

and our body heat was a great stimulus for the lice. At every opportunity we would strip to the waist and remove them from our clothing. With a stick or stone we would scrape the lice eggs from the seams of our garments. This would give temporary relief.

As time went on, we reached a wooded hillside late in the day and were ordered into the woods for the night. We could see a farm community below and down the road. That night someone in the group had some reason to believe that the date was April 12th. I mentioned to Joe that April 12th was my birthday. The word spread among our immediate group and it was considered a good omen for an escape that night. It was also noticed that our group of guards had dwindled down to just six men. Joe and I decided not to escape, but a small group did disappear in the darkness completely unnoticed. We heard nothing more from them.

The next morning we were assembled on the road, and much to our surprise, we walked down the hill and into the barnyard of a farm which was surrounded by several out buildings. The main attraction was a large water pump and trough for the livestock. Some were attempting to take sponge baths at the water trough, while others were searching for food. While I was stripped to the waist at the trough, a P.O.W. who could speak and understand German, stood up on a farm wagon and informed us that the six guards had surrendered their weapons to us and that he had been informed that American troops were in a nearby town and approaching in our direction. After much celebration, order was restored and a group was dispatched to make contact with our troops. Before the group left, someone looked through the gate and saw an American convoy approaching. I was among the first to reach the first vehicle which was commanded by a lieutenant colonel who said he was from Baltimore, Maryland.

He ordered those under his command to give us food. Someone gave me a can of powdered eggs, a pack of Juicy Fruit chewing gum and a pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes. Upon my return to the barnyard, as ordered, I discovered that Joe had done some begging from the German civilians. His reward was a whole loaf of dark bread.

Order was again established at the barn yard where we were told to be on good behavior until the next day when we would be moved out. The six German guards were turned over to the liberating troops with a firm plea from us that they be treated fairly, since they had done the best they could for us.

Joe and I wasted no time consuming our big meal of powdered eggs and bread. The chewing gum gave us a bit of sugar which was quite a treat. We each smoked a cigarette and spent the rest of the night reveling in the fact that we were free and would soon be returning to a normal military life. One of the liberating soldiers informed us that the date was April 13th, and further, that it was Friday. It was truly my lucky day as it ended 114 days of captivity with its sufferings, hardships and anxieties.

After two days of travel by G.I. trucks and a plane ride, I found myself at a large assembly area in LeHavre, France. There, we were decontaminated, given a quick medical check for contagious diseases, and were able to take hot and cold showers under a large circus type tent.

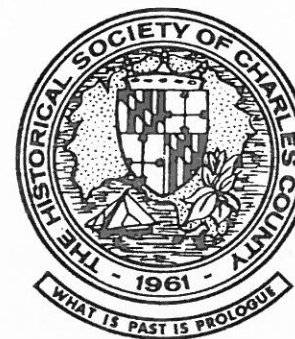
All new clothing was issued and we felt like real human beings once again. During my medical checkup I was weighed and tipped the scales at 145 pounds. I had weighed about 185 pounds prior to capture.

There were many P.O.Ws. who fared much worse than I did. Our group had dwindled down to about 200 men. I have always hoped and prayed that those who fell along the way, and who escaped, were able to return home as I did on May 15, 1945.

## —RAFFLE NOTICE—

We hope you have received your raffle tickets. They are \$1.00 each and to be mailed to the Historical Society's address c/o Raffle.

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# The RECORD

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## A World War II Prisoner of War In Germany

Written by Patrick C. Mudd, P. O. W. # 094411

*Editor's Note: The Historical Society is beginning a long range oral history project to record the experiences of Charles County's prisoners of war in World War II. Patrick Mudd is a lifetime resident of Charles County. He was born and raised in Bryantown, and resides in Spring Hill. Mr. Mudd served as Clerk of the Court for Charles County from December 1946 to June 1984.*

As a platoon sergeant and tank commander in the 21st tank battalion of the 10th armored division, I was taken prisoner by the Germans on December 21, 1944 in the small town of Waldbilg, Belgium. Our division had become attached to General Patton's 3rd Army and was proceeding to Bastogne to assist the 101st Airborne Division in the defense of that city.

My platoon, which consisted of five Sherman tanks, was ordered to explore a small town, which reportedly was undefended by the enemy. This information proved to be incorrect, since the town was well fortified. As was discovered later, Bazooka's were concealed within the buildings and positioned to fire on our tanks from doors and windows at a very close range.

As my tank made a sharp turn on a narrow street we were hit, with the shell penetrating the tank's turret. My gunner was killed instantly, my radio was knocked out and I found myself in a dazed condition on the rear deck of the tank with a leg injury. Since my tank was still moving, and being unable to communicate with my driver, I slid off the tank deck in an effort to alert the tank to my rear. Being unable to do this, I rolled into a gutter hoping to hide there until I could be picked up by one of the other tanks. While in the gutter, I noticed Dave, an assistant driver from one of the other tanks, running up the street toward me. He was badly burned about the face, since his tank had been hit and his tank commander killed. He was hysterical and became very difficult to control. In a few seconds we were surrounded by a German machine gun crew and were forced to surrender. This all happened at about 1:30p.m. and the entire episode lasted only about twenty minutes.

My initial incarceration was in a cow barn. It appeared to be the same building from which the shot was fired that hit my tank. A bazooka crew was there as well as my captors. There was also a cow munching on some hay, and an old pitcher pump stood beside a water trough. Since I did not know the extent of my injury, my first concern was to take my sulphur tablets, which we always carried on our person. We had been instructed dur-

ing our basic training to drink lots of water when taking our sulphur tablets, so the pitcher pump appeared very inviting. After much sign language and the use of the only German word I knew (wasser), I was allowed to fill my canteen from the pump and take my tablets.

After about a half an hour I heard a roaring noise, and much to my surprise I could see all of the tanks in my platoon going back up the street and leaving town at a high rate of speed. I found out after the war that the driver of my tank had assembled all of the tanks and led them out of further danger and back to headquarters.

Late in the afternoon we were taken to another building and kept in an underground area, which appeared to be a root cellar. This place was crowded with wounded German soldiers. We were the only Americans there. We were interrogated by a German officer who spoke English. I pretended not to understand him, so the interrogation was very brief. I was quite thirsty (apparently the effect of the sulphur) and attempted to collect some water from an overhead dripping pipe. A German guard detected me doing this and discarded the bit of water that I had collected in my helmet. He no doubt knew that the water was from a sewerage pipe. All during the night the town was bombarded by our artillery, but our building was not hit. Throughout the night, wounded and dead German soldiers were brought into the shelter. We were very apprehensive about retaliation, but we were spared.

That night, after the shelling subsided, the two of us were taken outside by two German soldiers and told to get in a wagon drawn by a yoke of oxen. From there we were taken out of the town and through a rural wooded area. Needless to say, we were very frightened. As dawn approached we found ourselves at a crossroads, and were placed in a large truck loaded with wounded German soldiers. From there, we were transported to a large building on a high hill, which appeared to be a monastery or convent, converted to a field hospital. I saw two Catholic nuns there and one American soldier who were assisting with the first aid. While there, one of the nuns gave me an apple and a small cup of red wine. Since I had lost touch with dates and times, I surmised that this was either Christmas Eve or Christmas Day which brought forth the wine and the apple.

From there, we were again transported by truck, with the Germans walking wounded, to a railroad yard where we all boarded a passenger train. Enroute to an unknown destination, the train stopped suddenly on the outskirts of



a city, and all passengers including us, were loaded and rushed into an underground shelter, where we stayed for the rest of the day and night. We could hear and feel the effects of a terrific bombing going on overhead. The next morning, upon leaving the shelter and resuming our trip, I discovered that the city was Koblenz, and that a tremendous amount of damage had been done by the night-long bombardment.

Our next stop was at a small town where the German wounded were taken to a school building, which was set up as a make-shift medical center. Dave and I assisted in removing the wounded from the train and into the building. We were trying to be helpful for our own good, but at the same time we did not want to minimize our own injuries. I did not know the extent of my leg injury. It was painful, but I had been unable to examine it closely, and had no opportunity for any first aid. While at the school building, I was able to make my injury known to a young German medic. He appeared to be no more than 16 years of age. He examined my leg, and with a pair of scissors, clipped away some ragged flesh from the inside of my left thigh, did a bit of probing and removed a piece of shrapnel about the size of a half dollar. He packed the cavity with a yellow ointment and wrapped the wound with heavy crepe paper. I saw no cloth bandage being used. I had no ill effect from the injury or from the crude first-aid treatment. The heavy dose of sulphur on the day of capture apparently paid great dividends.

Upon boarding the train again, I found myself among a large group of P.O.Ws, none of whom I knew. Our next stop was at Limburg, Germany where we were placed in Stalag XIIA. This seemed to be an assembly point for P.O.Ws. It was here at Limburg that I became registered as a P.O.W. along with hundreds of others of various nationalities. I was here for about two weeks. We slept on bunks made from 2 x 4s and chicken wire. We were given one blanket. Our winter clothing was taken from us and we were given light-weight pants, shirt and jacket. Our daily rations consisted of a piece of dark bread and watery soup. The pangs of hunger were setting in as my food intake since capture had been very meager. Our captors had taken all of our personal belongings, but I had been successful in concealing my wrist watch. This earlier maneuver now paid great dividends because I was able to trade the watch to an Arab P.O.W. for a half loaf of bread, a piece of cheese and some marmalade. This was quite a treat because food was rapidly becoming a scarce commodity. We saw some evidence of Red Cross food boxes around the Stalag, but I was never able to obtain any of the contents. The word was that the German guards had confiscated them.

During my stay at Stalag XIIA, the Germans conducted a roll call and we all lined up outside the buildings. There, a very unusual thing happened. As the German roll-caller fumbled through the names, I thought I heard some resemblance of the name "Mudd," so I stepped forward. Much to my surprise I noticed another P.O.W. stepping forward. The Germans did not notice this irregularity, but I kept my eye on the other P.O.W. After roll call was completed I sought him out, and very much to my

astonishment, I found that his name was William Joseph Mudd from Louisville, Kentucky. We had never met before, but in a very few minutes we traced our ancestry back through the same family lines. Joe and I became very close friends during the remaining months of our imprisonment. We shared what little food we were able to find; we combined our two blankets to the best advantage and generally looked out for each other as well as we could under the circumstances.

While at Limburg, I discovered that the standard procedure in the Stalag was to separate the officers and N.C.Os from the lower ranking P.O.Ws. As I was an N.C.O. and Dave was a P.F.C., we parted company there and I was never able to contact him again. After many inquiries since the war, I have been led to believe that he survived and returned home. Also at Limburg, I was interrogated by a German major who, surprisingly, showed little interest in me, stating that he knew all about the 10th Armored Division. He unveiled a chart behind his desk which showed the complete table of organization of our division. The chart even listed the name of my company commander. He further stated, much to my astonishment, that he had received his college education in Detroit, Michigan. I was greatly relieved when this was over, but was very apprehensive about the status of the war, knowing that the enemy had so much information about our forces. After a few pokes in the back with a rifle butt, I was returned by the guards to my building where I remained with all the others for about two weeks. Joe and I became very well acquainted and stayed together the best we could.

A day arrived when we were ordered outside near the railroad yard where a long train of box cars was waiting. We were counted, loaded into the box cars, and the sliding doors were shut and bolted. The only openings to the outside were two vents, measuring approximately 8 by 12 inches, covered with iron rods. There we stayed for a train ride that would last 7 days. This was in the middle of January and the weather was cold. There was no heat, so every effort was made to keep warm. Joe and I huddled together with our blankets and would massage each others feet to stimulate the circulation. In spite of these efforts, all of us sustained frostbite to some degree. Once a day we would get a piece of dark bread and a cup of thin soup. Dysentary became a problem, and everyone became infected with body lice. The only toilet facility was a bucket in one corner of the box car. This trip to an unknown destination was a harrowing experience often interrupted by air raids and long delays for unknown reasons.

A day finally arrived when the train stopped, the doors were opened, and we were unloaded in about four inches of snow. Someone determined that we were near the Baltic Sea, but I was never able to verify this. Since the war, I have reviewed several maps of Germany in that area, and from road signs I had remembered, I have concluded that we were at Stalag IIA near Neubrandenburg, Germany.

At our new location, dysentary and frostbite continued to plague us. Our only toilet facility was a slit-trench outside the building. Because of our painful and swollen feet,

many of us had to crawl to and from this area. Our food consisted of bread and soup, but not every day.

There was a wood burning stove in our building, but only occasionally did we have any wood. No Red Cross parcels ever reached us. Body lice had become a constant problem since we had not been able to bathe since our capture. Our only relief was to remove our clothing and destroy them, which was only a temporary measure. They stayed with us until we were able to discard our clothing after our liberation.

