CPT Clarence M. Ferguson

1911 - 2004

This biography is based on the book by Clarence Ferguson, KRIEGSGEFAGENER (PRISONER OF WAR), with cited notes and excerpts from additional sources.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND ACADEMIC HISTORY

Clarence Ferguson was born eleven years into the 20th century in LaSalle, Texas, to P.F. and Lula Blair Ferguson. Clarence attended public schools at LaSalle and Groesbeck, Texas, graduated from Tarlton College, and attended the University of Denver for two years.

> *When I was in high school, I had thought that the military offered opportunities. This was in the 1920's when our army was dangerously low in strength. In trying to train a reserve, Congress had authorized Citizens Military Training. Boys of high school age were selected to fill a quota. The training lasted 30 days on designated military posts throughout the country and culminated in reserve officer's commission. In 1927 I was selected and spent a month at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. We received no compensation but were given train fare from our hometown to the nearest army post. In my case I got a train ticket from Groesbeck, Texas, to Fort Sam Houston at San Antonio. The quota at Fort Sam Houston had been filled, but I was allowed in at Fort Sill. (p.56)*
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> *Again in 1927 I attended another CMTC camp. This time I was assigned to Fort Logan, Colorado, to learn the proficiency of a water-cooled 30 caliber machine gun. These were days of learning and stringent exercise under the most uncompromising regulations the army had ever produced.* (p. 56)
>
> *In the fall of that year I enrolled at John Tarlton College and immediately enrolled in the ROTC* [Reserve Officer Training Corps] *program. The disciplinary regulations of the college were administrated by the ROTC, following the structure and regulations of the army.* (p.57)
>
> *In 1931, I graduated from the colleges' two-year program with the rank of major in the Cadet Corps. During the summer of 1934 while attending Denver University, I procured a two-week suspension of classes to accompany the Colorado National Guard on their summer training camp. I was not given credit academically for the*

time missed, and I did have to take examination of the subject matter covered while I was away. (p. 57)

Following that brief interlude, I completely disassociated myself from the military until the spring of 1937. Then I enlisted in Company B, 143rd Infantry, 36th Infantry Division, Texas National Guard. I entered as a private and no one except the company commander knew that I had had previous military training. At the time I was teaching school at Mustang Prairie, a rural, two-teacher school in the northeastern corner of Falls County. My school was 32 miles from my post, but every Tuesday night I attended drill. My compensation was one dollar for each drill. (p. 57)

In the fall of 1938, I received my commission as a Second Lieutenant and was assigned to Company B, 143rd Infantry. At the same time I was licensed to practice law and later became the Assistant County Attorney of Limestone County. I served under the able leadership of L. L. Green, one of the county's most famous prosecutors. During this time military training everywhere had been stepped up and we were accelerating our training operations because of the deteriorating international situation. (p. 57)

*Those were busy days and nights. Criminal investigations and trials were the constant order of the day while preparation and military training consumed my nights. We were averaging two or three district court trials a week in addition to county and justice court cases. The military was constantly planning both field maneuvers and command post operations. My family scarcely saw me except at short intervals at night when I would return home for clean clothes and a few hours sleep. The country was restless, but people were cooperating in preparing for a war that all us knew was coming. (*p. 58)

During the summer of 1939 war games were held in Louisiana. Arriving late because of an acute case of the flu, he remembered these "game" as being more realistic than any previously held.

'We learned to live under difficult circumstances and realized that the battlefield operations were not done in military precision and dispatched among admiring spectators. I returned home with at least some knowledge for field training and about twenty pounds lighter.' (p. 58)

The early section of the book relates an interesting story which involved a fugitive who had killed his wife in Groesbeck and fled to be caught in New York 20 years later. During this time period, Ferguson was supposed to attend a required post operation. Explaining the importance of his participation in

the extradition and prosecution of this man to his battalion commander, he was released. The fugitive was tried and convicted. (p. 59)

Inducted into the Army on October 25, 1940, Ferguson's insightful descriptions preview for readers the inadequacy of installations and facilities used to prepare and train overwhelming numbers of recruits assigned to camps. Cleanliness issues, bouts of illnesses, and unheated tents instead of barracks, all paired with constant non-stop training left many disillusioned. Fortunately, positive interventions were to change these negative elements.

> '*Overnight America became an armed camp and civilian and soldier alike joined in to prepare for any eventuality in the international crisis on December 7, 1941.'* (p. 60)

NORTH AFRICA AND BEYOND

CPT Ferguson then described the missions of the 2nd Battalion of the 143rd Regiment.

> '*We were one of the best trained amphibious divisions in the armed forces…participated in numerous exercises in the United States and in the Mediterranean off of North Africa.'* (p. 6)
>
> *Tomorrow we would leave North Africa* [September 1943] *to get on with the task for which we had left home. And through the thought was frightening, I am sure every man felt he would survive the ordeal.* (p. 7)

After designated LSVPs (landing craft vehicle personnel, better known as Higgins boats) loaded, the coxswain headed for the transport ship, Elizabeth Stanton, in deeper water. Arriving at her sides, rope nets were dropped over the sides for the convenience of those climbing aboard. All vehicles and personnel aboard, a busy night was spent securing all present and orders opened, with the plan of attack to commence predawn on the third night of the voyage. (pp. 10, 11)

In addition to the Elizabeth Stanton's own operating equipment, the volume and lists of US Army equipment and personnel could have created scenes of chaos; therefore, careful planning was paramount.

> *On this ship the procedure was different from others on which we had trained. Usually, we went overside on large rope nets and dropped into the landcraft waiting below. For this operation, though, all the personnel and equipment the craft was to carry was loaded into the boat while it sat on the ship's main deck. When*

ready, the craft was lowered into the water by the crew. Once in the water, the craft rendezvoused with others and assumed the attack formation. These small boats would then head toward the beach. As they neared the shore, the steersman would drop the ramp, with men and vehicles racing toward the shore. (p. 2)

The basic accoutrements of an infantry soldier were so commonly known it was almost prosaic. These consisted of his weapon, an M1 Gerand rifle; a cartridge belt, containing sixty rounds of ammunition; his canteen filled with water and a canteen cup; a first-aid-packet; bayonet; and either a shovel or a pick axe. In this instance, he was issued an extra bandolier of 120 rounds of ammunition which he swung over his shoulder. His pack held underwear, socks, toothbrush and paste, soap, handkerchief, hand towel, shoe strings, bed sack, shelter half with pole, two blankets—one of the blankets remained a part of the pack while the other was rolled and fitted in horse-shoe fashion over his pack—his mess gear, and on this mission a gas mask. He wore heavy leather boots, wool shirts and trousers, and a steel helmet over a plastic interlinear. Once on the beach he would drop his backpack and gas mask above the highwater mark and continue into battle with his weapon, cartridge belt and an extra bandolier of ammunition. Getting thirty-two fully equipped soldiers into a LSVP was no small problem. (p. 12)

On this day the invasion fleet completed its assembly for the attack. Units could be seen as they joined the main body. War ships of every description—some we had never seen before, some we had only read about, some we had never heard about—formed a vast armada, sailing in a concert of strength never before accomplished by man. As far as the eye could see were ships. (p. 13)

In an unexpected turn of fate, a PA system on board broadcasted this announcement:

"Now hear this. The following message has been received. Today, the Italian government announced its unconditional surrender to the Allies." The date was September 8, 1943. (p. 14)

Shocking and unexpected news of this magnitude sometimes causes people to make implausible responses. I heard men express disappointment, feeling they had been cheated out of the opportunity to make an authentic landing. They described the impending operation as a 'dry run'. Men sarcastically admonished one another to be prepared to pass in review before the generals who would have preceded them ashore and accepted the surrender in the name of the Allies. (p. 14)

Commanders and staff gathered immediately to analyze the announcement and decide on actions concerning battle scenarios: Italian-manned shore batteries would offer no resistance, but German gun crews in the area were not affected by the Italian surrender. In addition, German armored divisions were in place within strategic positions around Italy—making Allied landings more difficult. The more important outcome of the meeting was to ensure that all aboard realize the planned invasion remained even more strategic and to act accordingly. (pp. 14, 15, 16)

CPT Ferguson's recorded memories about the events which occurred during the battle for Salerno, Italy, are professionally enumerated—more credit to his proclivity toward combining both military observations and personal observations.

THE STARK REALITIES OF WAR

> *Of all the weapons used in warfare, the most-deadly and the most feared is mortar and small arms fire.* (p. 20)
>
> *Though conventional records of warfare are kept in days, months, and years, to the soldier on the front lines the day of the month is of little significance. He is governed by two things: Not necessarily the time of day, but whether it is light or dark; and the proximity in time as to each. That is, he evaluates how much time there is until there will be a change from light to dark and vice versa.* (pp. 20, 21)

These thoughts of soldiering become even more personal when he came upon a young dead German soldier.

> *Heretofore, my training and mental conditioning was directed toward hating everything German, with a particular vindictiveness of anything Nazi. But as I looked at this young soldier, I could see little differences between him and one of our dead young soldiers on the other side of the woods. Both were clean and handsome. Both had homes and loved ones who cherished them. Both were the joy and pride of a mother who cuddled and caressed them. And now both are dead. I suppose each had fulfilled his duty of citizenship. Each, without zealous political commitment, without personal animosity toward each other, had obeyed the ordinances of his government, had met on a battlefield far from home and had been killed there. No man, regardless of age, wisdom, or loyalty, could more faithfully serve his country than they.* (p. 23)

While reconnoitering one evening, Ferguson heard the hushed conversations of American soldiers who had lost their company commander that day.

> *He had led them safely through the Sicilian campaign and through the last few days. They were talking more to themselves, and I found myself a bystander, listening to a conversation which was the first they had been able to have in several days. They were grieving, really hurting but showing little outward emotion. Not only had they lost their captain but also their friend and leader whose expertise had saved them from disaster in previous battles. Until they saw him lifeless on the cold ground, they had not realized how much he meant to them.* (p. 34)

> *Battles do not stop or even pause to memorialize the dead, not even the death of a great leader. Their captain would at some future time, probably in his home town, be eulogized in a dignified service denoting his heroic passing; but any future could not surpass the one paid by these three young soldiers. During the course of their reverie one of them uttered an epitaph summating the highest compliment a soldier can pay his captain. "The 'old man' was tough but he was fair."* (p. 34)

> *Heroism is very seldom recognized unless it is accompanied by victory, and in defeat it has very few observers and even fewer champions. Our men did go into position, did stay awake, and did entrench themselves before dawn in an almost textbook display. They challenged and overcame fatigue, time, and terrain. At dawn this land which had been used as a fine horse ranch showed very little evidence of having been pockmarked, and now was occupied by well-camouflaged, well-trained soldiers. Every man in this unit had been retrained from two years of selective observation by unit commanders. Each was in the position his commander thought fitted him best, and each was instilled with pride in his service. This war could see no better unit to take the field, and yet it would be needlessly sacrificed by a commander who so underestimated the enemy's capabilities and probabilities that his actions could be viewed with suspect. Later investigations would reveal disturbing facts in this connection.* (p. 36)

> *Our orders were to contact our parent division on the Calore River and a unit of the 45th Division at the Sele River. We reached the parent division without difficulty and immediately set out for the Sele. But no troops were there. Feeling there was a mistake as to the exact location of our left flank, we moved up and down the river. Much later it was determined that while we were frantically trying to reach the 45th, they were not within two miles of where we had been instructed to meet them. The order telling us where*

to hook up was based on wishful thinking that an attack by the 45th would put them in position.

This attack occurred but not close enough which '*sealed our fate for the movement Sgt. Bates observed on the north bank was evidently German troops moving into position for an attack on us.'* (pp. 36, 37)

CAPITULATIONS AND INTERROGATIONS

The battle raged on. We were being squeezed tighter and tighter. The sun was getting low, and the enemy stepped up his attack to finish us up before dark. It would be a close call and I kept wondering if night would provide any relief. The Germans had some English-speaking soldiers among their foremost riflemen. Every few minutes one would call out, "Come on boys, give up, we got you."

Finally Colonel Jones announced loudly enough for everyone to hear that future resistance was useless. He ordered everyone to surrender. "Remove your helmet and come out with your hands over your head." To the Germans he called in a loud voice, "We surrender." (p. 47)

The next entries summarize what he and his men felt as they endured the hardships and realities of becoming a Kriegsgefangener of the German Army. "*Pour vous le guerre is fin*i", a phrase used many times in win-lose situations, retains the same meaning in many languages: "For you the war is over." Disarmed and marched eastward toward German territory, Ferguson noted the limitless carnage with death everywhere. Held in a small barn for the night, their battalion surgeon, seriously wounded himself, tended to the men in a courageous manner. All were aware that any quick movements on their parts would provoke lethal actions from their captors, so conversations were limited and self-searches of personal items were done cautiously. (pp. 47 – 49)

*For some time there was a lull in the battle. But during the night it became apparent that our forces realized our position had fallen and the enemy was attempting to exploit the break-through. Our artillery began a concert of saturation fire into the positions we had formerly occupied. It is a disconsolate feeling to realize that your own forces, even though unmindful, are directing firing at you, thinking all the time it is falling on enemy positions. (*p. 50)

Colonel Jones and Captain Ferguson were ordered to German Headquarters and after a hectic jeep ride, they were escorted to the tent of young well-dressed Oberst.

He spoke excellent English. Introductions were as formal as they would have been in the center of a football field at the opening of an important game. The Oberst extended his hand in a cordial handshake. Had we eaten? When we replied in the negative but not hungry, he barked orders to soldiers nearby, who immediately brought snacks of cheese, wurst, and crackers. He apologized for not having coffee. We still politely refused to eat; and though he expressed mild concern, he was obviously impressed that we did not take this as a friendly meeting. (pp. 50, 51)

I was assigned to another officer who was also proficient in American speech. He and I walked to a wooded place where a picnic table stood under the trees. We sat on benches facing one another. His approach to the interrogation was adroitly and expertly done, evidencing outstanding training. He inquired into my well -being and depicted a fierce battle of the preceeding day as a contest in which each of us had been no more than spirited adversaries. He even indulged in a deceptive ruse by admitting the losses on his side were extremely heavy, while at the same time complimenting our soldiers as being the best his unit had ever faced. However, he was perturbed about the accuracy of our small arms fire. More than fifty percent of their causalities, of which ninety percent would not survive, were shot in the head. He asked if we had specifically trained our men to shoot at their heads. I made no answer. In feigned civility he inquired how long we had been overseas and how long we had been here. Again I said nothing. He attempted to discuss the weather and other trifles all without response on my part. (p. 51)

I was determined not to cooperate. My training in the practicing of law helped me in this kind of interrogation. I would not fall into his trap, and gradually he sensed I would not be fooled. A discussion of even the most commonplace things might reveal valuable information to a well-trained analyst. And I had no doubts about this man's ability. I had no intention of revealing any information whatsoever. Furthermore, I had no desire to engage in conversation with anyone at this time. The shock of being captured had left me uncommunicative and angry. I am sure he sensed that I began to have respect for his technique in the interrogation. Even though I was as uncooperative as anyone could be, he never lost his politeness and calmness. Never was there any threat of violence toward me. Finally I said, 'Captain, I am a prisoner of war and under the terms of the Geneva Convention, I am required to give only my name, rank, and serial number. And that's all you'll get from me.' (p. 52)

With a slight grin he replied, "Now I understand why your men will give only their name, rank and serial number in answer to any question we ask. Even when we ask the most simple question, they refuse to answer. I only wish our soldiers would do the same. We receive information that ours tell everything when you question them. Your men are well trained, and you are to be congratulated." (p. 52)

The interrogation over, Ferguson and Colonel Jones were taken to a barn and locked inside a stall. There they encountered Jack Frost, a Lieutenant in His Majesty's Service. Once true identity was established, they enjoyed the company of this fellow with an unusual name. These days were a pleasant reminder, but as the Lieutenant was taken away, the realisms of being prisoners were to last for many months ahead. (p. 53)

'Sometime during this impenetrable tangle of days and nights, the German commander summoned Colonel Jones and when requested, I accompanied him.'

In addition to shared talks about his numerous responsibilities, the commander stated that those who tried to escape would be shot. Colonel Jones' reply,

"*What you have said is in violation of the Geneva Convention in the treatment of Prisoners-of-War, and I protest.*" The commander's reply, *"You are not registered Prisoners-of-War and will not be until you get to Germany. This is what we did on the Russian front, and that is what we will do here. Tell your men."* (p. 54)

Thoughts of death and surrender plagued the men as they were led or taken from place to place—at times, unaware of their surroundings.

One night we were loaded into a column of trucks, and arrived the next morning at Bueno Viento which hosted a small sports stadium. Despite the cold night, it was there that we began to show signs of recovering from our capture. We seemed to be shedding the 'don't care' feeling of the past days and we began to evaluate our situation and plan to face whatever lay ahead. I first noted this change when a group of men approached me, expressing a desire to hold a combination memorial-thanksgiving service for our dead and for those who were still alive. For the first time in days, I found myself looking at living not as a duty, but also as a challenge. There was a rebirth of my resolve to continue even in my capacity to actively oppose the enslavement by Hitler of half the population of Europe. Somehow the bitterness seemed to be receding; and the toxic effect of shock and despair were

> *losing their grip. I even became hungry. Although the service was planned, a convey of trucks arrived with orders to mount up. We never conducted the planned service, but the initiation of it was a turning point.* (pp. 61-63)

Army trucks traveling during daylight hours became “sitting duck” targets for the Allied air force and since there were no identifying POW marks on the convoy, this concerned the Germans onboard as well.

> *Traveling north on one of Italy’s main highways, we turned off the road and wound our way into an area surrounded with barbed wire entanglements. This was Capua, Italy, our first view of an established Prisoner-of-War installation.* (p. 63)

CAPUA INTERNMENT

Capua became one of the infamous Italian prison camps used by the Germans as a collection point and temporary prison for troops being moved north to Germany. Destruction in the area made by Allied bombers and fighters was extensive. The newly arrived group found billets for sleep, thankful to have reached the camp without incident, but restless through the night due to greedy chiggers and ticks within their filthy bedding. The morning proved no better with camp food consisting of sweet spaghetti and drinkable water limited to eight ounces per day. Located on the banks of the Volturno river, the guards finally permitted small groups to wade in—their choice to wash what they could and drink polluted water—the first they had had in days. Many did. (pp. 64 – 65)

> *It was here that Colonel Jones was separated from us and flown to Rome for special interrogation. Later we learned that the real purpose for taking him was to make a propaganda broadcast about how well POWs were treated. They could have not picked a more difficult subject for that purpose. The orders to move out within the hour were welcome, even though we were moving toward Germany. Our last act in this despised place was the removal of our clothes to shake them and rid ourselves of as many fleas as possible. Wheals and open sores covered our emaciated bodies. Now, added to any number of epitaphs attributed to us, we could truthfully be called a ‘flea bitten army.’* (p. 65)

CONTINUING TO MOVE NORTH

Marching north along the Volturno River, the POWs arrived at the North-South Highway. Obviously turning north, they quickly realized why: all bridges except for a foot bridge across the river were destroyed.

Once we crossed the bridge, we were told we would march along the railroad tracks until we came to a train, which would take us to our destination. We assumed it would be in Germany, and the guards hinted confirmation. After about two hours, we did arrive where a train was on the siding. We were ordered to mount up. This was the only relatively comfortable train trip I would make as a prisoner of war. We were not too crowded. They were old baggage cars; and although they were rough, they were far superior to the cattle cars we would later use. Our air forces were very active, and trains were a delight to fighter pilots. Most of the time we sat on sidings. (p. 65)

As no food rations for the POWs were provided onboard, they depended on the generosity of local populations—some very generous, with men, women, and even children sharing their own, sometimes meager rations, with those on the train. Some wept as they envisioned their own family members having served and/or killed in the war. Ferguson remembers that despite the actions of guards screaming "verboten", these much-appreciated gifts continued to be distributed. The POWs were also fortunate in another way, as their guards were trained, front-lined combat troops, who shared respect even for adversaries: *'the soldiers knew the hardships of the combat soldier and without realizing it, were sympathetic to our plight.'* (pp. 65, 66)

Throughout the book, Ferguson relayed situations in which he and others, often British officers with their use of *"It was a bloody good show",* antagonized German officers. '*Often, we paid with solitary confinement, existing on bread and water for an inordinate period of time. But more important, our efforts restored our sense of dignity as humans*.' In one very celebrated win case, the entire cadre of prisoners were transferred to a new, more comfortable train with individual seats. (pp. 66 – 68)
As Rome and other towns and villages came into view, the men noted differences in the topography and physical attributes of people they saw: those from the south displayed dark hair and skin, often shorter in statue. Northern Italians appeared taller with lighter hair and lighter eyes—ancestor traits from generations of peoples' migrations. As they approached the Brenner Pass, Ferguson was remined of the meeting there between Hitler and Mussolini which Churchill referred to as a *"stab in the back".* Bavarian landscapes appeared manicured and pastoral—even in the cities where people's actions seemed purposeful. Still headed northward these scenes gave way to *'industrial complexes. Now that we were beyond the reach of Allied aircraft, we were being hurried to our destination.'* (pp. 69, 70)

STALAG VIII, MOOSBURG, GERMANY

Late on a deary October day found the train parked on another siding. This time the men disembarked and marched into the Kommandatura area of the prison camp where they saw the German commander. Assigned new guards and officers, they entered a highly secure area surrounded with barbed wire and watch towers with specifically placed lights and machine guns. Enclosed areas contained barracks—their new homes. (pp. 70, 71)

> *The guards were quick and efficient in dividing us into groups of occupancy. Officers were separated from enlisted men and marched to wired areas, counted and dismissed. Several British officers approached and stood nearby watching. Since I was the senior American officer, orders were addressed to me with instructions I should be held accountable for their observance. When we were dismissed, a tall, handsome British captain stepped up. "Captain Ferguson, my name is Massey. I'll show you where you're to be billeted. Those other officers here will take care of the others. Will you come with me?"*
>
> *I followed along as he approached the door of the nearest barracks, talking as he walked. "Food will be coming shortly, and I'll bet you're bloody hungry. We didn't get word of your coming soon enough to get you food packages tonight, but we have plenty and we'll issue packages to each of your chaps tomorrow." Reaching the door he escorted me inside. "It's not much, but it's warm and the beds aren't too bad. You'll occupy the bunk over there. Mine is right here."*
>
> *I was miserably cold and the room was warm. My bunk looked inviting, and either he or someone else had made it up with an extra blanket across the foot. I was overwhelmed by the kindness of the men in this small room. Massey had introduced me to each of them, but they deferred to him the bulk of the conversation. "The food will be along shortly. We didn't begin preparing it before you arrived because we wanted it to be hot." Later, a stocky man appeared with a metal container of steaming food, a kind of stew. Massey produced a bowl, knife, fork, and spoon and some French bread he had procured on the black market. I ate ravishingly. Warm, tasty food after an eternity of marching and riding was something I had never expected. Once again someone mentioned food packages. When they realized that I did not understand, Massey explained that the American and British Red Cross sent food packages to each prison camp to be issued to the POWs each week, one per person. I had never heard of this. The International Red Cross policed the distribution to see that the food was being given to the POWs as provided by the Geneva Convention. The only packages at this camp were American, which the British preferred over their own.* (pp. 70 – 72)

Next, Ferguson checked on his officers. They, too, were generously treated, fed, and elated about the food packages. From this night, information flowed freely between the groups, including chain-of-command procedures and the presence of an escape committee. Several had attempted, been caught and treated roughly by the Gestapo—the beginnings of a real hatred of these thugs of war. Ferguson next indicated a plan of escape in which he hoped to participate, but it was disapproved by the Senior Allied Officer (SAO) as being too dangerous. Several days later, the Brits left.

> *'From these unselfish men we learned how to cope with the enemy in ways we would use to advantage in the months to come.'* (pp. 73, 74)

THE TRUE NATURE OF INTERROGATIONS REVEALED

In late October, the American officers were moved to a permanent camp, told to place their personal items in a container, "for safe keeping"—a ruse for control—and immediately placed in isolated, cold, securely locked cells with non-communitive guards checking their presence, pushing only bread and water through to them. Any pretense of camaraderie disappeared quickly as Ferguson began to think *Why am I here?* Several days later he had a young visitor. His uniform was not German but British battle dress.

> *Rather casually, I mentioned I thought from my conversation with the commander of the guard we were being taken to a permanent camp. I wondered why the stop off here. With this, he fell for the bait. Trying to bolster his representation of being a sort of British social worker, he said we were probably delayed in route in order that our records could be brought up to date. That did it! He had just told me that this was an intelligence operation and that we were here for interrogation. The solitary was a softening up procedure for what was to come… and these people were not the common run-of-the-mill intelligence people. Here information was gathered for the supreme command. Our army had never specifically trained us on protecting ourselves in enemy interrogation. Up to the present we had given only our name, rank and serial number. But now it was not that simple.* (pp. 78, 79)

Through continued, specific questions about this man's background, Ferguson began to put the pieces of his false identity together through his evasive answers—the true goal was to build a more complete file on Ferguson (and others) which would lead to their true purpose.

> *Although my physical condition was deplorable, my spirit and ability to concentrate seemed unaffected. I felt I could meet whatever difficulties might come. I thought I had conditioned*

> *myself in such a way as to face and accept death rather than give information detrimental to our soldiers. No person can truly measure the boundaries of his resistance before they are tried, but I hoped and prayed I could withstand whatever confronted me. The waiting, the hunger, the cold and degrading personal humiliation were tools to weaken resistance, but for me they stimulated anger, resentment, and determined resistance. This was my only approach under these circumstances.* (pp. 79 – 81)

The next German interviewer began with the same informal scenario as those who proceeded him; fortunately, Ferguson was not fooled and realized immediately that this man was a very skilled interviewer and not the mid-level Hauptman Villiams [meaning Williams] he pretended to be. *'My legal training helped me in evaluating the questions asked and made me conscious that he was being very careful not to irritate me so that I would retire behind the shield of name, rank, serial number.'* Both men knew that professional, often personal historical dossiers were kept on both sides of the war, yet something else was at work here including his mention of the effectiveness of a new anti-tank weapon. (pp. 81 - 83)

Eventually, Ferguson confronted Williams:

> '*Hauptman Williams, I don't know who you are, and I suspect your rank is above that of a captain, but I do know that you are an intelligence officer in the Supreme Headquarters of the German Armed Forces. I know you know more about this and every other weapon in our arsenal than I'll ever know. I simply cannot understand why with all of this knowledge, you would ask such a question of an American army captain.'* (p. 83)

This verbal attack by Ferguson engaged William's ego as he admitted to his life in the U.S. and even produced *'a picture he had personally taken of a mobile weapon during its testing. But now began the inquiry of our bazookas and their effectiveness. This was it. This was the purpose of the whole exercise.'* (p. 84)

Ferguson's astute reply was to ask for more information on this weapon since he knew little about it or its effectiveness. These tactics to feign his ignorance had saved the day:

> '*He* [Williams] *could now report that American combat soldiers scarcely knew what a bazooka was and they were certainly not impressed with this mediocre anti-tank deterrent. I wish I could have seen his report of our interview. I am sure he deleted his admissions at the end of the session.'* (p. 84)

The interrogation was over. But as a final discourse surely to impress me as to his abilities of evaluation, he made a most perplexing statement. Looking me straight in the eye he said, "You will win the war. We have the best soldiers and generals, but Detroit will win the war for you. The use of your transport is horrible, and we have no difficulty in destroying your vehicles and your mobile weapons. But we cannot destroy them as fast as Detroit can build them. And eventually you will win. If we had your transport, this war would soon be over. But there is no hope for us. I may want to go back to America after it is over and maybe we could have a cup of coffee under different circumstances." (p. 85)

Entering the supply room, Ferguson's personal items were returned with his Red Cross food. Marched out of the building, Ferguson entered a compound and led to a building with other Americans. His former Battalion Commander, and now SAO Lt. Col. Gaines Barron, recognized him and welcomed him back among his own. Later, they exchanged information about interrogations which had taken place under the man known as Williams and the overall success of Americans' ability to withstand and mislead their interrogators. (pp. 85 – 88)

NEXT CAMP, LUCKENWALDE

This camp, adjacent to Moosburg and located in a suburb of Berlin, was a large, permanent camp for those POW nationalities other than British and Americans. Its populations included Yugoslavs, Greeks, other Europeans and Indians. Restrictions did not prevent communications between the groups, shared clothes items, or the gifts of needed food between the Brits and Americans. Ferguson commented that the Italians were especially generous (p. 89)

DIRTY TRICKS

A large contingent of French soldiers in the camp, who were allowed to roam freely, appeared to be healthy and well fed. As food supplies decreased dramatically, information was requested concerning Red Cross boxes. Told that the French retained control, a request was made to meet with a French representative. This was denied. Although the food had been given by the American government and our people, we would spend days and nights suffering the pains of real hunger while the soldiers of an allied nation were adequately fed and clothed. It was a relief to get movement orders. (p. 91)

BERLIN STATION

On a cold November day, the group was transported to a train station in Berlin and transferred to an extra coach coupled to a fast electric train. Before leaving the area, they had noted how the people looked well dressed, the city bustling with life. It was clear that Berlin had not yet been bombed. Transferred to cattle cars, the POWs watched the ebb and flow of train yard traffic.

> *As we waited we were able to watch other trains being assembled and made ready to move out. I would forever remember and be shocked by one of the most inhumane activities I have ever seen. Women dressed in thin clothes without shoes or gloves pushing freight cars into position to be made into trains. They had tied rags around their hands and feet to keep warm, but the wrappings were of little help. Switch engines with their idle crews sat around while a burly monster of a man armed with a sturdy whip drove his human charges much like he would have driven oxen.* (p. 92)
>
> *It was a paradox irreconcilable with the tenant of a civilized people. Here was a country which had more literacy, more scientists, more college graduates, more PhDs, and more technicians in ratio to its population than any nation in the world; and yet here in its greatest city was an exploitation and abuse of human beings so degrading that it penetrated below the treatment level of savages. These poor creatures would slave under intolerable demands on a starvation diet until one by one each would be too weak to arise from her pallet of rags. She would then be reported as being unfit for labor and soon thereafter would not be given the dignity of a gas chamber or bullet-administrated execution. A man would approach her bed armed with a sledge hammer and with one blow crush her fragile skull, strip her naked body and dump her frail body in the refuse to be removed with the other rubbish by the trashman.*
>
> *This was the arrogancy of a super race intent on ruling the world and is an invitation for historians to take pause when they minimize the atrocities of war. The train lurched as we began moving eastward, but not before it had left indelibly imprinted on my mind a scene so horrible that even in daytime its nightmares caused me to shudder.* (pp. 92 – 93)

Ferguson remembered that late harvesting was still in progress as they passed and the land held no current war scars.

We were approaching what the Germans called the Hinterlands—nearing the 1939 Polish border before the German invasion. The Nazi had removed all evidence of the Polish border. Whatever could be destroyed had been in an effort to erase it from the memory of its people. Even the names of towns had been changed to German names, and any use of the former one was prohibited under severe penalties. Maps were withdrawn and published emphasizing these changes. But Poland was Poland as it had been for many years and when we crossed its borders, there was no mistaking where we were. (p. 94)

ARRIVAL AT OFLAG 64

In the early afternoon on 20 October 1943, they arrived at Alterburgund (Schubin/Szubin) to the Poles), formed into columns and marched a mile to opened double gates allowing the men into a holding area. A large contingent of men who were obviously established residents stood at the fence and in quiet voices urged us to follow the established routine—safer that way. Gear surrendered, with some personal items kept, the new groups were searched, then moved to the main area of the camp. Being with Americans again was comforting as many introduced themselves.

Among them was Amon Carter Jr. who asked for names and address to be passed on to his father for family notification of their POW status. Captain Tony Lumpkin assigned the men to their barracks and announced that each would receive a Red Cross box, with eleven pounds of delicious food. This news had a profound effect on the hungry men! (pp. 94 — 96)

The incoming POWs soon learned that Oflag 64 operated within the provisions of the Geneva Convention and was governed by the command of regulars of the German Army.

Its commander was an old Prussian Oberst, Wilhelm Schneider, with 42 years of service in that army. He spoke in no language but his native tongue and stood as ramrod-stiff as a wooden soldier. He gave the Weirmach salute and permitted none under his command to publicly give the Heil Hitler genuflection. Under the proper circumstances he would make known that he was not a Nazi and did not endorse its philosophy of politics. Every inch of him was a soldier. Although he gave the impression of being tough, he exhibited a trait of stability. In spite of his advanced age, we found him to be a soldier who not only maintained discipline within his ranks but also commanded respect in ours. (p. 97)

Ferguson's written descriptions of the camp included its policies, daily routines, specifically detailed camp areas, activities, etc. In many ways Oflag 64 resembled a small town; this noticeably bolstered more positive attitudes among the new arrivals since being captured on 13 September 1943 during the Salerno campaign.

> *A few days after we arrived, I became a registered Prisoner-of-War—Kriegsgefangener 3074. A metal tag stamped with this number was given to me. I was ordered to wear it around my neck at all times. I was "mugged" in the universal way that all prisoners are photographed with my number superimposed in front. Later an identification card would be given to me containing my picture and pertinent instructions. (pp. 98, 99)*

The American SAO of Oflag 64 was Colonel Thomas D. Drake. A valiant leader during World War I, he was again called upon to safeguard the lives of different men in another war and demonstrated the same quiet, efficient manner which would become even more important than initially anticipated:

> *Soon after we arrived it was known to us that we were American Army Officers. Subsequently, our conduct and dress should reflect this. Our impression on the enemy would be made from our conduct and dress. Military bearing and demeanor would be our greatest asset in these difficult circumstances. We knew this to be true, and throughout our captivity we sought to conform to this philosophy.* (pp. 112, 113).
> *In the days and months that followed, we met all of the men in the camp and our lives became so closely entwined by intense association that each of us was molded and influenced measurably by the experiences. In all of our close associations, I never saw a time when there was any reluctance by anyone to do his part and share in the common danger. Never a complaint, never a shrink of responsibility, never a betrayal. Even in the face of extreme personal danger, there was fulfillment of responsibility uninfluenced by fear. There was no pettiness, no bickering, no selfishness, but a cooperation based on a maturity necessitated by our common facing of danger. I am sure that each one believed that in all probability he would be dead before the end of the war. Our respect and companionship became so enduring that it transcended those years of prison and cohesively welded a brotherhood unalterably pledged to one another.* (p. 103)

> *In the months that followed we settled down into a routine of living far from the active arena of the war. In this pastoral setting a thousand miles from the battlelines with food barely sufficient to sustain us and housed in tolerable comfort, we felt helpless in the initiation of any affirmative action that would assist our county.* (p. 103)

> *To overcome depression and boredom we instituted projects to occupy our minds. As officers we were not allowed to work on farms or in the factories nor were we allowed to be interspersed in camps where enlisted men were kept. The diversity of professions of our group, however, assisted us in planning programs and activities which appealed almost to everyone. One could pick and choose. For instance, we organized small classes in many subjects. We had good language classes in German, Spanish, French and other languages. All except Russian. There was even a class dealing with vocabulary and grammar. Other classes included elementary law, but we were severely hampered by the unavailability of textbooks. Captain Lumund Wilcox was a former prosecutor and at the time of induction was a very successful practicing attorney in Jefferson, Iowa. He taught a group the specifics of contracts and their relations to the law. In a broad, general approach, I discussed criminal law.* (pp. 103, 104)

During his time in the army before being deployed, Ferguson had *'devoted much time to discipline and was Summary Court Officer for the Regiment. Also being a member of three separate special court martials and a member of many court martials, I was in constant touch with the discipline of the command.'* (p. 122]

> *There were expert engineers, draftsmen, carpenters, cabinet makers, and people from every profession. Many of the younger men had just graduated from college and gone directly into the army. They were excellent contributors in these time-passing endeavors.* (pp. 103 – 104)

General camp knowledge comprised information passed by word-of-mouth, posted on bulletin boards, or read in the camp's newspaper, *The Oflag 64 Item*. By the end of their confinement, the camp also housed an excellent library, sponsored theatre productions, and offered many sports activities. Assistance from outside sources was also appreciated. Henry Söderberg, the Swedish Y.M.C.A. Representative, had visited the camp in 1943 and made good on his promise to provide much needed sport and musical equipment. Record players and music also found their way into the camp. Söderberg was always welcomed and kept in touch with many former POWs after war's end. (p. 119).

VIP MAIL

Mail and mail call were on the "most wanted" lists.

> *On February 24, 1944, our designated mailman made his regular appearance in the barracks, announcing the recipients of mail for that day. Somewhere* in the *middle he said, "Captain Clarence Ferguson." I was overwhelmed and so excited, I fell over a stool getting to him. He handed me a letter. Josephine had written it. In anticipation of what she knew would be my distress, she wrote in the first sentence that all at home were well. Their best Christmas gift she said was a recent letter from me telling them that I was alive and well. She had been thoughtful in describing that both my mother and father had survived the news of my missing in action and were thankful that they now knew where I was. My brothers and sisters had been particularly attentive to her, our son Jon, and my parents. The letter was abundantly informative when taking into account that only one short page was allowed by the authorities. The love and consideration expressed in the closing lines would be a comfort and strength for me forever. I finished with thankful tears in my eyes and passed it to the man nearest me. He read and passed it to the next. Before long twenty men had shared it.* (pp. 113, 114)

A LETTER OF APPRECIATION

December 20, 1943
Mr. Amon Carter
Publisher of the Star Telegram
Ft. Worth, Texas

Dear Mr. Carter,
We were indeed very happy to receive the telephone message Saturday evening, December 18, regarding Capt. Clarence M. Ferguson.
During these uncertain times it is fine to know that word can come through from our loved ones, wherever they may be. We are deeply grateful to your son, Lt. Amon Carter, Jr. for his kind considerations of our feelings and hopes and we pray for his Happiness also.
I have been fortunate in getting all the packages sent to Clarence that are allowed during the specified time; having received direct help from the Red Cross in Waco, I believe the personal packages will go through the censors. The tobacco and books are well on the way, I'm sure.
Clarence wouldn't say a word that he thought might sorry us, but even so the feelings in his generalities assure me that he is well and kept busy, which is so important. He is a lawyer by Profession, and might I add, a good one, and since they are adept at conversing and discussing innumerable topics, I feel the time may not seem too long.
In my letter today to Clarence, I have given Lt. Carter my deepest thanks for his consideration, and I know that each soldier will be much happier when they know the ones at home have had their anxious thoughts and fears

alleviated somewhat. I hope all our letters will get to them, as time goes on, and the culmination of it all will be their job well-done and at home once more. If at any time I can be of any service to you, please don't hesitate to call on us.
I am enclosing a short article published in the Groesbeck Journal that you might like to read.

Sincerely,
Mr. & Mrs. P.T. Ferguson (father and mother)
Mrs. C. M. Ferguson (wife)
& Son — Jon
[The letter was personally signed Mrs. C. M. Ferguson]

Source: TCU Digital Repository
Title: Letter re: prisoner of war
Author: Ferguson, Mrs. Clarence M.
Collection: Amon G. Carter, Sr. (/handle/116099117/12392) [14131]

HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS AND CAMP GROWN FOODS

Ferguson described those most treasured—Thanksgiving and Christmas—with the same preparations, sharing of foods, entertainment, simple gifts given and heartfelt good cheer as they were celebrated back in the states. Red Cross box items, with foods saved for these two special occasions, were brought out, prepared in communal kitchens and shared. Some foods came from a local source within their camp.

While exploring the grounds one day, Ferguson noted the presence of a small hothouse behind the hospital containing beautiful flowers growing within—something he never expected in a POW camp. Introducing himself, he met John Kreech [Creech], an accomplished botanist and horticulturist, and they became friends. (pp. 108, 109)

> *"John knew the biggest problem facing us was the serious shortage of food. Colonel Drake, as a fellow gardener, shared this concern and arranged for Creech and his Kreigy helpers to use an old greenhouse plus two-and-a-half acres of compound land to grow food for the American prisoners. With a lot of back-breaking effort, they spaded up the plot. Then he created flats for the greenhouse with used Red Cross cartons."* (pp. 43, 44)
>
> Source: *Americans Behind the Barbed Wire WWII: Inside a German Prison Camp* by J. Frank Diggs
> Publisher: Vandamere Press, Arlington, Virginia, Copyright 2000

Seeds began pouring in from many sources and the rest, as they say, is history as Creech's vegetables (carrots, tomatoes, leeks, onions, etc.) made a substantial difference in the diets of the men at Oflag 64 and will be remembered for his ingenuity by the men whose health and well-being were improved by John Creech's dedication and imagination. After he was repatriated, Creech was destined to become a leader in his field and as Dr. John Creech, became Director of the Arboretum in Washington, D.C.

Presentation of the Bronze Medal
Document Date: 11 June 1945
First Lieutenant John L. Creech, formerly 26th Infantry, 1st Division, was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for his services to the men at Oflag 64, Szubin, Poland.
Document Signatures: Colonel Thomas D. Drake, Lt. Colonel John K. Waters, and Chaplain (Capt.) Stephen W. Kane.
Source: US ARMY ARCHIVES

The following letter was written to Dr. Creech by Clarence Ferguson.

> *To Dr. John Lewis Creech,*
>
> *On this day, March 4, 1992 for the first time since January 21, 1945 when we separated at Oflag 64 in Poland, I talked with Dr. John Creech whose kindness and self-sacrifices literally made life tolerable in the most difficult period of my life inspiring me to live when I had almost given up. The details of that help began on page 108 of this book, and although I misspelled his name as John Kreech, it is a _________ for which error I apologize. In no way does it dilute or detract from my unmissable admiration and appreciation for this great man.*
>
> *John Creech in his quiet unselfish industrious way brought comfort, food and beauty under the most difficult circumstances to more than 1500 POWs in their time of depraved imprisonment without hint of self-acclaim or public recognition.*
>
> *John, Dr. Creech honored and recognized by the world for outstanding accomplishments, I am singularly blessed by your friendship and in genuine admiration dedicate this volume of Kriegsgefangener which contains only a microscopic recitation of your contributions in our time of great need.*
>
> *Sincerely,*
> *Clarence*

Sources: *Defiant Gardens – Online extension of Defiant Gardens: Making Gardens in Wartime by Kenneth Helphand, San Antonio: Trinity University Press, (2006)*

"*I Gardened for My Life*" by Captain John L. Creech
Material courtesy of Dr. John Creech, WWII Posted by admin in the POW Archives under One Response to "Dr. John Creech, WWII" concerning a letter written by Clarence Ferguson. http://defiantgardens.com>admin>pows>dr-john-creech

SECURITY AND THE ENEMIES WITHIN

Ferguson, through his native intelligence and legal training, knew that a camp with1500 POWs held men as diverse in their beliefs and cultures as they appeared in the U.S. As a group, brought together by the dictates of surrender, Oflag 64 also had its secrets and internal chains-of-command. As an observer and trusted individual, he knew about the requirement to secure information concerning issues which greatly affected their lives.

> *Intelligence was another of our prevalent responsibilities. Lieutenant Colonels Alger and Waters were primarily responsible for this. Both were well trained, graduates of West Point. We were alerted to constantly observe the activities around us. In particular, if we by some coincidence had an opportunity to observe something of military significance, we were to be attentive and to report in detail to fellow officers. We were also told not to discuss or reveal our reports to fellow officers. It was surprising how well secrets were kept and again it was remarkable the quality and quantity of information we were able to provide our government. At such times and for various reasons we were outside the camp, we were ordered to be alert, both to the conduct, attitude and reactions of the civilians and military personnel with whom we came in contact.* (pp. 115, 116)

> *The Germans were known to put 'plants' within a camp, and we suspected one of the young lieutenants who came into our barracks. His American English was as commonplace as any of us and the vast knowledge of the United States was accurate, but his identity was questionable. We were never able to certify this officer and one day he was ordered to another camp. We never knew whether or not he arrived at his destination and never heard of him again.* (p. 116)

Ferguson also added detailed information about the POWs ability to receive information*:*

> *'The radio from which we received the daily news was assembled by two of our men and placed in two cans commonly found in Red Cross parcels. They passed through numerous searches and were never detected.'* (p. 116)

Information concerning the expertise used when creating forged documents, uniforms, and other items which would hopefully enable escapees to pass through German "check in" lines was also carefully noted.

For several years the war went exceedingly well for the German forces. Eventually, however, truths about the successes of the Allied war machine became known—much to the disappointment of the high German Command. Although the Kriegies received and read many of their daily newspapers, they began to notice the increase in radio broadcasts aimed particularly at front-line forces and at them in the form of psychological warfare. Late in the evening a gal with a sexy voice whom someone named "Axis Sally", but who had been dubbed by some of our men less complimentary as "the Bitch from Berlin" would appear on the air. (pp. 132, 133)

The 'Sally' script was a mixture of valid information about unit locations and facts with wording intended to make the Americans believe that their sweethearts and leaders were leading them astray.

> "*You notice your officers aren't with you these cold nights. They're back in the rear in a nice place, but you have to stay there. They sometimes go back with the nurses at the hospital. Do they invite you to go with them? Of course not. If you weren't protecting them, they couldn't have their fun. I sure hate to see you so miserable. You are such good guys. I wish I were with you. I bet I could keep you warm."* (pp. 132, 133)

Another intrusive voice was called "Lord Ha Ha". He analyzed the war news always avoiding German losses. '*Although some of his revelations were distracting, his irrationalities destroyed his effectiveness in some of the tenable truths he advanced.'* (pp. 133, 134)

OFFICER'S DEATH AT OFLAG 64

A well-liked officer and Ferguson's bunk and table mate, Captain Richard Hurley "Dick" Torrence Jr., died while at appell of a medical condition. Colonel Drake set the funeral on January 21, 1944 at 2 pm. Service with an American Honor Guard was held in the Chapel with Chaplain Father Brach officiating. As the casket was lowered into the grave near the cemetery of the Greek Orthodox Church, the German Honor Guard fired a volley of salute.

'The universal salute to the death of a comrade had been given unsolicited by our enemy.' (pp. 135 141)

Military procession and gravesite photos are displayed on pp.155, 156. Captain Torrence was later reburied at Waco [Texas] Memorial Park.

THE PLAGUES OF WAR

Ferguson, like many who served in the Africa campaign and beyond, contracted diseases and illnesses which affected them for the duration of the war and for some, throughout the rest of their lives.

While attending an officers' combat training school on the edge of the Sahara Desert, Ferguson suffered an attack of dysentery but finished the course. (p. 148)

Later, as a prisoner at Oflag, this diagnosis was debilitating malaria.

My illness had stabilized into a more or less regular pattern. It was impossible for me to remain ambulatory for more than four continuous weeks. After two weeks of activity, I became enervated. Perceptibly, every day thereafter it became worse and within two weeks I would not have enough strength to go from the barracks to the parade ground. I, then, checked into the hospital where I remained in bed for seven days; by the second week I would regain enough strength to return to the barracks. (p. 192)

Every man who entered the gates of Oflag 64 was observed by others and often used his own recollections to record his personal observations and opinions. He may have recorded these years later as a cumulative record—using his memory—to "turn the page" of those imbedded events which were important, humorous or threating, even perhaps to change the circumstances in order to salvage his survival or honor.

One who used his articulate and accurate powers of observation was the author of this book.

There seemed to be an insatiable compulsion of every POW to relate in detail the circumstances of his capture. It was usually the first thing he talked about when he arrived at camp. It did not matter how long he had been captured or how many different camps he had previously occupied, there was something inherent in his present status which moved him to particularize the sometimes morbid, sometimes humorous details of his capture. It was always the new arrival who told his story first. It was a confession of a kind, an explanation and justification of our being

there. It was an apology. We were seeking solace, comfort, and approval for an act that we had never anticipated, that somehow was difficult to equate with honor. We tended to forget that our audience had suffered the same fate, but we could not realize compatibility until we had justified our individual choice of surrender instead of death at the time we had met defeat. The super charged trauma had left each of us with a distorted coercive bent to exculpate our existence. (p. 168)

PAYOFFS AND PAYBACKS

Under the Geneva Convention the captors were to pay to POWs a percentage of their monthly salary. In turn these captives were to pay a stipulated amount to the captors for food. The ration provided was to be equivalent to the ration provided to a German soldier in the field. This was never done, but we were, nevertheless, ordered to pay on this basis. The Germans violated both the payment and food provisions. We were paid in Lager (prison) marks which were not currency, and the food provided, when it was, in no way approached the standard required by the convention. Nevertheless, the bill was presented for our food and rather than take up a collection from the men, some of the imaginative fellows collected it in a unique way. (p. 186)

In an impressive saloon setting, gambling tables were provided using Lager marks for betting. Ferguson and a friend, Phil, were able to contribute considerable earnings (three powdered milk tins full of the fake Marks) when they exited the camp a year later. (pp. 186, 187)

Once again it was time to pay the Germans for the food they were supplying us. The camp money we used would not buy anything and was another one of the frauds practiced by our captors. These paper coupon-type slips were worthless except for the purpose of settling our account with the Germans. The Saturday Night Saloon and Gambling Casino had been very successful in collecting enough to pay our bill for several months, and now was a good time to plan something else. Besides, it was early spring, and we needed something outdoors to pull us out of the winter doldrums. Someone suggested declaring a holiday and having a carnival. The idea caught on like wildfire and the theatre groups began their planning. (p. 196)

Horse racing, para-mutual betting, dancing “girls,” dunking tank (with Lt. Col. Waters being the favorite “dunkee”), and fortune-telling were main events created on the midway. These, plus decorations created a festive holiday atmosphere and a much-looked-forward-to celebration. The race track was

set up between the barracks and the Big House, with race lines drawn on the ground for the six colorful jockeys their stick ponies—the winners determined by the throw of the dice. (p. 197)

It was on this memorable day, a few minutes past eleven o'clock, that a whispered message passed quickly through the camp: the Allies had crossed the English Channel in force and had successfully landed on the French Coast. A German communique followed suit confirming the fact. THE INVASION OF EUROPE HAS BEGUN. Germans around the camp would always believe that Americans had foreknowledge of the invasion date and had planned this celebration to commemorate that event. Sometimes it is more advantageous to let people believe what they want to think, especially in times of war. This day was June 6, 1944! (p. 198)

BOGUS "CRIMES" BECAME PUNISHABLE

The Escape at Sagan Luft III by British POWs and the unconscionable assassinations of some who participated became a shameful world event. Two Americans were present there when this occurred: Major Jerry Sage and First Lieutenant William F. Higgins. Higgins continued to escape and was represented by CPT Ferguson twice in German courts. The long solitary confinement sentences prompted Ferguson to seek permission to see the Kommandant. After hearing convincing testimony, the Kommandant regrettably agreed.

Meanwhile tunneling continued to take place as Red Cross boxes of discarded dirt were placed in ceilings then transferred into trouser legs and scattered on the grounds and gardens of the camp. These actions remained unnoticed. (pp. 192 – 194, 198)

As news spread about the unsuccessful assassination of Hitler, POWs prepared themselves for severe retributions by Hitler and his henchmen. During this time, Lts. George Durgin, Seymour Bolton, Jack Rathbone, and Pat Teel were escorted under guard to a railway station where they were to proceed to a nearby town for medical treatment. Entering the street, they were then ordered by the guard to walk in the gutter instead of on the sidewalk. All refused. Returned to camp, the guard related the incident to Oberst Schneider who then contacted Berlin for instructions. The trial date set, American officers Colonel Millet, Captain Wilcox, Captain Ferguson and Captain Barker (as translator) accompanied the four lieutenants to the site of the German Court. (p. 211)

After arriving at Genisen, they met with a representative of the Swiss Government, Mr. Franz, who had been appointed to observe the trial. During their conversation he offered the following information.

I have just come from Berlin and the situation there is very grave. There is a struggle between Hitler's group and others. The war will be over in a short time and you will be free. I know you have plans for escaping but talk to your friends and persuade them not to try it. It's too dangerous. The Germans will kill anyone who tries to get away now. Don't do it. If you have tunnels, go ahead and dig them to where you can get out in a short time, but don't use them unless you have to. Just keep everything like it is now and stop your plans where they are. If Hitler wins out, he will order the execution of every escapee. If others win, peace will come soon and you'll not need to escape. (pp. 212, 213)

Source: PUBLIC SITTING OF THE FIELD COURT
MARTIAL OF DIVISION No. 192
Present as Judges:

1. Deputy Judge Advocate General Oakiorski as President of the Court.
2. Major Kichhorn, Staff/Division192.
3. 1st Lieutenant Strehlow, Staff/Division 192.

Present as Prosecutor, Deputy Judge Advocate General Dr. Guddat.
Present as Office Recorder: Inspector of Military Justice Langor.
Court Document Date: 10 October 1944.

The lieutenants were defended on the basis that requiring POWs to walk there was humiliating and an affront to their dignity as a soldier. Famous jurists' rulings on the question of human dignity were emphasized and correlated to the treatment the men were receiving. The court, after a short deliberation, returned a verdict of not guilty on each count. (p. 213)

News of this acquittal infuriated Hitler so gravely that he ordered another trial in which the four POWs were tried in absentia. This verdict was a unanimous death sentence for all defendants. Fortunately, because the condemned men had left Oflag 64 on the long march, the sentences were never carried out.

