CPT Roger Lincoln Shinn

1917 – 2013

BOOK FORWARD STATEMENT

> *'I belong to a generation familiar with war. Born during World War I, soldiers in World War II, my contemporaries are living through a period when war has become endemic in human history. It was not the first such period. It may be the last for the portentous reason that war, as never known in the past, can destroy life and history.'* (p. 9)

MILITARY SERVICE and COMBAT

Shinn entered the war as a private in 1941 and graduated from Infantry Officers School at Fort Benning in 1942.

Shinn's reflections on Comradeship:

> *'In combat men are knit together as in few other experiences of life. At first glance, the unity of the fighting squad may seem to be artificial. The men, usually from diverse backgrounds and worlds of discourse, have been thrown together by accident. They may share few memories or few common interests apart from their role in war. They usually have divergent values, religions, superstitions, ethical standards and goals. Whether or not they like one another, as human likes and dislikes usually go, is relatively unimportant. They are embattled together, and that does matter.'* (p. 270)

BATTLE OF THE BULGE

15 December 1944

Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Collins was Commander of the 60th Armored Infantry Battalion, 9th Armored Division. Captain Shinn, Commander of C Company, was stationed in the hills and woods of Luxembourg and could look across the Our and Sauer Rivers into the Siegfried line, which appeared formidable as he had inspected the area from the air. He noted big gaps left positions vulnerable on both sides. Artillery shells were traded with no real damage as a result.

> *But here both sides were taking it easy, satisfied to save their strength because they were pouring it extravagantly to the north, where the First Army had recently taken Aachen in a rough and*

wearing siege and was now grinding painfully and bloodily through the Hurtgen Forest.

The hard facts of logistics had stalled that great drive, and in our sector our army had pulled back to settle down on the river banks, while the attack went on at reduced speed, in areas that higher commands decided were more important. (pp. 15 -17)

16 December 1944

The war was on.

Artillery, lots of it, was coming down on the whole front. Shelling continued as daylight increased. Communications were broken and restored. Our men kept eyes and ears alert, spliced wire, and made ready for expected enemy assault. When shells came in, they crouched in their foxholes, and casualties were few. No reports of enemy troops but Co. A on our right, commanded by Lt. (Mac) McCarthy, was fighting off an attack. Germans were coming through the woods at night. (pp. 17 – 20)

Taking a jeep to McCarthy's position, Shinn used the observation post to note Germans' maneuvers:

'We saw the Jerries across the river, but their crossing place was hidden. Our artillery was keeping them fairly scattered. But the Germans had a big artillery superiority, and American troops not in the habit of fighting that way.' (p. 20)

The German 'screaming meemie', a shell whose shrill whine always gave notice that it was coming –specifically designed for demolition and was most effective against buildings'—was flooding the area. And then it stopped. (p. 23)

'Our men were doing a good job in their first big fight. I knew then well. I had trained this company and had led it overseas. Now I was encouraged to see their confidence under fire.' (pp. 20 – 23)

'What about the rest of the front?' I asked. There were only vague reports. It appeared that the Germans were attacking in strength to our north. To the south of us, nothing was known. (Though it would be a long time before a picture emerged from the confusion, this information was essentially right. We were at the south edge of what was to become known as the famous 'bulge'. But we could not know this now, and to us, as all troops attacked by a stronger enemy, it seemed that our sector must be the focal point of everything. That night, as through the next few days, we could not understand in our desperation why Corps did not throw in all its reserves where we were. That, of course, would be the sure way to lose a war'.) (pp. 24, 25)

Returning to the command post (C.P.), Shinn noted the assembly of his own platoon with the addition of members from other platoons. Deciding to visit his left platoon with his communication's sergeant, they started in the dark, moved carefully and evaluated the reality of the German's position with no real attack on this platoon, ammunition being supplied. Shinn returned to the C.P. The third platoon, with segments of the second platoon, left to reenforce Mac's platoon, reorganize the second platoon, and reestablish themselves in their previous area. The presence of too many 'Jerries', however, prevented this action.

December 17 1944

German flares sent Shinn's group to Hotel Meyer, a strong stone building with usable cellar. Communications were established with the first order for Shinn to report to Battalion C.P. for plans to counterattack, with Capt. John Hall of H.Q. Co. using covert tactics to reenforce the battalion. Reconnecting to McCarthy's group through Recon troop was priority.

Fortunately, removal of casualities plus the use of a half-track with extra ammunitions made it through and although the appearance of P-38s and P-47s raised hopes, groups of the enemy were reported in the area and ground force assistance was stretched too thin. With limited options appearing toward late-day hours, Shinn laid contingency plans. As 'screaming meemies' continued their earth-shaking appearance, Shinn considered reconnoitering another shelter, but finding his virtual moat surrounded by Jerries, decided to stay entrenched in this present position.

> *'The fight started. We had a fortress, ammunition, and a few men—some cooks and mechanics, two or three company men, a scattering of individuals from the second platoon and wanderers from other companies. The battle had movie quality with each side firing continually, throwing grenades, and ducking for cover when prudence demanded.'*
>
> *'Keep fighting,' was the only answer I could think of. Somehow, I was not much worried. If I tried to be reasonable, I could not see how we could expect to leave the hotel alive. The Germans outnumbered us and could eventually force an entrance. At the very least, they could hold us inside, and it seemed only a matter of time, in the present course of battle, until a German company or battalion would be there. But this fight was exciting. It was not like absorbing artillery. We could fight back, match wits and strength with the enemy. Our men were exhilarated and fought brilliantly. We were killing Germans, so far at low cost to ourselves.' (p. 31)*

As firing from the German side ceased, Shinn became concerned that artillery would soon take the place of troops: death instead by barrage or ambush. He counseled his men to move away from the building in small groups, him

leading the way, then followed by several others. Traveling between groups of the enemy for several miles, they turned to see the hotel a blazing inferno as some of their ammunition had become a bonfire. Careful to bypass German bivouacs, Shinn walked into the village of Befort to find the C.P. deserted, then continued on to spot supporting artillery and caught a ride with the artillery colonel to his C.P. in a farmhouse and asked him to radio his C.O. After eating and sleeping briefly on the floor, a message shook him awake:

> *'They want you at your Battalion C.P. A truck is outside to take you. I went.' (p. 34)*

COUNTERATTACK

Arriving at Colonel Collin's black-out tent, they greeted one another and discussed the proposed counterattack. Asked by the Colonel about its chances, Shinn replied, '*It should have a good chance. There are a lot of Germans up there but they are disorganized.'* (p. 35)

Additional details were discussed, and they left at daylight. Exchanges between tanks and artillery were constant. The battle proceeded slowly with German infantry surrendering—

> *'mostly second rate soldiers. Sometimes we would find a few of their better troops, who were stubborn fighters. But now it was the poor soldiers surrendering fast.'* (p. 38)

Dark was descending, the battle still raging, when Shinn noted something problematic:

> 'I saw *extensive telephone wire spread out on the ground; it meant that the Jerries had established a communication net, behind my men. I cut some of the wires, as a sort of spare time activity, hoping to cause the enemy as much trouble as broken communications had made us.'*
>
> *'The major had lost nearly half his tanks and could not let the rest get caught at night. He gave orders to go back. It made me sick. My men were somewhere ahead. But maybe it was all he could do.' (p. 39)*

Shinn reported the results of the failure and received the Colonel's permission through authority to withdraw the men through infiltration; McCarthy needed this information and Shinn volunteered to deliver it. Accompanied by Sergeant Ziringer, they would follow one route while Capt. Harder of Company B would divide the same mission to reach McCarthy's company. Revising plans because of the presence of Germans, Shinn and Ziringer stopped abruptly when Shinn heard a sound like '*Halt.*' (pp. 38 – 44)

CAPTURED

> '*In a split decision I had to make a decision, I could not tell whether it was an American or German voice. So I simply halted. My eyes struggled to see. There was a rifle barrel sticking out of a hole in the ground. Another grunt and other men came running toward us. Closing in from both sides, they grabbed our weapons and quickly searched us. Then they marched us off into the darkness. We were prisoners of war.' (p .44)*

Marched into Befort, Shinn and Sergeant Ziringer were moved to a house C.P. They were searched by a Sergeant who seemed pleased that he had captured an American officer but acted in a non-threatening manner. His belt buckle contained the phrase, '*Gott mit Uns'* [God with us] *and seeing it reminded Shinn that it was the symbol of the old Kaiser's army and surprised that Hitler's army retained it.'* The German Sergeant spoke good English as he asked them questions about unit location strength, etc. to which the Americans replied only with name, rank, serial number. (p. 45)

Given instructions by the Sergeant, Shinn and Ziringer were escorted by two alert guards to an ancient castle, now serving as a German headquarters. Early the next morning, after a restless night, they were moved outside to join twenty other Americans, most of them recognized by Shinn, but not acknowledged, as this would give the Germans additional information. Marched next out of town toward Germany, Shinn recognized an elaborate communication net and pockets of Co. A's men; they had either withdrawn or been killed.

Moving past dead German soldiers, they headed toward the Sauer River and were being taken across into Germany. New guards became their captured group of twenty-two Americans, and for the first time, Shinn felt depressed and worried about the fate of remaining platoons, the Colonel's position, and plans for escape. Hours later, the group was loaded into a truck and driven to the banks of the Sauer River.

> '*The river was strangely unwarlike. If the Americans had attacked across that river there would now be a pontoon and perhaps steel bridges. Trucks would be rolling forward with supplies; everything would be activity. I marveled at the German ability to fight with little equipment and almost no activity in their rear. We were rowed across the river, and stepped out in Germany. The rugged hills of the Siegfried Line loomed before us. A new group of guards took over and we started climbing into those rocks and woods.'* (p. 47)

Ascending the rocks and woods was slow going and tiring. Approaching the headquarters, Shinn noted that it was located in a shell-proof pillbox of several rooms. Enlisted men were separated from Shinn in a room with water

on the floor and no place to sit. Shinn was pushed into a corridor near the H.Q. switchboard and told to sit. One of them shared two slices of bread, for which he said, *'danke schoen'*—the first food he had eaten in three days.

Moved by truck, then told to walk, Shinn reflected on the following:

> '*Occasionally we passed a few horse-drawn carts moving west. They carried ammunition and military supplies, sometimes covered with straw, sometimes not. This was the only sign of a supply system we saw. Again I thought of the roads in the American rear area, choked with supply vehicles and marveled at this German army. As I learned later, Tiger tanks and heavy equipment were used farther north at the center of the bulge. But here Jerry had staged a major infantry and artillery offensive, with almost no visible supply system backing it up.'* (p. 49)

Their next destination occurred at a home which contained a kind of military police headquarters. Exhausted, Shinn laid on a straw floor and slept. As other Americans joined him during the three day stay, he learned, as the newcomers shared information, that word had gotten through to McCarthy's patrol after all. (p. 49)

The German Feldwebel was as helpful as possible considering cramped conditions with little food and filthy outhouses. He explained that we would soon be moved to a place with improved living conditions called a stalag.

Another German NCO interrogated the men one at a time. When interviewing Shinn, the NCO who spoke English recited pertinent information about Shinn's unit. The Germans had obviously found the desk roster and used it to coordinate answers, although the only ones given by the Americans were name, rank, and serial number. When conferring with his men later, Shinn learned that the Germans referred to the Hotel Meyer as a higher-grade Division C.P. This brought a smile to Shinn's face.

Moved the next day to a city with a building that resembled a penitentiary, they were quickly searched and questioned by a German officer; then the three Americans, Hardy, Robert, and Shinn, were placed in a cold room where an older guard used the term, 'Sing Sang.' Prisoners from the 28th Division joined them, trading notes about ongoing battles. Issued a *'three-day travel ration' of bread and baloney',* they were marched to the train station and loaded at night onto crowded, freezing boxcars with no heat boxes. (p. 51)

Informed that the track ahead had been bombed, the groups of 200 including 30 officers were unloaded and walked to the next town's square on a Sunday morning where the Volksurm [people's army] was assembling. Shinn's remarks about this version of a home guard are worth noting:

> '*I was not feeling very friendly toward Germans, but I felt only pity at the idea of these men ever facing our army. They looked like*

some of the good simple Germans I had known as a boy in Indianapolis. A few were carrying rifles, but most of them were armed with shovels. All wore farmers' or laborers' clothes.' (p. 52)

'In the square was one very different figure. He seemed to be the local party leader. Fat and pompous, he wore a yellow-green uniform and swastika armband. He barked out orders and swaggered about, happy at the chance to strut in front of captured Americans. When our senior American officer, a Major, tried to ask him a question, be barked out and almost spit in his face. He provoked hate in every American there. This, we supposed, told us something about Germany. On the one hand, the simple, bewildered people, doing as they were told without any idea why. On the other, the strutting offensive party leader—the type who made Nazism flourish.' (p. 52)

Marching again, they entered a road beside a highway that moved beside the Mozelle River in the area of the famous Mozelle Valley grapes—toward Koblenz.

'*A couple of planes flew overhead. We winced, then saw the swastikas and with some astonishments felt safe. I realized that we needed a new set of conditioned reflexes in Germany. We were quickly learning to dread the American air force.' (p. 52)*

Crossing the Rhine River, it was evident that Koblenz was destroyed, especially around the railroad yard, yet some life was evident. Walking farther, they boarded a train and departed for Limburg. On Christmas Eve, they marched into the gates at Stalag XIIA—a cold, dreary place, especially since the officers' quarters had been mistakenly bombed in an RAF air raid the night before intended for the Limburg rail yards. Most officers were either killed or wounded. Although some attempt was made to create a holiday atmosphere with decorations and gifts from the YMCA and some American coffee from the Red Cross, spirits remained low. Prisoner-of-war food rationing became a reality. Red Cross parcels were appreciated but at Limburg they were limited.

Indian prisoners were permanently stationed there, whereas the Americans only moved through the camp. Many had been prisoners for years, taken in Africa or Italy. Shared stories and news were exchanged—filling the hours. Sgt. Ziringer was also there and had escaped from Limburg, but the outcome was unknown.

'*Limburg was a wretched place but it had its blessings. We were registered as prisoners of war; the information would go to Geneva and then to our own government. We were allowed to send home a postcard (mine was written Christmas Day and got home March*

6th, the first word after the Army's mission-in-action notification).' (p. 55)

Limburg was also blessed with a devoted man of medicine. The doctor, a British captain, had volunteered to stay and tried his best to serve those who needed his assistance, although his only supplies were aspirin and bandages. The Americans took events in their strides and hoped soon to be moved on to a better place. Shinn's next place was a 'special' one used for interrogation. (p. 57)

On New Year's Eve, 1945, Captain Shinn walked two miles from Limburg, ascended the steps to the castle at Diesz, and was locked in a small room. Solitary confinement became his companion with an invitation once a day to wash his face and use the latrine. Those who preceded him in this space left their marks, either by signatures, dates, menus, or home towns. Over Shinn's bed was the flyer's name and this verse:

'I crashed my plane, I know not where.

When I awoke, there were Jerries there.'

The 91st Psalm was printed on the door by an Ohio corporal. Shinn was *'grateful to have read and memorized it'* as he reviewed his life as a soldier and a civilian, his love of poetry and reflections, his worries and fears—all the knowledge and thoughts he had gained over a lifetime of 27 years.

'The mind became intensely grateful—for home, for memories, for the fact that life, now seen as never before, had been so grand, so wonderfully worth living. It leapt into a distant civilian future. It forgot the boredom of solitary confinement. It thought of learning and doing. It saw visions, made plans, and prayed.' (p. 63)

His door opened at 5:00 A.M. with the sound of '*Kom, Offizier.*' His interrogators were a Feldwebel, who spoke English, and a German Major, who also spoke English—a good cop/bad cop combination. (p. 65)

Shinn's three days of interrogation were based on combinations of practiced, insincere comradeship (on the part of the Germans); brutality used by the German major, including repeated beatings which knocked Shinn to the floor; intimidation threats used by both; and ruthless accusations about American's unprovoked role in the killing of innocent Germans and destroying their country—the most damning claim being that the Major Bill (actual name, Wilhelm von Bohn) had lived in America and had a son and wife killed by American bombers which he claim justified Germany's actions. (pp. 65-73)

No device emotional or physical was spared in enticing Officer Shinn to betray his country's trust by admitting betrayal. Throughout these deviations from the Geneva Convention Rules, Shinn matched their battle of wits and remained true to his country's honor.

'*My interrogation took four sessions, including the New Year's Eve party. I do not suppose my lies ever did much damage to the German Army. But I am confident that I did not betray my own Army. In the last three meetings, Bill always tried the friendly approach. He was an interesting conversationalist and was fairly smart, though never quite sober. Sometimes I actually enjoyed listening to him. Once I enjoyed a few moments of remarkably beautiful music from Radio Berlin—music of the kind rarely broadcast in America except on Sunday'.*

'On my last visit, Bill gave me a Red Cross parcel and described the delights of living in an officers' prison camp. A train would be leaving that day from Limburg and I would be on it. And Bill bade me farewell with the thought that he might see me in America someday. I said I hoped so, and to myself that such a meeting would not be very healthy for Bill.'

'He allowed me to write one letter to my wife [Katharine Cole whom he had married on 6 November, 1943 in Tiffin, Ohio]. *It actually reached America.'* (p. 81)

Trading information with other Americans who had been interrogated by Diesz, Shinn learned that possibly four German officers conducted the interrogations and only Major Bill used brutality. Everyone was given a Red Cross parcel as they departed—a 'gift' they greatly deserved!

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Shinn and twenty-three other officers were next loaded into a 40 x 8 boxcar, but only occupied part of the space; between one-third to one-half of the space became a wire fence separation between them and the six guards. The usual German boxcar accommodations included scattered straw around the floor and a bucket for sanitation purposes. Their home for a week, they were given no destination details.

'*An old Master Sergeant was in charge of us. He had the self-assurance of old Master Sergeants in all armies. The rest of the men were a little afraid of him. He kept a sort of dignity and attention to duty. Slightly friendly, he kept his distance from us, except when offered an American cigarette.'*

'The Corporal, who managed the guards, was a short young fellow with a Hitler moustache, who obviously fancied that he looked something like Der Fuhrer. He liked striking poses, enjoyed his authority and loved to order the guards around; it was an obvious thrill to him to be guarding officers. At first, we disliked him, then he began to amuse us and we found out he was human. He was

another of these pitiful little Nazis—one of the small-town folk who in a different world might have lived a different life but who responded to the phony grandeur of Nazism and must bear part of the responsibilities for its terror unloosed on the world.' (p. 83)

Food and cigarettes were in short supply. Men who had come from Diesz had Red Cross parcels; others had nothing which encouraged some generosity among the group though others hoarded what they had. Water handed out by the guards became a more accommodating action as the trip progressed, with some even offering to toast the POW's bread on their stove. Everyone felt fortunate to have a heat stove on board. Eventually, a bench was passed to the men and they devised a schedule which allowed for better—if far from perfect—sleeping arrangements.

'*Each day grew worse. Nerves became jangled and tempers short. Sometimes we froze and sometimes we suffered. Idle talk became arguments, and arguments became quarrels, and quarrels almost became fights. Human nature was about as petty and mean as I had ever thought it could be. In a boxcar much must be forgiven'.* (p. 84)

The third night the train pulled into the Berlin railyards. It looked undamaged, but they later learned from other prisoners that '*Berlin itself was already largely destroyed at this time'.* The Master Sergeant left and returned with news that the German Red Cross was delivering hot noodle soup. The POWs *'filled whatever cans we happened to have and enjoyed it like a banquet.'* (p. 85)

As the train moved on, station names were sometimes seen, the snow was deep, and the country was Poland.

All felt a tremendous relief to be off the train and able to move freely—even to march, which they did to a camp on the other side of the town. *'And this time, as we entered the barbed wire, there was less of the oppressed feeling of that first time at Limburg. Our morale must have been very low, for it seemed almost less of a prison than a haven.'* (p. 85)

WELCOME TO OFLAG 64

'*It was a pleasure to shake off our shoes and step from the frigid air indoors. We crowded into a room where a peppy American Lieutenant greeted us. In a few minutes there was some coffee—bitter German ersatz stuff that tasted bad but warm. Then came a grunt or shout at the door, which we somehow understood to mean that we should stand at attention, and a German officer and NCO came in'.*

The officer was an Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) and a handsome man. He was meticulously dressed and looked an

> *aristocrat. His face lacked the hardness of the German Field Marshalls in Time Magazine but in every other respect he was the picture of the Prussian Officer. The NCO introduced him as Oberstleutnant Loida, the assistant commandant of the camp. The officer gave us a short speech, interpreted by the Sergeant, in which he welcomed us, told us that every possible thing would be done here for our comfort and enjoyment, and that we in turn must obey orders strictly'.* (pp. 86, 87)

Next, warm oatmeal was served with sugar, to the absolute enjoyment of the new captives, as they had arrived very cold and half-starved. This was soon accompanied by a Red Cross Christmas parcel for each one. *'The American officers had generously saved them for arrivals like us. We looked at the canned chicken, candy and the plum pudding—delicacies unknown to prisoners except in Christmas parcels—and wondered that luxury could be so great.'* (p.86)

Their American greeter was Lt. Roy Chappell. He had been taken prisoner in Africa and was patient as the men peppered him with questions about Oflag 64. It was known as one of the best German prison camps and was located near Bromberg, Poland, on the edge of a small Polish town called Szubin. Chappell continued to explain the lay out of the camp, its activities, rules and regulations. *'The Americans ran the camp; the Germans (known as 'Goons') only kept the guard and enforced regulations, most of which were annoying.'* (p. 87)

After spending their first night on the floor of the administration building, they were treated to a hot shower and delousing. Checked over by an American doctor, it was discovered that several officers from a second boxcar had scarlet fever, so the entire group of 47 was quarantined and assigned to a separate barracks. Receiving personal items and some clothes from the Red Cross increased their morale considerably. Through camp gossip they learned about the various activities available throughout the camp and looked forward to the day they would be cleared to join other 'Kriegies'. Many who felt sleep deprived slept hours each day and read or played games sent over from the main camp.

The biggest area of activity was cooking—by the Americans who ran the kitchen. In addition to Red Cross parcels, an established green house supplied vegetables to their diets. Breakfast was ersatz coffee and soup at noon. The evening meal was potatoes and meat (salmon or corned beef) from the parcels. The eleven-pound box contained powdered milk, margarine, soluble coffee, cheese, sugar, prunes and were worth more than gold. One of the lieutenants in their group had managed a Howard Johnson. *'He quickly became a man of individual status, an oracle, and counselor to all.* Their assigned barracks had two stoves made from oil drums. What they lacked as effective barrack-heating units, they were more than adequate when used as cooking ranges. YMCA pans and skillets were in service almost constantly, and when the ranges became overcrowded, the men used little homemade stoves, fashioned from tin cans called either smokeless burners or smoky Joes. (p. 90)

Bread was rationed to one loaf per day for six men. A ritual was established so that each man received the same size and weight—a small drama but an important one. Drama also occurred in other areas. Since officers were not allowed to work by Geneva rules, there was plenty of time to share thoughts with barrack mates. Discussions which sometimes elevated into heated disagreements included diverse subjects from reenactment of battles, to politics, religion, styles, jobs after the war, etc. No subject was taboo and most everyone had an opinion. This passed many hours and formed many friendships. (p.91)

> *Old Kriegies were traditionally pessimists at Oflag 64; new ones were optimists. Among all there was more realism, or perhaps just more resignation, than back in the army. Still you could hear all the theories here. A few months before, the then new Kriegies—anyone who had been captured since D-Day in Europe—were all 'victory before Christmas' group. The old timers—from Africa and Italy—were not so sure. The two groups had organized bets and put-up hundreds of dollars, all in I.O.U.'s. Now Christmas was past, and our group should by precedent have been optimists. But we had all been too much startled by the German Ardennes drive, and no one was sure of anything.* (p. 91)

Still in quarantine, they waited each day for news:

> *The 'bulge' was shrinking. That was good. Then came news of the Russian drive with Soviet tanks moving. Here in Poland, this took on new importance. Daily our news report gave the mileage of the Soviets from Szubin or the Vistula nearby. We all knew and respected the power of Russian offensives. Would this reach us? Excitement became feverish. Everywhere we heard the hope that we might be overtaken or surrounded. (pp. 91, 92)*

On January 19, they awoke to the sound of west-bound wagons—refugees moving with all they owned—a massive evacuation. Shinn reflected on their chances of being rescued by the Russians and felt perhaps he was too optimistic. The German had a plan—one which would cost American lives.

January 20 the following order was announced:

> *'Be ready to move, at any time after 7:00 P.M. by rail or by foot.' Late afternoon, we were told to be ready to move in the morning. The commandant is trying to get boxcars, but does not know if he can. A Red Cross parcel is given to each man. We are cooking madly, eating up what is in the old parcels. There has been a physical examination by our American doctors of all who may be unable to walk. We have been told that a German doctor will examine those on the list, but he does not appear, so our doctors'*

list is final. All reserve clothing has been passed out. We are planning ways to carry our blankets, tearing up mattress covers for straps or using them for bundles, but we are in no shape to face this weather. Yet that will not keep us from leaving in platoons of 50.' (pp. 91 - 93)

Orders came from the Senior American Officer that escapes were authorized but not recommended as the groups assembled on January 21. The Americans were still hoping that the Russians would arrive to rescue them, so every time the German Adjutant counted, the total number was different. The German Commandant had given a short speech hoping for rail transportation during the march, but most were doubtful. Eventually the columns of 1300 men left the front gate, except for those hospitalized with orderlies as support. Shinn's pillowcase pack became a burden, but he clung to it as it contained two blankets, mattress cover, razor and soap, candy and eating utensils, books and Red Cross parcel goods.

Columns soon became a mass of men and refugees (some with wagons and horses), struggling through snow and mud. Those who were too weary fell behind, some never seen again. As night settled around them, marchers found places in a sizable barn and made beds on straw or grain bins. Most opened and ate from their Red Cross parcels and drank water from a well, possibly tainted with animal waste, thirst overcoming fear. They slept in pairs for warmth and tried to visualize better days to come. Late commers were examined by American doctors, the result being that 150 were to remain in the barns with guards until help could be summoned. Later reports revealed that successful escapes were made—the first of many throughout the march to Hammelburg. (pp.94 - 98)

Marching began early the next morning across the endless plains. Local Poles handed them bread from their homes as they passed through their villages.

The guard company was a conglomerate group, mostly 4-F-ers unfit for combat duty. Many were from Austria or Poland had no love for the Germans, and were wounded in other battles. Ersatz coffee was sometime offered from civilians which was much appreciated. Even the guards gave us some oleo—the first indication that our captors understood that the human body required food. (p. 100)

Sixteen miles were marched that day to a town near Wirsitz where the men slept in barns. Shinn found himself wondering as he drifted into sleep if he could drag his stiff leg through the next day's journey.

Startling news was heard the next morning:

> *We heard an American voice down at the barn door. 'The German officers and guards have left.' it said. 'The Russians are supposed to be very close, but we have only rumors, and Col. Goode (our senior officer) orders that everyone stay where he is.'* (p. 101)

Although this was good news, it also resulted in questions. Would the Russians be dangerous instead of helpful? Was it a Russian reconnaissance element or a real attacking force? Would they fire on the men first and ask questions later? All felt that Colonel Good's plan to avoid hasty action was sound.

The marchers were numerous and had slept in several large barnyards, each with its own commander who received orders from Col. Goode. American flags were made ready to display to the Russians and the locals volunteered to search the area for more news. Our quad barnyard moved into the owners' home and waited for news. Unfortunately, it was disappointing. Col. Schneider and the guard returned to order the continuation of the march at 4 P.M. (pp.101-104)

As the column continued down the road, numbers seamed smaller as more Americans were escaping. With fewer guards, the real threat to their survival was the weather, shelter and lack of food, so most continued to march until they reached Charlottenburg.

> *There was a huge, beautiful farm, like a palatial manor. Through Poland and Prussia, the farms were large, many with barn space where a thousand men could sleep. We were reminded that Poland had been feudal modern times, that the Prussian Junkers were still lords of vast estates. Now it was not serfs, but foreign slaves who worked the farms. The crumbling Third Reich was held together in those fateful days by the most conglomerate mixture of races the world had seen.* (pp. 103, 104)

More sick marchers were left behind along with a group of 30 who hoped to escape. Unfortunately, they were found and returned and their actions caused the Oberst to threaten death by spraying the barns with machine-pistols before departure. Polish civilians continued to be friendly and helpful. On the

fifth day of the march, marchers were given ¾ of a loaf of bread and some cheese—not enough to live on but appreciated.

At Flatow, they stopped in a barnyard area and built fires for warmth. The Oberst delighted in announcing the following: '*Russia has recalled her ambassadors to the United States and Great Britain and some of your comrades who tried to escape may become the first American prisoners of Russia.'* This news was met with mixed reviews. (p. 105)

Several more boxcars of those unable to continue left during the next two days. Everyone was miserable and the lack of sanitation (as compared to the rigorous format followed in the US Army) was the major cause of illnesses including diarrhea. The next town was Jastrow with German soldiers in white-camouflage suits being sighted—an obvious defensive measure.

Shinn's remarks about the Oberst's nature described him as a man who followed orders as his military background demanded and who was probably concerned about the day when the Allies would win and he would be a prisoner.

His protagonist, Col. Paul Goode, became the marchers' hero. He was efficient and courageous—standing in the middle between the German commander and his duties as the SAO.

> *'He rarely rode, even when invited to do so and stepped out at the head of the column each day with a set of bagpipes—reportedly a YMCA gift.' (pp.107, 109)*

Hunger was a great concern every day of the march. At some farms, the marchers were given potatoes or soup with unknown ingredients, but consumed with gratefulness. Bartering with cigarettes became the most valuable asset when 'shopping' for food.

On January 28, the eighth day of the march, a church in Zippnow became the next rest stop as bales of hay were placed between pews for increased bedding space.

> '*Before I fell asleep, I saw the Oberst step in the door to see if everything was all right. He was worn out, but his German sense of duty moved him.'* (p. 111)

Other places included on their 'tour' included a vacant stalag, and the towns of Machlin, Templeburg, and Dramburg (reached on February 4) where the march turned north.

> '*For the next five days we moved toward the Baltic. A hundred and eighty more of the unfit were put on trains: Less than half of its original strength was left.' (pp.110-118).*
>
> *'In Regenwalde, they slept in the barracks of a German submarine school and on February, the stayed the night in the barracks at a*

large Luftwaffe training school. 'The base was full of girls and boys. The boys were training, the girls working. Over the door of one barrack, I saw a sign, STALINGRAD. I was surprised and wondered if I had read correctly. The next one, TUNIS. And so on and on, each barracks named for a great battle that the Germans had lost. Over another was a German motto which meant, 'Who would win must fight.' So that was it: the spirit of militant revenge dominated this school. We saw the youths march across the grounds in the snappy Luftwaffe uniforms. They were young—what we could call high-school age. The morale was superb, their marching precise, their singing boisterous. We looked at them and wondered. They had been sheltered from war and nourished on propaganda. Would the Nazi be able to preserve these boys through the war so that they would never feel the despondency and disillusion that was blanketing the rest of the nation? Would they never know the horror and the morbid pessimism of war, especially of defeat in war, that was infecting the rest of the army and the civilians of Germany? If so, they might remain romantic fanatics in a country that was fast losing its desire for fanaticism. They might be a problem someday.' (pp. 121, 122)

They celebrated Lincoln's birthday by marching their 200th mile and arrived at the famed Baltic naval base of Swinemunde. A ferry to Usedom Island displayed the Peenemunde base, site of secret V-1 and V-2 former labs.

On St. Valentines Day, 100 more sick and weary boarded a train. Only 500 of the original marchers were left. After crossing to the mainland, Oberst Schneider's car met them with the promise of Red Cross parcels which they received while resting on a farm owned by a Countess whose son was a well-treated prisoner-of-war in America. On Washington's birthday, they passed the 300-mile mark and heard from the 'Bird' that the First and Ninth Armies had attacked toward the Rhine.

On February 28th, they entered Siggelkow, *'our favorite town in all Germany, the ideal place to vacation after our 350-mile march.'* They ate well and with cigarettes from Red Cross parcels, trading thrived. On March 7, they marched to Parchim and boarded boxcars. Destination: Hammelburg in Bavaria. On March 10 they arrived. Upon his own departure, the Oberst Schneider sang his own praises, which was accepted by the men with good graces as he had acted honorably. His last words: *'I wish you all good fortune and a happy return home.'* (pp. 123 – 128)

As the men entered the new barbed wire encampment, their new commandant of the Lager, Major General von Goeckel, gave a short speech of welcome, which was followed by the now recognizable processing actions. For the men, seeing friends they had not seen since being captured plus news that the Rhine had been crossed was-a hopeful sign. Although those who completed

the march had endured hardships, many of their mates were in worse shape—but help stepped forward in the form of Col. Goode. He restored order and self-respect by scheduling inspections and raising camp morale. One main factor, however, remained the same—food shortage. Each day in the camp became another day to survive as rumors about Allied advancements surged through the camp with dreams that K-rations would soon be available.

On March 27 after Col. Goode was seen at the gate talking to the General, the men were told to prepare to leave at 5:00 A.M. on the 28th. Then the deadline was moved to 7 P.M. that night. The Americans must be close. Some action was taking place which would affect them all and it was approaching by the hour. Later, it was known as Task Force Baum and comprised 300 troops and 50 vehicles behind German established lines. Undermanned and outnumbered, this mission has become one of the most controversial actions in WW II and because it affected the lives of American POWs at Hammelburg, Shinn devoted nine pages (pp. 135 – 143) under the chapter heading DECEPTIVE FREEDOM.

> *Back in the prison camp [Hammelburg], the Germans were again in control and rounded up a few hundred of us to march that night. German Oberstleutnant Loida commanded our column. We moved out while it was still dark, once again exchanging prison for the road.* (p. 152)

A WALKING TOUR OF BAVARIA IN THE SPRINGTIME is a running commentary concerning the challenges which faced those who continued the march. Begun on March 28, 1945, Shinn's writing began with descriptions of the beautiful landscapes seen as they moved from one small Bavarian town to another, often sleeping in barns. Everyone agreed that shorter marches, pleasant weather and frequent rest days were greatly more desirable than prison camps. Easter Sunday was spent in a quaint town—the day made even more appealing because of the receipt of Red Cross parcels (for every three men) sent by the General.

Entering the city on April 5, Shinn related the following:

> '*Nurnberg, I remembered, was one of the ancient and picturesque cities of Germany, famous for its history, its toy-factories, its clocks. Nazism had made it a center of party strife and a cog in the vast war machine. War had made it an inferno of destruction and a pile of ruins. The desolate city was a convincing demonstration of the power of our air force. In street after street, we looked at demolished buildings, at city blocks piled high with rubble. We felt uncomfortable and wanted to get out of town.' (p.149)*

Formations of American bombers were constantly seen overhead, monitored closely by the men who quickly took shelter away from roads or targeted areas such as rail yards. One such devastating explosion, however, took place when

the marchers had stopped between a highway and a railroad. Many were killed or wounded, including 29 Americans left behind as ambulances were summoned—the marchers moved on. They later learned that crews had been briefed to watch for groups of POWs, especially those carrying white banners on sticks; many lives could be saved—including innocents. (p. 150)

Others began to join them, including American air force officers and British flyers. Their perspectives, taken from the air, were often vastly different from those of the present group of ground force marchers.

While in the small village of Zell on April 13 and 14, news of President Roosevelt's death was learned from the guards. Even those Americans who disproved of his policies, were jolted as Roosevelt had been THE President and policy maker for many terms. (p. 161)

> *On April 7, our path led down into the valley of the Danube, where the muddy river flows between steep cliffs. On that spring day the river valley was beautiful. Across the Danube, we moved in leisurely style. In prewar days this had been a tourist country, and even to us it was beautiful. April 20 was Hitler's birthday, the Germans told us. The Allies celebrated it with a tremendous air show. We watched it from the hilltop where our barn was. The day was warm, and we spread out our blankets, took off our clothes, and lay on the hillside, soaking up the sunshine and picking lice out of our garments. Hour after hour the planes passed over—those same majestic formations that could be so awful.* (p. 162)

FREEDOM WAS ONLY AN ARMY AWAY

Moving out that night they saw both Russian prisoners and German troops on the roads, moving in formations of platoons and companies. They were in the vicinity of Moosburg, where the main Red Cross depot in Germany was said to be located. Supplies being brought back to the marchers should last for two weeks—the end of war. Americans were advancing rapidly now and although some thought about escaping, it might be risky, so most stayed and moved on the next day closer to Moosburg and bedded down at a large farm at Sielstetttin. Food was plentiful and several officers became chefs for a meal. Four days later, on April 27, another move took place while hearing rumors that Americans were near Munich in Landshut and a BBC broadcast was heard that the Russians had three-quarters of Berlin. *'The war seemed to be moving to a finale'.* (p. 169)

> *'Americans were now running the Moosburg camp and the German army had made an agreement with the Americans that prisoners in camps of the advancing armies would be left in place. We were not in a camp and could move. German artillery was setting up in*

the town and American counter-battery fire could endanger us so we moved six miles late that night and six more the next morning.'

'Our column was shrinking. About fifty had left us, attempting escape. Most of us stayed with Col. Palmer and figured that there was some strength in numbers. German officers and guards led our column but did not control it. We continued marching when we heard that Hitler had committed suicide. Every day we heard artillery and after staying in the woods, the marchers reached the town of Gars a. Inn. Disagreements about truck food dispersals were present during this period when soldiers from the 86th then the 14 Armored Division tanks and half-tanks rolled into town and we knew there was plenty to match anything the Jerries had within miles. They showered us with K-rations, candy, pencils, paper, cigarette paper and all the odds and ends that the American army carries. The certainty of freedom overwhelmed us.' (pp. 170 – 176)

A convoy of trucks arrived to transport the former marchers. The German guards, as a whole, according to Shinn, were simply waiting to learn their fate. All the Nazi absolutes were gone and most just wanted to return home to pick up their lives again. Extra food and cigarettes were passed to those who had marched alongside the Americans as a kind of farewell gift.

'As the convoy moved up the hill, out of the valley of the Inn, we passed the guards marching and called out 'Weiter marchieren!'— the 'March on' that had been so familiar on all our trips.' (pp. 177, 178)

'We got to Moosburg that day, May 3. There in the old prison camp the liberated prisoners were assembled, waiting for transport out of Germany. Supplies had not quite kept up with the swift advance of the American armies, so for a few days we still ate Red Cross food. The camp was crowded, and our group was installed in an airplane parts factory across the street. We slept on the shelves of the stock room and tore up crates of precision parts, worth thousands of dollars when there were planes to use them in, to get wood to burn or excelsior to sleep on. We wrote our first letters home. We tasted army white bread and could not quite believe it was bread; it seemed more like angel-food cake.'

'I looked over the few sheets of paper that held my diary of life in Germany. The walking tour of Bavaria had covered 240 miles. Altogether I had seen some 600 miles of Germany on foot—and on two pairs of socks.' (p. 179)

Trucks arrived to take them to the Ingolstadt on May 8 where they spent the night in an old stone fortress. While washing his shirt in the Danube and

listening to an English voice on the radio, he heard the words of King George stating that the war would cease that night at a minute after midnight. From Ingolstadt they flew on May 9 to Reims and learned that *'Reims was General Eisenhower's advance headquarters and that in a schoolhouse there General Jodl had signed the German surrender at 2:41 A.M. on May 7.' (pp. 179 - 180)*

May 11 was spent flying to Le Havre-

> *'the towns looked bad but in the fields the green of spring was covering the marks of war. From the sky the craters below looked like fast-healing wounds on human flesh. These are wounds of war, I thought, that will not be healed in my lifetime. I wondered how many generations it would take to heal this war's scars on history. Whether the nations would find a surgery less destructive to the face of the earth of earth and the lives of men.'* (p.180)

Camp Lucky Strike near Dieppe was their next destination: there they were processed and waited for a ship. New clothes were dispensed along with mone*y:*

> *'gradually we achieved the psychology of free men—of men who can eat a meal and remember that there will be more meals tomorrow and the next day, who can walk into a place without their eyes roving for something to eat or to burn for fire.'* (pp. 180-181)

On May 21 they boarded the U.S. Army Transport *Sea Owl.* Stopping at Southampton to pick up wounded soldiers, it then proceeded via convoy (avoiding possible wolf-pack subs) toward America on May 24. On June 3 they sailed into Boston Harbor. (p.181)

> *'My adventure was over. It had been harsh in fact, but rich in memory. I had asked for it and had taken it.'* (p. 181)

SUMMATION

Additional biographical information concerning Roger Shinn's life appears below through the permission of The U.S. Army Officer Candidate School Alumni Association, Infantry Officer Candidate Hall of Fame at Fort Benning, Georgia, COL. Frank Harman, President and CEO.

Dr. Roger L. Shinn was born 6 January 1917 in Germantown, Ohio. From 1938 to 1941, he served as a Student Assistant at the Second Presbyterian Church in New York City. Dr. Shinn entered the Army as a Private in 1941 and graduated from Infantry Officer Candidate School in 1942. He served with distinction as an Infantry Company Commander in Germany during World War II and was captured by the enemy. He was released from active duty in 1945 after having

attained the rank of Major.| His awards and decorations include the Silver Star. | After the war, Dr. Shinn became a tutor assistant in Philosophy of Religion, at Union Seminary until 1947. In 1946, he was ordained by the Northwest Ohio Synod, Evangelical and Reformed Church (now United Church of Christ). From 1949 until 1954 he served as Chairman, Department of Philosophy at Heidelberg College in Tiffin, Ohio. He was a Professor of Theology and as a Professor of Christian Ethics at Vanderbilt University Divinity School until 1960. Upon returning to the Union Theological Seminary, he served as a William E. Dodge Professor of Applied Christianity, Dean of Instruction, the Reinhold Niebusr Professor of Social Ethics and served as an Adjunct Professor of Religion at Columbia University. | Dr. Shinn lectured extensively at many American Colleges and Universities and was active for many years in Ecumenical activities throughout the world. He is the author of 13 books and has written chapters and essays in some 25 books, along with articles and reviews in numerous scholarly and popular journals. He was also wrote and narrated the television series entitled, "Tangled World." | Be it known that Dr. Roger L. Shinn having displayed outstanding leadership and being duly qualified is placed on the Honor Roll in the Infantry Officer Candidate Hall of Fame attested at Fort Benning, Georgia on this the 1st day of February 1973. Signed Orwin C. Talbott, Major General, US ARMY

SOURCE

WAR & RUMORS OF WAR by Roger L. Shinn is the published book source for this biography. Page numbers are noted in the text. Specific quoted passages are placed in *italics.*

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers