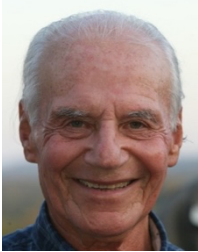


PVT George Joseph Rosenthal

1925 – 2018



George Rosenthal was born on 14 May in 1925 in Amityville, New York.

His story is best told through excerpts from an article written by Elaine Markowitz in the *Times Correspondent* article from Thursday, October 13, 2011: “Oldsmar veteran recalls World War II, plans POW reunion”.

MILITARY SERVICE

George Rosenthal sits in his living room with his wife, leafing through handwritten pages detailing two years of his life—from April 1943, when he enlisted in the U.S. Army, until October 1945 when he sailed home from Italy.

“It was part of the atmosphere,” he said of enlisting at 18 to fight in World War II. “All my friends who were physically able were going.”

In early 1944, the New York native landed at Anzio Beachhead in Italy, unprepared for what awaited him. The Allied forces had invaded Anzio, the site of one of the war’s bloodiest battles and the place where Rosenthal was captured by German soldiers – “the most intense experience of my life,” he recalled.

One incident looms large among Rosenthal’s war memories, the first of many that he wants to convey to his six children and 13 grandchildren.

At Anzio Beach, his squad was surrounded by German soldiers. He and nine other squad members, at the instruction of his sergeant, ran for their lives through a clearing. Under a barrage of gunfire, the men were ambushed and told to put up their hands. Rosenthal was shot in his left hand.

“I kept thinking of the Bible,” said Rosenthal, who is Jewish and carried a small Bible with Hebrew text in his back pocket. “Somehow I got the nerve to slowly lower my hand into the pocket and then drop the Bible into the sand.”

In the semi-darkness, the young soldier discreetly buried the sacred book with his foot and was not caught.

The hand injury and subsequent chest injury, wounds that earned him two Purple Hearts, necessitated quick medical care. Accompanied by a German guard, Rosenthal walked to a small medical facility and passed out.

[When he woke up, he was 20 miles from the front. A nun was looking down at him and his first impression was that he had died and gone to heaven. Source: OFLAG 64 *The Fiftieth Anniversary Book*, p. 118]

He was later transported by boxcar, along with wounded German soldiers, to hospitals in Florence and then Venice. Rosenthal couldn't believe his good luck, especially having been a Jewish soldier in the company of Germans.

"No one even looked at my dog tags or asked my religion until I got to Venice." In a hospital there, a German officer questioned his name, [which was] posted at the foot of the bed.

"Are you Jewish?" he asked.

"Yes," Rosenthal said nervously, but nothing more was said.

His memories of Venice, where he was sent to his first POW camp, are filled with images of suffering. "It was a real hellhole. Hundreds of Americans soldiers arrived, many missing legs or in terrible physical condition."

Rosenthal was in pain and itching from lice. "Lice accumulated under the cast on my arm, but at 18, I thought I could put up with anything."

During 1944, he spent time in four more POW camps. He was packed into a truck or loaded onto straw in a boxcar going from camp to camp, including two in Germany: Stalag 11A and Stalag 2B. At the latter camp, he gathered cigarettes and traded them for food from Belgium soldiers.

Fortune smiled at Rosenthal when his injuries prevented his being forced to work in dangerous locations like coal mines. This redesignation to "*limited service*" probably saved his life. According to many documented sources, forced labor practices concerning Americans and many ethnic groups were rampant in both Asia and Europe, especially during World War II. Holocaust centers and many museums and are testimonies to the inhumanity of some humans toward others.

His next boxcar trip took Rosenthal to Oflag 64 in Szubin, Poland.

This camp had been established for American ground force officers and according to Rosenthal's remarks, "*he spent several months there, cleaning and mixing vats of soup in the kitchen.*"

[“Most of my activity at Oflag 64 was as an orderly and kitchen helper. It was definitely a good move for me. In December 1944, I again volunteered to be a part of the cadre team under Lt. Craig Campbell and Lt. Col. Yardley to staff Oflag 64Z at Shocken. This camp was needed to handle the overflow of officers captured in the Battle of the Bulge.” Source: OFLAG 64 The Fiftieth Anniversary Book, p. 118]

THE LONG MARCH – JANUARY 21, 1945, HOME AT LAST, REUNIONS

“A sequence of events follows: Waking at 4 a.m. to begin a 10-day march through the snow to another camp in Poland, Oflag Z. Exhausted fellow soldiers dropped along the way. Some nights, the squad bedded down in hay in barns. They spent one stormy night in a one-room schoolhouse where Russian soldiers seeking Germans burst in.

The prisoners’ guards fled. The Russians loaded the freed prisoners onto boxcars headed to Odessa on the Black Sea. There, in March 1945, the 20-year-old Rosenthal and other surviving troops welcomed the sight of American naval vessels bringing their first real supplies.



George Rosenthal aboard ship

Several days later, an English ship took the soldiers to Naples, Italy, where they boarded an American ship and headed home.

“I couldn’t wait to see the Statue of Liberty when we got to New York, but we docked in Boston instead.”

“When we got off the ship, I kissed the ground.”

Nearly 70 years later, he and his wife, Arlene, live in the East Lake Woodlands community and are organizing a reunion of survivors of Oflag 64, a Nazi POW camp in Poland. It’s this weekend at the Hilton St. Petersburg, Bayfront. Hundreds of survivors attended earlier reunions, but now only six remain. Rosenthal, age 86, is the youngest.



*Front l-r: Jimmie Kanaya, Vincent Di Francesco, Herman Littman;
Back l-r: George Rosenthal, Ray Klinkenborg, Sidney Thal*

AFTER-REUNION NOTES

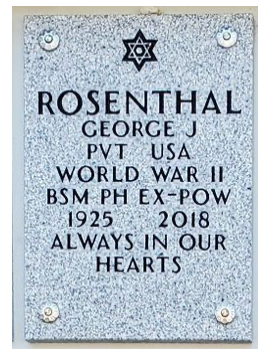
ONE OF THE BEST...was the declaration of all who attended this 2011 Oflag 64 Reunion on October 13 – 16.

Attending Kriegies included George Rosenthal, Ray Klinkenborg, Sid Thal, Jimmy Kanaya, Vincent “Doc” Di Francesco and Herm Littman. Fifty family members were also present to share the memories and the scheduled events.

Complete details can be found on the Oflag 64 website under ITEM, The ITEM Archive, 2011, 4th Quarter

LIFE AFTER THE ARMY AND TAPS

George Rosenthal owned and operated The Corner Store in Larchmont, New York, until his retirement and relocation with his wife to Florida. He died on May 14, 2018 and was buried with military honors at Bay Pines National Cemetery, St. Petersburg.



Other photos from Rosenthal family files and from Oflag 64 POW Reunion files.

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers