ELDON M. TOLMAN'S MILITARY HISTORY

November 4, 1936 I joined the Wyoming National Guard. Troop A of the 115th Cavalry was located in Lovell. The commanding officer was Archie R. Boyack. He was also the principal of the High School. Mr. Boyack taught me in an American History and Government class, as a junior in high school.

The National Guard Armory was located on a large town block of sandy soil on the east side of Lovell. The Armory building was a basement to which no ground level story was added during my tenure. Across the street north of the Armory was a large barn made of corrugated metal where the horses were maintained. My uncle, Nephi Shumway, and a man named Lusk, two World War I veterans, were full-time employees to take care of the horses. Neaf and Lusky were part of the landscape I grew up with.

So one day in November I appeared at the Armory to see Captain Archie R. Boyack. "I want to join the Guard," I proudly asked him. He looked at me and without hesitation asked me, "Are you eighteen?", knowing very well I was not. "Yes sir," I lied. Thereupon he gave me the papers to fill out and issued me a uniform and instructed me to attend weekly drills.

The uniform included a wool olive drab khaki shirt, flare legged pants, boots which laced almost to the knee, socks, a black necktie, a webbed belt, and a campaign hat. The pants were flared out at the thigh and laced up on the sides of the calf to be worn with the boots. The hat had a stiff horizontal brim and four equally spaced dents around the crown, and was made of rather heavy felt.

Our drills were weekly for about two to three hours, and mostly in the evening. Part of the time was spent in some type of military instruction and part of the time was spent in drilling on horseback. Our instructors were the commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers. Two of the commissioned officers were high school coaches, head coach, Wendell Poulsen, and assistant coach, Reed Colvin. Both were B.Y.U. graduates. Our classes were well conducted. They covered the gamut of military subjects.

Working with horses was especially enjoyable. We learned to care for them. We brushed them down, we saddled and bridled them. Riding the horse was our favorite activity. We learned to drill on horseback. It requires some skill in horsemanship to form a straight line, to maneuver into a column of twos or fours. Each summer the individual guard units gathered together in a two week encampment of concentrated practice and training. Troop A had the reputation of being the best unit in the 115th Cavalry. There was a lot of pride in the Troop. We worked hard at maintaining our image.

We qualified in the use of several weapons. Our rifle was the 1903, 30-06 caliber, Springfield. This was the very rugged "doughboy" weapon of World War I. In the winter we practiced our marksmanship in the armory using 22 caliber rifles. When the weather was good we practiced on a range southeast of Lovell using the 30-06. We also learned to use the Colt, 45 caliber, automatic pistol. We qualified in a standing position and on horseback. Riding through the field of man-size targets at a slow gallop shooting the Colt 45 was most exciting. Shooting a horse in the ear was not advisable. We were equipped with sagers also, but I can't recall ever really using them.

In 1937 the encampment was at Pole Mountain near Laramie. It was a time full of new experiences for someone not yet seventeen and who had never been more than 200 miles from Lovell.

I was assigned to work in a canteen in the evenings at the encampment. We sold pop, candy, gum, cigarettes and beer, and did a lively business during the movie which was shown each evening. During the day we participated in military activities on horseback. I was piled by two horses during the two weeks. A test was passed by getting up, dusting yourself off and getting right back on the horse. One of the horses was one of our regulars (whose name I can almost remember) that we worked with during the year. The other was a broomtail. A broomtail is a semi-wild horse that was leased to the cavalry just for the encampment period by local ranchers.

The second and third camps which I attended were at a new location near Guernsey, Wyoming. The camp was on the bank of the North Platte River. The Oregon (California-Mormon) Trail followed along the river bank opposite where the camp was. Register Cliff is about a mile down river. Wagon wheel ruts in the sandstone are found a short distance up stream from the bridge across the river near the camp. All of this I read about, discovered, and visited years later. None of this was evident to me the two years I participated in the National Guard camp there, which was 1938 and 1939.

I served as a messenger and a scout while at Guernsey. It was exhilarating to get out on a project by myself and successfully evade the enemy in the war games we played. One team was the blue, the other red.

We were impacted with a feeling of patriotism. This was most real when we stood retreat. Each unit spruced-up and marched to its position on the parade ground. The band played the National Anthem, and we marched in review by General Esmay and his staff at the reviewing stand. On the command, "Eyes right", we looked, lined it up, and had that good, united military feeling.

On Governor's Day we did it on horseback with the Governor himself on the reviewing stand. It was something to remember. We were something to behold, no doubt.

The personnel of our unit were very stable. After three years of service I was a First Class Private with little hope of advancement. I really hadn't thought much about acquiring a higher rank. In the summer of 1940 I went to see Captain Poulsen(Archie Boyack had moved up in rank to a state staff position and Wendell Poulsen had become our commander) to request a discharge from the National Guard to join the U.S. Army Air Force. He promised me an advancement to Corporal and a plush assignment as an officer's orderly if I would stay out the summer and go to camp with Troop A. I opted to join the Air Force. Later that fall the 115th Cavalry was nationalized and made into a motorized unit. The horses finally had to go.

In the summer of 1939 I was working in the Scott Bakery in Lovell. Al Leach was a friend employed in the Safeway Store next door. I'd heard that there was an Air Force recruiter at the

Post Office. So I said to Al, “Let’s go talk to the Air Force recruiter,” and we did. We listened and were captured by the idea that we could escape the monotony of the small, hometown for the green hills of military service. There was one catch. We were not twenty-one years old and enlistment required a form giving parental approval. Al’s folks agreed. My mother gave me an emphatic no. Al joined the Air Force. I stayed home. It took me a year before I’d convinced Mom that she should sign. She never agreed but finally gave into my manipulation as I approached the age of twenty in July 1940.

Al was stationed at March Field and then sent to the Philippine Islands. He was there when the war broke out 7 December, 1941. He was captured when the Japanese occupied the Philippines and remained a prisoner-of-war throughout the war–four long years. After the war we spent a day together hiking into Devil’s Canyon to fish. He chastised me all day for talking him into enlisting in the Air Force leading to his unfortunate experience as a Japanese prisoner. It was little compensation to him that I had spent 21 months as a German POW on the other side of the globe.

I was sworn into the Army Air Force 16 July 1940. It occurred at Fort Francis E. Warren, west of Cheyenne, Wyoming. A number were sworn into the Army. Most of them were Indians. I was the only one in the group going to the Air Force. I traveled alone on the train to Mountain View, California at army expense. Two of us got off at the station at Mountain View. The station master took one look, picked up the phone and dialed a number. Without a word to either of us he said on the phone, “We’ve got a couple of live ones here–you’d better come and get um.” Shortly an army vehicle appeared and we were transported to Moffitt Field which was then under the administration of the Army Air Force.

During the next period I was involved in a Basic Training Program. It was nothing unusual. Most of the training was a repeat of the National guard programs I had already experienced. We drilled, exercised, listened to lectures in basic military information, and received weapons instruction. I met new people and made new friends. At the end of this period my name appeared on an assignment list on the bulletin board. The order read that I was assigned to the 79th School Squadron, but that my first duty would be to attend a Cook and Baker’s school at the Presidio of San Francisco. I wasn’t pleased, not having joined the Air Force to serve in a kitchen.

It seems that in filling out an information form I had identified my occupation as a baker. I had worked for four years in the Scott Bakery of Lovell. Without consulting me the Air Force had determined that my duty would be cook and baker. By now it was early September, 1940.

The Presidio of San Francisco was an army base, part of which was an army school to train cooks and bakers–army style. The base is located on the south shore of San Francisco Bay almost directly under the Golden Gate Bridge. It was a beautiful setting. Candidates for the training were sent from all over the west coast. Some were field artillery, some army and then our contingent from the Air Force. We worked in a large kitchen under the direction of a little Master Sergeant who seemed all the time on the verge of getting drunk. He knew his craft well. We rotated from an assignment to running a dish washing center to being a cook, to preparing the food, to making baked goods, to operating a steam table and managing an area of tables where people would eat.

On completion of the cook and baker's school course I returned to Moffitt Field and joined the 79th School Squadron. This was sometime in late October. Thus began my official function as an army "slum burner". It wasn't a duty about which I had great motivation. I had wanted to fly airplanes. Nonetheless I performed with some diligence my assignments as a cook and baker.

Our squadron serviced the basic training aircraft for the Aviation Cadet Program. We maintained the B.T. 13's and 14's the cadets flew. We were the mechanics and radio servicemen. There were clerks and cooks to do their thing. My exposure to our operation led to the desire to work on the line where the aircraft were as a radio serviceperson. It took me about a year to get out of the kitchen to do this. But all of this was not the bottom line of my ambition. I really wanted to become a pilot. To apply for the Aviation Cadet Program required two years of college, which I lacked, and the passing of a screening test, and meeting stiff physical standards. I bided my time.

A cook's schedule was on-duty for 24 hours and off-duty 48 hours. There were six of us and a mess Sergeant in the squadron. On a shift one cook was in charge. Four were off duty all the time.

As the routine settled down I relaxed with it. After a time as a cook my experience in the bakery became evident. The Mess Sergeant, whose name was Tremain, assigned me to work exclusively as a baker. My work was to bake rolls, pies, and cakes as needed for the menus that were made up. Though this was a pleasant enough assignment, it didn't fulfill the desire I had to get somewhat closer to the operation of the airplanes. After about a year of being a cook and then a baker I got into a spat with the Mess Sergeant. The 1st Sergeant called me in and said, "What am I going to do with you?" I expressed my desire to work on the line with the planes. He assigned me to the radio section.

The radio section had the function of keeping the radios operational in the basic trainers which the cadets flew. This involved installation, servicing, and monitoring the radio sets and the radio gear. Sometimes we would instruct the cadets on the use of the radio.

It was a new and challenging activity and I enjoyed learning how to do it. We had a small radio station with a limited range which we use to check out the radios in the planes our squadron maintained. Our little station had the call letters B.L. Seven.

After still more time my desires to fly surfaced again. To apply for Aviation Cadet training required two years of college which I did not have. However the Air Force had a "Flying Sergeant" program in which college credit was not required. I checked it out–completed the application, passed the physical examination, and waited for orders to enter the program.

In the fall of 1941 I was transferred to the 373rd School Squadron. In a year and a half the Air Force had expanded considerable. In this newly formed squadron I was given the rank of Sergeant. Then everything went out of focus on the 7th of December 1941 with the attack by the Japanese on the American navel base at Pearl Harbor, and the U.S. Army Airbase at Hickham Field. I had planned a furlough in December to be home for Christmas. But in the emergency created call leaves were cancelled.

By the first of the year I had received orders to go with a group from Moffitt Field to a mysterious destination X. The “Flying Sergeant” activity was discontinued for an expanded Aviation Cadet Program. The first step en route to our new base was to travel to Mitchell Field on Long Island a few miles from New York City. So we left sunny California on a train trip across the nation. I succeeded in getting a three-day delay en route so that I could go to Lovell for a short visit.

I was soon on the bus again. This time going to Cheyenne. After four days by train and three days delay en route I arrived at Mitchell Field on Long Island in New York state. I was attached to the 1st Airbase Squadron. Here my rations were drawn along with hundreds of others waiting orders for foreign service. In searching for my Moffitt Field Detail I was initially unsuccessful. I scouted the hangars and barracks. (Some were actually living in the hangars because of the overcrowding at the base.) Anarchy has no place in the military, but in the confusion of wartime expansion disorder was frequently a pattern which could not be completely avoided.

At Mitchell Field I learned that the Air Force no longer required two years of college to apply for Aviation Cadet Training. The requirement had been reduced to a high school diploma. Immediately I ran down an application form, filled it out and turned it in. The process was to pass a physical examination and screening test (kinda like an I.Q. test) . I passed on both counts and was given an appointment as an Aviation Cadet. In a blink the whole perspective of my military service changed. By March 28, 1942 I reported for Cadet training at Maxwell Field, which is in Montgomery, Alabama.

The processes for cadet training had been streamlined to accommodate the pressures of the war. The United States specialized in mass production. Mass production of airplanes, tanks, and guns. Now, for me, a mass production of air crews.

A new cadet is made to feel that he is a lowly creature. Upper classmen require a, “yes sir,” or “no sir,” or a “no excuse sir.” We literally ate three square meals a day. At the table one had to bring his utensil to his mouth by forming a ninety-degree angle. Strict courtesy to all “Misters” was maintained. Though there is some “ hazing” going on we understood it had been minimized from previous pre-wartime practice. It was pretty childish stuff for a person who comes out of the enlisted ranks. For a newly inducted civilian person it might have been more entertaining.

For the first few days we were busy getting organized, being issued uniforms, getting new manuals to memorize, and learning the rules that a potential officer and gentleman must follow. We got into regular patterns of drilling, and athletic activity. Formations of close order drill, running and vigorous sitting-up exercises were soon augmented by a series of testing sequences. A combination of intelligent–aptitude tests were given for the purpose of classifying each cadet as a Pilot, Bombardier, or Navigator.

I was classified a Bombardier. It was a terrible disappointment but I quickly rationalized that the training would be shorter and that way I would see action quicker.

Finally my orders to go to Santa Ana came through....May 31st . I traveled by train through Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arizona to a training opportunity in Santa Ana, California.

Coming back to California was like being in familiar territory. I'd never been at the Santa Ana Airbase, but I began to run into old friends. It seems that the personnel I knew at Moffitt Field were scattered about California as a result of the natural expansion after the war began.

I was moved from one training squadron to another without actually getting started on a pre-flight program. Not until June 29th did we get down to actual pre-flight class work. Finally I'm in Squadron 97 and beginning class work. We are back in tents. Seven in our tent. We adjusted to crowded conditions and avoided being crippled by footlockers, beds and equipment.

School had actually begun. Our classes are Naval Operations, Code, Math, Physics, and Ground Forces. Physics promises to be the most difficult for me. However the hard subjects depend entirely upon our previous knowledge. In each subject enough can be mastered to pass the required exams. Our schedule is full. There is barely fifteen minutes between each formation. We are all so pleased that training has actually begun.

August 21st we completed our pre-flight program and were assigned to an advanced training base where we will fly and learn to use the bomb sight. We were sent to Kirtland Field, Albuquerque, New Mexico. The transfer took place during the latter part of August.

For 12 weeks we worked hard to become Bombardiers.

A few cadets were washed out. Usually the washouts were sent to gunnery school.

We marched, we went to classes, we flew and dropped practice bombs, we exercised. On weekends we sometimes went into Albuquerque.

As the final weeks of training approached we began to get excited about being Second Lieutenants and being assigned to combat duty. Our training emphasized the strategic approach. The B-17 was preferred to the B-24. The B-27's sleekness, it's flying characteristics, it's combat steadiness, etc. made a popular choice among our classmates. Really it was partially romantic nonsense. The B-17's had more good promoters. Still it was a great plane, even though patriotic propaganda influenced our personal preferences.

We got fitted with new uniforms and insignia. This was at our own expense, a dubious blessing of being an officer. We speculated on the type of unit we'd be assigned to, and where we'd be sent Europe or Asia. As we graduated the U.S. allies with the British were involved in the Battle of North Africa. The battles of the Southeast Pacific Islands was at a critical stage with the Japanese in the fall of 1942. We were eager to get into it, and most of us got our wish; assignment to a B-17 crew and combat duty flying out of England to fight Germans.

On 21 November 1942, the Kirkland Field class of 42-16 graduated. We received Bombardier Wings and were commissioned Second Lieutenants.

A bunch of us got orders to report to Ephrates, Washington to be assigned. Ephrates was the most dreary, dismal, desolate, place I'd ever seen. The winter season made it appear much worse. A few days later on December 16th I was assigned to the 510th Squadron, 351st Group, just newly organized. It was a B-17F group. I was a replacement bombardier on the model crew in the 510th Squadron.

We flew several times locally at Geiger Field. It was all new and exciting. The enlisted gunners of the crew seemed an especially well qualified group of specialists. We lacked one waste gunner at this point. The six experienced crew members operated well together. I worked hard to fit in with my role as bombardier as quickly and effectively as possible.

The plan that was projected was to move from Geiger Field to Biggs Field, Texas. At Biggs Field we would complete the size of the group so that each squadron had nine crews. The move took place the first week in January, 1943. We flew to Biggs Field, which is near El Paso, Texas, January 4th. Here was to begin what we called phase training. Phase one and two would be two months of organizing and flying to develop our proficiency as a bomber group of four B-17F squadrons.

Though our group deserved a good reputation on its own merits, we were also known as the "Gable Group". Captain Clark Gable spent a year with the 351st joining us in January 1943. He was on special assignment to make propaganda film on the day to day activity of a heavy bombardment group in combat. His film, " Combat America" was one result of his effort. Captain Gable was well liked by the men of our group. To my knowledge he was never presumptuous of his fame as a movie star. On one occasion while at El Paso, our crew was used by some group honchos to fly east to Wright Field, at Dayton, Ohio. Gable went along. He was very friendly to our crew.

Two months went by quickly. We were ready for the third phase of our training and another move. We moved back into the winter. El Paso had mild weather in the winter. Its dust storms were the negative. Pueblo Field, Colorado was our destination on February 28th. Three more weeks of becoming better as a heavy bomb group. We were declared combat ready March 22nd, and given a nine day leave. I got on a bus and went home.

Most of my friends were away from the hometown doing the same thing I was doing. I was glad the leave wasn't longer. I returned to Pueblo eagerly.

In a couple of days we were en route to Great Britain. The ocean flight was uneventful except that at one point we spotted a sub. We didn't know whose it was. We presumed it was German. We noted the coordinates and were gratified that the British seemed very interested when we reported it to them after we landed. On April 15th we landed in Preswick, Scotland. The following day we flew to Polebrook Airbase, North Hamptonshire, our permanent base of operation in England.

Our air echelon arrived before our ground support personnel. They came by ship on the Queen Mary. During the first month in England we trained to adapt our group to carry out a mission over German occupied Europe. We were somewhat inhibited in doing this without our regular maintenance services. Until they arrived in a week or so we were our own mechanic, etc. Two things especially required our attention. One was learning the British system of radio navigation and acquainting ourselves with the English countryside. The second thing was to learn and practice a type of box formation flying which was particularly designed for the European Theatre of Operation (E.T.O.). A group box or formation consisted of three squadrons of six or seven B-17F's each; a lead squadron, a high squadron, and a low squadron.

A plane might drop out of formation for a number of reasons; mechanical failure, personnel problems, shot down or battle damage, etc. Leaving the formation and returning to base was referred to as "aborting". The box formation used in the E.T.O. had these several objectives: 1) It provided for the maximum use of the fifty caliber machine guns for protection against fighter attacks, 2) It provided for the maximum concentration of the bombs of a group on the target, and 3) Only one plane used a bombsight. All of the planes in the group dropped their bombs on the leader. With this box formation system one squadron was always held in reserve. Twenty-one crews out of a total of thirty-six in the group would be in operation on a given mission. The exception to this was on a day when the orders called for an M.E.(maximum effort). Then all four squadrons would fly. An extra, composite group, would be formed out of every three groups.

The theory behind the U.S. Army Air Force's technique was high altitude, daylight, and precision bombardment. The British and Germans had given this strategy up as too expensive in terms of the losses incurred. The USAAF advocated it justified on the use of the Norden bombsight with its pinpoint accuracy and its four engine bombers which were designed to protect themselves with a tight defensive formation and their well equipped firepower. The theory is still being debated. The losses in men and airplanes were horrendous. Nonetheless the technique persisted throughout the war. Using the 351st Group as an example within one year of our first mission we could account for eighteen out of thirty-six crews being shot down. Of the one hundred and eighty men involved as casualties we estimated that half of them were dead. That's a fifty percent casualty rate and twenty-five percent fatality rate in one years time. In spite of these facts the USAAF in the E.T.O. consistently increased in numbers to the end of the war. Our production of aircraft and the training of personnel more than replaced and compensated for the losses.

With the use of radio and radar the British system of navigation was much more sophisticated and precise than what we were used to. We learned and appreciated the British system and procedures.

Flying at high altitude requires the use of oxygen and heavy sheep-skinned flying suits. The temperature was usually below zero at high altitude. Our usual bombing altitude was in the range of 24,000 feet. Our practice was to put on our oxygen masks at 10,000 feet. We were advised by our intelligence officer that flak(anti-aircraft shells) was mainly a deterrent. That's okay until you get hit by it. German fighters were the principle obstacle to meet and overcome. The ME-109 and the FW-190 were both excellent single engine fighters in the hands of well trained, experienced pilots. They were considered formidable opposition. We were instructed in their identification, their tactics, and their armament.

A month passed. Our Group C.O., Colonel Bill Hatcher, had been on an operation with a neighboring group. May 13th was to have been our first operation, but because we failed to assemble successfully the mission was aborted.

May 14th became the date of our first mission. The target was an airbase at Courtrai, Belgium. It was a short mission, only three and a half hours in the air. In the terms of the British, “a milk run”, or a “piece of cake”. The 510th squadron was in the low position in the group. Our crew flew on the right wing of Captain Forsythe, our squadron commander.

Things were pretty routine until we started the bomb run. Then we experienced our first fighter attacks. My job was to watch the group leader and toggle my bombs on his signal. Also with the nose guns we united with the group in fending off fighter attacks from the front of the formation. The group opened bomb bay doors at the beginning of the bomb run which was called the I.P.(initial point). I checked my panel to see that all switches were set. To drop the load I would push the toggle switch. We had been told that the fighters, in a frontal attack, would come in about 01:00 O’clock high, roll and dive away in front of the formation shooting at us through the maneuver. A ME-109 came in from the front, high at 01:00 O’clock. The closing speed was about five to six hundred miles an hour. But the fighter came on in and didn’t roll and dive in front but flew right over our right wing straight through the formation between the lead and low squadrons. It all happened quickly. Indelible on my mind is the image of the black cross on the side of the ME-109 as it flashed over our right wing. As the fighter got into range he tested his position first by shooting small arms with red tracers. As he zeroed in he shot his 20mm cannon. The cannons were close in by the fuselage. The yellow flashes of the cannon seemed to alternate from one side of the fuselage to the other. I tried to fire my gun as the fighter attack began. I charged a shell into the chamber and pulled the trigger as I aimed at the fighter coming in. One shell fired–no more. Manually I charged another shell into the chamber with the same result. No machine gun action. Visualize the ludicrous effort. With a malfunctioning gun I watched the fighter attack and at the same time kept an eye on the group leader to make the bomb drop. In the midst of the frenzy our squadron leader, Captain Forsythe, upon whose right wing we were flying, was hit. He pulled up slightly, smoke billowed out of his bomb bay, he dropped his bombs, and fell out of the sky. When I saw the bombs dropping I panicked. I looked at the group leader-no bombs in sight. Had I missed the bomb drop? The thought brought an instant reflex. I hit the toggle switch and dropped my bombs right along with Captain Forsythe–thinking it was a late drop. Ten 500 # bombs away!! Then I noticed that the bomb bay doors were still open in the rest of the group and long seconds later the group leader dropped his bombs. I felt like a sap. I hadn’t been late but early in my drop. As we left the target the fighter attacks persisted. The left wing-man of the group leader was hit and left the formation. His position in the group formation was just to our right and slightly ahead and above us. Two planes in our group were shot down, one on either side of us. We returned to base on this short “milk run” feeling worked over. That night in my sleep I fought the details of that first mission over, and over, and over again.

The next day I was called to the group bombardier’s office. Capt. McTighe greeted me with, “How are you at reading aerial photographs?” I grunted something like, “O.K.” He responded, “You’re plane yesterday had a camera in it which automatically photographed your bomb drop.” “Here are some shots; tell me what you see.” I studied the photographs, “I see two clusters of ten bombs each.” “It looks like two B-17's dropping 500# bombs.” “Good, he said and then asked, “What’s the target they hit?” Sheepishly I suggested, “A Belgium cow pasture.” He sarcastically congratulated me on a fine, tight pattern. “There are Captain Forsythe’s bombs in one cluster and right next in a nice tight pattern are the bombs from Boyd’s plane. No small matter that the airfield you were sent to hit is 10 miles down the run!” It was a humiliating day for me on two counts. I fouled up the bomb drop and my gun hadn't worked effectively. It had been a learning experience I never forgot. The next day I sought out the group ordinance shop and requested some instruction on the operation of a fifty caliber machine gun. It was readily available. A buffer adjustment would have solved the problem I'd had. No longer did I depend on our enlisted crew members to take care of my guns. Their mechanical operation had become a matter of very personal interest. Malfunctioning guns became a thing of the past.

Because of our procedure of dropping bombs on the group leader, there were never more than three bombsights in a group formation. There were second and third alternate bombardiers. No other bombardier carried a bombsight in his plane. After all that training and receiving a commission, most bombardiers were relegated to the position of gunner and toggliers. Another example of extravagance in the American military system.

From May 14th until July 25th in 1943 our crew flew on twelve operations. Submarine pens or slips and airfields were an emphasis by way of targets. There were few crews in the group that chalked up more missions than we did. May 15th we bombed sub-pens at Emden, Germany in a maximum effort. For six days we stayed home because of English weather. Then we bombed Wilhelmshaven, Germany on May 21st. Sub-pens were the target. The week slipped by and the target was sub-pens again. This time the target was St. Nazaire, France. The date was May 29th, and it was our fourth mission. We flew on the left wing of the Squadron leader of the low squadron. Flak was the heaviest and most accurate we had seen to date. On the bomb run we got caught in an unfortunate position. Our squadron leader tucked in too close to the group leader forcing our plane directly under the right wing-man of the 2nd element of the group leader. The formation was so tight that our left wing was directly under the bomb bay of the plane just above us. Our left waste gunner, Sergeant Johnson, reported on the intercom that our left wing would be hit by the bombs from the B-17 above us. For an hour he watched the formation noting and reporting the problem. By the time bomb bay doors were open and we were on the bomb run, the kid was almost hysterical in his fear that we would be hit by a 2,000 lb. bomb. Our load that day was two 2,000lb.and two 500lb. bombs. When the bomb drop finally occurred the bomb from above took off our wing tip. This amounted to only about a foot of the wing, but that much was too much. The bomb had not dropped far enough for the small propeller on the fuse to have spun off and therefore the bomb was not armed and did not explode. Nonetheless we were a terrified crew. Incidentally Sergeant Johnson went to the hospital for awhile, and at his request was released from flight duty, and never rejoined our crew. As we left the target area one engine became inoperative. The pilot feathered the prop to keep it from wind-milling and vibrating from the wind resistance. With an engine out we were unable to stay with the formation. We dove to a lower altitude and returned to England on our own. Fortunately we met no fighter opposition. At the first English airfield we landed. We examined the plane, noticed the wing damage was minimal, and found that we could not repair the engine. On three engines we took off and returned to Polebrook. It had been a very exciting-full day.

Our next operation was an attack on the U-boat yards of Bremen, Germany, June 13th. Two days later we flew over Le Mans, France. The target was covered with a 10/10 undercast. We returned to base without dropping our bomb load. It was our policy to never bring bombs back if the target was in Germany, but over France we never did any indiscriminate bombing.

June 22nd our target was a synthetic rubber plant at Huls, Germany. This was the one time our plane carried a bombsight into combat. Captain John R. Blaylock, the new commander of the 510th Squadron, piloted our crew. Stan was co-pilot and Joe got bumped. We were third alternate leader in the group and therefore carried a bombsight. We faced intense flak and strong fighter opposition. The bombsight restricted somewhat the use of the frontal gun in the B-17F. As we neared the target area, the fighter opposition was the heaviest. To facilitate the use of the gun I dismounted the bombsight and handed it to the navigator. When Del took the bombsight to put it in its case it almost pulled him off his feet. The gyros were reved up and the torque from their revolutions gave the holder a tug across the compartment. This penetration into the Ruhr Valley was about a six hour trip and we were under fighter attack for a major portion of that time. The floor of the nose compartment was ankle deep in empty cartridge cases.

The Huls Mission was memorable for a parachute problem. Bombardiers were issued seat packs. There were three kinds of parachutes: seat packs, chest packs, and back packs. Seat packs were designed to sit on-which we didn't do much of in the nose compartment of a B-17F. They were great chutes when used, but were very awkward and cumbersome when you were moving about much of the time. On a previous mission I'd snagged the seat pack on the bolts which stick up from the wooden ammunition boxes when the lid was off. The consequence of this was the pack began to leak through the hole torn in the cover. It is disconcerting, to say the least, to look around and see the nylon from the chute scattered in the compartment behind you. One has visions of needing the chute, of scooping up the nylon contents in his arms, jumping out of the plane, and somehow unstringing it so that it might break his fall. On the Huls Mission I snagged my chute again and it partially spilled out behind me. It was the last straw. Upon my return I registered a sterner complaint to the supply sergeant. He smiled tolerantly at me and responded for the second time with, "We have no back packs, and the chest packs are in short supply and have to be reserved for the turret gunners, sorry Lieutenant." (Turret gunners couldn't wear a chute in the turrets. The chest packs were detachable. When you needed them you quickly snapped them on.) I felt like I'd had my T.S. card punched.

Our 8th mission was June 23rd and the target was an airfield at Villacoublay, France near Paris. Because of the solid undercast there were no bombs dropped. Imagine the frustration and waste when an all day effort is for not.

June 25th proved to be eventful for our crew. We were awakened by an orderly yelling in our ear, "Out of the sack and into the flak, briefing in thirty minutes."

Joe and I bailed out of our comfortable pads, looked at our watches to see that it was 01:30, and headed for the mess hall. Here we could feel the charge of excitement and tension which always permeated the air until take-off. Everyone was joking and laughing and seeming nonchalant to hide any fear. At the briefing our C.O. came jaunting in to say, "I'm surely glad this is not my trip today." Then turning, he zipped up the window shade covering the outlined map, showing our target to be Hamburg. Commanding officers were restricted to one out of four operations and Hamburg, at that time, June 1943, was a deep penetration.

Our crew was assigned its proverbial position of "tail-end-charley"–a position at the end of the formation for the purpose of replacing casualties and abortions within the formation. After receiving our various instructions on bomb-load, description of the target, weather, bombing altitude, flak areas, and so forth, we hurried out in crews to find our trucks and gather our flight equipment. Reaching the line we piled off our truck and went about the complicated task of making our Flying Fortress ready for operation. When guns had been installed, ammunition loaded, oxygen tanks filled, bomb-load inspected, radio and interphone checked, personal equipment accounted for, and duties of all positions coordinated, we waited.

The signal to start engines always caused a sucking, empty feeling in the pit of my stomach. This was also an understood signal to get in one's position and stay there. From my post as the bombardier in the nose, I checked the crew from tail forward and reported all is well to the pilot. Then came the taxi-flare closely followed by take-off. Until we were safely in the air the tension never relaxed. But once airborne we became occupied in our various duties and our stomachs quit flopping.

Group formation was quickly accomplished over the field: then we moved off on course to form the wing and ultimately the Air Force. It took an hour or two before we were out over the North Sea climbing to altitude. All went well until we sighted the Frisian Islands. At this point we moved up to fill an abortion in the low squadron. In the process number three engine was hit with a thirty caliber shell and had to be feathered. Three engines proved not enough to keep our ship in formation; consequently we slipped back to become duck-soup for enemy fighters. This all happened while the formation was nearing the target. Finding Hamburg covered by a solid undercast, the leader turned and started out without a bomb run. At this point we lost formation. Quickly salvoing our bombs and recognizing the impossibility of catching the group, we headed for the nearest cloud cover en route home. Before being able to reach the security of the clouds, we suffered several violent fighter attacks from the rear, resulting in the wounding of three gunners and the cutting of an elevator control. With this damage we entered the welcome clouds, going on instruments until we sighted blue sky again. We found ourselves just off the coast, somewhere near northern Holland, when we broke through. From then until we saw the beautiful shore of England we held our breath watching for fighters and hoping our fort would hold together. Upon reaching the comparative safety of the ocean it fell upon the bombardier to go back and assist the wounded men in licking their wounds. The ship was difficult to fly because the bomb bay doors were flapping in the breeze and the control cable was broken.

Not daring to voice our pessimism we attempted to lighten the ship somewhat by throwing overboard ammunition boxes, oxygen bottles, and various articles our hands could reach. Our ship was in a crippled condition and as an emergency measure we considered all possibilities, such as arrangement for ditching and bailing out, and we attempted to prepare for them.

The navigation problem was a great one. It was difficult to hold the ship on course and we were uncertain of our actual position when we lost the formation. Upon reaching England we radioed for a Q. D. M. And found that by adding windage we were exactly on course due to the brilliant calculations of Del Ray, our navigator. After crossing the last bridge of landing safely with bomb bay doors open, each of us gave a silent prayer of thanksgiving. The wounded men were put in an ambulance and taken to the hospital, where they all recovered without ill effects.

Our tenth mission was a July Fourth celebration. The target was the Rhone Aircraft Engine

Works near Le Mans, France. The bombing was on target; however we learned that the 500lb. bombs we dropped didn't effect the sixteen foot reinforced concrete roof of the target we hit. Two-thousand pound bombs would have been more successful. Upon our return to base without any loss of aircraft, we could not resist demonstrating our national heritage in an appropriate fashion. We broke up into squadron formations, buzzed the field en trail and while over the field we shot off every pistol on the plane, in every colored cartridge we could find. The very pistol is a signal gun used to shoot colored flares. For a moment we were kids back home improvising for want of firecrackers, horns, and roman candles to make real in England the way John Adams had instructed us to celebrate our independence from British tyranny.

Our 11th mission was a "milk run" to bomb a German Airfield at Amiens, France on July 14th, ten days after our previous operation. And then we were another nine days before we went out again.

On July 25th the target was Hamburg again. It proved to be our nemesis. It was our 12th and last mission. We flew as a "tail end Charlie", an extra to fill in where any vacancy occurred in the formation. There were substitutes among our gunners. Sergeant Gurbindo, our radio operator, was in the hospital. Sergeants Keen and Hamlin were our only original enlisted crew on board. The "Battle of Hamburg" began the night before with a large, devastating operation of the RAF, and was to be ongoing for several days as weather permitted. Industrial targets were destroyed and much of the city of Hamburg was "bombed down" as they say in Europe. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed. Fierce fire storms developed, the horror of which was unmatched in the creative power of man to wage war; until the use of the atom bomb. A note of fact important to us was that our targets were always industrial, strategic, military targets. At no time was our planned target cities and/or populations. Precision bombing was our skill not area bombing which some nations engaged in.

The 351st was the low group in the wing formation. The high group had some problem in getting into their position. Our plane and crew had no problem until we reached the coast of Germany. At this point we lost the #2 engine. Standard operating procedures required feathering the prop to avoid the resistance of vibration of a wind-milling propellor. Being in a position at the rear of the formation the problem of staying with the formation was magnified. We straggled behind. To this point we had met no fighter opposition, nor had we run into any flak. The pilot faced a tough decision. Should we abort and return to base alone? Or should we follow the group with the hope that we could somehow catch up on three engines? We were a half hour from the target. Our chances of catching up were zero to none, but those odds were tempered with a substantial measure of hope. As the airplane commander, the pilot began to ask questions of crew members on the intercom. "What should we do?" "I can't make this decision by myself?" "Navigator, what shall we do?" "Bombardier, help me make this decision." Crew members reacted negatively to the pilot's obvious indecision. Joe, as co-pilot spoke up representing most of the crew and said, "Stan, shut up we're going in." A brave decision. Also the wrong decision in hindsight. It was stupid to face an hour and a half alone over Germany. Our lack of vision cost us dearly that day.

Fighters began to nip away at our rear. The city of Hamburg loomed up in the front. We followed the group as best we could but gradually the gap between us widened. They dropped their bombs and turned right around the south of Hamburg to avoid the concentrated flak areas.

The flak over Hamburg was denser even than it had been at St. Nazaire.

We estimated the bomb drop and toggled our bombs since we had no bombsight. We turned inside the group hoping to gain a few yards. Then the wing did a left turn to circle north of Hamburg on a route out toward the North Sea. We were hopelessly isolated from the rest of the group. It was in this stretch of one hundred miles that we were deluged with attacks from ME-109's and FW-190's. From all directions they pounced on us. A frontal attack came within my range. A Focke Wulf 190. I jammed my gun toward the floor and watched the tracers. In the few seconds the fighter was within the range of my guns it was folly to think I could hit him. He was too high for me to line up my sights. First I could see his red tracers from his small arms out on his wing and then the yellow, blinking 20mm cannon in near the fuselage. He scored with a direct hit on the co-pilot. Joe was dead instantly and nearly cut in half. A few inches lower and the shell would have hit me instead. Sergeant Keen in the ball turret reported being out of ammo. He stayed in his turret and maneuvered his empty guns. A ME-109 flew within a few feet just off our left wing. He presumed we were all out of action apparently. Del had a surprise for him from the navigators position. We were in a dive. The tail gun and the waste gun positions were no longer in operation. The airspeed indicator needle was going over 200 miles per hour. The altimeter needle seemed to whirl around. The pilot gave the order to bail out. Controls had been shot away. Fighters had apparently knocked out the rear guns positions and gradually worked their way toward the front of the ship. No shells had penetrated the nose of the ship.

With the bail out order Lt. Del Ray reached down and pulled the handle that released the door to the nose hatch. Could I actually dive through it into the air below? We had no choice. Del went first. I was reassured by his example and immediately followed him. (It was providential that when we checked our parachutes that morning the supply sergeant handed me a brand new back pack with the remark, “Now maybe you will quit bellyaching about having to use a seat pack.” I was innocently gratified.) The first time on with a new parachute and I get to use it. Once out into the air survival thoughts flashed through my brain. “Wait until your five hundred feet above the ground before pulling the rip cord” somewhere I’d received that instruction. “But how can I tell the altitude tumbling around up here?” I felt around and found the rip cord ring. My grip tightened around it. It came loose from the pocket it was in. “What if it is not hooked on to anything?” I wasn’t waiting to find out. I gave it a mighty pull. It worked beautifully but what a jerk as the nylon blossomed above me. I was wearing brown, buckled-on oxfords with the sheep skinned boot over my shoes. The jerk of the opening chute caused the boot and shoe on my right foot to pop off leaving me stocking footed over a strange land. As a consequence of my jerking the rip cord, I hit myself in the nose with the ring and started a nose bleed for which I never received a purple heart.

