

2LT Herman Littman

1919 – 2017

BACKGROUND

Herman Littman's birth occurred on May 29, 1919 in Chicago, Illinois, to Abraham and Millie Littman. Encouraged to pursue educational opportunities, Herman attended the Art Institute of Chicago in 1939 prior to enlisting in the US Army. Determined to seek additional college-level courses, he later graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in psychology and completed his post-graduate Masters at Eastern Washington State, Cheney, Washington.

Marriage to Lucille Whatley of Sylacauga, Alabama, occurred in February 1942 and shortly after their ceremony, Herman was shipped overseas with the US Army, 82nd Airborne Division as a paratrooper.

An article appearing in *The Spokesman-Review* on September 6, 2001, by Doug Claric included these details:

For Littman, the paratrooper, the story began one July day in 1943. He was hit in the knee while attacking the enemy stronghold prior to the invasion of Italy.

Littman was one of the lucky ones. Of his platoon of "25 or 30 men, he was one of the three men who survived. 'Next thing I knew I was on a stretcher.'"

In a bazaar twist of fate, Herman would later see his kid brother, Ralph, both as POWs.

OFLAG 64

Eventually, Littman became a prisoner at Oflag 64 and according to the article, gave major credit to Colonel Drake, "a hardened WWI vet", the American SAO (Senior American Officer) for enforcing military discipline while serving as an exemplary example of leadership versus chaos and fear when in enemy hands. It was said that Drake's bearing was so complete that he even intimidated the German camp Kommandant.

Herman also had a reputation for being strong, but in a physical way, as noted in Howard Randolph Holder's book, *ESCAPE TO RUSSIA*.

Weight lifting was also a sport at Oflag 64, and this group was called the "big muscle operators" by the less hardy. I fooled around with it a bit, but I'm afraid I was a bit too lazy to take it up seriously, although I did learn a few of the fundamentals. George [Durgin] stayed away from this type of exercise too. It looked too much like real work. There were bar bells around Oflag 64 weighing as much as 190 pounds, which were being thrown around by the enthusiasts, led by Lt. Herman Littman from

Chicago, Illinois, as if they were toothpicks. One of the funniest things I ever saw behind the barbed wire was when the leader of the Goons security team, the "Ferret", tried to lift one of the larger bar bells. He puffed and pulled, but the bell didn't budge off the floor. Then Herman, who was standing nearby, took hold of it with one hand and quickly pushed it high over his head. The Ferret walked away slowly, talking to himself. These bar bells were all homemade, of course, and were made with a length of pipe for a handle. For the weights, mortar was mixed and poured into a couple of large cans to harden. These were fixed with holes in them so they would slip on and off over the pipe and could thus be changed for lighter or heavier weights as desired. [p. 127]

In January 1945, constant reports of Russian intervention into their area propelled Oberst Schneider, the camp Kommandant, to announce immediate camp abandonment.

Frantic gatherings of survival gear and possessions saw the kriegies of Oflag 64 standing in the extremely frigid morning on January 21 for the beginning of what became known as The Long March—a 350-mile overland, hazardous trek. Led by Oberst Schneider, they exited the gate, eventually becoming single-file marchers which stretched more than a mile long on slick, icy roads.

For most, it was the longest nightmare of their lives—sleeping in unheated barns, eating whatever could be found and surviving each day with thoughts of survival, home and family. They became another group of refugees fleeing invading armies, not knowing what lay ahead.

At some point during the terrible ordeal, Littman's group encountered another group of American POWs going a different direction.

"Someone called my name. It was my kid brother Ralph. He was shot down in a B-24 on his 17th mission and he said, 'you aren't the only one who can get captured.'" [Ralph survived his imprisonment and returned to the U.S.]

April 29, 1945, the day of liberation will long be remembered by those who survived—the long miserable march was over.

REPATRIATION AND LIFE AFTER THE WAR

Excerpts from Herman Littman's life are summarized in the following obituary.

After liberation, he returned home and continued his military career, with postings all over the United States and Japan. In 1971 he retired after 30 years in the service and settled in Spokane, Washington. He continued his association with the military, teaching and working in the Education Office at Fairchild AFB in Spokane. He also taught at Spokane Falls Community College in Spokane.

Littman was an accomplished artist and often lent his talent to his wife's cake business and other creative projects. He was an avid outdoorsman who loved fishing and hunting. He was also an active member of the Oflag 64 Former POW organization and sponsored one of their reunions in Spokane in 2001. A frequent letter writer, he will be remembered for the many letters-to-the-editor contributed to the Spokane newspapers.

Over the 66-year marriage, Herm and Lucy welcomed seven children into their home. His wife Lucille Whatley Littman and daughter Theresa Littman Mullins preceded him in death.

Their five surviving children include Carole Littman Lester, Lawrence Littman, James Littman, Susan Littman Dana, Michael Littman, and Patrick Littman.

MEDALS AND DECORATIONS

Bronze Star Medal

Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster

Prisoner of War Medal

TAPS

Herman Littman died on May 24, 2017 in Bellingham, Washington at the age of 98 and was buried in a private ceremony at Fairmont Memorial Park.

A public memorial celebration of Herman's life took place later in Spokane.

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers