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Technical Sergeant Gordon K. Butts *U.S. Army Air Force*

451st Bomb Group (H), 725 Bomb Squadron,
15th Air Force
Shot Down Over Mostar, Yugoslavia,
During an Air Raid
Prisoner of War
April 17, 1944–May 7, 1945
Stalag Luft III, Stalag VIIA, and Stalag XIIID

Pre-War Enlistment, October 29, 1940

Gordon Butts enlisted in the Army at South Bend, Indiana, on October 29, 1940. He was sent to Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis for his basic training. After his arrival by bus he received his first Army meal — a bologna sandwich and a glass of milk.

From Fort Benjamin Harrison Gordon was send to Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama, where he was introduced to what would become commonplace — six man G.I. tents constructed with wooden floors and frames. He was also introduced to Southern style cooking. One morning at the mess hall Gordon covered his cream of wheat with sugar and milk. It was grits.

Gordon was stationed at a couple of bases before he embarked on a troop ship to several ports in Central America: he debarked at Rio Hata, Panama, to build a technical school to train aircraft mechanics and worked as a clerk in the inspection division at Albrook Field near Panama. The

major turning point in Gordon's career came in October 1942. He heard about an air cadet examination that was being given and anyone could take the exam. A buddy told him he couldn't pass the exam because it was designed for college graduates. Gordon was a high school graduate with six months of business college. He took the exam anyway and passed by one point. Then after passing a battery of physical and physiological tests, he was on his way.

Gordon begin flight training at Harlington, Texas, and washed out of flight school. It was the low point in his career. He was given a choice of officer training in the infantry or corporal in the Army Air Corps. He chose the Air Corps. Gordon trained for the next couple of months before being assigned as a gunner on a B-24H and then left for Europe.

Heading for Europe, December 1943

In December 1943, the group started overseas. The ground support personnel of the group went by ship. Each individual aircraft was to fly by itself to Africa. Gordon's group flew to West Palm Beach, Florida, stayed a couple of days, then went to Puerto Rico. They landed on the south side of the island. The next day took them to Georgetown, British Guyana, and then they were in Belem, Brazil. The next day the unit went to Natal, Brazil, and all Gordon can remember is flying over jungle. They stayed three days in Natal and all he did most of the time was check over the aircraft.

The group took off in the early morning over the Atlantic headed for Dakar, Senegal, West Africa. The navigator gave the crew an ETA (estimated time of arrival) and he was within ten minutes of the time. They were ten minutes early, and glad to have made it over 2,000 miles of ocean. They had an extra rubber gasoline tank in the bomb bay, but had not had to use it.

When the airplane landed Gordon heard a loud noise; he thought something was wrong with the plane. It was the metal lattice runway they were landing on: metal pieces hooked together to provide a hard landing surface. Each piece was about twenty inches wide, about ten inches long. They were used in most of the fields the crews were to land on.

They stayed at Dakar until all their group was in Africa. One day while the crew was training, word came down that one of the planes had lost some engines. The plane was about five miles out from the base. "We watched for them and could see the plane coming in on one engine. The runway was cleared and it came straight in. We never thought the plane would make it, but it did."

Most planes had a picture and a name painted on it and the crew that brought the plane in on one engine was no exception. They named their plane *Three Feathers*. There was a whiskey named Feathers so the crew painted a young lady holding a bottle of Three Feather Whiskey.

One other time while they were at Dakar, Gordon found out that the president was in the area. "President [Franklin] Roosevelt returned from a meeting with [British Prime Minister Winston] Churchill and boarded a cruiser in the bay. I had binoculars and watched the president being put aboard. I didn't know he couldn't walk and was in a wheelchair. I didn't know because the news reporters always took photographs of him from the waist up and they never wrote about him being in a wheelchair."

As time went on Gordon's crew decided that they wanted a picture and name painted on their plane. "We met and chipped in $10.00 to get the job done. After several days of discussion among the crew the pilot finally decided we had discussed it enough and named the plane *Honeychile*."

From Dakar Gordon's crew flew to Marrakech, Morocco. On the flight over the Atlas mountains the carburetors on a couple of the engines iced up. "We turned the deicers on and the engines quit missing just about the time that the wings started to ice up. When the wings ice up they lose their lift. The deicers on the wings, which are located on the leading edge of the wing and move in and out to crack the ice, were turned on and the ice was removed. It was a busy time for a while."

"On the early part of the trip we flew over the Sahara desert at about 100 feet, looking for a B-24 that was missing, but we saw nothing. Years later the plane was found and the story was in *Life* magazine. They found no bodies and the plane was in good shape. It had landed, but not crashed. Another mystery."

They stayed in Marrakech until an air field was captured in Italy and they could fly in. Marrakech had a population of over 100,000 and was a

tourist vacation spot before the war with major hotels and many gambling casinos. "I saw my first French Foreign Legion soldier there. When they would enter a café, they would stop and salute, then enter. This was in case there were any officers in the café."

The city had two parts, a European section and a native section called Medina. The native section was off limits to G.I.s. "Being the good G.I. that I was, I wanted to see why we shouldn't go in. The native section was a walled city with large gates. The gates were closed at sundown. I went to the native part of the city and stayed too long. I was caught in the city when the gates were closed. What to do? I saw a moor pulling a cart loaded with hay. I stopped him and asked how much he would charge me to take me through the gate. We settled on $10.00 and he hid me under the hay. He took me through the gate without any trouble. The best ten dollars I had ever spent because I didn't want to lose my stripes."

In December of 1943, the crew moved to Italy. They landed in Gioia Del Colle, Italy. They had tents, open mess halls, tent showers, and a wash bench with cold water faucets.

The First Missions

"Our landing strip was again steel grating linked together. We flew a few practice missions and were ready for combat. Our first mission was on the coast of Fier Radar station on the coast of Albania. We were excited and a little afraid. We circled a few times trying to find the target. We had no flak and saw no fighters.

"Now we were combat wise, we thought — no fighters, no flak. Why? We missed the target by five miles and had dropped the bombs in an open field. Mission one was over and only 49 to go."

The next missions were at radar stations and a marshaling yard, then a mission to support troops. The *Honeychile* ran into flak but had very little trouble with fighters. Mission number six was to support the ground troops at Anzio, Italy. They had a lot of flak and a few fights, but they were not hit.

On mission number 10 they bombed a marshaling yard and then a Messerschmitt Aircraft Factory in Regenburg, Germany. This was the toughest mission for the crew up to that time. Gordon's group led the

mission with 40 aircraft. They flew without fighter escort. They were attacked almost continuously by the Luftwaffe ME 109 aircraft (German Air Force) and there was intense anti-craft flak from batteries near the target. During the aerial battle their gunners shot down 16 ME 109 fighters, but lost six B-24s.

"I shot down my first ME 109 on this mission. The 109 tried to fly up and through the formation. I was manning the top turret. When I saw him he was about 150 feet from us. I could see the pilot in the cockpit clearly. I fired. Other planes in the formation saw the plane explode. You had to have verification from other crews to claim a kill.

"We were so beat up after landing at Foggia Air Field in Italy, about 50 miles from our home base, that night I couldn't sleep. All I could think about was the pilot's mother. War is hell.

"I had another experience with 109s later. We were on a mission and there must have been a squadron of them. In your turret you have two .50-caliber machine guns. In order to charge [load] the round into the barrel, you pull a cable with a handle on it, then let go. This puts a load into the chamber and you are ready to fire. My left gun jammed and would not fire. The right gun quit firing. I tried to charge the right gun and the cable broke. Each gun had a sear pin. It is a safety device; the end of the pin sticks out about three quarters of an inch. I reached down and got a spent casing and stuck it into the sear pin and pulled. I was able to charge the gun so it would fire; I continued to fire one gun for the rest of the fight. When we landed I tried with one hand then with both hands to charge the gun. No luck. This shows what you can do when adrenaline kicks in during a fight."

On the next mission Gordon's crew hit Foulon Sub Pens in France, then a marshaling yard in Northern Italy. The yards were in a valley and the sky was black with flak bursts. They received some flak damage, but nothing serious.

On the next mission, on March 15, 1944, they bombed the city of Cassino, Italy. The German ground troops used an old church ruins to dig in. Only part of the group dropped bombs because of cloud cover. This turned out to be a difficult time. "We were over the target and I was told to go to the back of the plane. The bombardier had opened the bomb bay doors. Since I had to walk on the catwalk I closed them. I just got in

the back of the plane and the bombardier let the bombs go. The bomb bay doors were closed and the bombs took the door with them. I still had to walk back to the cockpit and my turret. All I could see was the open space and the ground below.