I looked around. There was one chute on either side of me some one hundred yards distance. One was Del Ray and the other was the engineer Sergeant Eddie Hamlin. Lt. Boyd got out later at a somewhat lower altitude. It was a bright Sunday afternoon, and all of a sudden it was completely quiet. No engine noise. No gun fire. Then the silence was interrupted by a single engine. A ME-109 flew at us and then veered away. We were grateful that he didn’t shoot at us. Just curiosity on his part. We must have floated down almost 20,000 feet There was no sensation of movement until objects on the groung began to come up at us. After about twenty minutes a forested area was discernable below me. There was a roadway. More by luck than by skill I pulled at the shroud lines to miss the trees and land on the roadway. What now? I took off my heavy flying togs. I put the left boot on the right foot so that both feet had something on. I tried to hide my discarded togs. As a good bombardier should I had carried a 45 colt automatic pistol which I kept. I heard voices. There was a dog barking. I turned to face a German shepherd about ten feet high. A soldier with a rifle and a crowd of children appeared on the road. Our chutes had been spotted because we were so high when they were opened. A reception committee had been sent out to welcome us to the Fatherland. I might have shot the dog but what would I do with the soldier and the young people who had come along to see the fun. I was trapped. I felt that everything that could happen to me in one day had happened. I gave in without resistance. The first English words I heard in Germany were, " Vor you zee var ist over."

The soldier took my forty-five pistol and marched me down a roadway. Suddenly two shots were fired. One on either side of me. The kids giggled when I jumped in surprise and fear. The soldier was performing for his crowd. He was trying out my forty-five pistol and entertaining his audience. I was pleased also to learn it was all in fun. I was locked in a room of a building until some Luftwaffe guards could arrive and pick me up. In a military vehicle they took me to a Luftwaffe station. There our crew were being collected Stan, Del, Eddie and I were presumably the only survivors. (Years later I learned Sergeant Charles D. Cavanaugh, our radio operator, had also been a prisoner.) The Germans told us six men were found dead in the wreckage of our plane. Cavanaugh must have been wounded or injured and therefore delayed in getting to a POW camp. This was exciting information but it still meant that half of our crew had perished on the mission.

KRIEGSGEFANGENEN

1930

Eldon M. Tolman

Landing in the middle of Germany as a Prisoner of War involved substantial shock. Our first night we were held in a filthy local jail in the city of Neumunster. That afternoon as the four survivors of our crew were gathered together we were items of curiosity. A steady stream of Germans came by to stare at us. Several picked me out and gave me a word lashing none of which I could understand. Finally one spoke in English. He asked me who I'd been shooting at. They had my gun and two shells were missing. The gun had been recently fired. They thought I'd been shooting at some German. I explained that the soldier who took the weapon had shot two rounds. That seemed to end the matter. Nothing further was said about it. We were given a very heavy loaf of schwarzbrot for food. It was musty, sour, and repulsive to our stomachs. Yet in time we adjusted and ate it without question. The next day we were put on a train and traveled via Berlin to Dulag Luft near Frankfort on the Maine. The language was strange. The guttural sounds seemed harsh when not understood, especially when spoken by men. The trains were different. The soldier's uniforms were a contrast to our experience. Eating patterns were completely different. As we traveled by train one of the guards reached in his pack, pulled out a chunk of bread and a slab of what looked like bacon fat. He cut the fat to fit his bread. Then he proceeded to eat the feast thus prepared. Bread and margarine, a type of ersatz tea (it was called sassafras tea) and a variety of tasteless soups were our fare. Sometimes we got some red ersatz jam to spread on the bread. It tasted sweet. Germans used a lot of sawdust in their bread. Sometimes we'd find little chunks of wood in it.

The route taken to Frankfort was round about because of the allied bombing. In Berlin we changed stations by marching for a mile or two through the city. We could see the effects of British bombing, though at this point the damage we saw in Berlin was not as extensive as the damage we had seen in London. We arrived at Dulag Luft at night. We were marched to a wooden barrack like structure where we waited our turn to be interrogated.

Each room had one bed, a chair and a small square table. We had as many as four men in the room at one time. No one quite trusted anyone outside his own crew. We suspected that the Germans had planted English speaking Nazis among us to gather information. We got fed portions of the food already described, three times a day. For lunch it was usually soup. There was mutton tallow soup which had usually cooled in the bowl to form a thin layer of hardened mutton fat across the top. When we tried a spoonful it coated our mouths and hunger seemed to fade. Sometimes we got a potion we named "Green Death" soup. It was actually dehydrated spinach, and if we dipped too deeply into the bowl we would scrape up dirt which settled in the bowl. Occasionally we got barley soup which we found quite tolerable. And I still love barley!

The building we were in was within a barbed wire enclosure constantly patrolled by armed guards. Several times a day guards would let us out of our room to use the outside toilet. We hid small stones of dark and light color in our hands while sitting on the ground waiting our turn. When we got back to the room we etched a checker board on the small table and using the stones played

tournaments of checkers to while away the time.
Prisoners came and went. It was four days before my turn came for interrogation. I was the last of the four in our crew to go through the process. It was lunch time when the guard took me to the interrogator. He was in the process of eating his lunch of beef and boiled vegetables. After a week without a real meal it looked good, but I wasn't offered any food. He was a young man and spoke good English. He began to talk casually about the war and led to our group, our crew, and eventually to my personal military experiences. He had considerable detail of the places where I had trained. He had a copy of the order on which I was commissioned with a list of all my classmates. He outlined the missions our crew had been on. I got the impression that he had information that could only have come from a member of our crew and I suspected Stan as the source. Needless to say that it was disarming to discover the amount of detail the Germans had collected. Their system was to add together numerous bits and pieces of small items which could then be totaled into a significant conclusion. Their effort was impressive.

After an hour of "snowing" me with how much they knew the interrogator got to the point. "Now Lt. Tolman you think we want to know about the secret of the bombsight but it is not so. We captured a bombsight in North Africa. We know all we need to know about it. What we need from you is current information. On July 25th what was your bomb load? And where did you drop it? This is just routine information. Once we have it you can join your friends in the outer lager." When I hesitated he continued, "They will soon be going to a permanent camp. If you delay they will be sent without you and you'll be alone in solitary confinement." I declined to give him anything but my name, rank, serial number, and my mother's name and address. The latter was given on the promise that she would be notified that I was alive, well, and a prisoner of war. He reacted by saying, "I have a lot of prisoners to talk to. I can't spend more time with you. We'll have to confine you until you cooperate with us."

I was taken to a solitary cell and locked up. The cell had one high, small window with bars on it. There was a bed of a sort, a stand with paper and pencil. I was told that when I wrote down the information about the bomb load and the bomb drop to let them know and I'd be released to join the other prisoners. It was a lonely feeling to hear few words you understood, to be isolated in a hostile enemy land. I thought it over. If I told them the truth they wouldn't believe me. We had been carrying a new incendiary bomb with a total load lighter than usual. The truth might not help. I considered fabricating a tale just to satisfy them but decided against it. It was my duty not to comply to their demands. I'd wait it out and see what happened. The night passed. Next morning the interrogator visited me in the cell and we went over it again. Nothing changed. He left me to my loneliness. About noon a guard came and took me out and released me to the outer lager. They had no more time for the likes of me.

There was a sense of relief and anticipation about being among my fellow country-men again. Stan and Del were there. Eddie Hamlin was separated from us because he was not an officer. It was a relief because I was no longer center stage. From here on I'd be treated as part of the group rather than being the focus of individual expectations. It was anticipation in that some services would be supplied. I was issued a pair of shoes, a tooth brush, and shaving equipment. Brushing my teeth again was such a lovely cleansing experience. A shower was great albeit was a cold one.

The outer lager was a temporary holding place to gather a group large enough to transport to a permanent POW compound. In a matter of days we were on our way by train to Stalag Luft III near Sagan, Germany. There we were put into the center compound. This was primarily occupied by British airmen. We were housed in low-roofed, brown colored, blocks which were divided between the American and British groups in an attempt to separate us as much as possible.

Our first job was to fill our paillasses(mattress) with fine wood shavings and arrange our bunks. Then we organized ourselves into combines of six or eight men for mess purposes. When our sacks were set in order we settled down to an enjoyable cup of brew, and spent our energies in getting acquainted with new friends. At five o'clock a bugle blew and we filed out to the appel grounds to be counted by the astute supermen. We formed ourselves by blocks into ranks five men deep to facilitate enumeration.

Our inception period was spent in adjusting to Red Cross food parcels, intimidating ferrets, and exchanging "There I Was" stories. In the warm August afternoons we would bask in the sunlight near the central fire pool and listen to old timers tell of escape attempts, especially frustrated wire jobs. We soon learned that "George" was actually a name given, for security purposes, to a tunneling project. It was surprising and encouraging to learn of an extensive D.P. (Duty Pilot) system. When the inconspicuous announcement, "Soup's Up"(code for news report), was given, the appointed men quickly assumed salient positions in the outside aborts and blocks to scrutinize the compound and goon boxes during the pouring of the soup. If a goon should happen along, the D.P. would nonchalantly exclaim, "Tally-ho!" This warned the group of approaching interference and immediately the subject was changed into non-informative channels.

It was an absorbing environment at first, but it soon took on an atmosphere of monotony. Some of these British had been prisoners for over three years. These veterans were hardened and experienced. We learned from them. They taught us a new language. A German was a "Goon", a "ferret" was an English speaking goon in coveralls. An "appel" was a parade assembly in which the goons counted us. A prisoner was a "kriegie". A toilet was an "abort". A barracks was called a "block". Our basic function as kriegies was to keep the goons as occupied as possible. We listened carefully to the history of the experience of the British prisoners. Camp security, escape activity, military discipline within the compound, maintenance of the emotional and physical health, and food preparation are some examples of topics about which the British taught us much.

The south Compound was about to be finished and occupied as an American Compound. It became the first all-American flying officer's POW compound. On the 8th of September in 1943 we were moved into the new quarters. As military personnel we were subject to the command of the senior American officer.

Colonel C.G. Goodrich became our S.A.O.. His room was in the same block as ours. He was a quiet man who displayed a great deal of dignity in dealing with the Germans. Guidelines for treatment of POW's were set forth in the Geneva Convention of 1929. The rules of this agreement became our bible. Occasionally visitors of the International Red Cross would visit us to check on our treatment. Colonel Goodrich would then become a major source of information. Conditions in our POW compounds were effected by this international agreement. Our camps were administered by the German military authority not the Gestapo who represented the German political authority. As a consequence our treatment was better than it would have been under the Gestapo.

Del and I maneuvered to get away from Stan when we moved into our block on the South Compound. Our block commander was Major Davey Jones who had been one of the pilots flying B-25's off the deck of carriers to bomb Japan under the leadership of General Jimmy Doolittle earlier in the war. He had been captured later in the North African campaign.

Our room in block #137 grew from a half-dozen Kriegies to begin with to fourteen men in the course of a year’s time. Bernard “Rusty” Rauch from Louisiana, Jim Rendall from New York, Israel Rogg from New York, Vernon Brack from Kansas, Lloyd “Slim” McGrady from California, Bill Weir from California, and Paul Williams from Ohio to list a few names, were together with Del and I in a room. They were all great men. I’ve never know men of higher character. Rendall was a Catholic and the most christian-like man I’ve ever met.

Each block had a small kitchen, a wash room and an abort. The use of the kitchen was scheduled so that each room had its turn. Each room formed an independent mess. In our room we followed a chore schedule. Rations were given out by room. This involved primarily food and fuel. Food came to us from three sources: the German ration, the Red Cross food parcels, and infrequently food parcels from home. We were issued small blocks of pressed coal which we had to conserve for cooking our food. Each room had a stove for heat but we were always short of fuel. In November, 1943 we pulled thirty tree stumps in our compound which our room used for a little supplemental supply of fuel the first winter. Shovels, axes and a stump puller were paroled from the Goons to pull the stumps and chop them into fire wood. That means that we promised not to use the tools for escape purposes and would only use them for the designated purpose.

Tin bashing was developed as an essential skill to make cooking utensils. Our best resource for tin was a KLIM can. KLIM is milk spelled backward. It was powdered milk which came in Canadian food parcels. It was the largest can to which we had access. It was about the size of a number three can. In each combine or room someone emerged as a tin basher. This person made cooking pots and pans by flattening tin cans, flanging them together, and shaping them into utensils. Small stoves were made by flanging one can on top of another. Small pieces of wood or paper were fed into the bottom to burn while a pot could be cooking on the top. With a little patience amazing utensils were constructed and strange concoctions were cooked.

We ate three times a day. Our breakfast was a couple slices of schwarzbrot and a brew. When we had fuel we’d heat our stove, which had a long side about three feet high, then we’d press the schwarzbrot on the side to toast it. When it was toasted it would fall on a paper we placed on the floor under it. Sometimes there was a spread of ersatz jam to put on it. Three times a day we could go to the central kitchen and get hot water. Our brews usually corresponded with this hot water schedule. For lunch we had more bread with a spread on it depending on what was available. American parcels had a liver paste, sometimes cheese. Sardines came from British parcels, salmon from Canadian parcels. Some parcels had crackers which we would eat for lunch instead of bread. In the evening we had our one meal for the day. There was usually spam, corned beef, or meat roll in modest quantities. The Goons gave us potatoes and occasionally kohlrabies, small amounts of cheese and blood sausage. For flour we crumbled the crackers which came in the Red Cross parcels. We used German tooth powder as a soda or leavening in our make-shift cakes. Sometimes we had dried fruit, raisins, and prunes which we stewed or made into puddings. Can you see how we were obsessed with the occupation of feeding ourselves?

A word about the woody kohlrabies the Goons gave us. But first a description of the “Honey Wagon” and the little man who operated it. The outside latrines or aborts had concrete basements in them to hold the precious and odoriferous contents. Periodically the honey wagon would be sent in to empty the aborts. The honey wagon was a cylinder-shaped tank mounted on a wagon pulled by horses and operated by a nice little grimy man with a handle-bar moustache. One of the sights for a new kriegie was to watch this dirty little man perform his task. Once the honey wagon was in place, the tube inserted into the abort, and the motor on the pump begun, its operator would reach in his pocket, pull out a sandwich, sit in a convenient place to watch the operation and proceed to have his snack.

Because the kohlrabies were inedible we decided to dispose of them so the Goons wouldn’t know we hadn’t eaten them. We put them in the abort. This would have been O.K. but we hadn’t forseen that some of them were too large to go through the pump into the honey wagon. They got caught in the pump and fouled up the process. The Goons were angry and punished us by cutting our bread ration.

Twice a day we had an appel. On these occasions we lined up by blocks on the parade ground. Each block would assemble in rows of five to be counted. Usually these were short assemblies. However they could be forever if someone was missing or if the Goons screwed up the count. If there was a question we had a picture appel. The Goons had a file card with a photograph on it. We were marched by and individually checked by our picture. Appels could be held anytime. If the compound security was in question for any reason an unscheduled appel might be called. On occasion the Goons would search the blocks. They looked for contraband, uniforms, weapons, knives, radios, any type of escape equipment, etc. They would rout us out of the block while they tore it apart in a careful search.

Ordinarily apart from the two appels each day we were free to roam within the compound. The boundaries of the compound were two barbed-wire fences about ten feet high and set about five feet apart with coils of wire in between. The top wire on the inside was charged so that if anything touched it an alarm was set off. About every fifty yards along the fence was a goon box. These were sentry stations elevated above the fence which were occupied by a guard who was equipped; with a machine gun and a search light. Ten feet inside the fence was a wood rail about two feet high. A prisoner could not go beyond this warning rail without being challenged by a guard. Consequently a prisoner could never get to the fence that surrounded the compound. Prisoners made a pathway just next to the warning rail along which they would walk or run for exercise. We called this pathway the circuit or the perimeter. There were also roving guards in the compound. The ferrets were a special English speaking group with flashlights and long steel prangers whose job was to gather information. They were interested in anything they could hear of military value and they also specialized in snooping out information about any escape activity we might be engaged in.

The floor in the blocks were built about eighteen inches above the ground. This left room for the ferrets to crawl around and listen to any conversation they found interesting or important. When ever a ferret went under a block the occupants were warned of his presence by a, “Talley Ho, Goon under the block.” This often provoked a performance on our part. There were two approaches: one was to accidentally empty a pitcher of hot water on the floor above him and listen to him scramble as the water worked through the cracks in the floor. The second approach was to fabricate a tall tale about a secret weapon like: “Boeing is making a new six engine bomber that flies above fifty thousand feet that will soon be in operation over Germany.” We were forbidden to listen to the British Broadcasting System. Any radio program we could officially listen to was piped into our camp and controlled completely as Goon propaganda. Secretly we had radios and listened to the BBC. The news would be digested and reported secretly in each block. The signal was for someone to go down the hallway letting each room know that “Soups Up.” The block would be secured from Goons, we would gather in one place and the report would be read. The radio would be carefully hidden from the Goons in various ways. At times it was concealed in a loaf of bread, or in a musical instrument, or under the floor of a locker.

In the South Compound a security system was organized. The head of our “X” committee was called big X. He was a tall red headed light colonel also known as flamingo. The second in command was a major whom we called little X. Two functions of our X committee were: to know how many Goons were in the compound, who they were and where they went and what they did; and second to coordinate any plans for escape which might be organized. The Goons most always came through one gate. A room was designated for a D.P. (British for duty pilot) where those coming and going could be monitored. Once a Goon entered the compound his movements were charted. A kriegie shadowed him throughout his stay mapping where he went, where he paused or what he observed, and who he talked to. The Goons knew we did this. Several were so well trained that they would come by the D.P. and say, “California Joe reporting in.”

Through the International Red Cross we could receive food parcels from home. There were book parcels, cigarette parcels, and parcels with food and personal effects. Cigarettes, chocolate bars, and Nescafe had particular value as items to barter. Many Goons were eager to trade for these items. This kind of trading was against the Goon rules, but quietly it was being done. To control the market we had a rule that only one person was authorized to trade with a particular Goon. To trade without authorization was a court martial offense among Americans. This not only kept the price reasonable but it gave us the leverage we needed to get contraband materials like wire cutters, uniform insignia, radio parts, maps or anything we needed for our escape activity.

Goons were careful about making a deal. A trusting relationship needed to be established. It would start with items of little value like a toothbrush, a pair of socks, or a pint of cognac. A couple of packs of cigarettes for such items seemed innocuous enough. It was, however, a serious violation of the Goon’s code of instructions. If the trader was exposed he was usually demoted in rank and sent to the Russian front. After a few deals had been made the Goon was trapped. He then could be asked for a pair of wire cutters or other contraband items which we needed for escape purposes. If he declined to trade for these items he risked exposure to his commandant. This process was called, “taming the Goon.” To accomplish this it was necessary to restrict the contact with the Goon to only one American Kriegie. For others to interfere with the relationship disrupted the process.

And then there was a ferret named “Phil.” Attempts to “tame him were unsuccessful. He would not trade. He was more Nazi than the others. So another process was devised to deal with him. Wherever men have access to sugar, fruit juices, dried fruit, or vegetables which will ferment a way will be found to make intoxicating beverages. Some kriegies had become proficient along this line. Someone was always coming up with an alcoholic brew. One group even developed a way to distill the concoction to increase its strength. It was discovered that “Phil” liked to nip a bit. In a friendly fashion he was invited to test a new batch being made. Not realizing that it was concentrated-distilled brew “Phil” was encouraged to drink a sizable amount, to the extent that he passed out. In this condition he was stripped of all his identification and valuables and dumped into an abort for the other Goons to find. He was disgraced. We never saw him again. We were told that he had indeed been sent to the Russian front.

Each day was not full of memorable events. Each day was outlined with routine. Each day included some housekeeping chores. Almost every day was rich in time to do your own thing. The battle with boredom was constant. To creatively use time in a productive way was our major challenge. We were very often guilty of not being very creative. There were endless games of bridge. We gradually developed a pretty good compound library. Charitable groups sent books. Kriegies received book parcels which were usually shared. I read some sixty odd books in my tenures as a POW. Sherman, The Fighting Prophet, stands out as one. I received one book parcel which contained two copies of a A Tree Grown In Brooklyn. My life long interest in history has its roots in this period. It was at Stalag Luft III that I decided to go to college and become a high school history teacher.

The goons provided us with three cards and four letter forms each month. This circumscribed the limits of our correspondence as prisoners. These missives were censored by the Goons and by Americans before being delivered. Therefore what we wrote was quite restricted. The prisoner wanted his loved ones to be assured of his health and well being. He could write about that. There were particular requests and instructions about having your folks send food, books, clothing and needed miscellanea. My mother criticized my letters for not being more informative. Substantive letters would have been censored. Her frustration was warranted. It took at least six weeks for a letter to go from the P.O.W. to the destination. Parcels to the prisoner took from four to six months. This type of delayed communication had its obvious limitations. Regardless, any message received by the prisoner, however long delayed was greatly anticipated and always exciting. Even when some fellows received a “dear lieutenant” letter from his wife or a girl friend. I didn’t receive my first letter until 8 December 1943. From then on my mail came in spurts which seemed to be determined by the whim of my Goon censor. Gepruft 42 was stamped on my mail as the mark of the Goon censor. Many of my Lovell friends wrote me at one time or another. Their names are an honor roll in my memory. My mother and my sister Mary head the list. Frank Brown was especially thoughtful. Gladys Emmett, my sixth Grade teacher and life long friend, was very special. An English nurse, Frances Abrams sent me books and letters. Nancy Wicker from New York City of all my women friends wrote regularly until she became interested in an army Major who won her hand. Grace Allphin wrote a good letter. Numbers of others unmentioned by name made me feel that I was important to them and my home community.

Every Sunday morning when we stood at Appel the chaplain would announce the religious services which were being held. The pattern was to have Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish services.

There was a surprise for me on Sunday 14 November 1943 when these announcements included: “there will be an L.D.S. discussion group meeting at 6:00 p.m. today in the cook house.” To this time I was not aware that there were other Mormon kriegies in the compound. It turned out that there were sixteen of us. We met weekly thereafter. The first meeting had been a week before I heard the announcement. A presidency was organized and Sacrament Meetings were held on monthly basis. In our weekly meetings we studied the Book of Mormon, then the Articles of Faith, and were into Church History when the war ended. David Farrell was the clerk of our group and published the minutes of our meetings after the war. This book is a precious record. The association of those men did much to help me endure the trials of being a P.O.W.

Much was done in the South Compound to provide some entertainment. Through the YMCA musical instruments were provided. The American airman who were also professional musicians organized and developed an excellent band. Several full-blown musical shows and several plays were put on. We eventually had a compound radio station. On holidays, especially Christmas, lovely programs were presented. One of our buildings was converted into a theatre. With the labor of American kriegies the furniture and equipment needed were made for it. The men who worked so hard to provide this diversion made our ordeal pleasant for an hour or two with each production. This was real dedication and an invaluable service.

During the air raids we were required to be inside our blocks. At first air raids were infrequent. We were never allowed outside the block at night. The Goons had guards with dogs who roamed the compound at night. These were called hundt fuehrers. As the war progressed air raids became more frequent. They began to occur during the day as well as at night. On April 11th, 1944 we actually saw our first formation of B-17's. After we moved to Stalag VIIA we would see the American heavies (B-17's or B-24's) several times a week. Late in the summer of 1944 we saw our first ME-262. This was a jet fighter the Goons developed. The sound of a jet engine and the obvious speed of the ME-262 caused our hopes to stagnate a bit. The Goons were obvious into something new and better. We worried about how this would effect the length of the war.

Twice during air raids at Stalag Luft III we had Goons with itchy fingers shoot into our camp. The first time we could not figure the provocation for the shot. It seriously wounded a kriegie, Colonel Stevenson, in the leg. On the second occasion an enlisted worker in the central kitchen, Corporal Miles was sitting on the steps of the doorway. The Goon shot him dead. These atrocities were dealt with by securing the names of the Goons responsible, keeping the record with the intent to secure accountability after the war.

The 24th of March 1944 was one of the three of four really memorable days in those two years in the Fatherland. It was the day of the “Great Escape.” Eighty men escaped through a tunnel in the British North Compound. The Goons went crazy and we encouraged them all we could. They feared a general uprising of prisoners and three days later decided to have three appels a day instead of the routine two. The word was passed among us that we would not cooperate with the noon-appel which had been added. Our method of rebellion was to leave a vacant place in one of the inside lines. We lined up by blocks in rows of five. Two Goon counters would count us. One by walking passed in front and one in the rear of our formation five lines deep. As the counters walked past a block one line would shift a man. The counters would stop go back and start their count again. This time a different inside line would quickly move to the right or left one man. By the time they had gone half way around the parade ground they gave up and dismissed the appel without completing the count. We had frustrated their effort to count us or so we thought. Our rebellion and our victory was short lived. In a half-hour a whole troop of Goons marched into the camp armed with everything they could get their hands on. We were instructed that anyone who smoked in ranks or did not cooperate in any way would be shot. So much for that rebellion. We lined up and were quickly counted. I thought of this experience when I got home and heard of Germans who were American prisoners who were used to work the beet harvest, striking for better working conditions and getting away with it. The contrast in militarism was noticeable. We called our experience the "hardware appel." It was several months before the Goons went back to two appels a day.

At least forty-nine of the British Kriegies who escaped from the North Compound were brutally slaughtered after they had been recaptured. We were officially warned that to escape was no longer a "sport" and to be recaptured alive could not be promised. Our chances of making an escape successfully weren't very good. Few of us counted the risk worthy of a suicide effort. We prayed for an early end to the war and bidded our time.

It was June 6, 1944, and it was difficult for me to understand why last August I had insisted that the war would be over by Christmas–last Christmas. I could never lose my faith that we would win the war . Surely we were making progress, and Eisenhower could not be serious in attempting to win the war with air power alone. But where–when was the invasion coming? We, with our optimistic hopes, had been making friendly bets since last January that the invasion would come sometime in the spring. Now it was June and spring was nearly gone.

The day wore on with its customary slowness. I wasn't surprised when the mailman brought me nothing. If those German censors had had to sweat out news as we did I'll bet results would have been better.

I sat at the window and watched ambitious Kriegies walk around the perimeter. One could tell by the cast of their faces that the drab dreariness was weighing down on most of them. There were some laughing and enjoying the brisk exercise of walking, but I could not see them–not today. My friends left me to myself. We all had days when we wondered, and the helpless futility of our position made us impatient, dismal, and unhappy. Time seemed to be compressing me into its slow-moving coil. Today I desperately wished I could be actively employed in gaining liberty. But what could one do except spend six months on a tunnel which was always discovered or attempt suicide by doing a wire job?

After the habitual bowl of bad soup I lay down on my sack to spend a dull afternoon at the common pastime of sleeping and reading alternately while thus engaged I subconsciously noted a convergence of people toward the radio at the central cookhouse. This was not unusual. Every day a large crowd gathered to hear the German communique, so I paid little attention. Then the air became electrified with the vitalizing word "INVASION!" By some reflex I was sitting bolt upright in my bunk. With vaguest conscious reason I was out of the window and on my way to the cookhouse. Enroute I gathered bits of overheard conversation which told me that, according to the news report, the Americans were attempting a landing on Normandy in France. "Attempting"was the German expression. If a landing were being made I knew that it would be successful. The

Yanks were coming! It might be a matter of days now! One couldn't tell how fast the German resistance would collapse! My heart jumped eagerly within me. My gloom was completely whisked away. The drab environment I had grown to dislike so much actually seemed friendly and pleasant. It was a delightful experience to feel jubilant, young, and happy again. Despair went out of our camp and we responded as if we had been stimulated by a powerful drug. Speculation hit an all time high that evening. Before night was over we had pictured the Yanks battering the walls of Germany. We felt as if we could last at least two or three more months if necessary.

I wondered how it was possible to have experienced two such opposite sensations within a few hours. Both had been very real. Now that the Allies were on the Continent I felt that I should never again reach such depths of despair.

The success of the invasion didn't lead immediately to the end of the war. France was liberated. The Russians made great advances against the Goons in the Eastern Front. By fall it was evident that the war had another winter to go. In the second winter at Stalag Luft III we were even more optimistic about the end of the war being near. The Battle of the Bulge gave us a discouraging December and January. By the end of January we knew that the Russians were getting near our location in Eastern Germany. The scuttlebutt was that the Goons would never bother with evacuating us but let the Russians take over our compound as they advanced, and it was sure that the Goons would never move us at night. When the order came for us to evacuate it was a surprise. This decision is to the credit of the Germans. It reflects some integrity on their part to assume some care of POW's; especially in now knowing some of the harsh treatment some Americans received at the hands of our allies the Russians.

Our leaders had prepared us for the possibility of evacuation even though it seemed to run against the rumor mill. We had been urged to maintain and emergency supply of food, canned items mostly. We had also been instructed to be prepared to move quickly. Make-shift packs were designed. A list of bare essential items had been made.

Toward the end of January the air activity had increased and we could hear the booming of the large artillery guns. It was estimated that the Russians were within fifty miles of our wire home. Though we were not making any decisions our status was obviously soon going to be effected.

27 January 1945. The order came in the evening and we were on the road marching out of Stalag Luft III by 11:00 p.m. We had just received our weekly ration of Red Cross parcels. Our cook, Lt. Antony for the week brought the news that we were leaving. He opened the food locker and said, "Let's bash the food, we can't take it with us." Visualize fourteen men in a small room trying to eat up their food reserve in an hour or two and sorting, packing and repacking what could be taken with them. Under this pressure we selected what small and precious items we might take or leave. I regretted most having to leave a sizeable packet of letters that had accumulated.

For the first few hours on the road it was an exhilarating feeling to be out of our confinement. The kidding and the singing stopped after the first while. It didn't take long before the hike lost its appeal. Periodically there would be a short rest stop.

28 January 1945. It snowed. We marched thirty kilometers to a place called Grosselten. It was

about noon the next day. We were housed in barns to rest on the hay for a time. The Goons gave us a fourth of a loaf of bread and some margarine. Sleeping was in short minutes because of the discomfort and the cold. There was no way to become warm. At 6:00 p.m. we were on the road again. "No, the Goons would never march us at night." That second night we covered twenty-six kilometers. We came to a place named Maskau, and we knew Napoleon had nothing on us. They fumbled us around the village and finally put us in a large building used as a pottery factory.

29 January 1945. We stayed on in the pottery factory. Those who had collapsed from fatigue and cold along with way were picked up in wagons and taken to hospitals the Goons told us.

30 January 1945. Early this morning we were marched out of Maskau. We covered eighteen kilometers to Graustein. We were slowing down. At about 6:00 p.m. we stopped. We were scattered around in barns. It was cold and miserable. We were exhausted.

31 January 1945. They had us on the road again. About another eighteen kilometers until we arrived at Spremberg. Here they circled us in a large field. We wondered if we were going to get the same treatment they had given the escapees of the North Compound. They had been slaughtered in an open field with machine guns. But they are taking a count. They gave us a bowl of barley soup instead. We waited a long time. Then they put us on box cars from which cattle had just been taken. They crowded fifty of us in each of these railroad cars.

1st. 2nd. & 3rd of February 1945. For three days we traveled on the train in these box cars. Our destination was Stalag VIIA at Moosburg, Germany. The train was worse than marching. It was colder. The movement of the train caused the air to breeze through the cracks in the box cars. There was not room to stretch out. We stood and sat in shifts. We were lucky when we could nod a little. There was no sleeping. After twenty-four hours they stopped. An attempt to put some meager rations in the cars was interrupted by the movement of the train. We were on our way again. It was two days before they let us out to relieve ourselves. Then there was no facility. They restricted us to an area near the train. Were reduced to very primitive conditions. Finally the third day we arrived at Moosburg. After what seemed an endless time we were herded off the train cars into another prison compound. We were grateful for the shelter of the blocks it contained. We were crowded beyond reason. Facilities were very crude. Somehow the war would soon be over and we had to survive.

Conditions at Moosburg remained deplorable for the duration of the war. Goon rations of bread, margarine, blood sausage occasionally, and potatoes were minimal. Red Cross parcels were irregular. The transportation systems within Germany were constantly being disrupted by allied bombing. The fuel supply for cooking and heat was wholly insufficient. One water faucet supplied four hundred kriegies. The blocks were so crowded that some of us preferred to move outside and live in tents. Abort (latrine) facilities were gross. Dysentery was common. It was impossible to get rid of the lice and fleas which permeated the buildings and bedding. Showers and de-licing programs were so limited that in three months I could only receive one shower. We had to depend more on our small KLIM can stoves to cook on because of fuel shortages and the number of men needing to use the kitchens. About eight hundred men for each small kitchen. The smoke from these make-shift stoves caused eyes to redden and noses to run. We began to cook outside as soon as the weather permitted. Del and I formed a mess of two and shared meals.

During these months at Stalag VIIA the Goons presented us with a most ridiculous if not ludicrous proposition. It was printed on a propaganda sheet which was widely circulated throughout the compound. They offered us freedom if we would agree to join them to fight the Russians. There argument was that Bolshevism was a common enemy of Britain, the United States and Germany and therefore we were invited to take up arms and join the Goons in fighting the Russians. Even if we could philosophically agree no one would consider joining a lost cause and pay the price required. The bottom line was who would trust a Goon promise. We laughed at them for the offer.

April 12th was a day when we joined with other Americans throughout the world in genuinely mourning the death of President F. D. Roosevelt. He symbolized so well the American commitment to oppose totalitarianism and its tyranny. I'll always remember where I was on that occasion.

Almost daily the American bombers flew over our compound. American armored units were deep in the Fatherland by mid-April. Each day began with speculations and anticipation. The 29th of April became our day of liberation.

I expect never again to be as jubilant as I was on that day. It was the day of liberation of Stalag VIIA at Mooseburg, Germany. After twenty-one months, three days, and twenty-two hours as a German prisoner of war it was an ecstatic, uplifting feeling to be free, free, free!

That morning, April 29th, 1945, began for us with a feeling of excitement in the air. Even the pessimists seemed impressed. There were the usual rumors of imminent liberation, but added to them was the diversion that tanks had been seen on the hills north of us. Then gunfire was heard; it became louder. We were cautioned by the Senior American Officers to keep near the ground just in case stray shells might come our way. My navigator and I had installed our kitchen, such as it was, in a German slit trench; so there we stayed watching, listening, and waiting. The firing ceased–then began again. This rotation continued for what must have been nearly and hour before complete cessation. The camp became alive with speculation and hope. Our liberation became official when a large American tank, black with cheering Kriegies who had climbed aboard for a ride, stormed through our camp. Souvenir hunters clamored and struggled for empty shells or any other detachable object they could grasp. The poor tank crew was overcome by autograph seekers and thankful ex-Kriegies. Gates were thrown open, and holes were made at short intervals along our barbed wire enclosure to let freedom and liberty enter without restraint. Americans, Russians, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Hindus all raised silent voices in prayers of thanksgiving. The resistance to our recapture had been slight and we were grateful to someone–to everyone for our liberation.

That day was culminated by the capture of the nearby town. The S.S. troops resisted in a church and town hall but were soon wiped our. Our attention was naturally drawn to this little battle, and when someone shouted, "The Flag is going up!", in a body we climbed up the barbed wire fence to get a glimpse. Goose flesh covered my body, tears of joy filled my eyes, and a most indescribable thrill raced up and down my spine as I watched "Old Glory" slowly rise to rest and reign over that little city. Our dreams of steak, clean beds, clean clothing, and reunion with our families became nearly tangible as we watched our flag unfurl.

The Goon guards had disappeared on the 29th. American G.I.'s took over control of our compound. It took them a week to make arrangements to evacuate our compound. That was a slow week. We tasted American bread again. It was very white and terribly sweet, more like cake. Del and I hiked beyond the boundaries of the compound to an old castle on the hill nearby, It was occupied by American G.I.'s also. We made plans. Our most recurrent vision had to do with food. We learned that the topic of women was subordinate to hunger, and survival comforts such as a nice hot bath. We were dusted with DDT to get rid of the lice and fleas.

Finally on the 7th of May American trucks drove us to an airfield at Ingalstadt. We only waited overnight to be flown to France. During the day of waiting for the C-47's we observed an example of German surrender. A ME-109 landed at the airfield. It taxied to the flight line. The pilot offered himself in surrender. He was swarmed by liberated American kriegies. The pilot was frightened and feared for his life. The mob, however, were only after souvenirs. They wanted his pistol and his insignia, etc. They pulled at his uniform. Any moveable piece of the plane was taken. It was embarrassing to see American officers reduced to such unmilitary activity.

We were flown to a rehabilitation camp in France called, "Lucky Strike." We were treated to clean G.I. beds, showers at our demand, clean uniforms, meals regularly with food in abundance, and physical examination. It was heavenly. Del and I planned to get a furlough together so that I could travel with him to Buffalo, N.Y. to taste his mother's pancakes. We were scheduled to leave LaHarve, France within a week. Del became ill with a digestive problem and had to go to the hospital. I was shipped out without him. After all this for us to be separated was a great disappointment. Our ship was the M.S. "John Ericsson." Leaving France on May 16th we went to England for three days and sailed for the United States May 19th. By June 1st we were in New York City. The Statue of Liberty was a most thrilling sight. I was furloughed for sixty days from Fort Dix, N.J.

En route home my first was New York City. I looked up Charita Bauer, She was so sweet and hospitable. She was married to a sailor. We went to see Nancy Wicker who was engaged to an Army Major. After an evening with Charita I headed for Lovell by the shortest railroad route.

It was a long ride. There was a new excitement about going home this time. So much had happened. There was something final about it. In two years I'd had unique experiences. The war was over in Europe, Japan's defeat would soon follow. By now I had a plan. My life was coming into focus. My urge to become a flyer had been satisfied. I wanted out of the service so that I could go to college and become a history teacher. That summer was a marvelous recuperative period. I worked a little at my old job in the bakery. My brother, Charlie, came home on furlough from the marines in Okinawa and the Pacific war. He dated an old friend from Greybull and I went along to entertain the younger sister. When the dust settled a wonderful thing had happened. I was engaged to the sister. I returned to the Air Force long enough to get separated from the service. Returning home Belle Weir and I were married in September and by January we were settled in Utah to begin my studies at the University of Utah. Within three years I had a job teaching in Lovell. For five years I taught in Lovell and then moved back to Utah. After thirty years of teaching in the Granite School District I retired.