During my stay at Stalag IIA I was able to find a stub of a pencil and scraps of paper. Since food was almost always on our minds, Joe and I amused ourselves by making up menus of our favorite meals. We made complete menus for a full week in each of the four seasons of the year. We went into great pro and con discussions about every dish. This occupied a lot of our time and seemed to give us some satisfaction. Other P.O.Ws. in our group would often become irritated by our constant conversations about food. It seemed that it only aggravated their hunger all the more.

At one time I was given a printed post card that I could sign and send home. It merely stated that I was a prisoner and in good health. The card finally reached home, but only after I had arrived. One day there was a religious service held in one of the buildings and I was allowed to attend. It was a Catholic mass, said by a French priest. Being Catholic, this service meant quite a lot to me. Many of the P.O.Ws. had become bedridden from various ailments. Malnutrition, dysentary and injuries were the most common.

My best estimate is that our stay at Stalag IIA lasted about 10 days. One day we learned through our interpreter that the Russian army was only a few miles away. We were told that all who were able to walk would have to leave, and those unable to do so would remain and suffer the consequences. My feet were badly swollen and sore from the frostbite, but I managed to get my shoes on without lacing them. We were lined up on the road, four abreast, and began a forced road march that would last about two months and take us an estimated 500 kilometers through the rural sections of northern Germany. After about a mile or two my feet felt much better and I was able to keep pace with the group. The walking apparently stimulated the blood circulation and the swelling subsided. Almost everyone with frostbite had the same experience, which was indeed a great relief. The dysentary was improving somewhat, but the body lice remained a constant problem since there was no bathing and no change of clothing. A head count was made of our group at the outset of the march and the group numbered 600. There were roughly 25 German guards.

The Germans apparently had no place to house us. We would walk during the daylight hours and be corralled in a wooded area at night where we would sleep on the ground. On three occasions, when in a farm community, we were herded into a barn yard and allowed to sleep in the out buildings. Other than these shelters we were never under a roof during the entire march. On one of these occasions a fellow P.O.W. removed a piece of leather from

some farm equipment to make a shoulder strap for his blanket. This was detected by the farmer and reported to the guards. They immediately classified this as sabotage and proceeded to punish all of us until the guilty one confessed. They marched us in a circle for about an hour, but no one admitted to the act. They then stated that 25 of us would be shot if no confession was made. Still, there was no admission. They then counted off 12 P.O.Ws. from the end of the column where Joe and I were located. Joe happened to be number 12 and I was number 13. They took Joe and the other eleven and lined them up against a brick building. The riflemen paced off about 25 feet and took aim. We then heard a sobbing sound nearby, and a very young P.O.W. stepped forward. At that time a German officer appeared and halted the executions. The young P.O.W. surrendered the leather strap and was taken away in tears by the guards. We never learned of his fate.

Food continued to be a problem. Some days we would get a piece of bread and other days a cup of soup. I remember once getting some marmalade for our bread. I became a pretty good scavenger and often found potatoes, turnips and wild onions along the roadside. You would get hit in the back with a rifle butt if you strayed from the marching column. I took the gamble on several occasions and took the consequences.

We saw no motorized vehicles except for a motorcycle here and there. A horse drawn wagon brought up the rear of our marching column and once in a while it would pick up a P.O.W. who had fallen by the wayside. Some of our group escaped during the nights, but it was very risky. We didn't know where we were in relation to our troops and were unsure of the treatment we would receive at the hands of the German civilians. I was never tempted to make this move.

During this march, I had one pleasant experience which I think is worthy of note. We had been halted in a small town and ordered to sit on the roadside. A bit later, and much to our surprise, we were ordered to line up in single file for food. As I advanced in the line, I could notice ahead a pot of food cooking over an open fire. I eventually obtained my cup of potato soup and soon consumed it. Hopeful of a second cup, I sneaked onto the tail end of the line. As I took my place in the line for my second cup, a German guard spotted me and kept his eye on me constantly. I didn't know whether to abandon my mission or to stand fast in hopes that he really hadn't seen my sneaky maneuver. I decided to stay put, and as I advanced toward my goal, the watchful guard positioned himself between me and the pot. I was confident that punishment was in store for me. But, believe it or not, this guard came over to me, took my cup, filled it to the brim and handed it to me with the most beautiful smile I ever saw. I never saw this guard again, but I will always remember his smile and his humanitarian deed.

Although we had lost touch with the days of the week and dates, the weather was getting warmer and I suspected that spring was approaching. Also, on one particular day, we saw well dressed women and children along the way and concluded that it was Easter Sunday, but we never really knew. The combination of the warmer weather