

**/Sgt. Charles C. Clark "Tip"**

**451st Bomb Group 725th Squadron**

**B-24 Engineer and Gunner**

**Shot down Dec. 11, 1944 over Vienna, Austria, on 20th mission.**

**Stalag Luft I Prisoner of War**

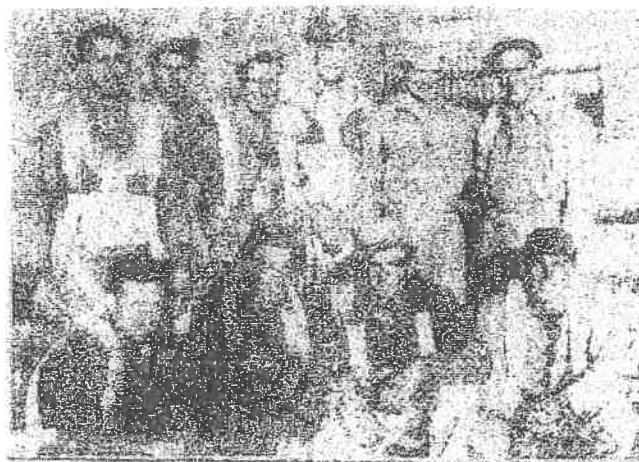
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JJ's GRANDPA - My Hero

I, Charles C. "Tip" Clark, at the age of 82 years of age, am writing my memoirs as a former P.O.W. in Stalag Luft One. My P.O.W. # was 7470. I was T/Sgt. in Charles R. Campbell's crew on B-24 Liberator. Shortly after graduating from high school in Matthews, Missouri, 1941, at the age of 17, I enrolled in Draughn's Business College in Memphis, Tennessee, and worked part time at cafes and shoe stores. Later I got a job at E. I. DUPONT Powder Plant in Millington, Tennessee. While working there, Pearl Harbor was bombed. Not long after that I was drafted, and was sworn in at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri. Very quickly, I found myself on a troop train heading south. A person in charge came through as we traveled a ways and informed us that we were in the Air Force. We arrived at our destination at St. Petersburg, Florida, to start basic training; then, went to Gulfport, Mississippi, for air-plane mechanic training. When I finished there, I was given a 17 day delay in route to Las Vegas, Nevada, for gunnery schooling. I returned home during that time. Finishing gunnery school gave me a buck sergeant rating.

From there I was sent to Fresno, CA, and then on to Muroc Air Force Base for overseas training and assigned to a crew of 10 men listed as follows:

Charles R. "Chuck" Campbell; Ruport, Idaho; Pilot  
Jack L. Ward; Los Angeles, California; Co-Pilot  
David Davis; Columbus, Ohio (presently in Hollywood, Florida); Navigator  
Kenneth Trimmer; Long Island, New York; Bombardier  
C. C. "Tip" Clark; New Madrid, MO; Engineer and Gunner  
William Devine; Pottsville, Pennsylvania; Radio Operator and Gunner  
Vincen Daniels; New York, New York; Waist Gunner  
Gilbert Fisher; Bethesda, Maryland; Nose Gunner  
Andrew P. Kraynak; Pennsylvania; Ball Turret Gunner  
Paul Butler; New York (later Connecticut); Tail Gunner



We were sent to San Francisco to be assigned to an airplane , which we expected to be sent to the South Pacific. On waiting 30 days our orders were changed. We boarded a troop train and traveled across the U.S. to Patrick Henry, Virginia, and left there on Sept. 25, 1944, on a French Merchant Marine ship...arriving at Naples, Italy 14 days later. Our menu, while on the ship going across, was boiled eggs and beans each day. We were immediately loaded on a slow train to Foggia, Italy. Traveling through wine country with orchards so plentiful, sometimes we would jump off the train and pick some grapes, then jump back on. When we arrived at Foggia about October 9th, 1944, was assigned our tent and fed, we then began to get acquainted with our new surroundings. Our bombing missions began pretty quick. We were never assigned a permanent plane. It seems that we just got whatever plane that was ready. Sometimes, we would have to change planes because the one assigned would be red lined (grounded). I'll never forget our first mission.

