

My Experience in World War II

By Forrest Steele Burns



Well, Company "E", 423rd Infantry, 106th Division left Camp Atterbury, Indiana at 10:30 a.m., Sunday, October 8th, 1944. We travelled in a troop train and all wondered where we would go. Finally found it would be Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts and arrived there about 4:45 p.m., October 9th, 1944. At Standish we were given shots, had orientation lectures, issued some new equipment, whistled at the WACs, as usual, stocked up on gum, soap, cigarettes, and stuff to trade overseas. Well, we were at Standish till the 16th of October and then went by train to New York. Got on a ferryboat and went to a pier where the usual Special Services band played and the Red Cross old gals gave coffee and donuts. Then on board and it was the Queen Elizabeth. We were double loaded and had to sleep on deck that night. Next morning, October 17th, 1944, at 7:30 a.m. we left the dock and I saw the Statue of Liberty for the first time – and me from New York State!

This ship sure was better than the others of my acquaintance. We have no escort and make a real good speed. Boat drills every day. A PX, two chows a day, two movies a nite. Nothing to do but watch the water during the day, or sleep, read, and talk. Chow is Limey style but I eat it, while I can. Pass Ireland on the 20th of October and into the Irish Sea. During the nite, we pick up speed and heel over from side to side. Next morning our C.O., Captain Maxcy S. Crews, Laurens, S.C., tells us that we outrun and dodged a pack of three submarines. Don't know how true. Sight Scotland on the 21st. In the evening and next day unloading begins. We get off about 5:00 p.m. About five baby flat tops and some destroyers are in the harbor. We get on a train and again the Red Cross coffee and donuts. Train ride all night and I can't sleep 'cause Ruthie is on my mind. Next day we arrive at Toddington, about 2:30 p.m. and the 2nd. Bn., 423rd Inf. is assigned a bunch of Nissen huts, clean them out and we're home. Life here is routine training, hike, classes, passes to Cheltenham, and other towns. Have a couple of dates with WAAFs. While here we have a demonstration of German weapons and uniforms. On November 16th I got a four day pass to

London with some of the fellas. Seen London Bridge, Big Ben, Thames River, Piccadilly Circus and rain. Met a nice RAF Sgt-Pilot and a nice girl who was married and lives in Couldson, about ten miles from London. Met her in Fitzroys Pub, but she was enjoyable to talk to. One day I found a park by Buckingham Palace and fed ducks and seagulls some bread. I really enjoyed it.

Our Thanksgiving Day was on the 23rd of November and it sure was a good meal and I only ate one helping. Our Bn. C.O., Lt. Col. Pruett said that we would leave soon for the action. It sounded good. Then on the 30th of November we were packed and loaded down and on a train in the middle of the nite. We got off the next morning at Southampton and aboard an LCT with a British crew. That night we pull out into the English Channel and set. I made the Limeys mad by fiddling with the radio and turning on a German broadcast. You should have seen them. Sea sick pills were issued but they taste too bad to swallow. On December 2nd, we come into sight of Le Harve and what a wreck it is. Docks, wharves, and ships are wrecked and sunk in the harbor. We debark on December 3rd and walk about six miles and then ride to our area for the night. Next day we ride about fifty miles and pitch pup tents in our company area. Stay here for two weeks. Have training as usual. Rains every day. We walk around and see the country. I sent my Christmas cards on the 7th of December and on the 8th we are paid and we pull out on trucks for Belgium. Stop at night and sleep along the road. Near the fire we made I found an old German rifle, probably dropped in 1940 when they came through here, for it was almost buried in the ground and stock all rotted. Next day on the road again and we finally get to a woods near Saint Vith. All along the road we see wrecked German tanks, guns, trucks, signs, but never any planes. We stay in the woods two days and it snows hard. One of the mornings a good looking girl goes down the road and I speak my first German, "Guten Morgan", and she answers with a smile and a "Ja, it is." So I'm happy. Well we move to a small town and into buildings about five miles from the Germany-Belgium

border. About the 10th of December the 106th moves into the line and relieves the 2nd Division which has been sitting there for a couple of months – no action. Our Bn. is in reserve. We are to go up on December 19th. Training and classes as usual. Early on the morning of Saturday, December 16th, some of us are awakened by a sound that we all take to be a plane low to the ground and in trouble. About 6:00 p.m. Sgt. Sciulli, the 1st Sgt. Starts running around and says the Jerries are making an attack and we are going up to help stop them. The Bulge has begun.

