

COMMENTS FROM THE AUTHOR

MAY 31, 1995

I look upon this story as a first cut or dry run. It focuses on dates and places rather than events and episodes. Also, it does not include the role which my twin brother, Ray, played in my life. Ray went through the same training at the same time and ended up with me in the same squadron in England.

He was in the same formation flying on my left wing when his plane was shot down on his first mission. I saw all parachutes open as his plane went down in flames. When I returned to home base, I obtained the names and addresses of his crew members and wrote to each next of kin that they would receive a notice in about a month that their son was "Missing in Action". I assured each of them that I saw all ten parachutes open that chances were great that they would end up as prisoners of war. (This is actually what did happen).

Jennifer Hughes really was responsible for providing the necessary incentive to start this project and keep at it (with prompting from Trudy) until we could finish it.

I hope that at some future date I will write a complete autobiography and use the war experiences as a a chapter in my life.

Respectfully submitted,

Paeph B. Haley

THE WORLD WAR 11 EXPERIENCES OF RALPH B. HALEY

During the year 1940, the U.S. government started a program to encourage young men between the ages of 17 and 25 to obtain free flying lessons. It was necessary to pass strict mental, physical and psychological examinations to qualify.

I had graduated from the University of Denver in 1938, was age 24 and working as an accountant for the Denver Dry Goods Co. I applied and was able to meet the qualifications.

Flight training was conducted at Combs field about 3 miles from the center of Denver. Ground school (navigation, meteorology, engines, etc) was conducted at night on the University of Denver campus.

After 40 hours of flight training, I obtained a private pilot's license. Other flying lessons in Cross Country flying (finding out how to get from town A to B) Acrobatics (aircraft maneuvers such as Loops, slow rolls etc) provided a total number of 150 flying hours and a Commercial Pilot's license.

On December 4, 1941, I received a "Greetings" letter from the U.S. Government to report to the Old Custom house in Denver for entrance into the United States Army. I passed the physical examination and was sent that evening to the Indoctrination Center at El Paso, Texas. (War was declared three days later on December 7, 1941). After the processing procedures were completed, the Colonel in charge called me into his office and stated that I had the qualifications to become a Interviewer and Classifier. This job entailed talking to the men who were being

inducted into the Army and writing down his vital statistics and work experience. He would then be classified and sent to the appropriate station for basic training and future assignment.

After nine months in this position, and taking six months of basic training, I decided to join the Air Force and was sent to Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas.

After a brief stay in San Antonio, I was assigned to begin Primary Flight training in Ontario, California to fly Stearman airplanes. When this training was completed, I was sent to Merced, California for basic training in single engine fighter planes to learn aircraft maneuvers. Then, on to the final course in Fort Sumner, New Mexico to fly a two engine plane. I graduated as a 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Army Air Forces on July 28, 1943, two days before my 27th birthday.

After spending two weeks at home in Denver, I was ordered to report to Bend, Oregon to be a member of a bomber crew of ten men. At this base, we were introduced to the B-17 Flying Fortress and trained in the procedures necessary to fly missions over enemy territory.

Next stop was in Kearney, Nebraska, where, along with the rest of the 10-man crew, I was issued flying gear and other essentials (oxygen mask, compasses, maps, goggles, etc.) needed for combat flying.

On November 16, 1943, the crew arrived at Four Corners, Ireland to await transfer to a specific Air Force base. On December 6, 1943 the crew was sent to Grafton Underwood, England, where we were officially assigned to the 547th Squadron, 384th Bombardment Group. (A squadron

was composed of nine B-17's. Two additional groups of nine B-17's made up a Bomb Group which then flew in formation to specified targets. This was called a "Mission") The movie "Memphis Belle" offers an account of what a mission is all about.

The 384th Bomb Group had originally arrived at Grafton Underwood in May, 1943, and had already experienced some of the bloodiest battles of the air war over Europe. This base had the distinction of being the launching point of the first and last bombs dropped on the Continent by the 8th Air Force during World War II.

The goal of each crew was to complete 25 missions before returning to the United States. This was quite difficult, as evidenced by the fact that out of the 30 crews assigned to Grafton-Underwood at the same time, only two crews were able to complete the 25 missions. Crewmen were encouraged to obtain the last rites of the Catholic Church in the event that this could be their last mission.

The objective of each mission was to knock out or disable enemy factories or other installations that contributed to the German War effort. It was never the intention of the Americans to injure people; in fact, I was keenly aware of this since my aunts, uncles and cousins were living in Germany.

After two aborted (forced to return to base because of weather or engine problems) missions, I flew my first completed mission on January 14, 1944. After the fifth mission, I was advanced to pilot and flew a rather short mission to Nancy, France. Our Group left rather late in the afternoon, bombed railroad yards and then returned in the darkness. My

commanding officer called over to me and asked me if I had been checked out for night flying. I told him I had not. "Well, you are now". he said. Another interesting assignment at this period was to check out incoming B-17s which had been delivered fresh from the U.S. I, and a couple of crew members would take the plane up, turn off different engines (not over two at one time) and check all the controls. I always looked under the plastic on the Pilot's steering wheel to see a message from the U.S. "Go get em, Yank". Wipe out those Nazi's".

Another assignment was to fly the pilot and crew of new arrivals on their first mission. Their pilot would be the co-pilot on this mission as he learned the procedures on how to join the airplane with the formation at the start of the mission, the protocol for handling communications, when and how to use "evasive action" (moving the airplane up and down to make it more difficult for enemy fighters to score a hit) and other techniques which would give him more confidence when he flew his own crew.

On the 18th mission, as pilot of the "Booby Trap" on April 24, 1944, I was unable to return to my home base in England. This particular mission was to Oberpfaffenhoffen, Germany, the site of a strategic ball bearing plant and aircraft factory. My Bomb Group had previously bombed this same target on March 18 and the aim of this mission was to completely annihilate this target forever. Our Group was part of 113 planes to do the job. I found out afterwards that our Group scored a bull's eye, and was awarded a Presidential Citation. This raid was known as one of the most effective missions in the European Theatre of Operations (E.T.O.) When the 384th landed again at Grafton-Underwood, after one of

the fiercest aerial battles, only 15 of the 30 planes were able to return to home base.

So much for the overall picture. In my particular case, I was the pilot with a crew on their first mission. The plane encountered a strong flak (anti-aircraft missiles) attack, which disabled two of the four engines of the airplane before we reached the target. This loss of power resulted in the airplane falling behind the regular formation-- an easy target for enemy fighters. One of the enemy fighters succeeded in knocking out an additional engine and the hydraulic and communications systems. Since the plane did not have enough power to stay in the sky and was losing altitude rapidly, I gave some thought to flying to Switzerland. I could see Lake Constance which was on the edge of Switerland and it appeared to be about 75 miles away. The German fighter pilots quickly ruled out this option as they circled above the plane. I, therefore, made a forced landing on the only available level ground in sight. This later turned out to be the parade ground of a German Infantry Camp in Fussen, Germany.

Since the parade ground was comparatively short for a regular landing field, and the hydraulic sysyem was inoperable (no brakes) the plane ended up with its nose dug into the pasture beyond the parade ground. The plane was immediately surrounded by German soldiers and Hitler Youths who watched us entangle ourselves from the wreckage. I knew we had an injured man in the front of the plane because we received a flax hit where the navigator and bombardier were stationed. Also, I could see blood in the catwalk of the plane before we landed. (The bombardier told me afterward that one missile hit in the ammunition box

and in the process four or five 50 caliber shells hit the navigator). I yelled out the window that a doctor was needed immediately. Although the doctor did arrive fairly soon, he was unable to save the navigator's life. The rest of the crew although shaken up, appeared to have no serious injuries.

The crew was taken to a nearby army installation, where each man was interviewed and kept in a makeshift jail cell overnight. A few hours after I was put in a jail cell, I was visited by one of the German fighter pilots who gave me a memorable lecture about how the Germans were fighting for the lives of their wives and children, while the Americans were battling for the money and sport of it. He also mentioned that our plane was responsible for knocking out one of their planes which was piloted by an officer who had downed six Americans planes. He seemed to hold no remorse for our part in this event. I shook hands with him and thanked him for refraining from knocking us out completely and for giving me a chance to land the plane.

Early the next morning, our crew was marched down the main street of Fussen on the way to the railway station. The people jeered and taunted us, called us gangsters, and some of them threw rocks at us. We boarded the train under heavy guard and arrived in the city of Frankfurt that evening. We were taken out of the train and spent the night in a regular jail. The next morning, the officers were taken to the town of Wetzlar, a few miles north of Frankfurt, to Dulag Luft, a big building where officers were interrogated. The enlisted men were sent to a separate camp.

Upon arrival, I was searched very thoroughly and then ordered to remove all of my clothes. The guards kept everything that had the least value including my watch, ring, and identification tags. The clothing was returned, and I was issued new identification tags officially entering me into the land of the of the "Kriegesgefangenen", or "Kriegies"--German words for prisoners of war.

I was confined in a room about 6x9 ft. The only furnishings were a narrow bunk with a straw mattress and one blanket. During the next eight days, I was in solitary confinement . Food was scarce, consisting of a slice of black bread in the morning, a cup of soup at noon, and another slice of bread and cup of ersatz tea in the evening. During this period, I was not allowed to wash, brush teeth, comb hair, or do anything but sit, lie down, sleep and ponder my fate. If I needed to use the restroom, I pulled on a cord in the room which raised a board on the outside of the room. My shoes and belt were kept on the outside of the door.

About the third day, I was ushered into a large office for questioning by a German Officer. He was a older man who told me that he had been a fighter pilot in World War 1. He spoke excellent English and said that after World War 1, he went to the United States to get a job as an airline pilot. He was not successful in getting a job, so he returned to Germany. "Just think", he said, "If I had been hired, I would probably be fighting the war on your side". He also questioned me about the name of Henry Helfenbein, (my step-father), as next of kin which he saw on the dog tags around my neck. He said,"This is a German name. Are your mother and father German?" I told him respectfully that he would have to

decide that for himself since I was allowed to give him only my name, rank and serial number.

The German Officer gave me a cigarette and told me that he knew that I had graduated in the class of 43-G, was stationed at Grafton Underwood in England with the 384th Bomb Group and my Commanding Officer was Col. Smith. He also said he had pictures of our Air Force base. He was correct on all points.

The purpose of the German interrogator, no doubt, was to have me believe that since they already knew so much about me and the Air Force base, I might go ahead and reveal something that they did not know enough about such as how the Americans could bomb through the clouds to reach the targets.

Since my captors were unable to obtain any worthwhile information at this interview or in two subsequent interviews, I was informed on the eighth day that I would be transferred out. I was marched across the street to a transient camp where I was issued a Red Cross capture kit-- a brown cardboard box containing toilet articles, some items of clothing, food and cigarettes. It was a great pleasure to take a shower, shave and brush my teeth.

The next day, along with other prisoners, I was transferred by train to Stalag Luft 111, a permanent camp for officers of the U.S. Airforce being held as prisoners of war. This place was near the town of Sagan about 100 hundred miles southeast of Berlin. The camp was exclusively for aviator- officers.

Stalag Luft 111 (translated, Camp three) was also the location of a massive escape which took place in an adjoining camp housing mostly British officers. They had worked for many months to tunnel beneath the camp fences, shoring up the tunnel with bed boards. On March 24, 1944, 76 prisoners slipped out of the 30 foot deep, 300 foot tunnel. All escapees were eventually captured. The Germans, angry at the escape, ordered the men executed. Fifty were shot and 26 re-located to other camps. (This event was also the subject of a movie called the "Great Escape"). I noticed signs as I was ushered into the West Compound warning "Escaping is no longer a sport. If you try you will be shot".

Fortunately, I was assigned to a room where I met the remaining officers of my crew, Bill Bice, co-pilot and Don Masterson, Bombardier along with six other men. Eventually, there were 12 men assigned to each room. Each bedroom-sized room contained 4 triple-deck bunk beds with burlap mattresses filled with wood shavings or shredded paper. The mattress was placed on nine wooded slats and regular inspections were made to insure that none of the slats were being used for digging or shoring up a tunnel. The lice which permeated the mattresses was hardly noticed by some lucky guys but, for me, they were responsible for a permanent, itchy rash.

Initially, food was sparse and we relied on the Germans to supply it. They gave us a black bread which was reputedly made of sawdust and other unknown ingredients. Pea or barley soup was served at noon and more soup plus one boiled potatoe at supper. Occasionally, we were issued a blood sausage which tasted OK but lost its attractiveness when it looked more like blood than sausage in the Summer. Later on, we began to

receive Red Cross parcels which contained cigarettes, Army ration chocolate , oleo. crackers, cheese, sugar, corned beef, coffee, some jam, and a cake of soap. Each person was issued an eating bowl, cup and spoon.

Living in close proximity with a dozen people required lots of humor and tolerance. Conversations were mostly about food, great restaurants and ingenious plans on how to escape. We were all taught that, in the event we were captured, we must every effort to escape. There were two roll calls each day at 8 A.M. and 4:30 P.M. All the men would be called into formation and either an officer or a commissioned officer would take a head count.

As more men were brought into camp, additional activities were made available to the prisoners. For example, A British chaplain who has been shot down was now on hand to say Mass and provide counsel. Books arrived, and a small library was established. Musical instruments reached the camp and provided the means for starting a band and producing a few musical shows.

Athletic equipment set the stage for a number of sporting events and competition in games of softball, volleyball, boxing and gymnastics. Playing cards helped to while away the time for games of bridge, cribbage, solitaire, etc. We, indeed, had settled into an existence that was tolerable.

We also were able to receive mail from home and occasionally a food or clothing parcel. Our letters sent to home (four postcards and three letters per month) were read and severely censored by the Germans who cut out any words or paragraphs that they deemed to have any

significance to the war. On Christmas, we was able to attend Mass while the band played Xmas music. Another memorable event, was the arrival of a small wagon with Santa Claus in a red and white suit tossing out mail from home. The wagon was pulled by two men dressed as reindeer. The mail apparently had been held to accumulate for a week or two and I received two letters from home. What a wonderful Xmas present!

In January, we heard that the Russian Army was heading into East Germany at a steady pace. All at once, the Germans decided that Stalag Luft 111 should be evacuated. So, with just a few hours notice, the entire camp of approximately 11,000 prisoners was ordered to move.

I gathered my belongings plus a few chocolate bars and a do-it-yourself book which contained poems, favorite recipes, bright sayings etc.. It was a few minutes after midnite when we started down the road. Just before leaving the camp, someone asked me if I would carry a pair of crutches in case they were needed by some straggler.

It seemed like we marched for endless hours in extremely cold weather and with continuous snow falling during most of the trip. I threw my book of mementos away after the first few hours and gave one of the crutches to another Kriege who seemed to be struggling. I held on to the single crutch. I found that it did help and gave me entrance at the front of the chow (food) line or a more favorable place to stay at night. There were occasional rest periods and less frequent stops. If we were lucky, we slept in barns and factories along the way. The march took six days and covered a distance of 62 miles.

We finally arrived at a railroad station in Spremberg, Germany, and were put into tightly packed boxcars (about 50 men to each car). After two days and nights, we finally arrived at Nuernberg, Germany to be transferred to Stalag X111-D, at the edge of the city. Then began a two month period living in deplorable conditions in buildings filled with lice and bedbugs. Food was in short supply and no Red Cross parcels were delivered to help our cause. The main diet was soup (called green death) made from some type of worm-ridden dehydrated vegetables, the usual black bread and, occasionally, potatoes, which were in short supply.

We were housed in long buildings each building large enough to accommodate the 24 men who were bunked three high and twelve to each side. Some men had to sleep on the floor because of the shortage of bed slats. I slept the entire time with all my clothing to cut down the number of bugs that tried to feast on my carcass.

As previously mentioned, this camp was located only a short distance from the city of Nuernberg, still a prime target of the Americans and British bombers. The final weeks at this camp were marked by frequent air raids. The British bombed at night and the Americans during the daytime. When planes came over Nuernberg, all the lights were extinguished and we were in darkness until the raid was over. One specific raid on February 20 lasted over an hour and left the lights out for days. I prayed constantly and asked the Lord to please keep those planes on the proper target.

On April 4th, the Germans again decided to move this camp since American troops were heading toward Nuernberg and Stalag 111-D. We (about 11,000 men) departed the camp just before noon for what turned

out to be a 10 day march to Mooseberg, Germany about 90 miles away. The weather was in sharp contrast to the cold march we took from Stalag 111 in January.

We had rest periods for ten minutes every hour. That afternoon, we saw P-47 Thunder-Bolt fighters strafe (fire on targets at a low altitude) a small town which we had left a few hours before. Rumors said many Americans were killed. That night we stayed in the small town of Polling which was about 16 miles from our starting point. We were sheltered in a large brick factory that night.

The next morning, we arrived in the small town of Neumarkt which was about three miles from Polling. We saw American bombers again carry out a raid over Nuernberg. The people in this village fled to the open fields for fear of an attack. Their own freight yards were in a shambles from an earlier raid. Later in the afternoon, we camped in the woods.

Because some of our troops were killed while walking during daylight hours, either the Germans or Americans decided that we should march at night. That night, on April 5th, at 8:00 P.M. we started down the road in a steady downpour. Guards and dogs accompanied the formation on each side of the marching column of prisoners. The guards were mostly older men who probably wouldn't have been too effective on the front lines.

After about an hour of marching, we noticed that both the guards and dogs started to lag behind. The rain showed no signs of stopping. It was then the four of us decided to escape. The plan we thought would work was for each man to watch for the right opportunity to fall off to a

safe distance away from the road when out of sight of the guards and dogs then wait until the formation had passed by. The man who dropped out last was to walk back, join the others and then we would all develop a plan to get back to freedom. The first of my roommates to go was Joe Kwederis, the second Quentin Coyle, the third, George Neiheimer, and the final man, Ralph Haley.

The neat part of this plan was that George had gone into the kitchen before we left Stalag X111-D and managed to acquire a 5 lb. sack of barley. This was great food since you could put a handful of barley in your mouth, take a drink of water and have yourself a meal.

Everything seemed to be going according to plan. I stayed in the ditch for about two hours until the remainder of the formation passed by. I then started back to join my roommates. I walked back and back and to my surprise and dismay didn't find any sign of them. Both Coyle and Kwederis told me later that they were captured almost immediately. George, the man with the food, was never heard from again. It was surmised by some that he may have been captured by SS troops and shot.

It was still raining steadily, so I headed west to see if I could find the American Forces. It was about 2:00 A. M. in the morning. After about two hours of walking and running I saw a church where I spent the night. The next day I headed down the road. It wasn't long until I saw German troops, tanks and trucks headed my way but in the opposite direction. The entire formation appeared to be intent on reaching some pre-determined goal. None of them paid any attention to the stranger on the road as they sped down the highway.

It was then that I decided to walk at night and hide out in the daytime. Although it was more difficult to walk around towns than through them, I managed to make progress toward my goal. My supply of chocolate D bars was finally used up but there was plenty of water in the streams and I helped myself to the potatoes and kohlrabis that were buried in the fields. Even though I was somewhat cold when I hid in the woods and bushes in the daytime, I began to feel confident that I could make it back to the front lines.

On the sixth day when I was holed up in the bushes, a German women came into the forest to gather wood. She got near to my hideout spot and finally saw me. She was very frightened and was about to run away. I asked her in German to please wait. I told her in the best German I could muster that I was an American soldier, was separated from my troops, had no weapons and was very hungry.

This seemed to settle her down and she seemed to want to help. She told me that she had two sons fighting on the Eastern front and was concerned about them. Finally, she showed me her watch, changed the time to 5:00 O'clock and said she would bring me some food. Sure enough, at the appointed time, she showed up with the end of a slab of bacon, a loaf of bread and two eggs. I broke a piece off the bread, cracked the eggs and maneuvered them around the bread. My first bite was delicious! I thanked this motherly lady profusely and bid her goodbye. (Some six months after I was discharged, the son of this same lady sent a letter addressed to Ralph Haley , U.S. Air Forces. Somehow, the letter was tracked to my home in Denver. The son wrote that his mother had always

worried if I had made it to safety. I wrote back that I was alive and well and again thanked her for helping me in my time of need).

It seemed important that I move my location away from the immediate area and I settled on another hideout about 500 hundred yards up the forest. I was hidden in the bushes when all at once a dog was hanging on my leg, a Hitler youth was ready to stick a knife into me, and a group of about eight German soldiers with rifles drawn ordered me to get up.

The German Sergeant in charge quickly pulled the nervous and excitable Hitler Youth away and the soldiers then marched me about a half mile away to a small village. The entire group stopped at a nearby bar and each man, including myself, ordered a drink. My choice was schnapps (German Whiskey). As soon as the drink was set down before me, I finished it in one gulp. Suddenly, the Germans realized what I had done and loudly complained to the Sergeant. He calmed them down and said he would be the one to take whatever action was necessary. After the drinks were finished, the Sergeant and his group marched down the street to a small building where he took me into his office. He offered me a chair and asked me what I was doing all by myself in this part of Germany. He was a man in his fifties and looked a lot some of my uncles who came to visit at my parent's house back in Denver.

The Sergeant reached in his desk drawer and showed me a picture and a snapshot of his son who happened to be a prisoner in the United States. The son was very complimentary of the good food and fair treatment he was enjoying in the United States. The Sergeant then told me that since they had no jail facilities in this village, I would be

transferred to the next town. We shook hands and he ordered one of the soldiers to march me on a two mile trip to the town of Abenburg. This town was approximately 50 miles from the point where I had escaped from the formation.

When we arrived, I was turned over to a Hungarian outfit. I was immediately put into a room where I stood with my hands up while they performed one of the most thorough searches of my life. They were especially curious when they discovered an ordinary package of cigarettes. Instead of cigarettes, however, I had little maps rolled up in paper. These were compiled just before I left Stalag 111 and came from German newspapers which showed how the war was progressing. These maps proved invaluable to me in identifying my location.

It was evident from the start that they had no use for me. After a extremely detailed physical examination, my new captors put me into an underground cell. They gave me a jug of water but no food. The cell had a dirt floor, no windows and no other prisoners. On the morning of the third day, a Russian soldier was put in the cell with me. About an hour later, two German soldiers were brought in. One of them told me that they were caught sleeping while on guard duty. It definitely became too crowded in this small cell but nothing was happening. I began to wonder if this was to be my ultimate fate-- to die from starvation while these three men stared at me. However, about an hour later, two German soldiers ordered us out. I arrived at the top of the stairs with a tremendous feeling of relief even though I could hardly see because my eyes were not accustomed to the bright glare of daylight. The two soldiers lined us up in front of them and signaled that we should start down the road. The

trip absorbed most of the day but we finally arrived at a jail in the small town of Schwabach where I spent from April 12 to the 14th with little food or water. My previous companions apparently were taken to some other place. The first day, a German soldier came in to see me and tell me about the death of President Roosevelt. He was wondering what effect this would have on the war effort. I offered him little consolation and observed that as far as I was concerned the war was almost over.

On the afternoon of April 14th, I was transferred to a permanent prisoner of war camp near Nuernberg. This was a fairly large camp and housed all of the Serbian Army which the Germans captured without a fight in the early stages of the war. There was also a large number of Russian prisoners, a smattering of Americans and others who were considered to be the enemy of the Germans.

There seemed to be plenty of food. I was issued a British Red Cross parcel which contained a lot of goodies such as plum pudding, cookies, bully beef, crackers, jam, oleo and tea. I was ravenous and tried to make up for the many days that had gone by without a decent meal. This plan proved to be my undoing. I became deathly sick and had my first real introduction to indigestion and heartburn. Within two days or so, I again began to eat more bully beef and crackers and far less of the rich puddings and cookies.

I was in this camp only a few days when we began to hear the distant sound of artillery fire. The sound came from the Forces of Gen. George Patton. Before long, we found that we were in the line of fire and shells began coming into the camp. One night, as we thought we were okay, a shell came right into our tent and killed the American in the cot

next to me. I ran out into the street and was just missed by a shell that didn't explode but rumbled down the street. Just as suddenly, the firing stopped. Somehow, the American troops must have received word that there was a prison camp and a hospital in this area and held their fire. Within a short time, the tanks, trucks and soldiers over-ran the camp. Although a number of prisoners in this camp were killed, it was beautiful to see the American troops storm the camp and free the prisoners. The date was April 14th 1944.

It didn't take long for me to realize that I was free and temporarily out of control of the American Forces who were intent on storming down the road to new targets. They did, however, take the Russians and Serbs into custody. I wandered into a nearby town and noticed some ex-POW's taking what they wanted from jewelry stores, liquor stores and a warehouse filled with ammunition and firearms. I selected a small 25 caliber revolver from the warehouse since it was a special weapon worn only by German officers. Also, I stopped by the liquor store and confiscated a case of six bottles of cognac wrapped in a fancy container. Somehow, this didn't seem like stealing, but I just couldn't take anything from the jewelry store.

The next asset acquired was a motorcycle which was still warm and ready to go. I started it up and went about sixty miles down the road before a bearing wore out. I then hailed a Volkswagen car containing two Americans heading for the city of Wurtzberg. They had painted a red cross on top of the roof of the car so they would not be mistaken for Germans. When I arrived there, I headed out to the airfield where I saw a number of American planes. I identified myself to an American Captain. He said

they had planes flying back and forth to Paris, France all the time. However, I wasn't able to get a plane that late in the afternoon and so spent the night at the airfield.

The next morning, I was stowing my precious cache of cognac on a plane. The revolver, (which was brand new and had never been fired) rested comfortably on my belt.

The Captain who flew me to Paris got a jeep from the motor pool when we landed at the airport and drove me into the city where he left me off at an office that was established to take care of returning prisoners. A jovial Air Force Major there outfitted me with a complete wardrobe of G.I. clothes and issued me \$200 dollars. (I had a nice fund built up since I was entitled to regular and flying pay during my internment). I was also assigned to quarters at the hotel du Louvre. This was a first class hotel and was located near the famous Louvre museum. Since it was getting late in the afternoon, I decided I would start on a personal campaign to make up for time and weight lost in prison camp. When I weighed myself on scales at the hotel, they showed 118 pounds-- quite a few pounds less than the 155 pounds when I was shot down.

It was late in the afternoon so I opened the first bottle of cognac to get prepared for dinner. I finished about a fourth of the bottle and started to get dizzy. Thinking what I really needed was food, I went down to a beautiful dining room in the hotel and ordered the most expensive dinner on the menu. After gulping down the soup, it was on to the prime ribs. After a few more bites, I was really sick. I hurried back to my room, crawled on top of the bed, felt somewhat better, and then decided to take a bath. Even this simple task was difficult so it was back to bed

to face another day. The next two days I was a free spender going to the Follies, Night Clubs, Shows and other activities. Soon, I had a problem.-- there was very little money left. Also, I didn't feel very good. For instance, I never knew anything about kidneys but they actually hurt a lot when I was intent on reducing my supply of cognac while having a drink or two at some of the night clubs.

I visited the Major the next day, but he did not appear as friendly as before. He hastened to remind me that I should report to Camp Lucky Strike for return to the United States. I mentioned that I had lost most of my money and threw myself on his mercy. I begged him for more money to see some of the famous museums and attractions in and around Paris. He finally took pity on me and gave me \$100 more with a final warning that when this sum was gone, I was to report back to him for shipment out. Fortunately, he appeared to be a busy man since more and more ex-prisoners were showing up and he didn't have time to follow-upon every returnee.

The next several days in Paris and environs were lived frugally and wonderfully. I ate most of my meals at reasonable prices at a huge commissary called "Willow-Run". The U.S.O. provided free or reduced prices on sight-seeinging trips to castles, museums, Arc de triomphe, Notre Dame Cathedral and scores of other attractions. All transportation was free for Americans in uniform so it was easy to visit places by train, bus or the Metro (underground subway). One memorable event was a dinner, auction and lavish entertainment at the Paris Opera House for returning French Prisoners which I attended as a guest of the French government.

After ten wonderful days of "Paris in the Spring", I reluctantly reported to the Major, thanked him for his generosity and received orders to Camp Lucky Strike --the staging center for both incoming personnel from the U. S. and ex- POWS.

I arrived there on April 30th and departed on May 7th, 1944. Most of my time was spent in attending lectures on how to adjust to life after prison camp. They particularly warned us to eat only at the tent where bland foods were served and attend the physical classes set up for this purpose. The vast majority of the men had come in to Paris in groups and were sent directly to this camp. Nevertheless, I heard that two of the men ate hot dogs and all the trimmings in the wrong tent, and died of acute indigestion.

On May 7th we boarded a small ship, crossed the English Channel and arrived at South Hampton, England for transfer to a much larger passenger ship for the trip to New York . We arrived there on May 19th. We boarded a train from there and checked in at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. At this base, I received orders transferring me to the AAF Redistribution Station at Santa Monica, California for processing and future assignment. A delay in route of 50 days, plus four days travel time, was also granted. I arrived at Lowry Air Force base in Denver on May 21st, 1945.

After a pleasant vacation in Denver flying B-24 "Liberator" airplanes at Lowry to keep up my flight pay, I reported to the Santa Monica, California processing center. At this center, we filed claims for personnel possessions lost while prisoners of war. Also, Income Tax forms were completed, and the remainder of back pay given to us. All of our records and paperwork was brought up to date.

Santa Monica was a great place to wait re-assignment and I spent the time with several of my Ex- Prisoner of War buddies enjoying the luxuries of a fine hotel and the companionship of the girls who came to our dances.

On August 8th, I was assigned to Douglas, Arizona to become an instructor in B-25 airplanes to teach six Chinese students how to fly this plane. First, I had to know how to do so. With eight hours of instruction, I found out that this two-engine plane with the bicycle landing gear would be no problem. This program of teaching Chinese students how to fly combat airplanes was a joint sponsorship of the U.S and China and I never did know why it was necessary.

My students also didn't seem too eager and liked to play the slot machines in the Officer's club more than flying airplanes. The language barrier was a continual problem but, in spite it all, they were learning to fly. Occasionally, our base would receive a telephone call from Mexico asking what we wanted to do about the two Chinese officers who were lost and had landed at their airport.

While at Santa Monica filling out forms, I made it clear in all my answers that I did not intend to stay in the military service. Shortly, I received orders sending me back to Denver on "Terminal Leave" with a date for discharge of October 26th, 1945. This date was changed later to September 20, 1945 to allow me to immediately accept a position with the Veterans Administration.

So ended my experiences in World War 11 before and during this great "War to end all Wars" and my transition to civilian life.

In this year of 1995, people throughout the world are commemorating the end of World War 11. Each person has their own memories, sorrows and thankgivings to contemplate. In my case, I thank God for his many blessings especially for a wonderful wife, children : grandchildren. LIFE IS GOOD!