We encountered pretty heavy flak (88 mm gunshots fired from the ground), and when we landed back at Foggia, most of us jumped out and started counting little places where we were hit. I think there were 57. We never bothered anymore about looking. After flying 19 missions of which several were double sorties, we began to get kinda flak happy (nerves). Our pilot, Chuck, arranged for us to go to the "Isle of Capri" for one week. It was the most beautiful place I ever did see -- except home!

On our first mission after returning to Foggia, which was our 20th mission, we got a direct hit on December 11, 1944, over Vienna, Austria. Our lead plane's controls were shot out and beyond his control, leading us right back over the target after we had already released our bombs. At this point the gun batteries on the ground had determined our range. Being

in the top turret, I saw the burst of flak coming. One, two, three, and the fourth one got us, killing Chuck, our pilot; injuring Jack, the co-pilot; and injuring the bombardier. No one else was hit. Our plane was very much out of control. Jack was trying hard to bring it around. At the same time, he gave me a hand motion to bail out. I got on the catwalk and looked back; and he motioned me to come back. I got about halfway back to the cockpit and he motioned me again to jump. I didn't know that Chuck had been killed at this time. I looked back at Jack again and he motioned for me to jump, which I did. Jack changed his mind again and no one else bailed out. He turned on the automatic pilot and gained control of the plane, which he couldn't do manually. We only had one engine operating properly. One engine was running away, one was feathered, and one was on fire. How long it was on fire, I don't know. How far they flew before they had to jump, while high enough, is just a guess. They caught up with me about five days later at Dulag Luft in Frankford, Germany. In the meantime, I was in the dark. I had no idea what had happened to them.

They informed me that on completion of everyone leaving the plane, it was set to circle and plunge into the ground. Chuck, our pilot, went down with the plane. As I said, our plane was hit on Dec. 11th, 1944, and the 725th squadron was notified that our plane had been hit and the plane had left formation and lost altitude. Only one parachute was seen leaving the plane.

My parents were notified on Christmas Eve day that I was missing in action. A telegram was delivered to my parents' home. My sister, Nadine, went over to a small town nearby, Kewanee, Missouri, where my dad was working on the roof of the Methodist Church, to let him know. My mother had her hands full trying to calm my dad during this time. He took the news so hard that he was having a lot of trouble handling it. She was having to be strong for him, even with all her heart ache.

When I landed on the ground, I was greeted by 15 or 20 people I supposed were slave laborers. They acted extremely nice, and one offered me an American cigarette; but very shortly, four German soldiers, spread out, came toward me. The people around me disappeared very quickly. I was instructed to pick up my chute. We got into a convertible sedan and they began trying to find out what to do with me. Not understanding German, I had to guess about a lot of things. They took me to a brick school house where they had an office. They made several phone calls trying to decide what to do with me, "heiling" Hitler on the phone.

At sundown, two officers and a soldier ordered me to follow them. One officer, I assumed, was a doctor. We marched down the street and approached a high wall with many scars or peck marks, appeared to be rifle marks; and I thought they were going to execute me. I considered running, but knew if I did, they would certainly shoot me, so I kept walking and waiting, expecting them to stop at any time; but we got to a street corner and turned. I was quite relieved. Finally, they put me upstairs in a room next to a patrol unit of about 8 or 10 soldiers. I had a bunk with a little straw in it. They brought me a round loaf of German bread, and gave me a knife with about a 4" blade to cut my bread with and a bowl of soup. I only ate 2 or 3 bites. I just didn't have an appetite. They changed the guards while I had this

meal and didn't ask for the knife back. I hid the knife on the bunk above me, thinking maybe I might get a chance to escape that night. After considering my treatment, thus far, I thought maybe they had planted the knife on purpose to have an excuse to execute me, so I decided to turn the knife over to the guard. He was quite surprised. I didn't sleep much that night because he marched up and down beside my bed, clicking his heels each time he'd turn around. They were always "heiling" Hitler whenever they met anyone.

The next day, they put me on a 1 1/2 ton truck half loaded with tires and about 6 soldiers; delivered me to a confinement in Vienna that had 18 American airmen who'd been shot down the same day as I had. They had very little to do with me at first, thinking I might be a German planted among them. The next day, being December 13, 1944, we were put on a flatbed 1 1/2 ton truck, instructed to keep our head down, stay quiet and still. I understood "why", right away. People along the way would throw things at us, spit at us and, I assume, saying bad things to us. Arriving at a train station, our guards had us to get in a corner, and they kept their backs to us, facing the public to make them leave us alone. Very soon, we were put on a train into two private rooms with one guard in each room. We had no water or food; and needless to say, we got very hungry and thirsty.

Where we went to, I have no idea. When we would get to a town, we would have to unload, walk across town, load onto another train and proceed, I think, to an interrogation center. I was put into solitary and brought out at times for questioning at any time of night or day. They threatened to stand me in the snow barefoot, turn me over to the Gestapo or the SS if I didn't cooperate with them and tell them answers to their questions.

Name, rank, and serial number is all I ever gave, which was by regulations, all I was supposed to say. The questioning went on for about two days. Our next stop was Dulag Luft at Frankfurt, Germany, where all of my crew were reunited, with the exception of Jack and Trimmer, who were sent to a hospital somewhere for treatment. I was assigned to a room and upon my entrance, the first person I met was John Payne of Memphis, Tennessee, (a personal friend I last saw in Memphis before entering service). We spent the rest of our time together while in prison, and we still stay in contact.

Dulag Luft in Frankfurt was a pool where prisoners were sent out to different permanent camps. I had been there 3 or 4 days when someone said they were gathering up a group to go to an officers' P.O.W. camp; and that enlisted men could go. It was rumored that they had movies, swimming pools, etc., which we didn't believe, but my crew figured it would be better than here; so we signed up to go. Right away, we were loaded into a prison car so full of P.O.W.'s that we had to stand closely. I don't remember how many days we were on the trip, but as we went to Berlin there was an air raid. The guards left us locked in and they went to the air raid shelters. Thankfully, we were not bombed in that area. We were so crowded, it was a miserable trip.

Arriving at Barth, Germany, we were ordered off the train and in formation to march to Stalag Luft 1 near by. We had to march between two mean dogs nipping at us. That was their introduction, I suppose. I'm not exactly sure, but I think we were in the North

compound. We watched them train their dogs in the direction of the Baltic Sea. Incidentally, they said we were only 60 miles from Sweden. There were around 10,000 kriegies (P.O.W.'s) at this camp. My stay at Stalag Luft 1 is pretty well a story in itself. Colonel F.S. Gabreski and Colonel Hubert Zemke were our commanding officers, and we thought very highly of them. They had us organized in a very military manner. We were housed in barracks with cracks in the floor. Sometimes a guard would crawl under our floor at night and eavesdrop on us for information. A kriegie would heat some water and pour it on him. I think you can guess what happened next. We were always locked in at night. One or two guards with dogs would roam around the barrack. Our windows were covered. No light was allowed to shine through. If there was an air raid during the daytime, all kriegies had to go inside and close all doors. I remember one kriegie didn't know there was an air raid alarm and ran outside. A guard shot and killed him. That was really upsetting to all of us.

We had a ration of potatoes and cabbage pretty regularly. We were supposed to get one Red Cross parcel per person a week. The most I remember ever getting was one parcel to four kriegies a week. Many times we didn't receive any. The parcels contained many items: two packs of cigarettes, one can jelly, D Bar (chocolate bar), powdered milk, salt, pepper, prunes or raisins, and other items that I can't remember. The pepper was confiscated because if we escaped we couldn't put pepper in our tracks to keep the dogs from tracking us. All cans of food were punctured with a hand axe, so we would not be able to pack an escape kit.

There were details called out every so often to go just outside of camp to get potatoes and/or coal to be distributed in our compound. Of course, we would cheat and stuff our jackets with as much as we could. Our barracks were made of wood with several rooms, with a hallway down the middle. The bunks were built from wall to wall on one side three bunks high; and slept 18 men. In a corner, another set, three high, would sleep 6 men. In the other corner, we had a coal heating stove. In our room we elected two kriegies to prepare and distribute whatever food we had. As you might guess, we watched them very closely to be sure some didn't get more than others. We felt by preparing it all together, it would go farther. Our loaves of bread would be brought in, unwrapped, in an open wagon pulled by one horse. Malnutrition was common with all of us.

When we would first get up, we would black out for a few seconds. After being locked in, we could go about inside our own barrack from room to room as we pleased. If and when we would receive a news bulletin, anyone in your room that didn't live there, had to leave. We received bulletins from our secret radio often. Two kriegies would come in and ask if our room was clear. We knew as soon as they came in who they were, and we would tell anyone who didn't belong, to leave.

They would go to each room and do the same thing; so everyone would get the news. They would tell us where the American, British, and Russian fronts were, and how they were advancing, or other news such as President Roosevelt dieing. At the front of our barrack was a room we used as our restroom. It was equipped with a container for waste. The next morning, two kriegies were detailed to carry the containers to a designated place. These

kriegies were called the "Honey Bucket Brigade."

Fortunately, we most always had plenty of soap and water. There were quite a few paperback books; and we could play ball, box, pitch washers, play cards; do lots of walking or creative things with what we could find. We would flatten tin cans and make cooking pans. Some guys would melt wrappers from food boxes, and pour into a wooden mold in the shape of wings, etc. One kriegie made a clock out of tin cans and it worked. There were men from about every professional background you could think of: doctors, lawyers, ministers, accountants, etc. Men who played poker and lost would pay off by writing a check. Were they good? Who knows?

Sometimes, a group of guards would storm our quarters, order everyone out, and do a search: upsetting our beds, dumping boxes, really messing up everything...trying to find our secret radio, weapons, or anything we shouldn't have. They would also take whatever they wanted. If you thought of an escape plan, you were to submit it to our escape committee. They would decide if it was a good plan and who would be the best to use it. If you wanted to try to escape, you were supposed to submit your name, even if you had not submitted a plan. I don't know if there was ever an attempt while I was there, but I don't think so. Because it was nearing the end of the war could have been the reason.

Opportunities never cease. Some kriegies opened a business. They assessed points on almost everything. There were so many points for a D Bar, powdered milk, pack of cigarettes, a wristwatch, etc. We would present our product for what they had and make our deal. One day a cat got into our compound. The chase was quite interesting. The cat lost! I didn't get any of it. There came times when we desperately needed a shower. In order to accomplish this we would tell them we had lice. We would have to gather up all our belongings, march down to a place where we could put all our clothes in an oven; take a shower, then come out on the other side, collect our clothes, and return to our quarters. Sometimes, showers were available on request. We would march down to the shower, get soaped up, and the guard would turn off the water. For him to turn the water back on would require that someone give him a cigarette. If we gave them more than one, they would demand more the next time.

Some days it was extremely cold. Snow came down with the wind blowing it crossways. You could depend on it; they would call out "roust" or roll call. We would be in formation, and the guards could never count right when it was cold; so we had to stand there in the cold until the German soldiers sent for a list of everyone...then they could call us out by name. After this we would be dismissed. On pretty days it was a common practice for kriegies to pair off and walk around the compound near the "warning wire", talking of home and everything imaginable until it was time to go inside and lock up.

Along about April of 1944, news came that the fronts were moving fast. We were told to dig trenches and prepare ourselves for protection. We were also told that the Russians would be shooting from one side of the camp and the Germans would be shooting from the other side. The night fell and the Germans left about 10 p.m. to avoid capture by the Russians.

When daylight came, we were liberated by two drunk Russians in a tank. Everyone seemed to know we were being freed. Orders were given that everyone must stay put and not go outside the compound for fear of stepping on mines and booby traps. The two Russians were meeting with Colonel Zemke, (who could speak Russian fluently), seemed unhappy that we hadn't torn down the fences; so, the Colonel gave orders to tear them down. Very shortly, several thousand kriegies were scattered out all over the place, going into Barth and confiscating everything from milk cows to motorcycles.

Late that afternoon, they began to come back to their quarters and build little camp fires and cook things they'd found. A few of us thought it best for us not go outside the compound until we could find out more of what was really going on. After two days, Colonel Zemke appointed M.P.s to get in towers and not allow anyone out. Our camp was on a small peninsula and M.P.s were placed so no one could leave. About the 4th day, Paul Butler... my tail gunner, Jim (somebody)...a friend, and I decided to go out. We found a jon boat; paddled across to another peninsula; and went into Barth.

We explored the town all day, just looking for anything. Late that evening, a German with horses and wagon, hauling stray, came by; so we just hopped on. We were tired. Shortly, a truck, with a cover over the bed carrying several Russian soldiers passed us and stopped to remove the wheels from a car that was parked. When they pulled out, we ran and climbed in the truck with the soldiers. They were nice, and we swapped some souvenirs. We must have traveled about 5 miles to a crossroad. The truck turned to the left and after about 2 miles, the truck stopped. An officer, I presume, got out of the cab, came back to the rear and began talking to us in Russian. Not being able to communicate with him, we decided to just get out. They pulled out and left us, and we started back the way we came.

We noticed a group of about 50 people at a barn cooking something. We were hungry so we just stopped and joined them. They fed us. Leaving them, we began to walk and soon another truck passed us and was stopping along the way to pick up barrels. We ran and jumped on. A wild guess is that we rode it for about 30 miles. It was getting dark. We got off the truck at the edge of some rather large town. There was no one to be seen. It was deathly quite. We didn't know what to think. A rooster crowed. Finally, we saw someone a long ways off in front of us and standing in the middle of the street. We approached him and informed him that we were American P.O.W.'s and needed a place to sleep. He summoned someone, and he took us up about 4 stories to a bedroom. We asked for some food, and it was brought to us. We noticed that this was their headquarters for that area; and the town was under curfew. We were lucky we didn't get shot at.

We got up the next morning, went down to the street, and headed in the direction we thought might be some Americans. Somewhere, we found little map, which was a big help in showing us the direction to go. I do believe the Lord was with us. We also found a little book with English and the equivalent word in German. This was extremely helpful. I wish I could tell you the route we took, but I can't. We walked; rode buggies, one plane, a bus or two, and whatever came by. In our walking we would be in marches with lots of German people moving away from being caught under Russian rule. We would see a dead horse,

and a hunk of meat would be cut out of him. When we became hungry, we would look for a farmstead with chickens and cows. There would usually be a man and woman looking after things. They would claim not to have anything to eat and we would pound the table and say "essen, yah" (eat, yes). We would start opening cabinets and drawers and whatever we found...we would demand them to cook it. Sometimes, they would and sometimes, they wouldn't. We never abused anyone.

One evening, about sundown, we saw a good prospective looking farmhouse, a little off the road, with some activity. We proceeded toward the place, and just before we got to it, discovered it was a Russian headquarters. We were a little puzzled as what to do. Talking between ourselves, we decided to go on up to the house, identify ourselves, and ask for some water, then leave. As we approached 3 or 4 soldiers, one was very drunk and said "halt." He pulled out his pistol; began to lower it toward me; and another soldier near by jumped in and grabbed him. I think he very likely saved my life. They let him keep his pistol, but removed the clip and kept it from him. That introduction being ended, we began to talk with them by means of broken English and sign language. We were invited to their evening meal. We declined, but they insisted; so we accepted. Inside their buildings, they had a long table loaded with lots of food. There was plenty of meat, vegetables, etc.

Of course, there was vodka. We felt it would be unsociable to them if we didn't accept. We were not too hard to coax into it. They had German civilians waiting on tables. As soon as we felt comfortable, we excused ourselves, and told them we were anxious to go home. We found a house on down the way. No one was home, so we just went in and spent the night. Somewhere, on down the road, we entered a town, We found out a bunch was gathering in someone's cellar, having a party, and drinking up his stock of beverages; sooooo! we were ready to check it out, since we were enjoying our freedom. Yep, we did it. We got very "tipsey", which I'm not proud of, today.

Where we slept that night.....I do not remember. At some point, we managed to be where there was some air traffic. We asked permission to board, and told them we were trying to get into American occupation. We were granted permission. Where we landed is beyond my memory; but we were in American territory. Right after we departed the plane, it took off. We asked if there was some way we could catch a plane to England. They said, "Well, if you had stayed on the plane, that's where it's headed." That was a little disappointing; so, we left there and proceeded toward the English Channel.

Arriving at the English Channel, we discussed trying to board a ship, and just go on home. After walking up and down the harbor, we decided that might not be too good of an idea. We thought we might accidentally get on a ship that was going to Japan. That idea was abandoned. We wondered what to do next. We talked to people we met and asked questions, finding out that all ex-P.O.W.'s were supposed to report to one of the camps that was being set up for them.

There was Camp Lucky Strike, Camp Camel, etc. We agreed to go to Lucky Strike about 3 to 5 miles out. As we walked, truck loads from our Stalag Luft One began passing us. They



had been flown in. Arriving at Lucky Strike, we found much confusion. Someone said there was about 50,000 kriegies there. Spending about 24 hours there, we had a bowl of soup after standing in a long line. We were supposed to erect our tent; so instead, we decided to go to Paris.

The guard at the gate said we had to have a pass. We just laughed and said, "No, no, we're free", and we went on by. Right away, we caught an 18 wheeler all the way to Paris. One rode in the cab, and two of us rode inside where the refrigeration unit was...in the front of the trailer. Paris was something else to us. Our eyes became tired from seeing so much. That means we needed a pay day which was impossible. The Red Cross was all we could come up with. They said, "Nothing doing." That wasn't good enough for us. We tried other places and Red Cross finally loaned us \$50.00, which we did pay back later.

Cigarettes were just as good as money, usually better. Pigalle was another part of Paris that was very familiar to all soldiers: German and American alike. I don't think I'll say anything more about that. We enjoyed about a week in Paris, and thoughts of home began to nag at us. We read in the "Stars and Stripes", where they were asking all former P.O.W.'s to report to camp, that a ship was waiting to carry us home. We didn't believe it, but agreed to head back and get in line. Back at Lucky Strike, we met our buddies from Stalag Luft that flew back. We met up with Lt. Jack Ward, our co-pilot; and Lt. Kenneth Trimmer, our bombardier. This was our first time to see them since bailing out.....a very joyous meeting.

Our wait for a ship wasn't long.....not over a week. We boarded the USS Admiral H. T. Mayo. Our captain, Roger Heime, USCG, did a magnificent job of feeding us hospital rations; live entertainment, and putting us safely across that big Atlantic in 7 days to New York. Immediately, they transferred us to a troop train that didn't stop until it got to St. Louis. We had a little briefing and was issued a 60-day recuperation leave. I got on the Old Greyhound bus early and the next stop was in front of my home at Matthews, Missouri, Hwy. 61. I was coming home so fast I was afraid not to call first. Telephones were few and far between. I called Mr. Al Daugherty about a mile from my home and asked him to go over and tell my family that I would be home in a few hours. As I write this, I can't help but cry.

I hadn't heard from home since our plane had been shot down, and didn't know what to expect. I thank the Lord that everything was just fine. The Greyhound stopped in front of my home. I got out and made a dash for the front door. My mom, dad, and sisters: Evelyn, Nadine, and Ramell, were there to greet me with open arms. My brother, Arlene, was still in service in Alabama; brothers, Farris and Melvin, were at their home near Cooter, Missouri. Home and family never looked so good.

As I write this on September 5, 2006, the rest of my crew have passed on except David Davis and Gil Fisher. I pray this writing of my memoirs will be accepted in the spirit that I have intended. I did no acts of a heroic nature. I thank God for seeing me through, that I might be a witness for Him.

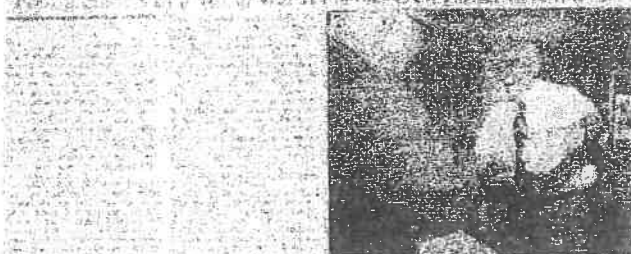
# SEMO NEWS



Clay conferred medal



# WAR TIME MEMORIES



Return to Kriegies