We pack and are ready about 8:00 a.m. Division headquarters near Saint Vith is shelled and the woods we were in before coming here. We get in trucks and are taken up to what is the front. My 1st scout Powers and old BAR man Dudley and Mitchell, my assistant, and “Bugs” Alexander were gonna get a bunch of something. The old artillery was really going to town and the “Screaming Meemies” of the Germans. Buzz Bombs appeared about every five minutes and .50 cal. machine guns fired at them. We dug in on a ridge overlooking a town on our left. Artillery was firing on the ridge across from us. At dawn I light my little gas stove and heat a “K” ration. It was eggs. Mitch and I were in the same hole and then “Bang” a couple of shells land over to our right and rifles start firing. Some one in the machine gun section is firing tracers at a clump of pines on the hill across from us and watching there I saw the flash of a gun. Must be an 88 or 50 mm. It hits a TD and sets an ammo truck afire. David Brown of Altoona, PA is the first one hit. Then for some reason we are told to retreat. Personally, I can’t understand it, for we are dug in and have not had any bad fighting as yet. But, I tell my men and trot out of my hole. Heard those bullets singing and wondered. We sure are disorganized, guys running everywhere. I keep as good a track of my men as possible. We reorganize somewhat and after going about five miles to the rear and right we are fired on by artillery but only two shells, one an airburst and one about one hundred yards to the right. Keep going on and up on a small hill where we are told to dig in. Just then a

ME 109 comes buzzing by us with a couple of P-47s on its tail. They fire a couple of bursts and the ME hits the ground. It looked good. Well, we start to dig and doggone if the ground isn't mostly shale rock about six inches below the surface. Up the valley we can hear the Jerry machine guns firing up a storm. Lt. Miller, who had been in Africa, said not to worry about them for the Jerries just kept firing to make you nervous and to help their own morale. I don't know. It's cold tonight, December 17th and hard digging. I am with Dudley, my BAR man and Martin, who is from Hastings-On-The-Hudson, N.Y. About 11:00 p.m. I tell my men to get some sleep, for we'll probably need it and they are only waist deep.

After watching a while, I fell asleep and woke up hearing Mitchell yelling that there were four Germans about fifty feet from our hole. We couldn't see anything and afterwards Mitchell told us he was coming over to see me when a flare went off in the distance and he spotted the Jerries and they spotted him at the same. Before he could shoot the flare went out and he started hollering. I left Mitch with the men and took "Red" Dore, a big husky fella with me, went out about 200 feet in front of our position and waited. All we saw was a big white rabbit or hare that came right up to us. I sure wish I could have shot him. Morning comes, we keep digging and put out further outposts to watch for the Germans. About 10:30 a.m. December 18th, Sgt. Sciulli says to drop everything but ammunition and rations. We are going to try to get to Schonberg before the Germans and hold it against them. We start out, but are fired on after going about three miles, and try to go around, but the Jerries are everywhere to the front. Stanley, my 1st scout, says he seen some at a small white house to the right, and before I can pass the word on, we see and hear them hollering about the "Crazy Americans". Firing starts and then as our mortar squads start to zero in, their artillery starts to zero in – on us. It seemed to be coming from two different positions, for there was a gun that fired and then we could hear the shell and one that fired and then "BANG". Luckily it is more to our right and rear, in the "F" Co. area.

No orders come to advance or retreat, and I thought we ought to do something. One shell almost took my boots off and I really got my nose down in an old truck track. But funny, somehow I'm not praying. After about twenty-five shells come in a fog that starts to veil us and the order comes to move back. I found out then that Hall, from Tennessee, had been killed and Assessor, had been slightly wounded. However, none of the fellas were shaken up or unnerved. Crossing the road, I almost stumble over a big dud that was laying on the road, and wondered, "Will it go off now?". Also I see another big hare that probably wonders about the same thing.

We re-organize and start forward again. More artillery and then Lt. Hanger, of California, our platoon leader, is hit in the behind. Baker's platoon is doing O.K. Got two machine guns and kill some young Germans, and take five prisoners. One of the platoon's men got a whole burst from a Schemeisser machine pistol in his arms from elbow to elbow. Sgt. Lloyd Auld, from Burkburnett, Texas, was so mad that he shot the Jerry that did it five times. We try to go on but can't according to the commanding officers. Dark comes, and we go back and get some chow and then are told that we are almost surrounded and the only way out is to leave all vehicles and go out by foot. We move out in complete silence for an hour or so and come to an evergreen woods where we are told to dig in again. We try but water fills in every shovel of dirt taken out. Mitch and I raid a half-truck which is stuck and abandoned and get a big shovel and one bedroll and two blankets and so go to sleep. Wake up and start cleaning our rifles, checking ammunition and men, and digging again. Open my "K" rations and take my rifle apart to clean, and then "Whooooee" – artillery starts again. I remember someone tried to get away in a jeep and a machine gun opens up and in the quiet that followed, the horn shorted and started blowing. I lost part of my rifle when I jumped in my hole at the first shell but picked up someone else's. Everyone started to dig again, and then another order to retreat. How could anyone do any good by running away all the time? We moved up the hill through

the underbrush, with bullets whining and the artillery banging. I got word that Mitchell was hit by artillery, but not how bad. Sgt. Auld said to me, "Burns, if I get out of this, I'll never hunt another rabbit, I know how he feels." Down in the valley we could hear the Jerries hollering "Anzuk", or maybe it was "Hands up". I have five of my squad left with me. We are supposed to be completely surrounded and the 422nd is supposed to be fighting to get us and make a corridor by which we can get out of the trap. Then, Col. Pruett, our Bn. C.O., orders "E" and "F" to form a skirmish line and get the machine guns that are firing to our front. I collect my few men and start down the hill.

"F" company is on my right and at the bottom of the hill where the trees ended and there was an open valley about one hundred yards wide, we halt till the line gets even and then charge across the valley, into some large pine trees. I fully expected some Germans in those woods so slowed down and closely looked around. Then a machine gun opened up down the valley and into the pines. We jumped behind the trees and I felt a sting on my arm and thought I got nicked, but there was no blood. I later found my jacket and shirt were cut. Then mortars opened up and quite a few of the men were hit crossing the valley. We tried to locate the guns firing and before we could they stopped firing and Lt. Kessenger, of the 1st Platoon and Sgt. Glenn Wright, said they would go to get more men and took three or four men with them. There were about fourteen of us then, Lt. Mangeri, 3rd Platoon, Sgt. Janick, Pvts. Roulie, Katkowski, and myself from "E" company. We waited and all grew quiet. Then we heard someone holler, "Are there any more wounded here?" from across the draw. We weren't and thought it might be Jerries so no one answered. I took my jacket and shirt off and found no wound so I didn't get the Purple Heart. We waited there till 6:30 p.m. when it got dark and decided to try and get back to the company.

We left three men there who would not come across the draw. We couldn't find anyone in the area where we had left the Bn. So as I had a compass we headed West to try to get back to our lines. I lead the way and the Lt. didn't volunteer so even if he had I thought I'd just as soon know where I was going and be responsible for myself and him. We went at a good pace stopping every hour or so for a break. Found later one of the men from "G" company had a big chunk out of his lower leg, but didn't say anything. We went through great pine forests and once through a Jerry tank park. We could hear their trucks on the road and hear them shouting. And the firing to the West of course. We came onto a power line that Roulie, who could speak German, said went by Saint Vith, so we decided to follow it, as it ran generally West. But after an hour or so we ran into an unfordable stream and so followed it till we came to a bridge. We went on till 4:30 a.m., December 20th, 1944, and then we stopped in a pine wood and rested till 8:30 a.m. when it was light enough to move. We had gone about two hundred yards and decided to stop for a while and make plans as to what to do. While sitting there, a column of Germans came through the woods about 250 feet from us with their horses and carts and stuff. There were about a company of them and they looked like gray ghosts in the early light. We slid to the ground and watched them. One man came to the edge of the road and looked in and I thought "This is it." But he didn't see us. After they had gone, we got up and headed West again. We could hear counter-battery fire to our right and so we knew we were close to the line. We came out of the woods looking onto an open field and large hill. We guess that the couple of men we saw on the top were Americans and were studying how to get up there and whether to try it in daylight or wait for dark. We decided to wait for a while and started back in the woods, when "Br-r-r-r-rp", someone let go on us. Boy, I sure hit the ground! The burst had went between Lt. Mangeri and I and the trees were all that saved us I'm sure. We tried to locate the guy but couldn't and so hid in a small growth of pines, which was an awful foolish move, I guess. I had field glasses and was looking around when I heard voices and looked to my right and there were a group of Jerries looking up the

hill and pointing. I watched them for a while and then heard voices from my rear and sneaking a look back saw about fifteen or twenty Germans with machine pistols coming toward me. Then I heard a shot and figured they had found someone and shot him or one of our men had fired at them. I lay there hoping that they wouldn't look too closely, but two of them came along and spotted me. I couldn't have fired and got away with it with so many and in such a position, so when they motioned me out, I went, of course.

They took me over to an officer who shoved a pistol in my stomach and asked where my comrades were. I told him I didn't have any. They searched my pockets and took my wristwatch, but didn't see my Parker "51" pen and left my bill fold and my pay book with me. He repeated his questions and then saw the other fellas that had been rounded up. He told me to go join my comrades and as he had been drinking a lot, I almost expected to be shot as I went. We were put under guard and one of them who could speak English said that he had worked in Montgomery Wards in Chicago before the war. Another was Polish and Katkowski talked with him. "For you the war is over" they told us. "Good barracks, warm, good food, etc." I'll admit it sounded good. As we stood there the Germans started to attack the hill and they made us get down on the ground so we wouldn't be hit by our artillery firing back. Some joke! Then two soldiers took over and marched us up the road to the rear. Along the way we seen all kinds of equipment, wrecked tanks, dead Jerries and Americans, and Jerries moving up. Lots of dead horses, for the Jerries used a lot of them. We are allowed to pick up overcoats, canteens, forks and spoons, etc. These guys certainly didn't treat us mean. Roulie and Katkowski interpreted for us so we knew something about what was going on. We saw some of our M-8 armored scout cars with the swastika painted on them. About 6:00 p.m. we arrived at Winterstadt or somethin, and were put in a stable with about 15 others from armored and infantry units. Slept on straw that night and the next morning we were taken out for "coffee" or what they called coffee. Tasted awful and I

said I'd never drink that stuff. It was made from parched acorns or barley, I think. I thought coffee was coffee the world over. I later changed my mind and was glad to get this hot stuff in me. Later that day we were interviewed and the officer said he knew what outfits we were from even if we wouldn't admit it. He said our girls were very pretty according to the pictures we had. Next day we were sent out to pick up German and American equipment and stack it up. Also we had to hunt for the German dead and line them up. The Jerries said we Americans were bad because their dead hadn't been buried and they always buried ours. We got two out of an old woman's house. One had suffocated when the haymow had fallen on him and his face was all black. But at least they were fresh killed. After we lined them up, groups of Germans came and looked for buddies and friends. We stayed there another day and the Jerries brought in six Australian fliers who were shot down a mile or so from here. Then along came a long column of men from the 7th and 9th Armored, 28th and 106th Infantry Divisions and we joined them.

We marched till December 24th when we stopped at Gerolstein, a small town which had a railroad through it. We were put into a large barn-like building where no one had room hardly to turn around in. That evening we were given a fifth of a loaf of bread and some molasses. While we were getting it, someone stole my overcoat and some socks and gloves. The next day our planes bombed and strafed the railroad and of course hit the hospital and wounded a bunch of prisoners who were in the boxcars setting on the tracks at that time. The people of the town were sure mad about the hospital and about 200 fellas had to go and put out the fire and clean up the wreckage. We left that town in the late afternoon on Christmas day, and were given a fifth of a loaf of bread and a fifth of a can of cheese. We hadn't learned to save our food and ration it out and were too hungry to do it anyway. We walked till the 31st, stopping at night in barns. We were supposed to stop at Prüm but didn't because our bombers had visited there during the day and bombed

