a couple of instances when he didn’t do what I thought was right, I became angry and sullen. Many others were in the same mood. During the day I made three complete trips from the front to the rear of the column, which added approximately six extra miles of walking for me. By nightfall I was completed exhausted. This was the first day when any of our lads gave up and said they could walk no further…

“On many occasions I saw further evidence of the friendliness of the German people that had astonished me ever since my arrival in Germany. In the dead of winter and with little or no fuel of any kind and with practically nothing to eat, the peasants would come out of their neat little houses bringing hot water and little bits of food for trade. Coffee and cigarettes were our most prized possessions. Once I caught two of my Kriegies swapping coffee for bread. It was Nescafe, but instead of the coffee the boys had crammed the box full of snow and had obtained the bread from the Germans by cheating. This was an exception to the honesty which almost everyone showed along the entire route. Whenever we caught one of our

boys engaged in such practices he was taken to task immediately.

“On the evening of January 31, we arrived at Muskau, some 50 kilometers from where we had started that morning. Arrangements had been made for my group from Center Compound to stay in a tremendous pottery plant. We occupied the first and second floors of this plant and slept among the tremendous crocks and pots and vases, some of which were finished and some in the process of drying. It was a veritable heaven on earth because we were out of the cold, had plenty of cooking utensils, and plenty of fire…

“The following day we received our first German food since leaving Sagan. It consisted of a thin soup, but it was hot and good. We obtained permission to visit a sausage factory in the vicinity where, in exchange for some cigarettes and a little money, we obtained many pounds of blood sausage and bologna. We also got some German and French bread.

“We were now beginning to hear some rumors about our destination and how we were going to get there. Frequent requests were made for permission to escape, and two boys did escape. It would have been comparatively easy at this time and later to get away, but our rule still held that unless things got much worse than they were it would be better to stick together. This was a hard rule to enforce and it took all my courage to do so. However, it proved in the long run to be the wise course.

“We remained together in the pottery factory for three days and nights waiting word to move on to the railhead where,

we were told, we were to entrain and proceed to some place in Southern Germany."

Comments from Vernon Burda from his article entitled *I Saw Ten Thousand Men Cry*.

"On January 31, it was a long, long day. We walked and walked and walked. Twenty-nine kilometers to Muskau. What made it so bad was the fact that the country was very hilly and the weather was so uncertain. It would snow one minute and then it would rain the next minute-we even had hail. The sled was still working okay, although it was tough pulling it up some of the these hills. The fellows were trading cigarettes and soap for bread, spuds, and hot water all along the way-especially in Muskau while waiting for quarters.

"We were finally quartered in a brick factory-really swell. It was dry and warm and had lights, and best of all, we got German black bread and marge. We were too tired to do much but eat, and then we slept on the concrete floor.

"On February 1, General Vanaman again talked the Germans into letting us spend the day here. It was like Heaven! We washed and shaved and slept and ate very little. Guys from West Camp and Balaria came to the factory. Their feet were frozen and blue and green and yellow. They really looked terrible. They had walked all the way with no stops! Some of them were really in bad shape. One knew the bombardier and co-pilot from my crew, Krzyzynski and Weiss, and they were okay the last time he saw them.

“On February 2, we rested.”

On the one piece of paper carried by Don Phillips we have this record.

“Jan. 31 Marched to Muskau stayed in brick factory-dem find place! 28 km.
“Feb 1- Stayed over
“Feb 2- "

Please note the exclamation ! in Don’s record.

One of Don’s combine members had a birthday on February 1, and his fellow combine member, Verl Fisher, bought German ‘white’ bread for cigarettes and gave it to him as a present. At that time in American taste, white bread was considered superior to brown bread, or maybe Verl was just looking for something that looked more like a cake. Either way, it is touching.

In addition to what is happening on the ground, also imagine what these men are seeing and hearing from above. German planes were in the air and probably being flown where they could not be taken by the advance of Russian troops. These were men of the Army Air Force, they knew what this meant.

A comment on age. In the movie *The Great Escape* consider the age of the actors. Steve McQueen was 33 and James Garner was 35 when the movie was made. They looked those ages. By and large the men in Stalag Luft III were not that age, they were, as Spivey says, ‘youngsters.’ The pictures of almost all of them either entering the service or

time of capture look like youth, not the age of McQueen or Garner.

Visualize the scene we have. P.O.Ws and civilians are on the ground moving away from the Russians in bad weather. German airplanes are above moving. Allied planes are above. Planes are looking for targets, hopefully not where civilians or P.O.W.s reside.

The war is winding down but certainly not yet for any of these people. They are in the thick of many things to come. We could say, colloquially, all hell is breaking loose.

7

February 3, 1945

We continue the many-man view of the Forced March in the same order in which they left the camp.

Albert Clark was in South Compound, first out of Stalag Luft III.

In Clark's book *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story,* Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado, he wrote, "South Camp moved out after two nights of rests and headed for Spremberg..." An account written by another POW from South Compound states it had stopped snowing but the roads were still filled with drifts.

From Ernest Thorp's self-published *My Stretch in the Service 1943-1945*. Thorp started out from North Compound.

"On the morning of Feb 3rd, my 24th birthday two trailers pulled by a high speed tractor pulled up. Felt very

miserable when I finally got squeezed on with a group of other Americans. However, it covered the remaining 25 kilos to Spremberg in no time. We passed the Center Compound kriegies, long lines that seemed to go on and on. Noticed the Goons were building a defense line in front of Sprembrug, new 88's and heavy artillery were being placed. We were taken to an Army motor pool depot. Permanent bldgs and nice ones. Plenty of German tanks and vehicles of all sorts. We slept in a gym, 30 of us under automobile chassis in wood shavings and kept quite warm. Young German soldiers who could speak very good English came in to argue with us on politics. They were quite fanatical and the talk got a little heated, but they were very sure of final victory. They had knifes to trade for fags and I got one for 40. Sure needed one."

Ernest Thorp in a letter to Theresa March 20, 2005.

"On Feb 3rd, my 24th birthday the Germans loaded me on a trailer full of crippled & sick POWs pulled by a tractor similar to our 2 cylinder John Deere. We flew by hundreds of POWs in the road. No one had sleds but many baby buggies because the snow had melted. At the head of the POWs was General Vanaman, marching like a soldier with his officer's hat on. We were ahead of the main group so we got priority on shelter at an Army motor pool depot. They fed us barley soup which tasted very good and served us the same 50 years later on our reunion to Luft 3."

Thorp's correspondence to Theresa was mainly in 2005 after they were connected through a cousin. There are several long, detailed, handwritten letters from Ernest at that time. The year 2005 was when the 60th anniversary of

the Liberation was coming (*Stay Alive 'til 2005* Thorp said was the mantra). He intended to go to the reunion in Tucson but family illness prevented same. In one of the letters, having reviewed what Theresa was writing about the P.O.W. story, he finished the letter by saying, "Keep writing!"

Now the men from Center Compound.

It is at this juncture in the story that the five sources from Center Compound begin to disagree on dates and places. Perhaps you have noted so far there have been minor disagreements in distance gone for a particular day, but with this entry we begin to have disagreement on what happens on what day. The reporting shall quote exactly what the person said and then the reader will have to determine what they think on their own. Probably more credence to those written at the actual time of event.

First the words of Col. Delmar Spivey from his self-published book, *POW Odyssey*.

“We remained together in the pottery factory for three days and nights waiting for word to move on to the railhead where, we were told, we were to entrain and proceed to some place in Southern Germany. During this time the weather moderated to the point where most of the snow melted, so it became necessary to abandon all our sleds. Some bizarre looking wheeled contraptions were put together in the pottery plant.

“On February 4 we moved out and through the town of Muskau, one of the prettiest I have ever seen. It was used as

a summer resort for very wealthy Germans and was beautifully landscaped, with magnificent trees and huge estates. About noon of this, the eighth day of our march, we beheld one of the biggest air raids of the war from a distance of some 60 or 70 miles from the target. It was a 1000 plane raid on Berlin. We could hear the constant rumble of the high explosives; before nightfall we could see the smoke. It was an awesome experience and first raid close enough to impress us with the might of our truly magnificent air force. The German guards grew quiet but gave no indication of increased hostility. They were pretty much fed up with the whole war and especially with the arduous march which they were having to undertake....

"As night approached we were halted at a crossroads with a few scattered houses and barns in the vicinity (a footnote says this is Graustein)...

"We found it difficult to locate enough barns in this area to get all of the men in out of the cold. They were beginning to learn to take care of themselves, so I didn't have to worry too much about them. After everyone was bedded down for the night I was told where the General was sleeping and that I was to stay with him, as had been customary since the march began. This was a farm settlement; our billet was a hayloft above a cowshed, minus the cow. Farm buildings formed a complete enclosure, the house making up one side of the quadrangle. The old German lady who lived in the house was very kind, offering us her kitchen for heating water and for cooking any food we had on hand.

"The night was comfortable since the hay was of especially good quality....

“All along our route we had seen many evidences of the final colossal preparation for the last-ditch defense of Germany. Small one-man foxholes had been dug on either side of the highway for use by men armed with bazookas. There were also prepared roadblocks and tank emplacements.

Comments from Vernon Burda from his article entitled *I Saw Ten Thousand Men Cry*.

“On February 3, we got up at 4:30 a.m. It was raining out and thawing, so broke up the sled. I was really loaded down now, but I was determined not to throw away any of my blankets or food or clothes. We walked 18 kilometers to Braustein (probably means Graustein). We were bedded down in a barn, with straw on the floor-not bad. With the barnyard and all, it looked exactly like the pictures we had seen of troops in World War I in France in the barns. We slept fairly good, as we bundled two or three of us together for warmth.”

On the one piece of paper carried by Don Phillips this record.

“Feb 3- Marched to Graustein 18 km. Stayed in barn”

Don’s combine member says the weather is warmer and rumors were floating that they were to take a train tomorrow.

Next, the even more grim part of the Forced March proceeds as they reach the train station.

If this has seemed bad thus far, it is about to get worse.

Buckle up.

February 3, 1945, was the bombing of Berlin. These 10,000 men in the Forced March could hear what was going on relatively close to them. It was the biggest bombing raid of WWII by the Eighth Army Air Force, 1500 bombers protected by 1,000 fighters. Accounts state they were attacking the railway system--guess where these 10,000 were going next as a mode of transportation. The fires from the bombing in Berlin lasted for several days.

8

February 4, 1945

We continue the many-man view of the Forced March in the order they left Stalag Luft III.

Albert Clark was in South Compound, first out of Stalag Luft III. From *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story*, Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado.

"We arrived at Spremberg in the late afternoon of about 2 February, and it became clear that we were going to entrain the long line of boxcars next to where we had stopped....After the war we learned that when the Center Camp reached Spremberg a day or two later, General Vanaman, Colonel Spivey, and three other officers were pulled out of the column and told that they were going to be taken first to Berlin and then sent home via Switzerland as a reward for their peaceful and orderly conduct during the march..."

From Ernest Thorp's *My Stretch in the Service 1943-1945*. Thorp started out from North Compound, but eventually joined Center Compound. Recall February 3 was his birthday.

"On Feb 4th the center camp with the General moved in and down to the train…me still having the G.I.'s."

Ernest Thorp in a letter to Theresa March 20, 2005.

"Feb 4th we were moved to a railhead and they put 50-55 men in a box car and me still having bowel problems. I was lucky to get jammed in a corner of the car. I had a back rest & not near the door where the vomit and toilet buckets were…."

Now to Center Compound men.

First the words of Col. Delmar Spivey from his self-published book, *POW Odyssey*. Again there is a problem with dates, as it appears Spivey is one day off in his record. He says it is February 5 and it is probably February 4. Little does Col. Spivey know at the beginning of this day by the end of it he will be separated from his men for the rest of the war.

"On this morning, February 5, when we were just outside Spremberg, we saw German 88 mm antiaircraft guns moving into position, pulled by Russian prisoners of war. About noontime we entered the outskirts of Spremberg, marching into one of the most beautiful German military posts I have ever seen. It was an extremely large post, constructed of brick and stone, and was very modern,

having been built during the past five or six years. We were marched to the armory and to several other large buildings where we were told to fall out and prepare our noonday meal. The Germans were most cordial on this day. They had prepared for us about 500 gallons of barley broth, extremely nourishing and good. Many of us had the opportunity to wash up and shave for the first time in well over a week. It was here that we were told that in the evening we would embark for Southern Germany, where our permanent camp was located. Rumors had it that we were going to Munich to the big POW camp at Moosburg.

"About 2:00 in the afternoon I recognized our old Abwehr officer, who had not been with us on the march but who had given us much trouble at Sagan. He came blustering up to me with a tremendous toothy grin, stating that I was to prepare myself for immediate repatriation. I was in no mood for trifling and told him so, but he insisted that I was to come with him at once and that I was to prepare to leave for Berlin immediately. He told me that ten of us had been chosen to go to Berlin to receive final instructions before being repatriated to Switzerland and thence home. It seemed, according to his story, that we had done such a magnificent job in getting the prisoners away from the Russians that we were to be rewarded. The story sounded extremely suspicious to me. I told him I refused to move unless made to do so. He immediately demonstrated that he was very serious about his mission and that I would come or else be taken by force.

"I was then escorted over to the big field house where General Vanaman was, and found him with Colonel Kennedy, Lieutenant Brown, and Captain George. I

recognized these three among those whose names I had given the General at Muskau. General Vanaman was extremely happy about the whole situation. I think he had absolute faith in the Germans concerning the possibility of being repatriated at once. I shall never forget my own feelings at the time. It was the last thing I wanted to do, and I told the General so. He promptly informed me that I was to come along without any further back talk. It seemed that five of us were to go with the two special security officers who had lectured us the preceding day; that we had been selected by the Germans for some kind of a mission that would take us to Berlin and then to Switzerland. I knew I could not make the men in my command understand what was happening because I did not understand myself. Besides, I was reasonably sure that they would believe that the General and I had worked some kind of a deal to get ourselves out of the discomforts of any further march. I don't think I have ever been any sicker about any command I have ever received.

"A hurried conference was called. The block commanders and the remaining senior officers were told that we were being separated from them.....

"As I stood there on the sidewalk and watched my 2,000 men march out of the barracks area toward the station in Spremberg I had a feeling of utter impotency, a fierce desire to run amuck, to curse and kill every German I could find, and to take my men and head for home. Instead, I stood there waving at them, exhorting the block commanders to keep their chins up, trying to exchange repartee with some of the more well-known camp characters, meanwhile doing my best to swallow the

tremendous lump in my throat and to keep back a flood of tears....I wanted to be alone and I almost hated to see General Vanaman, whom at that moment I blamed for being separated from the others. It was not until much later that I found out he had nothing to do with the trip to Berlin and had done nothing to foster the scheme which the Germans had in mind."

We will have no more words from Col. Spivey, but for those interested his book, *POW Odyessy*, takes him through the rest of the war. Well worth the read.

Comments from Vernon Burda from his article entitled *I Saw Ten Thousand Men Cry*.

"It was now February 4, and we were up at dawn and marched seven kilometers to Spremburg-biggest town so far. We went into a permanent camp that had good brick buildings, and it was really nice. We stayed in the garages and got some hot soup. Toward evening, we marched through the town to the marshalling yards. We saw plenty of signs that reminded us of home--Shell, Standard, Esso, Mobil Oil, Kodak, Agfa, and others. The town looked as if it were in fairly good shape.

"The German crowded us into old French 40 and 8 (Hommes 4, Chaveau 8) and I do mean crowded...."

On the one piece of paper carried by Don Phillips we have this record.

"Feb. 4-Marched to Spremberg stayed in garage, caught train in aft."

Don ’s combine member noted there was no straw in the box cars and that high ranking officers had stayed behind by German orders.

Reading several other accounts of this day, one mentions Popeye the German sergeant saying the trip would take 3 days and all would go well if they were not bombed by your own air force and that the new camp was run by Storm Troopers who know the meaning of discipline. Other accounts say those being put on the train did not know where they were going to go and yet other accounts say most agree after the fact that what was to come was worse than what had already happened to them.

What is known is many received permanent injuries from the Forced March that lasted long after the war.

Next will be the description of the 4-day gruesome journey to Stalag VIIA in Moosburg. The box cars were intended to hold 40 men or 8 horses at the most. They held many more men per car.

9

February 4-7, 1945

We continue the many-man view of the Forced March.

Albert Clark was in South Compound, first out of Stalag Luft III. From *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story,* Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado.

"I have some vivid memories of the train trip from Spremberg, which lasted about two days and three nights. I remember passing slowly through Dresden. This was on about the 3 or 4 February. The city was a center of German history and housed a collection of priceless and irreplaceable art. I recall seeing the old women dressed completely in black who were greasing the railroad track switches in the marshaling yards with a stick and a bucket of black grease. The city was filled with military hospitals and refugees from the east and was regarded as an open city. On 13 and 14 February, ten days after I passed through,

Dresden was utterly destroyed by British and American bombers with great loss of life…

"Sometime during the second day our train stopped on a curved track on an isolated siding and we were all let out to relieve ourselves. It was quite a sight–2,000 men all squatting in the snow with their pants down. Rojo chose this pause to move his staff to the head car. It turned out to be a dreadful mistake. We all traipsed through the field of feces carrying our sled on our shoulders and were filthy by the time we reached the new car. It turned out to be full of manure, so we were all a real mess…

"Sometime during the next day, we pulled into the station in Regensberg. In spite of our warnings, many men drank out of the big tubs holding water for the locomotives. Fortunately none of them became ill, but the water was dangerously contaminated and I was concerned…"

From Ernest Thorp's *My Stretch in the Service 1943-1945*. Thorp started out from North Compound but by this time in the Forced March has merged with Center Compound men.

"The 3 day trip was a nightmare. Crowded and cramped to where we couldn't even stretch out to sleep. Eating in dirt and filth. Water only once. Men sick with bad food & the G.I.'s. I got along better than most or what I expected to. Sure no pleasure trip. We were told we were going to Nuremburg but it was Moosburg that we finally hit on."

This from Ernest Thorp in March 20, 2005, letter to Theresa.

"...Feb 4th we were moved to railhead and they put 50-55 men in a box car and me still having bowel problems. I was lucky to get jammed in a corner of the car, I had a back rest and not near the door where the vomit and toilet buckets were. The 3 day trip was a nightmare. Couldn't stretch out to sleep. Train stopped once out on a mountain side. There was snow on the ground which was our only water source and chance to relieve ourselves. We were really glad to get to Moosburg, but we thought we could end at Nuremberg. Most of the men on the train were from the Center Compound. North Compound friends did go to Nuremberg on another train..."

Comments from Vernon Burda from his article entitled *I Saw Ten Thousand Men Cry*.

"The Germans crowded us into old French 40 and 8 (Hommes 40, Cheval 8) and I do mean crowded. There were 55 men and a guard in our car. They also brought in a Red Cross parcel for each man, which was very welcome. But it was so crowded. We finally allocated space to each man, but as soon as they would go to sleep, the men would try to stretch out. I lay on the floor, and several times I woke up with four men laying zig zag across me so that I couldn't move. All in all, it was a pretty lousy night. We only made 30 or 40 kilometers that night. We heard we were to go to Nuremburg, but we had gotten to the point where we didn't care where we went, as long as we got there. The Germans gave us no water, and that was not fun. Most of the guys had loose bowels and were throwing up.

“February 5-didn’t make much progress all day, but towards evening, we made good time. We reached Dresden at about midnight, and there were a lot of German troops going to the Russian front near Berlin. It seemed like they moved a lot of the troops from the West front to the Russian front. One Jerry kidded with us-said he fought at Moscow and Paris, and now to Berlin. He would catch the girls nearby and kiss them-he seemed happy and slightly drunk. We didn’t blame him.

“In Chemnitz, we almost were in the middle of an air raid. They locked us up in the boxcar when the sirens blew. Luckily, the train took off like a bat, and we left.

“February 6th-arrived in Zwickau at dawn and finally got something to drink-German coffee. Boy, was it lousy. The guys all were sick by now, and they were having bowel movements all over the place. The civilians were sure peeved, and they screamed to high Heaven.

“We made better time after Zwickau-heard the West camp went to Nuremburg and that we were going there too. The cars were still awfully crowded, and the Germans would not give us any water. We went through another air raid in the afternoon-we saw the Forts (ed. note--B-17 Flying Fortress) and Libs (ed. note--Liberators) this time.

“On February 7th, soon after dawn, we were in Augsburg. Still, we were not given any water, and we were thirsty as the Devil. Finally, we hit Munich, and we were put in a railroad yard. The place was really bombed out. We saw American POW’s fixing it up. We got so thirsty that Downey got a Trinkwasser of steam water out of the locomotive.

“In the afternoon, we traveled to Moosburg, and we got off at Stalag 7-A. We went over to the North Lager, which we called the ‘Snake Pit.’”

On the one piece of paper carried by Don Phillips we have this record.

“Feb. 4–Marched to Spremberg stayed in garage, caught train in aft.
“Feb. 5–rode
“Feb. 6- “
“Feb. 7–rode, arrived at VIIA late p.m.”

What is there to say after such a grim experience?

Reading several accounts of the trip one is left feeling viscerally every sense is assaulted during the trip. Smell initially of manure turns to smell of men who are sick both with vomit and excrement that was overflowing from the toilet boxes that could not be dumped with the closed doors. Sound of planes and air raids overhead and the moans of men who surround you in agony. The parchment of thirst is paramount in all the accounts. What food they had could not be easily be swallowed because of dried throats. Another account states that hatred of their guards was at an all time high. Sleep was impossible. Frigid air was coming through the cracks in the boxcar, and coughing that follows same.

Endurance of cold, hunger, thirst, exhaustion, and bombers overhead, who do not know you are not the enemy. Perpetual fear as one P.O.W. stated it while being in

the boxcar hearing the planes overhead and the box cars not being marked for prisoners.

Is it any wonder that those who survived this part of the trip (and there is much more to come) never talked about it with anyone other than someone who had endured it as well? At times perhaps all of these men we are following in this Forced March acted less than they would have liked to act with fellow human beings, and, were in fact, as a cousin put it simply, 'every man for himself.'

We simply don't know, but perhaps you have tried to imagine yourself in this experience as we went along. How did you measure up?

A quip from Vernon Burda when he was discussing his experience with Theresa in 1996, "my wife says nothing ever bothers me, my retort is always the same, no matter what the issue…this is nothing as compared to what I've faced in the past."

Truth.

The Forced March to Moosburg is over for the men of Stalag Luft III and for those who endured it it would be an experience of a lifetime, but it hardly became a footnote of WWII.

The next task is to stay alive in Stalag VIIA, a place built for 10,000 and by war's end has 130,000. It is a miserable, miserable place to be for almost three months as you will see.

We are a long ways from Liberation and V-E Day.

Hang on...

10

February 7-24, 1945

Now all the men we are following are at Stalag VIIA at Moosburg. Follow along in the same order as presented before.

Albert Clark was in South Compound, first out of Stalag Luft III.

From *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story,* Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado, selected descriptions of early days at Stalag VIIA.

“We were separated from our clothing and gear and herded naked into a big room with overhead shower outlets where we took brief, warm showers. We were all shocked to see how much weight we’d lost…While in the shower all of our possessions were fumigated, but this was a useless precaution as we soon discovered that the camp was heavily infest with fleas, lice, and bedbugs.

"...The German rations were the worst we had experienced, and we were on half the normal Red Cross parcels. These parcels were out of a huge warehouse near town managed by old British and French prisoners under German supervision. We never had enough to eat, and I was hungrier than I had ever been. This was the first time we had been without enough food for any length of time, and the hunger caused us to do things we would never have done under normal circumstances.

"...One man was caught stealing potatoes from the box of hoarded food belonging to his bunkmate. We told him that it was being made a matter of record and that he could expect to face a court-martial after the war. In retrospect, it is hard to comprehend the significance of such an act. Nothing came of it, of course, but I remembered who he was and could find no warm feelings toward him when he showed up at the reunions."

From Ernest Thorp's *My Stretch in the Service 1943-1945*. Thorp started out from North Compound but was now with men from Center Compound.

"Feb 7 - A rainy, cloudy, gloomy day we walked in the mud to the "Snake Pit" a very small compound with 3 sheds, 600 men to a shed to stay in. Just enough room to stretch out. Two faucets for 1600 men. No hot water, a trench for an abort. Mud & filth everywhere. To get a drink you stood in line for 3 hours. Not allowed to have a fire to cook with. Many became very sick and G.I.'s very bad. Some of the German rations were rotten and wouldn't have made hog feed. To wash I would get up in the middle of the night having to walk on guys to get out. Protecting Powers (Swiss)

delegates came in to look our situation over which was indeed deplorable. Foot hurt quite badly.

" Feb 11th - Sunday we got deloused, showered and moved to a permanent bks. Felt fine till we saw what we drew. Were made for EM's who were to work, damp, poorly lighted and cold. Did have bunks but they were full of bed bugs and fleas and few bed boards. No library, room for recreation or cooking facilities. They told us these quarters were only temporary, that permanent ones were being fixed at Nuremberg. 'Sagan was never like this' was the theme song and how true it was. Never thought I could or would look back to Sagan and wish I was there instead of where I was at.....One appel a day but after some guy escaped they got to two and from 2 - 3 hours long while we froze & cussed them plenty. Like at Sagan rain or snow didn't matter, we stood outside anyway...On the 16th I got the G.I's again and Sagan fell to the Russians. 3 weeks to the day after we had evacuated the place. Our latrine got so full it overflowed and the Goons would do nothing.

Comments from Vernon Burda from his article entitled *I Saw Ten Thousand Men Cry*. We pick up his story as they arrive at Stalag VIIA on February 7, 1945.

"In the afternoon, we traveled to Moosburg, and we got off at Stalag 7-A. We went over to the north Lager, which we called the 'Snake Pit.' They put 600 of us in a shack with nothing for beds or fuel or anything. We were all sick by this time. It was cold and damp, and everyone was covered with fleas and lice. Morale was really low. There was not enough room to have everyone lay down at once, and many did not sleep. There was no heat and no hot food.

“On February 8th, 9th, and 10th, we stayed in the ‘Snake Pit.’ I used a blanket and slung a hammock and got some sleep. Everyone was really sick.

“On February 11th, after supper, we went through a search, which was a farce. We had saws, hammers, maps, nails, wrenches, and everything else we had picked up along the way, especially at the brick factory at Muskau. We were deloused, and we took a shower. Then we were taken to the East Lager, and we were put into barracks. What a hole!

“We were put in tiers of 12 men, three bunks high with six bed boards per bed. The beds were straw pallets and were full of lice, fleas, and bedbugs. Thus, our life in Moosburg started, and what a miserable life it was.

“The weather was very cold and damp. The Germans did not give us any fuel for heat, so we had to stay in bed all day. There were no facilities to do anything even if we did get up. The lighting was so poor that some of the fellows never did see what their sack looked like. We were so crowded that the only way we had of keeping personal stuff was by hanging it from the ceiling.

“I had the top bunk, and after hanging up my stuff, I barely had room to lie horizontal. Sitting up in any of the bunks was out of the question.

“The German food ration consisted of one-half cup of warm water for breakfast, one cup of thin, watery soup for dinner, and a little black bread for supper, with extra issues of cheese, marge, or blood sausage. For a while, we had no

Red Cross parcels, and the fellows were really thin. We then received issues of parcels. One parcel lasted two weeks. At first, we were issued British parcels which contained food that had to be cooked, but the Germans would not give us any fuel. We made burners and blowers out of tin cans, using the barbs from the wire as nails. For fuel, we first burned our bed boards and slung our sacks by nailing the burlap pallet to the sides of the bed. When the bed boards gave out, we did a little more sabotage work, and we tore the inner floor out of the barracks. We also swiped sticks from the slit trenches."

On the one piece of paper carried by Don Phillips we have this record.

"Feb. 7- rode, arrived at VIIA late p.m.
"Feb. 8- stayed over 550 in one block
"Feb. 9- ditto
"Feb. 10-ditto
"Feb. 11-ditto
"Feb. 12-deloused, bathed, moved to diff. quarters, 350 to bks.
"Feb. 13-21-Stayed there
"Feb. 22-Snake pit for delousing
"Feb. 24-Back again-still lousy"

Don had more room on his one piece of paper, but he wrote no more. Why stop on February 24? By looking more carefully at all the accounts regarding this time frame, Don probably realized this is how it will be until the war ends or worse as many men thought there would be another forced march. They stayed in the worse part of Stalag VIIA for four nights, they were deloused and moved to somewhat better

quarters on February 12 (some accounts have one Latrine Revolt on this day) and stayed in the different quarters from February 13 - 21. Then back to the Snake Pit for two days, and back again.

Don's last words on his account are "still lousy."

'Lousy' what, we are left to wonder. There are enough accounts of others to make several guesses. Initial speculation was that mean how he felt but another definition of lousy is infested with lice. That is probably what the above means.

Don only writes one letter home during his time in Stalag VIIA. It is dated April 8. It is a long way to April right now.

Reading several other accounts of early days at Stalag VIIA one POW describes a fellow POW dying as they arrived at Stalag VIIA and accommodations at Stalag VIIA entirely inadequate for the numbers now there. The area the men from Center Compound were in was labeled the Snake Pit. There were lines an hour long to wash in cold water and to get drinking water. The Swiss Red Cross toured the Snake Pit and told the German officials the conditions were deplorable. Most of the men from Center Compound moved into the permanent part of Stalag VIIA on February 12 after being deloused. All accounts mention the latrine overflowing....one latrine for 1800 men. The men of Center Compound went on strike and some label it as the Latrine Revolt.

In this time frame the Bombing of Dresden, Germany, happened February 13-15, 1945. Was it necessary at this

juncture of the war? Read *Slaughterhouse Five* to get a sense of it written by P.O.W. Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

11

March, 1945

The men of Stalag Luft III are now in Stalag VIIA, Moosburg, Germany.

Albert Clark was in South Compound, first out of Stalag Luft III, comments on life in Moosburg from his book *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story,* Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado.

"Most of our men were utterly miserable. They were hungry, cold, discouraged, crowded, and being eaten up by the bugs in our dirty blocks...

"Sometime in March, I came down with pneumonia again and was given a bunk in the lazarette, which was nothing more than a room with double bunks and a little extra space. An American prisoner-doctor and a few noble kriegies were doing the chores so we could stay in bed and recover. I don't remember how long I stayed there, but with some sulfa drugs, warmth, a special food ration, and rest, I

recovered fairly promptly. The weather was wet but warming up, so we no longer suffered from the cold."

Another POW from South Compound reports in March they had many all-day outdoor appels and the Germans searched for missing men. Air raids overhead were frequent.

From Ernest Thorp's *My Stretch in the Service 1943-1945*. He started out from North Compound at Stalag Luft III, but was then separated from them and joined the men in Center Compound. This excerpt from March 1945 in Moosburg. His notes give the most complete feel of a day-to-day existence in the camp.

"March 1945 - Came in cold & windy. February wasn't too bad. After the 3rd there was to be no more food parcels so that gave us something to think about. Heard our friends at Nuremberg (note—most North Compound POWs went to Nuremberg which was Ernest's group) are faring worse but I understand we are here for the duration. Offensives on all fronts seem to be going strong. The Americans crossed on over the Rhine the 7th and kept coming. Prayed it would mean the beginning of the end. I still said it would be August before the war would be over. I finally caught a cold, doggone it! More parcels did come in the 8th so we go back to feeding again. Goons claimed acute fuel shortage so only hot brew every other morning. Less H20 in our soup and cooked spuds only 3 times a week.

"…I made myself a better burner so I could brew up anytime I had the fuel. Scrounging down to the closest degree was done. Anything burnable wasn't safe. I got to

making a habit of looking thru all garbage pits for salvage because you never know what you might find. Germans weren't happy about us taking floor boards, sills, walls, post, etc. for fuel. Threatened to take our Kriegy Blowers away.

"Put out new orders and restrictions all of the time but disregarded as fast as put out. The Germans were in full retreat. The 15th news came of full parcel issue so Harvey wanted to mess alone. OK by me and I went in with Springer, a cook from Springfield, California, to fix my desserts. Now we have personal inspections of the bay every Saturday. PT after appel. Kept myself occupied tin bashing. Had cut fingers and thumbs all of the time.

"....Bartering brought me an egg for 12 fags, can of sardines for 15. So on the 22th, my 24th month of active service I got up early and fried it for breakfast, brewed tea and fixed some toast. Sure good. Bashed a week's ration of sugar, 2 tins of soup, a "D" bar, opened my Klim, k2 biscuits and cocoa as well as 2 days ration of bread. Springer on a 50-50 basis made me a chocolate pudding with whipped cream which was really prima.

"My foot was still bad I gritted my teeth and took a so called "sponge" bath with the nice cold water we had. Made a good deal with Springer, Hanson, and Harvey for a tin chimney stove. Sure beats a burner or blower for heating brew water, cooking etc. for two men. Only cost a cocoa tin and a half full cocoa. Took the fuel but it was a very efficient cardboard & soap burner.

“Got to having 6-7 brews a day mostly tea. Full parcels brought on guys trying to bash on in 8 hrs, 13 and in a day but the ones who tried it failed among much publicity and interest. Many actual and side bets. Spuds now only come in 3 days a week. Boilers from the Germans finally came in and hot brew water 3 times a day stopped a lot of cooking in the latrine.

“Goons seem to be on the ball as much as possible in what we hoped were the closing days of the war. One appel a day, hot showers for some, water faucets and pump fixed…Air raids almost every day and usually coming at soup times and it would not come in until the all clear was sounded. However, on the 24th we had a picture parade and the day was very clear. The 15th AF put on a very good show for us. Bomber formation after formation with agile fighters darting in & out flew over. Very impressive. Much chaff was thrown out and came down in the camp. We wished it was K rations. Hoped none of them up there would end up in our location.

"On the 31st we were run into the bks by the guards and not even the siren blew. We needed none when we heard guns going off. P-51's with red tails manned by Negroes strafed the railroad that ran by our camp. We could see them circle into position, dive down and see the flash of fire from their machine guns. The war news was very good. Allies are driving deeper and deeper into the heart of the Vaterland.

“I had two bets on June 26th as to when the war would end. The weather out was very good for offensives. Drawing my entire parcel has its advantages. With Springer doing most of my cooking I don’t pile up any surplus. He was a wizard

cook, one in civilian life, shot down on his second mission...."

Here's the view of Vernon Burda from his article *I Saw Ten Thousand Men Cry*.

"The Germans refused to clean out the outdoor latrines-one latrine for about 2000 men. It finally filled up and overflowed. As everyone was still sick with the "runs," you can imagine the mess it created. We were practically wading in human excrement. It overflowed into the parade ground so that when the Germans told us to fall out for appel-to be counted-we refused to go. Finally, after several hours of tension, they promised to clean the latrine out, so we fell in.

"The fleas, lice, and bedbugs were really bad here. It was not unusual to find 100 or more bedbugs in one bed. Gould became so infected with flea bites that he got blood poisoning. Several fellows had their whole bodies covered with bites. The bites weren't so bad, but they itched so that one could hardly keep from scratching them. As soon as the bites were opened, infection readily set in. For some reason, I wasn't bothered too much. I could feel the little devils running over my belly and my legs, but they rarely bit me. As Tipton said, it was probably because we were so filthy. A lot of the fellows had not had their clothes off in four to six weeks and hadn't washed in just as long. We only had the clothes we wore and no facilities for laundry, and it was too cold to sleep out of our clothes."

Reading several accounts of prisoners in this time frame disbelief that liberation had not occurred already is

palpable among the men. Many believed they would have been liberated within days of leaving Stalag Luft III. That did not occur. The German military, some POWs believed, knew they were going to be defeated, perhaps they were not radical Nazis themselves, and could see the day when they would be prisoners. Perhaps it would behoove them to do their best for the current Allied POWs before the tables turn.

Many, like Ernest above, describe making their own stoves out of tin cans, many very ingenious models. Almost all talk about food and a big bulk of the conversations being about food and what they would eat after the war.

In a series of postcards with questions sent to Don by Theresa the last month of his life in 1995, on one card was, “What food did you most miss having while in POW camp?” The answer simply was, "Plain foods - all foods!"

Herb Fortner comes to Stalag VIIA on March 3. He was captured February 18, 1945. This from Herb’s obituary "In June 1944, Herb was inducted into the Army and served in Europe. In January 1945, his platoon was captured by the German Army, near Drusenheim, France and he was a POW until the war ended three months later. His World War II experiences had a profound effect on him and he eventually wrote an account of this period of his life that is a treasure to his family.”

Theresa made contact with Herb in December 2011 after an article about WWII veterans was in the local paper. Herb was pictured with his German-issued ID tag and also Army-issued soup spoon he used in prison camp identified as

Stalag VIIA. With Herb's account we learn how the experience in Stalag VIIA was for an enlisted man.

After many letters, emails, and phone exchanges with both he and his wife, Herb sent pages 18-65 of the above document mentioned regarding his time in Stalag VIIA and after. His family have given permission to use his words.

"A few cars ahead of us was a kitchen car equipped with a big steam-jacketed soup-cooker. Later in the day we were given some of that soup, one fellow's steel helmet full to the brim almost, placed carefully on a rock outcropping and four of us gathered around. I was the only one of our group with a regular large mess kit spoon, the others having picked up regular teaspoons along the way when living on K rations. It didn't take long for us to decide that my spoon should be used by each man in turn. I think we settle on three dips per turn, passing the spoon around the circle. One quarter of a helmet serving of soup was a good satisfying amount and much appreciated.

"We came to Stalag 7A a mile or less north of Moosburg Saturday morning March 3rd from the south. The train stopped just short of a small commercial building on the east side of the tracks, a road paralleling the tracks in front of the building we later heard was a cheese factory. Across the road from this building was the main gate. Going in the gate the first thing I remember seeing was a large storage building with a prominent sign "Holz & Kolen" "Wood & Coal" I learned later. We were taken just beyond a building to the right of the main gate. This was the camp hospital with prominent red crosses on the roof. In the rear part of this building were showers which we took while our clothes

were fumigated. It was during this time I heard deep voices singing, a Russian Prisoners chorus, beautiful.

“There were a dozen or so of us in the shower room really appreciating the chance to get clean when one fellow passed out and fell hard on the concrete floor, a shock to us and him. He came out of it right away and was okay. Our clothes smelled from the fumigation but it quickly dissipated. This was our assigned camp so were given our prisoners dog tags, my number 145086 and would now get Red Cross food packages, the first we heard of such a thing. That was my one shower as a prisoner.”

How far away is liberation for these men that has swelled into the tens of thousands at Stalag VIIA?

12

Early April, 1945

We continue with the many-man view of those who were first forced march and are now living at Stalag VIIA at Moosburg, Germany.

Albert Clark was in South Compound, first out of Stalag Luft III, now life at Stalag VIIA from his book, *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story,* Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado, which gives us clues to the state of mind these men were enduring in addition to everything else.

"The camp was rife with rumors about the fortifications and weapons going into redoubt (ed...Hitler's last stand in Alpine area), and some of it was true. We also heard the rumors that Hitler was planning to liquidate us. Sometime in early April all airmen prisoners were ordered to be ready to depart for the redoubt in two days. Our senior officers had decided, after painful debate, that we should not resist, as it might set off a slaughter in the camp.

"...In early April we began to worry about the possibility of serious disorder in the camp as the war grew nearer daily. There was no way to predict how the Germans would handle the surrender of this huge mass of hostile men of various Allied nations. Nor could we be sure, at the last minute, the SS or Gestapo would not undertake to vent their spleen in a rampage at our expense.

"We knew we could control our officers, but the 10,000 to 20,000 enlisted men of several different nations—the United States, England, France, Italy, Russia, and others—worried us. There was little real leadership in their camps, and they all worked hard all day every day, mostly in bomb damage clearance in Munich. They marched out at daybreak, were taken by train to Munich, and returned at dusk, dirty, hungry, and apathetic...." (This was Herb Fortner's experience. Clark then gives a good description of how they managed leadership under those circumstances in the enlisted men part of the camp.)

Ernest Thorp remembers Easter this way in his book, *My Stretch in the Service*. Thorp had originally been in North Compound, but because of walking problems ended up with men in Center Compound at Moosburg.

"We went together on an Easter bash which was really a feast considering the conditions. We started on oatmeal I had carried and kept all the way from Sagan, cooked with raisins. I also contributed the SPAM for supper, grilled oh it was good, a cake for a teaser then for dessert a klim tin full of thick, solid delicious chocolate pudding with whipped cream. Rich as radium and twice as good. So rich and so filling mine had to lay over till the next day. Everyone I

believed bashed on this day. Many skimped and saved for cake baking, Kriegy cakes galore. The size and extremeness plus care in the decorating was a credit to any commercial bakers. The G.I. relieving himself all over Germany on a cake was a masterpiece. Sure look genuine enough. To say the least I was very full and content. It took care of all my food reserve but worth it.

On another page Thorp remembers…

"April brought changes. Further driving into Germany on the 8th. Tents went up in our already crowded compound and 2000 more officers moved in of all nationalities. Really hard to breathe.

Ernest Thorp sent one P.O.W. letter from Stalag VIIA. It is dated March 31, but was not received, noted by his mother, until February 23, 1946, long after the war was over.

"Dear Folks

"Hope you don't get this before I get home but I'm afraid it will. Anyway things have improved 90% to what they were. However I'll have to admit to only 1 bath in two months. Doesn't feel too bad but my clothes are getting rather the worse for washing. The food situation is very good for the time. We are on full parcels & that from none at all is quite a jump. Sure is nice to eat well or as well as we are doing. Bought a little chimney stove for a can of cocoa which beats this tin burners so we are planning a feast for Easter. Been saving for it quite a while. Had my first fried egg in German a week ago. Really tasty. My cooking is improving but my lack of ideas is still too great. Sure be heaven to do the same

at home. Takes a lot of time but there is little else to do. We have inspections to keep us on the ball & exercises at roll call which we never had with the English. Good Friday services & communion was impressive. My foot is also well & my health is good. Very nice weather. Had a haircut which decreased my wt as I had had none since Aug. Sure had the hair. Must be oat sowing time in Ill. People around here use a lot of oxen. Fields are really neat as are their homesteads. Barns make fine overnight stops. Lots of love, Ernest"

Theresa asked Ernest Thorp if his parents in Illinois knew he had been transferred from Stalag Luft III to Moosburg. In a letter dated January 24, 2005, Ernest said, “Did my parents know I was transferred from Sagan to Moosburg? I don’t think so but I never heard them say when I got home. They could have an idea from the Red Cross newsletters send out to all families which had POW’s in Germany. I asked the lady who was our Thorp Seed secretary at the time and she said my dad never indicated or spoke of me being moved. They did wonder what was going on as it may have got in the newspapers of the Russian advance in the Luft III area.”

On April 8, 1945, Don wrote his parents, the only P.O.W. letter known to be written by him from Moosburg. The last letter Don sent to his parents was on January 6, 1945. April 1 was Easter and once again Don celebrated a holiday with his combine buddies. Not home for an Easter bonnet as he wrote much earlier in a P.O.W. letter to his parents when at Stalag Luft III.

“Dear Folks,

“While I do expect to beat this home still I remember feeling that way last fall and all for nothing so best I keep writing. All is well here. Cooking is quite a different proposition here than at Stalag III. Here we cook on stoves which we make from the empty tins from Red Cross food parcels. Mine is a two-man stove, a tiny thing 6" x 10" x 7" with a doll’s oven 2" x 5" x 5". I think Jeannine (his oldest niece) would get a bang out of cooking on it. With spring weather coming on, my combine buddy and myself sit out in the sun and cook as long as the food holds out. Don Wassner and I have been holding some length bull sessions and as I said before it seems darn nice to find someone from home.

“Perhaps soon now I’ll be holding some of those lengthy bull sessions with you and all the family. I’ve looked forward to that day for so long that sometimes it seems it will never get here. Love to all from Don.”

We have no idea if Don’s parents or sisters and brothers-in-law knew where Don was or how long he had been there, although we do have some clues from Don’s combine member Verl Fisher. Verl is the one who said it was a BIG mistake that he took new boots on the Forced March.

Verl was married before going into the service and his wife kept notices she received from the government. One of those pieces of paper was from the Army Service Forces to give a “notice of change of address of prisoner of war.” Mrs. Fisher was told her “next of kin has been changed to the prisoner of war camp indicated.” Then there was an arrow to another page that said she could write to her husband at

Stalag 7-A, Germany. Mrs. Fisher noted on the official government document that she received it on April 24, 1945, which was only 5 days before liberation.

In this time frame the P.O.W.S from Stalag Luft III who initially went to Nuremburg were evacuated and came to Moosburg, which we know at least one of Don and Verls' combine members was in this transfer. The conditions were even more crowded and one author described it as looking like a hobo village with tents and lean-tos and 400 prisoners in each barrack and water from only one faucet and horrible sanitation conditions.

Now Herb Fortner's memories. He was an enlisted man. His description of daily life matches what Albert Clark states above.

"As a reserve unit we went out each morning, would wait, and then return to the barracks. Some mornings guards on the other side of a fence would be restraining a couple of snarling, barking dogs, I guess to intimidate us. To me it seemed like an unnecessary show of force. Made you mad, in fact.

"The third or fourth morning we were waiting as usual, expecting to go back to the barracks when suddenly we were on our way. One of fellows said, 'We're going to have luncheon in Munchen' making Munchen rhyme with luncheon. We learned that one of the advantages of working Munich was a fairly generous noon meal. There was no noon meal in camp and breakfast was a container of tea-flavored hot water.

“We went out the main gate and across the road to load in a boxcar for the hour ride to north Munich. This was an open area outside the city. We disembarked there and walked on into the rail yard that was pretty much in the center of the city, a two or three mile walk, I would guess. I remember this small open, forested park closer in to the city that must have been Grunwald Park. On a corner ahead of us was a two or three story apartment house with a second floor balcony and a lady propping up a mattress over the railing to air.

“The rail yard was a mess from the bombing. There were a half-dozen electric locomotives badly damaged, what I thought was a railroad signal flare lying between the rails, an object two inches in diameter, hexagonal cross section, several inches left after having burned, but later realized it was one unit of a cluster fire bomb.

“Off to one side of the yard was a lot of broken concrete. I was given a sledge hammer and put to work breaking up some of it and found it tough going. There were steel reinforcing bars in it on a six-inch grid pattern, a lot of hard work with little result. As I worked I began to realize it had been the pedestrian shelter between tracks for a railroad station now blasted down to ground level. The curved roof part that I was breaking up intrigued me. It was thinner at the outer edge, two and a half to three inches and of a curved shape. An interesting design.

“We didn’t accomplish much being on short rations. That noon meal was appreciated. I remember us walking a few blocks in the downtown business district to a street level room in an older multistory building. There were benches

and tables, and good soup I am sure, though really don't remember.

“It was really a short day of actual work with the the travel to and from Moosburg. We would arrive in north Munich at eight thirty or nine in the morning and leave central Munich around 3:00 PM and walk back to north Munich to load up for the ride back to camp. The train would pull back out of north Munich in the morning after we unloaded and come back in the afternoon to pick us up.

“…We got into this routine for the next four weeks with Sundays off. The activity was good, it kept us occupied and we got to see more.

“…There were several air raid alerts during our work time in Munich. You would hear the siren going up and down in note for a couple of minutes and we would be led off to shelter, once in a utility tunnel about ten feet in diameter in the railroad yard. It was like going into a mine entrance, then down at a gentle grade until we had twenty feet of earth above us. A safe feeling one way, but a little feeling of claustrophobia at the thought of a bomb hitting the entrance. In twenty or thirty minutes came the all-clear, the siren going up its highest note and holding there for a minute, then back to work.

“…April fourth was to be our last day of work in Munich, though we didn’t know it at the time. We put in our usual day’s work…..(ed. note then he describes a bombing that happened.)

"...On these work groups we were all Privates or Private First Class, as anyone corporal or above could not be required to work under the Geneva Conventions and had gone to other camps."

As the Allies moved into Germany the tension in Moosburg was described as palpable among the men. Nerves shattered and difficult living conditions made each man measure his words and actions before doing anything or arguments prevailed. One EM (enlisted man) who was having bowel troubles said after finding a way to wash his underwear it was stolen. Then and there he decided not to take off any more of his clothing for fear it would be taken. He also burned his straw mattress to get rid of lice and then slept outside on a table.

13

April 12, 1945

On April 12, 1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt died in Warm Springs, Georgia, of a cerebral hemorrhage. He was elected President in November 1932, to the first of four terms. For most of the men at Stalag VIIA it is the only president they remembered well.

Here are different memories about the event as it happened at Moosburg.

Albert Clark from his book *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story*, Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado.

"On April 13, we received word that President Roosevelt had died. I think the Germans took this news more seriously than we did. We all knew that the president had been in poor health for a long time. The Germans, on the other hand, were used to a one-man authoritarian form of government and may have thought our president's death might somehow change the course of the war. The news

caused hardly a ripple amongst us, for we knew that the war would proceed vigorously until the end without change of strategy."

From Ernest Thorp in his self-published book, *My Stretch in the Service*. This was written at the time of the event.

"The shocking and tragic news of President Roosevelt's death came into camp first as a rumor 2 days after it happened, then later confirmed. When the Germans printed it in their newspapers we had a special memorial service to him in as full dress uniform as we could muster. You can bet almost every outside foot of space was covered as we paid tribute to a great leader. The Germans marred the service by running the honey truck in to pump out the latrine so I heard very few of the words spoken by the chaplains and Colonels."

Herb Fortner came to Stalag VIIA in March as an enlisted man. Here are his memories of early April.

"We then got the news that we were to be part of a six hundred man Commando to work in the railroad yard at Landshut, ten miles or so north of Moosburg. I sold my interest in the Smokey Joe, so got my forty cigarettes back, fixed up a Red Cross parcel box to carry along and on Thursday, April 5 we said goodbye to Stalag 7A. As we went out the gate there were at least half a dozen white freight cars with red crosses on them parked on the siding by the cheese factory. That meant a Red Cross parcel every week from then on. Those cars had come in from Switzerland.

On April 10 this observation…."A few minutes later we heard fifty-caliber machine gun fire off to the north and drew our own conclusions. Seeing those planes that close was a real thrill. Our planes!"

During this time frame Herb writes his first letter home. The last half of the note is "…Since I've come over here I've thought of you and of life at home. A lot of things that seemed disagreeable when I was younger, little tasks around the ranch and such I think of now and am glad I was raised that way and think often with enjoyment."

Back to his memories written later in his life.

"The next day, Sunday, April 15, I was told I would be going back to Moosburg, as they were allowed only a limited number off work. The next morning I was escorted out to a white painted Red Cross, wood burning truck with a Swiss driver for the trip back to Stalag 7A…

"Back in Stalag 7A, I was taken to the second of the two permanent barracks near the main gate and told I could sleep in a tent behind it, large enough for quite a few men. They were pitched on a foot deep layer of wood chips which looked satisfactory, but one night was enough as moisture seeped up through that layer. The barracks had a wide center aisle the length of it with a small table near the middle close to the bunks on one side. The French prisoners played cards there every evening until around eleven o'clock, so I would wait patiently until they retired, then sack out under the table. That barracks was home for the rest of my time there, dry and warm."

“The prisoners in these barracks were French, no doubt the first ones in this camp. I had little chance to communicate with them, me knowing no French, and they no English.

“There was a fairly large room in the barracks where we would rather and talk. It was here a day or so after my return to Stalag 7A that I heard the news of President Roosevelt’s death on April 12 from some British prisoners. Some of these fellows, ground troops, told that three months before, they were in Poland and started walking west and south as the Russians advanced. When they got to the next camp, it was time for it to move on, so they had spent the better part of ninety days on the road to Stalag 7A.”

This is the memory of Sally Chiary, later to become Sally Phillips, wife of Don Phillips. This written on February 12, 2005.

"My dear Niece Theresa--you're asking me to recall the day FDR died, which is 60 years ago, when I'm lucky if I can recall what I did last week!

"Anyway, I do recall leaving the office at 5 p.m., walking to the corner to catch a bus to the Peoria YWCA and one of our good citizens (a bachelor) drove by on his way to Peoria and offered me a ride--he's the one that told me of FDR's death. He was in his 4th term!”

Now who is this Harry Truman?

What do we know about him must have been on everyone's mind. What we know is Harry Truman did not have a clue about the Manhattan Project and the Atomic Bomb. He was as clueless as the rest of the nation about same.

In the next three weeks in 1945 everything would change for everyone in this story.

14

April 29, 1945

April 29, 1945

This was the day that many men at Moosburg recall as probably the greatest day of their life. Many had been prisoners for months, and some years. Their liberation came at Moosburg, Germany, Stalag VIIA. The Stalag Luft III website reports, “the camp had been built to hold 14,000 French prisoners. In the end, 130,000 POWs of all nationalities and ranks were confined in the area.”

The video *Behind the Wire* reports at this stage of the war, “all sanitary and nutritional services had disappeared.”

How to report a story that has at least 130,000 versions and that is not counting the SS troops and 14th Armored Division of Patton's liberating 3rd Army or the nearby German civilians who were severely affected by all that went on before, during, and after the liberation. There are also the stories of the folks at home who probably had

access to this wire cable from Paris, France, on April 30, 1945. The wire said,

"AMERICANS FREED: PARIS-- WILDLY CHEERING AMERICAN SOLDIERS, ABOUT HALF OF THEM AIR FORCE OFFICERS, NEARLY MOBBED TANKMEN OF THE 14TH ARMORED DIVISION WHEN THE TANKS BROKE DOWN BARRICADES OF STALAG SEVEN-A YESTERDAY. THE CAMP IS LOCATED AT MOOSBURG, NEAR THE SWISS BORDER IN SOUTHERN GERMANY. IN THE CAMP AND IN NEARBY TOWNS THE GERMANS WERE HOLDING ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY THOUSAND ALLIED WAR PRISONERS... "

Now the accounts by the men we have been following.

From Albert Clark's book *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story,* Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado. "The excitement in camp was indescribable. As soon as the shooting stopped, men started popping up by the thousands all over camp. They climbed up on the roofs of the huts and even on the wire to get a view of what was going on. When they spotted an American flag going up on one of the more prominent buildings in Moosburg, they knew for sure that the war was over for us. Men were hugging each other, crying, praying, screaming, and jumping up and down. Everyone rushed out of the huts, and the crowd grew so large that each man had to do his celebrating in place. The roar was impressive, and the whole scene was very moving."

Next Ernest Thorp, the first account was written on February 7, 2005.

There is an account Ernest wrote at the time of liberation below, but in a 2005 letter to Theresa, when asked what he had to say 60 years later about this day, he stated this. (In the letter to Thorp Theresa acknowledged his upcoming birthday.)

"When the firing started I decided if I was going to die it would be with a full stomach and the kitchen seemed to be the safest.

"The greatest sight was to see the American flag go up after the firing stopped. I wrote an ode to the flag which I have given dozens to time to schools, meetings, lodges, Eastern Star, etc.

"In part I quote, 'to live under other flags is not always a pleasant experience, one of the greatest thrills in my life was to see a Nazi German Flag being taken down and to see the Stars and Stripes rise up in its place. Over the barbed wire and guard towers I watched. I cried, I prayed, and I cheered with thousands of other PW's to see this flag unfold and shed its brilliant luster upon us. Then and only then did we know we were free men again. We had been liberated from tyranny!'

"So I feel very strong about our Flag, then and now.

"Any other questions let me know. Yes, I'm 84 now. Had a 2 day checkup in our local hospital but seem to be OK and checked out to keep flying. As ever, Ernest N. Thorp"

Now the account from Ernest Thorp written on or near the day it happened from his self-published book, *My Stretch in the Service*.

“Sunday, April 29th–At 11:30 German war time the American flag went up over the town of Mooseburg and one hour later in the Vorlager of Stalag VIIA. It wasn’t without some excitement and gunplay did we become RAMPS (Recaptured Allied Military Personnel) though.

“The night before Harvey and I paced the street till after midnight hoping to hear or see gunfire. Everything seemed too quiet. So it was in the morning this beautiful clear crisp day. It was the first day we had no appel as appel. It was reville. The Germans tho doubling the guard outside the fence and posted extra machine guns around left the management of the inside to the Senior Allied officers. Just at 10 o’clock when I was waiting for church services to be outside P-51's flew very low around and around the camp. Fairly close by loud and frequent explosions took place as if the Germans were blowing installations up. The sound of a retreating army came to us. The P-51's spotted a target and down they went after it strafing a part of the town good. Then one flew over very low and did a beautiful slow roll for us. As if it was a signal, ground firing begin.

“Tanks begin to roll over the hills & thru the fields firing as they came. The noise of battle ranged from planes to rifle fire, 75's on the tanks to machine gun clattering. Some stray bullets entered the camp & everyone hit the dirt. Some got very excited but most of us went into our barracks when the firing was the loudest and the Germans apparently were replying. I deemed the kitchen the safest place and begin

cooking a pudding like mad. I wasn't the only one & the kitchen was full. Begin bashing our food like mad too. Then with the battle still going on the Major gave us the gin on what had happened to other liberated RAMPS, how they were treated and how soon we would get home. Certainly sounded too good to be true. This couldn't happen to us. We were dreaming, everyone of us.

"L-5's started coming over and we could hear the crash of artillery. As suddenly as it started the firing stopped. We ran outside in time to see the flag go up in the distant, Mooseburg Center against a beautiful background of sky and landscape. The good old American Flag!

"Mooseburg had come thru the battle in good shape. Some fanatics holed up on the water and church towers but were soon blew out. For an hour tho everyone was in a frenzy of excitement nothing was seen of our liberators. The German officers who were walking unconcernly up and down the street during the fighting in full dress uniform, had disappeared, but bet they hadn't gone far. By the time our lookouts shouted they are coming in, the flag went up by the main gate. Then jeeps and a tank rolled down the street. The tank was so covered with human beings I didn't know it was a tank till I saw the cannon.

"Everyone cheered and yelled theirselves hoarse. We shook hands with all the G.I's we could get a hold of. Telling how glad we were to see them and they replying they were glad they got to us in time, surprised to find us still here etc. My feeling of elation gave me a funny feeling in the throat & stomach as well as tears in my eyes. But was I ever happy! Man! Just so I wouldn't wake up. Naturally the rest of the

day was one big flap. Everyone bashed and the entire tier 6 had one big meal together, Springer the chef."

Carol van Rossum, daughter of Ernest Thorp, relays this about Liberation Day. "At the 8th Air Force Museum in Pooler, GA, there is a Nazi flag signed by Dad and many other POW's from the day of liberation. Dad didn't remember doing it until a hometown friend saw it while visiting the museum, took a photo and showed it to Dad. When I asked Dad about it he said he did remember in all the chaos someone passing down a flag for all to sign." Carol sent a picture of the Nazi flag with her dad's signature "E.N. THORP Clinton, Illinois."

This is the account written by Vernon Burda from his article entitled *I Saw Ten Thousand Men Cry.*

"One day in the latter part of April, we saw fighter planes scouting our camp. On April 29th we were ordered inside the barracks as we could hear the big guns, rifles, and machine guns. By peering through cracks in the wall, we could see Allied infantrymen advancing through the fields and pushing toward the town of Moosburg. Almost immediately thereafter, we all heard the most pleasant sound we had heard for almost a year-the rumble of American tanks. When those tanks rolled into the prison compound, they looked as big as battleships.

"The Kriegies spilled out of the barracks, unmindful of the live bullets still whistling through the air, and cheered the troops and gobbled the K-rations which the American soldiers threw to us-just as though those K-rations were candy.

"Then suddenly, for no apparent reason, a hush fell over the compound, and all eyes turned toward the town in which stood two high church steeples. Over 20,000 eyes saw machine gun bullets splatter against the steeples. There was a period of quiet, then it occurred. A scene, the happening of which brought tears streaming down the face of every single American prisoner-of-war there, and a sob from every throat. We saw the greatest sight-the most emotional minute that we would probably ever witness-raised before our eyes and flying defiantly above one of the church steeples, was the symbol of our beloved land. THE AMERICAN FLAG!

"As one great mass, all felt emotion that one who has not been deprived of freedom, who has not suffered behind barbed wire for months without adequate food, clothes, heat, or word of loved ones and home could not possibly feel. Yes, the tears flowed from over ten thousand faces that day, over ten thousand unashamed faces as that Flag shocked us back with memories of the place we all held most dear-OUR BELOVED LAND, OUR HOME."

Here is what Don Phillips wrote after the event from *Don's Great Escape*.

"It became apparent that the war was nearing the end. By the end of April we knew that the Seventh Army was very near, and the rumor mill worked overtime. Most of the speculation centered around another forced march to keep us in German hands. On April 28th came the semi-official word that the Germans would abandon camp, leaving us behind with a token guard force, and allow us to be

liberated by the American Seventh Army. The next morning we watched from the camp as the German Swastika atop the Moosberg Town Hall, a mile away, was lowered, and in its place, and billowing softly in the April breeze, up went the Stars and Stripes, seen for the first time in so many, many months. Never will I see a more beautiful sight, and never have I seen so many grown men cry. It was probably the most moving experience I have ever witnessed. Many times in later years, I have stood at athletic events as the Flag is raised and the Anthem played to a yawning, apathetic crowd, and thought again of that moment. If you have never lost your freedom, it is a thing taken for granted, perhaps even laughed or scoffed at by some. For them I have only pity.

“Things moved swiftly after the raising of the flag. Minutes later, a U.S. Army tank steam-rolled its way into our camp, not even stopping to open the barbed wire gates. Even though we hadn't budged an inch from where we were, suddenly we were home…we were among friends.”

Herb Fortner, an enlisted Allied man, from his memoirs.

“Sunday morning, April 29, I was outside behind the barracks cooking when we heard small arms fire outside camp. I remember fellows, a little concerned, drifting back inside. I stayed, not wanting to abandon my cooking. The small arms fire soon stopped. A little later I heard and saw a P-51 fighter off to the southeast swoop down and buzz the camp at two hundred feet altitude, and then here came a C-47 transport plane doing the same. Seeing those planes was a real Thrill! A while later word came that an American tank had come in the main gate. Stalag 7A liberation day!"

The day after liberation at Moosburg, April 30, 1945, Hitler committed suicide.

Also on April 29, 1945, Dachau Concentration Camp, the first established by the Nazis in 1933, was liberated by 45th Infantry Division, which was 10 miles NW of Munich and close to Stalag VIIA.

In many accounts of WWII history the liberation of Stalag VIIA is not mentioned. You can understand why because so many other things were happening at the same time.

There is still a long journey for Don to get home to that fried chicken dinner he mentioned so often in earlier POW letters from Stalag Luft III and also the rest of these POWs.

15

Early May, 1945

The men we have been following go from P.O.W. to R.A.M.P. (Recovered Allied Military Personnel)

From Albert Clark's book *33 Months as a POW in Stalag Luft III: A World War II Airman Tells His Story*, Albert P. Clark, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, Colorado.

"We soon learned that General DeGaulle had prevailed upon General Eisenhower to give first priority to the evacuation of all French prisoners. Since there were several thousand of them out on farms in Bavaria (managed out of Stammlager VIIA), they all had to be brought in, processed, and airlifted back to France. I was impressed by the efficiency of the French prisoner administrative staff that handled this job. The first thing I noticed was that a large German office building in the Vorlager had been taken over by the French, and it was filled with men typing up records for all the French prisoners. They had commandeered every typewriter in the German garrison offices and were quietly preparing the necessary forms and records for

thousands of prisoners, most of whom had been in Germany since the fall of France in 1940. We waited an agonizing week for them to be evacuated.

"The war was over, so there was little for me to do. I longed to head home. Pop Goode had organized all the Americans into companies, each with a strong commander, and they were ready to move out on a moment's notice. It was a heartbreaking sight for me and several other fairly senior officers who were old prisoners when Jeeps started coming in to pick up almost all of our full colonels. Apparently on General Spaatz's orders, they were taken to his headquarters back in France. Most of them had not been prisoners for long. We old prisoners felt like we'd been forgotten..."

Another P.O.W. who had originally been in South Compound with Clark reported a few days after liberation is when the former P.O.W.s saw their first American women who were nurses who had been close to the advancing lines and then Red Cross women. His quip was the men just stood and stared as if they had never seen a woman before.

Some excerpts from Ernest Thorp's self-published book, *My Stretch in the Service*.

"Tuesday, May 1-....Did some trading with the Russians and got a "D" bar for 3 packs of cigarettes but while I was carrying on the transaction General Patton in all his splendor paid a visit. Made a tour then a little speech. Wished I could have seen it. Newspapers and magazines got in from the G.I's and with a comfy feeling sat down to read them, to see how people back in the states were taking in

the war. Editorials and columnist's statements were interesting. No German bread so Argentine crackers were sent in. However, that wonderful white bread came in, 3 men to a loaf, a day's ration. My first in a year and it was about the best single thing I ever ate. I just ate my first hunk piece by piece, or hunks at a time. No one knows when we will be evacuated....

"Wednesday, May 2- Still eating heavily but I have definitely slowed down....Loading lists were made up, 25 to a plane. U.K. the destination now. It was France. The fellows from Nuremburg were alerted first as they won the card cut. Later in the evening I took measures in my own hands went thru about 3 holes in 6 fences and sneaked by guards till I got into Mooseburg. The town looked o.k. You knew the G.I's had been thru tho....Every house had a list of its occupants posted on the doors. Very few Germans stirring about. White flags and sheets hung from every window. MP's patrolled the streets and seemed to have everything under control...

"Thursday, May 3-Wasn't very eager to get up which shows how you can get used to anything. For a long time was glad to get up and out of these hard old bunks. I'm going to be very glad to miss sleeping at an angle to stay in bed, the bedbugs, the fleas, the dirt and straw in your face from the bunk above, the rattle and clang of tin can eating utensils hanging around over the tier which sang out everytime someone shifted in the tier. Being careful when getting in or out not to kick the guy under you in the face, not having to sort thru 12 pairs of shoes unless you happen to be the one wearing wooden ones as I did for two months. Then when

getting up and trying to dress you are jostled and pushed by guys coming and going in your 4 ft. passageway.

“However, this even carries over into everything you do here things were so crowded. Eating space at a table was something you had to be lucky and quick to obtain. You try to write at one end and another is bashing tin cans with a pranger at the other. You scurry to find a good location for your kriegy burner, preferably up on a ledge so you don’t have to stoop or sit on the ground to attend it. Anyplace you find is far from the cleanest place in the world. Dirt blows around, soot, smoke makes your brew or food that much more tastier and you still eat it with relish…….

“How careful you had to be on division then to lessen the squawks, run a card cut, who had the heel of the bread last, whose turn on the roster for margarine, meat & cheese portions so small they hardly make more than a taste, the scraping and scrounging of utensils for every small crumb & particle of food in your tin can and wish you had twice as much more, peeling rotten potatoes and nary throwing any away, the haggling over the distribution and division of food parcels, sweating out the abort line which was always full and smelling to high heaven, having to wash yourself and all of your eating utensils in cold water, 2 hot showers in 3 months……..(and much more)….

“Oh I could go on and on but enough is enough and I pray I’ll never see a repetition of this again…..We were told we were to be moved out on Friday so got a good delousing by spray guns so we bashed out what we hoped to be our last Kriegy meal but fate was not that kind. Announcement was made that we would not be evacuated Friday and no

specific reason given. Rumors on the reasons ranged from the fact the 3rd Army had taken over our camp, bad weather in England, muddy landing strips to too many PW's taking off AWOL. Many are trying to beat us home by taking off and trying any method to gain their end.....Time really dragging.

"Friday–May 4....Witnessed quite a fight in the bks. Between an Indian from Oklahoma and a Swede who had been thru the hills of Buckenwald. I'm not too proud of my fellow officers. True they are only human beings with the usual feelings in a prison camp but their conduct here has been far from being what you would expect of an officer anywhere.

"...In the camp Red Cross girls brought in a truck full of doughnuts and I was lucky to get one. Certainly tasted elegant. I had my food supply down to where not what shall I eat but what was left to eat. So I greet the Army trucks with a little more in mind than just visiting with the driver....Colonel Good, our SAO the last two weeks, a gruff and ready infantry man, told us what he knew on our evacuation situation. Seems to be all SNAFU.....Rumor has us here for two more weeks.

"Saturday, May 5–Rainy, windy weather which harmonizes with my feelings and still we sit....The Germans in Italy surrendered, those in Northern Germany are caving in and even no O.K.W. Our morale was still very low and plenty of griping. They are even bringing in coal by the truckload but nothing to cook. I don't even feel like writing a letter home even if I had the material, tho others are writing like mad. Still sweating out getting sick, the G.I's or both. I ate 3

rations of rice and stew for supper and I had the gut ache for most of the night. I was afraid to go to bed before 2 a.m. Earlier I was lucky to draw high card to see the show over in the cheese factory *The Thin Man Goes Home*. Had to march to it as tho we were cadets. Driving rain. Then we got in a little early, the officers in charge ran us out to come back in again in an orderly fashion."

Don Phillips wrote a V-Mail letter to his parents, probably May 1 or so. The last V-Mail Don had used was in England in 1943.

V-Mail was short for Victory mail. It was a postal system put in place during the war. The War Department in pamphlet No. 21-1 described V-mail this way. "an expeditious mail program which provides for quick mail service to and from soldiers overseas. A special form is used which permits the letter to be photographed in microfilm. The small film is transported and then reproduced and delivered. Use of V-mail is urged because it greatly furthers the war effort by saving shipping and airplane space."

Don did not date the letter but the next letter is dated May 5. The first letter is 8½ by 11 (approx) size, which means it appears they sent the letters original size immediately to the next of kin, the heck with the air space needed for all the mail involved.

"Dear Mother and Dad:

"What a long time since I've written you on one of these forms! The long awaited day has arrived at last, and it

certainly seems great to be surrounded by G.I's instead of Goons.

"As to when I'll be home, I think a month to six weeks will find me trekking into Pontiac. I suppose will land in New York and Pete (fellow combine member and pilot of their downed mission in 1943) wants to buy a car there and drive to Chicago, so I'll drive thru with him.

"I am in good health; was afraid you might think I'd been kidding you about that for the past 20 months so you wouldn't worry. Haven't gone bald or lost my teeth, but I am thinner, a few weeks of your cooking will remedy that. The latest news I have of you is now six months old, but I'm confident everyone is okay. So, give my regards to the family and expect the black sheep home in June. Love, Don"

The next V-Mail letter is dated May 5 and is one of the 1/4 size facsimile letters and more difficult to read.

"Dear Mother and Dad:

"Now that there's no restriction on the number of letters I can write you I find there's still little or nothing much to say. Still hoping to leave the camp in two or three days; now that we're actually in Allied hands I'm very impatient to be on my way to Pontiac. I'll be getting home just in time for the fried chicken season, the best time of the year. Also I plan on plowing corn, shocking oats, and cleaning up a hundred odd jobs, such as the bathroom ceiling, etc. The peace and quiet of the farm really appeals to me after living under such crowded conditions for so long.

“I suppose two years has wrought many changes in the people and places I knew. Well it won’t be long now, I guess I sound terribly impatient-and I am. Love to all the family from Don”

Herb Fortner, an enlisted man, from his memoirs. This part of the account starts the day after liberation which was a Sunday.

“That week, things went along pretty much the same. The wood-powered latrine tank truck now had a G.I. driver who razzed it up a bit at times as he head along the main concourse toward the main gate, not like the sedate pace the German guards had maintained. It had apparently been fitted with a carburetor and gasoline tank; sounded different.

“Somewhere around the middle of the week, the German black bread was replaced by white bread. I realized that I had developed a real fondness for that good solid dark stuff.

“About that time we heard that the British troops were to be flown from the Landshut airfield direct to England on Saturday and Sunday, May 5 and 6. I was glad for them, especially those who had been prisoners for so long, and thought of the light infantryman who had left England in 1939.

“I remember being in the barracks gathering room and hearing the British merchant marine fellow saying he didn’t want to fly. He was told he would have to write a letter

requesting ground transport. He sat down at a table with writing paper in front of him but not writing. One of the Brits watching said in a low voice that he is going to ask someone to write it for him, and sure enough, in a few minutes he did just that.

“Earlier, while in the barracks and working in Munich, we had speculated about how long it would take to get us home after being liberated, and had figured about three months, so now we were going to find out…”

The descriptions above makes one remember it is not over, until it is over. For these men it was far from over. They are still a long ways from getting home to fried chicken or anything else. And how have things changed at home had to also be in their mind.

16

May 21-31, 1945

Don is on his way home. He mentions a Bob Shook in this letter who is from Ocoya, Illinois, population around 30 plus or minus, depending on what year you counted. Don worked for Bob's dad for 5 years before going into the service as a carpenter. Theresa has one of Mr. Shook's tool boxes. Her father was a good friend of Mr. Shook; visited there often; and he gave Raymond Ripley one of his tool cases. Theresa brought it out to Oregon after her parents died.

May 21-28, 1945, onboard ship

Finally, Don is at a place where he can write as much and as long as he wants.

Posted May 31, 1945
May 21, Abroad Ship
Dear Folks

This is where I came in. (Don sailed across to England in 1943.) All of it, the life preservers, the constant easy roll of the ship, the hammock like cots, and a dozen other things bring to mind the Queen Mary and 25 green navigators, off to England. Coincidentally, another of the original 25 is on board with me now, having travelled approximately the same roads as I during the past 22 months.

Speaking of ship's roll, this is a much rougher crossing so far. For one thing we're on a boat one-fourth the size of the Queen and for another the weather just naturally isn't calm. My stomach hasn't revolted yet, but I'm knocking on wood. Then too, as I stagger and slide around on deck I can see the advantage in being an octopus or a centipede--anything with a lot of legs--two are highly inadequate!

Left LeHavre, France on May 19 enroute to Trinidad, then New York. To go a bit further back--liberated Apr. 29, rode a G.I. truck to Straubing on May 8, flew to LeHavre, spent 10 days there being fed, clothed, bathed, shot, and interrogated--and here we are, on our way home and darned eager to get there! Why I had to hit this boat bound for South America , I don't know. At another time I'd probably welcome the trip.

I'm feeling great--have started filling out already and should soon have regained the few pounds that knocking around Germany peeled off me. Life holds so many things in store for me again, for instance, today I used the first hair tonic since September '43, yesterday I had my first orange and apple since then; I'm still sweating out ice cream and Coca-cola.

Gradually, too, I'm catching up on the news, there are always back issues of *Times* and *Newsweek* to be found. Tomorrow we're supposed to have our pictures taken for release to the hometown paper. Was just thinking what a surprise it would be to you if they managed to get it in before I got home, and without your knowing it beforehand.

Oh yes, the day before I left Moosberg (Stalag VIIA) I saw Bob Shook. Of all the boys I didn't expect to see, he was the last! But life is full of surprises, I'm finding. Anyway, in case this reaches you before either Bob or myself gets home, he's fine, fatter than I last knew him, and should be on his way home soon. Somehow I always expected to see P.D. come straggling into camp--but he never did. Of course, it's been over six months since I've had word from any one.

I saw the comic strip Blonde the other day. Judging from the way their children have grown, I suppose all my nieces and nephews have sprouted beyond recognition almost. I dream of all of you occasionally--funny thing, I always seem to be dreaming of the McMahon family (other Ocoya neighbors, ed.) Can't explain it.

I had hoped to stop over in New York for a day but it seems we're going straight to Ft. Sheridan so I won't be able to. I should be home, actually home by June 8th or 10th, and as things stand now, I'll have 60 days leave. So I'll get to spend a birthday at home--the first one since '41.

The food on board ship is fine; two big meals a day plus a snack at dinner. Then too there's the luxury of toilets that flush, lavatories with running water--and mirrors. All in all,

this G.I. way of life is the nuts! Soldiers of any other nationality are just naturally fighting for the wrong country. I wonder if the German POW's in the States realize how fortunate they are. Their country is nothing but ruins--all of it. So much for tonite. See you in three weeks or less. I check off the days now.

May 22, 1945

Much calmer today. You don't have to chase your peas all around the tray and back. Other days they acted like Mexican jumping beans.

After reading various articles about the shortages in the States, I'm all confused. Some writers seem to think conditions are much the same, others paint a picture that resembles the chaotic destitution of Europe. I read of black markets on eggs and young fries and wonder how you're affected by all this. Then too, *Life* has pictures of mile long lines for cigarettes. Guess I'll just have to wait till I get home and see how drastic has been the change.

We are traveling in a convoy with some eight or ten other ships. Today I watched them transferring fuel from our ship to a smaller one. This, of course, is done as we go--I don't think we even slowed down. Actually, I guess it's not much of a maneuver but to someone like myself it was impressive. Tomorrow we are supposed to leave the convoy and strike off for Trinidad--the rest go straight to N.Y.

Had hoped to be home in time for the Derby, June 9th. I've always wanted to see one run--might still make it.

May 28, 1945

Tomorrow we dock at Trinidad. Everything's been going smoothly, the weather's been lovely. Although it's getting hot now that we're in tropical waters. Some of the fellows sleep out on deck--it's damned hot down below.

I spend an hour or less each day watching the flying fishes cavort and flit about. They're little devils, only six or eight inches long and they come zipping out of the water and fly along a foot above it for 20 or 30 yards. Occasionally, too, we run into a school of porpoise.

I'm gaining weight like furious; have a cute(?) little roll of fat now that blouses over my belt when I sit. There's no room to exercise here--I'll soon remove that roll at home.

I'll close now and hope to get this posted tomorrow. I don't think we exkriegies are allowed ashore but some friend will no doubt help me. I guess this is the first long letter since way back when. Oh yes, our latest ETA for N.Y. is June 5th--so I'll be home around the 10th.

Love Don

Theresa has this letter. His P.O.W. letters were given to the U.S. Air Force Academy Library Stalag Luft III Collection. By the time Don wrote this letter he was not a P.O.W. He was a free man. This one stays with the family.

17

Father's Day June 17, 1945, Ocoya, Illinois

Don's letter onboard ship to his parents on May 28, 1945, ended with this:

"I'll close now and hope to get this posted tomorrow. I don't think we exkriegies are allowed ashore but some friend will no doubt help me. I guess this is the first long letter since way back when. Oh yes, our latest ETA for N.Y. is June 5th--so I'll be home around the 10th. Love Don"

We can't track Don exactly, but here is what we know. An identity card picture was taken on June 5, 1945, and we can only assume it was taken after the ship landed in New York as Don said above.

If Don arrived in New York on June 5, 1945, when did he arrive in Pontiac, Illinois? We are not quite certain. Don answered this question on a postcard to Theresa on

October 6, 1995. The question: “Was anyone else there to greet you at Pontiac bus station when you came home?”

“Not knowing how (bus or train) or exact arrival time, Mr. McCarty, a local farmer, told my folks he would meet all buses and trains. I arrived by bus; I called the folks and they came to the station to pick me up.”

When Don wrote his POW memories, he wrote this about his three cherished memories:

“Three things stand out…the afore-mentioned raising of the flag in Moosburg, the sighting of the Statue of Liberty as we entered the harbor, and the final moment when I stepped off the bus in Pontiac and embraced Mom and Dad for the first time in so many months. A most gratifying moment, and a cherished memory even now.”

However it happened, Don was home and it was probably around June 10, 1945. The next thing we know is from a clipping from the local newspaper.

Here’s what coming home looked like to the Phillips family on Father’s Day, June 17, 1945, as stated on a very yellowed little clipping.

HONORED AT DINNER

A family dinner was enjoyed Sunday at the home of Mr. and Mrs. R.W.E. Phillips, which not only celebrated Dad’s Day, but the return of their son, Lieut. Donald Phillips, who spent nearly two years in a German prisoner of war camp and returned recently to his home here.

All members of the family were in attendance at the dinner, they being Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Ripley, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin C. Rhoda and Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Rittenhouse, and their families, and Lieut. Donald Phillips. Miss Tillie Klein, of Pontiac, sister of Mrs. Phillips, was also present.

The people present at this dinner were Don's parents, Ralph and Amelia; three sisters, Blanche Ripley, Bernice Rhoda, and Dorothy Rittenhouse; three brother-in-laws (names given above); his maternal aunt, Tillie Klein; and his nieces and nephews, a total of 11 at the time. They were Jeannine, Jim, Sue, Dave, Martha, and John Rhoda; Greg, Norman, and Beth Rittenhouse; and Ray and Theresa Ripley. We shall also count Eric Rittenhouse being there as Dorothy Rittenhouse was seven months pregnant at the time.

Can you even begin to imagine what this experience was like for Don. There were three new little faces around the table he'd never before; one of his sisters was pregnant again; and Don had experienced what we now know about for the last two years. How in the world do you integrate back into this scene in Ocoya, Illinois?

18

Coda, 2022

The P.O.W. families involved in this project were asked if the wanted to add any comments.

The words of Dan Burda, son of Vernon Burda.

I REMEMBER SEEING HIS AIR MEDALS WHEN I WAS AROUND 10 YEARS OLD

TO ALL THAT HAVE SEEN OR READ OR EVEN HEARD FROM THESE MEN ...THEY WERE ALL HEROES

AND THOSE THAT WENT DIRECT INTO BATTLE TO STOP HITLER WERE ESPECIALLY HEROES

ALL DESERVE THE MEDAL OF HONOR

AND I MEAN THAT

GO DIRECTLY INTO A POSITION WITH 800 ANTI AIRCRAFT GUNS TRYING TO SHOOT YOU DOWN WITH IRON GRIT DETERMINATION TO BOMB THE TARGET AND TO STAY ON TRACK AND THEN TRY TO GET HOME

ONLY A FEW OF US WILL KNOW WHAT IT MAY HAVE BEEN LIKE FROM OUR FATHERS STORIES

HOW THEY WERE CRAMMED INTO CATTLE CARS LIKE SARDINES

MOST WITH DYSENTERY

ROTTED AND LOW GRADE PIG SLOP AS FOOD

BITTER COLD

BUT THEY RETURNED TO THE USA AND BECAME SUCCESSFUL MEN WITH A MISSION TO DO BETTER

NO CHANCE TO FAIL IF YOU TRIED

I AM SO PROUD TO BE THE SON OF A HERO

AS I DID THE SAME WHEN I BECAME A COMBAT PILOT IN STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND

MISSION WAS TO FLY INTO CANADA NORTH AND OFFLOAD FUEL TO THE B52 GROUPS ON THEIR WAY TO STRIKE RUSSIA

WE HAD NO PLAN TO RETURN

SOMEONE HAD TO DO THAT TASK

SO AT LEAST I FELT THE HONOR OF KNOWING THAT MY MISSION LIKE MY FATHERS MISSION COULD BE A ONE WAY TICKET TO HEAVEN

WISH YOU WELL

Dan Burda, July 4, 2022

The words of Mary Jane Gabrielsen, daughter of Verl Fisher

A Daughter's Stab at Flashbacks

I found my dad at war today,
his snow-packed boots
in a hundred-mile dreams.
He marched to Patton's
melting drum. Once again,
he's a starry-eyed soldier
stacked in train-car drizzle
with drifting names from
boyhood. His swollen ankles
sifting golden-haired wheat,
in fields with ghosts and
twirling girls. In his dreams,
they're still boys on leave
with rings of gold and clothes
in duffels, packed weeks ahead,
stacked below cots, coddled
in pillow-soaked rum. Their
clear nights, rationed and

zipped. They stand shivering
with shoulder-back hope.
Four walls now, no room for
daydreams in falling snow.
The storms, the blinding
soured sleet. It keeps
snowing and snowing war.
Each one, blue-eyed drifts
slicked back and dazed.
Cold fronts, cloudy, cloudy
killings, blinding blizzards
of dust.

Mary Jane Gabrielsen, written after her father died.

A second poem by Mary Jane.

A War March and A Young Soldier's Lingering Dream

From Stalag Luft III, one hundred miles
in wind and snow. Long steps, thin men.

Soldiers shelter in boxcars, sleeping upright
like a load of wooden matchsticks.

Buy Defense Bonds and Stamps, on the back
of matchbox, dot dot dot dash, Morse Code for V.

Negative forty-degree temperatures shutting
down diesel engines and equipment.

Enemy fighters overhead. Russian troops
on the prowl. A slivered moon hides too.

Earth keeps its bedtime, its stars and dreams.
Night blankets the trail and stray boots.

Dad survived the long march. With so many
heroes lost; years passed without his story.

One thing left on his bucket list, the longest
train ride across North America, Canadian-Pacific.

The words of Carol Thorp van Rossum, daughter of Ernest Thorp.

Dad was not a swimmer. Growing up with a creek behind the house gave him and us 5 kids experience in water, but nothing like having to bail into the cold North Sea on August 4, 1944 from a B-17 that was on fire. As a result, Dad wanted all of us to have formal swim lessons at our local YMCA. He felt we should all know the basics. (To this day I still can't tread water.) The Mae West and German fisherman who pulled him out of the water saved his life.

Dad was always willing to talk about his experiences in the Army Air Corp and being a POW. He told his story to school children, adult gatherings, individuals whenever invited to do so. He would emphasize "Freedom isn't free" and his great respect for the American flag.

He cherished the contacts he was able to maintain with fellow flight mates. Attending POW Reunions was something he looked forward to. Dad stayed in contact with the family of the boy who came to the base to do his

laundry and whose land was taken over by the Americans for the base. He was able to revisit the base site as was his oldest son, Nelson.

Dad enjoyed watching WWII movies and reading books on the subject. Being able to actually fly a B-17 over his farm when it was at a local air show was the thrill of his life. He never missed a nearby air show that had a B-17 in it. He was proud that all 5 of his children were able to take a ride in a B-17 in the 3 different states they lived in. It gave each of us the opportunity to feel the cramped space, the narrow walk way between the bombs to the cockpit and see the tiny "hole" Dad bailed from.

Memorial Day and Veterans Day were always observed by Dad. He wore his original dress uniform jacket (with some slight alterations) with pride to these celebrations and did until he passed away at age 95.

Dad hoped his 2 sons wouldn't have to go to war but was proud of their service during the Vietnam and Desert Storm era.

The lasting effect, I saw on him, was his pride in serving his country, flying the American flag everyday (weather permitting) and having a great disdain for the swastika. (He along with many other POWs, did sign his name boldly on a German flag taken down at his POW camp on the day they were liberated, which by our standards was defacing the flag.) Dad was a big supporter of the Red Cross because of what they did for him as a POW and was proud to have an Illinois ExPOW license plate on his car.

He was proud to have served and humbled to have survived.

The June 2022 book by daughter of Albert Clark is entitled *We Also Served: Three Generations growing up in the Military* by Carolyn Clark Miller.

“This is one woman's story of growing up in a military family and creating one of her own. The author traces her military roots back more than 100 years, from her grandfather's service on the Mexican border, through two World Wars, and up to the service of her husband and brother over the skies of Vietnam. She faced the challenges of all military families: frequent uprootings, long stretches as a single parent, children moving from school to school, often more than once a year. It took courage and dedication. Not all the heroes of military service wore the uniform.”

The words of Scott Spivey, grandson of Delmar T. Spivey.

Delmar T. Spivey was a strong leader before he was a prisoner of war. However with the great responsibility as the Senior American Officer for most of his time in the camp, he worked hard to sharpen his leadership skills. The lives and welfare of each and every man under him were constantly on his mind. He kept the men focused on being military officers positively representing the United States, making the best of their conditions there, their cleanliness and health, their survival, their communications with the outside, their escape plans, their entertainment and their

recreation, their education and improving themselves, and keeping them encouraged looking towards their return back to America.

Spivey also developed a warm, respectful, professional relationship with the POW Camp Commandant, Col. Friedrich Wilhelm von Lindeiner. They mutually respected each other for the rest of their lives. Both leaders wanted to achieve the best conditions possible for the inhabitants of the Camp while still fulfilling the mission of their respective Countries. Under Commandant Lindeiner, the Camp was pretty much run in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, despite Adolph Hitler. After the war, General Spivey searched for the Commandant and once locating him wrote encouraging letters to his former captor. Many of these letters were reprinted in the book FROM COMMANDANT TO CAPTIVE by Marilyn Jeffers Walton and Michael C. Eberhardt, Copyright 2015.

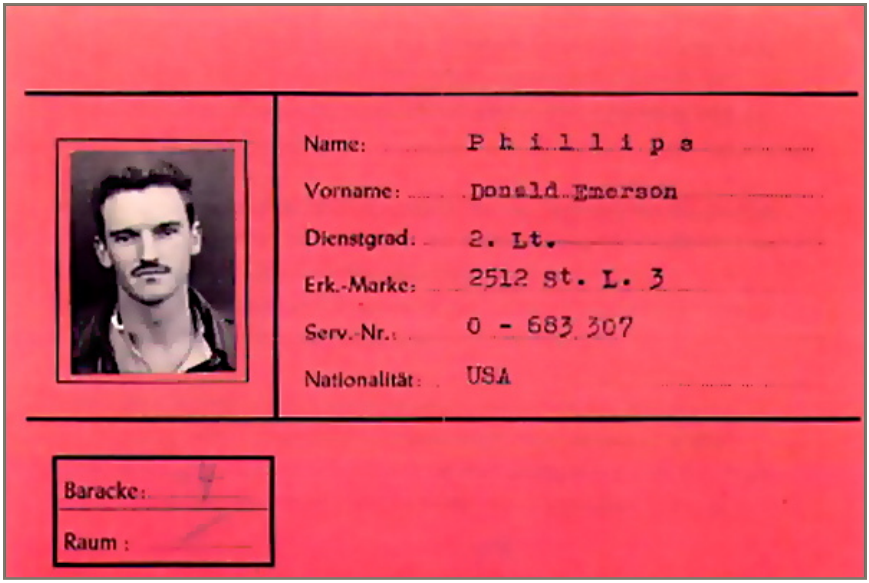
In 1956 after he retired from the Air Force, General Spivey was the Superintendent of Culver Military Academy in Culver, IN. for 11 years. Developing young people into successful, productive Americans and keeping America strong and free was important to him. He greatly enjoyed that leadership opportunity.

General Spivey was exceptionally ever mindful of the needs of others.

The words of Jerry Ripley, great nephew of Don Phillips.

This collection, and others like it need to be read now and by future generations. They are missing or under utilized pieces of history told at a very personal level. Thank you to families who gave permission to use them!

I had the pleasure/honor of knowing Don, and his wife Sally. He was larger than life, big easy smile, tall, witty, personable, and confident. He did well while I knew him, but was always gracious and happy to be with whoever was around. I never heard him speak of his service or time as a POW. It is very hard to put him in the accounts that the men and their families have been graceful enough to let the author share. I wish literature like this could be a part of basic education curriculum. It gives a really personal feeling to an event in our country's history. To learn history from the voices of the men who made it is an invaluable tool to help us make wise choices for our kids and grandkids. The raw strength of the people in these accounts gives one a reason to look inward and put ourselves in their, and all the POW's place in the forced march.



About the Compiler

Theresa Ripley compiled the pieces in this story. She is the niece of Don Phillips, shown above. This story has both inspired and fascinated her for a long time. She has written and published other books and stories. A partial list of those can be found here. https://thinkpint2.com/ebooks/