"As flight engineer you never wore a parachute, just a chest parachute harness. If you wore a parachute you could not get around inside the plane. I hung on to the bomb racks and walked the catwalk back to the cockpit. I thought I would catch hell when I got back to base, but no one said a word about the doors. The next morning we had a set of new bomb bay doors and were ready to go again."

From March 7 to April 4 of 1944 the crew flew missions about every day, unless they were grounded for repairs. They bombed a variety of targets in Rumania, Austria, Italy, and Hungary.

The morning of April 5, 1944, they found the target was to be Ploesti Oil Refineries in Rumania. This was the most heavily defended target in Europe. This refinery provided the greatest source of fuel for the German war machine in Europe. The Germans were determined to protect it and keep it operating. The last raid on Ploesti had been in August 1943. The mission was to go in at ground level. General Lewis H. Brereton, the commander of the mission, told the plane crews that they expected 50 percent loss of planes. The crews were not happy.

The losses were not quite that high. Of the 177 planes that went in, 54 failed to return. "The Air Corps felt if only 5 per cent of the planes were lost on a raid, it was a successful mission. The catch was that you had to fly 50 missions before you could go home. Fifty missions at the 5 percent rate is 250 percent, what chance did you have of going home?

"What actually happened in my squadron, the 725th, was that one full crew of ten and four other crew members from other crews got home. Of course, what keeps you going is that it is going to happen to the other crew, not you. We lived in a tent city separate from the ground maintenance and other personnel. In April every crew around us had been shot down. We were jittery.

"The next mission was going to be the big one, Ploesti.

"We all knew what had happened on the last raid. This was the group's 24th mission and our 20th. Only 30 more to go. The only thing that we felt good about was we were going in at 20,000 feet and we felt we had a

chance. This was a major effort; several groups from Italy would be bombing the target from different directions. We expected a rough fight and it happened. We encountered many ME 109 fighters on the way to the target and more fighters as we came off the target. While over the target we received major flak. We received flak damage, but it could have been worse. I shot down two ME 109s on the raid, one going into the target and one coming off the target.

"We lost four B-24s over the target. For this raid we received a second Presidential Citation. One of the things most people don't realize is the ways the German air force attempted to shoot us down. We were bombed while in flight from German aircraft dropping bombs into our formation from above. This was not very effective. We did fear having ME 109s around with rockets trying to hit us. I only saw two bombers hit the rockets; they exploded on contact. The Germans would flip in back of our formation, out of range of our .50-caliber machine guns, and lob rockets into the formation. This was scary, but again not very effective."

After the Ploesti raid the *Honeychile* made raids on marshaling yards in Yugoslavia and Rumania and an airdome in Hungary and Rumania. It was a busy time in April 1944, four targets in four days.

Mission 23—The Last Bombing Raid, April 17, 1944

"Dawn, April 17, 1944, another raid. This one was to bomb the Belgrade Zemun in Airdome, Yugoslavia. This was the groups 29th mission and our 23rd.

"It was a normal mission to the target, some ME 109s on the way and some flak over the target. We were hit by flak. We had bombed at 20,000 feet and were letting down to about 14,000 feet over the Carot Mountains in Yugoslavia. The mountains were about 10,000 feet. Intelligence had not told us that the Germans had 88mm anti-aircraft guns on the top of the mountains. We were literally flying down their barrels. They opened up and we were hit. The first hit was on number three engine. This is the engine that has the main hydraulic pump which enabled the pilot to control the aircraft.

"At this time I am standing between the pilot and co-pilot. I saw the pilot go through the regular check off of all controls, no response, and the bail out order was given. I had my chest parachute harness on. I hooked on my chute, checked to make sure the two snaps were secure, and got down off the main flight deck to the deck below. That was the last thing I remember. I think the airplane exploded and blew me clear. The next thing I remember was floating in space with my parachute open. What made the chute open, I don't know. Maybe the explosion caused it. I may have had a reaction, for we often practiced bailing out, after a mission, when we landed and stopped rolling. It will always be a mystery why more didn't get out. There were four men in the tail of the plane; the tail gunner and back turret gunner bailed out. The last thing the two men remembered was the two waist gunners fighting over who would open the bottom escape hatch. I often wondered why they didn't go out the open waist windows. Of the ten men in the plane three bailed out, two of the four in the tail and one, myself, in the cockpit end of the plane. The rest went down with the plane."

The Capture

"On the way down I was machine gunned by a ME 109. The silk of my parachute was full of holes, but I wasn't hit. I landed in a tree and my feet were about three feet off the ground. A German soldier came over and pointed a Luger at me and said in broken English, 'For you the war is over.' S/Sgt. Sanborn and S/Sgt. Tittle were on the ground when I landed. We were all taken to a jail in Mostar."

The Journey to Prison Camp

"We were in jail in Mostar for three days. We were interrogated. We had been trained only to give name, rank, and serial number. That's what we did. After I was interrogated, the German captain told me more about our group than I knew. He knew our group by our crashed plane.

"When our group had flown about 15 missions one of the tail gun-

ners bailed out over Germany. We were told later that he was interrogated. I would say he was a spy.

"We were taken to Sarajevo. There was a large German garrison there. In the jail we would watch the new German recruits learning to march and do the goose-step. Our jail was okay, food fair, but we couldn't bathe or wash our clothes. We had only our flight suits. At Sarajevo the three of us were put on a train with three guards. On the train we went through many towns and cities we had bombed. A grand tour at German expenses. The next step was Budapest, Rumania, we stayed there for a couple of days, and then to Vienna, Austria. Here we were held in the mess hall at an army camp. We slept on the floor. We had been given two German army blankets, one to sleep on and one to cover with."

Stalag Luft III

"Our next step was at a POW camp at Sagan — Stalag Luft III. The camp was situated in a pine wooded area out of the city of Sagan. It is in Northern Germany near the old Polish border. There were four compounds of American Army Air Corps prisoners, three of Royal Air Force officers, British, Australian, and Canadians. Each compound had 15 buildings. Ten were barrack or blocks each housing 80 to 110 men. The high rank officers had 2 to 4 men per room; normally there were 10 men to a room. The blocks were one story much like the barracks we had in the U.S. Beds were double decker bunks.

"When we entered camp the prisoners lined up on each side of the road looking for some of their old outfit. I found no one from my group. We were taken to the supply building and issued new clothes. The clothes had been sent from Switzerland where supplies had been stockpiled. The uniforms were enlisted men's uniforms, even though this was an officers' camp. They issued us one overcoat, one pair of gloves, one pair of wool trousers, one belt, one G.I. blanket, two German blankets, one blouse, two pairs of winter underwear, one sweater, one cap, two wool shirts, two pair of socks, one pair of high top shoes, and four handkerchiefs.

"I was assigned to the enlisted men's room in a block. All the men were sergeants. They were expected to take care of the block. Officers

could not work. This was the reason the camp had to have some enlisted men.

"I was lucky to end up in an officers' camp. In the enlisted men's Stalag the housing conditions were bad, and the food poor, not that ours was good. I was assigned to a room of ten men. Two men did the cooking, two men did the dishes and cleaned the rooms. Each man was responsible for his bunk and surrounding area. Sometimes duties were rotated. The rest of the men were assigned to block duty.

"After I had been there for a few days I was assigned to the compound's first aid room. I had had some Red Cross courses in first aid before joining the army. There were no doctors in the compound. In the center compound was a hospital manned by German, American, and British doctors for seven compounds of men. If we couldn't take care of a man we sent them to the compound hospital. There were three of us manning the first aid station. All new prisoners coming into the camp, if they were wounded or ill, were examined by us and if necessary sent to the hospital. The Germans furnished very few medical supplies. What supplies we had, we received from the Red Cross. In 1944, we received some much needed sulfur powder. We mixed this with iodine and this made a paste that we could put on wounds and cuts. It worked.

"Sanitation was poor. Bathing facilities were extremely limited. In theory the camp shower house could provide each man with a three minute shower weekly. If we got one a month, we were lucky, and it was cold water.

"I was housed in the west compound. Our American senior officer was Colonel Darr H. Alkire. His duties were to run the camp and he was our contact with the German Luftwaffe, who ran the camp. Again, we were lucky to be held by the Luftwaffe rather than the German Army.