the church in which we were supposed to spend the night. One day about 3:00 p.m. we were passing through a small town with tracks running through it, when we seen a couple of our bombers returning home from raids. Everyone wondered at that moment whether they had anything left, I think for I did. But as we crossed the tracks we heard the whishing of bombs and jumped for the ditches on each side of the tracks. Luckily they were off and didn't hit among us. The Germans laughed at us for acting so about our own bombers. We arrived on the 31st at Wirges and stayed in a fire-brick factory till the 4th of January, 1945. While there we had no heat or food except one-tenth of a Red Cross parcel which came from Limberg, about thirty kilometers away. And they were British and Indian parcels and had such stuff as tea, curry powder, and other foreign and uncookable things in them. The fellas smoked the tea, and I sure was glad I didn't smoke. We got very little water. We heard that bombers had hit the camp at Limberg and killed thirty American officers there. We were loaded into boxcars, fifty to a car, and given another one-tenth of a parcel. A little straw on the floor. We stayed on the siding one day and then moved out. Went through Frankfort-Am-Main one day and seen lots of locomotives and a bunch of passenger cars burned up. Seemed as though every time we got to a city the air raid sirens started blowing. We were never let out of the cars for water or to attend nature's call. Luckily we had our steel helmets yet and an open window. To get water we tied a rope on a helmet and drug it in the snow as we moved along.

We finally arrived at STALAG IV B and some of the men were too weak to walk the mile or so to the gate. We were given a shower, deloused, given a typhus shot, registered and our next-of-kin notified through Red Cross. I was given my dogtag with "STALAG IV B. 316947" on it. Our money was taken and we were given a receipt for it. Everything of military value was taken, and we were put in barracks and meals consisted of one-sixth of a loaf of bread and a kind of soup and maybe some boiled potatoes once a day. Twice a day we had "coffee". Roll call was every morning. I met about three

men from my squad and a few other NCOs that hadn't been sent out, but Cheshire, Bennett, Wescheleberger, Auld, Mitchell, and the others had been sent to STALAG III A, up near Berlin. I sold my pen for eighty cigarettes with which I got some ersatz pepper, a box of saccharin tablets, French jam, and some onions. On January 12th the NCOs were loaded into boxcars again which had a stove in with about twenty bricks of coal, but no straw. We were given half a loaf of bread and some meat for the trip. En route I traded my cigarettes for some of the fellas' bread. On January 13th we arrived at Gorlitz, which we heard was down near the Czechoslovakia border. There we found that STALAG VIII A which was supposed to be an American NCO camp, but it had British, French, Russians, Serbs, Belgians, Poles, etc. Here we were given another shower and delousing, and put in a separate area for "quarantine". Rations here were one-seventh of a loaf, four days a week and one-sixth of a loaf for three days. Also a soup or just potatoes around noon. Coffee came about 5:30 a.m. and about 3:00 p.m. A barracks leader was a 1st Sgt. from the 28th Division. Roll call every morning and the Feldwebel who took it was really O.K. He didn't keep us standing very long unless we mixed his counting up. Everyone had the GIs and so it was a continuous going and coming. We finally were put into another area and carried on a trade with the other nationalities, if we had anything to trade. I traded my field jacket for a Limey battle jacket and fifteen American cigarettes. Got a Klim can half full of rice for ten cigarettes from the Serbs and so filled my stomach for once. All we did was sit around and dream of food or talked, played cards, or slept. I didn't have any meat on my bottom so I had to sit on a blanket so my bones wouldn't hurt. We had two blankets but only wooden slats on the bed. News came in everyday from the Germans and supposedly from a secret radio. The Russians, Americans, and British were all making an offensive. On February 3rd, Ruthie's birthday, I sent her a card. I thought of her in between dreams of food. Russians were getting close and we thought we might be liberated soon. However on February 14th, we were evacuated from STALAG VIII A and headed west away from the lines. We were told they were moving us for safety's sake and in

compliance with the Geneva Convention, which said that a P.O.W. camp must be one hundred miles from the front. On February 16th, my 23rd birthday, we were given one-third of a loaf, some meat, and about one-third of a pound of cheese. It sure was an occasion. It had to last for the next two days. We walked on and on. Through cities and sometimes never seeing one. We stopped at night in barns, and every other night at towns with German garrisons in where we received rations for the next few days. The garrisons usually meant food but no hay.

On March 14, 1945 we had arrived nowhere. The Captain in charge of us was a good fella to us and told us that he didn't have any definite destination. We were just to be kept moving. On two occasions I had my bread ration stolen and on the second one on March 17th, I decided that I might as well start riding and save my strength. In the afternoon after a break, I faked total collapse and when the column started to move, I just lay there. Pretty soon the wagon came along and the Jerries tried to get me to walk but I pretended that I was out. They put me on the wagon, where I quickly revived. The wagon was slower than walking, but it didn't demand any exertion. That night we stopped in a small village and were fed an awfully good turnip soup. While we were being served it in a farmer's courtyard, I saw a big rabbit in a cage and tried to swipe it, but the other fellas said that I would get everyone in trouble so I didn't get it. After being fed we were taken to a barn with lots of hay in it, but I had had enough. I asked another fella from Reading, PA to go along with me and slip away from the column and make our way if we could to the lines. But he wouldn't. Said he was too weak and we'd never make it. So I hollered and asked the guard to turn on the lights so I wouldn't step on anyone as I went to the latrine. When I got to the back I asked a couple fellas if there was a guard back there. There wasn't so over the fence I went.

I had a blanket, a knapsack, a couple of boxes of matches, and a tin pail. After going about five miles I stopped for the night. In the morning I cooked some sugar beets and tried to shave with an old razor. Then I went on keeping to the woods and avoiding the farms and towns. Passed a couple of men driving wagons, but didn't say anything. Found some beechnuts that were sprouting, but still good. Kept on and hoped to find a railroad and maybe a farm house where I might steal a chicken or goose or something. The next day while cooking some sugar beets, I was spotted by some kids and had to take off up the hill. I lost them and rested for most of the day. Then I went and dared to ask at a farm house for some bread. The woman was scared and thought I was a Russian or a flyer or paratrooper or something, but they'd hardly be looking like I was. She gave me two large slices of bread and just then a man came up and I was too weak to run again. He took me to a small village about a mile away where a schoolteacher who could speak a little English asked me questions. Then I was given some more bread and a little coffee with milk in it and put in a stable with a bunch of straw for a bed. They took my pack and shoes away from me but my stomach was full, I didn't care. Next morning kids peeked in at me and a policeman came and took my name and STALAG number. Then at noon I was given a bowl of eleven large potatoes and some kraut over them. I ate seven of them and saved the rest. Then two soldiers arrived from somewhere and said I was to go with them. One had been airforce for he wore blue. We walked about five kilos and they told me it would be Spring in about two weeks, that leaves would be out and everything. We got on a little train and went to Gottingen where I was put in the guardhouse with German soldiers, but everyone had a separate cell. They fed me garrison rations for the time I was there. I pushed my wooden bunk up to the window and watched the drilling of the recruits and everything I could. There were two Sergeants here – one treated me good from the start and the other, who had only one eye, started out bad but got better. I tried to understand them and they me. I did find out that a blanket is a "ticker". On the third day a Volkstrum guard and a German Sergeant came and took me into town to the Gestapo

headquarters where they questioned me as to my relatives in the States and their addresses, where I had escaped, when, how many comrades did I have, what help did I receive from German civilians, etc. Finally I was taken back but not to the garrison, but to a Kommando camp of French and Belgians. There I was put in a room by myself, but a little later a Russian was brought in. We tried to talk to one another by using German, English, and Russian, but not much was said. A Jerry who had learned English in a school seven years before came in and asked me some questions about myself but he could hardly understand me as he hadn't spoken it for seven years and then I suppose American slang is different from book English. I was getting hungry so started banging on the door and finally got half a loaf of bread. Gobbled that down and when some soup for the Russian came he gave me half of that. I still had the GIs so asked to go out and in the latrine met a Belgian who could speak English. His name was Joel and he took me to his room where another Belgian gave me some medicine and a bar of Nestles chocolate. I was taken back to my room and went to bed. During the night another Russian was brought in and he gave me a drink of beer. Next day was Sunday and I was permitted to spend the day with the Belgians and had a good dinner. That night I was told that the next day I was to be taken to STALAG XI B. Andre, another Belgian told me that if I didn't want to go to say that I was sick and so would go to the doctor for a checkup. So I did and the next day went to town again to the Lazarette. The German doctor examined me and I was put to bed, and fed only oatmeal and charcoal. After two days or so I was permitted to have regular soup and bread. Met two British soldiers there who had been working in a rock quarry. After five days there I asked to leave as I didn't like to just lay around. Wrote Ma a letter on the 25th of March and the next day planes strafed the railroad and I was sent back to the Kommando camp. There I found two more Americans, one from the 106th and one from an armored division. The next day we went by train with two old German guards from Gottingen to Hanover, where we saw almost every building in ruins. Had to walk through the main section of town to the station. Bombers had been there

plenty of times before and there were incendiary heads of bombs laying just thick all around. The bombers had been there the night before and there were crowds poking in the ruins for valuables and stuff. The guy from the 106th was putting on a big act about how weak he was and moaning and groaning and wanted to sit down. The guards tried to get us to carry him but we said nothing doing. We were weak too. While he was sitting down an old German woman about 75 or 80 came along and offered him a sandwich she had in her pocketbook. It was probably her food for the day and although this fella had half a loaf made into sandwiches in his pockets, he took the sandwich from this old woman. Boy, it got me mad! We went on to the station, and no one paid attention to us hardly. We sat in the station for an hour or more and watched people coming and going just like the States. Finally we went to our coach, and began our journey to Falinbostel, where STALAG XI B was located. It is located about sixty kilometers northeast of Hanover.

We arrived there about four o'clock and walked to the camp. There we were searched and put in a temporary jail, pending trial, for we were classed as escaped prisoners. A Frenchman was in charge and it wasn't bad although we had only a small compound to roam around. Rations here were one-sixth of a loaf, and a soup or potatoes a day, and the "coffee" of course. After about a week, I was called in and was questioned about my so called escape and I told them my story about being weak and sick and falling by the way, when I woke up I was alone and so made my way to the nearest village where I turned myself in. The board must have believed it for I did not go to jail, but in a few days was sent out in the main compound and assigned to a barracks with mostly British paratroopers who were captured at Armeim. There were a few Americans in here from the 106th that were at Gorlitz with me. The barracks were so crowded I had trouble finding a place to lie at night. Everywhere guys would say that spot was taken. After one Limey had told me that, I struck a match to see where I was and

then he said that maybe he could move over and make room for me. Of course, it was the matches he was after and asked for a light soon after. Anyway I had a place. Rations were the same here. During the period before this I had never had any lice on me but after a couple of days, I started to feel them running around and itching. So the days were spent in delousing clothes and walking around the compound. One day about 600 air corps men came into camp. Said they had been walking from the East near Poland. They were well fed tho' and said they had had plenty of Red Cross on the way. It made things even more crowded and so the Jerries put up a large tent and most of them were put in there. We got about one and a third Red Cross parcels while we were here. We heard news that the Americans and British were coming at a fast pace and it wouldn't be too long before they would reach here. We could see civilians and a lot of army vehicles moving to the rear on the road nearby. Explosions began to go off all around us as the Germans blew up buildings, bridges, and things of that nature. "British and American Prisoners of War" was written in large white letters on the roof of our barracks. Then planes began to be seen, British "Typhoons", firing rockets at AA positions to the West and one night the barracks was fired on by a night fighter that saw a light in one barrack. The guys sure were afraid to make a light at night after that. Got ten guys in from the 2nd Division that were captured between Kassel and Hanover. They said that they had met hardly any opposition at all till they came to the small town in which they were captured, then there were Tiger tanks all over the place. These were infantrymen and had been riding on the tanks and in trucks almost all the time. One fella had his face all black spotted and said he was in a basement and a tank had rolled up and stuck the gun muzzle in and fired. And so he had gotten powdered burned – wonder he wasn't deafened. We heard that the Germans had agreed to a five-mile circle of neutral ground around the camp and so everyone was a little relieved, for we had some SS barracks across the road from us. No one knew what they would do. We did hear quite a bit of fighting around and within five miles.

About 9:15 a.m. on April 16th, 1945, we heard a cheer and tanks appeared at the entrance to camp, and darn it was the British and not Americans. It was the 2nd Army. There were about eighty old German guards who had been left to keep order and they went up and surrendered. The British wanted everyone to stay in the compound, like darn fools, and of course everyone was out to find food and souvenirs, and anything we could.

While looking around, who did I see but Krushinski, of the weapons platoon. He had been hit by a mortar in the foot and was still on crutches. I found some macaroni and sugar and lots of other junk. Took one German's dogtag and Solbuch, or service record, and money, while he was being searched. In one warehouse found a camouflage jacket and two flare pistols. Got a couple of newspapers and some stamps. That night we were told that we would be moved to an airfield and from there flown out of Germany. We stayed one night at a British camp and the next day got to the airfield and were flown out by C-47s. Boy that field's barracks were sure wrecked. On the way out we watched for a while, and saw more fields bombed and then I stretched out on the floor and slept. We finally came near Brussels, and when we landed I was in the latrine. We were fed tea and cookies by the Red Cross and taken to some barracks where we were given twenty dollars in Belgian money and some soap and razor and stuff by the Red Cross. We were deloused and took a shower, and then to bed. Next day we were loaded into boxcars and went to Namour, where the Americans finally took us over. Got a physical, a typhus shot, new clothes, and twenty dollars in French money. Stayed here for two days and had good meals with French girls for waitresses. Went to town for the first time on my first night and met a guy who took me to a place where the lady gave me a steak and French fries and there was a girl there celebrating her twenty-first birthday and sent me over a big piece of cake. Couldn't say anything other than "Merci". It sure tasted swell. Then I bought two or three little pies from the lady and took them back to camp. Next day we were given six cans of "C" rations and

loaded on a train. We travelled all day and night and part of the next day. At one stop I noticed my eyes were turning yellow and went to the medical officer. He told me I was getting yellow jaundice and to report to the hospital when I reached Camp Lucky Strike. I did and was sent to the hospital. I hid a pair of pants and a jacket under my mattress for later uses. Boy sure had cute nurses here, but they wore coveralls instead of dresses. I was fed by tray and had 12 vitamin pills a day plus orange juice or eggnog in between meals, but me, I was still hungry. So slipping out the back door I beat it to the mess hall and ate two or three helpings there too. Boy, I really gained the weight. I met Mitchell, Di Lodivico, England, and a couple of others in the mess hall. Stayed in the hospital for two weeks and then was well enough to leave. Wrote Ma a couple of letters and Ruthie too. While we were being processed to leave, word came of Germany's surrender. After about three days of waiting and waiting, we traveled to Le Harve by truck and went aboard a Liberty ship. We were one day in the harbor and then our convoy set sail. This was about May 12th, 1945. I was so afraid of getting sea sick again that I stuffed everything in me that I could eat. We had pretty good meals and no labor to do, so it was eat and sleep and go up and watch the water. Luckily I didn't get sick the whole journey.

One night we ran into fog and had to stand ready to abandon ship for we were in waters where icebergs had been seen. But we didn't see or hit anything. Journey was uneventful and on June 2nd, 1945 we arrived in Boston harbor. The band was there again with the reception committee. As we went aboard our train, the Red Cross and their everlasting donuts, and milk this time, were there. We went to Camp Miles Standish again and were oriented as to what was going to happen to us. We were here one day and as I had put in for Camp Atterbury, Indiana as being my closest post to home, I went there. Arrived there the night of the 4th and on the 5th I was on a sixty-two day furlough. Of course, I decided to head to Ruthie's but had to go to town and ship my stuff home first. In town I met Nonie, Dorothy and rode out to the farm with them. I snuck

into the house and there's Ruthie talking on the phone. Boy, she was so tan! She gave a gasp and almost dropped the phone on the floor. Guess she was surprised. That night I had a date with her, and asked her to marry me. She said that she wasn't ready to marry and that I was all mixed up, so that was that. She was going to come home with me for a week but couldn't get away. So I sent home and after the furlough went to Miami Beach, Florida for two weeks and came to Camp Atterbury again and was discharged August 26th, 1945.

Forrest Burns

Added by Ruth Fiesbeck

After he was discharged, he went to Louisville and got a job with the Telephone Company, instead of going back to his home in New York. He would come to Columbus every weekend to see me. We were married February 24th, 1946. Then, in June 1951 he was called back in service during the Korean War. He was sent overseas January 26, 1952 and killed August 30th, 1952.

POW In WWII: December 20th, 1944 – April 16th, 1945