

Former POW relates his experiences in Germany

by Alfred Keith Muntz

Keith Muntz was inducted into the U.S. Army July 6, 1942. As a soldier in Company F, 377th Regiment, 95th Infantry Division, he completed his basic training at Camp Swift. On August 9, 1944, Keith boarded the U.S.S. West Point in Boston and sailed to Liverpool, England. After additional training in Winchester, England, the 95th crossed the Channel and disembarked on Omaha Beach September 14, 1944. Traveling in 40 & 8s, the 377th passed through the southern part of Paris, Versailles and Verdun and relieved the 90th Division in the area around Mazieres-les-Metz. At 21:00, on the dark and rainy night of November 8, 1944, Company F attacked Fereau Mill. This is Keith's account of the events which followed.

S/Sgt. Robert E. Roberts, who was one of the first to make it into the mill, came back to where we were waiting, so my squad followed him back, and we got into the mill and spent the remainder of the night. Needless to say, we didn't sleep that night; there were Germans in the hayloft, and in other parts of the building, and they would drop grenades and open up with machine guns and bazookas during the night. The next morning at daylight, we captured several of the remaining Germans who were in the building complex, many of them just young boys. The the rest of the 2nd Battalion, attacked past the mill and up the hill towards Hannibois Woods where the main German line was dug in.

Many of us made it up the hill and captured a lot of Germans, but the resistance was strong, and our Battalion suffered many casualties in this operation.

We received orders to withdraw and go back down to the bottom of the hill and dig in. On the way down, we came upon one of our wounded buddies who had been hit in the stomach. Jim Collins, Don Athey, Harry Modest and I were told to bring him back to our aid station. We had just captured a German medic who was carrying a stretcher, so we put our wounded friend, Larry Strahler, on the stretcher. Don Athey was carrying our guns, so Jim Collins, Harry Modest, the German medic and I were carrying Larry. Then we heard voices from behind, and they weren't speaking English. An S.S. trooper with about six German soldiers slipped up on us from behind, and as Don was carrying our guns, they had the drop on us. Then instead of taking Larry to our aid station, we had to carry him back up the hill, and

we had to turn him over to the German medics. Don Athey and Harry Modest were loaded on a truck and taken to a different place, Larry Strahler was taken to a hospital in Metz, and Jim Collins and I, both non-coms, were marched on foot all the way across the Moselle River into Metz, by a guard waving a pistol. We arrived there after dark. We were taken to an underground fort, and I am sure, it was the German Command Post, as there were many high-ranking officers there.

We were then taken to a hospital in Metz where German medics treated my right hand which had been hit with shrapnel earlier in the day. They also gave me a tetanus shot.

The next day, November 10, we were interrogated and searched, then put in box cars which took us to Stalag XII-A at Limburg, Germany.

From there, on approximately November 23, 1944, we were loaded onto boxcars and sent to Stalag III-B, which was located near Furstenburg, Germany and east of the Odor River, close to the border of Poland. This was a large camp, which housed other nationalities, some of whom had been there for many months. Many starved to death each day and were hauled away. We Americans were housed together and separately from the others, and we did get some Red Cross parcels at this place. Jim Collins and I would share one parcel, which we would get every two weeks. We learned quickly how to ration out our food. The Germans gave us black bread, soups of different kinds, and once in a while, some blood sausage. As I didn't smoke, I could take the cigarettes from the parcels and trade them through the German guards for bread from the outside. The Germans liked American cigarettes.

The winter of 1944-45 was extremely cold with a lot of snow. Many of the guards (and I felt sorry for them) had to weather the cold days and nights. In one section of the camp were Mongolian POWs captured in Russia. They were very big men and were used as slave labor. Evidently, they were fed better, as they looked to be in better physical shape than the other prisoners.

On approximately January 31, 1945, it became necessary to evacuate Stalag III-B because of the advance of the Russians. They started marching us to the west. The weather had been so cold, but the morning we were to start marching west, the weather started to warm up. During our journey it seemed like a miracle had happened, as we couldn't

While held prisoner at Stalag III-B, American POW Angelo Spinelli took over a thousand photos with a camera he traded from a German guard. He had the same guard develop his film. Here is one of his photos at Stalag III-B where Keith Muntz was also held for over two months during the bitterly cold winter of 1944-45. Photo by Angello Spinelli.



have survived during the cold a few weeks earlier.

After a few days march, we came to Stalag III-A, Luckenwalde, Germany. We remained overnight, and then were sent to a subsidiary camp, Number 483-C. During this march at nighttime, they put us in churches; one night they huddled us into a large barn and shut the doors. No one dared strike a match or light a cigarette, for if the barn had gotten on fire, it would have burned us all.

While we were at Camp 483-C, President Roosevelt died April 12, 1945. I can remember a German officer coming into our barracks and announcing, "the world's greatest war monger is dead." This event lowered our morale, as we did not know what would be the course of the new president, Harry Truman.

On April 22, 1945, because of the nearness of the Russians, we were again forced to march west toward the American lines which had stopped at the Elbe River. At the end of the march, we came to a small town, and the guards sort of disappeared. Some of my friends who were with me in the prison camps could speak other languages fluently. This town was a compound where Belgian POWs lived. They stayed in this compound at night, and every day they would go out to a German farm to help with the farm work. They asked some of us to stay with them that night, and then during the day, each one of us Americans would go with the Belgians to a different farm to help do the chores. One day I helped plant potatoes. The farm where I worked was owned by an older German man and his wife and two grown daughters. One Sunday afternoon they asked my Belgian friend and me to come to their house and eat dinner with them. They served us real good light brown bread. As this farm was in the Russian sector of the fighting, I always wondered what became of them when the Russian Army came through and took over, which they feared very much.

Hitler committed suicide April 30, 1945, in Berlin. It was about a week later, on a Sunday, that the word came that the

war was about to end. All of the Belgians in the compound, along with us Americans who had been staying with them, got our possessions together and started hiking down the road towards the Elbe River. There was a ferry boat there that was taking people across to the other side. We had to get permission from a German captain to get on the ferry and cross over. At that time, he told us that he would probably be our prisoner in a few days.

On Sunday morning, May 6, 1945, we were allowed to board the ferry, and in a few minutes, we Americans and Belgians were across the Elbe River and free men again as we were greeted by American GIs. It was at this place that a German officer was getting off the ferry, and he gave me a pair of Carl Zeiss artillery binoculars, which I brought home.

In just a few days, the German officer who gave us permission to cross on the ferry along with his men came across and surrendered to the Americans as the Russians were closing in on them. They knew that if they didn't get on the American side and surrender, the Russians would kill all of them.

After we got to the American side, we were to go through a de-lousing process even though our group didn't have any, and we had been given Typhus shots prior to going overseas. We were told not to eat too much at a time, as our stomachs had shrunk, and we had lost so much weight; we had to be careful not to gorge ourselves with food.

May 8, 1945, the war was officially over, and we started on the long journey home. From this place, we were trucked to Hildesheim, Germany Airport, and on a cargo plane, my first plane ride, flew to Le Harve, France to Camp Lucky Strike, where we would stay until ready to start home across the Atlantic.

On May 29, 1945, Jim Collins and I got a three-day pass to go to Paris. Jim and I were together from our time of capture November 9, 1944 until we got back to the States. During our captivity we had lost a lot of weight, so we were not sent home until we got back to normal. I can remember they fed us a lot of egg nog to gain weight. I think we looked like stuffed toads.

On June 27, 1945, we were loaded on an English Liberty ship and headed to New York. The trip took about two weeks as this ship was much slower than the U.S.S. West Point. When we entered New York Harbor, for the first time, I saw the Statue of Liberty, and as I had lost my freedom for six months, I knew how blessed I was to be an American.