"The camp was operated like a military base. We had appel [roll call] twice a day, morning and evening. In some cases there were special appel. An example would be when they wanted to search the blocks. There were guards stationed in gun towers armed with rifles and machine pistols. The guards were fourth class troops, either peasants or too old for combat duty or young men convalescing after long tours of duty or wounds received at the front.

"While we were in the camp we had no contact with other POWs. In addition to uniformed sentries, soldiers in fatigues hid under the blocks,

listening to conversation in the block, looking for tunnels and making themselves generally obnoxious.

"Occasionally the Gestapo descended upon the camp for a long, thorough search. The only way we could get back at the guards was passive resistance at appel. Instead of falling in, we milled around, smoked, failed to stand at attention, and made it impossible for the Germans to take a count. This was not done often, for they would bring in regular German soldiers with rifles and machine guns. There was an escape committee operating in the compound, and men did escape. Any individual that wanted to try to escape had to have permission from the committee.

"The Germans did supply some hot food, about 1,900 calories per day. While this was insufficient, what they provided was mainly brown bread and potatoes, and meat three times a week, vegetables twice a week, and watered down soup on alternate days. To supplement the German food we received Red Cross parcels, most were American, some British and Canadian. This was food like we had at home and greatly appreciated. These parcels came out of Switzerland and were delivered to the compounds in G.I. Army trucks. These trucks were driven by Swiss civilians. We were to get one half parcel a week, but as the war went on the normal rations were a half a parcel every other week. Some of the items in the parcels were Spam, corned beef, salmon, cheese, dried nuts, crackers, Klim [powdered milk], orange powder, liver paste, and a chocolate bar. The chocolate bar became money; if we wanted to trade with anyone for something, the questions was how many bars of chocolate for the items.

"Each compound had an athletic field and volleyball court. POWs built a theater, the materials furnished by the Red Cross. Musical instruments were brought in by the Red Cross and several orchestra and choral groups were formed. There were bridge tournaments and a school was set up to teach a wide range of cultural and technical subjects by the former teachers. The Germans and the officers that ran the camp wanted to keep the men busy for morale purposes. Busy people don't cause trouble and try to escape.

"The sports equipment was provided by the Red Cross. There was a library, which is where I spent my time. I was lucky because I had a job at the first aid room. I worked six mornings a week and part of the afternoon. Some of the time I took patients to the hospital, which gave me a change of pace.

"Most of the prisoners were interested in keeping in shape. The most common exercise was to walk the compound circle. Starting from the outside guard fence, there were two more guard fences, which had coils of barbed wire between them. Then inside the prison was a space of about ten feet which was considered no man's land. If you were in this area you could be shot. Just in front of the no man's land was the walking path, which was about five feet wide, wide enough that three men could walk abreast. There were always people walking, except at night. At night we were locked in our block. If you went out of the block you would be shot.

"Walking the path was interesting because often you would find fresh dirt. This was a clue that someone was digging a tunnel. The tunnel diggers would carry the dirt from the tunnel in their pockets or small bags and dump it on the path. We would never ask about the dirt. Of course the Germans also watched the new dirt on the path, so the hunt would be on to find the tunnel. This was the camp from which the British soldiers attempted escapes in the film *The Wooden Horse*. They were caught as they came out of the tunnels and shot. The ashes were in urns in the Central Hospital, as a reminder not to try escape.

"In April, when I arrived, some of the blocks were planting gardens with seeds they got from home. Fresh vegetables would be a welcome to out diet. We did receive some mail from home and packages could be sent every three months. I received one package while I was at Sagan. My mother said she had sent three. These packages were often pilfered. We could send one letter a month; my mother did receive some letters. All mail was read and censored by the Germans. The International Red Cross made all the extras we received possible. We gave thanks to them.

"One day when we were walking the circle a German fighter flew low over the camp. It made a lot of noise, but no propellers. What made it fly? Then we realized this was the new jet fighter, the ME 262, the Germans were building. They started production too late to make a difference, thank God.

"There was always a friendly discussion between the fighter pilots and the bomber crews. It went like this: Fighter pilot, 'Your bomber crews shot me down. I was looking for protection, for I was having trouble; when I got in formation, you shot me down.' The answer, 'You pointed your

nose at us; we had a standard rule, if any plane pointed his nose at us, we shot them down.' This discussion would go on for days.

"The reason for this discussion was that the Germans had rebuilt some of the American fighters from planes that crashed. They would come up and get into the formation and fly with us. Then all of a sudden they would kick their rudder and start firing. Whenever a fighter came into our formation we always trained our guns on them.

"Another reason I was glad I was in the officers' camp was because the guards were from the Luftwaffe, the German Air Force.

"We knew our troops were getting closer from the radio broadcast; mainly the BBC [the British Broadcasting Corporation] picked up on our canary. [The canary was an illegal radio in the American compound.] In a room next to the first aid station was a map of Europe. The map would show where the German battle lines were. On the same map the Americans would put on a line where BBC and the allies said the battle lines were. The Germans would come each day and look. They knew there was a radio in camp. They searched for it. Sometimes I think they didn't want to find it. The canary was never a topic of conversation in camp. It was understood you did not ask questions. Just enjoy the map. The lines were [put up with yarn and pins] that the Russian Army was not too far away.

"The big question was, would the Germans move us out before the Russians captured us?"

The March to Nuremberg, January 25, 1945

"We received the answer at 2100 hours [9 P.M.] on January 25, 1945. All compounds received German orders to move out on foot within 30 minutes. Colonel Alkire had told us two weeks before to be ready to move on a short notice. In knotted trousers used as packs and makeshift sleds, we packed clothing and all the food we had. The Germans issued one Red Cross parcel per man. We abandoned books, letters, camp records, and took our overcoat and blankets and left.

"By 2400 hours [midnight] all men, except some that couldn't walk, marched out into the bitter cold and snow in a column of threes. Destination unknown. Our guards from the camp went with us; they carried

rifles and machine pistols. We marched all night, fifty minutes of marching and ten minute breaks, every hour. German rations consisted only of black bread and margarine obtained from the horse drawn wagon — the camp kitchen. Each compound marched separately, each could tell a different story.

"We slept in unheated barns, empty factories, and on the ground. After the first 24 hours we were given a thirty hour rest for recuperation. I am not sure where we were at this time or where we were going. The guards from the camp were old men and had trouble keeping up. The G.I.s told the guards that they would carry their rifles for them; they knew we couldn't escape in this kind of weather. At the first river we came to, we dumped all the rifles in the water. We had some very angry guards. We had a good laugh."

The Forty and Eights

"Later, we were loaded on unmarked 40-8 freight boxcars, 50 men to a car. They locked the doors. We were in the boxcars for three days and nights with no water and no sanitation. One corner of the car was reserved for a toilet area. But who could go in a corner with 49 men looking on. Our greatest fear was that our train would be strafed by our P-51s or P-47s. At that time of the war the fighter planes were sent out to shoot up trains or any other target of opportunity. The 40 by 8 meant forty men and eight horses. Fifty men in the car made it crowded. There were four boxcars of prisoners. And on the third day we changed trains at Nurnberg [Nuremberg].

"After being in the boxcars for three days we needed to relieve ourselves. Having no place to go, the guards kept us together in the marshaling yard; we looked at each other, took down our trousers, squatted down and let nature take its course. What a relief. Some picture, 200 prisoners getting relief."

Stalag XIIID

"Conditions at Stalag XIIID at Nurnberg were deplorable. The barracks had recently been inhabited by Italian POWs who left them filthy.

There was no room to exercise, no supplies, nothing to eat out of, and practically nothing to eat. The German rations were 300 grams of bread, 250 grams of potatoes, some dehydrated vegetables and margarine. A few days after our arrival, Red Cross Parcels started to arrive by truck.

"Toilet facilities during the day were satisfactory, the only night latrine was a can in each sleeping room. Many of the men now had diarrhea, the can had insufficient capacity, so the floors were soiled very soon. The barracks were not heated. The morale of the prisoners dropped to its lowest ebb."

The March to Stalag VIIA, April 3, 1945

"At 1700 hours [5 P.M.] on April 3, 1945, we were told to evacuate the Nurenberg camp and march to Stalag VII at Mooseberg. The Germans agreed that the Americans would take over the march. The Americans were responsible for preserving order, and that we would march only 20 kilometers a day, about 12 miles.

"On April 4, 1945, each POW received one food parcel and we started south. While we were marching through a marshaling yard near a highway, some P-47s dive bombed the yard. Two Americans and one British soldier were killed; three others were wounded. The next day a large replica of the American Air Corps insignia was placed on the road with an arrow pointing in the direction of the march. This ended the bombing of the column.

"Many of the men were very weak and had difficulty keeping up. This is when we started the flying wedge. The weaker prisoners were allowed to drift back through the column as we marched. Then a group of the stronger prisoners would take the weaker prisoners to the front of the column during the ten minute break. This was repeated every hour.

"Colonel Darr H. Alkire was now in charge of the column. He was an excellent officer and was responsible for many of the improved conditions during the march. The German guards were aware of how close the American Army was, and this helped. Even though the Americans were in charge the guards went with us. On the third day of this march diphtheria broke out among the prisoners. Since I was the medic, I did what I could, which wasn't much.

"A couple of days later I had the disease. I could hardly talk, my throat was beginning to close. We were camping near a barn. I climbed up into the hayloft. I thought I had had it and the hay was a soft place to lay. Later in the day I heard Colonel Alkire asking where Sergeant Butts was at. They told him in the hay loft. He shouted for me and wanted to know what the problem was. I crawled out to the opening and tried to answer. He couldn't understand me, but realized I had caught the diphtheria. He said to lie down and stay there.

"We had been getting Red Cross parcels on a regular basis, for we were near the Switzerland border. Since Colonel Alkire was in charge he told the German captain that we needed more Red Cross parcels, now. The German captain called Switzerland to send a truck load of parcels right away. The truck was there the next morning. They unloaded the parcels and told the driver to take me to the column ahead of us, for there was a doctor there. This was what the driver did. When he got to the column, they found the doctor. I had worked with him at Sagan. He asked what was wrong and when I tried to answer he knew. In his medical bag he had some diphtheria serum and he gave me 1,000 units and told the driver to take me to Stalag VIIA. It was down the road about 20 miles."

Stalag VIIA

"When I arrived at Mooseburg they put me in a barracks. This was where they dumped all the sick prisoners. There were no German or American doctors, no medical personnel at all. I don't remember much for the next few days. I had gone into a coma and just laid in my bunk. An Army corporal took care of me as I came out of the coma. He fed me, gave me water, and looked after me. I don't even know his name.

"The sanitation was unbelievable. When I was able to move I would crawl to the latrine. The latrine had a sloping floor, with holes in the floor. The holes took care of the human waste. There were no stools or sinks. When finished, I would crawl back to my bunk. I was very weak.

"This nameless corporal saved my life. This was near the end of April. General [George S.] Patton's 3rd Army and the Germans fought a battle with the camp in the middle. Bullets flew like mad in the barracks. A

View of Stalag VIIA, Mooseburg, Germany, which held the largest number of prisoners liberated at one time (National Archives).

British soldier in the bunk next to me was killed in his bunk by a stray bullet. It hit him in his mouth and came out the back of his head. We all talked and he told me he didn't want to go home. He had been captured in North Africa."

Liberation, May 7, 1945

"From the barracks we were taken to an evacuation field hospital for seven days. The rule was that after seven days you had to move up to another hospital. I was the last one to leave from my old barracks. At that time I was paralyzed in both legs, arms, throat, and I was down to 105 pounds.

"From the evaluation hospital we were flown out on a C-47 hospi-

tal plane. We were on the ramp waiting to get on the runway. The first plane took off, the second plane taxied to the runway, it tried to take off and crashed at the end of the runway. We taxied to the runway, and took off through the smoke of the crashed plane. I was afraid, because the last time I was in a plane it went down.

"They took me to a hospital in Reims, France, where I stayed for a few weeks. I began to get stronger. The next step was Camp Atterbury near Franklin, Indiana, at Wakeman General Hospital. At Wakeman I was given a lot of vitamins and all the food I could eat. I was a ramp [Released Allied Military Personnel] and treated very nicely. When I started to walk and could move around I went down to the recreation room to watch a ping-pong match. I noticed a young lady also in hospital clothing. I asked if the chair next to her was taken and she said no. This was the beginning of a lifelong experience. She was a WAC [Women's Army Corps] recovering from an appendix operation. We were married in the hospital chapel on September 7, 1945."