Many officers in the camp including Ferguson admired Colonel Drake for his SAO leadership qualities and the professional relationship he maintained with Colonel Schneider, the camp Kommandant. Drake was soon to be repatriated for health reasons but continued to act accordingly in defense of the men at Oflag 64—including harassing the German war machine whenever possible. Warned that this might lead to his demise, his reply was *"If they do that, they'll be admitting that I'm right."* (p. 216)

The next morning when we were summoned for appell, Drake was no longer with us. His unrelenting tenacity had maintained his dignity and honor. (p. 218)

December 28, 1944, Ferguson joined Colonel Goode, the new SAO at camp, Captain Barker, and Lieutenant Schmidt. They were again traveling to Genisen to act as advocates for First Lieutenant Schmidt and Lieutenant Colonel Scheafer. Scheafer had been transferred from Oflag 64 several weeks previously to a maximum-security prison in western Germany and would join the others at the trial. Since Wilcox and Ferguson had acquired an acquittal for the four Oflag 64 Americans, Ferguson was told that he alone would be representing these two POWs. (pp. 222, 223)

> *Lt. James R. Schmitz, our assistant adjutant, was in the camp office alone when he was approached by two German guards who were about to post some anti-escape posters on the office wall. Schmitz considered the posters insulting to American officers as they accused our government of "resorting to gangster warfare up to and within the frontier of the Fatherland." So he requested them to wait until he could contact our SAO. He was unable to reach the colonel and brought back Lt. Col. Schaefer instead, who discussed the posters with the guards.*
>
> *As they were leaving, Lt. Schmitz stood in the doorway in token protest. When one of the Unteroffiziers approached and touched Schmitz, he immediately got out of the way. Nevertheless, the American was accused of blocking the doorway and Lt. Col. Schaefer was accused of "interfering with the functions of the German Reich."*
>
> *They were both tried in December 1944, found guilty, and sentenced to death. The camp was evacuated the next month before the sentence could be carried out. (pp. 79, 80)*
>
> Source: *Americans Behind the Barbed Wire World War II: Inside a German Prison Camp* by J. Frank Diggs
> *Publisher: Vandamere Press, Arlington, Virginia, Copyright 2000*

CPT Ferguson's reaction concerning the verdict was immediate*:*

> *DEATH! DEATH! I could not believe it. My first impulse was to scream a vituperative insult questioning the parentage of members of the court. These pseudo-jurist in their spit and polish uniforms with monocles and ceremonial sabers had defiled the sanctity of universal truths flaunting the mockery of humane guaranties by civilized peoples and reduced to defined terms in the treaty of Geneva.*
>
> *Goddard, the presiding officer, understood and knew better but he was a spineless intellectual whose cowardice would promote the likes of Hitler. Death for an innocuous triviality that was at most*

should have been punished at no more than a reprimand. Goddard, I hope a war Crimes Court gives you justice when this war is over! (p. 235)
My mental anguish as a result of this trial was unbearable. I was ashamed that I could not separate myself from the unjustness and total depravity of a nation which would use the universal formalities of a court of justice to commit premeditated murder. I knew these cases were rigged from the beginning but I did not know that they were designed as an example for severity of punishment prisoners could expect in the future. (p. 239)

THE LONG MARCH WAS ON

The winter of 1944 was one of the worst in 50 years. Traffic along the road in front of the camp increased with loaded wagons and the feet of refugees going by. The men were told to begin making plans for a move.

'*Sometimes the Russians moved so fast that there was very little time to get ready. We had no hopes that the Germans would leave us behind to be liberated.' (p. 240)*

Ferguson suffered a malady which continued to plague him but he decided not to stay with the hospital group but leave with the others on the march.

During the afternoon we were issued one food parcel and a very meager German ration. Early in the morning we were summoned to the parade ground with others to be ready to move within the hour. The headcount was short because some had gone into the tunnel to wait until we had moved out.
Schneider came through the main gate and ordered them opened wide. With his staff he stood in the center of the formation and spoke in German. "Gentlemen, I have orders to march you from here back into Germany. I want your cooperation, but whether I get it or not I will take you out of here."

He saluted, turned on his heels and walked back through the open gates where a surrey drawn by two mules awaited him. He climbed in. The driver spoke to the mules and they started off at a slow walk. We were given the command. "Right face, forward walk!" We followed behind the mule-drawn carriage. The date was January 21, 1945. (pp. 240 – 242)

As the Oflag 64 marchers mingled with other groups along the road system, Ferguson recalled that his strength and mobility combined with low energy levels decreased as the day moved toward nightfall. Deposited in outbuildings on a large farm, he spent a restless night in freezing conditions and was

offered the opportunity to be placed in the stay-behind group. Debating both sides of this issue (remain there or take his chances with his friends) he chose the latter. Moving off again in the cold misty morning, they encountered more human wagon trains. Every step was a nightmare.

> ‘*I shook so hard it was difficult to stay in formation…at times I stumbled without apparent cause. This could be one of the most difficult days of my life.’* (p. 245)

As the Russian grew closer, Ferguson almost lost hope as he lost consciousness, but assistance and encouragement given by a friend, Phil, enabled him to continue as their second night was also spent in a barn. The hay and manure scattered on the floor made their night somewhat warmer and by the next morning, Ferguson was able to eat.

The next day was a longer march, the night spent in a commune-type farm complex with the temperature in the area recorded at forty below zero. Fortunately, the bread, cheese and liver pate he had eaten during the day added to his survival strength. Somewhere he found a water bottle which he hung around his neck after filling it with water—a precious and scarce commodity. (p). 246)

Passing through a village, the march commanded the attention of civilians including women and children. ‘*Without a doubt some of them had a son, brother, husband or sweetheart who were POWs in America, and their empathy encouraged some kind words.’* This was repaid, unfortunately, by a guard who struck the speaker. (p. 247)

> *On that day I promised God that if I got out of this war alive, I would devote my entire life to my government to constantly work to prevent my country from deteriorating to any level where this kind of conduct was tolerated.* (p. 248)

Another day’s march, another barn encountered. *‘Robinson and I along with others were assigned on the second level of a hay loft. The hay was so deep that we had to sleep next to the rafters. Again, we dug deep and burrowed ourselves under the ice-cold hay.*’ (p. 248)

The morning wake-up calls on January 26 were not what they expected. *“The goons have left! We’re alone!”* When this was confirmed, Colonels Jones, Gooler, and Captain Ferguson set about forming the men into two infantry battalions. Colonel Goode was still acting SAO while also working with another group to contact the Russians. (p. 248)

Unfortunately, the freedom they felt did not exist past 2 pm as storm troopers arrived to take possession of the men—but these were not the camp guards—they were Latvians ‘*singularly programmed cybernauts’* who had served on the eastern front. (pp. 250, 251

Later, we would learn that our near liberation could be accredited to Menner, the officer of the guard when he released his men. He was convinced the Russians would arrive and knew the probable outcome. Placed under arrest by Colonel Schneider, Menner stayed with the column. We would never know why the Russians never made contact. Probably their conduct was deliberate; they were not interested in liberating us and assuming the responsibility of returning us to our forces. (pp. 251, 252)

That night was spent in a small village—the men still cold, depressed and hungry. The town of Lobenz was reached at nightfall on the following day—the column moved into another farm complex. Limited food was supplied with the promise that additional supplies would arrive soon.

*About 9 o'clock an announcement caused great excitement. The Germans reported that the radio had just announced that American and British had accepted the unconditional surrender of Germany. That at this very moment American troops were pouring into Danzig and occupying the area northeast, not many miles from where we were. It was further stated that Russia was not included in the surrender terms; and our government, along with England had agreed that if the Russians did not voluntarily stop where they were, we and the German would fight side by side to stop their advances. (*pp. 253, 254)

The Americans were skeptical as propaganda had been used as a psychological weapon throughout the war so their attention remained as it was before this announcement—reaching their final destination safely and then returning home to America. (p. 253)

Two days later the march continued with many men throughout the column becoming ill. Ferguson was among them. While entering a large, vacated dairy, Colonel Gooler announced that rail cars were in the area for the use of those unable to travel further. (pp. 255, 256)

TRAIN TRAVEL

Only two small cars were available. Divided into two groups and crowded together with little sitting room, these sick, injured and weary men were nevertheless determined to make the best of the situation.

'*Our movement during the next forty-eight hours was sporadic. We would move for an hour or two and then stop. It was well that we did because our dysentery patients needed relief.'* (p. 257)

While the doors were open, some walked along the track for exercise—none were tempted to escape as they were too weak and lacked the physical conditioning to survive in this situation.

At some point, their train moved to a small station and connected to a longer train carrying refugees from the East. One night, as the train stopped, the refugees began laying their dead, perhaps loved ones, on the cold, snowy, deserted ground near the train tracks. This site was unsettling to everyone. (pp. 258, 259)

The sergeant in charge promised food and no doubt tried at every stop to provide some, but none was forthcoming:

> *'We were going to Stettin, a town on the Baltic, where there were military depots, and we could get food there. We were disciplined to undergo hunger, and with great effort we could cope with it. That afternoon we were detached from the refugee train and connected to one carrying freight. We began to move faster.'* (pp. 256 – 259)
>
> *We were in better spirits as we approached Stettin. We were confident there were enough military depots to supply us with some food. Our situation was desperate. Our train came to a stop about 10:00, one-half mile from the depot. Within minutes the German train guard summoned Colonel Jones to the door and requested that he or his representative accompany him to procure food. Jones designated me to go.* (p. 260)

This was a staging area used for cooking and feeding. Ferguson and the guard were pointed toward a building with a large red cross on the door. The sergeant explained about food needs of those on the train to a woman in charge after which she turned to Ferguson and in a spiteful voice stated, "Kriegsgefangener Americanish?"
Ferguson replied, '*Yes.*'
"Roosevelt sent you over here, let him feed you."
Arguing with an irrational person was useless, so Ferguson turned to the exit when confronted by a woman who in broken English told him that her husband was a kriegy in America. Returning to the boxcar with the guard, he explained that they would get food in the next town. Around midnight, a miracle took place.

> *We heard someone running along the train tapping on every boxcar door. When they got to our car, we opened and two women handed us two stew pans full of food. We gave one pan to the men in the other car and kept one for ourselves. By morning an engine had hooked on to us and we were speeding toward Berlin.* (pp. 261, 262)

They arrived in Berlin before noon on the sixth day. The city looked quite different to Ferguson than on his trip two years before. '*Blocks of buildings were either destroyed or gutted.'* Waiting through the day, the train was finally moved to an army field kitchen where the hungry men were each given sweetened barley porridge. (pp. 262, 263)

> *'That night, they heard an air raid warning, followed by the drone of a plane. Lieutenant Meyers who was a member of the OSS related that the plane was doing reconnaissance—taking pictures.'* (p. 263)

The next day, February 3, 1945, sirens sounded, bombs dropped and the train was not moved. Requesting that the Americans be allowed to enter shelters was met with denial. '*We were a paragraph in Dr. Goebles propaganda release:* AMERICAN AIR FORCE BOMBS OWN TROOPS.' (p. 263)

> *The Germans never understood the thinking of Americans. He could not comprehend that an American soldier could in many instances defy all the rules of military tactics and come out a winner over the professional German soldier. Slowly we moved on. Stopping often, sometimes backing up, changing directions constantly and finally winding ourselves into the night, leaving a burning and exploding city in the distance.* (pp. 264, 265)

LUCKENWALDE ARRIVAL

As soon as they were in formation after departing the train, they moved through the residential part of Luckenwalde and entered the camp through the main gate.

> *The grounds were beautifully landscaped and well kept. The buildings were painted and attractive. It could not be expected to be otherwise since it was so close to Berlin. The beauty of the place faded rapidly as we moved through the barbed wire gates to drab buildings, expectedly out of sight of headquarters. We were marched into a sturdy square building with thick doors. There was no furniture in the large vestibule where we entered. We were required to remove all our clothing and give them together with all other possessions to an attendant. We were left stark naked in this barren room where the temperature was below freezing.* (p. 266)

Divided into groups, each one marched into a separate room, and with the doors locked and bolted, it took four hours for all to receive a shower. Ferguson's group was the last and had to endure ice-cold water. The

realization that the shower room with its crisscrossed ceiling pipes resembled an execution chamber also increased their discomfort. Afterwards, an exit door opened into another room where their clothes were returned for redressing. Ferguson remembers the numbness and lack of control over his muscles which caused him to be the last man finished. With assistance from one of the American lieutenants, he was able to stand and carry the mattress composed of wood-shavings into a building. (p. 267)

> *I was taken to a cubicle where there were bunks for twelve men. I choose one on the top of a tier of three. With the help of my kind young lieutenant, made the bunk, climbed up and fell in it, completely exhausted. Later in the afternoon, a wood-staved barrel was brought in. It contained boiled, dried red cabbage. There was enough for one cup of cabbage and the water in which it had been cooked for each man. I had fed slop to hogs that looked and smelled better than this. Even to starving men it was next to unpalatable. Enough black bread for ten men to share one loaf was given as our ration for a day. When sliced, we each received a piece slightly over one-half inch in thickness.* (p. 268)
> *On other days we would receive two small, worm-infested potatoes in lieu of the swamp-water cabbage. And once a week we were given a cup of dried peas. This was our favorite, despite the fact that there were usually not more than twelve or fourteen peas in the cup. The juice was good but slightly adulterated by the weevils that inhabited the peas before they were cooked.* (p. 268)
>
> *We had an interesting experience with this dish. A pilot who had been shot down on a raid over Berlin had been sent directly to the camp. He was assigned to one of the vacant bunks in my cubicle. When the pea soup was served, he noticed the black objects floating on top.*
>
> *"I'll bet even the black pepper used by the Germans in this soup is ersatz," he said.*
>
> *"Turn one of them over and take a look," said his companion. Carefully, he examined one of the black objects. "Hell, that's not pepper. That's weevils! I just can't eat this."*
>
> *Not a word was said in answer. The man next to him took the tin can and carefully distributed it equally among us. We ate without comment. Later as the weeks went by, I noted that the pilot never again examined the ersatz black pepper in his pea soup but ate it all.* (pp. 268)

The days and weeks that followed became a monotony of hunger, cold and discomfort. Although the world was in daily combat, we had been so maimed in body and spirit that we could not grasp the enormity of the situation beyond us. The holding on to life exacted all the strength and stamina we could assimilate.

Our bodies were so broken and starved that for days our minds failed to register the passage of time. Every movement we made was by great effort. Constant exhaustion was our physical characteristic; acute lethargy dominated our thinking. If we stood appell more than twenty minutes, more than half of us would fall to the ground. Those standing were hardly able to help the fallen. The march had been in such cold weather that most had frozen feet. Putrefaction set in and after a time, and I saw men amputate their own toes with knives that had been smuggled through the searches. (p. 269)

Germany was daily being compressed into a smaller arena, and we were in the very center. For seventy-one consecutive days and nights we were bombed. I finally stopped counting. The dumping of the newspapers announcing in bold type the "Jew Murdered Gangster Franklin Roosevelt" gave us little concern. But contributing to our despair was the condition of men arriving each week from the march. They, like us, had gone to the limit of their endurance and were put in boxcars and sent to join us. Their emaciated bodies bespoke of the harshness of their ordeals. But more unbearable than all else was their apparent acceptance of defeat. (p. 269)

Ferguson continued this tale of horror with graphic descriptions. There was no heat in their buildings despite temperatures in February and March of near zero. The Americans were even denied permission to cut and use branches for cleaning their areas. With no proper bath areas, this was done at a spigot with a rag cloth in cold water. Toilet facilities were even worse for the 200 occupants crowded into this building. One toilet by day and night—outside areas forbidden after dark. Despite these deplorable conditions, they kept a military appearance with shaved faces and combed hair. (p. 270)

MORE DIRTY TRICKS

West of our compound was a French compound. We were surprised that they did not have formations outside for a count, and they looked well fed and wore good clothing. Each week we saw them moving about with what looked like an American Red Cross parcel under their arm. After a time we confirmed that it

was just that. Colonel Jones made inquiry about it and learned that one parcel per man was being issued to the French each week.

We immediately began making demands that we be included in the issue. They refused stating that they had no authority to divest the issue from the instructions of the Red Cross and that parcels had been received, stored, and ordered issued to the French. The Germans were sympathetic to our positions but listened to our complaints with complete resignation.

Finally, they agreed they would arrange a meeting between our representatives and the French. They had difficulty getting the French to meet with us and finally ordered them to do it. After every possible delay imaginable employed by the French, the conference finally took place. In spite of every plea our officers made, they flatly refused to allow us a single parcel. Even some pressures from the Germans were repulsed with indignation.

Until the end of the war, they continued to receive American parcels weekly! (p. 270)

THE BRITS ARRIVE

While spending another day trying to survive, the Americans heard marching and singing outside, as a British Royal Air Force unit came into view. After their gear was placed in vacant buildings, the two groups met for a general chat. Several days later, their commander met with Colonel Jones to exchange news and current situations. Noting that the Americans were on the verge of starvation, the British commander offered food in the form of bread as their current rations had carried them through.

'That afternoon we had a different outlook on life and a new admiration for the RAF. From our associations with these men came lasting friendships. They continued to share without complaint, and never was I to hear the mention of their sacrifice. We benefited immeasurably from their unselfishness.' (p. 271)

One of the men Ferguson journaled was Captain Ed Jackson, a navigator on a British bomber who was shot down in France. While working his way with the underground through France to Spain, he discovered, instead, that he had been delivered to Gestapo Headquarters in Paris.

From there he was sent to Fren Prison in Paris where he underwent all kinds of interrogation, accompanied by physical brutality and deprivation of food, water, and toilet facilities. Before Ed volunteered, he was a detective for Scotland Yard, and he

looked every inch of it. He was tall and angular. Arthur Conan Doyle had a man of Ed's statue in mind when he described Sherlock Holmes. His police training helped him in Gestapo interrogations and soon he was sent to a group of airmen captured while trying to escape. (pp. 271, 272)

There was no comity between the German Air Force and other branches of the German Armed Forces. Airmen took the attitude that flying was engaged in by a special group of professionals without regard to nationality. They would not allow airmen prisoners to be kept by any other department of the armed forces. Their prison camps were denominated as Luftlager, which was exclusively for enemy airmen.

This attitude was fortunate for Ed. The Luftwaffe had learned that British airmen were being held at Buckenwalde [Buchenwald]*and went to get them. When they arrived, the camp commander refused to deliver the British to the Luftlager. A bitter argument ensued and the Luftwaffe commander deployed his unit around the perimeter, announcing that he would attack unless the prisoners were immediately released to him. The camp commander relented and Ed* [with other members in the unit] *was transferred. Fifteen days before they arrived here, their camp was in danger of being overrun, so they were marched out and did not stop until they reached our camp at Luckenwalde.* (p. 272)

By the time the Americans occupied Luckenwalde, it was known to have incarcerated an estimated 20,000 prisoners within its encampment—many from other countries as well, including Norway, Poland and Russia. As a patient man and a good listener, Ferguson heard many stories about the actions of warring nations.

The terrible days of February gave way to March. Like a drowning man sinking for his last time, we suddenly without expectation were issued an American Red Cross parcel of food. Whether or not our contact with the French had anything to do with it we would not know, but in the first week of March, each man had enough food to sustain him for a time. We stretched the food as far as possible, but it could not last always. Its nutritional value gave us new energy and spiritual stimulation. We began to actively seek diversion from the constant thought of hunger. To a limited degree we began playing games that required no physical exertion. (p. 276)

The game was chess. The teams were composed of players from Norway, Poland, and the U.S. Ultimately a tournament commenced—the Americans losing to both but winning on another front, the battle of opportunity (p. 278)

Lawyers appear to possess "homing signals" toward other lawyers even in war. This talent was proven when a Norwegian lawyer, a Lt. Grebe of the Norwegian Army and a civilian lawyer in peacetime, was led to the barracks of Wilcox and Ferguson.

> *His practice there was specialized. He was one of the five Crown's appointed public defenders in the country and from what we could determine, he and the other four defended most persons charged with a crime. It was not a charitable arrangement, but his office was on the level of the prosecutor. We also understood that his appointment was for life.*
>
> *He was interested in the structure of the penal system in America, with particular concern about sentencing and incarceration. He felt that Norway would restructure its penal system after the war, and he wanted to have knowledge of other systems to draw on.*
>
> *He visited us on other occasions and Wilcox kept in touch with him after the war. Ironically, he was compelled to defend Quisling, the Norwegian traitor, whose activities partly caused his long imprisonment. Records show that Crebe defended him with ability and tenacity. Quisling was found guilty and executed.* (pp. 276, 277)

CHANGES ARE COMING

> *Although food was a constant problem, near the end of March* [1945] *the military situation was such that our morale was excitedly stimulated. The big raid on Potsdam was spectacular. It was night and after it began the roar was deafening even though we were approximately thirty miles away*. (p. 278)

Finding the doors secured, everyone including some guards, climbed out the windows and met on the parade grounds to cheer the Allied bombers. Small strips of aluminum foil often covered the ground—their purpose to disrupt German radar and range finding equipment.

> *Every day we watched the bombers as they came closer. First we saw only B-17 and large British aircraft with long range capabilities, but now we were seeing the B-25 and B-26. We could even see the string of bombs arch to the ground shortly after they were dropped. It was not long until we began seeing evidence of the attack on the East. At night time we could see explosion of their artillery missiles. Later we could hear it as they moved toward us*. (p. 278)

In early April, an American sergeant who was captured less than 10 K from their camp told the POWs his advance infantry had crossed the Elbe River and would liberate them within three or four hours. Time passed and this did not occur due to political reasons.

> *'The Yalta Conference gave Russia permission to capture Berlin—no American or British troops would proceed east of the Elba River.'* (p. 279)

Unwelcomed surprises continued. The Brits moved out, supposedly to board a train waiting at Luckenwalde, only to return several days later. The Americans also had orders to move out which never happened.

> *Both we and they* [American and Brits] *had been selected by the German High Command to be taken into the Bavarian Mountains where we would be held as hostages in the negotiations by members of the German hierarchy. It might have been successful but they waited too long. The Allies cut the railway and there was no way for them to get us* there. *Starting on Friday, April 14, 1945, the Russians were present and occupied the compound. Our celebration was somewhat sobered by the report that a large German force was concentrated immediately to the west and that in the event of a counter-attack we would be in the path. Although the camp was free of guards, we were by no means secure.* (p. 279)

Food became less of a major issue when the Russians started providing some meat and vegetables—with the Americans in charge of the kitchen. Unfortunately, Ferguson became ill again with fever, but after a few days felt better.

> *The news was that Berlin had been captured, and that Hitler was dead. But nothing was authenticated. The Russians were not news conscious, and we were not sure of the rumors. We were content to know that now we were free but could not quite understand why we were not immediately returned to American control.* (pp. 280, 281)

The day finally arrived when American ambulances arrived. According to men who knew Ferguson, he was a compassionate man who felt that others deserved to leave before his evacuation. Overruled [about staying behind] by Colonel Jones, Captain Clarence Ferguson, supported by two good friends, Lawyer Wilcox and Lt. Braddock, supported him to a medical tent where a doctor told an orderly to move Ferguson onto a stretcher. A difference of opinion occurred between the doctor and Ferguson, with the decision that he would go with the proviso that he skip the stretcher, thus making room for three more men. Braddock was also sent because he had been shot in the

center of his chest—the bullet going straight through—leaving him in constant pain. (p. 282)

> *I could literally feel that phrase of the day's last bugle call, "All is well safely done. God is nigh." We continued to roll through the bright afternoon. At times I registered the passing of a destroyed village but gradually those conscious recognitions became farther and farther apart. There must have been a glorious sunset on our journey, but I didn't know it.* (p. 283)

The ambulance stopped at the entrance of a long tent. Orderlies opened the doors and Ferguson was helped inside. Food was offered to all; he chose an orange—'*the first citrus I had eaten in over two years.'* By morning he was hungry and ate with enjoyment. Eleven ambulances were called into service and Ferguson remembers being able to sit up and enjoy the trip. Later they arrived at another tent-city hospital which was located next to an airstrip.

Well cared for within the temporary hospital, Braddock, Ferguson and the other evacuees were loaded onto a C-47 bound for Paris, the pilot easy-going and friendly. Taking them low to the ground for aerial sightseeing, he then landed the plane at La Bourget Airport, taxied in and opened the door for them to depart. On arrival, they presented themselves in a combination of various uniforms. Ferguson wore GI enlisted men's trousers, a gabardine army officer's shirt, a British battle jacket and carried an English overcoat. Driven across Paris, they arrived at a large hospital in a residential section. The American hospital commander and staff welcomed them warmly and shook their hands, each in a personal way. (p. 286)

> *We had our bath and each with an assigned orderly appeared in the dining hall dressed in now clean pajamas and robe. We formed a chow line and marched past the serving table. We had roast beef, mashed potatoes, salad, jello and other delicacies we had dreamed about these past years. If you did not stop them, the servers would give you a double serving.*
>
> *After the meal we were shepherded to the ward we would occupy. It was a large room with plenty of space and American hospitals beds made with white sheets and pillow cases. One cannot imagine the appreciation of sleeping on a good mattress with clean sheets and fluffy pillows unless he has been denied them for three or more years.* (p. 286)

Nurses gave their full attention to the men and accompanied them for walks within the ward and hallways which contained windows on the street side.

> *On the night the radio announced the Germans had capitulated, I was awake about three o'clock in the morning. I walked into the*

> *hallway where a nurse was at a window looking out. When I joined her, she pointed toward the street below. A man and woman were dancing on the payment.* (p. 287)

> *On VE day Braddock and I went up on Champs Elysees and sat under the shade trees and watched the celebration. We were in sight of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Parades formed and moved down the Champs Elysees toward the Palace de Concorde. They were not organized in any systematic order, more or less impromptu where a group gathered and usually walked down the street. No vehicular traffic nor horses were allowed except wheel chairs and carts drawn by men.* (p. 287)

Ferguson continued to recall others who participated in this time of renewal—some had obviously suffered ill treatment, some were dressed in the striped clothes of prisoner garb, and all, whatever their circumstances—were celebrating. One was an American, known by his clothes as a former POW, and he was kissing every female! (p. 288)

Given thorough examinations by doctors at the hospital, the men learned that malnutrition was the main issue among all POWs. Ferguson was offered a six-months treatment for malaria, but he would have to remain at the hospital and decided after hearing these options that returning home with food, rest, and family were the best medicines for him. As strength returned, he was also able to visit Notre Dame and the Tomb of Napoleon:

> 'I *was much impressed with the cathedral, its traditions, its artifacts, and the knowledge of its meaning to the French people. The simplicity of its audience rooms created an atmosphere of timelessness.'* (p. 288)

HOMEWARD BOUND

A train trip from Paris delivered them to first to Le Harve, France, then to Camp Lucky Strike, a major departure point for many Americans. After seeing and saying good-bye to many friends, some proceeding other directions, Ferguson boarded one of the many Liberty Ships going to the U.S. The trip through the North Sea was uneventful except for an iceberg field, the possibility of being in the sights of German submarines who had not surrendered, and the fact that the war in with Japan was still ongoing. Called on deck, Ferguson focused on a non-mistakable home signal. (p. 290)

> *As we stepped from the hatch onto the main deck, he* [Robinson] *pointed toward the bow of the ship. Just over the bow and on the horizon, I saw the torch and half of the extended arm of the Statue of Liberty. She looked as if she were emerging from the blue*

> *waters of the Atlantic. My heart skipped a beat and I gulped deep breaths to stabilize my emotions.*
> *The sensations I had experienced at seeing the American Sentry on the West bank of the Elbe River returned. Only this time I was able to enjoy it. Our ship was sailing toward it and as we looked and waited the ocean receded. Her crown and upper were next and as we waited my emotions swelled and swelled—*HOME HOME! *As my sight bleared and my thoughts pounded these words:*
> *"My Country tis of thee,*
> *Sweet land of liberty,*
> *I was unashamed that my face was wet with tears. This land I love. We were returning emaciated, war-weary and broken but the despot who would have enslaved it has been destroyed, and in its beautiful countryside we will rest and recuperate.* (pp. 290, 291)

Other ships joined our homecoming including fire boats with their powerful pumps at full blast spraying streams of water high into the air as we dropped anchor. Taken by train to Camp Joyce Kilmer for the night, each person was given a five-minute phone call. When Ferguson's time came he could only say, '*This is Clarence.*' Fortunately, Josephine understood his joyful but apprehensive greeting and said plainly, "*Everyone here is all right.*" He could now relax—the tension gone.

Their next train ride stopped in Saint Louis for a change of trains with much better accommodations than the first one. By the next afternoon they switched onto a siding north of Fort Worth until clearance was given through its yards. Ferguson slept through the night and the next morning found them at Fort Sam Houston at a station within the military reservation. An officer met them, assisted them with the out-processing, and sent them off with a "*Good Luck.*" Another train ride and he was finally home. (p. 292)

> *Almost five years ago on this very time in the morning* [4 AM] *I had kissed Josephine and Jon good-by here and gone away to the army with no one seeming to know I had been gone.*
>
> *I sat my barracks bag down and stood for a moment, giving thought as to what I was going to do. As my eyes adjusted, I saw a car parked on the unlighted street south of the depot. I looked and saw the door open slowly and someone emerge from it. At first they walked hesitatingly in my direction, then the steps became more decisive. Suddenly she was running, and I, too, was running. It was Josephine.*
>
> *Our words were unintelligible before we met, but our embrace spoke our feelings. Finally I said, 'How did you know I'd be here?'*

"I've met every train, day and night, since you called. I knew you would be on one of them.

"As we stood in the semi-darkness of our town with no sounds louder than the beating of our own hearts, she quietly said, "Let's go home." (pp. 292 – 293)

JUDGE FERGUSON: A RESPECTED MAN OF CONTINUED SERVICE

Commencing with Ferguson's forty-five-day furlough in which he reconnected with family and friends, he began then to receive and make inquiries concerning the possibility of public service, having been in the legal realm as a licensed lawyer. This began in 1946 with his election to the office of County Judge of Limestone County, Texas, where he served until 1952. His next judicial appointment by Governor Allen Shivers was as Judge of the 77th Judicial District of Texas where he served until active retirement in1987. He also served as Juvenile Judge for Limestone County.

Clarence Ferguson's extraordinary endowments of memory and eloquent expression acquired while practicing law before and after World War II imbued him with a strong sense of justice and conduct during his long life of service. These qualities for which he was known and admired continued throughout his days on the bench and beyond. He truly was a man for all seasons in the name of justice.

A MEANINGFUL GESTURE BETWEEN TWO FRIENDS

Early in the book as Ferguson was outlining operations orders for the Salerno Invasion, he and another officer, Captain Milton Henry Steffen, shared a difference of opinion about the loading of troops and equipment in the quay. Later, they met again, each apologizing and as Ferguson turns to leave, Steffen said,

"*Captain Ferguson, I have something to give you. It's just a little gift to express appreciation for our good friendship these years we've been together." With that, he handed me a pocket knife. I recognized it as his own. I had seen him use it on many occasions. It was a rather a large knife, commonly used by farmers and cattlemen, but it had been well cared for. Anyone would enjoy owning it, and it particularly practical for use in our everyday duties.*

Ferguson replied, '*Steffen, 'I can't accept your knife, you'll need it. I sure do appreciate it, though, but I just can't take it.'*

"I have another one and I really want you to have this one."

I was shaken by this act of kindness and sincerity. After three years of the hardest combat training the army can give, you come to the conclusion there is little emotion and sentimentality left. It was one of the most appreciated gifts I ever received. As I walked away, he knew I recognized that no more meaningful expression of friendship was possible. I never had another conversation with Steffen and saw him only briefly during the battle later, but I kept that knife throughout the war and used it in ways neither of us would ever expect. (Ferguson, pp. 8,9)

After Ferguson was a POW, he read a German newspaper account, "American Major Has Great Fear of German Army", which mentioned Steffen.

The story contained the contents of a note found in Major Milton Steffen's pocket at the time of his capture in a battle at the Rapido River crossing. Steffen was evidently keeping a diary by scribbling notations on small pieces of paper about specific events he wanted to remember. The Germans evidently found only a note which I am sure he intended to deposit with others he probably kept at his headquarters. In it he said that he had received orders for another attack across the Rapido and that he had fears about its success. He was sad about the numerous casualties in previous attempts to cross the river and that this attack had little chance of success. He concluded his note by saying that he had a premonition that he would become a casualty; but without regard to his feelings, he would lead his battalion across the river at dawn. The news item concluded in one of the sophistries so typical of German propaganda in an ad-lib stating that the major had no cause to be afraid any more. He was now in the protection of the German army where there was no fear.

He was dead before the article was written.

Prophetically the note enumerated exactly what did happen to his unit resulting in disaster. Not enough of his battalion got back across the river to form more than one platoon of men. In him, one of America's greatest field soldiers, mangled beyond belief, was evacuated to the rear where he died and was buried in a little Italian cemetery without ceremony or notable recognition of his passing.

Ironically, he was the first generation of immigrants coming to this country for a more abundant life. He had worked his way through college and before assuming his civilian profession, had volunteered to defend the country he loved so much. I have never

known nor have I ever seen a better soldier, and yet propagandized by descendants of his progenitors as a weakling on the field of battle.

I reached into my pocket and retrieved the knife he had given me in what seemed to be a long time ago on the quay in North Africa. Not all of him was buried in that Italian countryside. A portion of his warmth remained with his gift; and as I held it, I recognized that the twinkle of an eye, the grasp of a handshake, the communication of a smile is immortal. (pp. 187, 188)

The permanent gravesite for Major Milton Henry Steffen is located at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio, Texas. His decorations include the Purple Heart, the Silver Star twice and the Legion of Merit for his exceptional service.

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers