

1945

Mar 30th target Bremen:

My radar equipment was not working well and we decided to follow the high squadron into the target and drop on them, about 15 miles from the target I picked it up and set up the bombsight for a release, Berkett told me that there was just a small cloud over the target and if we went around again we could get a complete visual run on the Sub-pens. We held the bombs and took the formation around again, we had already lost one ship on the first run. As soon as we leveled off and started the run the flak came up, I could hear it hitting the bottom of the ship, I saw two bursts off the #3 engine and Berkett said he was hit, I didnt think wed get through the bomb run, about the time we dropped the bombs I smelled gasoline, Jonson said there was something wrong with the ship. He feathered #3 engine and then #4 caught on fire, he feathered that one and we were flying on 2 engines, I could still smell the gas and looked out at the wing tanks and there was a hole in it the gas was pouring out very fast. We talked the situation over and decided to land in France, Hannsen fixed up Berkett who had some small flak wounds in his hands his oxygen hose was cut and he was unconscious for a while but they revived him O.K. About this time the electrical system went out apparently from a hit in one of the cables and we couldnt transfer the gas, there was nothing to do but either bail out or try to make our lines which at that time were just at the Rhine river. We picked up 2 P-51s for escort and headed for the Rhine river. We knew it was going to be close we came over the battle lines at about 400 ft. and the Jerries let us have with machine gun fire and light flak I could see the bullets and tracers coming through the ship, luckily no one was hit but Johnson saw a field and came down in a hurry. I was in the Radio room when we crash landed and I went through the waist door. I knew I had been hurt but didnt waste any time getting out of the plane. I was bleeding badly from my face and couldnt move my left hand, my feet and side were bruised and cut. Everyone was out of the ship by this time, we knew we were in Holland someplace close to the lines. We landed in a small field, There were some houses and a woods at the edge of the clearing. We were deciding what to do when bullets started zinging all around us and we all ran away from the plane. I had my shoes tied to my parachute harness. I took my harness off when I ran forgetting all about my shoes. We ran about 50 yds. when a little Dutch kid came running up to us waving a white Handkerchief, he tried to tell us there were Germans in the woods around us. We saw a bunch of soldiers coming out of the woods towards us, some-one said they looked like Canadians, We walked toward them with our hands up, They were coming out of the woods in all directions and they were Germans. There was an Officer with them and he told us to keep our hands up while the soldiers searched us. This Jerry that searched me was more scared than I was he was almost afraid to touch me. He took my escape kit, ciggarettes, lighter and candy bar I didnt have my gun with me. They took us to a little farmhouse about a 1/4 mile down the road. There were some Dutch people standing around there and one of them brought us some milk to drink. Some Dutch kid brought me a pail of water and towel and I was able to wash and clean the cut on my nose which had been bleeding a lot. He also gave me some Sulfa powder to put on it. One of the soldiers came over and wanted the senior officer of the crew. He took Maj. Schumake with him and they left. None of us knew what the score was and we were half afraid they were going to shoot us especially when Schumake didnt come back after about 15 minutes. A few minutes later they marched us back to the field where

the plane was and we saw Schumake standing there. It seemed one of the moto was still ticking over and they were afraid it would explode so they made ^{him} go in the plane while they searched it, there was plenty of stuff in it we hadnt a chance to destroy anything they took the maps and log and other stuff and put them in a bag which we took along. They marched us for about 3 hrs. and were evidently looking for someone to turn us over to. About this time I realized I wasnt going to be able to walk very far in the flying boots. We stopped to rest a minute and some Jerry wearing a snipers coat asked us where we had been, no one answered him and he said, "Thats what you get for going to Bremen." We finally reached some farmhouse where the guards turned us over to an Officer. He searched us again and took about everything else we had away. He then turned us over to 3 Germans who were wearing M.P. badges. We marched to another farmhouse down the road and picked up 2 Tommies who had been captured that morning. They told us the advance tank units were across the Rhine and we had actually landed about a mile from the English Tanks. As soon as it got dark we started marching we knew they were taking us behind the lines somewhere. The Germans were retreating then too. We must have walked about ten miles and we came to a little town, where we spent the night in a farmhouse. I could ^{hear} the machine guns and artillery fire all night. They woke us early the next morning and we stood on the highway till some truck came along and we rode on that for a while. They stopped at a little Dutch Cafe on the road and we all went in there, none of us had eaten since yesterday morning. The dutch people were very good to us we washed and they went to a lot of trouble to make us sandwiches and coffee, after that we sat around and talked to the owner and he told us he expected the English to take the town in 2 days. A lot of people kept coming in and looking at us I guess word got around, then the local Nazi big-boy came in he looked like something out of Paramount pictures. He had a gal with him and two soldiers for body guards.

We left there in about two hrs. and got a ride in a truck, while we were riding through some town a Spitfire came down and strafed us, we ran like hell into some alleyway. He blew up the truck we were riding in and we got a lift in another one, we went on the road 5 minutes when two Spits started working over the convoy, when they got through there wasnt a truck on the road that wasnt shot up including ours, about this time we all decided including the guards that it was a lot healthier walking. We became a little friendlier with the 3 jerries that were guarding us, they were all ex paratroopers from the russian front. They were pretty good boys and they were watching out for us, though I have no doubt they would have killed us all without batting an eye. They told us they were ordered to take us to Ennschede to a transient Prison camp there. One of them kept asking us whether we had ever bombed Dresden, his wife was killed in Dresden during a raid last week.

I had been on that raid but naturally didnt tell him about it. We walked all that day my feet were in bad shape but I managed to plug along. That night we reached Hengalo. We stopped there and they got us some bread and cheese from a Canteen where they were giving soldiers there battle rations. While we were eating there was an Air raid and we went to a place outside of town till it passed over, it was the RAF, meanwhile 2 Typhoons flew over the town and the Jerries opened up on them with tracers, I thought they were going to get one of them but he did

evasive action and got away. There was a little crowd of Dutch people standing around us, including some girls who kept looking at us and smiling. The guards told them it was alright to come over to us and one gal could speak a little English. She said we were the first Americans she had seen. She asked us if we fly the bombers, when we told we did she said "you make us very much afraid" We then assured her that we didn't bomb any Dutch towns. There was no doubt about the friendliness of the people and we all thought the same thing, if we could escape and hide out in one of these homes we'd be safe till the troops overran us. We talked it over though and decided it was every one escape or noone. It would be pretty rough on the rest if one got away. It was dark now and we watched the Germans retreating through the town, they were in bad shape making the most of wagons and horse drawn carts we saw very little artillery or tanks. We went to a hospital of some kind in the city expecting to get a place to sleep there, but they had no room and sent us to a schoolhouse. While we were in the hospital I was standing next to a German soldier he looked about Twenty good looking with blonde curly hair. He had a bandage around his neck where he was wounded. He offered me a cigarette and started talking to me. I was having a little trouble understanding him but could make out most of what he said. He just got back from the front and didn't like the idea of going back again. He didn't think the war could last more than a few weeks. He then asked me why I didn't get away and hide in one of the Dutch houses. He went along with us to sleep in this schoolhouse. We all laid down in a room filled with hay and went to sleep. When we woke up the next morning two of the guards were fast asleep and the other one had left to get some information. Johnson and I got a hold of this Jerry kid and started to form some plan to get away. It was tough going, we had a hard time understanding each other but we finally decided that we'd all leave at once and the German kid would march us all out of the town into the woods, we told him we'd make sure he got good treatment when we got back to our lines. We just had everything about settled when this other Jerry came back and he was mad as hell about something. All our plans went into the sink right then. From what we could gather the English were already shelling Enschede and instead of taking us there and getting rid of us they would have to take us someplace else. That was a rough day for us we walked for eleven hours without stopping once for rest or water. They were really mad too and none of us smiled or talked to them that day. The troops couldn't have been very far we could hear firing and we no sooner would cross a bridge than they would blow it up behind us. We had also crossed the Dutch border and were in Germany now, and you could sure tell the difference in the people, they spit at us and yell "terrorflieger" and "murderer" as long as the guards were with us they couldn't do anything, but I knew we were going to have to sweat them out. We finally arrived at a camp, it was a good thing too as we were all about ready to drop. They gave us each two slices of black German bread and some coffee. I thought we were going to stay there for the night but about an hour later we started to leave, the guards told us we would take a train out. We sat in a little woods for a while and while we were waiting our Guards fooled around with a couple of Frauliens, they were in some kind of uniform probably red cross or something. A little while later the town was under fire from our artillery and we left for the train station, that was the last train out and it was packed with civilians evacuating. It was night when we left, I fell asleep on the floor of the box-car but couldn't of been sleeping more than an hour when

they woke us up and we got off the train and walked to a jail of some kind. We slept there that night and left early the next morning. Luckily we got a lift on a truck and he took us all the way to Lingen. At Lingen we were ~~was~~ taken to a schoolhouse. While we were sitting around a couple of civilians came in they told us they were Dutch civil prisoners, later they brought us some soup to eat and a little tobacco. They were very nice and one of them fixed up my feet which were badly blistered and cut from the boots. We stayed there all day and they kept bringing other prisoners in, mostly English tank boys and a few fighter pilots. About 4 o'clock they rounded us all up and we walked to a garrison of some kind in the city. We sat around there a while and some Luftwaffe boys came over to us, they all wanted to know when we thought the war was going to end, they said Germany had lots of airplanes but no gas. While we were talking to them some Wehrmacht Major came over and started to yell at them for talking to us and fraternizing, he got all excited and said we were not soldiers but murderers. Some of the boys were smiling at the way he was carrying on, and he said if anyone of us smiled he'd shoot him. Nobody smiled. They got a bunch of guards and marched us back to the schoolhouse, we were all glad to get out of there, that guy was dangerous. As we marched through the city we could see they were getting ready to defend it. We slept in the schoolhouse and about 3 A.M. our troops started shelling the city. They got us out and marched us out of the city, there was heavy fighting going around the outskirts of the town the Germans were retreating along the same road we were marching on.

We walked all that morning, after a few hours my feet gave out, I was almost ready to call it quits when I spied a bicycle in a ditch. The Jerry guard got it for me and it saved the day as I was able to get along pretty good on the bike. I noticed one of the RAF boys beside me was limping badly when I asked him the trouble he told me he had two bullet holes in his leg. Seems when he was shot down they rounded up his crew and while they were walking two German officers opened up on them with sub machine guns, he ran into a woods but the rest of his crew were killed, he hid out for two weeks before they found him and he wouldn't say anything about his leg because he was afraid they'd ask questions. They - There was a kid marching along with us wearing a German coat he looked about 15 or so. I found out he was a French kid that they had taken in Metz for slave labor and he had run away. They were mad as hell because he was wearing the German coat I figured they'd kill him, I guess he knew it too because he tried to escape but they caught him and beat him up. We finally reached a town that afternoon and we all got on a train, I didn't like that train deal as the fighters were strafing all the trains. Besides a bunch of Hitler youth and some SS also got on the train. We rode along on the train for about two hrs. and sure enough there were Spits strafing up ahead of us. The train stopped and we all ran into the woods. The Spits worked over a convoy just up ahead but didn't touch our train. It was a good thing because I'm sure those SS guys would have shot us, as it was they had a big argument with our guards about us. Meanwhile I saw one of the guards take this French kid into the woods and shoot him. The Spits went away and we all got back in. Some Hitler Youth kid came over and sat in our compartment, he could speak a little English, he asked me why I didn't run away in the woods when the Spits were strafing. I told I couldn't walk let alone

run. He said if he was a prisoner he would swim the channel to get back. He told me he was going to the East front, but didn't think the War would last more than a few more months. Then he asked me why I bombed women and children, I asked him why the Luftwaffe bombed Coventry. He didn't answer that but told me a story of a Fighter pilot strafing a schoolhouse and killing 400 children, he shook his head and said he could never do such a thing. He tried to impress me with his bravery and his conversation was getting boring to me, but I kept on talking to him because I knew he had some cigarettes. I had smoked about two of them and was about ~~to~~ ^{to} get some sleep when I heard the Guard arguing with one of the SS men. This SS guy was determined to kill someone that "flies the four motored bombers". That was us, and it was a touchy few minutes while the guard tried to convince him we flew Red Cross Planes, evacuating wounded and dropping supplies. He finally went away and none of us were sorry when we got off the next morning. We marched all morning stopping once to rest we were all terribly hungry but the best we could do was some Jerry bread and water. I had held on to my bike and was sharing it with one or two of the boys, that way we managed to keep going. About 5 P.M. that day we reached the town of Oldenburg and we went to a Garrison in the city. They separated the Officers and enlisted men, and put us into cells, three in a cell. The cells were formally used to keep horses in and were cold and damp with nothing but some hay on the floor. We were too tired and hungry to care much though. They fed us some carrot soup that night and we went to sleep. Early next morning they woke us up, some high ranking Luftwaffe Officer was there. He came in my cell, asked me my rank which I told him, he then asked me my position on the crew, I told him I couldn't answer that. He then asked me if I had any complaints I asked him for some blankets, he said they didn't have any that we had bombed the warehouse where they keep blankets for the prisoners, it's your own fault he said, and walked out. That afternoon they took the officers, there were 9 of us, and we were put up in some rooms, they brought in some food and coffee and also a razor and hot water to shave and wash. Things were looking up. There were a couple of Russian prisoners and they gave us some cigarettes. They used the Russians to do the dirty work around the Post. All the men in this camp were recovering from wounds and waiting reassignment to the front. Some of them came in to talk to us and we could always chisel a cigarette. There was one kid that was pretty nice, he told me that he was in the Hitler Youth and they had ~~asked~~ ^{asked} told him that he would have to join the SS, He said that made him mad and he joined the Wehrmacht. His home was in Hamburg and his house had been blown up 3 times. He was a good kid and came in to see me often always bringing a few cigarettes. He noticed the wound on my nose and took me to the hospital to have it looked at. While we were in the hospital there were a bunch of civilians waiting there also, they saw my flying boots and started that "Terrorflieger" stuff. A couple of them started for me but the kid took out his gun and made them leave. I finally got in to see the doctor and he said I had a piece of flak in my nose, I guess I was hit by that light stuff just before we crash landed and didn't even know it. He took it out and said it would be alright. The Officer in charge of the Post was a typical Prussian soldier very military, he came in to see us and I noticed him looking at me. I knew what he was thinking and began to worry a little bit. I knew I'd have a rough time if they found out I was a Jew. I went into the Latrine and there was a big picture of Roosevelt Stalin and Churchill with "Judens" in big letters under it. That night they took us

one by one for interregation. They were puzzled by the fact that we had so many Officers on the crew and we had come down so far from the target I guess they thought we were on some kind of a secret mission. I was waiting outside the office for my turn and there was some ~~gal~~ gal there, I dont know if she was the Jerries wife or what, she wasnt a bad looking gal a little on the solid side. She could speak a little English, she asked me if we loved ~~Hitler~~ - Roosevelt like they loved Hitler, I told her if we didnt like him wed get some one else. Then she wanted to ^{know} why we were allies with the Russians who were animals. I asked her why they were allies with the Japs, she replied that they were good soldiers and not like the Italians. They called me into the room then. There were one or two soldiers there taking notes The Jerry Officer and a little weasel looking guy in civilian clothes who was the interperter. The Officer said somethoing to him and I heard the word Juden and knew what was coming. He looked at me and said "Are you a Jew?" I told him no, I was an American Indian. He translated this to the Jerry who lookked smilingly at me and invited me to sit down. The Jerry Officer would speak to the interpreter and he would ask me the questions. He started out by saying this wa an informal talk and that nothing would be recorded. He asked me my name and rank which I told him, he wanted my next of kin and home address, when I refused to tell him he started a long sob story about not being able to notify my parents that I was a P.W. and how they would worry about me etc. I still refused to tell him and he asked me geustions about my crew position target and stuff like that, I refused to an wer anything, and he swung the conversation around asking me what I thought of Germany, my opinion of the Nazis and things like that. He then brought out a bust of Hitler he asked if I recignized it, I told him that was Hitler, at which he exclaimed, "The American cartoonists dont draw him that way!" He then brought out a big map and explained to me how the Russians were going to attack Britian through the Baltic. h e finally tried to impress upon me that Nazis werent bad people pointing out that everyone in the room there was a Nazi and how nice I was being treated. He ended the interregation by giving me a ciggarette and a piece of candy, and I went back to my room.

We stayed at Oldenburg another day and the next evening we were moved in a big barn with the rest of the enlisted men, it was obvious something was up. That night they told us we were to ~~leave~~ leave Oldenburg the next day. The Germans were busy hauling stuff out of the camp and burning records and such. About 3 a.m. the barn door was opened and the Guard was all excited about something, we finally made him out, it seemed the Tommy tanks were closing in on the city and he wanted us to go and hide with him and he would surrender to us. We told him to scram we didn't want him to surrender. He tried persuading us a few times that night and was actually getting panicky, but no one paid any attention to him. We left the next morning and walked through the town, the people were starting a refugee train out of the city. One old guy was standing up on the second floor of his house yelling like hell at us, he let out a few spits at us when we passed.

We walked down to the canal and were loaded in a barge. There were about a hundred of us now and we were crammed into the hold of the barge with barely enough room to stand. None of us slept that night because there was no room to lay down. When we left the barge at Wesermunde all of us were black and dirty again. Wesermunde is a port and was badly bombed, there was a lot of bomb damage in the city most of the people were living in shacks outside the city. We were taken to some kind of a naval training base and hung around there for about three hours, later they took us to the city jail and we slept that night in cells on the floor. Early the next morning we were put on a train and traveled due East most of the morning. After we left the train we walked about 15 miles and arrived at a prison camp which looked like a country club to us after all this marching.

When we got in there they told us that the Airman would go to a different camp this was just for the ground forces. We received our first Red Cross parcels there. We slept there that night and early the next morning we took a train for Hamburg. We were going to a Dulag Luft for interrogation by the Luftwaffe. None of us liked the idea of going to Hamburg when we got there our suspicions were confirmed the city was practically leveled and the people were very hostile. I had bombed Hamburg myself and just strung the bombs across the city. We got a good look at what our bombings could do and it was pretty rough the city was horribly torn up hardly a house had escaped damage we had killed thousands of civilians in our raids on Hamburg. We took a subway to Pinneburg where the camp was and were greeted by a Luftwaffe Officer, we were searched again and put in solitary cells. We knew just about what to expect, we were all thoroughly familiar with their methods of interrogation through intelligence lectures. We were all filthy and dirty and had lice to the bargain and the next day we went to a Hospital in the city, again we rode on the subways with the people. At the Hospital we were deloused and took a shower and shave and returned to the camp that night. At the camp they told us we would ^{leave} the next day for Stalag Luft #1 which is located at Barth Pomerania, on the Baltic. They weren't going to bother interrogating us, another indication of the nearness of the troops. We also learned that night of Roosevelt's death.

Early the next morning we left by train with three guards, they were old guys and treated us nice. One of them had three children killed in the raids on Hamburg. Another had a son in a Prison camp in the States. He showed me a letter he received from him. The best we could do was a boxcar but we preferred that to riding with the civilians and troops. At Lubeck we picked up a crew that had been shot down the day before. I spoke to the pilot and he told me the civilians had killed the Navigator and his tail-gunner with pitchforks, he had a bad knife wound in his arm and the rest of the boys were beat up pretty badly. The trip took two days, when we arrived at the camp we were searched again and given clean clothes and shoes. My feet were so badly cut and blistered that I couldn't walk in the shoes for a couple of days. When we finally were taken to a compound in the camp it was old like old home week, half of my classmates were there and a lot of crews who had gone down from my group. Life in the Prison camp is a story in itself we actually stayed prisoners for 15 days and were liberated by the Russians. The 8th Air Force flew us out a week later.