

Dr. James T. Godfrey, Jr.

1915 – 1998

EARLY YEARS

James Godfrey was a native son of Texas, born in McKinney on 5 July 1915 to James T. Godfrey and Maude Moore Godfrey. Jim was raised in modest circumstances, worked innumerable part-time jobs as a young man, was a voracious reader and graduated from McAlester High School as Class President. He worked his way through undergraduate school at Baylor and LSU and recalled a memorable summer spent on a dredge plying the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Memphis. From his journal in 1934: *“The puffing of the ferryboat and the incessant croaking of the frogs mingled with the crickets’ voices and the whir of a lone mosquito, the persistent barking of a dog on the western shore, the swish-swash of the waves breaking against the hull-nocturne of the river.”* That same year he also hitchhiked 1700 miles to the Chicago World’s Fair and back in 10 days.

Godfrey enrolled in the University of Oklahoma Medical School in 1936 and graduated in 1938. Internship and residency requirements were completed in Washington D.C. at Sibley Memorial Hospital—the only hospital which mentioned a monthly stipend in its brochure—and where he met his future wife, Nathalie McClinton Hatton. They became engaged in 1940 and in a demonstration of his sincere regard and love for her, he sold his blood to pay for her Easter corsage and joined the Army Reserves in January 1941 in order to earn money towards the payment of her engagement ring.

The Pearl Harbor attack impacted their wedding plans, which took place on 20 December 1941, as rationing of gasoline and foods prevented either set of parents from attending. Fortunately, two of Nathalie’s sisters lived in the area and were present at the ceremony. Other than brief leaves from training and maneuvers in North Carolina and Georgia over the next few months, they would not be reunited until July 1945.

DEPLOYMENT AND AFRICA CAMPAIGN

Deployment orders changed the Godfrey’s Valentine’s Day plans on 14 February 1942. According to Kay’s notes, *“They exchanged cards and Daddy took his when he left the apartment. He was being shipped out that day but did not want to upset Mother, so he didn’t tell her before he left.”* Northern Ireland was the first target, then Scotland for additional training, where he shipped home an army footlocker containing, among other items, Irish linens and a Scottish mohair blanket. On 26 October aboard the *H.M.T. Awatea*, they crossed the Atlantic to Algiers in November 1942. He was assigned to the 109th Medical Detachment, 34th Infantry Division.

As they neared the Algerian coast, Dr. Godfrey noted the loud and violent actions of war, both Allied and German armies fully engaged. Once ashore, observations of his duties as a medical officer in a foreign land punctuated his writings below. Wounded and deceased men, ambulances and staff, chaos and actions under fire became his constant companions.

None of us can speak any fluent French; it is clear that we must learn some of the language if we are to remain here for any time to communicate with these people. The people in Algeria are very enthusiastic now, very demonstrative, those from France, very grateful that we are here. Americans are popular, the British are not.

Litter bearers from my section whom I had sent over another route to service a rifle company turned up in the early evening; they had been the first Americans in that area, no rifle company was in evidence. Our medical unit, as litter bearers and ambulance sections, was completely superfluous because battalion aid men dressed wounds on the spot and rushed casualties directly to the clearing station by jeep or truck or weapons carriers. Troops moved up from the beaches on commandeered vans, trucks, civilian vehicles. Our military transport was virtually nil, communications impotent. There was nothing we could do as our ambulances had not appeared. I let my men turn in for some rest with blankets and litters on a cut in a hillside screened by some large cacti.

There are American infantrymen, German airmen, Italian submarine crewmen, and French soldiers in the military hospital. Bodies are washing ashore. The Nazi, it is reported, have dispatched more regiments by air transport from Italy while Rommel allegedly continues to retreat across Libya from Montgomery, his Army reportedly in shambles.

November 19 – Ordered to Blida (picturesque, oriental, lying at the foot of the great Tell Atlas range) by battalion surgeon yesterday to set up dispensary for company and detachments guarding airport and Boufarik radio station. Much larger field than I expected, big two-story barracks all concrete, good lighting, comfortable beds, lavatory in my private room, showers, congenial group of officers.

The clearing platoon and the British 159th Ambulance have taken over the large modern Mustapha Civilian Hospital. Casualties still arrive, some from ships, some from the airport, where bombing has been going on and some crash landings have been made.

We have been informed that the hundreds of ships which sailed from both Great Britain and the States to Morocco and Dakar and Oran and Algiers for the invasion of North Africa constituted the largest armada in history.

We know of course that this record lasted only until the inevitable massive Allied onslaught against Nazi-occupied Europe. (Godfrey, pp. 2,4,5,7)

Early in January 1943, Godfrey managed to have dinner at the Hotel St. George and experienced the following scenes:

Darryl Zanuck, the Twentieth Century-Fox magnate, was among the diners and was doing his patriotic thing as a civilian consultant to the military filming and photography section with a striking Hollywood blonde on each arm—'secretaries' of course. Leaving the dining room, I noticed through an open doorway to an anteroom shelves lined with leatherbound books. On entering the room to examine them, I was startled to encounter General Eisenhower, all alone, pacing slowly with a perturbed preoccupied manner, so I simply saluted and withdrew.

Godfrey continues his observations about the devastating actions occurring on February 14, 1943.

A powerful two-pronged offensive suddenly took us by storm through Faid Pass. No warning, no intelligence by our people: Eisenhower was here in the area yesterday and fortunately returned last night to the rear before this total debacle. In the early morning a very heavy incessant artillery barrage began, under cover of which Mark IV's (medium tanks) and Panzer units moved up swiftly from Faid Pass and Maknassy. The German 88 mm. guns are deadly, long-barreled and almost as accurate as a rifle.

Flights of Stukas and Messerschmitts arrived at clocked intervals, bombing and strafing our small contingents of tanks, artillery, vehicles, and men, although it seemed our medical stations and ambulances, all clearly marked with the red cross, were conspicuously avoided as far as possible in the overwhelming assault. We sent out litter-bearers to pick up the dead and wounded. One ambulance got away with patients, strangely and tragically another was bombed and strafed on the road. No communication reached us from C.T. and we were unable to establish any contact. (Godfrey, pp. 10,11)

CAPTURED

At 4:30 p.m. enemy tanks, armored troop-carriers, and reconnaissance cars rolled into our area. Our entire medical company was captured, with the exception of a few who had returned to the rear with our supply trucks. The German enlisted

men and Arabs went in for wholesale looting. The German officers, where there were such, reduced it to a minimum. Our command car, in which were most of my personal possessions, was driven off immediately, but I was able to persuade an officer who spoke a little English to allow me to fetch my Val-pak [personal luggage] from the trailer and then our officers, four of us, were taken to Sidi Bou Zid on a German truck. Captain Corcoran, Captain Gallo, Captain White of a tank outfit, Warrant Officer Knapp, and I were placed in one of our ambulances after being searched and warned that we would be shot should we make any move to escape. (Godfrey, p. 11)

Concerning the Val-pak, Howard Randolph Holder's book, *Escape to Russia*, includes the following account of Americans helping one another:

When we left the city limits [of Tunis], we noticed an American officer, who was trying to carry a Val-pak, straggling farther and farther behind the column. We debated a little about going back and helping him, but since the guard who was staying back with him was getting a little impatient, we [Holder and George Durgin] decided to go back and help him. We also noticed that he was a doctor who had been captured complete with ambulance and that was why he had his Val-pak, so that made us feel better about helping him. Back we went. Doc, Captain James Godfrey, said that he was not about to leave his belongings for the Germans to use even if they killed him. So he was just letting the German guard stew about his falling back. Four of us took turns carrying the Val-pak, and a heavier one I've never seen or carried.

When we finally arrived at the airport, I had blisters on both of my heels from walking at an angle, leaning out from the person carrying the other end. Later George and I were very glad that we helped Doc, because he gave both of us some much-needed articles of clothing when we reached our first camp. (Holder, pp. 9-10)

Dazed and feeling "incredulous" that they were indeed prisoners of war of the German Army, they were driven away as a German officer covered them with an automatic weapon. The driver, unfamiliar with this vehicle and ignoring blackout restrictions, lost control, causing the ambulance to roll over repeatedly. All inside received mostly minor injuries, [Godfrey reported a head wound] except for Captain Gallo who suffered a broken right clavicle and was left at a German field hospital. Godfrey and the others were taken to Bou Thaid for the night. Successive trips included a camp near Faid, then Sousse. Some nourishment was offered at each stage.

Taken by truck to Tunis, they were kept in a requisitioned school building on February 17th and 18th, where they faced more searches and interrogation, resulting in answers of only names, ranks and serial numbers. Fortunately, no abuse or indignity was used as they were questioned for intelligence. Confiscation became a primary focus for their captors including US Army

watches and Godfrey's personal watch. He recalled that the Afrika Korps were (by and large) courteous and considerate. The French Red Cross supplied the hungry men with macaroni, bread, fruit, wine, and some canned food for their trip to Italy and in appreciation, French francs were offered by the Americans.

On 19 February, the group of four was marched ten miles to the Tunis airport. Dr. Godfrey recalled the hot weather and the presence of multiple fighter aircraft and transport planes. Boarding a JV-52 with thirteen other American officers, a crew of five and guards, they crossed the Mediterranean in about three hours, over Capri and Vesuvius to Naples. He counted as many as fifty aircraft during the flight, making their transport a sitting duck for any Spitfires from Malta in the area.

Later, Godfrey reflected on this "*incontrovertible fact*": "*Our poorly prepared, poorly informed, poorly trained, untried, inexperienced novice forces had been a piece of cake for Rommel's battle-wise, desert-tough, efficient veterans.*"

During the trip through Naples in open trucks, the weary American prisoners endured thrown rocks, spit, curses and jeers, finally arriving at the camp at Capua.

The appearance of the enclosed retaining area was typical of its cinematic counterpart, surrounded by a tall hedge of barbed wire, searchlights and guard towers at each corner, with patrolling armed guards. Each of us was issued two blankets and we slept on the ground under a little flimsy canvas. A few Americans and some British have been here for a week, subsisting on tea for breakfast, cauliflower tops at noon, rice in the evening, with a small portion of bread daily and a bit of meat once a week.
(Godfrey, p. 13)

Fortunately, The British Red Cross, through a Swiss agent, tried to provide one box per two men twice a week and this was much appreciated. Spoons and clean cans were in short supply—many shared both. The most prevalent topics were food and the barter system. Other amenities included the delousing chamber, hot shower and steamed clothes. Men who needed replacements were issued British military trousers and shirts. American officers were quartered separately from the British. As of 1 March, Godfrey stated that the camp presently contained about 1600 men with the following conditions unacceptable: "*congestion extreme, latrines totally inadequate, terrible sanitation, gastrointestinal disease spreading*", all resulting in bare existence levels and troubling concerns for a trained medical officer.

Revenge against Arabs who looted and spied for the Germans and Italians who stripped Americans of everything they carried became daily topics. Negative remarks about American lack of air support and general inefficiency in the effective use of personnel and equipment were rampant. A singular positive note concerned the appearance of the Catholic priest, "*who brought us form messages to sign when we arrived here, notifying us that they have been passed by the German censor and broadcast to Washington from the*

Vatican so our families should soon know that we are still among the living.”
(Godfrey, p.15)

The declaration below was sent from the following authority:

February 21st ..No.1

Segreteria di State – Ufficio Informazioni – Citta del Vaticano

Secretary of State To His Holiness

Sender (Lieutenant) James T. Godfrey, Jr.

Rank First Lieutenant No. 0-412924

Camp No. 60 Military Post 3400

Address Mrs. James T. Godfrey, Jr.

Street 2427 Monroe, N.E.

Town Washington, D.C.

Country United States of America

Message (25 words)

Safe and sound in a Transit Camp in Italy Letters following. Love Jim

The last day and night in this camp were wretched, a constant powerful cold north wind whipped us with dust, dirt, sand, debris, leveling all but a few tents. That night hundreds of men lay in the ditches, under sections of canvas on the ground, and even huddled in the filthy latrines, seeking some shelter from the blast. There were 2800 men in our camp when we left. Friday afternoon, March 5th, about 130 officers and 1000 enlisted men were marched to the railway station at neighboring Capua and boarded the train for Germany. I was fortunate to be placed with some other officers in a coach; about half the officers and all the enlisted men were jammed into box cars which were very cold, with only one small window, hard rough wooden seats, and only one bucket latrine.

Our coach was warm, clean, had cushion seats, open view on both sides, and a sanitary latrine commode. For the journey we were issued three-quarters of a loaf of sour bread apiece and one can of bully beef for three men with one Red Cross parcel for every two men. On these rations we ate rather royally for the two-day trip. Our itinerary took us through Florence, Bologna, Verona, and Trento Italy, through the Brenner Pass into Bavaria to Munich. One Texas Second Lieutenant, foolhardy but determined to escape, dropped through a window and escaped but was later caught. The Alps were fully as majestic as I had always imagined them to be, the section of Austria which we traversed was blanketed with

snow. The evergreen-covered hills of Bavaria were breathtaking in white. (Godfrey, pp. 15-16)

The train arrived at Stalag VII-A near Munich at Moosburg on a Sunday afternoon. Known as a “model”, it housed the following nationalities: French, Polish, Czechs, Yugoslavs, Russians, Australians, Canadians, British, and now Americans. “*Approximately 5000 live inside the camp and roughly 190,000 are attached administratively but live outside in work details.*” German guards who were able to communicate with the Americans expressed their fear of the Russians, describing them as “*barbaric, cruel, crazy, usually dying rather than being captured and nearly always killing rather than capturing Germans who offer to surrender.*” Dr. Godfrey notes an ironic twist description of the cruel natured treatment of Russian POWs in German hands.

OFLAG 64

Dr. Godfrey arrived at Oflag 64 on 9 June 1943. After being processed and vetted, he was assigned to doctors’ quarters and became immersed into the Kriegy way-of-camp-life with all of its challenges and acts of comradeship. He and his wife, Nathalie, exchanged letters and parcels when permitted, including candy bars and books for Jim.

The following letters represent a sample written by Dr. Godfrey to his wife, Nathalie, while he was a prisoner of war.

May 29, 1943

Having finished their active part in this war, the officers in my room insist on re-fighting the Civil War every day, the North and South being fairly evenly-and-noisily-represented.

June 13, 1943

The Russians—a number of temporary orderlies—are singing outside, strange, mournful, stirring melodies in their exotic language. Music seems to flow from them as naturally as speech, and they sing from the heart. Last night one of them asked us (in French) to reciprocate, so we gave with God Bless America and You Are My Sunshine. There are only American officers in this camp and it will take some time to form a smoothly functioning organization in our little community. Tonight, when church services were announced, the German Commandant warned us that the chapel is holy ground and we should not therefore attempt escape while there... We have a hospital with fair facilities. Ten of us have quarters in it—eight doctors, one dentist, and one chaplain. We are quite well off as far as physical comforts are concerned. There will be further delay in our mail now, but I have been enjoying last year’s letters, beloved. Jim

November 11th, 1943

I have been transferred to Stalag VIIA and have been unable to write until now. They have placed me in charge of a ward of American, British, and Indian patients. Happily, just before leaving Oflag 64 my third parcel arrived. I continue in chronic good health and pray that you do too, my dearest. Jim

Dr. Godfrey's last camp assignment before VE Day was Wollstein Lazarette [Hospital]. He was in charge of a ward there for sick and wounded soldiers.

January 21st, 1944

I was with Lt. Col. Waters at Tunis, Capua, and Oflag 64. His wife may be pleased to know that we have only admiration for him; he's a man's man.

September 6th, 1944

Lt. Col. Waters told me last night that his wife had written about your being out at his place.

(General Patton's daughter was married to Lt. Col. Waters and lived in Washington, D.C. also. Mother told me that Mrs. Waters invited the wives of officer POWs from the area to her home and updated them on anything she could regarding the POWs. I met one of Lt. Col. Waters' sons (grandson of General Patton) and his wife, Martha, at the Oflag 64 Reunion in New Orleans, Louisiana in 2015. I told him my Mother had been to his home and probably had met him when he was a young boy. Talk about a small world! – Kay Godfrey Cruise)

The following message was sent to Mrs. Godfrey at their Washington, D.C. address. Published date was not readable.

My darling, I hope to reach you before this letter does, but if it should not pan out this way, at least you will know I am coming.

The Russians took me off the Germans' hands 26 January [1945] and since then I have been working a circuitous route toward you and trying to believe that I am actually free again. I am quite well, my dearest, and I pray that you are, too. I do not know, of course, precisely what the powers that be will do with me but, on the other hand, that does not worry me in the least as long as I can come once more to you, my beloved. Jim

WESTERN UNION MESSAGE

1945 MAR AM 7:59

I AM PLEASED TO INFORM YOU REPORT RECEIVED FROM UNITED STATES MILITARY MISSION IN MOSCOW STATES YOUR HUSBAND FIRST

LIEUTENANT JAMES T GODFREY JR PREVIOUSLY REPORTED A PRISONER OF WAR HAS BEEN RELEASED FROM A GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMP THE WAR DEPARTMENT INVITES SUBMISSION OF A MESSAGE NOT TO EXCEED TWENTY FIVE WORDS FOR ATTEMPTED DELIVERY TO HIM MESSAGE SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO CASUALTY BRANCH AGO ROOM TWENTY FIVE NAUGHT NINE MUNITIONS BUILDING FURTHER INFORMATION WILL BE FURNISHED WHEN RECEIVED=

THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

In addition to his expertise as a medical doctor, Dr. Godfrey had also participated in a vital top-secret project. His primary source paper gives specific details about this very secret coding operation.

A dozen of us were taught a code by a regular army colonel by means of which we could transmit and receive certain information to and from intelligence in the U.S. in our occasional letters. Decoding a message was relatively easy but encoding one to send out was extremely tedious because the context had to appear innocuous and sensible and yet contain the necessary words to impart the desired information. My personal signal denoting a code letter was a closed-top numeral four (4) in the date, as 1943 or 1944. In ordinary correspondence I used the ordinary "4" and this ploy was never noted by the German censors who checked all mail. One letter I received notified me to break open a cribbage board which would arrive as a gift parcel, which unlike many other such parcels did eventually come in. The cribbage board contained an onionskin map of East Germany and Western Poland and the North Coast, a compass, and German currency, which one of our German-speaking officers would well utilize if he were able to escape and obtain some civilian clothing. (Godfrey, pp. 18-19)

For years after the end of the war and whenever former Oflag 64 Kriegies gathered, they expressed a sense of pride in the knowledge that searches conducted by Gestapo and German prison guards never discovered the tunnel being dug from beneath one of the barracks with spoons, tin cans, and bare hands; nor did they find the crystal-set radio concealed in another building, which enabled them to receive BBC broadcasts, affording them information of events, including the D-Day invasion, even before the German guards were aware that they existed.

DR. GODFREY'S PERSONAL SUMMATION

Itinerary of the 38-month "grand tour" with 25 months under involuntary armed escort (February 1942 to April 1945.)

Voyage in convoy from New York to Belfast via Nova Scotia and North Atlantic, Kilrea, Londonderry, Giant's Causeway, Eniskillen,

by ship to Glasgow, Scotland from Belfast, Loch Lomond, Inveraray for amphibious training, from Glasgow by naval convoy through eastern Atlantic to Mediterranean, past Gibraltar and Tangier to D-Day landing outside Algiers, Cheraga, Blida, Boufarik, brief visit over border to Morocco, back to Algiers and by motor convoy to Tebessa, Sidi Bou Zid, and Faid Pass for battle and capture by Rommel's Afrika Corps, to Sousse and Tunis and by air over the Mediterranean to Naples Italy, Capua, Verona, and through Brenner Pass in the Alps by train to Moosburg near Munich, Stalag VIIA to Rotenburg to British Oflag IX AZ, by train across Germany to Altburgund (Schubin) Poland, Oflag 64 (XXI B), Bromberg, Berlin, Leipzig back to Moosburg by train to work with P.O.W. sick and wounded, back to Poland Oflag 64, to Wollstein Poland to care for sick prisoners.

Russian Army "liberated" us February 27, 1945, by cattle car across Poland and Russia through Warsaw and Brest-Litovsk to Odessa [where he attended a Russian ballet] on the Black Sea, by British vessel through Dardanelles past Istanbul to Naples, visit to Pompeii, by American ship to Boston and HOME!!

CIVILIAN LIFE

Following the war, Dr. and Mrs. Godfrey moved to Ardmore, Oklahoma to care for his widowed mother. He entered private practice as a generalist and was recognized as a pioneer in providing medical care to indigent families in the South Oklahoma region. In 1959, he chose to enter the psychiatric field and moved to Cherokee, Iowa, to serve his residency in Psychiatry. Later he was the Administrator of the Mental Health Institute in Mexico, Missouri and in the capacity of expert witness for a medical services group in Bluefield, West Virginia. Dr. Godfrey relocated to Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 1972 to work in the Veterans' Administration, providing psychiatric assistance to fellow Veterans until his retirement. During their 56 years of marriage, Jim and Nathalie completed their family with three children: Kathleen Moore Godfrey (Cruise), Jean Godfrey (Block) and Brant Hatton Godfrey.

FINAL RECALL

Upon Oflag 64's liberation by the Russian Army, a young American Lieutenant Colonel approached Dr. Godfrey and demanded that all ambulatory patients be released so that they could march with the Lt. Colonel to Berlin. Dr. Godfrey, incredulous that this officer would endanger the lives of men who had survived to this point of near freedom for personal glory, asked if the Lt. Colonel was serious. Indeed, he was. Dr. Godfrey informed the man that all

these men were still under his care, including the Lt. Colonel, and hence under his command, and he would not comply with the Lt. Colonel's order, as Dr. Godfrey was not his subordinate under these circumstances. The Lt. Colonel stated that he was a friend of Eisenhower's, had many friends in high places, and would see to it that Dr. Godfrey was made subject to a Board of Inquiry. This in fact happened on his return to the U.S. The members of the JAG's Board questioned Dr. Godfrey regarding the incident and his understanding of protocol, to which he responded he had not read the book and simply used his common sense. Dr. Godfrey was commended for his actions and given a promotion to Captain as a result. Regret was extended that the rules could not be broken to reward Godfrey with the rank of Major.

A final reminder of the cruelty of war made a lasting and heart-rending impression. Dr. Godfrey had cared for many Russian POW's in nearby Stalags throughout his imprisonment, and had made close friendships with a number of them. As a token of their appreciation, they created from sardine tins, wooden boxes and Lucite scraps, works of art to be used as cigarette boxes which were decorated with scenes of the Moscow skyline, Mother Russia and similar decorations hand stenciled and carved, with Dr. Godfrey's initials included. Dr. Godfrey was stunned and dismayed to see these young men, who he had nursed to health during captivity, executed by their own Army on their "liberation" as penalty for having been captured. – Brant H. Godfrey, son of James T. Godfrey, Jr.

This was the Stalin policy that Russians should die rather than surrender, taking their malnourished and emaciated tuberculous comrades who were POWs, lining them up in their air raid trenches, and murdering them with their automatic weapons en masse before heading West for Berlin, their Commandant calmly stating that for every Russian killed by the Germans on their way to Stalingrad, five Germans would be killed by the Russians on their march to Berlin. I had no doubt. – Dr. James T. Godfrey, Jr.

SOURCES

Dr. Godfrey's paper: *Random Jottings Overseas In World War II Primarily Concerning Invasion and Occupation of North Africa and Early Prisoner-of-War Days by James T. Godfrey, M.D., U.S. Army Medical Corps;*

Dr. Godfrey's oral recording regarding impressions of war experiences in Africa

A passage from Howard Holder's book, *Escape to Russia*; personal correspondence and public documents;

Additions submitted by the children of Dr. and Mrs. Godfrey, Kay Godfrey Cruise and Brant Hatton Godfrey, whose assistance and research have added greatly to the depth and historical significance of their father's biography.

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers