

# **Baker's Story**

**July 16, 1944**

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Lyle A. Baker - co-pilot  
Name of plane: Ready Teddy (version 1) #42-52087  
Squadron: 726th  
MACR #7156-4X

## **CREW:**

Capt., Francis L. Fort - pilot (KIA)  
2<sup>nd</sup> Lt, Lyle A. Baker - co-pilot (POW/Survivor)  
F/O, George S. Campbell - navigator (KIA)  
1<sup>st</sup> Lt, Willard "Pete" E. Mulry - bombardier (POW/Survivor)  
Sgt. Frank S. Hooper - upper turret gunner (KIA)  
Sgt. William J. Kilcoyne - nose gunner (KIA)  
Sgt. Joseph H. Booker - lower turret gunner (KIA)  
S/Sgt. Aaron E. Butler - waist gunner (KIA)  
S/Sgt. Kenneth J. Bruster - waist gunner (KIA)  
Sgt. Norman E. Feldman – tail gunner (KIA)

**L. S. M. F. T.**  
**T. S. P. O. E.**

What a title for a short story – yet how apropos. Little did I realize as we jokingly uttered this little ditty at Grenier Field, N.H. just how much significance it would have a few weeks later when one Lyle A. Baker was to be suddenly changed to Kreige 6844. Helluva Situation. And after everything was going so well too. We had flown the 5000 or so mile hop from the U.S. to Italy with nary a hitch via New Foundland, the Atlantic, French Africa, Tunisia, and finally Foggia. The requirement for a trip home was 50 missions and with everyone flying four or five a week and a brand new B-24 all set to go, the entire crew of the “Urgent Virgin” was eager to get started and finish the job as quickly as possible – as we all optimistically expected to do. Then our ship was taken by another squadron which had suffered some high losses of late and we were told that we would fly various ships in our own squadron. Of course, we hated to part with the “U.V.” since we had become rather attached to the crate by this time, but we had no choice in the matter. Besides, S-2 claimed that the maintenance in combat was wonderful, so we didn’t figure it made much difference what ship we flew. (Like all others who learned about S-2 the hard way, my opinion of that organization was much higher than it ever has been since.) Our crew was split up for the first few missions for obvious reasons – Ploesti, Toulon, and Budapest being no places to send 10 new men. Then finally, on that fateful day of July 16, we were briefed for Weiner-Neustadt – our first mission as a complete crew. The ship was a decrepit battle-scarred veteran of 64 combat missions – well riddled with flak holes – and barely cooled off from a trip to Ploesti during which it had limped back to the base on engines 1, 2, & 3 due to a defective turbo on #4. As we collected around the ship that cool AM we thought little of this fact – this seemingly unimportant incident that was to prove our undoing. I remember the wisecracks we pulled before we took off – kidding Campbell the navigator about the extra flak suit he was taking along to sit on in order to avert a certain catastrophe he had heard about. And then when the bombs were loaded, I wrote my little cousin’s name (Ned) on one as per promise, and Fort did likewise for his little son. I recall thinking of how big a joke the war must be to their immature minds, and how glad I was that they and my sister, and other American kids would never suffer like the kids in Europe. It was a beautiful Sunday morning, not unlike many I have seen back in Pennsylvania and when I saw on the poop-sheet that “Bombs Away” was due at 10:30, I couldn’t help but think that people over here would be in church at that hour same as in Osceola, Pa.

“Oh well, this is War” and I have nothing to say in the matter”. Even so, I could do a little praying that the bombardier would do a good job in synchronizing today and drop the missiles on nothing but the engine factory.

Two hours after takeoff and things are running smoothly. It is true that No. 4 has a tendency to “run away” making it necessary for Fort and myself to deviate from the usual plan of flying 15 minute alternate shifts. This is because it is impossible for one man to maintain uniform manifold pressure and still fly the perfect formation necessary in combat. However, this problem is by no means insurmountable. We change to a system by which one pilot works the throttles and the other does nothing but fly the ship – i.e., Fort would fly 15 minutes while I worked the throttles, keeping a close check on #4. Then we would reverse the process – he working the throttles and I working the controls. Not the better of the two systems, but the only means of keeping #4 in line. For some time now I have noticed the cylinder head temperatures rising consistently, especially on #3. This we attribute to the fact that we spent an hour circling around 6000 feet. Now we are near the target and are still short of the 24,000 feet we are supposed to have, so the leader has been climbing at a much faster rate than he should. Maybe his new ship can do it, but some of these old jobs can’t take it – especially some like this one which flew several hundred miles only the day before on 3 engines – a severe strain – even on a Pratt-Whitney. One – then another ship breaks formation. Now we are pulling 45” with 2400 RPM just to stay in formation. “Why in Hell doesn’t that guy slow down for a while?” Now it’s Fort’s turn to fly, and I turn my undivided attention to the throttles and instrument panel. #4 is no better, and the #3 cylinder head temperature is so high as to be alarming. Soon I have to increase the RPM to 2500 and the M.P. to 47”. We seriously consider turning back, but hell, we’ve come this far with the bombs – we’ll take ‘em all the way or bust. Besides, didn’t the colonel just make a speech about the increasing number of abortions and tell everyone to get to the target regardless of the condition of the plane. “I guess you better drop a couple, Pete.” But, no sooner are these words uttered than the engineer yells, thru interphone that #3 is on fire. I close the cowl flaps immediately trying to smother the flames – retarding #3 throttle at the same time. Bruster shortly reports the fire is out, but we do not dare increase the M.P. on #3. Nos. 1, 2 and 4 are now pulling 55”, and our best hope is to drop only the few bombs remaining and stay in formation with the 3½ engines - taking the chance that 1, 2, and 4 hold out. But no such luck. All of a sudden #3 bursts out in flames once more. Then comes the worst of all – a terrific lurch and we are in a tight spin. #4 had suddenly gone out and

the terrific torque, caused by full power on the left hand engines (1&2) with no counter balancing power on 3&4 had thrown us over. Fort and I exerted all our strength trying to pull out, but to no avail. It was like trying to put out a hotel fire with a glass of water. He pressed the alarm bell – a signal for the crew to bail out. We continued our efforts, but the controls were like granite. Finally at 5000 feet Fort said we'd better try to jump. I barely recall what happened in the next few moments – my head feeling like a top from the terrific rate of decent. Somehow, I managed to rip off my helmet and flak suit and leave the seat, but try as I might, I couldn't make my way to the bomb bay due to the pull of the spin. What must've been moments, seemed like hours. Then a lucky movement in the ship threw me forward and I managed to grasp the iron rail in front of the bomb bay. Thank God Pete had dropped some bombs and left the door open, Fort was right behind me. I jumped, pulling the rip cord almost as I left the ship. I felt two hard jolts – the first as the chute opened and broke my tremendous rate of fall – the second as I hit the ground. There wasn't a second between them. I looked up and saw a huge mass of flames not more than 10 feet away. My first thought: "I'm in Hell". Then I saw the chute and felt the wind pull me away from the burning ship. Talk about miracles! I unhooked the straps, and ran from the withering heat until I was out of danger. Conscious of a pounding in my ears, I realize that I had fallen over four miles without clearing them. I did so at once, but results of that quick change of pressure left a hum that lingered for days. I looked in the sky for chutes for I felt sure that someone must have gotten out. You can imagine how I felt when I saw not a one and then glanced at the flaming wreckage, flames from which were now several hundred feet high. Since I could see a farm house in the distance, I knew that people would be there shortly, and it behooved me to make tracks. I took stock of the situation. I had landed on the edge of a corn field surrounded by a forest on 3 sides. In fact I had come dangerously close to landing in the trees. And another miracle: The soft freshly cultivated soil was all that prevented a broken leg. As it was, my nose was bleeding, and I had bit my lip when my head hit the ground. Small matter that, though. I had on a green flying suit – almost identical with the color of the leaves in the woods. Why not hide in the underbrush near the plane? They will probably search a wide area and may never think of looking in the most likely of all spots. I had about 15 minutes before the crowd came which gave me enough time to leave a false trail. I walked toward the other edge of the forest leaving plenty of tracks in the soft soil. Then I followed the edge of the forest back to the plane, and lay among the bushes, completely covered. The crowd gathered from all directions – men, women,

and children all very excited and speaking a strange dialect. Sure enough, they saw my footprints and began a wide search which lasted from 10:30 'till after dark and all the time I was no more than 100 yards from the plane. A small town was nearby and people came by the hundred. An hour or so passed – then a loud bang. A 1000 pounder that Pete hadn't released had gone off. I never saw a more frightened outfit in my life – people running in all directions. I was afraid some of the closer ones had been killed, but I found out later that all anyone received was a bad scare. Knowing it was useless to move 'till the crowd dispersed, I opened my escape kit and debated my chances for escape. I found \$48 dollars of escape money which I had hid in my socks. Other articles were a tiny compass, silk maps of Europe, concentrated food pills, water purifying tablets, etc. The first job was to locate myself – then by a few hundred miles of walking in the right direction, I might be able to reach Italy – a long shot hope at best – but my only chance. The rest of that day was the longest I have ever experienced – never knowing but what some searcher might stumble on to me. One Hunky did pass within a few yards, but failed to see me. I looked at my watch – only a little past noon. I thought to myself, “the folks back home aren't even up yet – it's only 6:00 AM in Pennsylvania”. THE FOLKS BACK HOME. Oh my God, what will they think? Here I hadn't even thought about that. After all they suffered since Burdette went down, now to have me reported missing and go through it all again. What will the grandparents think? Will Granddad Baker be able to stand the shock? Or will they dare tell him? If I could only let them know in some way that I am alive. But no chance for that. All I can do is hope for the best. If I had only gotten a letter from Bunny before I went down. “I love her so much” and the last word I'd had from her was the morning I took off from Topeka. No mail had caught up with us in the five weeks we'd been gone.

I knew it was useless to move 'till the crowd dispersed. Six o'clock and still as many people as ever. Now and then a motorcycle drives up on the nearby road. Seven PM and it starts to rain. The trees keep most of the moisture off, but the mosquitoes are so thick as to drive a guy crazy. Shortly after dark, I was chilled through but the crowd still lingered. Why'n Hell don't they go home to bed so I can get moving? “Baker, this is a Hell of a situation you've got yourself in – hiding in a dark mosquito infested woods 5000 miles from home and you don't even know what country you're in”. Then I would think of the others who just crashed to their death and think that perhaps I was lucky enough just to be alive, or was I? I was so miserable; I would just as soon have been one of them. But no, I have to get

back for the folk's sake. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad if I was the only Baker, but after Burdette's misfortune, I just have to get back for their sake. Perhaps that was the reason I had been spared by such a narrow margin – The Lord surely wouldn't let them suffer a second time. But enough of thinking about the past – the situation at hand is something new and one for which I am not well prepared. I had never even considered it. I always figured I'd either get back okay or if I did get it, I'd never live to know the difference. And now, here I am. "The crowd seems to be dispersing – perhaps it is safe to try a get away".

I must've been around 2 AM when I felt the coast to be clear. The rain had stopped and the moon was bright enough to enable me to follow a narrow path through the forest. I had to walk slowly because my knee was becoming worse as time went by. In the excitement of the plane crash and my haste to escape the flames, I hadn't even noticed that I had twisted my knee when I hit the ground. Now I was limping more than somewhat and hoping it would not become so bad as to stop my progress altogether. As dawn began to break, I could see high wheat fields all over the countryside and a prosperous farm house in the distance. I hugged the edge of the woods to avoid being seen. Before long, I came to a railroad which ran north and south – the southern running directly through a heavily wooded section. My plan: to walk along the tracks (walk only at night and hide for sleep in the forest in the daytime. The railroad would eventually lead me to a town by which I could locate myself on the map). Since it was still early, I decided to walk another half hour or so before I took a nap for the day. So far, all well and good. I had evaded the crowd of the day before, and my chances of detection in this forest were small. Imagine my consternation as I rounded a small bend to see a woman with a nursing child in her arms standing among the trees. Where did she come from? She spoke to me in a strange dialect. How I wished I could talk the language. To run might cause her to become more suspicious. I waved my hand and continued nonchalantly along, hoping she would not suspect anything out of the way. But my costume was a dead giveaway. Next thing I knew, a pair of men with pistols were cutting ahead of me and admonished me to halt. They searched me for a weapon – then took me to a small house completely hidden among the trees. Before long, no less than 30 people had gathered from where I had no idea. What a collection. Girls of no more than 12 or 13, each obviously pregnant or with a nursing child. And everyone, especially the old men, very dirty. (I later found out that these people were all peasants working for a wealthy land owner. The houses were made of logs, dirt, sticks, etc. And were scattered

through the forest. A good deal of the old feudal system.) However, they all seemed very friendly and one woman brought out a hunk of brown bread and a piece of dirty raw pork along with a knife (I wasn't hungry). Since neither they nor I spoke a common language, we resorted to signs and motions. Then they pointed to the sky and demonstrated a crash, I nodded my head. One woman out of perhaps 55 or so seemed cleaner and more intelligent than the rest. She brought out a faded letter dated 1925 and written from Wisconsin in broken English. She sighed and asked me to read it. I inferred it was a son or a brother who had gone to America for a new start on life. Evidently she had never heard from him except that once and she couldn't even understand this one. One little girl seemed out of place among these dark haired people as her hair was a golden blonde. I had a picture of my sister in my pocket and pointed to the girl then to the picture. The woman smiled. She had no reason to fear me and we suddenly became friends. It was plain to see that she was the law and God of that clan. She told the man with the pistol to put it down. When he hesitated, she picked up a stick and chased him in the house. I heard that there were anti-Nazi groups in the Balkans – my only hope of escape was through their assistance. But were these people willing to help me? If I could only speak their language and find out where they stood. They pointed to a town in Hungary on my map. I then pointed to Italy and tried to make them understand I wanted them to help me. The woman nodded her head. Soon a car drove up and out stepped a pair of uniform soldiers – with long feathers in their hats. Maybe I was dreaming. When I assured myself I was awake, I thought, "Surely no army would have motley uniforms like this – they must belong to the friendly groups I've heard about from the S-2." They drove me to town. Cars were scarce and we had to drive slowly to avoid large flocks of geese and a few cows that strayed at will up and down Main St. Every man, woman and child gathered around the car eager to get a look. A man ran out of the main building with a tray and 5 glasses of red wine. The soldier raised his glass as in toast and drained it in a gulp. I followed his example. "Egad, what manner of concoction is this? Tastes like liquid fire". Ten more miles and we repeat the process in another town. And still another. "Does this guy drink this much every day or just when he has guests"? I was beginning to see double already. Then fortunately, we stop and enter a building with a room full of silk (from parachutes) and pieces of burned metal. A short man speaks to me in broken English. "Thank God, they have someone that talks English – maybe I can find out about the crew". He showed me a picture of Hooper, the Martin turret gunner. My heart leaped. He must've gotten out – else his wallet would have burned.

Then I heard that they found him at the far end of the corn field. His chute had failed to open. Then the man told me they found 7 bodies in the plane. 5 in the back – 1 (Fort's) on the flight deck – and one in the nose. So someone was still alive. Probably Pete since he would have had the best chance. The guys in the tail had never had a chance with their chest chutes. (Made in 2 parts to facilitate movement around the ship and ease in getting into turrets. Only the harness is worn. The chute itself has to be strapped on after word to bail out is given – requiring plenty of time.) The only thing that saved me was the “seat type” (one piece) chute that each pilot wears. I never would have made it had I been forced to fasten on a chest type chute. Food was brought out. I had been famished, but I couldn't eat a mouthful now.

With an interpreter, I could now talk to the soldier that had driven me here. He asked if I was afraid or fearful of my life. I said no. British or Yankee? I told him. Then I asked if he would help me get to Italy. He laughed and replied, “No, I can't. You are a prisoner of this Hungarian government and will be detained in a camp until the war is over.” A fine state of affairs. He then asked if I was tired. I hadn't slept in 48 hours and was practically out on my feet. He told me I could take a nap which I did. He aroused me at supper time. Menu: Hungarian goulash, bread, string beans. Not bad at all.

That night I found out that the English speaking man had lived in Brooklyn 15 years – returned to the old country in 1938. All evening crowds came – peering in the window. I created more excitement in that town than a 5 ring circus. They all wanted to find out why the Americans were bombing them. “Why do you try to destroy us?? And damned if I could find an answer. I hadn't even known we were at war with Hungary. From their viewpoint, Russia was the enemy. Hungary's soldiers were all at the Eastern front fighting Bolshevism, and from their point of view America had no business saddling in. Maybe they were right. I don't know. I do know that war isn't right. But how can it be prevented? At any rate, I couldn't for the life of me find an answer when they asked me what I was doing over here. All I wanted to do was fly 50 missions and get home. And here I was less than a month away from the states – Egad.

My soldier friend quizzed me about America. He said he was going there after the war and wanted to look me up. I hope he does. I couldn't have asked for a better host. Beer was rationed, but he couldn't buy me enough. I tried to talk the boy from Brooklyn into helping me get to Italy. He shrugged his shoulders and said “I'd like to, but there's nothing I can do.”

All my arguments were to no avail. T.S. The following afternoon, I took a train ride to the county jail. The jailer was a young fellow who removed my belt, shoe laces, etc. before locking me up in a bare cell. Reason: I might hang myself. “What the Hell does he think we Americans are”. The bed was a wooden slab – I think it was solid oak. Bedding consisted of 1 dirty blanket. I raised a fuss and finally got another. I still spent one miserable night. The next day seemed like an eternity. The solidarity is terrible. I amused myself by killing the bed bugs which moved freely around the room. Dinner consisted of brown bread (foul stuff) and bean soup with a little meat. Mid afternoon and my jailer brought me some pastry his girl friend had made. Very proud he was. I could understand that. Next day he takes me to a train bound for Budapest. The first passenger I see is Pete. We stared at each other like we were seeing ghosts. Then we exchanged stories. He had gotten out at 15,000 or so and watched the plane fall – but had seen no chutes leave – not even mine. We went over all the details of what had happened – cursed the colonel for sending us up in a ship like that, and came to several conclusions which can best be told by mouth. A young German Officer was on the train. We talked to him in English. He had spent a year in England, and said the German people wanted the war to end. All the cities were masses of rubble, etc.

Every now and then a civilian would come up and shake a fist at us and yell “gangster”. Luckily our guards kept them away. The European trains are old and slow, but we finally reached Budapest and walked to the center of the city. People kept yelling “gangster”. One old woman even made a pass at me with an umbrella. I wouldn’t have traded my guard for a million bucks. Pete and I spent 2 days in a small cell with a wooden cot apiece. Those things are hard. Next Geneva Convention I’m going to propose a motion that all cots be made of soft pine for POWs. To pass the time, we drew a checker board on one cot – used bread for checkers. It wasn’t good for anything else and the soup we got with it was even worse. A young Jewish political prisoner took care of us. He gave Pete cigarettes once in a while. He asked for my wings as a souvenir. I gave them to him. We asked him why everyone called us “gangster”. He explained, “American flyers are dropping toy dolls, etc. which little children pick up. These then explode and blow their hands off.” I told him he was crazy – German propaganda. He explained the yellow patch on many of the people we had seen – “Jews”. In the cell next to us was a young Jew who whispered to us when the guards were absent. He had escaped from a work camp and was to be shot soon. So this was the world that ‘till a week ago had been merely something to read

about in the paper. Then we were taken to a big prison in another part of the city. Here things really got tough. We were stripped and completely searched. One young sergeant had trouble getting his jacket off. The guard hit him. There were 18 of us, but we could do nothing. Soon all 18 of us were placed in a small room. What a motley looking crew – all with week old beards. It seemed good though, just to be with other Americans. There I met Pat for the first time – later to become one of my best pals. I remember that he was the first to speak, “Well, here we are – just like the bull with one horn and one testicle. He can’t fight and he can’t f\*#@. All he can do is bellow and shit”. That broke the tension. We all laughed and discussed our fate. Pat and Hood had gone down over Ploesti – A P-38 pilot had got it over Vienna – a bombardier over Budapest. Rumford & Williams & Hanson had gone through phases with us at Tucson. It was their 2<sup>nd</sup> mission too. A couple of hours passed. We wondered what would happen next. They surely wouldn’t keep all 18 of us in the same room. Now the door opens and we are lead to a shower room. We sure needed showers like never before. Our clothes were steamed before we donned them. Then we were split into groups of three and placed in small cells. I did not get out of the cell for 8 days. “By this time I was beginning to feel like Al Capone”. My cell mates were Hanson who had been at Tucson with me – and a young sergeant belly gunner who had gone down over Ploesti. The first day wasn’t bad since we each had stories to compare. The next 7 days were almost unbearable. The cell was 6 feet wide and perhaps 10 feet long. There was a small window to let in air, but every time one of us would look out, a guard would point a gun at us. Not a very friendly chap. Sanitary conditions were vile. We did have a rusty iron jar in one corner and the odor was none to pleasant. Each morning a guard gave us each a small round loaf of bread – our only solid food. I couldn’t swallow it at first, but I soon learned to eat the sour stuff. At the time we got our bread, we got a tin bowl of thin liquid – looking like dish water and tasting even worse. I never did figure out what it was. At noon we got a bowl of watery soup, usually pea, but once I found a couple dozen beans in mine. At night another bowl of soup. We had a pair of dirty blankets to cover us at night. The days were warm, but at night my knee would get cold and cause trouble. The days were endless. Luckily, I still had my pocket service copy of the New Testament which Uncle Hugh and Aunt Margaret had sent me. We took turns reading it and found it helpful. We took turns pacing the floor at first. After a few days were too weak to do even that. This liquid diet was also playing havoc with our kidneys. On the 5<sup>th</sup> day, they took the sergeant away. I never saw him again. Hanson and I talked endlessly. He had worked in a Kotex factory. I learned everything he

had ever done since he was a boy and vice versa. His wife expected a baby the last week of July and here he was. Perhaps she was having it now. Would they dare notify her he was missing – the poor guy was frantic.

July 25 – my birthday. What would my folks feel like today? They wouldn't even know I was alive. In the back of my Bible was a small collection of songs (hymns, America, Star Spangled Banner, Rock of Ages etc.) We start to sing. Soon a guard pounds on the door. Hanson says, "I wonder if he wants us to stop," – Let's test him one time and find out. We sing all the louder. In walks the guard (Rasputin we called him. A big ugly guy with a black moustache) and proceeds to beat us up. We could cheerfully kill the son of a Bitch. But it would have got us nowhere. Perhaps even now there is a day of reckoning (as I write this – Nov. 14 – the Russians are fighting in Budapest).

8<sup>th</sup> day and it seems like we can stand it no longer. Then a guard comes and takes me to a small office. A German officer speaks in perfect English and offers me a cigarette. I notice that it is American. He asks for my name, rank and serial number which I give him. Other than that, I am not required to divulge according to the Geneva Convention. He does not press the point. In fact, he doesn't need to. He already knew more about me than I knew myself – even as to hobbies. My squadron and group he knew from the markings on the tail of the crashed ship. In a little book he had listed every group as to insignia, CO, etc.

The German intelligence was really on the ball. He told me that Pete had just been interrogated, and had asked that we go to the same prison camp. The request was granted. "25 of you will leave tonight for Sagan, Germany. There you will be treated as an army officer instead of a Hungarian criminal". I asked about Hanson. "Yes, he will go to."

Before departure we were given a large; loaf of bread apiece plus a piece of raw sausage. Also a 4 oz piece of cheese to be split among 2 men. It was to last the entire 3 day trip. We went to the train on a truck. At the station, some civilians spit on us and otherwise got nasty, but no violence occurred. Our home for the next 3 days was a boxcar, the bottom of which was covered with a bale of straw. Our guards were 5 German soldiers going home on furlough. One said, "Do not try to escape. If anyone tries, the entire 25 will be shot." No one tried. The trip was uneventful. Nights were cold, but the days were swell. But what a way to see Europe – from a door of a boxcar. A 7-hour layover in Vienna – due to RR yards being bombed

out. As time passed our guards became friendly. One pilot from New York could talk German so we had an interpreter. We showed them pictures of our girls – they showed us their “Fraus”. Several times we stopped at stations where the German Red Cross gave us hot soup and ersatz coffee. One time a guard asked Bob Hood to hold his gun while he got a drink. “These boys are okay. They want the war to end as bad as we do”. We finally reach Sagan and say goodbye to the guards. New ones lead us up to a camp enclosed by masses of barbed wire. We got a shave and a shower. How wonderful it was – my itchy beard was driving me nuts. Then a German brings out a couple Red Cross parcels – our first sample of Red Cross food. And a pot of steaming American coffee. We stuffed ourselves mercilessly – raisins, cheese, crackers, prunes, jam, etc. Needless to say none of us slept a wink that night. We were too miserable. But it was worth it. Next day, we were issued Red Cross supplies. I got a Canadian jacket, a pair of pants, 2 sets of underwear, 3 pair socks, 3 handkerchiefs, 2 shirts, tooth brush, tooth powder, soap razor blades (5 blades), sewing kit, then we were taken through another barbed wire enclosure into the midst of a milling crowd of Americans – they formed a double line and as each man passed through, each pair of eyes was searching for a long lost pal. Every now and then I heard a shout of joy. Someone had been recognized. “BAKER”, I hear. I look around. It was Loar – a Pennsylvania. boy I had gone through the Cadets with. Not only was he here but so was Harry Bacchus, my roommate at advanced. I later met several others who had got their wings that same day at Columbus, Miss. Little had we realized that happy day just where the road ahead was to follow.

We are taken into a theatre to hear a talk by Colonel Spivey. – himself a POW. And even he isn’t the highest ranking officer here. The Germans have a Brigadier General in the bag – General Vananan. The talk was very good. He told us that we were in Stalag Luft III strictly an officers’ camp, i.e., pilots, bombardiers, and navigators. A few sergeants were here as orderlies (easy work – strictly a voluntary job – and they got extra privileges). Every man here is from a flying crew. A good deal. “Your pay will continue to be the amount you were getting the day you went down.” “All promotions are frozen the day you become a POW.” (T.S. I had one coming up.) “Do not feel bad about ending up here. You did the best you could and that is all your government asks. You weren’t as lucky as some, but then, think of all those that made the supreme sacrifice. You are luckier than they because some day you will go home to your loved ones.” “We have 7 Colonels and 6 Lt Colonels in this camp alone in addition to a

General. You aren't the only ones to have hard luck." "Your family will be notified through the Red Cross. Do not expect any mail for at least 6 months." "You can write 3 letters and 4 cards a month". "You are all worn out mentally and physically from your ordeal. Just relax and take it easy for a few days."

It was a hot day – August 1 – but I was freezing to death. I went directly to bed with all my clothes on and put on both blankets we had been issued. I still froze. Cold chills all over. I had a fever. That night I was taken to the hospital with the flu. The exposure and lack of food had lowered my resistance and the draughty boxcar had finished the job. In addition I had not had a bowel movement for 12 days. Now I was visiting the abort (German for latrine) every 15 minutes. For 4 days I was half delirious and didn't eat a mouthful. Then I commenced to get better. I was put on a limited diet to get my digestive system back on schedule. I wrote my first cards – one to Bunny. My knee was nearly well. After 10 days in the hospital, I was ready to join my friends and adjust myself to this new strange life that was (is) to last for the duration.

### **STALAG LUFT III      SAGAN, GERMANY**

This Luftwaffe camp is located in a cleared portion of a forest not far from Sagan. It is divided into five "Compounds", namely, North, South, East, West and Center. Each compound contained at least 1800 POWs. East and North compounds contain British and Canadians – the others all Americans. The entire camp is enclosed by an ominous barbed wire fence – about 10 feet high and consisting of dozens of strands of wire intermingled so as to form a well high impenetrable barrier. Also a similar mass of barbed wire is strung around each individual compound. No movement from compound to compound is allowed even though a Krieger may have friends in other compounds. Over 10,000 flyers who used to float through the air with the greatest of ease – over 10,000 pairs of wings clipped very short. To make it worse, there was a Luftwaffe air base near by and nary a day passes but what several hot pilots buzz the camp. And they do a good job with their FW-190's too. Everyone here has respect for those boys. One day as a particularly sharp pilot zoomed by in his ME-109 about 60 feet above our heads, a friend remarked, "They fly pretty well without ball bearings, don't they?" And they do. Hm – m – m.

Pete and I were assigned to the Center Compound along with the others in our 25 man purge from Budapest. A "purge" is the term given to each new

group of “Krieges”. Kriege is short for Kriegagefangenor – goon for Prisoner Of War. “Goon” is the Kriege term for German, e.g., goon bread, goon sugar, goon planes, or just plain goon. Of course we never use that term when actually talking to a guard. One Colonel, however, doesn’t care what manners he uses, and uses the word goon copiously when talking to Germans of any rank. One day, a German Oberat (colonel) came into the room and said, “I have looked and looked trying to find what this word “Goon” means. At last I know. I do not like this term. In the future, you will not use this word goon when referring to us – no?” The American Colonel shrugged his shoulders and replied, “You’re the goon with the gun”.

To get back to Center Compound, it consists of approximately \_\_\_\_ acres of sandy ground. About half of this is taken up with athletic fields – 2 softball diamonds and a basketball court. In the fall and winter, it is transformed to a football field. The building area is composed of 11 blocks (barracks), each housing 160 men. In the US, buildings this size can hold no more than 40 men. However, this is not the US. Other buildings are: 6 aborts, a theatre seating around 250 (General Vanaman’s room in south end), 2 cook houses – each with boilers to heat brew water, soup, etc. for the entire compound. At the south end of the east cookhouse is a Fiction library, a reference library, and a news room containing maps of the various theatres and German news bulletins posted on the walls. Also, there are two classrooms where various classes are given in Math, German, speech, Agriculture, French and various other courses. A well worn path (the perimeter) has been worn around the compound just inside the barbed wire. Nearly every Kriege takes a few turns around the perimeter each day. The perimeter is 400 yards long – 150 yards wide. At each corner of the compound stands a tall guard post – manned by a guard with a machine gun. No shots have ever been fired into Center Compound – the others have each tasted bullets. One day, during an air raid, (when every Kriege is supposed to be inside his block), one young man stood in the doorway to get a glimpse of the planes. He didn’t stand there long – a bullet clipped him in the middle of the neck. Another time, a Kriege got drunk on raisin brew (a concoction, strictly “verbatim”, but nevertheless made by fermenting raisins and sugar from the Red Cross boxes). With his perverted aspect of affairs in general, he made a dash for the fence before his mates could stop him. Exit one more Kriege.

## **BLOCK 42          COMBINE II**

I have resided for the past few months in Block 42, one of the newer barracks in this compound. This rectangular one story affair is divided into

12 “Combines” for the sake of convenience – the dividing boundaries being our 3 decker wooden beds and the crude homemade wooden lockers that serve as receptacles for our few clothes. At each end of the block is a small stove – the one serving the needs of the northern combines, and its twin feeding the 6 combines at the south end. Yes, that one stove with a cooking area no larger than 2’ x 1½’ feeds 30 men. Of course, it requires a strict schedule which must be adhered to by each combine. As you no doubt have guessed by this time, we do our own cooking with the goon rations that are issued – supplemented with the Red Cross parcels from home. Thank God for the Red Cross. It really saved our souls. Even so, there are many hungry moments. Goon rations consist of the following: (1) One loaf of black bread per man per week. This looks as if it may be composed of sawdust, but tastes slightly better. It comes in heavy loaves (which are unwrapped) and is stacked like logs. At first we could not stand it, but hunger changed our minds. By toasting it, you can get rid of much of the sour taste and with jam it now tastes pretty good. (2) Potatoes – luckily, we have had spuds regularly. (3) Cabbage in the fall – sauerkraut in the winter: also, Kohlrabies – a red vegetable tasting somewhat like a turnip, but very woody. Once in a while we get dried peas. These vegetables are good, but unfortunately, there is never enough of them. Oh well, at least we get a few and the goons themselves don’t have too many. (4) Each Saturday, there is an issue of beet sugar and a red Mrsatz jam made from turnips, but tasting surprisingly well. (5) Odd issues consisting of cottage cheese, barley, blood sausage and even an ersatz honey. About twice a month we get a ration of fresh meat – very tough, but eagerly looked forward to.

With each bread issue, we get a small portion of margarine – good stuff. This blood wurst is as foul looking a concoction as I ever saw. When I came here, we were getting a full Red Cross parcel per man each week. Now due to a transportation tie-up, we are on half parcels. Instead of throwing the blood wurst away, we now eat it. One day we asked a guard how to prepare it. He replied, “We don’t eat it ourselves.” When the Germans aren’t eating things at this stage of the war, they must be bad.

When each man was getting a full parcel each week, we managed very nicely – the goon bread and potatoes supplying bulk and the Red Cross items adding the variety, palatability and vitamins. Now on half parcels, things are tougher, but we still eat better than many Europeans and are thankful for it. We take turns doing the cooking – a week at a time. K.P. duties are taken care of daily – each man taking his turn. Some of these lads who never went

near a stove have become culinary artists. In fact, many of them look forward to giving their wives a big surprise when they get home. Some of the things that can be done are amazing. Chocolate pies, cakes, prune whips, raisin pies, oatmeal cookies, goon bread puddings, etc. Cakes that are as heavy as a brick, but are delicious and filling. Once in a while, a mishap occurs in which case the pie becomes a cake and the cake becomes a pudding. When this happens, we merely eat the pie with a fork and the cake with a spoon. Who the Hell cares?? Spam can be made into a reasonable facsimile of a turkey by chopping it into small pieces, seasoning, molding it into a fowl design, and baking it with a sugar syrup. Some of the older POW's get food parcels from home with pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon, dried bananas, etc. In lieu of baking powder, we add tooth powder to the cakes to make them rise. Try it sometime.

Here is our chocolate pie recipe:  $\frac{1}{2}$  can margarine,  $\frac{3}{4}$  can Klim, 1 lb. sugar, 3 D-bars. Mix with water and bring to a boil. Add a box of powdered cracker crumbs 'til the mixture has thickened. Makes 3 pies. Pie crusts are made by pulverizing a box of cracker crumbs and mixing it with water and a little butter, then baking. Very delicious, especially with a raisin filler.

Chocolate cake:  $\frac{3}{4}$  can butter &  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups sugar mixed together and creamed well. Add one can cocoa or 2 melted D-bars.  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Klim cans cracker crumbs. Mix gradually adding water slowly, keeping a good solid batter. 4 heaping spoons of Klim (milk powder)  $\frac{1}{2}$  stick teeth powder. Mix well and bake. Cover bottom of tin with waxed paper. A cake fit for a king.

Potatoes are prepared in a dozen different ways. One of the more unusual (to me) is potato pancakes. Raw potatoes are ground into bits, mixed with goon flour, salt added, and fried in a pan. A sugar syrup sets them off perfectly.

Pat proved himself particularly adapt at making desserts and volunteered to be our permanent dessert man - a position he fills admirably. Not only do we eat desserts, but the best, but we are also able to save a little fruit and other dessert material due to having one man only handling the job. A question we often wonder about, "How did our mothers ever cook without having cracker crumbs?? Can't figure it out."

A very ugly rumor has it that we may go on  $\frac{1}{2}$  parcels. I hope it isn't so. As it is, the twelve of us get only 8 parcels a week and we just get by. Colonel Spivey says that several thousand parcels are on their way from Geneva.

Just as long as we get enough to stay alive until the war is over, we can afford to go hungry. But it sure is nice to dream about chicken, steaks, white bread, milkshakes and all the wonderful concoctions Mother, Grandmother and Dell used to make in copious quantities. And what I wouldn't give for a glass of cold Ayrshire milk.

Life in a Kriege camp is monotonous, but one soon learns to adjust himself so time passes as rapidly as could be expected. Our time is our own except for two "Appels" (formations) which must be met daily. At 9:30 AM comes morning appel at which time we form by blocks on the athletic field so the goons can count us (to prevent escapes). At this time we engage in a little PT or sitting up exercises. Afternoon appel lasts only long enough for another recount – about 15 minutes. One of the more popular guards usually does the counting – a man we call Popeye. He was transferred here after loosing an eye at the Russian front. We sometimes wonder if Popeye, instead of counting sheep at night, doesn't mumble Ein Kriege, Yivei Krieges, Drei Krieges, Vier Krieges, Funf Krieges, Sechs, Sauen, Acht, Neun, Yehn, etc.

Here is a typical day: Get up at 9 AM and eat breakfast (1 slice of bread and jam and cup of coffee). Appel is over around 10 AM. The rest of the morning is spent in washing clothes or peeling potatoes, if on KP, or reading a book, or just plain loafing. At noon we eat a light lunch of bread with a spread of cheese, liver paste, etc. Some days we get an issue of cooked barley (delicious stuff). Lately, we have been getting soup a couple times of week. And always a cup of coffee or tea. Last summer, I spent the afternoon playing softball (YMCA equipment) or watching other games. A league is set up in all sports and competition is lively. With the advent of winter, I have stayed indoors more – either reading books or playing bridge or writing this little "opus". I play some football, but on this limited diet, none of us have the energy to exercise too much. Shortly after afternoon appel comes our big "bash" of the day – eagerly awaited all day long. We usually have potatoes, vegetables if available, bread, coffee and usually a dessert. We can usually get a "filled up" feeling at this time. It only last a half hour or so, but that is to be expected. A few times we've had a big hash bash after which I was full for an hour. And once in a while we have a "gash hash bash" – gash being extra issue. After supper, we usually take a walk around the perimeter before settling down for an evening of bull sessions and bridge. Needless to say, we have retold our stories time and time again. Some of them become a bit distorted. "There I was 90,000 feet

with my right wing off and #3 and #4 feathered. All along, just me and Christ, and I said to Jesus, 'Christ take over!' And he couldn't fly worth a darn."

Bridge is a real standby – several hours per night. A bunch of culbersons. Lights go out at 11 PM or at midnight at which time we hit our hard bunks and dream of food and home. All we live for is the Armistice and the next supper.

November 23 and not a drop of mail. When I arrived, I figured I'd get my first letter around Christmas if the war lasted that long. I didn't expect it to – everyone was in a big flap. However, things are now different, and it appears that our purge will be here long enough to get mail. I have never heard from my family since they left Topeka. And I'd do anything for a letter from Bunny. I love her so much. I am glad she is so different from the present day girls. One English POW – captured in 1940 Dunkirk – received a letter from his wife saying that they had just become parents of a bouncing son. And he had been a POW for 4 years. WAS LST LOS?? Worst of all was the P.S., "You'll like his father when you meet him. Such an American chap, you know. Jolly good fellow." That woman should be shot.

Several fellows I know have gone "around the bend" already. It's not surprising when you consider this close confinement and waiting for an armistice which never comes. Some of these men have not been out in the outside world for several years. Most of them have become adjusted, but many will be permanently affected. War is a terrible thing. And yet we are so very lucky just to be alive because we will go home some day. Some men feel that the German people will take revenge on us or the army will pull a deal like they have done so many times in the past. For my part, I cannot believe that any civilized people could perform a mass murder, especially on young men who are not in Europe by choice, but because their leaders willed it. Sure enough, most of them have wreaked terrible destruction, but they all shuddered at their task imposed by the demands of war. All we want to live for is to get home to our loved ones and help build a better world in which everyone can live in peace and plenty. However, just in case some fanatic ruins our plans, I hope that my family will never hold any malice or hatred in their hearts against the Germans. They are just as good a race as any other, and there can never be any permanent peace in this world until all peoples put bitterness aside for the finer things in life.

## **THEATRE**

With so many hundred officers, most of them college men, there is any amount of talent. Each night there is some form of entertainment to enable a Kriege to ‘forget just for a couple of hours’. With costumes from Berlin, and the YMCA, several plays have been presented, including “Arsenic and Old Lace”, “Man Who Came to Dinner”, “Front Page”, “Night Must Fall”, “Outward Bound”, etc. In lieu of females certain Kriegers have become adept at impersonating girls and women. The YMCA also supplies musical instruments and a top notch swing band has been formed with stock arrangements from Dorsey, Miller, Goodman, Basie, etc. files: Johnny Ward has composed songs here which are expected to become hits in the US after the war. I predict great success for “Just Let Me Look at You.” “A Kriege is Dreaming” and “Dawn Will Bring a New Melody”. With records from the YMCA and personal parcels, we are able to have recorded concerts. Other attractions at the theatre are mock trials, variety shows, lectures by experts on subjects such as boating, skiing, sex, psychology, etc.

## **SAGAN UNIVERSITY**

I started a course in German, but gave it up for lack of interest. I do take Van’s Speech class and a course in Bible given by Chaplin Daniel. The “Armed Forces Institute” gives courses acceptable for credit in the US. Many students get certificates for their work here at Sagan. A course is given in Agriculture, but nothing I don’t know already.

## **SUNDAY**

On Sunday, we dress for appel and many Kriegers attend church (Catholic or Protestant). In fact, there is a mad rush to get seats in the theatre – the first time in my life I ever heard of such a thing for a church. Add one good aspect of Kriegedom. Chaplin Daniel was picked up in Africa in 1943 and he is a big help to the spiritual lives of his fellow prisoners. In addition to regular Sunday morning services are a Sunday evening service, a mid-week prayer meeting, and a class in Bible study.

## **HOSPITAL**

A small American hospital is maintained to take care of minor diseases and ailments. Chief of staff is Captain Brockman – also picked up by the Germans in the African campaign. More severe cases are taken to a big

German hospital in Obermassfield. The Germans do their best for our wounds – even to the extent of glass eyes, skin grafting for burns, etc.

November 22 and our block is being searched. Around 7:45 AM a goon came in turned on the lights and said, “Good morning boys, the search is on.” I don’t know what they’re looking for. They must be in a flap about something. Until they are done, we can not enter our block. Today is Wednesday – one of our despicable days. Our meals now consist mostly of potatoes and gravy and bread. I never tire of potatoes, but their satiating affect is poor. Unlike fat and protein foods, they pass more quickly from the stomach and leave you satisfied for only half hour or so. Hunger is a terrible thing. I now see why it is the foremost drive in man. Yet with us, things could be much worse than they are. Millions of European children don’t even know what chocolate tastes like. If only some way could be found to let everyone have all the food they wanted – what a world this would be. I remember how Bunny, Bill and I used to fry steaks at midnight at the Alpha Zeta house. And the many things Bunny and I have eaten together. I’m glad she appreciates good food as much as I do.

Before I run out of paper, I wish to put down a few items I wish to remember about my pals of combine II. Being a Krieger has had some advantages. I have learned to appreciate many things I always took for granted back home. Never again will I complain about trivial matters such as burnt pancakes, etc. I have also learned to live harmoniously with other men under some of the worst and most trying conditions imaginable. True, in a place like this, petty incidents swell to huge proportions, our tempers become frayed and everyone has to fight continually against his own selfishness – but all in all, we get along pretty well and all of us have learned to win the battle with ourselves.

***EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS FROM THE STATES:***

“I’m so glad you were shot down before flying became dangerous.”

From a fiancé:

“Dear John, I just married your father. – Love, Mother”

“I wonder if you are as sick of the war as we are”

“You were reported missing a month ago, so I got married.”

“When your brother heard you were a POW, he rushed right out and joined the Home Guard.”

“It must be frightfully hard to be locked up all the time. However, it should be easier under such pleasant surroundings.”

“You must have heard about Pete and Johnny being MIA. Don’t worry, I’ll avenge them.” (from a war dept employee)

“Keep your chin up. It won’t be long now.” (To a British POW 1940)

“Joe’s in Stalag Luft 88. Pop in and see him sometime.”

### **THANKSGIVING DAY November 30, 1944**

This Thanksgiving is the second in a row I’ve spent away from home. Next year???? By a few weeks of careful hoarding, we’ve managed to accumulate enough food for a feast – not a large one to be sure, but at least, (for the first time as a Kriege) enough to fill everyone up. Here is the menu: Breakfast – hot millet, toasted cheese sandwiches, coffee. Lunch – creamed corn beef on goon bread toast, Spam sandwiches, mince pie and coffee. Big Bash came at 7:00 PM. Salad (cabbage, carrots & salmon) mashed potatoes and gravy; ½ can Spam per man with a dressing made of goon bread, milk, liver paste and corned beef; Sauerkraut; creamed peas; French fries; fruit cake and chocolate. Van said grace for the occasion, and everyone agreed with him that though things were tough, we still had so much to be thankful for – that our families back home were eating so well today, that we were still alive after months in this enemy country, that we ourselves had so much food today and so many other things for which we had reason to be thankful. Jimmy and I were on KP today, and after working all day preparing the food, we both found that when it came time to eat, we were not too hungry after all. Never before have I realized how much our mothers go through on Thanksgiving and other holidays – working all day in the kitchen, eating on the “run”, cleaning up afterwards, worrying about how the dishes will turn out, etc. and this time the rest sit around on our can and ask “When is dinner ready?” Thanksgiving night and Stalag Luft 3 is echoing with moans and groans from overstuffed Kriegers – me included. Our shrunken stomachs have not been able to stand the strain. But what a glorious ache and well worth it. We may not eat this coming week, but thanksgiving has to be celebrated by Yankees no matter where they are.

## **DECEMBER 16, 1944 (from Bunny)**

A memorable day – my first letter – and the one I've waited so long. These V-mail forms aren't long, but those 3 words from Bunny are all I needed to make that letter the best Christmas present I ever received. How I long for her – wonderful creature that she is – so beautiful, yet sweet and unspoiled by this world of corruption. Just as long as she is waiting for me, I can go through anything - and gladly will.

## **DECEMBER 23, 1944**

7 letters so far – one each from Bunny, Mrs. Fort, Grandmother, Arlene Seelye, Ozzie, Jeanette Norton and my parents. Words cannot describe how glad I am that everything is well at home with my friends. My little sister is growing up – I bet I'd hardly recognize her. I'm sure proud of that kid. And mother – how she must have suffered in these months of waiting. I can see her now, working like a horse with her own burdens and those of everyone else besides. There is a real woman. As for the death of my Grandfather, it grieves me tremendously – even though I hardly expected to see him again. If only he could've found out I was alive instead of 'missing'. However, I guess it is best that he pass on and be spared all that suffering he endured for years.

I wish I could answer the letters of my friends. But someday, maybe I'll get a chance to describe in person just how much it means to a guy in a place like this to know that his friends are still with him and haven't forgotten.

## **DECEMBER 25, 1944**

Christmas Day and not very merry. We did get a few decorations from the YMCA to brighten this dull domicile. And each man got ½ a Xmas Red Cross parcel. Here is what I received:

3½ oz mixed nuts	8 oz honey	6 bullion cubes
6 oz hard candy	3 oz butter	plum pudding, can of cherries, can of Vienna sausages & 5 oz can of turkey goes in combine for dinner
2 oz fruit bar	4 packs gum	
22 dates	1 wash cloth	

I was not on cooking today – thank God. I really enjoyed our big bash of good food. If we could eat this well every day, this German winter might be bearable.

“August”, best goon guard I’ve met – came around to wish us Merry Christmas. He has not spent a Xmas at home in 5 years and really feels bad about his family who live near the west front. He is as much a prisoner as any of us – especially since Xmas is the outstanding German holiday. I gave him a couple packs of “Old Golds”, some cashew nuts and candy and gum. If he could have given the sweets to his kids, how happy he would have been. Merry Christmas – “Peace on Earth – Good Will to Men”. What a travesty this statement has become. Will this corrupt world ever put aside greed and hate and malice and get itself righted so that men can once again live together in peace and harmony – and so that Christmas will once again be the beautiful season it was meant to be - ??? I sometimes wonder.

**(January 27, 1945 – description of march follows)**

For several days now, there has been a big flap in camp – the old glap indicator hovering right around the “red hot” and “going home” points. Planes are flying by Sagan by the dozen – several hundred a day, and all German. Everything from lumbering JU-52s to cadet trainers. It is very evident to one and all, even the goon guards, that the Americans are over running large sections of Poland, Prussia, and even Silesia – hence the large scale evacuation of planes. And planes are not all that are being evacuated. Refugees by the thousand are streaming past. This morning one of the guards told us that a whole trainload of flat cars stopped at Sagan, each one covered with the bodies of frozen children. How much longer is this needless murder going to continue? Even the goons must now realize that the war is lost, and yet they persist in continuing the slaughter and suffering of their own people – army and civilian alike. For two days now, we have been without bread; the Germans confiscated all of our reserves to feed the refugees. Fortunately, we went back on full parcels last week. We have a 5 week reserve and it is pretty evident that we will not be here that long. Most of the Krieges feel that if we are to ever be liberated, it will be before long. And everyone is anxious for something to happen – anything to end the suspense. There is much speculation as to whether or not we will be moved. The camp is divided about 60-40 with the majority feeling that we will either die or else be liberated right here in Sagan. I can not possibly see any reason in the world why we would be moved. In the first place, Germany is becoming so small that there is not much of any place to move us – we

expect the Americans to start moving east pretty soon. Also, the war is so nearly over that we would not be of any value militarily to our own government in this war. And how would they move us except on foot? We would be a definite hindrance to the German army, and putting 10,000 Kriegers on the road in weather like this would be the most inhumane act in the world. The temperature has not been above zero now for 50 days. And none of us are in any kind of physical shape for a march after a winter as cold and hungry as this. Still the goons are unpredictable, and they can't tell what they will do. Everyone in camp is ready to move on an hour's notice. We have been saving Red Cross food to take with us if we go. We have for each man in our combine a box of prunes, a can of corned beef, and a can of cheese. We'll at least last a few days.

2 PM and our combine is peacefully playing bridge or engaging in a little tine – same as every night has been for so many months. Here is a real hand – 4½ honor count and a beautiful heart suit. “Two hearts” is the bid. All at once Lt Col Tyrell, our block 42 O.O., rushes in with this startling announcement. “Get ready to leave here by 10 O'clock. You can take anything you want with you, but I don't recommend very much. You'll only have to throw it away on the march” and he's off to the next combine. Our feelings cannot be described – they can only be experienced. It was 10 degrees below zero and a blizzard was coming up. We had no idea where we were going or what provisions would be made for sleeping or for medical aid. We could all visualize ourselves freezing to death out in some woods. Hell, we almost froze sleeping here in the barracks these nights. What chance would we have outdoors? Everyone was obviously very nervous, and at first we could almost hear our hearts pounding out loud. Then Jimmy Hall called Pat, Joe and I together, and pulled out his Bible from his sack. “Maybe this will make you feel better” and he read the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrew – the one about faith. And as he read, I amazingly calmed down so that by the time he was finished I was not the least bit excited and not nearly as worried. And the same went for Pat and Joe. One of the most amazing things I've ever seen. Pat, Jimmy and I have stuck together ever since Budapest, had read each other's mail, played countless numbers of bridge, and learned each others addresses so that in case only one of us lived to get home, we could pay a visit to the families of the others. We now made a vow that we'd all get through this thing somehow, regardless. We had to for the folks' back home, whether we ourselves felt life worth living or not.

I made a blanket roll out of two blankets – putting inside my box of prunes, can of cheese, can of corned beef, and a box of sugar I'd saved. I also had a carefully hoarded D-bar. Since we knew that our backs would get very tired with a pack and that every ounce was important, I hesitated about including this story. I finally tied it together with an old shoestring and put it in. I had just started to get mail in quantity – I had gotten 20 letters that very week, making a total of 25. I hated to leave them behind, but I had no choice. In my billfold, I kept the one letter from Mother and the 4 from Bunny. These 5 were going to stay with me regardless. My only link with the two I loved so much and were so far away. As for clothes, I put on my 2 sets of long johns, 2 undershirts, Canadian pants, 2 shirts, jacket and Belgian overcoat. I wore every article of clothing I owned. On my head was a little stocking cap – something like the one that is worn under a helmet. By 9:30 I was all set to go, at least physically. But my mind kept shuddering at the thought. We kept waiting for word to form, but it didn't come until about 3 AM the next morning. Finally it came. "You will form in columns of threes and march directly in back of the one in front of you. Anyone deviating from the column will be shot by the guards who will be interspersed all along the column." Well, that was one consolation. Every time we took a step, there'd be a bunch of goons taking one right with us. I felt better. So out we go in the bitter cold. As we pass the Red Cross storeroom, we were allowed to take a parcel if we could carry it. Most of us took one, opened it, and removed the D-bar, cheese, beef, sugar and other concentrated food – leaving behind the Klim, Margarine, etc. And food was scattered all over the ground eagerly being picked up by the goons. It almost broke our hearts that after starving ourselves all fall to prepare for an emergency, we were leaving thousands of parcels behind and lots of food to freeze on the ground. What was worse was to realize in a few days we'd be hungry and yet we couldn't carry much in the shape we were in. TS. After walking a couple of miles, we stop for a rest. That was the way it was all during the blizzard. While we were moving, the cold didn't bother us too much, but our backs ached like hell. The when we stopped to rest, we just removed our packs and walked around in a circle to keep our feet from freezing. Wagon after wagon of refugees passed by us – a pitiful sight seeing those farmers with a few belongings and their families moving away from their homes – they know not where – but on orders of the Nazis. Worst of all was seeing a little girl with hands blue and red from cold and sobbing softly. Said Pat, "My God, if those little girls can get through, I can too". We stopped at a few small towns. It was there that we found out that cigarettes were priceless in Germany. The civilians were lucky to get one a day – had been that way for

months. For a pack of cigarettes some of the boys bought sleds from German civilians which pulled very nicely in the snow. I looked back at the column of three once in a while. Mile after mile back there, as far as I could see were these Krieges – all walking they not where. Much as we would have liked to be back at Sagan, it was still good to get out from behind that damned barbed wire. It sure seemed strange not to be fenced in. American humor once more came to the fore. The Germans had taken a few prisoners each week for an afternoon walk along some river – even allowing swimming in the summertime. Then they take propaganda pictures and publish them – even sending them to the states – leading everyone to think that all Krieges were that well treated. Vandergrift had been a Kriege for 2 years and his turn had never come for a walk. One boy yelled, “Hey, Van, at last you’re getting that walk that you’ve been sweating out so long.”

After walking about 18 kilometers, we reached a town called Halbau. There were approximately 2000 of us from center compound and we were all led into a small church on the edge of town. It was almost as cold inside as it was outside. But at least we were out of the snow. I took off my socks and placed them on my belt next to my body to dry out. I followed that policy of alternating socks each night and nearly always had dry – though very dirty socks. I think that is why my feet never became seriously frozen. Our supper at the church consisted of corned beef on black bread we had saved and brought from Sagan. Lying down was out of the question. We huddled together trying to keep warm – packed there almost like sardines. The church echoed with thousands of hacking coughs. Everyone had one, and the fear of pneumonia was worrying everyone. If anyone got that now, he would have had it. To say that night was long would be a gross understatement. It seemed that it would never end. Finally morning came, and we were on the road once more – this time stopping at a barn near the town of Friewaldau. We were just as crowded as the night before, but at least here there was straw to sleep on. Rosie and I pooled our blankets, and cuddled close. With all the clothes we had on to help, we slept pretty warmly. This system worked out so well that we stayed together all during the march and each time we stopped, I would eat a couple prunes and a lump of sugar. At the barn that night, we ate some frozen corned beef. The farmer was very friendly, and cooked a lot of potatoes. In groups of 24, we were taken to his house and we each got one unseasoned potato. Not so tasty, but having something hot in our bellies was wonderful. The next day we got a break – no walking – so we stayed in the barn all day and night. The rest was badly needed. I got another hot potato that day. It was worth a

million bucks. On the fourth day we walked to the town of Muskau – about 30 kilometers. And my feet were really sore as we stumbled into a pottery factory. Still packed like sardines, and the floor was slid concrete, but the building was heated, and we were thankful for a chance to get warmed up. Besides there was hot water available, and we could make coffee out of the Nescafe that our combine had saved. At Muskau, there were several dozen Krieges from West camp which had passed through just ahead of us. They had gangrene from badly frozen feet and were unable to continue. I never knew what happened to them, and the others that were left each place where we stopped. Another break – we stayed 2 days at Muskau. And finally the weather began to break. The bitter cold disappeared and although it was still around 35 degrees, it seemed almost like spring. At last we marched to another barn, this time near the town of Spremburg. By this time, we were trading with the civilian population. The first 4 days, the Germans gave us no food whatsoever. On the 5<sup>th</sup> day, we received a little bread occasionally. That was all. (Das was alles) But we had each brought along a few packs of cigarettes from our Red Cross parcels. Most of the boys smoked. I do not smoke myself, but I brought some along just in case some of my pals needed them. It was the luckiest thing I ever did. I was able to pick up bread (civilian bread which was much better than what we had been getting), potatoes and onions. As soon as one of us could spot a German woman, we'd say, "Haben Sie Bret fur Zigaretten" (Have you bread for cigarettes) and usually she' say "Yah". Then would follow a rapid flow of non-understandable words and a lot of gesticulating with the hands before a barter bargain was struck. The price varied, but it was amazing to see what a handful of cigarettes would buy. Toward the latter part of the march, we were eating more than we had in months. None of it cooked, but at least it was filling. Another humorous angle: A lot of Krieges were sweating out the Pacific war once they were lucky enough to get out of the German war alive. Maxie Bender was walking along one particularly cold road, head down, and feeling just as miserable as the rest of us when all at once he looked up and said, "I'll be damned if I'm ever going to be trading cigarettes for fish heads and rice." It brought a laugh.

One of the worst aspects of the march was the fact that we didn't know where we were going or why. We counted the kilometer signs along the road. After we had walked 55 kilometers, we saw a sign "Sagan 60 kilometers". We walked in sort of a U. Southwest then gradually up to a point almost west of Sagan. Rumors floated about like mad. We were sweating out the Russians – hoping against hope that they would catch up to

us. They were only 30 miles away a couple of times, but they never closed the gap. One rumor had it that they were surrounded on 3 sides and about to be liberated since the goons had no way to get us out in time – hence the U shape move. Column after column of German army equipment kept moving up to the front – and lots of cannon fodder. They all stared at us. I guess they felt sorry for us, and sorry for themselves. They couldn't have helped but realize it was hopeless. And they couldn't do any more about the situation than we could. Our guards were mostly old men of 50 and up, and their packs were heavier than ours. They never so much as raised a gun when anyone got out of line, and after the first few hours of the trek, we paid no attention to staying in perfect column. I often dropped back to talk to Pete and try to cheer him up – and incidentally get cheered up a little myself. He bore up much better than I expected him to. He was from Texas and had never experienced a cold winter before. But he pulled through nicely. Any of us could have escaped any time we wanted to, but where was there to go. Besides, General Vanaman told us not to escape. It was better for the group if we stick together, and besides, we figured the war would not last much longer. A few took off each night but they all froze their feet and had to give themselves up again for lack of food. You couldn't trade with the civilians by yourself without raising suspicion. Our guards kept taking slower and slower steps. One old man in particular, I remember, kept bending forward a little and every time I looked at him his shoulders were nearer the ground. The last we saw of him, he was stretched flat on his face in the snow. Two guards died of heart failure.

General Vanaman and our full Colonels were offered wagons to ride in, but they very nobly refused. Said the General, "If my men don't ride, I won't ride either". And he was in his fifties. A real leader. We all wished he would take the offer, but he never did. Nor any of the colonels, who incidentally walked more than anyone. Colonel Spivey and Colonel Kennedy in particular kept walking back and forth along their columns, giving words of encouragement. We would have followed them anywhere.

Finally, we reach the city of Spremburg and are taken to a railway station where there are a lot of "French 40 & 8 cars". Forty men or 8 horses. From the looks of the cars interiors, they had just held 8 horses. Not a bit of straw in them either. 58 Krieges were sealed in each car and started on the way. For three days and nights we traveled like sheep. We took catnaps on top of each other. Our legs got numb from the pressure of someone else's body. In the daytime, we took turns standing up. The Germans had brought some

parcels from Sagan, and we got ½ parcel per man. Rosie and I split a parcel. We also had some bread we'd picked up on the road from some frau. One night we were at the town of Chemnitz in the rail yards when an air raid siren blew. That train really tore out of there in the biggest hurry I ever saw anything in. I guess the engineer knew from experience what the RAF night raids were like. At Dresden, Leipzig, Munich and all cities we were sweating out raids on marshalling yards and strafing from planes, but we were lucky. The bomb damage in these towns was terrific. Bob Day was a bombardier who had been shot down on his first mission – a trip to Munich. Thus he never got to drop a bomb since he went down before they reached the target. As we entered Munich, one of his pals yelled, “Hey, Day, you finally got to Munich”. American humor again.

Finally, we unloaded at the town of Mooseburg in Bavaria – 50 miles or so northeast of Munich. 500 of us were put in a tiny building no larger than a large living room. A little straw was scattered on the floor. Needless to mention, we all could not find a place to lie down. The second night, I found a spot in the aisle-on muddy ground, but I was so tired and sleepy, I didn't care. By this time, we must have looked like a bunch of tramps – or worse. None of us had taken off our clothes for several weeks, and our beards were long and shaggy. Also lots of us were beginning to get dysentery from the lack of hot food, and the filthy conditions we'd been living in. All night long, Kriegeres kept stumbling past me on their way outside to trenches outside which served as latrines. Many of them were deathly sick to their stomach. And more than one didn't make it – just let it fly where ever he was. One guy was stumbling past me when he fell flat on his face and vomited all over everyone in the vicinity. And that was a very common sight. After a couple days in this “snake pit”, as we affectionately called it, we were taken to a shower room in groups of 25. There we were searched, our clothes deloused in a gas chamber, and given a shave and a warm shower, which felt wonderful – even though I got somewhat of a shook when I saw the bones sticking out all over my body, and a lot of my friends looking like skeletons. I guess it must have been the shock. We all had so many clothes on we looked fat till we took the shower. After the shower, we were taken into the main lager of Stalag 7-A. A real hell hole. About 400 of us to a one story barracks which in the United States army is limited to 40. No heat at all and no provisions at all for the cooking of food. Also, not much food. We slept in tiers of 12 – triple decker bunks, very hard and infested with bedbugs, fleas, lice, etc. I was allowed to keep the Red Cross blanket I had brought from Sagan, but the other was taken away from

me, and in its place I was given a dirty horse blanket. No sheets or pillows – just 2 blankets and what clothes I had on to keep warm. For the next three months until we were liberated, I never so much as took off my pants or shirt although at night I did take off my jacket to use as a pillow. Comfort was out of the question, but at least we didn't freeze to death. Also, the clothes kept the fleas and the bedbugs from biting my body. Some Kriegers were bitten so much that their arms and legs became a mass of sores. German food consisted of 1/7 loaf black bread per day along with 3 or 4 cooked potatoes (usually frozen and rotten) and at noon a cup of the most God awful soup I ever tasted. Most of it was made of dehydrated vegetables, weeds, roots, or anything handy. Here again the Red Cross saved our lives. We got ½ parcel per week. The biggest worry was how to get something hot in our stomachs. The ingenuity of Kriegers again came to the fore as hundreds of “Krieger burners” were put together out of Klim cans and marga cans. We burned margarine for fuel, and wicks consisted of pieces of belt or blanket. In this way, we were able to get a home brew about twice a day, and once in a while to warm up a little stew out of our spuds. However, we soon ran out of margarine, so we converted the burners into wood burners, and used as fuel the bed boards from our bunks, and pieces of the building. Also, we bribed the guards over the fence into letting us trade with the enlisted men for bundles of wood which they picked up in Munich. This camp was an enlisted men's camp, and we were the first officers there. All nationalities were represented from Hindu, South Africans, New Zealanders, Canadians, English, Russians, Americans, etc.,etc., etc.,etc., The enlisted men worked outside in work parties and had a very good deal since they could get all the bread and potatoes they wanted by trading with the civilians in Munich and other places. Then they would re-trade with us (throwing everything over the wire) at a profit. The bundles of wood were very valuable – almost priceless. No individual trading was allowed – a barter team was selected and all trading was done by them. Then all articles were split up among the 2000 of us to insure fairness. Lots of trading was done, but there were too many of us to get much benefit out of it. In all the time I was there, I received only 4 oz. of cheese and part of a loaf of bread. But the wood, as I said before, was priceless. These Krieger burners were very inefficient and we used to spend hours just heating a stew or brew, but then we had time to burn. For here there were no recreational facilities at all, no plays, no band, no books, no nothing. The barracks became filled with a dense smoke each day so it became necessary to sit up hours for cooking. Ever so many had swollen eyes and eye trouble from all the smoke. At night the foul air was almost unbearable, but having something hot was a necessity. We still had 2

appels a day – the rest of the time we just lay in our sacks trying to keep warm or monkeying around with a Kriege burner. We split all food 50-50. Arguments were many and tempers often were strained to the breaking point, but we remained good friends. Once we ran out of Red Cross parcels, but the situation was alleviated by a new fleet of trucks which Germans allowed to run unmolested from Switzerland to Mooseburg. In April, The weather warmed up considerably, ad we went on full parcels. The Americans were running wild through Germany – almost at will and it was only a question of time as to when we would be moved again, shot, or liberated. Again the camp was divided 50-50. But the Red Cross, along with powerful influences from President Truman and Stattinius, persuaded the German High Command not to move us again. Incidentally, speaking of Truman, we heard of the new president the day after Roosevelt died. When they said Truman was now President, everyone asked, “Who the hell is Truman”. We had been out of the active world for so long as we had never heard of him.

Around April 26, we could begin to hear artillery in the not to far off distance, and we knew that things would soon approach a climax. On Saturday night, April 25, it was very close, and we were almost sure that we'd see American tanks in a day or two. Sunday morning a lone P-51 came over and buzzed the camp, entirely unmolested – the first time an American plane had ever flown low over the camp. It was a nice day outside, and nearly everyone was out with their Kriege burners or just walking around. By this time the camp was strained to the breaking point with over 27,000 Krieges, many of whom had just walked in from Nuremburg and other places. Mooseburg was sort of a central gathering point for all Krieges when they had no place to move us in any direction. All at once, almost out of nowhere, came a rat-a-tat and machine gun bullets were flying over our heads. One prisoner was hit in the stomach – the rest fell flat on the ground. The SAO ordered us all to go inside our respective barracks and wait. The battle was going on outside the camp, but every once in awhile a stream of bullets would find their way through Stalag 7-A. Pete and I went out in the washroom, stoked up our burner, and started cooking every bit of food we had left. I figured if we were going to die – we might as well die with a full stomach – and if we got liberated we wouldn't need Kriege food anyway. The battle lasted two hours, and three Krieges were wounded. Very minor casualties. But all the time, we couldn't figure out why there was a battle since the goons had agreed to leave an open area around the camp with no military activity. Later, we found out why.

Saturday night, the American 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (14<sup>th</sup> armored div.) had pulled up just outside Mooseburg and told the German commander that according to the agreement reached through the Red Cross, he would come into Mooseburg unmolested the following morning. However, there were a couple of hundred SS troops around, and they claimed that the “Open Area” was too large, and they were going to defend it. The Americans said they were coming in anyway, and they did – hence the 2 hours battle to liquidate the SS, which incidentally they did to the last man. They could have taken prisoners, but the troops were so bitter at having to risk their lives in such a senseless battle they felt no mercy at all toward the SS. I felt the same way. Sunday morning, the SS told our guards to go out with a few rifles and fight the 3<sup>rd</sup> army. The guards realized it was hopeless, and refused – and those who did so were shot by their own countrymen. (SS)

When the American flag went up over the town of Mooseburg, we all rushed outside to celebrate, and at the sight of that flag, the tears just rolled down our cheeks. Nearly everyone was crying like a baby; they just couldn't help it. It was hard to realize that we were free after so many months of misery – especially for the other Kriegers who had been down 2 or 3 years – many from the African campaign. That night we got white bread from the 3<sup>rd</sup> army – the stuff tasted like angel food cake. Although ordered to stay inside the camp, nearly everyone went to town through holes which miraculously appeared all along the fence. I met a few boys from Penn State. Many Kriegers picked up the army's policy of taking over German houses and having the women cook meals for them. The German civilians were scared to death of the liberated Russians – each of whom rushed into town intent on raping a German girl. The townspeople were plenty glad to have the Americans in their homes to protect them from the Russkys. Although we did expect to stay at Mooseburg more than a day or two, it was not until the 5<sup>th</sup> day after liberation that we were evacuated by GI trucks to three airports in the area. I went to one at Inglestadt on the Danube River. Stayed there 2 days waiting for planes to fly us to France. While there, I ran into Lt. Dan Matto, a fraternity brother of mine back at Penn State. And who had been at Mooseburg all during April. He was an infantry officer and captured around Christmas Day. He and I stuck together until we took leave of France. The second day at Inglestadt, we flew to Reims, France in C-47's – 25 per plane. Incidentally, we were there the day the peace treaty was signed there. At Reims, we were issued GI clothing and a barracks bag – our old clothing was burned – insects and all. Spent 24 hours there – got a shower and a typhus shot and an issue of cigarettes and candy bars. Then we took a Red

Cross train to Camp Lucky Strike on the channel coast. Here were somewhere between 25,000 and 50,000 liberated Krieges. Spent 2 weeks here waiting my turn to take a boat. Had lots of hot showers. PA rations every 7 days, a complete issue of Officer's winter uniforms, and a partial payment of \$80. Also, a Lt. Col. Flew over from Washington and answered all questions of which we had many. Very few Krieges had heard of the GI Bill of Rights so he explained that in detail. A common question was promotions that had been frozen as of the day we had been captured. Some boys had been Lieutenants for 3 years or more, and they wondered if it would be made up to them in some way. The answer was "yes". We all were to get a 60 day recuperation leave at home – then report to an air forces rest home, we would get physical and psychological tests, etc. and a new assignment. If possible, we would be stationed near home. I don't believe any of us have a wick on the way we are being treated back here. It couldn't be better.

After 2 weeks at "Lucky Strike", we were moved to a tent city in a woods near La Havre, supposedly to take a boat within 48 hours. Actually, it was 11 days before we took a merchant marine ship called the "Marine Devil". Being officers, we got a nice stateroom – 12 men – each with a bunk and a mattress. Food was excellent – steaks, chicken, and ice cream etc., etc. We had been on a diet for 2 weeks in France and our stomachs were beginning to expand back to normal. Having shrunk considerably, they had caused us quite a bit of trouble at first. The trip took 11 days, and on June 13, we docked at Boston, Mass. – our first sight of the USA and it really looked good. A train was waiting at the dock, and the Red Cross gave us each a pint of FRESH MILK and a couple doughnuts. We were living again. Our first night in the states was spent at camp Miles Standish. The paramount question in all our minds was how our families and girls were. My last letter had been in Jan. – written the previous November. Bunny was waiting then, but was she now? Were the folks alright? Had they ever heard from Dott? Had Wendall ever gone overseas? Etc., etc. During my month in France, I had written many letters home and to Bunny. It had been very hard to write, not having heard from any of them for so long. All at once, I felt strange – it was good to be home, but I was sort of scared about seeing everyone again. That night I stood in line 3 hours and called my mother. What a relief. Everything was alright at home. And Bunny had graduated from Penn State, and was working in New York. By this time it was 2 AM and the lines were not so busy, I called Bunny, and talked with her for a long time (on reverse) (my money was nearly gone). The next morning, we took a train to Fort

Dix, New Jersey where we stayed 4 hours – long enough to get our leave orders typed up. I went immediately to New York, and spent a couple hours in a barber chair at the Hotel Commodore. I really got the works, and it sure felt good to get a good shampoo; a real haircut by a real live professional barber instead of any bombardier or navigator who happened to be around with a pair of rusty scissors; and all the blackheads and ground-in dirt removed from my skin. Then I met Bunny at her laboratory. I had waited for this moment so long and missed her so much that now as my dreams were now just beginning to come true, I could hardly believe that it was all possible. I felt very strange and unfamiliar with the rapid life of the American city. And with Bunny, it seemed like I hardly knew her. Odd thing, but that's the way it was. Well, the rest is just a romance – a double romance. A romance of love and a romance of food – both very wonderful. I will not attempt to write anything about this department, but will leave it up to the specialists in the subject such as Mary Roberts Rhinehart, Margaret Mitchell, and Dorothy Parker. But I can say:

## **WE DID GET MARRIED**

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