

FROM COMMISSION TO CAPTIVITY

Written by Asay B. Johnson

On April 20, 1925 I entered this world in a small town of Monroe, Utah which deprived me of being a native Nevadan. This occurred even though both parents were residence of McGill, Nevada at the time, but my mother opted to give birth in her home town so her mother could assist, thus I was born a Utahan instead of being a native Nevadan, which was a sore spot with me for years. I don't recall why this was such an issue with me except all of my friends were native Nevadans and using the vernacular of today's youth it would have been "cool".

Growing up in a small western mining town was a unique experience. It was almost a cradle to grave existence with the Company providing most needs and during the depression years this was both a blessing and a curse. Working for the company was necessary in order to live in McGill since housing was company controlled as were medical services, food (commissary/company store), dairy, utilities and education was highly subsidized. However, recreational activities were abundant, but the hunting, fishing and related activities were limited to the few who had a means of transportation at their disposal; consequently, for the majority a great deal of imagination was required to utilize the pleasant summer hours and long cold winter days. Hiking, and for the fortunate ones, cycling was popular, but as with a majority of children the most popular of all pastimes was baseball. For the older ones a well established American Legion program existed and a competitive semi-pro league provided entertainment for the general population, but for the younger set there was nothing organized. This was several years before The Little League program was introduced. The inventive American spirit solved this problem by organizing teams within neighborhoods and carving baseball diamonds, of a sort, out of the desert surrounding the community. These ball fields were crude indeed, sometime built on a ten percent grade, but were functional when there was nothing else available and since most mining communities were, of necessity, located on a hill for economical ore processing, the only available space was on a hillside. Red letter days occurred when we could use the community ball field and interestingly enough the only level part of this field was the infield. The equipment was handed down from the semi-pro teams or scrounged in any manner possible. Bats and balls were often held together with electricians friction tape as were gloves and run down spikes, if available at all. The competition was then between neighborhoods and the games quite often ended up brawls with two winners being decided, the winner of the game and the brawl, which frequently was one and the same.

Then almost miraculously things changed from a depression atmosphere to a robust economy. December 7th brought about the beginning of a period of utmost urgency in the mining industry and full employment was created. This happened near the end of my high school days so for the most part my childhood was spent under the scourge of the depression; however, summer employment was made available on the company owned railroad and the company owned dairy.

Street smarts were words that never existed (except in movies such as the "Dead End Kids" and the meaning wasn't truly understood and seemed more closely associated with their hi-jinks than some form of inner city education) and it wasn't until years later that I discovered that my sheltered life was naive in the extreme. I never knew a different world existed and the shock of finding the real world was alarming. The only glimpse of the outside world came through viewing movies which in our estimation were more fiction than fact.

To illustrate how naive I was I will relate a short story. Community dances were popular and well attended. During one such dance I was working in the cloak and hat check stand as a representative of

the Boy Scout troop of which I was a member. As the evening progressed I noticed that one prominent individual would leave the dance frequently with some women who wasn't his wife which did seem strange to me but since I didn't know why he was leaving I never gave it any more thought. Then as it got later the temperature started to drop and at one time as he was leaving I asked if they needed their coats. Everyone around me started to laugh and he then secretly handed me a five dollar bill (an unheard of fortune) and said, "you haven't seen anything kid." I then asked one of the older scouts what he meant and what I should do with the money. He told me the money was mine and that I was not to say anything about him leaving the dance. But I asked, "what will I tell my parents about the five dollars?" He just shrugged with a gesture of disgust and I didn't know anymore than before I asked but I did know that I had five dollars that I was going to require an explanation. Sure enough I was questioned about the five dollars and when I related the story my mother just gasped and my dad smiled and turned away. I had five dollars but no explanation. It wasn't until several years later that I found out what was going on.

I was to learn later that McGill was just another little "Payton Place" and occurrences such were not uncommon.

During my childhood I was mischievous, bordering on hooliganism, but the wild flings were tame compared to the shenanigans of the gangs in large metropolitan areas. In fact, crime was virtually non-existent, so much so that houses were generally unlocked and tools and personal effects left unattended.

My childhood resembled a Tom Sawyer world. Adventures were created from incidents read about in books or seen in movies. Actually a pleasant experience. Much time was spent exploring caves, old mining shafts in the nearby mountains and rummaging through old dumps. I like to think that my friends and I were responsible for old bottles to become collector's items since we destroyed the equivalent of "umpteen" dollars worth during target practice with either flippers, sling shots, BB guns or occasionally when one was available a 22 rifle, providing the 18 cents required for a box of shells could be amassed; not an easy task at that time. The bottles made ideal targets since there was never a doubt whether one was hit or not. Scores were tallied by the most bottles broken in a given period of time.

Scouting was an integral part of my childhood and was the most popular activity available to the youth of the village. I was so engrossed in the scouting program that I advanced through all ranks and eventually reached the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest level of scouting. In fact, I had the distinction of being the youngest Eagle Scout in the state of Nevada.

Scouting encompassed all of the activities that I found so enjoyable; consequently, the deep involvement in the program.

As I grew older hunting and fishing became enjoyable avocations. The mountains surrounding and adjacent to McGill teemed with wild life from big game (Deer, Elk, Mountain Lion, Bobcats and Coyotes, to name some) to rabbits and numerous types of birds. Small mountain streams were well stocked with pan size trout and several lakes provided still water fishing. Although all of this outdoor activity existed in abundance motive power to reach these isolated areas was virtually non-existent since this was a short time after the great depression. Consequently, to partake of these adventures one had to ride a bicycle (if fortunate enough to own one) or by hiking, which most of us did frequently. Bicycle trips of up to 20 miles were not uncommon and hikes of 10 miles were common. As the country emerged from the depression, automobile ownership became a possibility and participation in all outdoor activities was broadened considerably. Nevertheless travel was still a luxury and consequently limited. By the time I could fully utilize the value of automotive power rationing raised

its ugly head and travel again was restricted.

Another popular activity was swimming. The company provided and maintained an outdoor warm water swimming pool (72 degrees Fahrenheit!!!?- now if my swimming pool drops below 85 degrees I refuse to enter) which gave all residents an opportunity to learn to swim. Red Cross swimming and life saving lessons were available to all who desired to take advantage of them as a result most everyone was a proficient swimmer.

The company also provided holiday festivities such as Easter egg hunts, Halloween bonfire parties, summer camp outs and Christmas extravaganzas, which consisted of a stocking stuffed with goodies and a small gift presented by Santa. In many cases this was Christmas for many children!

The educational program in a secluded community was a memorable never to be forgotten experience. The broad spectrum offered in a large metropolitan area was not possible, but a well rounded experience indeed. In that period of history those in authority were never challenged. Their authority was explicit and unquestioned; consequently, the slightest peccadillo brought immediate punishment. usually in pairs. The punishment meted out in school was followed up by a more severe punishment at home. As a result I spent a good deal of time "duck walking", erasing blackboards, or other distasteful chores because of my rowdiness, which by today's standards were nothing more than doing my own thing. I fail to see how controlling my rowdiness in anyway dampened my spirit, or otherwise put any constraint on my upbringing but certainly controlled juvenile delinquency. More than I can say for today's liberal thinkers. Those in charge were never challenged and, in fact, as mentioned earlier, punishment meted out was compounded by a more severe dose at home, double jeopardy in its extreme.

The promotion from grade school was recognized by a formal ceremony in which certain gifted students displayed their musical or dramatic talents and the principal handed out awards in penmanship, scholastic achievements and extra curricular activities. Naturally there were the commencement speeches and I was honored by being permitted the opportunity of presenting one of these; the title naturally, "The Advantages Of Being An Nevada". I have ever since enjoyed the thrill of public speaking and the recognition received.

My high school days were even more enjoyable! I participated to the fullest in all activities from dramatics, service clubs, merit society to athletics. Never being a standout star in any activity never deterred my participation. My greatest athletic thrill was being a member of the 1942 Nevada state football championship team and being chosen as honorable mention on the all state team. This was really no big deal since in those days all members of the state championship team were afforded this "honor". A far cry from today's political maneuvering.

As a continuation of the cradle to grave coverage, the company provided employment to all male offspring after they had reached age 18. Since this was the immediate post depression period employment of any kind was difficult to come by and to solve this moderately the company worked all employees one half month, thus spreading the employment across a wide base.

This brief background is presented to give the reader an insight to the shock experienced when my secure, protected existence was interrupted by my call into the military and I was mixed in with individuals from all walks of life from all over the country. This adjustment was a traumatic experience. The old adage of a big fish in a small pond to a little fish in a large pond was never more true.

Since travel was limited during my childhood the pending trip to Salt Lake City for air force cadet screening and basic training at Kearns Air Force base near Salt Lake City was an unbelievable experience.

Traveling by bus, staying in an honest to goodness hotel and eating in restaurants was beyond any dream. The discipline and regimentation was indeed different than the leisurely pace I was accustomed to and the army chow was a revelation. It was impossible for me to comprehend how the delectable produce entering the mess hall could be turned into such unappetizing "crap". In fact the camp environment was so strange and different that severe cases of home sickness prevailed, certainly not life threatening but extremely distressing to the sufferer, similar to motion sickness. For those who have never experienced these maladies the symptoms and associated distress is difficult to describe, a combination of the worst symptoms of the flu and severe depression. Time is the only known cure and eventually everyone survives. At least, to my knowledge there have been no known deaths or long term effects associated with this malady.

My next destination was Grand Forks, North Dakota for pre-pre flight training. This was one of the most memorable and enjoyable experience of my military training. Although the military regimentation existed it was still comparable to life at home. The setting was the comfortable and secure confines of the campus of The University Of North Dakota and the town people were gracious and extremely friendly. The schooling was rewarding, but most importantly this was where I met my future wife and life long companion.

Following the training at Grand Forks it was back across the country to Santa Anna, California for cadet pre-flight training and the strict discipline associated with the air force cadet program. Southern California presented another unbelievable experience for a small town boy. The incredible weather, the smog and the beaches were all story book fascinations. The memory of the rigorous training was indelibly imprinted on my mind. Finally the long awaited graduation arrived and then it was back across the country to San Marcos, Texas for navigation training.

Texas offered still another make believe experience. Finally we were actually flying in real airplanes and doing actual flight associated work. Each class period and each training mission was a never to be forgotten experience; a dream beyond my wildest imagination or hopeful desire. It was difficult for me to understand the constant "bitching" since everyone present was a volunteer and we were doing exactly far what we had volunteered. My naiveté apparent. At long last the training was complete and during the month of July, 1944 the US Army Air Corps Brass conferred upon me the title of sir with the MO of Navigator replete with bars and silver wings. Filled with exhilaration and a sense of euphoria this brash and cocky "19" year old was now ready to rid the world of the despicable "Hun" and "Jap" menace that were terrorizing the world with their vile acts and atrocities.

During the training period the military had convinced us that we were the best fighting force the world had ever assembled despite the fact that the Germans had proven over and over to be first class professional soldiers, and that contrary to the dreary and disappointing statistics of plane losses, we were invincible. It was alluded to that the statistics were distorted to inspire the civilians to greater conservation efforts, increased productive efforts and to increase the purchase of war bonds. Whatever the reason the brass did in fact convince us of our invincibility and superiority. The only reservation any of us had was that the war would end before we could get into combat and prove our mettle.

Little did I realize, or anticipate, that in less than a year all illusions of grandeur would disappear and I would be suffering the agony and humiliation of incarceration at the hands of these despicable "Huns".

At this time I had the privilege of returning home and being doted on for a few glorious days. I left a

naive "country bumpkin" and returned in full military regalia as an educated officer and gentleman. I was for one glorious moment the guy who wore the silver wings.

Following this brief vacation I was sent to Plant Park, Tampa, Florida for my overseas orientation and crew assignment and subsequently to Avon Park for overseas training.

Our crew was a cosmopolitan conglomeration from all comers of the U.S. The deep south, the west, the Midwest, and the hills of Kentucky were mixed with the "street smart" kids of the Bronx, the south side of Chicago and the inner city of Philadelphia. Supposedly the Air Force formed crews by temperament, socioeconomic environment, religion and ethnic backgrounds to form a cohesive unit that would share the most terrifying experiences imaginable. They were to be a family so closely knit that nothing could separate them. If this was the case with our crew it was the most outrageous physiological experiment ever dreamed up. True we were a close knit fighting unit and worked well together, but at the point it ended. For the most part we had little in common and it wasn't until our incarceration that we really shared any personal experiences away from direct combat. This wasn't an isolated case which comes as no surprise considering the number of crews assembled during WWII

Florida in August is abominable and for a lad from Nevada it was pure hell. I had never experienced humidity such as that and to have to sleep under a mosquito net for survival, in that humidity, was uncomfortable in the extreme. My first bout ever with prickly heat. This was before air conditioning was wide spread so the only relief came from either actual training missions or sessions in the navigation trainer. The missions took us high enough to get out of the heat and the navigation trainer was one of the few air conditioned facilities on the base.

Aside from this Florida was another wonderful new unforgettable experience. New sights, which are unique with Florida and the ocean with all of its wonders. By this time I was not completely awe struck so I had full opportunity to visit extensively and digest the wonders of southern Florida.

An interesting anecdote occurred one evening in Tampa. To preface the story I must note that I was the youngest member of the crew and was constantly referred to as junior. This coupled with my country naiveté gave reason to make me the center of many practical jokes and jibes. On this particular occasion the officers of our crew had been invited to dinner in The Tampa Sheraton by the son of the manager. While waiting to be seated I was fascinated by the lobster cage and kept touching them to make sure they were alive. Someway one had broken one of its claw restraints and when I touched it he or she, as the case may be, clamped onto my finger. I was so startled that I jerked my hand away with such force that I catapulted the lobster across the dining room onto a table with most embarrassing results. The people at the table were so shaken that they panicked and created a stir in the entire dining room. "Junior has done it again", somebody yelled, and so it was.

One evening following a training fight I was called to headquarters where a message was waiting for me. It was from George Brunton, my childhood buddy. He had a short pass and was in Tampa. I made a quick trip to the hotel and to my chagrin they would not give me his room number. As I was leaving the desk, in total frustration, when the clerk told me they could ring his room but they could not divulge that information. They did and we spent the night reminiscing. We were not to see each other again until the end of the war. We had made contact and had scheduled a meeting in London but I was shot down just before the meeting.

One morning the entire roster of crews were alerted and briefed for a goodwill mission to Cuba, supposedly to cement relationships and enhance the standing of Batista, self appointed president(dictator). We landed at Guantanamo (Gitmo) and all personnel were trucked to Havana and the officers "bivouacked" in the luxurious Hotel Nacional in the heart of Havana, really tough duty. While

in Cuba we were hosted to state banquets, shopping trips, tours and Havana night life which was bizarre to say the least. I had never experienced such bawdiness or pornographic openly flaunted. I had never witnessed such lewdness, even in forbidden publications. I was, to say the least, awe struck and puritanically shocked.

About 1:00 A.M. one morning, during the stay, all US personnel found out of their hotel rooms were abruptly rounded up and ushered to a "pro station" (whether or not one had partaken of the joie de vivre available in all the brothels of Havana) and forced to administer a venereal disease prophylactic. This was a procedure that required injecting a concoction into the penis and holding it for a prescribed length of time that supposedly would eliminate the contacting of any venereal disease. There was some degree of success from this procedure if administered almost immediately following contact, if not the success was problematical. For we who had not sexual contact the procedure was just another humiliating and degrading experience. But the army in all its wisdom determined that any soldier exposed to this lustful environment had to be a potential venereal disease recipient so a blanket coverage was decreed.

Following the prescribed B- 17 overseas training with my newly assigned crew at Avon Park, Florida, I was awarded a brief furlough. I opted to spend the furlough in Grand Forks visiting with my future wife, Gloria Geddes, an exhilarating interlude following the drudgery and demanding overseas training. Upon my return we (the crew) were sent to Hunter Field, Savannah, Georgia for plane assignment and overseas briefing.

The first leg of our overseas journey was to Bangor, Maine, our debarkation point. Here we were briefed on how to conduct ourselves while in England, what to expect from the English people and an explanation of their mores and customs. Most of this was forgotten as soon as presented. Naturally, no orientation would be complete without an explanation of the incomprehensible English currency. (Pounds, quid, shillings, farthings, etc.) After this orientation we were given an overseas convenience packet from the American Red Cross which among the supposed essentials was a paper back novel which would almost prove our undoing.

Our first stop, outside the United States, was Goose Bay, Labrador. The capricious Canadian fall weather made this a rather lengthy and agonizing lay over. First, because of the inclement weather all planes were grounded so the crews had to bide their time with limited recreational facilities and crowded quarters while waiting for the weather to break. Every painful day spent there brought the end of the war nearer and if it ended before we got involved we would not be able to use our recently acquired skills to rid the world of the horrible Nazi plague.

Secondly, our crew had been assigned a B- I 7G Pathfinder to ferry to England. The military brass in all their dubious wisdom still considered this gear to be top secret in spite of the fact the enemy knew all there was to know about this "secret" gear. The only people that it was secret too was American civilians and the United States air crews. Consequently, the plane had to be guarded 24 hours a day. Standing guard duty in severe weather was not what we considered a good time or essential, but guarding the plane had been decreed and so the plane was guarded diligently 24 hours a day for the entire stay despite the weather being so bad that it was difficult getting to the plane and no one was about to venture out to walk to the plane. Even if ones curiosity got the best of him and he decided to investigate he would soon discover that the "secret" gear was so well secured that it was a virtual impossibility to penetrate the packaging.

After five days of ennui the weather cleared and we were scheduled to fly out. Because of the

unpredictable weather in the late fall the planes were sent out with dispatch (except for the B-24's which were held longer because of the icing conditions and I only mention this because of the ongoing feud between the B- 17 and the B-24 crews as to which plane was the best (this gave the B- 17 crews a chance to chide the B - 24 crews). Our flight plan called for us to take off late in the evening which meant we would be flying all night and there in set the stage for our near demise.

Following take off I set a course, checked the flight plan and settled back for a long flight. Glancing around I spotted the Red Cross packet which I had nonchalantly tossed aside considering it of no consequence. Looking through the bag I discovered the paper back novel and decided to bide some time by reading a few chapters. The book was entitled "Seven Steps To Satan" and try as I might I have never been able to find a copy so I can re-read and discover what was so interesting that I could lose my sense of responsibility so completely.

After cursory navigational checks seemed to prove everything normal I picked up the book and became deeply engrossed. The story, as I recall, was the age old theme of trading Satan part of ones soul for unbelievable sensuous and financial rewards. To accomplish this one had to undergo certain difficult and sacrificial tasks for the benefit of Satan. If successful one then advanced to the next more tedious and demanding step and again if successful the accompanying more glamorous reward was received and advancement to the next step was permitted. If one failed this test he was returned to the next lower step and Satan would mete out an appropriated punishment. One could stop at any level and owe that part of him to Satan, but the reward at each succeeding step was so alluring that this alternative was not a consideration. If all seven steps were negotiated the rewards were immortality, untold wealth and perpetual youth. Failing, as mentioned, one owed his soul to Satan. I've forgotten the details and I can't believe they could've been so intriguing that I would permit the following to happen:

The compass variation is great and changes rapidly as the Arctic Circle is approached and while navigating in this region constant attention is required to stay on top of the situation. Because of my obsession with the book I was lax in performing my navigational responsibilities and as a result we strayed considerably off course. Daylight dawned upon us and the pilot asked if Iceland shouldn't be in view"? I replied positively. He then, rather testily replied, "if that's the case you had better throw that damn book down and find out where the hell we are". I peered out the nose and sure enough Iceland was not in sight despite it's size. Panic overwhelmed me! I checked each log entry and calculation carefully and soon discovered I had failed to take into account the tremendous changes in variation and apply these to my calculations. Making the necessary corrections indicated we were a considerable distance off course. The necessary corrections were made and the new heading given to the pilot and we were headed for Iceland. Fuel now became a concern for to ditch in the North Atlantic at that time of year would be fatal! At last Iceland was spotted and we finished that leg of the journey, worried but safe.

The stop in Iceland was brief and extremely uncomfortable. As we stopped at the dispersal area a sergeant greeted us with "50 bucks for any liquor you have which succinctly described the undesirable nature of this base assignment. At one time it was a rather pleasant experience but some GIs spoiled it by their actions in Rykaveck and that city was made "off limits". The transient crew quarters were Quonset huts, which was not uncommon, but they were so poorly heated that if one was any distance from the central heater the cold was unbearable. Consequently, everyone stayed up all night huddled about the stove. Then at long last we were headed for England. To be sure I wasn't permitted the luxury of reading on this leg of the trip since the crew had destroyed the novel and their constant request for our position and our ETA precluded doing anything but navigating. Again, to this day don't know what happened to Satan or my soul except that in actuality I had reached the seventh step and was

momentarily free of Satan's spell. We landed in Prestwick, Scotland and on time.

Following a brief orientation we were assigned to Air Force Base 121, Bassingbourn.

Our arrival at Bassingbourn followed closely the tragic mission to the oil refinery at Mersberg, Germany on November 2, 1944 when 13 planes were lost and the flight personnel reduced dramatically. Following an abbreviated training session I was assigned to fly my first mission and ironically it was to bomb the synthetic oil refinery at Mersberg.

I was elated! everything I had trained for and dreamed of was finally becoming a reality and at long last I was going to make my personal contribution towards ridding the world of the Nazi scourge.

It finally happened! As we were returning from mess following the days flight training our crew bombardier told me that I had better take a quick check of the mission board because he was told that my name was there. I ran to the bulletin board and sure enough I was scheduled to fly with a Lt. Raisen, not that it made any difference for I cared not who I was flying with, the point was I was going to fly a combat mission. I hardly slept anticipating the next days adventure. It was akin to awaiting the arrival of "Santa" on Christmas Eve only for more exhilarating. Morning finally arrived and the alert officer made his presence known with wake up call and his routine words, "breakfast at 04:30, briefing at 05:30. I was so excited that I ran to my toilet and then to the mess hall for breakfast. Even the powdered eggs looked appetizing. I rushed through breakfast and then ran to the briefing room, well ahead of the other crews, and restlessly awaited the briefing.

Briefing was like awakening on Christmas morning and finding that everything that you had requested had been granted. I was thrilled by the presentation of the presiding officers, but paid little heed to the flak and fighter expectation, quite the contrary, I was overjoyed to learn that we would actually be involved in combat. It would not be long before I discovered how accurate the briefing officers could be.

Watching the "huge" bombers assemble was a sight I observed with awe and extreme patriotism. To be part of this was a dream fulfilled and now my childhood fantasies were unfolding before my eyes. I was so overwhelmed with patriotic satisfaction that I would have willingly done anything requested of me, in the line of duty. Obsession for a cause was not limited to the Nazi or Nipponese zealot,

The trip to the target was disappointingly uneventful except for a flurry of flak bursts as we entered Germany and they were a considerable distance away. Little attention was paid to the bursts except to log the time and place. I couldn't log my disappointment, but I felt if that was what anti-aircraft fire was all about, it certainly wasn't very exciting. As we turned on the IP (initial point of the bomb run) the flak became heavy and accurate and I witnessed my first B- 17 hit and fall from formation in an uncontrolled slow spin. Then another plane blew up. Almost simultaneously the flak was bursting dangerously close enough to rock the plane violently! All of a sudden my illusions of invincibility was challenged and I reached a most profound conclusion. Those "bastards" shooting those guns were trying to shoot my plane down and kill me. This was not in the game plan! Reality is a harsh way of pulling the rug from under ones fantasies.

We did complete the bomb run without taking a disabling direct hit although there were small holes in the planes skin which were discovered by the ground crew. I had now experienced my first taste of combat and it was far from glamorous, in fact, it was down right frightening. It was terrifying associated with feeling of total helplessness, and a completely frustrating to a young "gung ho" airman.

The trip back to the base was uneventful but extremely nerve wracking. Everyone was on pins and needles anticipating more flak and I now studied the veteran crew members intensity as they watched

for attacking fighters. To them this was a matter of survival and certainly no training exercise. I remembered the veteran combat crewmen gasp when they saw how deep into Germany we had to go and how they groaned when told of the possibility of intense flak and potential fighter attacks. A rapid maturing of a naive teenager from a little berg in Eastern Nevada.

It seems proper to relate some of my personal experiences at this time. Again, this story is about a naive youngster from a small town in Eastern Nevada that had been introduced to world affairs before he was, as they say in the west dry behind the ears. These few personal experiences I am about to relate further introduced me to a world outside the comfortable childhood I had the privilege of enjoying.

My first trip to London was such an unusual experience that it has remained with me all these years. The train ride from Royston to London was almost bizarre! Riding in a foreign train car was so much different from American trains that the first trip had to be an interesting occurrence for all participants.

London was mystifying to most but downright terrifying to the likes of me. It is one of the world's largest cities and to get around was extremely perplexing, especially when the city was blacked out and the underground was truly an enigma to the uninitiated. Taxis were available, but treacherous since most yanks failed to study and understand the English monetary system and the cabbies were vultures to say the least. The end of the trip usually ended by handing the cabby a handful of money and letting him take his fare. You can be sure they never shorted themselves. To further complicate the situation the underground passageways were used as bomb shelters from dusk to dawn, with a carpet of human flesh covering every bit of existing space. Regardless of the inconveniences this was without a doubt the fastest and most economical means of covering the city. As a result most everyone soon mastered this convenience.

While in London I observed history literally come to life. From the Tower of London to Westminster Abbey I was able to live first hand what I had studied, but not necessarily enjoyed in the history books. Seeing these scenes in true life setting made the dry dialogue come to life. Every trip to London was a wonderful adventure and I attempted to see everything of interest in London during my stay in England. I even listened to several controversial political tirades in Hyde Park. For the most part they were incomprehensible and completely foreign to my staid upbringing.

Night time in London was unusual to say the least. As soon as darkness fell the "Piccadilly Commandos" swarmed around every available Yank. The English had dubbed us as "overfed, over paid, over sexed and over here", and the Piccadilly Commandos were out to exploit the over paid feature by exploiting the "oversexed" feature. For the most part they were definitely successful except for me and I was so terrified of the scenario that I avoided them like the plague.

I managed to travel to enough places in England to say that I had visited most historical spots in England. Following the war Gloria and I made two visits to England and it was truly amazing how much I had remembered.

On one occasion the Squadron CO announced that he needed several officers to volunteer for an appearance at a formal state dinner in London. To most this seemed like a wet blanket type evening and few were willing to forgo their coveted leave time attending a snobbish state dinner just to fill vacant seats for appearance sake. I had nothing better to do and thought that it would be interesting to see royalty in their finery so I volunteered. True enough it was a cold snobbish banquet, but there was royalty in abundance all dressed in their royal best. Displaced dignitaries from all of the countries overrun by Hitler's legions were in attendance. I never did know the reason for the soiree or why there were so many American officers present, but the food was excellent and the wine flowed like water and

therein lies the primary reason for this tale.

I was conversing, as best I could, with the lady seated next to me and trying to keep my cool in spite of her supercilious attitude and her constant habit of talking down to me. The wine steward came around with a wine menu and each would select the wine of his or her choice. Knowing absolutely nothing about wine I nonchalantly pointed to a wine about half way down the list. It happened that I had chosen a rare vintage and I so impressed the maitre'd that he constantly fawned over me the rest of the evening. This also impressed everyone around me. Since I had no idea of what I had done I was completely confused over the attitude change of the guests. Even the supercilious "bitch" seated next to me changed her tone and actually showed a modicum of admiration. Incidentally, the wine was horrible!

On another occasion I was experiencing a proverbial "wet dream" when something went horribly and painfully wrong. One of the blood vessels in my erect penis ruptured and an inordinate amount of blood flowed saturating all my bed clothes. Mysteriously the bleeding stopped almost as abruptly as it started. I went to the central latrine and showered and by the time I had returned the alert officer was making his call for the days mission and all who were awakened saw the bloody sheets. Of course they had a risqué laugh and I was the center of every crude joke anyone could conjure up. Fortunately I was not scheduled to fly so I checked in to sick bay as soon as it opened. The flight surgeon told me that the reason for the ruptured blood vessel was that I had never been circumcised and that my sexuality was in jeopardy unless I underwent an immediate circumcision. Being completely convinced that doctors were never wrong I acceded to his advice and had the circumcision. I was not admitted to the hospital, rather the operation was performed in the surgeon's office with the assistance of a nurse. The only antiseptic was local and the pain associated with the injection was worse than anything I had ever experienced before, or since. I immediately regretted my swift agreement!

That was only the beginning. The surgeon told me that to have a canteen of ice water near by bed when I went to sleep because I would experience an erection and it would be painful in the extreme and the only way it could be relieved was to slap a cold object on it immediately. I didn't feel so good for the rest of the day and try as I might I could not nap for fear of having an erection and the associated pain that he predicted. If this pain was even close to the pain experienced during the antiseptic injection I was not about to let it happen. Consequently, I wandered aimlessly about the base all day skipping meals and generally feeling sorry for myself. By the time night had rolled around I was so tired that sleep was a necessity. I filled a canteen with ice water and placed it close to my bed and went to sleep. As predicted I experienced an erection and also as predicted it was painful beyond description. I grabbed the cold canteen and applied it as directed, As soon as that cold object touched me I jumped violently awakening everyone around me. I was then the object of their crude humor until they went back to sleep. I couldn't go back to sleep for fear the pain would return. The worst was yet to come!

About 4:00 A.M. the duty officer shined his torch in my face and told me to rise and shine for the days mission. I told him that I was on sick call and wouldn't be able to fly. "I have no knowledge of that sir and since you're on my list you have been alerted".

I pulled myself together and rushed to the flight surgeon with my plight. "TS", he said "circumcision is not considered debilitating and I cannot ground you for that. Sorry but you will have to fly."

Fly I did. This had to be one of the longest day of my life. The pain was excruciating and it was exacerbated by the electric flying suit and the irritation was so uncomfortable that I couldn't hook my leg straps on my parachute harness. Should I had to bail out it would have been "all she wrote for Ace". Fortunately we returned to base uneventfully and I was spared the agony of a parachute jump. Nothing; however, saved me from the chiding of the crew and my roommates.

One further unsolicited adventure and we will move on with the tale.

On Christmas Eve 1944 I was in bed awaiting the duty officers call for I was scheduled to fly the next day. This was during the Battle Of The Bulge and the skies had cleared so all available planes were put in the air. My roommate was not scheduled. He was a devout catholic and had gone out to partake of midnight mass in Cambridge. On his way home he decided to celebrate the occasion and was more than a little drunk when he returned. He awakened me and shoved a bottle in my face and said, "have a drink". I told him I had to fly and didn't need a drink. He persisted so I thought the only way to get rid of him was to take a drink. I looked at the bottle and it appeared to be a bottle of gin so I took a big pull, much to my regret and distress the bottle contained grain alcohol which blistered my lips and the inside of my mouth. By the time I returned from the next days mission my lips and mouth were swollen with blisters. Again I received no sympathy from the flight surgeon nor did he see fit to ground me. I seriously doubt that he believed my story and was out to punish me for imbibing so stupidly. I'm sure he thought it would teach me a lesson which it did. I lucked out and didn't have to fly for two days.

I did take every advantage of down periods to visit every part of England that I could compress into the limited time available.

I flew fourteen more missions, all embraced with the same fear and apprehension. The glamour had now been replaced by terror accompanied with the ever present possibility of serious injury or death.

On my sixteenth mission the ax finally fell! All delusions of invincibility had now been erased and the fantasies of my youth destroyed with no possibility of resurrection. Shortly I was to undergo the humiliation of being interred in a POW camp, erasing forever the "knight in shining armor" fantasy. There is nothing, in my opinion, more humiliating, humbling or degrading as being a prisoner of war. All semblance of pride is challenged. One is subjected to every conceivable means of humiliation from stark living conditions, scrounging or humbling oneself for food to the forced wearing of embarrassing type "uniforms" with a huge KGF emblazoned on the back. Coupled with this is the constant threat of punishment for any real or imagined violation of the rules which in some cases are so vague that they can be interpreted any way desired to fit the occasion. Derogatory and demeaning remarks, intended to belittle the individual or the prisoners country, are used constantly to provoke rash actions that could precipitate punishment. In addition are the of lack sanitary facilities or medical treatment. There are no shower facilities and the only means of washing is from a mess kit.

The information disseminated by the Germans was of course so distorted that it was nothing more than a propaganda effort to try to convince us of the invincibility of the Third Reich. The only source of information that was at all reliable was from incoming prisoners, but their incarceration in prison camps was delayed to such an extent that the information was too old to be of any value. Contrary to the portrayal of prison life in such films as "Hogan's Heroes" there were no hidden radios and the German officers and guards were not "dummkopfs".

World War 11 was seemingly approaching an end, now that "The Battle of the Bulge" had ended and the invasion of Germany was eminent. But for me it was war as usual with daily bombing missions scheduled with their resultant casualties and uncertainty.

This chapter of my story begins on a typically cold English winter night, during the winter of 1944-45. A typical wartime evening was being nervously while away when a rousing cheer broke the nervous tension and carried above the monotonous bar room noise- the next days mission had been scrubbed. Someone turned the drinking mug face to the hearth, which was the unofficial signal for the party to begin, and begin it did, with vigor.

It was around 1:00 AM, February 3, 1945. The party was in full swing for, as mentioned previously, the group had been stood down for the next day. Suddenly, someone called for attention. When quiet was restored the announcement was made that the brass had called for a maximum effort and the 91 st would be flying.

There was a mass exodus of airmen from the party to their barracks, hoping to get at least a couple of hours sleep and hoping to sober up in time for take-off.

I had hardly closed my eyes when the alert officer's torch hit me like a bolt of lightning. "What the hell is going on", I shouted? "You're flying sir", he responded! "How the hell can that be", I screamed. "I don't control that, I only make wake up calls. Breakfast 0430, briefing at 0500".

I had left the party before the notice of a maximum effort was made so I was unaware of the change. I had been involved in a high stakes poker game which had broke up and I took my winnings, approximately 400 English pounds (over \$1600) and bunked out. Incidentally, this was the only personal item that wasn't returned after I was shot down.

I tried to shake the cobwebs from my head as I sloshed to breakfast pondering what could have happened. This sure as hell ain't no milk run and no one would be so cruel as to schedules a practice mission after last nights soiree, and sure enough it was none of the above.

This nightmare belied the accepted theory that flight crews were well rested and alcohol free prior to flying a combat mission.

The food in the chow line was a typical air crew breakfast, a cut above the normal GI breakfast of powdered eggs, soggy French toast and unrecognizable meats. It stiff looked "crappy" so I skipped breakfast, a mistake I would deeply regret later in the day.

The vociferous bitching that had started in the chow line continued unabated as we filed into the briefing room. No one could understand why a mission had been scrubbed and the resurrected with such miserable weather conditions prevailing. On top of that the length of the mission string was alarmingly short! To explain. In the front of the briefing room was a huge map of Europe and on this map was plotted, with string, the route leading to and from the days target. The deeper into Germany the shorter the route string, naturally, since it took more string to plot a long mission than a short one and today the string was agonizingly short. Since the map was concealed until the appropriate time, during briefing, all that was visible was the remnants of the route string and this held everyone in suspense until the mission was later divulged.

In a few moments the show was underway. The curtain covering the map of Europe was raised and we saw the red string indicating the route of the bomber stream heading almost completely across Germany. The target for today was Big "B", Berlin.

A murmur went through the room, from both excitement and anticipation of the reception we would receive from the anti-aircraft gunners who defended their capitol with a vengeance.

We were told that this would be the greatest Eight Air force attack on the German capitol with over 1,000 heavy bombers participating. This was to help our Russian allies who were closing in on the German border from the east. The weather would be perfect, over the target, with unlimited visibility.

Let us digress for a moment. I think air force personnel were the most superstitious of all combat troops. All types of good luck charms were worn and daily routines were adhered to religiously. The most feared of all superstitions were last minute crew changes and resurrected missions. On this day the crew of the Yankee Belle was double dipped. Our formation assignment for the day had been

changed so that we were flying with a "toggeler" rather than our assigned bombardier and as mentioned earlier the mission was of the resurrected variety. One mans luck sometimes proves to be another mans fortune as was the case this day when our regular bombardier would benefit from the change and our superstitions were further enhanced.

About ten hours later I was still trying to sort out the days events. I was standing ankle deep beside a crippled B- 17 "Flying Fortress" surrounded by a gang of brown shirted Hitler Youths brandishing "99" foot long daggers and making threatening movements. I hurt all over from being tossed around inside the plane during the crash landing and had blood oozing from flak wounds in both legs and right hand and arm. My stomach was agonizing by now and the breakfast that had looked so "crappy" now seemed like a sumptuous repast.

The events of the day were still spinning in my head as I tried to fully comprehend the impossible situation now facing me and the crew.

The squadron box formation diagram showed The Yankee Belle, DF-H, our assigned B- 17, which had been our plane for several missions now and had returned us safely on each previous mission, slotted in the left wing position of the lead element off the lead plane. Lt. Colonel Lord would be in the lead ship as group leader and Lt. Adams as lead pilot in A/F 632, DF-J, a no name pathfinder plane. On the right wing was pilot E.O. Johnson in Rhapsody In Red, DF-Y.

Major Klette, who had always been group leader when the 324th was lead squadron of the group, had gone to London because of the set down of the group and was there when the unexpected alert was received at the base.

Colonel Lord had called Major Klette 324th squadron commandeer, and pleaded with him to relinquish group lead since it would have been almost impossible for the major to get back to the base in time for takeoff. Colonel Lord was eager to lead the group, on this, the greatest of all Eighth air Force raids on the German capitol. Major Klette recognized the impossibility of getting back to the base on time and begrudgingly relinquished the position of group leader to Colonel Lord. Probably the most momentous decision of his life since it saved his life,

After the navigational briefing I hurried down to the flight line and picked up my parachute, oxygen mask and other flying paraphernalia and boarded a Jeep which took me to the revetment where Yankee Belle with our crew was waiting. The crew always arrived at the plane ahead of the navigators because of the special navigation briefing that followed normal crew briefing.

It was still dark when I arrived at the plane and immediately boarded the plane and plotted the days course on the navigators small table. The crew had already made the necessary pre-flight checks and we were awaiting the word from the tower to start engines. As a bit of dawn appeared in the east the word came from the tower to "Start Engines" and one of the most memorable events of my life began unfolding.

It seemed as if every heavy bomber in England was in the early morning sunlight. Our squadron assembled and then the group assembled in the standard combat box formation. Shortly Colonel Lord had found our position in the bomber stream.

The B- 17 and B-24 groups filled the sky with their contrails for as far as the eye could see. Over 1,000 bombers going to one target created a bomber stream three hundred miles long. Such a scene only happened toward the end of World War 11 and would never occur again. I was somewhat cognizant of being part of something that had never happened in the history of man but would never happen again.

What terrible punishment Hitler and his henchmen would render on the people of Germany as this mighty echelon moved in the sky over Deutschland on this beautifully clear winter morning.

Finally, Berlin was recognized in the distance as we flew over the snow covered country side below. The city wasn't necessarily visible it was just the smoke from the spent "88" anti aircraft shells and the smoke rising from the ground below.

We watched in awe and horror as the bombers fell after being hit by the onslaught of the anti a fire being encountered on the bomb run.

As we approached the IP (initial point of the bomb run) the group split into squadrons with our squadron, with Colonel Lord in the lead ship, leading the formation. The target for the day was a communication center in central Berlin. What a synthetic and devious way of distorting the real purpose of terrifying the civilian population

At the IP the control of the plane is turned over to the bombardier who flies the plane through the Norden bombsight. The bomb sight is connected to the aircraft's controls through the auto pilot. As the bombardier adjusts the cross hairs in the sight the aircraft moves on his command. This meant that no evasive action could be taken to avoid flak on the bomb run. The anti-aircraft gunners were aware of this and knew that for a few moments the planes would be at the end of the half minute it took for their shells to reach our altitude of 25,000 ft. This was their opportunity to adjust their guns and correct any errors as the planes flew straight and level until bombs away.

As we started the bomb run the flak was high and to the right of the squadron. As we approached the target each succeeding burst moved closer to the formation. At this point everyone starts to sweat. The question each is asking is, "Will we reach the bombs away point before the anti-aircraft gunners can make their final correction that ultimately puts that fatal burst of flack in the center of the formation"? After the bombs are released by the lead ship each of the other squadron bombardiers will drop their bombs off the smoke bomb of the lead ship cluster. This is the reason the tightest possible formation is flown by each squadron. It was discovered early that the best bomb results come from a tight diamond shaped formation.

Everyone waits tensely for the smoke bomb so that the bombs can be released and the pilot can take evasive action which minimizes the accuracy of the anti-aircraft batteries. it seemed like an eternity, but finally the marker bomb was seen. Immediately, the lead ship took a direct hit and broke in half with the tail section drifting off and the nose section spinning down with the engines under full power. Almost instantly a burst hit us and we went into a slow spin with the Nos. three and four engines hit. The pilots were able to, feather the No. four engine, but the No. three engine was frozen and would not feather and continued to spin in a windmilling fashion, that is, it was turning like a windmill, spinning backward creating a tremendous drag as the plane moved forward. Finally, the shaft turned red hot and snapped throwing the propeller up and over the plane. This reduced the drag and permitted the pilots to gain a modicum of control and place the plane in a straight and level pattern but too close to the ground to bail out. We were covered by German fighters and had virtually no maneuverability so we had to crash land or be annihilated since we had no armament because it had all been thrown overboard to lighten the plane to give the pilots control of the crippled "fortress". So crash land we did in an open field narrowly missing a barn before hitting the ground. Now here I was a brash young American Airman surrounded by a gang of terrorists.

The hits taken by the lead echelon as seen by Mike Banta pilot of "Yankee Gal", lead ship of the second

element. "Before my eyes occurred a hideous, unbelievable sight. As leader of an element I was flying directly off the lead plane; therefore, I was watching it intently. Immediately after bombs away and prior to when the lead pilot could start evasive action, the lead ship received a direct hit by an anti-aircraft shell right where the trailing edge of the wing meets the fuselage. The lead ship was blown cleanly in half. The nose section went into a dive with engines still under power. The tail section appeared to fly along with the formation for a split second and then drifted out of my sight behind the co-pilots window. Ray, my co-pilot, told me that it fluttered back over the top of rear element and was lost from sight".

Banta continued his account. "The blast from the anti-aircraft shell badly damaged both of the lead ships wingmen. 'Yankee Belle', immediately to the right of my right wingman dropped down and turned to the left, most likely because of the blast and Lt. Miller's instinctive action. (As I mentioned earlier, the plane was in a slow spin at this time and was not under control.)

I, too, turned to the left as evasive action and to get away from "Yankee Belle". The last I saw of "Yankee Belle" it was losing altitude and heading easterly. We thought they were heading for the Russian lines."

After being harassed by The Hitler Youths, for what seemed to be an eternity, we were taken to a local air force jail, near Demmin, a short distance from the Baltic Sea, and fed a meal of red cabbage, tasteless porridge and black bread-"yuk", but this was to be the last half way decent meal I was to receive for a long time! Again, I thought of the meal I had passed up earlier in the day.

Later I was taken to the local dispensary where a doctor, much to my surprise, spoke perfect English not unusual I subsequently learned- who told me that though the flack particles should be removed, there was little he could do except provide me with some iodine, which hopefully would deter infection, and reminded me how lucky I was to be American because of the excellent immunization program of the US Armed Forces. This would probably prevent tetanus from developing and would therefore save my life. One must realize that this was near the end of the war and nearly all medical supplies were in short supply and those that were available were assigned to the front lines or influential German VIP's. In any event my medical treatment was minimal, contrary to the Geneva Convention agreement.

The next morning we were moved from the jail, by a Stanley Steamer type bus, which had to be fueled frequently with wood and in addition had to be emptied and pushed up hills. Fortunately, from this bus we were transferred to rail cars which took us to an interrogation center in the vicinity of Frankfurt. To this day it remains a mystery of their reasoning for transporting us all the way across Germany when there were several POW camps in the vicinity and ironically the 91 ST Bomb Group would help evacuate one of these camps at wars end.

The trip from the jail to the interrogation center was wrought with terrifying , humorous and educational episodes. It was indeed unfortunate that my youth, naivet6 and down right fear deterred me from taking full advantage of the opportunity presented by my misfortune.

The first night found us in a railroad marshaling yard in Berlin, the same target we had bombed the day before. This night however we were on the receiving end of the bombing attack when we were subjected to the fury of the RAF. Terrifying to say the least. The rail car, we were being transported in, was bounced around Re a beach ball in the wind. On top of that we were not permitted to leave the car for the entire night so relief became a painful problem for all of us. Finally, and incredibly, the damaged rails were repaired and we were on our way. How the Germans found the material and manpower to

make such rapid repairs have always been a puzzle, but repair them they did and on our way we were.

The train stopped frequently to load and unload both passengers and freight. The next major stop we had was in Leipzig where we were debarked and fed a hot porridge type gruel along with the civilian and German soldiers. A community kitchen of sorts that obviously was providing some sustenance for displaced civilians and traveling soldiers. Our presence was not well received, quite naturally, since we were not only eating "their food" but we were also dreaded "terra fleigers" who had rained tons of destruction on the cities. The guards were well disciplined and carried out their instructions to the letter, that is, to transport us to the interrogation center.

Meals were sparse and infrequent. This led me to relieving one of the guards of his ration of sausage and a piece of heavy black bread. After liberating the sausage I shared with all and we surreptitiously ate with relish. However, the smell of the sausage permeated the air and we were fearful that the guards would detect the smell on us and punish us severely for the heist. Night passed without detection and we felt safe. Then the guard, whose sausage I had pilfered, prepared to eat and found his sausage was gone. Anxiety spread among all of us, but incredibly the guard blamed the thievery on someone else, not us, in fact, we were not even questioned. I guess they thought it impossible for us to be able to accomplish such an act while under close supervision, or possibly the guard didn't want his superiors to know that he had been lax in his duty and permitted such a travesty. In any event we lunched on the guards sausage, but he was much more attentive after that.

The trip was uncomfortable and for the most part tentative. All nine of us were cramped into a compartment and forced to leave enough room for a guard to be comfortable which made the conditions even more uncomfortable for us. Normally, no more than eight people would occupy a typical compartment. We had no idea what the German's intentions were for us and we were further distressed being surrounded by civilians, who for the most part were displaced persons, forced from their homes by the incessant allied bombing raids. Several times the guards had to physically restrain some of the more belligerent and sometimes even with drawn bayonets. Again, we were relieved to find that a German soldier carried out his orders, no matter what they might be, other wise I might not be here to relate this story.

The guards whiled away their time much the same as any other soldier, that is, they joked, they doted and they played cards, but always alert to our presence and, I feel, somewhat apprehensive about the civilian passengers venting their anger and frustrations on us physically. They did voice their disapproval of us vociferously but fortunately for us, being the subjugated and disciplined people they were under the Nazi regime, they didn't take any overt action that would endanger us. Nevertheless, it was a tenuous situation for both us and the German guards.

One night we experienced a lengthy and terrifying delay in a station near Magdeberg when we were caught in an air raid, of British bombers, and we had to share the bomb shelter with German civilians, the German soldiers, local towns people and city officials, a scary adventure to put it mildly. The fear of being killed by the bombers was one thing, but the hate and animosity exhibited by those mentioned was even more scary. Given the slightest opportunity and they would have killed us, and probably by stoning us or just plain beating us to death.

Finally the trip ended as we reached assigned destination, the interrogation center near Frankfurt. I was placed in a small barren cell and the pangs of being a prisoner in a foreign country had now become a reality.

The cell was small and except for a straw tick (infested with fleas) and a narrow slit overlooking a court yard, there was nothing-all the comforts of home! There was a signal flag that supposedly would

alert a guard of your distressful needs, but was deliberately ignored for hours on end, adding to the already uncomfortable circumstances. Adding to this discomfort was the constant altering of the temperature within the cell. One moment it would be freezing and the next it would be almost bitter cold. I later learned all of this was a conditioning process which would make the prisoners more receptive to interrogation since better conditions and food was promised for cooperation.

The guard cautioned me against graffiti or vandalism since these were considered serious crimes against the state and could result in death. I had never been threatened in such a manner for such trivial misdemeanors and again proved to be part of the pre-interrogation conditioning I would be subjected to during the ensuing stay. To add insult to injury I was introduced to the European custom of using no paper to wipe with following a bowel movement, really shocking. The accepted procedure was to use the fingers and then wipe rinse them after. My solution was not smart, and poorly conceived, but my naiveté clouded my better judgment or semblance of reasoning so I used small strips torn from my shorts during my first few visits. I had no idea how I would replace the shorts? Not very long lived and then I was right back to the original predicament, but with no shorts, and to my distress, discomfort and disbelief never to be replaced. For some unknown reason there had always been paper of some sort available previously so this had to be another of their insidious mental conditioning lessons.

in addition to these discomforts my wounds pained me constantly but were never attended to in any fashion. When mentioned the response would be, "all in good time".

After three days of this mental conditioning, and with virtually nothing to eat, I was taken to a prestigious office complex and ushered into a plush office. The officer seated behind a table, bountifully spread with a gourmet meal of the most luscious and delectable looking food I had ever rested my eyes upon, was impeccably dressed in the uniform of the Gestapo- unnerving to say the least. And to top this off he also spoke perfect English which he had learned while attending three of America's most prestigious Eastern Universities. Contrast this to a tattered, unshaven, ill kept and trembling 19 year old American junior officer who was completely bewildered and scarred "spitless". I had not had an opportunity to clean up or have my uniform patched or replaced and, incidentally, was still covered with blood from wounds inflicted during the bombing raid days before. I must have smelled ripe!

"Sit-down Lt. Johnson', he implored me most graciously, and accept the hospitality of the glorious Third Reich. We feel no ill will or animosity despite your terrifying acts against our women and children. However; I do implore you to show some remorse for your outrageous acts and help us bring an end to this senseless killing."

After a few minutes of idle chit chat and an alarming divulgence of personal facts about me and my background, in which he impressed me completely of the omnipotence of the German intelligence network, he told me that after I had answered a couple of questions I could join him for dinner. By now I was drooling over the sight and smell of this sumptuous repast spread before me to the extent that I was letting this cloud my better judgment and reasoning. Obviously this was his intention and I'm certain that no matter what I had done would I have been permitted to dine with him. He did, however, impress me with the detailed facts surrounding my personal life. I was amazed by the effort they had expended to impress me but was puzzled as to how they had obtained this information. This was straight out of Hollywood Movies that I had seen prior to my incarceration which depicted the Germans as almost inhuman experts at acquiring information. The mental conditioning was complete! The tortuous days of deprivation in the small cell accompanied by this display of arrogance and intelligence had convinced me of my insignificance and my superior feeling earlier felt was totally erased by now. First the crushing blow to my ego after the first mission and now the final humiliation. A sad day

indeed for the proud lad from Nevada!

At this point he spread an impressive American Military Document before me, which my lowly rank or position would have never been permitted me to see, and he told me in flowering phrases that the brilliant Minds of the incomparable German intelligence had obtained and deciphered this repugnant document and discovered that it was a devious American scheme to synchronize their formations so that future bombing missions would increase the murderous suffering inflicted upon innocent civilians. I had, of course, never laid my eyes on this document, nor to my knowledge, had I ever done anything that would associate me with the schematic.

The print was replete with top secret stamps and in the corner was a blank space marked "For Secured Eyes Only", for what that meant. This blank space contained the triggering device which they needed to negate the effectiveness of this odious device so that further brutal extermination of women and children could be eliminated. Note how cleverly he worded the plea and how the blame for the bombings and related attacks were leveled at us, very impressive indeed and especially as far as a terrified young airman was concerned. In fact, by now he almost had me convinced that we were the villains and that I should do everything possible to assist them. Fortunately, I still had enough training to remember my obligation and duty to country to deter me from doing anything rash or disloyal even if I could.

"Now Lt. Johnson (the only slip he made during our entire conference-I was at that time a Flight Officer, and possibly it wasn't a mistake and his intent was to inflate my ego by making me feel important) we plead for your humanitarian aid in deciphering this", he said. I responded cockily, "If you know so damn much why don't you tell me?" Big time mistake! He summoned two goons who pistol whipped me professionally and unmercifully, but I was so young, brash and stupid that I would jump up every time they knocked me down, which was frequently. Finally, my better judgment told me that the only way I was going to survive the beating was to stay on the floor-so I did. I was then groggily returned to my cell for further "mental conditioning".

A short time later I heard a military type commotion in the court yard. I immediately rushed to the slit in my cell which overlooked the courtyard. This slit, you will recall, I mentioned earlier. As I peered through this slit I witnessed a German squad march an American Officer into the court yard and with much pomp and circumstance summarily shot him.

Almost immediately a guard entered my cell, the first time this had happened since the first day, and told me that the execution I had just witnessed was necessary because the eliminated officer had refused to answer questions vital to the ending of the terror bombings by the American "thugs". Christ I thought, he's talking about someone just like me.

I hadn't seen another American, save the one I had just witnessed being executed, since I had been taken from the train and placed in this God Forsaken hole. This further added to my bewilderment and fear. The events of the past hour raced through my mind. Why had I been shown that document? Was it a shot in the dark or was it a result of the night mission flown some time ago in which we were told nothing except that a test was being made and that we should just consider this another practice mission. I had given it no further thought except to wonder why a night practice mission unless we were going to intensify our bombing efforts by bombing around the clock. This didn't seem likely since night bombing had been abandoned earlier and none of our planes were equipped for night missions on a regular basis.

If there was any connection it would explain moving us all the way across Germany for interrogation by experts rather than interning us in POW camps close to where we had been shot down. But what

could be so important at this late date that they would shoot someone for not divulging information. Nothing made sense, except that I was extremely fearful for my life and I was helpless to do anything about my dilemma. I knew nothing and I wouldn't divulge anything if I did.

By now I really hurt all over. I had bruises upon bruises both from those received during the crash and those I had most recently received from the two goons. Nothing had been done about my wounds and they were continually draining. Was I going to die before a German firing squad for impertinence and failing to divulge information about a top secret subject about which I knew absolutely nothing. At 19 years of age I was going to die holding to the POW credo-name, rank and serial number? Although this seemed nonsensical in light of the tremendous knowledge they possessed. I wasn't scared-I was terrified. I knew that I was now in the big league of mystery, espionage and torture and this was not a movie or dream. I think I aged several years during my brief stay in that cell.

For another five days I was forced to endure the same discomforts. Then unexpectedly I was taken from my cell and re-united with my crew and taken by train to a typical Stalag at Nurnberg. To this day I have no idea why I was not interrogated further nor why we were abruptly moved to a POW camp. Incidentally, the shooting of the "American" officer was staged repeatedly as part of their mental conditioning process. It did impress me and terrified me absolutely.

The train ride from the interrogation center to the POW camp at Nurnberg was not without incident. We were strafed by our own planes and goaded and harassed by the guards. In direct contrast to the guarded status we experienced on the way to the center. One night in a train station we were spit on by civilians. Only the actions of the guards saved us from death. I suppose they decided that their orders were explicit enough to protect us even if their hearts weren't in it.

A typical German Prisoner Of War Camp was a bleak assemblage of buildings designed to *incarcerate allied POW in the most economical manner possible. The surroundings were austere, offering only lives absolute necessities. There were no amenities 'in stark contrast to the rather comfortable surroundings depicted by the popular TV series, "Hogan's Heroes". Radios were "verboten", uniforms were stripped of all rank identification and the only identification of a personal nature was the one "dog tag" worn around ones neck. The other tag was removed at the time of capture and was supposedly returned to allied headquarters for confirmation of either death or interment in a prison camp. The only news was provided by German intelligence and was, quite naturally, biased so favorably towards the German war effort that it failed to give the slightest clue as to what was actually happening on either the eastern (Russian) or western front (Allied Expeditionary Forces). This was of utmost importance to us since under no circumstances did we want to be "liberated" by the Russians. The horror stories associated with the Russians, such as shipping POWs into Russia, never to be heard of again. Most of these stories proved to be true and strenuous negotiations were required to repatriate even a small number of these lost souls. We were actually better off under German subjugation than under the Russians for Stalin had decreed that there was no such thing as a prisoner; therefore, there was no humane treatment afforded POWs, even Russian!

There was a central latrine which was the most frequented of an buildings since diarrhea was rampant and dysentery was rife. When I use the term latrine it is "loosely"! The latrine was a typical old style country outhouse with a limited number of relief holes which straddled a huge pit. This pit, incidentally, was pumped at regular intervals by the "honey dipping" crew and the residue spread over the cultivated fields as a fertilizer. The smell was enough to gag a maggot and was even "riper" just prior to pumping. This did nothing to soothe the discomfort associated with dysentery and diarrhea. Another extremely discomfort in g and annoying nuisance was the sadistic habit of the guards of withholding the use of the facility to amuse themselves. At times permission was withheld until it was too

late and you can imagine the mess this created since shower facilities were non-existent! The stench surrounding us must have been incredible.

There was a kitchen facility of sorts which generated a tasteless broth and a black bread that was over half sawdust, or so it seemed. We always knew when there had been a bombing raid that had killed farm animals because there would be horse meat in the broth the next day, a treat of a sort. The bread was served with a margarine of indescribable taste and an ersatz tea of questionable brew. This was served once a day, in the evening, and was a much-awaited occasion as one could well imagine. It was later estimated that this diet produced approximately 750 to 900 calories, which is ultimately a starvation diet. To attest to this I lost over 40 pounds in less than three months, from around 175 pounds to less than 130 pounds. To appreciate this statistic one must realize that this was near the end of the war and there was little to feed the German people let alone an unwanted flood of prisoners; consequently, this period does not compare favorably with the conditions experienced in German POW camps even six months earlier. (Not that I am making excuses for the incorrigible conditions experienced, nor for that matter do I want to exonerate any of their actions.) Red Cross parcels were supposed to supplement our diet, but logistics at this late date in the war, prevented regular deliveries so we never received the supplement they were intended to provide.

All of these comforts and amenities were surrounded by barbed wire and chain link fencing. There were two chain link fences about ten feet apart. Between these two fences was an uneven coil of barbed wire which presented an almost impenetrable barrier. On the inside of the chain link fencing, at approximately ten feet, was a warning wire similar to an electrified cattle fence. To cross this barrier brought immediate warning fire from the guards in the towers and persistence in remaining in the warning zone could result in being killed by gun fire. At night the enclosure was patrolled by guards accompanied by vicious guard dogs, of the Doberman Pinscher and German Police dog variety. Propitiously located along the fence perimeter were guard towers manned by short-tempered, trigger-fingered "goons" who took sadistic delight in firing warning shots, at times for no apparent reason. Because of these barriers escape was rarely attempted by crossing these obstacles since the odds were almost insurmountable and the few known attempts resulted in death or serious gun shot wounds. It was reported that those foolish souls who attempted to escape through this obstacle course were shot and left on the fence for hours as a lesson for others who might be so fool-hardy.

"Krieges" life was boring in the extreme. ("Krieges" was an American moniker for the German kriegsgefangenen, prisoner of war.) Reading material was scarce and playing cards and related material or games were even more difficult to come by. Although the Red Cross provided these items I must remind the reader that this was near the end of the war and the source of such amenities had been severed because of logistics. Although these were transported primarily by the Swiss Red Cross their routes were limited and the numerous prison camps and prisoners were in a state of constant movement as the Allied armies advanced on all fronts. I mention this only to point out that conditions in the German prison camps, although harsh throughout the war, were not nearly as bad as they were at war's end. As a result of this tedium, time was whiled away by discussing food, especially creating exotic recipes, which I doubt were tried. Although sex was discussed, it was on the back burner since sustenance was the primary concern.

To further aggravate this uncomfortable situation the camps were severely overcrowded because of the fluidity of the prisoner problem. When I was first incarcerated, at Nuremberg, there were recreational fields, but by the time we were moved the camp was grossly overcrowded. The camp was originally designed for about 500 prisoners, but ultimately over 4,000 allied prisoners were crowded into the compound, which as you can well imagine eliminated all recreational facilities. At this stage there were

few who had the desire to compete in any type contest, but the fact that we were deprived of the opportunity miffed us. A point of interest. No matter how restrictive the space became the English doggedly persisted in their daily constitutional.

Stage shows and skits were popular forms of entertainment and it was amazing the quality of these shows considering the lack of props and staging. Many of these were politically slanted and were resented by many English and Australian personnel. They were so "pink" that they were almost pure communist propagandist performances. At that time I was so young and politically naive that I didn't really get the message, or possibly there was no message for me, only pure entertainment. In any event there was some real talent and the plays always entertaining since most of the dialogue was operatic with the folk songs of Scotland, England or Australia providing the music.

One of the more memorable recollections of POW life was the exchange medium and some form of this seems to manifest itself as soon as two or more people assemble. Tobacco in any form was the basic medium of exchange between the Kreiges, Guards, German civilians (who were incidentally punished severely if caught trading with POWs, but who took that chance anyway), prisoners of other nationalities or anyone else who could be approached for the purpose of bartering or bribing. In the kreige world the leaf of gold was king. Second to tobacco was chocolate, not as popular as tobacco, but coveted highly by the guards and civilians who had been deprived of such luxury since early in the war. Swan soap came in a distant third, but in certain circumstances was extremely valuable. All could be used to improve ones lot in prison life if used judiciously. Basically one loaf of bread could be purchased for ten cigarettes. One cigarette would purchase one egg or one potato. These exchange rates varied according to availability and demand.

Red Cross parcels, packages from home and occasionally packages from manufactures contained tobacco products and/or chocolate, but were erratic toward the end of the war and this shortage naturally inflated the value of these exchange mediums. The law of supply and demand controlled the price structure absolutely.

When times were "good", a comparative adjective to be sure for times in a prison camp was never anything but tolerable, every POW fared well and each kreige was in a position to improve his lot in life. The situation was reversed when times were bad and conditions became almost intolerable. It seemed that conditions compounded as "Murphy's Law" indicates. When something can go wrong it will and will attract all related functions negatively. No food or Red Cross parcels for various reasons, usually logistic or occasionally punitive.

During "bad times" the non-smoking kreige could cope, and in some cases prosper, because the addicted POW would trade almost anything for a "butt". Tea leaves, potato peelings, wood shavings or weeds were all substituted for tobacco and in some cases with near fatal results. Also, the prisoners were always willing to trade for "Americana" cigareten⁷.

News and food were foremost in the thoughts of a kreige. To illustrate the meager diet, near wars end, I'll use myself as an example and case in point. When captured I weighed about 180 pounds, but when I was liberated I weighed a scant 127. Just think of the billions spent today on diets when the only ingredient for a successful diet is incarceration with an accompanying diet of less than 1,000 calories per day. Compare that with your last normal meal which in all likelihood contained in excess of 2500 calories with a high fat content.

Let us digress for a moment and take a look at the flip side of this scenario-the home front. Abruptly all correspondence stops with no associated explanation and more frustrating no way of breaking the bureaucratic red tape to get an explanation. Usually after a month or so a telegram would arrive from

The Secretary Of War stating that "We regret to inform you that your son/husband/father/wife has been missing in action since (date). You will be informed of any additional information".

Then follows the endless hours of worry, disappear, prayer and hope. The uncertainty is almost unbearable. The alternate notice sent, "The Secretary Of War deeply regrets to inform you that Your son/husband/father/wife has been killed in action" was horrible, but final.

After about six weeks another telegram would arrive stating that word had been received from the Republic of Germany that you had been taken prisoner. Following this telegram was a visit from a ranking military officer who did all possible to ease the pain associated with the news. He would describe the conditions, as known, of German Prison camp life. Then came the tedious wait and worry of treatment, diet and health especially in light of the horror stories circulated about the treatment of prisoners of war despite the efforts of the visiting officers to dispel these stories. The stories were generally regarding political prisoners in concentration camps, but next of kin had a hard time distinguishing between them and well they might considering the warped mentality of the hard core Nazi and some of their atrocities near war end.

Now back to the story. Shortly before wars end we were forcibly marched from Nuremberg to Mooseberg about twenty miles north of Munich. The first four days were a living hell! dubbed the mini death march. The SS guards pushed us relentlessly and were verbally and physically abusive to make us move with dispatch. Patton was advancing rapidly and the Germans were intent on keeping us ahead of the advancing armies. At that time we had no idea of their reasoning because it seemed to us that the Germans would be much better off releasing us and forcing the allied armies to care for us and slow their advance. The real reason surfaced later when it was discovered that we were used to camouflage the movement of German troops and in some cases actually used as cover for the German troops. That is, we would be marched on the same roads as the Germans were using to prevent the allied air forces from strafing for fear of hitting us. Another reason also emerged. The SS Troops had planned to use us hostages to negotiate liberal conditions for themselves. Hitler had issued an order to exterminate all prisoners in the same manner as the political prisoners. Fortunately the guards did not heed this order.

Anyone who couldn't keep up was removed from the column and their disposition was unknown. Following one hard pressure filled day of marching we were bivouacked in a farmyard when a guard announced that one of our injured comrades was laying beside a ditch and was unable to move any farther on his own power. If we didn't assist him the SS would dispose of him since they would not tolerate anyone holding our advance. I was astounded that everyone didn't jump up and volunteer to go help him, but amazingly no one moved. I guess the several days of forced marching for nearly 18 hours a day and their own weakened condition dictated that volunteering might lead to their own demise. For whatever reason there were no volunteers. After a short time the guard stated that this was the last chance to save this man. I was really beat but thought some one had to go or he would surely die. I did go with the guard and found the injured airman setting beside a ditch unable to move on his own. With extreme difficulty I assisted him back to the farm which seemed an eternity away. The next morning, before daylight, the guards roused us out and moved us on our way. I never did see the airman again nor did I ever know anything of his disposition. None of us had ever been subjected to this treatment and we could only account for their actions as that of a victor of sorts taking out his frustrations on those who were unable to defend themselves. Remember this was the "4c super race" who were being beaten on every front and were watching a dream turn into a living nightmare. Exonerate their actions? No way! But possibly explaining their cruel deeds.

For four horrifying days this torture, forced march, unrelenting mental and physical abuse continued. Truly a living hell! Then abruptly the SS guards were mysteriously replaced by The Volkstrom home

guard made up of conscripts too old for active duty- apathetic lot indeed. Now that I have reached that age they don't seem so pathetic, but service they were pressed into seems onerous and almost bordering on cruel and unusual punishment. These individuals were 60 plus years of age and not in the best of physical condition.

The bright side was that the march slowed considerably. Civilians were anxious to barter for chocolate, soap and cigarettes, even though the penalties for fraternization was severe, which gave us a golden opportunity to scrounge the countryside for food. They were so starved for these little luxuries that they would take almost any chance to indulge their desires. Remember, these people had been at war since 1939 and had been required to sacrifice for the war effort since Hitler took over. To discourage the fraternization severe punishment was meted out to both the guilty civilian and participating kreige. Severe punishment did not mean a slap on the wrist with a wet noodle!

During one of the more casual days of the march we were proceeding down a country lane type road when a goose waddled near us. "I'm going to have that for dinner tonight", I told my buddy. "You'll get shot if they catch you with that bird", he responded. Ignoring all advice I reached down and caught the goose by the neck and started wringing it to kill the thing. I didn't get the job done completely, but I did manage to stun it enough to get it into my ditty bag. When we arrived at our bivouac area I built a fire, prepared a spit of sorts, and killed the goose amidst loud protests from the bird. I did get the bird cooked but it was so tough that it was virtually impossible to eat. This did in no way discourage a starving bunch of American POW's from consuming the "whole thing". Even the guards enjoyed a morsel or two. The goose did leave his calling card in my ditty bag by depositing huge quantities of his droppings in my bag, hence the expression, "shit like a goose".

On another occasion, just when we thought we had it made and the march had settled down to a norm we were ordered to march all night. This was hard enough on undernourished POWs, but it was almost an impossibility for the decrepit guards who were forced to carry a full field pack with several days rations plus a rifle, with bayonet, and gas mask canister, probably sixty pounds or more. A couple of hours into the march the old guard next to me was having a tough time, so rough in fact that we thought he would experience a heart attack if not assisted immediately. The last thing any of us wanted was the return of the SS guards so I reached over and gently took his rifle and indicated I would carry it for him. He mildly objected but reluctantly acquiesced. Shortly another kreige volunteered to carry another part of his load and so on until his entire gear was being carried by "kreiges". Just before dawn we returned his gear and we preserved the credibility of the old guards in the eyes of their superiors and averted the return of the dreaded SS with no one being the wiser.

On another occasion my buddy and I had broken away from the column to do a little bartering with the civilians and scrounging on our own when a young German girl entered the pathway from a farm yard and proceeded down the same path we were on a short distance in front of us. Naturally, being red blooded American lads we started commenting on her obvious feminine attributes, which were well placed and pleasing to the eye. We continued to follow her for possibly a quarter of a mile when she turned into a yard and a few feet up the path turned and in perfect English told us that to partake of her "goodies" was verboten, but at another time we might have gotten together. We were dumbfounded! We couldn't believe our ears. Here was a German country girl who could speak perfect English as well as understand every sensual word we had spoken.

There were other interesting and amusing occurrences and I only cite them to illustrate the relative freedom we enjoyed during this part of the march. You ask, "Why didn't you escape?" The allied high command had sent out a directive, via the underground, for us to stay put, that escaping at this time would only hamper the advance of the allied armies since it would be extremely difficult to take care of

huge numbers of POWs and still advance. So with that order in mind we refrained from attempting any escapes.

All in all the march to Mooseberg, except for the first four grueling days, was a pleasant interlude, and we almost caught up on our eating. Then the world came crashing down and the good times ended. We reached our destination and were interned again in a typical POW camp. During this period of internment we regretted following the order to not escape.

Before we were interned in Stalag VII A we were cleaned up and deloused with the infamous DDT. We were severely infected with lice, ticks and fleas from the months of unsanitary living conditions and bivouacking in hay lofts. Again, the doctor who "treated" my wounds had been right about our immunization. There were no recorded incidents of American deaths from typhus, diphtheria or tetanus. This was not the case with soldiers of other nationalities.

The shower, which preceded the delousing, was the first honest-to-goodness shower I had enjoyed since the night before I was shot down and I probably enjoyed it more than any shower I had ever taken despite the tepid water and the strong soap. The delousing ordeal, on the contrary, was a never to be forgotten experience. Following the shower we were shaved from head to foot with the dullest straight edged razor in the world by the world's largest women. Having a less than friendly Amazon shave me was scary, but to have her shave me around my privates was terrifying! One slip, intentional or unintentional -----

The last couple of weeks of the war was spent enduring the same monotony, overcrowding and

Again our thoughts turned constantly to food. I dreamed frequently of the food that was wasted in the chow line and found myself waking up from a recurring nightmare in which I had emptied a garbage can and was in the process of consuming the contents.

Then at about 1300 hours April 29, 1945, the American flag was raised over the church steeple in the hamlet of Mooseberg. I never experienced a more dramatic moment. After the cheers the tears flowed unabatedly. The war was over- we had survived.

It wasn't until ten days later that the war officially ended and we were, in fact, liberated. Between the time of our liberation and the end of the war we covered the country side scrounging for food and generally pigging out with resultant disastrous results. Our emaciated bodies could not assimilate the rich foods we were cramming in and our insides would object painfully. This was not a deterrent! Like drunken sailors on leave we couldn't resist the temptation and pig out we would. Fortunately after a couple of days we wised up and ate more normally.

While we were waiting for the war to officially end and be returned to America a friend and I commandeered a German Duesenberg and started touring the area around Munich. We approached the infamous concentration camp of Dachau but were turned away by the American troops who had liberated the camp. We told them that we were POW's from Mooseberg and had been threatened with shipment to Dachau if we got out of line and that we wanted to see what horrors we had been threatened with. They commiserated with us but still turned us away stating that we didn't want to see what they had found inside. The stench of the crematoriums was still evident and the stark dungeon like structure was eerie.

We drove on enjoying the beauty of Bavaria ignorant of the hazardous predicament we had created for ourselves by leaving the camp and venturing out without any identification. Had we been challenged we could have been interred in a political camp as displaced persons. The ordeal of getting out of one of these camps was frustrating in the extreme. Since there were so many displaced persons the process

of separating the different nationalities was monumental and just getting a hearing was time consuming and wrapped in bureaucratic red tape.

However, we did continue our trip until our car gave up the ghost and quit on us. We had been using high octane gas that we could scrounge from tank units and this was digested well by the German engine in the Duesenberg and the engine simply blew its top. We returned to Mooseberg and awaited our movement.

A train ride to camp Lucky Strike, in La Harve, France and a brief period of rehabilitation, which consisted of delousing, grooming and attempting to put a little weight on our emaciated bodies (I had lost over 40 pounds during my incarceration) we boarded a ship for our journey to America. The nightmare had ended but there was still one uncomfortable but humorous episode still in store for me.

I had received my state room assignment aboard the SS Sea Porpoise and was anticipating the trip to the states. I entered the stateroom and noticed that the lower bunk had been taken so I tossed my limited gear on the upper bunk and climbed up to rest for awhile. The shower was on and momentarily a young women stepped out. She screamed and jumped back into the shower stall. "What are you doing here?" she demanded. "I have been assigned to this bunk", I responded. "We'll see about that," she replied. Sure enough she did and just as surely I was moved. That wouldn't have been bad except all bunks in staterooms had been assigned so I was relegated to the hold of the ship with the enlisted troops.

We had only started to move from port when seasickness raised its ugly head and the hold picked up the stench that only the vomiting associated with seasickness can produce. I moved out and found a place on deck to spend the rest of the trip. Fortunately it was June and the weather was mild so there was no temperature discomfort experienced. It could have been freezing before I would opt to move back into the hold.

The trip lasted only 8 days and the crew did everything possible to make the voyage enjoyable. There was considerable entertainment and the food was the best we had seen for months, an understatement of the first degree for we hadn't had any appreciable amount of food for months.

We arrived in New York harbor and as the Statue of Liberty came into view there was not a dry eye.

EPILOGUE

At Camp Kilmer, New Jersey we received new uniforms and related accessories. We stood in line for hours to use the phone to call relatives. The balance of the time was spent in orientation sessions and awaiting orders. Finally I was on board a train headed for Salt Lake City and Fort Douglas where I was to receive final instructions and leave papers.

The long awaited day finally arrived and I was on Lewis Brother's Stages for the final leg of the trip to McGill and home. The trip seemed eternal but at long last the smelter smoke stacks (landmarks of a mining community) came into view and I was back home greeted by a tearful mother, other excited family members neighbors and friends. Following a brief visit I left for Grand Forks, North Dakota and the long anticipated reunion with my future wife Gloria Geddes.

Marriage preparations were completed and we applied to the clerk of the marriage license bureau for a license. Much to our surprise and frustration she would not issue us the license because I was only twenty years old which by North Dakota law required parental approval. I had been involved in mortal combat, interred as a prisoner of war and been in control of my own destiny (within the confines of the military regimentation) for over two years but I couldn't get married without my parents permission. I

then wired my parents for permission which they returned immediately. The clerk had her neck bowed and wouldn't accept the telegram since she felt it could have been sent by anyone and was therefore a forgery. Frustrated, you had better believe it!

The clergyman, who Gloria had selected to perform the ceremony, told us he was licensed in Minnesota and he was aquatinted with people in the county offices. So the wedding party loaded up and headed for Crookston, Minnesota, a short distance from Grand Forks, where the pastor used his influence to obtain a marriage license at about 9:30 P.M. We had no hall rented for the ceremony so we proceeded to Gloria's uncles home and requested the use of the home for the ceremony. It was now after 10:00 P.M.! Imagine the surprise on her uncle's face when a niece, accompanied by a horde of people, knocking on the front door at 10:30 P.M. requested the use of his living room for a wedding ceremony. Following the ceremony the pastor charged us to make the Marriage a success in fight of the problems encountered. His admonition was followed exactly since we have now celebrated 52 years of marital bliss, at least that's my feelings; however, Gloria my have some reservations.

Subsequently I received a degree in engineering from The University Of Colorado at Boulder, Colorado and went on to work for Kennecott Copper Corporation for 30 years. We adopted two children and enjoyed the trials and tribulations of raising two children. We are now enjoying their offspring, especially a great grand daughter. We then retired to Lake Havasu City, Arizona for a pleasant retirement which has kept us extremely busy, so much so that I can't figure out how I ever had time to work 60 to 70 hours a week for 30 years because I have so much to do now that my time is completely consumed without working a regular job.

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