LT Donald Allan Lussenden

1921- 2004

EARLY YEARS

Don Allan Lussenden, the son of Charles Lussenden and Bernice M. Lussenden nee Booher, was born on June 10, 1921, in Flint, Michigan. He was the eldest of three children: Donald, Joyce, and Robert. He attended public schools in both Flint and Detroit, graduating from Central High School in Detroit in 1939. After graduation, he found work at Ford Motor Company in his father's department which involved cutting and sewing fabric for the interior parts of Ford automobiles.

MILITARY SERVICE

Don Lussenden enlisted in the Army on December 8, 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor, reporting to the federal building in Detroit. He remembers being given orders to report on December 24 for transportation to Fort Custer, Michigan. Sensing a mistake, he approached the sergeant, *"December 24 is Christmas Eve."*

The sergeant's reply, *"Yeah, I know it. You're in the Army now!"* (p. 1)

Lussenden next found himself at Fort Warren, Wyoming, the training station for the Quartermaster Corps. Because of Lussenden's experience at Ford, he received training to assist in forming the Mobile Shoe and Textile Repair Companies to be part of a quartermaster battalion attached to each division and/or for a Military Area. Moving to Camp Blanding, Don and fellow soldiers became the 218th Mobile Shoe and Textile Repair Company. Determined to become an officer, he applied for and was accepted at the Officers Training School, Class 103 at Ft. Benning, Georgia. (p. 3)

After receiving his Second Lieutenant's commission in November 1942, Lussenden was sent to Camp Wheeler awaiting orders for the campaigns in North Africa. Onboard a troop ship, he was determined to make the best of any situation. Reaching North Africa and housed in a replacement center near Casablanca, Lussenden next found himself and his platoon in 40 & 8 boxcars bound for Tunisia. Assigned initially to the First Infantry Division, also known as the "Big Red One", he was told that since the Germans had surrendered, his new assignment would be the 26th Infantry Regiment as an S4 officer in the 3rd Battalion.

> "*My job was to refit the battalion with weapons, vehicles and all the gear that a soldier is normally issued prior to a combat mission; scrounging became second nature to me and my sergeant."* (p.11)

Having sailed from Tunis to Malta and in command of an LCA (Landing Craft Assault), then on to a smaller ship called Landing Craft Infantry, Lussenden and his men were onboard for 6 days until the assault on Sicily. Don still remembered the sea sickness he felt. As they approached in darkness, *"we were all on deck fully loaded with our equipment and in platoon order*." (p. 15)

SICILY: THE ASSAULT LANDING

Joining the assault team running down the beach, Lussenden's initial assignment was to establish a supply depot for the battalion. German planes continued to strafe the beach, further complicating the dispersal of equipment and men. Lussenden recalls:

> *"one round went through my map case and clipboard lying next to me. On the third day, I was called forward and assigned as a platoon commander in K Company, replacing a lieutenant who had been wounded. By that time, German and Italians had moved back to the interior to set up defense areas*." (p.16)

Going inland, they met surrendering Italians and determined Germans. When entering towns, the Americans were often engaged by the enemy with 88s and small arms and mortar fire while changing terrains and positions.

> *Given a direct order to take a hill, my patrol discovered that the Germans had pulled out and a few days later the division was sent to Troina—the last good defense position to protect the main road of withdrawal up to Messina. My orders were to divide my platoon and occupy the only two spots capable of defense, dig in against artillery fire and maintain Observation Posts as our own warning lookouts. Infantry attack was discounted in the order.* (pp. 20 – 21)

As the engagements continued, the Germans were firing on us the whole way down. Lussenden and Lt. Thompson changed positions, having no direct contact with battalion command.

> *Most of the men in the section being wounded and my other section having been evacuated at the beginning of the fire fight, my platoon sergeant and I were attempting to find our battalion. The two of us broke out of the protection of the rocks and began to run down the slope to the river bed.*
>
> *When at last we hit the river bed, we were able to crawl along in the shelter of the bank as at flood time the water had carved a three-foot deep channel.*
>
> *We laid in that ravine for hours recovering our breath and composure. The hot Sicilian sun was beating on us without mercy and neither of us had water. We decided to wait out darkness before we attempted to locate our battalion.* (pp. 21 – 22)

CAPTURED ON AUGUST 3, 1943

> *At the end of four hours, a company of Germans approached and were about to pass our spot when our own artillery forward observer in a Piper Cub spotted them and dropped a few rounds in there, and the whole company moved into our ravine with us. After the initial surprise on their part and shock on ours, they treated the situation as a big joke and made us as comfortable as our own artillery would allow. They had a few American prisoners, including the section leader of my section who had moved back thinking to contact our battalion. He had taken a round through his knee and was in acute agony. We took turns carrying him sitting on a pole! Summing up this and later incidents led me to believe all this took place behind the German real line of resistance. Our battalion had apparently, by following the river bed in the darkness, passed between the German defense points on the hills above the river bed.* (p.23)

When the American artillery stopped firing, Germans led us along the river to a main road which we started to follow. Now in darkness with incoming artillery, Lussenden ran and tripped over a wall into the bottom of a river bank. Noting the surroundings, Lussenden surmised that the Germans' intention was to cross and secure the stone wall bridge, versus the American artillery's mission which was to destroy it, preventing movement of heavy equipment over the bridge during darkness. As Don was fleeing the area, he heard a cry of help.

> *I ran toward the call and found the German major who had been in charge of the group that had captured us. He had fallen from the bridge at its tallest point into the dry stream bed and had the skin of his forehead hanging down over his eyes. I pulled him to his feet and started pushing him up the embankment. As we got to the top, I could see a large encampment of huge tents marked with white squares with red crosses, a German field hospital! I took him into the encampment aisles and also called for a doctor. When help came, we got him to a surgical tent, and I then asked a German lieutenant for permission to return to the scene to look for possible wounded among the Americans who had been with me. He sent a few soldiers with me and we recovered my wounded sergeant and my men who stayed to care for him.* (p. 24)

Noting later that the Germans were preparing to evacuate, Lussenden and his men loaded his wounded sergeant in an ambulance, only to see him pulled out by a feldwebel [non-commissioned officer].

> *"When I saw the major with his head wrapped in bandages, I went up to him and asked for help in getting my sergeant to the main hospital. After thanking me for assisting him and a speech about*

the comradeship of real soldiers (through his interpreter), he ordered my sergeant to be cared for." (pp. 24, 25)

Later Don was taken to German headquarters for interrogation. The following morning, he and some enlisted men were taken by truck to the outskirts of Messina and on a road up a mountain overlooking the Straits of Messina. Apparently, the Germans were evacuating Sicily, but did not yet have the transportation of prisoners securely organized. During daylight, hundred of American planes patrolled the Straits, but most ferries made the crossings without incident. (p. 25)

Although British soldiers had been incarcerated for several years, U.S. soldiers were considered newcomers, which challenged, for a time, both movement and establishment of P.O.W. "holding" camps.

Kept in a goat pasture with only a hut for protection from the sun, seven days later Lussenden and a small group boarded a 1939 Ford German Army truck, were transported to the docks and boarded a ferry which quickly entered the Straits. The drivers and non-coms were decent toward their captives, often halting at German installations for food. Stopping next at a large Italian estate, the group again found themselves without constructed shelter but used the shade of large trees.

It was here that Lussenden remembers a stand-off between the Germans and the Italian soldiers stationed at this estate which illustrated the alliance between the Axis powers:

"In general, the Germans scorned everything about Italy and its military capabilities." (p. 27)

We spent only a few days at this collection point and were moved north to an Italian POW camp near Florence. The Germans moved us quickly from that camp via second class coach through the Brenner Pass into Austria and then Germany. Once in Germany at Stalag VIIA, Moosburg, Bavaria, (about 30 miles east of Munich), I was put together with about eleven other American Infantry officers who had been captured in Sicily. (p. 27)

APPROACHING AND ARRIVING AT LUCKENWALDE

Apparently, once I had arrived in the Florence area, I came under the control of the formal German army system of trying to extract information from prisoners, because I was rapidly moved from one site to another. Twelve of us, all officers, were quickly sent from Stalag VIIA to Luckenwalde, a few kilometers southwest of Berlin.

Luckenwalde, being close to Berlin in addition to being used as a labor source, also housed an intelligence unit where captured military personnel, especially officers were intensely interrogated. Of course, since we were the first ground force officers captured

since the North Africa Campaign, the Germans were extremely anxious to learn anything possible about our plans and equipment. (p. 28)

Lussenden's treatment at this establishment was to be repeated many times by American ground officers. The Germans reacted politely to the Americans' answers to their questions by stating only their name, rank and serial number. Their captors spoke limited to proficient English (some had visited and lived in the U.S. with some having attended American universities) and knew more about the men than they thought possible—including their Table of Organization. Their treatment was humane if not comfortable as their rooms were small cells, the guards usually unconcerned about their pleas for bathroom breaks, etc. For most of the POWs, their unfruitful interrogations ended abruptly, and the next day, they were shipped out.

After ten days at Luckenwalde, they placed us in a second-class coach and sent us on our way.

The Germans put all twelve of us in one compartment and allowed some of us to stand during the day in the aisle and sleep on the floor of the aisle at night.

I awoke at dawn and looked out over a very flat, uninteresting landscape that included large numbers of windmills. I thought we were in Holland! We were in northern Poland, roughly 100 miles south of the Baltic Sea.

The land was like a reclaimed swamp, the windmills pumped water from the land into canals that emptied into rivers. We pulled into the Polish village of Schubin (German name "Altburgund"), and there we were turned over to the village garrison, 813th Grenadier Regiment, a force of approximately 100 men. We walked from the train station to the edge of the village where our new home "Offizierslager 64" was waiting for us. (pp. 29 – 30)

LIFE AT OFLAG 64

Our arrival at the gate was greeted by about 150 American prisoners who had been captured in North Africa and placed with officers of the United Kingdom at Rothenburg. The whole group came to see if they knew anyone of us. We were turned over to the American Adjutant for processing and assignment to quarters. Mine were on the second floor of the right (east) wing of the White House, the largest building in the compound. It had been a Polish college before the war. The camp was enlarged with seven red brick and cement barracks to accommodate French POWs early in the war. After that, it housed British POWs, and lastly to make room for American Ground Force Officers who had been captured

in North Africa. Behind the White House was a large courtyard where we stood for roll call (Appell). Directly behind the courtyard, almost covered from view by the trees, was a large utility building on the second floor which was our tailor shop and shoe repair shop. (pp.31-32)

There was also a stairway in the front center of the White House and a number of small rooms in the center portion. One was used as an office and others were quarters for field grade officers. Each wing of the White House contained two large rooms, one on each floor. Three of the rooms were used as squad rooms and had approximately 20 double bunks each. They were normally arranged with four bunks in a group like an open C. This made for groups of 8 officers who were responsible for their section of the room. The fourth large room on the first floor of the west wing was a dining room. We had lunch and dinner in that room. When the population grew after D-Day we had 2 sittings. There were windows overlooking the street and windows overlooking the east and west sides. The rear of each room had a number of cold-water lavatories for our ablutions and laundry. Shower facilities were in another building and on a once-a-week basis. The daytime latrine was a large shed behind and to the west of our building. (p.32)

Meals and other foods for the men were prepared in the large kitchen area located in the basement of the building. For those who made pies and cakes, the kitchen staff would bake them for the Kriegies. In addition, this section housed a storage section. Also useful for many functions was the enormous attic; Lussenden comments that it was used in many ways. (p. 31-32)

MY CONTRIBUTION TO THE CAMP

In the first week at Oflag 64 I volunteered to work in the tailor shop. I had been cleared by the S-2 staff that I was not a "German Plant" through my conversations with former 1st Division officers, so I was free to participate in activities wherein someone might inadvertently allude to something we did not wish to share with the Germans.

In the tailor shop I altered the olive drab enlisted men's dress uniforms to fit the individual officers. I worked about eight hours per day and five to six days per week in the tailor shop for the first six months.

When a call went out from the library for help in repairing books, I looked into the situation. My experience consisted of earning the Book Binding Merit Badge as a Boy Scout.

And this is the way it all began. (p. 34)

We started repairing books and completely rebound others. Our rebound books were tight and serviceable, but were rather ugly, especially the edges of the pages. You could readily see each single section, as it is impossible to keep all sections even as you sew them to backing strips. Willi Kricks, a guard in our camp who owned the print shop and book bindery in Schubin, stopped by one day to check out his local competition and learned that I was, indeed, no bookbinder.

He arranged with the camp commander, Oberst Schneider, that I and Harry Hauschild go into the village each morning for two weeks to work in his bookbindery. There, under the tutelage of the four Polish bookbinders in his shop, we learned the old master's method of bookbinding. We communicated in very simple German. After six months of study with Carl Hansen, one of the other American officers in the camp, I was able to carry on simple conversations in German and understand simple directions in working with the Poles who spoke German also. Once we returned to our own shop in the attic of the White House, Willi Kricks found in one of the lager buildings a book trimmer, which allowed us to turn out a finished book equal to anyone's handiwork.

Binding books was interesting, as you tend to get a quick view of the contents as you sew the sections together. Also, there is a feeling of achievement as one completed a binding. Each book became a personal work of art! An interesting situation developed—our S-2 staff had been collecting information from new Kriegies as they were debriefed on atrocities and abuse committed against allied personnel and others. The information was to be used after the war in the prosecution of those who committed these brutal acts. The information included details of the acts, places, dates and times, and in order to be useful, the full names of the perpetrator, rank, serial number, his home address or town, as well as any other identifying items. This data was hand printed in India ink on a parchment-like onionskin paper about 4" x 5". These small packets were given to me to be hidden in the binding of textbooks that a person might expect to have in his possession if he were a professional person, such as a teacher, engineer, mathematician, etc. I started with the cardboards from the book cover which I was rebinding.

With a razor, I carefully split each cardboard into two thin halves, keeping them carefully oriented top to top/bottom so when united, the rough surface would fit like a casting in its mold. With a light pencil, I would mark out a 4½ or 5 ½ inch rectangle on the split side of each half, and then with a penknife I skived out a very thin bit of cardboard material to accommodate the thickness of the thin pack of onionskin sheets. I had a thin colorless glue which allowed me a few seconds to realign the cardboard halves before setting up. Then the edges of the cardboard were lightly sanded,

obliterating any sign that they had been split. The cardboards were then made into a book cover and worked into the body of the book in the usual manner. We applied the proper German censor stamps inside the covers where the originals had been, taking care to use the proper stamp to match those that were stamped randomly throughout the book. Each censor had his own stamp (different shapes) with his number.

Camp artist, Jim Bickers, had created duplicates carved on the surface of those big gum erasers. During the period we were working on such materials, our security system was on full alert, and any German personnel entering the camp was immediately reported to us in plenty of time to secure our materials. We knew that anyone caught in the act of counter-intelligence would be treated the same as a spy. I continued to rebind books until the day we left the camp ahead of the Russian Army's advance. (pp. 34 – 35)

Camaraderie and recognition of services to others are recognized traits when people are in confined environments. This was certainly true at POW camps in WWII. These encounters and observations have been recorded in books, lectures, academic pursuits, reunions, etc., even years later.

POWs at Oflag 64 were truly appreciative of those among them who provided services to all incarcerated in the hands of the enemy. Multiple articles on the same topic by different authors are present in this biography because they complement one another and display additional, relative and defining details.

This second source, located below, is taken from a four-page article in a book by J. Frank Diggs entitled *Americans Behind the Barbed Wire WORLD WAR II: INSIDE A GERMAN PRISON CAMP*.

"Prisoners Who Made a Difference"

The camp was especially fortunate in having a number of talented and energetic Americans, who were willing and able to take on roles that made a big difference in the lives of the rest of us. (p. 43)

Three Kriegies are mentioned in this article including Lt. John Creech, the Greenhouse "Green Grocer" and Lt. Jim Shoaf, the electronic genius and inventor of "The Bird". The third Kriegy's inclusion is included below.

The third hero of Oflag 64 *was a clever, conscientious lieutenant named Don Lussenden. In need of a project, Don started a bookbindery. He became involved when the camp librarian sent out a call for somebody who could repair books for the library. Our library then contained some 250 well-worn volumes, which the preceeding group of English officers had left behind. They were soon supplemented by American titles from the International YMCA and Red Cross. All of these books, old and new, had been machine-bound and were never intended for non-stop reading and handling. The glue and stitching soon broke down, allowing*

sections of the book to fall apart and the corners to come off. When the new and extremely popular American books began to break down after 10 or 20 readings, the call went out for a bookbinder.

Don, who had no experience in this field but had learned a bit from Boy Scout merit badge project, came to the rescue. As he tells it, the library staff had the foresight to order bookbinding supplies at the same time that they asked the YMCA for new books from America. So Don started a good supply of thread, needles, paper, artificial leather, and glue. And he said he had "plenty of beat-up books to start with."

Thus, the "Gnome Bookbindery" was born. Don explained: "In the attic of the White House there were a few storage areas. I selected a suitable space with a sky-light roughly one foot square and a single bulb hanging from a twisted cable. Using cardboard from old Red Cross food parcels, the walls and rafters were made reasonably weather-worthy. In addition, the cardboard was covered with white paper from our bookbinding supplies which reflected such light that was received from a single light bulb and skylight. The German staff provided a small wood-burning stove that took the chill off and kept the glue pot warm. The tools furnished by the YMCA included two knives, a shoemaker's hammer and a large wooden clamp made of two hardwood 3-inch-by-3-inch bars with a 1-inch wooden screw at each end. I must admit that our rebound books were not pleasing to the eye, but they were serviceable."

"After a few months of operation," Don went on, "we had a visit from a German guard, one Willi Kricks, who had lived in Schubin prior to 1939 and owned and operated a printing shop and bookbindery here." Willi was an Auslander Deutscher, and when the German Army occupied Poland, he suddenly became a German soldier. Handicapped with a crippled leg, he was attached to the local grenadier group and, of course, did the printing for the area military units. Later in 1943, he also printed The Oflag Item, our camp newspaper."

"Naturally, Willi was interested in seeing his only competition in Schubin, so he came to visit us. He quickly found out that I was not an experienced bookbinder and asked if I would like to go downtown to his bookbindery and learn the trade from his employees. Formal arrangements were made, and the two of us were allowed to go each day for two weeks and work with four Polish workers in his bookbindery. It was a fine learning experience." (pp. 47 – 48)

Lussenden received permission from the SAO to use cigarettes as barter for supplies and services such as glue and hardy thread. Next, Willi reciprocated with something truly useful:

"It seems there was a large book press and book trimmer hidden away in the building that housed the camp tailor shop. It took 10 Kriegies to lift and carry [it] *down to the ground floor and up again to the third floor of the White House where our bookbindery was located. This new equipment gave our work a professional appearance."*

"Frequently", Don reports, "Col. Drake and his staff gave the Gnome bookbinders materials to secrete into their books to provide evidence for future war crime investigations of the German treatment of their prisoners of war. Before starting on such an evidence-hiding operation, Don would inform our security office that they would be working on a special binding at a given time, so that a lookout could be posted to warn of any German guards entering the third-floor area. Had they been caught red-handed in the act, it would be considered by the Nazi regime in the same category as spying. We found out later how serious that could be when several Kriegies were tried and sentenced to be shot for less serious crimes."

"The evidence to be hidden was carefully hand-printed on onionskin paper 4 by 6 inches in size. Books then were selected by subject to later be matched with and assigned to an officer who would logically own such a book, e.g., an engineering manual for a mechanical engineer, a foreign text for someone studying that language. After selection of the book was made, we would rebind it using the original cardboards, slowly and carefully split the edges of the front and back cardboard covers into two thin sheets apiece. Then we outlined a space on the inside surfaces of the split boards to accommodate the onionskin evidence. After inserting the thin paper, colorless glue was used to seal the halves back into a cover board and then sanded to remove the evidence of the insert. The boards were assembled into the split, then assembled into a normal cover and attached to the newly bound book."

"Needless to say, every Kriegy benefited from Don's long volunteer work with the much-used books in the camp library, as did the war crimes investigators later on." (pp. 47 – 50)

[Note: *Documents intended to be concealed were passed to Lussenden and his Kriegy workers by the S-2, Lt. Col. Algers. Information was then turned over to authorities at the RAMP locations. The process of book binding continued until January 1945 when the camp marched out.*]

Source: *OFLAG 64 The Fiftieth Anniversary Book*, pp. 108-109

CAMP ORGANIZATION AND ACTIVITIES

Officer prisoners were not required to work. Our senior officer, Col. Thomas D. Drake, had organized our personnel along standard Army organizational lines. He had a staff of lieutenant colonels, S1, S2, S3 and S4, each with his own staff of officers to carry out normal functions of a military organization. This established strict military standards of operation, as well as how we related to one another, and in effect it really gave our people an esprit de corps. We got hungry and we got cold, but we never forgot who we were! The officers who did not have a formal job would, according to their own personal wishes, take part in our organized sports, attend classes of their choice, teach classes, read, play cards, garden, join the theater group (all stage sets, costumes, lighting, etc. were fashioned from scratch by our officers) and put on plays for the entertainment of all.

The theatre group was likely the single most important facet in the creation of the high state of morale in our camp. It involved a large percentage of our officers in one way or another. In addition to the members of the cast there were costume designers and makers (from scratch), set producers including scenery, lighting and sound. The camp musicians were involved and often wrote music. In nearly every instance it was necessary to orchestrate a piece to cover all the available instruments. It took a long time to prepare for each presentation, and there were usually two or three shows in process of preparation at the same time.

In February 1944, our lager newspaper, The Oflag 64 Item, made a survey among the officers and found 70 civil occupations listed. In that group were 7 doctors, 12 engineers, 7 lawyers, 5 chemists, 5 newspaperman and 9 professors. So it seemed natural to set up study groups that were taught by these specialists. I am certain that the quality of the courses taught would have been accepted for credit by any university, had there been communication resources to allow it.

(pp. 36 - 37)

The following article taken from the December 1, 1944, copy of *The Oflag 64 Item* (pp. 37 – 39 in Lussenden's book) gives the extent and quality of instruction at "Altburgund Academy".

"Altburgund Academy" Opens With Full Curriculum

Experienced Teachers Staff Faculty of 30

With a modest bow in the direction of Harvard, Yale, and other mighty seats of learning, Altburgund Academy opened its doors to approximately 350 eager students on November 8th.

The newly created Academy boasts a faculty of 30 experienced instructors from colleges and universities in God's country and even an "exchange professor" from French Morocco.

Capt. Hubert Eldridge, M.S. Colorado State, who has had 22 years of experience as a teacher and superintendent of public schools, is the principal dean and head proctor.

Capt. Lumund Wilcox is the dean of the college department and Capt. Ernest Gruenberg dean of the high school.

Fourteen courses are offered in the Kriegy curriculum, which has three purposes:

1. To enable officers who have not completed high school to finish that part of their education here.
2. To prepare those who desire to enter college after the war.
3. To benefit those Kriegies who wish to brush up their education by taking up new studies or reviewing subjects they have studied in the past.

A semester of 18 weeks is planned, according to Capt. Eldridge who, of course, hopes that it will not be completed before the end of the war.

A list of subjects, with instructors, follows:

German 1 – Lt. George Ellis, B.A. Yale University

Spanish 1 – Capt. George Thomas, B.A., Wheaton College

French 1 and 2 – Warrant Officer Gilbert Eberart, who holds a law degree from French Morocco, and formerly taught in the college of Oujda.

Speech – Capt. Jean Wood. B.A. – University of Washington.

Elementary Literature – Lt. Frank Colley, M.A. Duke University and four years a Fellow in the Department of History at that school.

Advanced Literature – Lt. Kenneth Goddard, B.A. Norwich University.

Elementary English – Lt. Paul Hadnette, B.A. Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, formerly an instructor in Onachita Parish, Louisiana.

Social Studies – Capt. Bruce Martin, LL.B., Drake University of Pittsburg, and Capt. Eldridge.

American History – Capt. Clyde Herring, LL.B., Lt. Col. Robert Cheal and Capt. Bruce Martin.

Advanced Science – Lt. Frank Garrett, B.S., V.P.I.

Chemistry – Major Newton Cole, B.S., Eastern State Teachers College, who taught school three years in Litchfield, Illinois.

Algebra – Lt. Col. James Skells, B.S., U.S.M.A.

Geometry – Major Edwin Haggard, B.M.S., U.S.M.A.

Advanced learning is furthered by three new classes of college caliber, all of which have large enrollments. These are: Salesmanship, taught by Maj. Jerry Sage, B.A., Washington State, in civilian life a senior salesman for Procter and Gamble; Security Analysis and Investment Banking, taught by Lt. George Seeman, M.A., Columbia University; and Physiology, taught by Lt. Harry Abrahams, M.D., who attended Washington University.

GERMAN TREATMENT AND RESPECT

I am often asked, "How did the Germans treat you?"

I can answer that with few exceptions I cannot complain. From the very first hour of capture, the German soldiers, and especially their officers were courteous and businesslike. During our whole period of captivity, I never witnessed any overt act of physical violence against any of us.

The German staff was very proud of our camp and would take great pride in showing visiting generals, etc., around. Our own staff insisted on a very military environment on our part to ensure high morale and good health. We had to maintain exceptional cleanliness in regard to our person, clothing, barracks, etc. The German staff obviously admired our esprit de corps. They usually tipped us off when visitors were coming. We always put on a good show for the visitors. The German staff cooperated with us when the Red Cross and YMCA representatives visited the Oflag. We could talk with the representatives, ask for items and even complain about conditions. Of course, a German officer was always present and sometimes they would seem a bit nervous, but things went smoothly. (pp. 70 - 71)

KRIEGY OBSERVATIONS

Of even more value to me was the close association with fellow officers from every walk of life. In my "squad room" were 39 other officers and, of course, during the long, cold winter evenings we were indoors and involved in all manner of fascinating discussions. We would learn from one another by listening to what a person was doing before the War and/or what he planned to do after the War and how he would do it.

I had no idea how much I was learning until I was able to attend college after the War. Comparing myself to other students attending college on the G.I. Bill, I realized how fortunate I was to have received all that training in what was otherwise an uncomfortable situation. When I considered these evaluations of cultural differences and reactions to natural occurrences, I

> *suppose that helps to explain why I became so interested in Sociology and Cultural Anthropology.* (p. 40)

Winter weather and the lack of appropriate clothing made the Kriegies appreciate the presence of two 7-foot large heaters in each room even though they were not extremely efficient. Leaning against the heated tiles provided some comfort during discussions and other activities.

Daily news from the BBC through the efforts of their "Bird" kept them in-touch with the outside world. This "one tube set" was secreted in the White House's attic and enabled all Kriegies to be kept informed. This was done through delegated listeners and runners who spread the word while watchers kept the German "goons" at bay. (pp. 40 – 41)

> *We received German newspapers daily, as well as some magazines. I recall Der Angriff, Der Volkische Beobachter and Der Adler. The news from these papers was translated by our German speakers on camp news staff and then in condensed form hand-lettered on large sheets and posted in the main hall of the White House.* (pp. 41 – 42)

Even the Germans read the posted information and propaganda became another kind of war inside the camp. For example, the German report of an air raid over Germany would read, *"30 four-motor Terror Bombers were shot down last night over Hanover"* and Allied losses would be magnified including examples of killed civilians and those in hospitals and schools. Of course, the Americans used their headline tricks as well.

> *"A photo published much earlier by the Germans of American POWs being marched through the streets of Rome was artistically doctored by our staff to appear as if the American soldiers were victoriously marching through Rome and the German guard in the photo became an American officer marching beside his troops."* (p. 42)

THE WISDOM OF INSIDERS

> *I have always considered myself fortunate to have been quartered with the officers who were captured in North Africa. They were the first Americans captured and there was no American Prisoner of War Camp at the time, so the Germans decided to put the American Officers with the British officers at Rothenburg. During their roughly seven months there, they took advantage of the experiences and know-how the British learned through toughing it out with their German captors since Dieppe. The Americans brought this knowledge to Oflag 64 in June 1943, and put it to excellent use in setting up an organization with good morale and discipline. I arrived three months later and received quarters with the "Old Timers". Their morale and self-assurance gave me a*

sense of security and well-being from the very first. When one first becomes a prisoner of war, there is immediately a feeling of insecurity. What is going to happen to me? At any time on the front line or at an established POW camp, a hateful guard could always say you tried to escape and he was forced to shoot you. However, once a person is in an organization like the Americans at Oflag 64, you feel secure and that someone is accountable for your welfare. I suspect that others who came after me and were assigned to empty brick barracks did not experience the same feelings of security to the extent I did, because they were not in continuous contact with established secure people.

The new prisoner arrives hungry, tired, dirty and discouraged. If quartered with others of the same physical and psychological conditions, then he is off to a rough start. We always paid special attention to new arrivals as soon as they were cleared by S2. We brought them into all special activities as we learned their talents and interests. Trying to help a new Kriegy adjust to our low-calorie diet was most difficult. It was always sad to see various individuals making the rounds of the older Kriegies asking for the crusts from our bread rations. We gave them our crusts, as we cut them off and threw them away because they were tough and dry. The new guys boiled them until they disintegrated into a gelatinous mass, gray in color, appearing not at all as something you should eat, but eat they did and survived! (pp.47-48)

The subject of privileges was often discussed. Until D-Day, Kriegies were escorted to the village cinema on Wednesdays. The language was in German, of course, but it was a form of freedom as long as they pledged not to escape.

Another concession was a weekly "Spaziergang". In small groups under guard, we were taken for a leisurely walk in the Polish countryside. Again, it was a good feeling just to be out. We were not allowed to speak to any civilians, as this was against German law." (pp. 48)

Questions concerning food have been the most frequently asked of me when discussing my experiences. The most important item in our diet was the American Red Cross parcel. Indeed, it was often the center of our social life. When we had them, we made coffee, snacks and shared good conversation. This was referred to as a "Bash". It was both a noun and a verb, and I expect it began with British prisoners, as they had four more years' experience than we with hunger and Red Cross Parcels (British type). In 1943, we did get shipments via Sweden once a week.

Now regarding the contents: these parcels weighed about 10 pounds and included a can of each of the following: corned beef, Spam (Prem), salmon, orange concentrate, and George Washington instant coffee powder. Also included was 1½ diameter 4 inch can

*of liver pate, ½ pound can of margarine, 1 pound can of powdered whole milk (KLIM), small tin of jam, little box of sugar cubes, a D-ration chocolate bar (semi-sweet thick bar so hard it was risky to bite it), package of C or K ration crackers, small amount of raisins or prunes and 7 packages of cigarettes***.**

The British parcel was somewhat similar, but contained tea instead of coffee, a can of sweetened condensed milk (for tea) and sardines or kippered herring instead of salmon. (pp. 49 -50)

It took discipline not to bash the whole package upon receipt. We had some help because before leaving the distribution center we left our cans of Spam or corned beef and salmon with the kitchen staff. They would then, on a daily basis, heat an opened can of Spam or corned beef and issue one can for three men. On Friday we had salmon. In good times we each received two small boiled potatoes. As often as possible the kitchen staff, when onions were available, would mash the potatoes with the corned beef and mix in fried onions and serve up a heavenly hash.

*Our mess hall had large tables with benches and would seat 8 men per table with an elected table captain. He arrived 10 minutes before Mess Call and divide the table's portion of soup at lunch and cut the loaves of bread into equal chunks. At dinner the captain selected equal sized potatoes***.** (pp. 50 – 51)

When preparing our own foods, we used "Smokey Joes" (invented by some Kriegy in 1939) which were usually constructed of three powdered milk cans (5 inches by 4 ½ inches high) stacked on top of one another with ends removed from the bottom of the top can. Although inefficient, it must be said that those little Smokey Joes were an important and integral part of our culture, probably contributing to our retention of sociability and sanity. (pp. 54, 56)

[Note: An illustration of the Smokey Joe was included on p. 55.]

MORE KRIEGY ACTIVITIES

Lussenden noted that the compound *"was a constant movement of organized activity. In good weather there was competition of baseball teams, basketball, and even football. There was always something being built or improved."* (p. 71)

He continues this discussion with names and descriptions of volunteer services provided by the Kriegies: construction of a track for exercise or races, kitchen duty, the tailor and shoe shops, book bindery and library workers who catalogue and help distribute 5,000 books sent by the YMCA with a wide selection of textbooks and novels. (pp. 71 – 73)

Probably every human being has some secret desire to create something—a wood carving, a poem, a painting, a tapestry, a song, a novel, an idea—and to put that urge into graphic or even three- dimensional form. However, the practical necessities of one's life, mostly driven by the need to earn a living, push such yearnings to one side never to be realized. Now that a person finds oneself in a position where he has no participation in "earning a living" and has "time" as one's greatest available resource, the inner feelings move to the fore and begins to manifest itself. Kriegies began to draw, paint, cartoon, write poems, lose reluctance and shyness to sing, act and entertain others. Everyone's talent seemed to overcome the fear of failure, and we all benefitted from these gifts! (pp. 71 -73)

DID YOU TRY TO ESCAPE?

Lussenden's answer was emphatic.

No! I neither tried nor had any desire for further adventure. I very early on recognized that the odds were definitely against one trying to cross Europe during the Nazi regime or in the Soviet Union then and/or later to appreciate the total control these dictatorships had over the movement of citizens even from one neighborhood town to the next. Every individual, citizens, foreign workers, and soldiers alike had to carry on their person identity papers and/or official documents. In addition, citizens themselves reported every stranger as an act of patriotism! However, that is not to say that other officers felt the same. I guess I thought them to be naïve or overwhelmed by some sort of romantic sense of adventure. Even our senior staff was aware of the extremely small chance of successes in escape. (pp. 56 - 57)

Don's next extended discussion concerned the process of the Committee's needed approval for planned escapes with descriptions of escape tunnel building and examples of those within the camp who planned and executed escapes—some which took months in the planning and were sophisticated in nature. He included valid examples of fellow Kriegies who escaped for a short time and were recaptured. (pp. 58-59)

Many first-hand accounts stated that consequences varied from days to weeks in the "cooler", also known as solitary confinement, to visits from the Gestapo and unlawful trials in German courts, some with the death sentence attached. Fortunately, these, the most severe, were not carried out as the camp emptied in January 1945.

A POSSIBLE CALL TO ARMS AT OFLAG 64

Our senior staff had in 1943 organized the officers of the camp into platoons of fifty members each, presumably to facilitate the counting of prisoners at Appell (roll call). We would fall out from our barracks and form up into platoons five ranks deep and ten persons to a rank. The front rank was all captains or ranking 1st lieutenants, and the second through the fifth ranks were composed of 2nd lieutenants. Each platoon was commanded by a Lt. Colonel or Major, and each Captain in the front rank had the four Lieutenants immediately behind him as his "squad". We were privately counseled on our objectives as a squad and platoon by our leaders, should there come a time when we would defend ourselves and take overt action against the Germans. Each individual had arranged for some kind of weapon (mostly clubs, kitchen items or carpenter tools). My bookbindery provided 2 knives with 4" blades and 2 cobblers' hammers. We all felt that it would likely never come to such a crisis, but, if so, we did not plan to die quietly. We also had heard that the German High Command was talking of a stricter control over prisoners of war, such as turning us over to the SS! Little did we know of the more immediate reason for our careful organization and preparations, and understandably so, for one little slip and it could have been terrible. (pp. 59 – 60)

INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS

Families could send one package of specific weight and size every two months. These were very important to those lucky receivers and for use in unobtrusive packaging for a secret mission as well.

The Kommandant's office was notified when a freight car carrying private parcels arrived. Camp detail then delivered them to the "parcel hatch" building which stored parcels and Red Cross boxes. All packets were then opened in captors' presence; food cans punctured to prevent them from being used in escape attempts. After inspections were complete and lucky recipients were notified, the POWs were allowed to claim their packages, but some were kept in reserve, secreted within the camp, unknown to the Germans and to those Americans not involved. (p. 43)

As a reference guide, *The Escape Factory* by Lloyd R. Shoemaker is recommended by Lussenden to explain the U.S. MIS-X operations. Working covertly within Oflag 64, the book explains and offers examples of received contraband, disguised letter names and contents. The securing of boxes, coded messages and requests of a secret nature were integral parts of MIS-X.

Before they went into combat, certain officers were sent for training in code communications in the event they were captured. In this manner, an officer could send coded letters to his "girlfriend" back in the United States, and the U.S. Army Postal Service forwarded such letters directly to the Army High Command. The "girlfriend"

naturally responded to her "sweetheart" thus information was exchanged between our American intelligence officer in Oflag 64 and Army Intelligence. We could request items to facilitate escape plans, such as European currency, flags, maps, compasses, 35mm camera, film, chemicals for developing film, radio components, wire cutters, civilian clothing and .22 caliber automatic pistols. Such items requested were sent in old used boxes with a standard mailing label as was used by families of POWs. No effort was made to disguise the contents avoiding the need for special packaging. The addressee was a fake name: great effort was made to ensure that no prisoner in Oflag 64 had a similar name. The idea was that the package would either be secretly received by our own intelligence or the Germans would find it without any way of placing guilt on us. (pp. 43-44)

To state the plan briefly, the intention was to rescue Oflag 64 officers by using twenty B17s with support from thirty hand-picked paratroopers in the 101st Airborne. Polish Resistance assistance and meteorologists' reports were also integral pieces of the mission. With its many convoluted parts having been approved by the highest level, General C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, these intricate maneuvers received the "Go" signal. (pp. 67 – 68)

The POWs were to begin executing their plan one hour before dawn on the day following a BBC broadcast in which the phrase "Give me liberty or give me death" was used.

After an hour of further discussion of this plan, General Bissell, [Assistant Chief of Staff] *felt that all precautions and* contingencies *had been properly planned and adjourned the meeting to make his report to General Marshall.*

Two days later, however Colonel Jones [deputy chief of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS)] *received word that Secretary of War Stimson offered his congratulations to the POWs for their daring and initiative but had rejected the plan because it was too risky. An unexpected German column had appeared in the area, and Stimson feared that, if the rescue attempt failed, the German troops would annihilate the rescuers and POWs in the camp. He was also concerned that the twenty B17s sitting on the ground near the camp, ready to transport the POWs, would be helpless against any air or ground attack, and as the German column indicated, German troop movement was too unpredictable to take chances.*

Simson's decision engendered mixed emotions in everyone who had been involved in the escape plan. At ***1142****, the men were especially disappointed—they had labored hard and confidentially to perfect their part in the escapade and had favored carrying it through.*

[Note: The number 1142 (mentioned above) is the notation of *P.O. Box 1142, "a secret American military intelligence Service that had two special wings, known as MIS-X and MIS-Y. The MIS-X program focused upon the escape and evasion activities of Prisoners of War (POWs) held by the United States in Europe. MIX-Y's duty was to interview the POWs*".]

Sources:

"P.O. Box 1142"

http://en.wikipedia.org.wiki.P._O._Box_1142 Access date: 8/14/2022

"MIS.XS Shadowy Secrets Aiding Allied POW Escapes"

http://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/mis-xs-shadowy-secrets-aiding-allied-pow-escapes/ Access date: 8/14/2022

I knew nothing whatsoever of the plan described above until I first read The Escape Factory. Other former Kriegies probably learned of it after the war when meeting together at the Oflag 64 reunions. Unfortunately, my name was not on the correspondence list, and I never heard of the Oflag 64 reunions until 1992! (pp. 68– 69)

Don and Lucy at their first Oflag 64 Reunion in Colorado Springs - 1992

D-DAY AND ITS CONSEQUENES

In May 1944, we began our preparations for a "Gala Bash" to commemorate the establishment of Oflag 64 on June 6, 1943. On June 6, we had more to celebrate. We learned via the BBC that the Normandy Invasion had begun! Knowing this boosted our spirits to the bursting point, but we had to wait until the official German radio or camp commandant announced it.

When the Germans officially let us know, our joy could be expressed. We were so prepared for celebrating the Camp

Anniversary that the Germans were convinced that we had known in advance the invasion date. (p. 74)

From that date forward our lives began to change. Almost immediately we began to receive new Kriegies from the Normandy Front, which began to put a strain on our Red Cross parcel supplies. Further, the Allied Air Force was bombing and strafing tactical targets, which included rail and roadways. This bombing either actually interfered with the distribution of parcels or allowed an excuse for the Germans not delivering the Red Cross materials. Eventually our American Lager Staff found it necessary, due to our limited space, to set up a cadre commanded by Lt. Col. Yardley to establish a branch of Oflag 64 called Oflag 64Z located at Schoken.

By October 1944, the shipments of Red Cross parcels were beginning to falter, and we had to depend more on the German issue rations. Our morale had been consistently high; however, the American losses during the Battle of the Budge gave us something to think about. The Germans were standing firm as the war entered German homeland boundaries. We all had felt, after the success of Normandy, that we could be home by the Fall of 1944. Now, we had another thing to worry about. The Eastern Front had been driven back by the Russians. We were certain that the Russians neither knew about us nor would care. We already knew that Russians thought any soldier who surrendered was a coward and did not deserve to live.

We also heard from the BBC that the Russian Army had refused the pleas from the Poles for help. The Poles in Warsaw revolted against the Germans and were fighting with nearly no arms or equipment. "Let the Germans wipe out the Poles for us, and then we will take out the Germans." We were in the path of the advancing Russians, but didn't know what their reaction would be to have 1500 American officers to deal with. (pp. 73 – 74)

We did not have long to wait. In January 1945, vast numbers of "Ausland Deutsch" families were fleeing to the west in an effort to get back to Germany before being overtaken by the Russians. They were families of Germans who had lived in East and West Prussia, as well as Ukraine, for as long as 500 years and had retained German culture and close ties to Germany. Russians were known to be merciless to all non-Russians. The German population had to get out or die. (p. 75)

Lussenden reflected on the numbers of single persons and families (men, women, old people and children) increasing each day; some were supporting packs on their backs joined by others in wagons pulled by horses on slippery hardpacked roadways as the temperature became colder. (p. 75)

The weather was below zero night and day, so if you were not walking you had to be bundled in blankets. The father and

teenagers walked along holding on to the ropes tied to their wagons and often assisting the horses to move the wagon after a halt had lost momentum. (p. 75)

JANUARY 21, 1945

In the morning, the bulk of our group at Oflag 64 joined the westward movement! The day before, the Kommandant, Col. Schneider, had informed us that the next morning we would march five miles to Exin where trains would move us west, providing the Russians had not taken Exin. We went into a frenzy of sorting and packing. (pp.75 – 76)

In preparation, Don reused a large piece of canvas that had been wrapped around a bail of GI clothing shipped the year before, fashioning a pack complete with shoulder harnesses. Next, he formed it around a Red Cross carton as a container with a long strap which he attached to the corners of his linen pillowcase. This became his "scrounge bag" for anything useful. His rolled-up blanket (tied together at both ends and slipped over one shoulder) became protection from the wind. (p. 76)

I wore two pair of long woolen underwear, two woolen olive drab shirts, one pair of woolen OD slacks and one pair of cotton twill coveralls. I had two pair of Army padded sole wool socks and wore one pair in my garrison shoes and kept the other in reserve.

At 1000 hours (Appell time) the men formed up in their regular 50-man platoons—27 platoons in all. Those unable to travel were left behind with a doctor and one German guard. (pp. 76 – 77)

Col. Goode (with his bagpipes) and his staff lead the way. At the gate, bread was passed out to those who marched out first. The four columns disappeared among other refugees in and around all manner of vehicles being pushed and pulled. Eventually, the column of people and animals would become several miles long. (pp. 77 – 79)

THE LONG MARCH HOME

The following saga is written in date-summary style and drawn from pages 79 to 133**.** These passages illustrate their day-to-day challenges across the nearly two months' incredible journey from Oflag 64 in Szubin, Poland, to Hammelburg, Germany.

Arriving after a 22 km walk through Exin (now Kcynia) they proceeded to Wegheim—no train in sight. Their accommodations for the night were barns filled with cattle; bashing on food they had carried from camp, these tired men laid in the hay/straw and slept. Counting marchers' heads the next morning was problematic as some Kriegies had disappeared. Finally at 9AM, the march continued. Weather became the biggest enemy—freezing snow and wind with many men suffering frostbite.

Barns would become their regular hostels—billeted usually in the hay lofts. They were hardly warm but did serve as some protection against the drafts which chilled the men to their bones.

> *The second night* ***(22, January)*** *was spent in Eichfeld (Potonow), being awakened at 4AM to learn that a group of guards had left. A rumor circulated that a Russian patrol has reached the edge of Eichfeld and then backed off. We believed the guards had pulled out to save their lives. Some Polish farm workers killed a hog and started a fire under a scalding kettle, and we were happily assisting them. Hoping for the best, this was not to last.*
>
> *At 1000 hours* on **23 January,** *Hauptman Zimmerman returned with a band of Latvian SS (Waffen SS, Freikorps) and they were once again under German control. No soup was served. Another night in a hayloft.*
>
> **24 January –** *A terribly cold day. We got a ration of soup and marched out at 0900. Our destination was Lobsens (Lobzenica). Here Oberst Schneider and our guard company joined us. The Poles in Lobsens were very friendly and with great care would trade with us. We were billeted in large barns.*

25 January – The day dawned early and they lined up for a small amount of oatmeal and a loaf of bread divided between 5 men. Before departure, the SS troops shot their weapons into the haylofts as a warning to those who considered escaping.

Marching again another 23 km across unending snow-covered landscapes, they stopped every hour or so for a ten-minute break. In this environment, even the necessary act of relieving oneself became a tactical maneuver as cold hands manipulating buttons was difficult.

All day they heard artillery fire in the east, each man hoping the Russians would bypass them. Another night—another barn loft—except for those who arrived first and chose huts used by Polish workers. Midnight "calls" involving descending hayloft ladders were difficult to navigate in darkness.

26 January - Finally, a rest day for the marchers at Flatow. They were fed soup at 1500. To ensure receiving even a cup, many stood in a freezing line for two hours.

27 January 1945 – Flatow (Zlotow) to Jastrow (Jastrowie)

Thin soup for breakfast. American marchers pass POWs from other areas including British, French and Russians. Men who can no longer make the march are being transported to Stalag III, Luckenwalde. Many are ill with diarrhea.

28 January 1945 – Jastrow (Jastrowie) to Zippnow (Sypniewo)

Comments by fellow Kriegy Vic Kanners.

> "*A long delay for marchers was caused because 120 more men are unable to make the trip. Those continuing are having to choose items to leave or take as they can no longer carry heavy packs. Continued severe weather causes more misery. Finding housing took 1½ hours. The former Kommandant has lost his car and is walking with us. Some bed down in a church."*

29 January 1945 – Zippnow (Sypniewo) to Oflag 11D

Men were served thin soup. Buddies Don and Mike shared some bread. After four km, they arrived at an abandoned camp used by French POWs. It was newly furnished with room for everyone. New stoves and supply of potatoes were in the basement. Stoves provided heat and a place to dry clothing and socks. Rest day is needed and Colonel Goode will try to arrange this.

30 January 1945 – Oflag 11D to Machlin (Machliny)

Rumor spreads that the Russians are in Jastrow. Soup was again offered. About 100 more men are too sick to travel. Marchers arrived in Machlin and had to wait again in cold, damp weather for housing. Fifty men were placed in barns.

Machlin (Machliny) to Tempelburg (Czaplinek)

Marchers covered 18 km to Tempelburg which is over the German border. Marchers were divided into 100-man groups and housed over a three-mile area within a small set of farm buildings.

1 February 1945 – Tempelburg (Czaplinek) to Heinrichsdorf (Siemczyno)

March began at 0900. Arrived in Heinrichsdorf after 6 km. While waiting for thick soup, a large truck arrived with bread.

2 February 1945 – Heinrichsdorf (Siemczyno) to Falkenburg (Zlocieniec)

Another miracle as men were given another loaf of bread. Noon departure.

3 February 1945 – Zuelshagen (Suliszewo Drawskie)

A day of rest. Soup at 1400. Some trading with SS troops stationed close by. An argument about missing chickens caused a Russian to be shot.

4 February 1945 - Zuelshagen (Suliszewo Drawskie) to Gienow (Ginawa)

A billeting officer, Major Hazlett, has been appointed. The men were beginning to feel more positive about their situations. In new barns, each man was assigned a spot for sleeping. "The Bird" continues to keep them informed.

5 February 1945 – Gienow (Ginawa) to Zeitlitz

Ersatz coffee and boiled potatoes for breakfast. Marchers now view cobblestones and road signs instead of barren countryside and farmland.

Road blocks are being erected in the streets with people loading wagons for evacuation**.** 4-5 wagons are used to carry German equipment and a few ill Kriegies.

Lussenden's next addition recorded a chilling incident which set the tone for possible dangers ahead.

> *That night they announced that about 100 men could be taken by train and I contemplated going. I felt sick and yet I wanted no part of a train ride. I recalled the eight days from Limburg to Schubin in a boxcar. The first three days we didn't move because the track had been bombed out. And where were we when the track was being bombed? On the train listening to the crescendo of the falling bombs. Many were hurt and 60 American officers were killed by a direct hit on the one-room building that we had been quartered in for three weeks. And only 2½ hours after we had left the building. No sir, no train rides. I'll keep walking. That night 180 men left to board trains.*

6 February 1945 – Zeitlitz (Wegorzyno) to Regenwalde (Resko)

> *A surprise was added this day—and it was welcomed. It appeared as a two-wheeled boiler with smoking stack being pulled by two horses—better known as "the Goon mess truck". Ersatz coffee for all!*

Coffee, potatoes and Brod along with gruel and watery soup became their daily menus. Food remains as popular subject as it was in the camps. When possible, the men gather supplies and cook for themselves. Crowded lofts, most often, become their over-night stays.

Trading with the locals often produced extra food or other useful items.

7 February 1945 – Regenwalde (Resko) to Lilbin (Ploty)

> *Vic Kanners*: *"Had soup and 1/6 loaf of Brod issued in the morning, and then after standing around until 1000, so our feet got thoroughly soaked, we took off. Thru Plather 20 km more to Lubbin* [Lilbin]. *Day after day, kilo after kilo, and there is no end in sight. Today – 20 km – sleep in a barn and dream of food. When will it all end?*
>
> *Why couldn't the Russians have gone North from Stargard? We were headed there and they took the town while we were 50 km East. So we turned North and got around them. The Germans sincerely believe that they are saving us. We had soup in the morning so there was none that night."*

9 February 1945 – Stuchow (Stuchowo) to Grosse Justin (Gostyn)

Vic Kanners: *"Next morning Dunc and Chappie tell us about how they were in the right place at the right time last night. They happened in a doorway looking for a trade and got invited to dinner with one of the Polish slave families living there. They were feted with pancakes, syrup and baked beans – all they could eat. A Kriegy's delight – the right place at the right time. How we drooled as they told their tale." Talk like this passed the time of day and I always welcome it. With Mike I discussed food, families and past experiences. For sports, Tom Paris was a man to stroll along side of. Whether it was baseball, football, bowling, boxing, racing or what have you – Tom knew the past present and future stars. Frank Heidt – Frank was in a class by himself. Regardless of subject, Frank was willing. He was always watching out for us. Racing to get a good spot in a barn, or running to get us when a wagonload of milk was found and about to be passed out (to the first comers) as occurred on this afternoon. We had just finished 14 km in a drizzly rain and entered the barn area.*

The rest of the story finds Frank securing several tins of milk for his buddies while in competition with 600 other Kriegies. According to Lussenden, *"Yes, there is no one like Frank Heidt.'"*

10 February 1945 – Grosse Justin (Gostyn) to Dievenrow (Dziwow)

Vic Kanners: "Rumor has it that we would arrive at an Oflag on an island in the mouth of the Oder River by nightfall. It was also rumored that we would get Red Cross parcels. This one undoubtedly arose straight from the shizzan area and we knew it but still it plagued us."

Don also daydreams about arriving in Norway via boat.

"Anything that led to home was worth thinking about, and we had nothing else to do but think as we marched along."

11 February 1945 – Dievenrow (Dziwnrow) to Neuendorf (Wisezka)

Next morning we shave, again for the first time in ten days. Toasted more brod and listened attentively to a fellow Timberwolf relate his war stories. We marched out at noon feeling very revived and thankful for the dry weather. Our route was along a double lane cement highway which was used as an emergency runway for the airfield. Camouflaged planes were dispersed in the edge of the woods along the road. Jerry infantrymen were conducting problems in the area and we watched squad after squad marching back towards the camp. The area is a great deal like Camp

Blanding, Florida. It was flat, half marshy and had many tall trees. I recalled some of my training days there.

At Neuendorf, only two barns were found to serve 360 marchers who went to bed with no supper.

12 February 1945 – Neuendorf (Wiselka) to Swinemunde (Swinoujscie)

This morning we had a small portion of gruel for breakfast. The coffee we had acted as a wonderful stimulant and we didn't get that gnawing hungry feeling until 1100 (instead of 1000). Many people collapsed this day from the grueling 25 km (17-18 miles) we made. Undernourishment is rearing its ugly head and taking a toll among the older men who don't revive after a night's sleep the way the younger ones do.

13 February 1945 – Swinemunde (Swinoujscie) to Garz

A fair soup is served inside a real mess hall and we make seconds of it. A little later we all wait inside while a Goon Medic examines 39 of our sick men. Col. Goode explained that the men had traveled 235 miles by foot in 23 days. We've received 4½ loaves of Brod per man, a little oleo and never more than one cup of thin soup a day. These men are deathly sick and the rest of us will soon be the same way unless we are given more food and rest.

At 1030 we moved out into a snow flurry and were on our way once more. At the center of town we are ferried across the Oder River—one of the three branches that led in from the Baltic.

February 15th – *Our day of rest. Mike and I took turns staying in the sack. One of us would look for the lice in our clothes while the other baked a few cartofels around the fire. Dunc and Chappie kept the fire going all day as they were making an all-day stew. The stew was ready early, but it was a comforting feeling to continually stir the stew and know that you are going to eat it.*

February 16th

Next morning 100 of our sickest men remained behind to wait for trains as the rest of us began the trek again. SOME DAY WHEN I WRITE MEMOIRS OF THIS DAMN TRIP I'LL RECALL TODAY AND THE MEAL WE'RE HAVING. AND I'LL WRITE, "ON THIS DAY MORALE WAS LOW".

On our feet again, a ***for r w a r r r r d h o o o o o o*** *from Col. Waters, and on our way. He was in the habit of calling this every time we finished a break and were to begin marching. We made 23 km.*

February 18tth - the big day. Each man received a sealed #10 Red Cross box.

Up early to bash before leaving at 0800. We made 20 km through Demmin where we heard that we were to get another parcel.

THAT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT THE STORY IS THAT THE TOWN IS A RED CROSS DEPOT AND IS BEING EVACUATED. MY GOD! ANOTHER PARCEL. WOW! HOW'LL WE CARRY IT? HA! WE'LL CARRY IT OK. THAT'S SUCH A COMFORTABLE LOAD.

February 23rd

At 1000 we left the barns and began marching in the rain. It was 10 km to Basedow where Oberst Schneider announces that we will get transportation soon…meanwhile we continue to march.

THAT'S A SILLY DAMN ANSWER. WE'VE BEEN GOING TO GET TRANSPORTATION SINCE WE LEFT SCHUBIN. OH WELL, THE OLD GEESER LIKES TO MAKE ANNOUNCEMENTS. HOPE TO HELL WE DON'T GET TRAINS ANYHOW. I DON'T WANT ANY TRAIN RIDES NOW.

February 24th

The Goons issued soup and a few cartofels which we ate while sitting in the moonlight, but we sat dejectedly thinking of the BIRD which remained as always—no change.

AND FEBRUARY 24 WAS THE DAY I PICKED FOR THE WAR TO END.

February 28th

We marched part of the 15 km to Sigglekow where it is announced that we will wait for transportation to arrive at Parchim only 7 km away. We're going to Hammelburg.

March 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th *were all identical rest days spent bashing around our 10-man fire. We managed to clean up and some people even got haircuts.*

At Parchim our march is completed. This is the transportation they'd get for us on January 21st.

We marched 580 km or 362 ½ miles.

We marched for 33 out of 39 days.

1300 Kriegies – 488 OLD KRIEGYS finished.

OH, THE RUSSKIES WILL OVERTAKE US IN A COUPLE OF DAYS.

The old 40 & 8 cars were waiting for us and we loaded 40 men per car. The three-day trip was fairly uneventful, that is, no

strafing or bombing. Karl, a Goon Pfc., taught us some German in return for the English we introduced to him.

***March 9*, 1945 – Hammelburg**

At Hammelburg we were unloaded from the boxcars and marched up to Oflag XIII B. Here the Oberst assembled us for his last talk. He told us there was a general at the camp and that he himself might be sent somewhere else. He said he hoped the war would soon be over and that we might have a speedy return to our homeland. I believe he was sincere.

Of the 1,400 men who left Oflag 64, some 1200 reached Parchim in central Germany. Along the way they had passed a V-2 rocket installation. The POWs instinctively grasped what devastation these rockets, as big as silos, could wreak.

Approximately 400 men were with Goode and Waters and were put in boxcars for the final trip to Hammelburg. Another 400 who arrived some days later were shipped by train to an oflag east of Berlin. The 400 or so men at the end of the column had marched all the way to Hammelburg.

The remaining 200 never reached Parchim. Some were killed, some wounded and sent to hospitals, and the rest managed to escape, avoid recapture and make their way to the Russian lines.

Dissension was rampant among the ranks at Hammelburg, but Col. Goode took command with this statement: *"I am the senior officer and from now on this camp will be run with the usual chain of command found in any other army installation."*

He was well aware of what happened to the men of the 28th and 106th Divisions and also knew they felt betrayed. But he also knew that they would not recover their pride and discipline unless they were forced to.

With Colonel Waters, his executive, order was restored, including the washing and repairing of uniforms. Lussenden was assigned this duty at the Serbian compound, absorbing his time and positive energies.

As the internal discipline of the camp improved, so did the deportment of the Germans. Commandant von Goeckel relented and no longer called as many Appells. He called none in bad weather. He released more Red Cross parcels. He let the German bishop provide communion wine and wafers for the Catholic chaplain. Von Goeckel even took Goode for rides in Hammelburg.

March 27, 1945

As Lussenden was returning from his job, the camp heard gunfire and observed Lt. Col. John Waters carrying an American flag along with Hauptman Fuchs with a white flag marching toward the front gate to contact

American forces and surrender the camp. A German soldier unaware of the surrender fired, seriously wounding Waters and forcing others to a wall. At this very moment, Task Force Baum arrived. POWs tried to escape or jump on one of the incoming vehicles.

Later, after the confusion died down, Col. Goode, with German General von Goeckel's assistance, marched 300 men back to the camp where they were loaded onto 40 & 8 boxcars, bound for Nürnberg. Assigned there to large tents, the survivors waited for the next step which occurred on **April 4th** when they were marched south. Intercepted by a Red Cross convoy, they continued marching in the cool of the night.

> "*After sleeping in a church one night, the German officer in command of our column called us into formation and announced that President Roosevelt had died. The news quieted us down but we all had one thing in mind—when were the American forces going to rescue us?"*

Continuing to march south, the Kriegies' spirits were on high alert thanks to American air power, the calm weather and Red Cross convoys. Approximately **two weeks later**, they entered the gates of Stalag VII A, next to Moosburg.

> "*It was also the first German prison camp I had been in after my trip from Sicily up through Italy and over the Alps via the Brenner Pass. The conditions were a bit crowded but tolerable. We could hear occasionally the sounds of artillery and always of bombing, so we knew it would not be long. We felt we were as far south as we could go and believed the Russians were coming from the east."*

On ***April 29, 1945***, a disagreement transpired which involved the Americans of the 45th Division versus the German Kommandant who could not surrender because the camp was controlled by the area SS.

> *So, after telling us to lie low, the Americans left the camp. Shortly, small arms fire began as the 45th American Infantrymen, backed by its tanks, attacked the defendants of the area. A few stray rounds went through our barracks, and as I recall, one POW was wounded. When we saw the Stalag guards who were walking post as the battle started begin to leave their posts, we knew it was over! The tanks came through the barbed wire and stopped by our barracks.*
>
> *Word came down that we were to stay in place—it still being too dangerous to wander away from camp. It was assumed that there still could be rabid Nazis among the local civilian population. As it turned out, the Bavarians were happy to have the Americans, instead of the Russians. If there were any incidents, they were probably caused by the crazy Russians prisoners who did go wild and started to harass the local population.*

By and large, it was a tedious wait with the American mess system. At first, we received field rations, and later a field mess system. One time we received a lot of cheese the Army had found in storage in a nearby town. It was great to simply eat up whatever was given to you, knowing there would be more.

ARE WE GOING HOME NOW?

We were told that we would be airlifted, but it was days before the plans fell into place. Our names were on a roster, and when the time came, our names were called. We loaded onto army trucks and were taken to the airport at Landshut. C-47s started coming in at about five-minute intervals and quickly loading and taking off. (p.133)

After landing at Camp Lucky Strike and experiencing an unfortunate incident, Lussenden found a tent in the darkness and slept. This camp was currently serving as a holding RAMP facility (Recovered Allied Military Personnel) for returnees until their ship was called.

"*We each had to go through a debriefing office where questions were asked about our treatment, etc., and also where we turned the atrocity data that I had bound into the book covers." (pp. 135, 136)*

Two weeks later they were boarded on a ship at La Havre, France. Lussenden remembers with affection the hot showers offered, but not the blood poisoning infection he developed from the shower floors. Known to be highly dangerous and possibly deadly, he was immediately hospitalized at Ft. Dix for a ten-day treatment upon his arrival in the states. It remained an issue for the next 45 years!

Home again, Don was promoted to 1st Lieutenant on January 30, 1946, and mustered out after the Japanese surrendered. He decided to use his GI bill for college. Don married Helen Jane Lipsey in June 1946 and moved to Michigan, continuing his education and employment at Ford Motor Company.

In 1950 I was recalled to Korea and in 1952 ordered there. I spent about 30 days on the line as a platoon leader before I was wounded seriously enough to be evacuated to Japan to a U.S. Army hospital in Osaka. After 90 days in the hospital, I was returned to the U.S. for continued recuperation. I returned to Ford Motor Company and resumed my graduate studies.

LT Donald Lussenden

1987 - Don's and Lucy's 25th Wedding Anniversary

In 1960, I was divorced and in January 1962, married Lucille Rhea. My three children, Kendrick, Garrett and Patricia, and I were living in New Jersey where I had been transferred by Ford. Lucy and her daughter, Debra, joined us after our wedding. In June of 1963, we moved into our new home in Livonia, where we presently reside. (pp. 136, 137)

POST WAR LIFE

Don and Lucy raised four children: Kendrick, Garrett, Debra, and Tricia - three children were from Don's first marriage and Debra was from Lucy's first marriage. The children were raised together after Don's and Lucy's marriage in January 1962. They have nine grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Don and Lucy with their four children traveled throughout the United States, camping at national and state parks when possible. They camped from Acadia National Park in Maine to Yosemite in California, the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone to name a few.

After the children had grown, Don and Lucy and her parents traveled to nearly all of western and eastern Europe several times, usually driving but sometimes on tours. Lucy's dad and Don were best friends. The four of them drove to the former Soviet Union in 1974 to visit her dad's previously unknown family in Ukraine and Belarus. It was a very emotional experience when her 58-year-old dad, John Kalusniak, met aunts, uncles, and cousins he had never known existed. The trips to the USSR happened during a time of detente after President Nixon met with their leader Brezhnev, who encouraged Americans to visit his country.

After leaving the USSR, they drove to Schubin to visit the former Oflag 64 camp. That was an emotional experience for Don.

Don was very interested in the social sciences and wanted to learn all he could about different cultures in the world, past and present. He and Lucy participated in two archaeological digs, one in Connecticut of an approximately 15,000 year-old campsite of Indigenous people through Earthwatch, an organization working to connect professionals and amateurs who want to be involved in such projects. Another dig in Alabama was coordinated between the University of Michigan and the University of Alabama to study an indigenous campsite on a ridge overlooking the Black River.

A hobby Don had was learning about his own genealogy. The name Lussenden had been of unknown origin all his life. The family story was that three brothers emigrated from England to the U.S. in 1850, settling in Cleveland, Ohio. The name itself sounded more Germanic than English so Don set out to find the answer to the puzzle. After decades of family research he learned

that the "Lis" clan had moved from Jutland to England in about the 5th century. Jutland was an independent country west of Denmark and north of Holland. Today it has been integrated into western Denmark.

While researching his Lussenden family, Don was given some letters written during the Civil War by his mother's grandfather, Lorenzo Gantz, and his two brothers Samuel and John, to their mother Elizabeth French Gantz. The brothers had enlisted in the Union Army from their home in Indiana. Their father, Joseph Gantz emigrated in about 1832 from the Black Forest in southern Germany. Don published the letters in a book for his family entitled "Civil War Letters of the Gantz Family".

OTHER POST WAR ACTIVITIES

Don was a Ham Radio operator with the Stu Rockefeller Ham Radio Society of Plymouth, MI. The “Hams” occasionally held Special Events during which other Hams from around the world would check in with the special event.

The Stu Rockefeller Hams held a Special Event in Dayton, Ohio at the Wright Patterson Air Force Base, National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, one weekend more than 20 years ago. While there Don and Lucy learned that the remaining members of Jimmy Doolittle's Raiders were holding their annual reunion at the same time. The "Raiders" visited the Ham's broadcast area which was located in front of the WWII POW exhibit. They were very interested in what the Hams were doing and struck up conversations. They invited the Hams to join them at their formal dinner that evening in the museum. It was such an honor for the Hams and their wives to be with the Raiders at their dinner. The Raiders held a wonderful memorial ceremony for those who had passed on. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for Don and Lucy. Neither had enough words to describe how they both felt about meeting and being with the Raiders at their memorial reunion.

Don at Korean War Memorial in DC - 1998

TAPS

Don Allan Lussenden died on June 9, 2004 and was buried in Glen Eden Memorial Park in Livonia, Michigan. A full military honors ceremony took place at the park's memorial chapel with a Scottish tartan-clad piper also honoring Don's service to this nation through his piping.

Mr. Jay Tucker gave a moving speech at his funeral on June 12, 2004, ending with these words:

> *Don Lussenden, my friend and mentor, was an American hero of the Greatest Generation. So long old soldier and Godspeed on your new journey.*

FINAL THOUGHTS

I hope that my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will have a better understanding of what life was like for a soldier and prisoner-of-war during World War II as a result of this work, and that they will develop an interest in studying the events surrounding the war that so dramatically affected the lives of everyone in this century. Donald A. Lussenden

The following Addendum was added to the book on pages 138 – 155 with this message written below by Don Lussenden:

> *This addendum is copied directly from the book "Raid!" the Untold Story of Patton's Secret Mission" by R. Baron, A. Baum and R. Goldhurst. The task force was overwhelmed by the superiority of German forces, and of the 294 men who had set out on the*

mission, all of them were killed, wounded, or captured. I recommend that readers obtain a copy of "Raid" and relive the wild ride from the America lines to Hammelburg.

Contents of a personal letter written by Donald Lussenden to Major Baum (dated July 6, 1998) are located on the Oflag 64 website.

My World War II Experiences by Donald A. Lussenden (published in 1997) is the major source material for this biography.

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers in collaboration with Lucy Lussenden, Donald's widow.