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## Stalag III-A

Our next camp was Stalag III-A near Luckenwalde, located about 50 kilometers south of Berlin. The conditions here were much the same as my first camp, Stalag VII-A. We received Red Cross Parcels from England, Australia, Finland and Denmark, but the regularity (or irregularity) was about the same. The entire Norwegian army was in the compound next to ours. We were separated by a barbed wire fence. It seemed that they were taken prisoner directly from their homes and military bases in Norway without a shot being fired. They spent the entire period of the war in this camp. This information came from them. I have not tried to confirm it since the war ended. Officers from England, France and Yugoslavia were in the compound with us. The Senior Officer here was American, so we took turns cleaning our area our way rather than in the unseemly way it was handled by British earlier in VII-A.



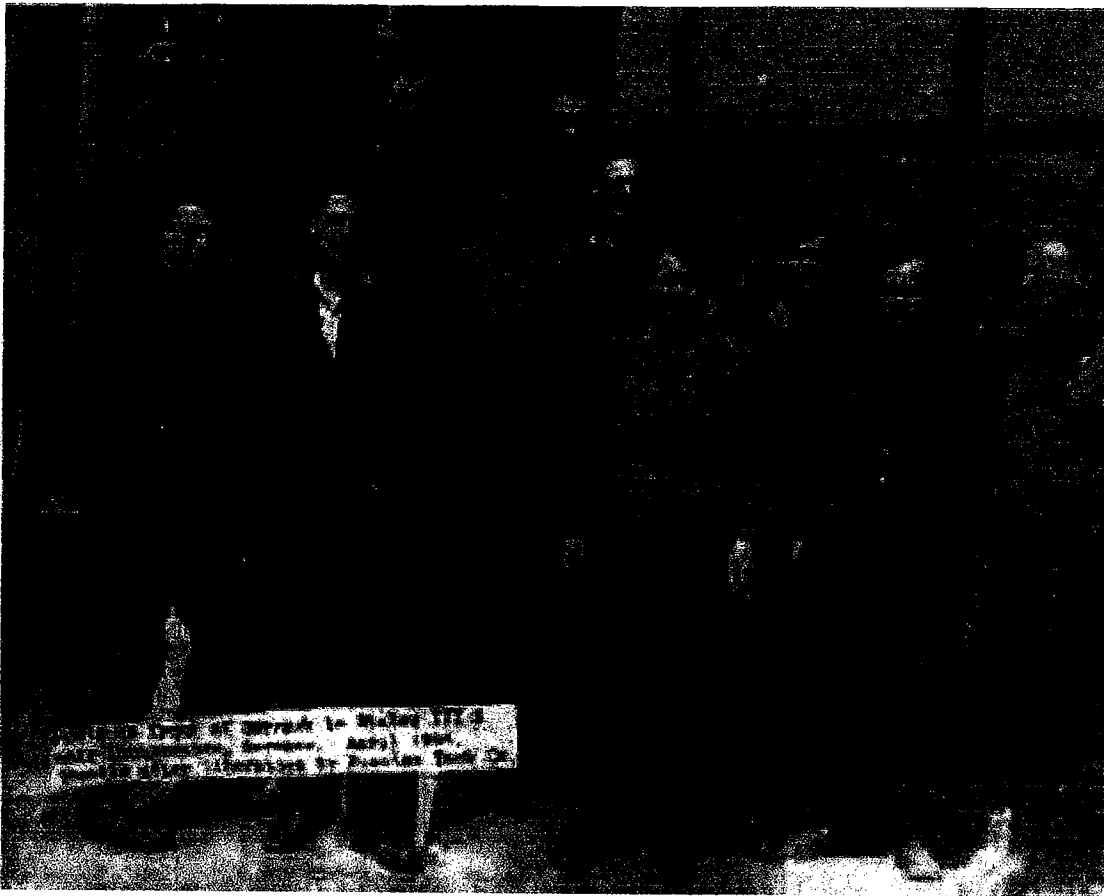
Typical four deck bed block. However, thankfully, ours were double deck. Usually, our guards followed their schedule of activities meticulously and we could count on their serving meals, calling for numerous roll calls, making inspections etc. with precise timing. However, one morning early in April, they called for us to assemble on the grounds where roll call was always held. We could not imagine what was going to happen, especially, when the camp commander, whom we rarely saw, entered all dressed up in his finest uniform and walked in front of us. Then, with a noticeable stress in his voice--which was unusual for him--he announced that President Franklin Roosevelt had died. He offered his condolences to us and stated that he, as well as all Germans, regretted this as they felt that he was reasonable and just in his actions and attitudes and that Germany might not fare so well after the war ended with another as our leader. This was the first time that he or any of our guards had indicated that they felt that they would not win.

## **GUARDS ABANDON CAMP**

On the night of April 24, 1945, the German guards abandoned the camp. Our "interior guards" consisted of ourselves being formed into quasi-military units in secret from our captors to do whatever might become needed. When the Germans abandoned the camp, we received instructions from our senior officer to do certain things. He had had various options planned well in advance. Therefore, at this time we assumed control of the camp. My job was to be a guard at a gate and to advise (but, specifically not to attempt to enforce) anyone desiring to leave the camp that he would be better off if he remained inside the camp until contact was made with friendly forces. Most heeded the warning, but a good many ignored it and left. I never heard how they fared.

## **RUSSIAN TANKS ARRIVE**

The next morning a Russian Tank Company came to the camp and assumed command. Since they, supposedly, were friendly, we made no objections. We were not in any position to do anything else--especially, when they began to supply us with food. Food to a hungry person is enormously more important than it is to one who is not hungry! When you are hungry, you will do a lot of things that you would not do otherwise. I know this, personally, because I have been there! We found out later that the food came from German stores and that the large quantity of milk the first day and the beef the next day came from a nearby dairy farm. The Russians took all the milk the first day. When they went back the next day, the farmer resisted and they killed him and brought all his cows to us for food. Of course, we were glad to get meat to eat, but, even though we were hungry, we abhorred their methods they used to secure it--but, we did put it to good use! The tank company CO was female.



&gt;

Rear, left to right:

Keeler, Jordan, Vinson, Vicek (standing in front of Vinson), Myron. Front, left to right, Boucher, Jones, an RAF pilot, Rose, Sutton, Klingerman (in tank suit), Bell, Naab, Culler, Melsenhelter.

Several days later, two platoons of US Army 2 1/2 ton trucks arrived and, of course, we all quickly piled on. I was a little slow because my feet had not healed from their exposure in the snow earlier, and I had to go almost to the last truck before I could find a space. Shortly after I got on the truck, the last few trucks (including the one that I was on) turned around in the roadway and sped away at top speed. When we arrived at Magdeburg, Germany, we found that the platoon leader of the second platoon of trucks had been in the Russian CP and had overheard orders given in Russian language for the trucks to be unloaded and everyone to be returned to the camp. Upon hearing this, he quickly returned to his trucks and ordered their hasty departure. The POW's on the remaining trucks were required to return to the camp.

At Magdeburg, we were welcomed by an American Quartermaster unit and given a good meal, a good hot shower and clean clothes. I, also, got a chance

to write v-mail letters to my wife and parents. The next day we went to Rheims on a C-47.

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## THE BIRD

Each night, we posted interior guards around our quarters so we would be warn guards while we gathered together to hear the "bird"--a reading of the current news. One of us would copy the news from the clandestine radio hidden in one of the bedrooms. A representative from each room to pass it on to be read that evening to the entire group. It disbanded almost instantly if an undesired visitor were to approach the building. In shorthand, I was suited to do this job, so I handled it for my group. Of course, the guards. I don't know what would have been the consequences if we had been d

## TOMORROW WE GO--GOOD BYE 64

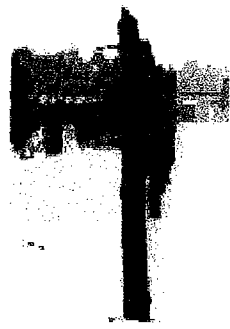
Late in the afternoon of January 20, 1945, during a blizzard, we were advised the next morning to hike ten miles to Essen, Poland. We were to meet a train which would take us from recapture (or release) by the rapidly advancing Russian Army. We bundled our possessions we had. We put any food that we had "squirreled" into our pockets. The next morning (the sun rises late in this latitude) we were called out and were formed into 27 platoons or about 1300 total. We found later that some had hidden in p



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These pictures were taken on the day after we left by some of the men who remained in the camp infirmary and had been authorized to remain in the camp.

We waited around in the bitter cold while the guards searched for them. We had miles away, but the Germans had received orders that we should depart right away. Finally, after our feet were about frozen from the cold plus about 2 or 3 inches of snow from the camp in a column of fours. We were about 2/3 back in the column, so I am not sure about this.

## THE WAGON

Shortly after we left, my group came upon a one-horse wagon near the edge of the camp. One of the men being shot and broke ranks to pull the wagon into the column. We piled our packs on the wagon, pushing and pulling. This was much easier than carrying our stuff in our hands. In our physical condition, we were allowed to ride.

Our guards were older and in poorer physical condition than we were. They were in poor physical condition to guard us strictly. Therefore, we took frequent rest breaks. I was always behind. On several occasions, someone who was unable to get up after the break. I heard rifle shots. This was out of our sight, but we could only assume the worst. In any way we could.

## WHAT TRAIN!

When we got to Exin, which was about 12 miles away, we were informed that the Japanese Air Force had bombed a bridge and we should continue on our way toward the west. These announcements, specifications, or other bits of news that really turned out to be stretching the truth or letting his imagination run wild.

## MANNA FROM A TRUCK

At one point during our march a small flatbed truck overtook our column and, as it was moving, it broke open when it hit the ice. It was filled with oleomargarine. You can imagine a box that had about a pound (probably 0.5 kilo) that was divided into four sticks. I proceeded to eat mine. I had several sugar cubes in my pocket and I would take a stick and follow it with a sugar cube. Today, this seems nauseating, but, under my physically inadequate diet, this butter and sugar seemed to me to have the best taste imaginable. It somehow responded to the needs of the body in critical conditions.

## TEMPTATIONS TO ESCAPE

There were several who hid in or behind haystacks, bushes, houses etc. I was t survival would be less if I were to attempt escape. I had heard that some of the would have had no way to determine this until it was too late.

## A QUICK THINKER PREVENTS A CATASTROPHE

A few nights later, we were directed to go to a large metal barn. It had from five nice to anticipate using this as a mattress. I also looked forward to being out of I had the scare of my life and hardly could get my eyes to close for the rest of th got a place to comfortably stretch out, someone decided he needed a cigarette the flame from about 30 feet away when it was about 2 feet high. I instantly got ten feet away, when someone beat the flame out with his coat. Had it not been t us would have undoubtedly been cremated or trampled!

We spent a rather pleasant night in a dairy barn. The temperature inside was at the cows. As soon as we entered the dairy barn, a line of men formed on each c tugged on the cow's teats so much that I began to feel sorry for the cow. After a became my turn to try. Since I had been raised on a farm and had to milk a cow skilled in this process. Therefore, I had no problem at all in getting about a pint c of my friends. I pushed aside the feed from the cow's trough and lay there to sle line had formed again on each cow and I got another cup of milk. This was the r

## A POPULATION ON THE MOVE

The road was packed with our units plus civilians of all ages and sexes. Someo had conversations with some of the civilians. He said that these people were Ge German army had devastated Poland and killed so many of the Polish citizens. Poland and operate the farms and businesses so that the military forces would l to Germany so they would not be there for the rapidly advancing Russian army had earlier treated the Russian civilians.

Some were walking and pushing wheel barrows, baby carriages and some were beautiful teams of horses, like the Budweiser beer advertisements on TV a few their worldly possessions as they were trying frantically to keep ahead of the Ru

## DECISIONS DECISIONS DECISIONS



**SHALL I STAY OR SHALL I LEAVE?**

After about a week of marching in the snow, which melted some each day and there was some transportation available for those with problems. A German doctor who he felt needed to be transported. When he saw my feet he immediately sent 8 box cars made available for us. I was reluctant to go, because we had heard of Jews in Germany and feared that this might be a one way trip for us. However, the shots that we had heard at the rear of our unit earlier, I felt that I would have a life on the train. Our route was approximately as follows:

Jan. 21, 12.6 miles to EXIN  
 Jan. 22, 15 miles to EICHFELDE  
 Jan. 23, 4.2 MILES TO CHARLOTTENE  
 Jan. 24, 4.8 MILES TO LOBZENICA (OR LOBZEN)  
 Jan. 25, 10.8 MILES TO FLATOW

I am not sure of the number of days that I walked in the snow and the extremeness of information that I have been able to get, it must have been about a week.

**TRANSPORT BY 40 & 8**

The two cars were loaded with 126 of us plus a guard on each car. The first train was loaded with the ammunition from his rifle and put it in one corner. He was about 70 years old and had to get out of the weather even though he was outnumbered on the car about 12 to 1 since he was undergoing the same treatment we were, we considered him as a prisoner of war and did anything that we wanted to do. Of course, there was not much to do.

There was a very small stove--almost a toy--that was in the car and someone had to keep it burning to give some heat. However, we needed the space more than we did the heat. It was so packed in such a small space, our body heat was sufficient to keep us relatively comfortable and standing. There was no such thing as lying down. There was no water available and by filling it with snow from the ground during stops, and letting it melt, water was concerned. After being on this train for seven days, we were given only one ration. Cross as the total rations supplied to us. Needless to say, the little food that we had was eaten with anticipation of a move had given out long before we reached Berlin.

After five more days on the train, we reached Berlin. The American Air Force had bombed the city beside a train loaded with tanks. The bombs hit all around, but we were spared because we were in a tunnel that the next one would land on us. This was a frightening experience. I learned

this date--February 1945.

Some of the civilians mentioned earlier had gotten on the train too. They were i they could. Every time the train stopped, everyone got off to respond to the der female, young and old, with privacy completely ignored, of course. When I se abuse, even today, I shudder breathlessly as this brings to my mind the conditi

. Our destination was to be a POW camp called Stalag III-A, which was near th south of Berlin.

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