

April 7, 1997

Mr. Kenneth Larson
200 North Commonwealth Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90004

*Personal
experiences*

Dear Kenneth,

You probably think I should have gotten back to you sooner, I apologize. I have read and re-read your various letters with much interest. I was in "M" Company as a heavy machine gun squad leader. We were in support of I, K and L Companies as they were trying to break through into Schoenberg. We were all captured around 4:30 P.M. on 19 December 19. The location was about 1,000 yards southeast of Schoenberg.

When I was captured I spent the first night in a church yard at Bleialf, then we walked eastward to a town east of Pruem named Dockweiler Dries. We stayed there for a few days, then on Christmas day we were put on the road and marched to Koblenz (on the Rhine). At Koblenz, while staying in some old German three story barracks, we were bombed for two days by British bombers try to hit the rail yard nearby. We left Koblenz one evening and marched over 25 miles to Stalag 12-A (east of the Rhine River). We were put on box cars there and rode six days and seven nights to the Elbe River an put into Stalag 4-B, Muhlberg, Germany.

Rather than tell you all this, I am going to give you a copy of my diary. That will tell you all about me.

Those were very interesting times. In part of your comments you mentioned (wondered) if we would have lived much longer. I don't think I would have. I couldn't walk when I was liberated and had lost over 50 pounds. All total I walked over 525 miles and only spent one month and one-week in compounds. Read about it in the diary.

I am getting ready to put together another book. You probably have read *The CUB of the Golden LION: PASSES in REVIEW*, which was a compilation of the many stories that appeared in The CUB magazine from 1947 to mid 1991. I have a couple file drawers full of information such as you wrote and will put your papers with the rest. I intend to make part of the book as personal stories, or at least parts of personal stories. With so many people captured, just about every diary or story eventually sounds pretty much the same, so I will have to research each one and come up with the interesting parts. I was in Astor's book. In the back where he gives personal experiences.

I appreciate the photo copies of *The Day the War Ended*. I do not have that in my personal collection and will try to find a copy.

Hope the diary enclosed brings back some memories.

Colonel Alan W. Jones wrote an interesting story about the 423rd Regiment in the May 1996 CUB. I do not have an extra copy, as a matter fact I do not have a copy at the moment. I loaned it to a friend to copy. When he returns it I will make you a copy of that story.

Thanks for sharing your experiences with me. Good Luck. Hope to meet you sometime.

John Kline, Editor
The CUB magazine
106th Infantry Division Association
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Apple Valley, MN 55124
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200 North Commonwealth Avenue
Los Angeles California 90004
June 13, 1996

Colonel Alan Jones, Jr.
Retired
U. S. Army
Fort Belvoir, Virginia

Dear Colonel Jones:

To John B. Kline, CUB
Editor. 5401 U. 147th Street
Apple Valley MN 55124-6637.
This is a carbon copy of the
letter sent to Colonel Jones
who wrote me and sent your
address and news about CUB
newsletter. Kenneth Larson.
February 24, 1997.

I have been reading the book by Gerald Astor called A Blood-Dimmed Tide: The Battle of the Bulge by the Men Who Fought It.

In particular, the accounts related to the Battle of the Bulge are of unusual interest. I served my basic training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, starting on January 2, 1944. I entered the U. S. Army at Fort Lewis, Washington, on about December 4, 1943. After basic training, I was sent to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, to join the U.S. 106th "Golden Lion" Infantry Division (about August, 1944). I had turned 19 years old on August 22, 1944.

(Camp Miles Standish)

After joining the division, we left for a camp near Boston, Massachusetts, and then left New York City Oct. 17, 1944, Queen Elizabeth. The division probably arrived via Scotland and some area near Birmingham, England. We had about one month's training in England (probably October-November 1944) and then sailed across the English Channel to Le Havre, France. We moved north across France and entered Belgium or Luxembourg via the Red Ball Express (packed into the rear of the trucks in cold and rainy weather). We probably entered a small village up near the Schnee Eifel sometime around late November or early December, 1944. At the time, we were told the area was quiet, to watch out for snipers, and to keep an eye out.

Early on the morning of December 16, 1944, I woke up out of a sound sleep by the noise of what proved to be German V-1 "buzz bombs" moving overhead and sounding like a tractor motor. We were told to climb on our vehicles. There was a great amount of confusion and hurry. I think I was with the 423rd regiment. At any rate, we saw crossroads hit by German shells, German V-1 bombs, German artillery, burning American ammunition trucks hit by 88s, etc. We encamped, dug slit trenches in cold ground and were around trees and snow. This was probably up on the Schnee Eifel where the Germans started their attack--and we were apparently strung out along an 80-mile line along the Ardennes.

Probably around December 17, I was coming off guard duty at around 4:00 A.M. to return to my slit trench. It was very dark, and my metal helmet hit a tree branch. The noise startled me, and I called out. Unknown to me, another American soldier in Company K, 423 Regiment,

heard the noise, picked up his M-1 rifle, and shot toward me. He did not call out or yell anything. The bullet hit me in the right side and came out the back, missing the spinal cord. I saw a white flash and fell down. Some other soldiers picked me up and carried me into the company command post. I was then carried on a litter to an emergency station or some kind of lodge or hut. At the time, I was a private rifleman in what I think was Company K in the 106th "Golden Lion" Infantry Division, 423 Regiment.

We saw abandoned American equipment, jeeps, guns, etc. The next day (December 18), German troops entered and took us prisoner. I had been taken before this during a battle on an American ambulance with other wounded, and we were left at the hut. Also, we were later strafed by Allied planes while on German trucks on a narrow road alongside German tanks. We jumped out and hit the ditch. A German doctor operated on my back in some kind of barn (where I had passed out). We were told that the dead soldiers were stacked up out in the courtyard. Eventually, we entered a German Red Cross train similar to the train described by Major Desobry in Astor's book (with American music, Bing Crosby's White Christmas, and wounded American and German soldiers). Oddly, I happened to talk to the wounded (in the head by a German shell near Bastogne) Major Desobry while at the station near Andernach, Germany. We talked about Hawaii--where he had lived before the war.

In 1984, when I read Captain MacDonald's book called A Time for Trumpets, I happened to read about Desobry. I wrote to MacDonald, and he sent Desobry's address in Texas. I wrote to him, and he recalled our talking at the railroad station on about December 19, 1944. Eventually I arrived at a hospital in a small German town and stayed there for about a month along with other Americans and British soldiers. If I had known, I would have stayed there--in spite of nearby canal bombed by Allied bombers and a B-17 I saw shot down and a fighter. After a month of recuperation, I was sent to Stalag 11-B about 40 miles north of Hanover, Germany. This was (I found out later) near where Anne Frank had been held captive until she passed away in March, 1945. We did not know about the German concentration camps until the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945.

By the way, some of my letters were cited by Oxford University professor history Martin Gilbert in his 1995 published book called The Day the War Ended: May 8, 1945. He sent me a free copy on April 20, 1995. Also, a letter was cited in the American book called Voices. I told Gilbert that one unusual incident occurred in the large international prisoner-of-war camp near Fallingsbostel, Stalag 11-B. Tired and cold and hungry, I went up near the main wired entrance fence one morning--and unexpectedly a loud-speaker on top of the fence

burst out into song with a recording of Blue Skies sung by the American entertainer Bing Crosby. The sudden incident lifted up my low morale, and I decided then and there I could make it thru to the end of the war. We all lost weight, had a bowl of soup and a hunk of bread per day, and stayed there for about 3.5 months. Conditions were not good, altho we were not hit by the Germans. We traded for bread (over the wire fence).

Sometime around January or February, 1945, a large group of American airmen came into our camp for a week or two after having been marched westward some 500 miles thru snow and ice to escape the approaching Russian Army. About two years back, I talked to an American lady in Florida who thought her military intelligence husband may have been in that group. Then they left (with thousands of others who walked in western Europe during the period of March to April to May, 1945). I read some of these accounts in Professor Gilbert's 1995 book.

As I understand now, our division was hit by several German Panzer and regular armies. Thus, our division was surrounded. Having been wounded around December 17 or 18, I heard later in the prison camp that our company had been walking down a road in the Ardennes and was hit by German artillery. Sergeant Henry was killed, and our company executive officer had his leg blown away. I met him later in our hospital in Germany.

On one occassion, I was asked to donate blood without any ether to an American soldier laying on a bed in the hospital. He screamed from pain because there was no ether. Afterwards, I tried to walk out and fainted with a German guard helping me walk back to our compound. Much of this later data was obtained from Astor's book and MacDonald's book and Gilbert's book on the Battle of the Bulge.

Hearing about President Roosevelt's death in April, 1945, and the news about advancing Allied armies, the British Army entered our camp possibly on April 28, 1945 (altho Astor's book has various dates). Gilbert cites April 28. Prior to this, some Americans had escaped, and German guards tore away their uniforms and fled across the fields. We were flown to Brussels, Belgium, then by train to Camp Lucky Strike (cited by Major Desobry in Astor's book) near Le Havre. We stayed there for about 5 days, then shipped out to New York City and to the Statue of Liberty, then by train across northern America (via Chicago) and to Seattle and Fort Lewis. I was given a 60-day recuperation leave at home in Seattle--and we were told we would ship out to Japan. But the war ended in August, 1945. I was stationed at Fort Ord, California, until my honorable discharge there as a former prisoner-of-war on about December 5, 1945. I returned to Seattle, attended the University of Washington, and then was employed as a graphic artist for some 35 years. Mostly California and Los Angeles employment.

200 North Commonwealth Avenue
Los Angeles California 90004
February 25, 1997
(213) 383-7034

John Kline, CUB Editor
5401 U. 147th Street West
Apple Valley MN 55124

Dear John Kline:

In your welcome association news and CUB booklets, you said to let you know about any unusual books on the Battle of the Bulge and that era between December 16, 1944, and May 8, 1945 (when the war in Europe ended). Thanks very much.

I would like to recommend the 1995 book written and published by Professor History Martin Gilbert. It is called THE DAY THE WAR ENDED: MAY 8, 1945--VICTORY IN EUROPE.

The book is published by Henry Holt Company, 115 West 18th Street, New York, New York 10011, 1995 date first American edition. Published first in England in 1995 by HarperCollins Pub. Latitude. EPT \$27.50 cost American edition.

Professor of History Martin Gilbert is a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, England, and Official Biographer of Winston Churchill. He cited some of my letters and sent me a free copy on April 20, 1995. The book describes the experiences of American and European people on May 8, 1945, on the last day of the war and that time era as well as the political and national events leading up to and after that war-end time.

With photos and 473 total pages. Has 61 photos and maps.

Includes letters from people who lived in that time-period around and to and after the Battle of the Bulge and also much historical data listed by Professor Gilbert. Explains what happened and why and later.

As a professor of history, Gilbert had access to many of Oxford's historical books and records. Also, I met and talked to British soldiers after being captured on about December 19, 1944 both in a small German town and later at Stalog 11-B some 40 miles north of Hanover, Germany, and we were freed by the British 13th Armored Division on about April 28, 1945. He had access to many diaries and letters (Gilbert) and British newspapers and military records and exchanged letters with many people from that time period of 1944-45. Lists many individuals, etc.

During that terrible time, I did not know in Stalag 11-B that our military prisoner-of-war international camp was only about 20 miles away from the concentration camp where Anne Frank (THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK stage-play and book made internationally famous after World War II) was held. Due to illness, she passed away in the camp during March, 1945. Also, we were not aware about the nearby German concentration camps and found out later. This may explain why we had so little real food and all starved due to lack of needed food (whereas some camps had much better rations).

Oddly, I can recall much about the Battle of the Bulge and the prison camps but hardly anything about Camp Lucky Strike where I stayed for about a week after being released by the British 13 Armored Division on April 28, 1945. We were flown from the camp to Brussels, Belgium where we stayed overnight at the University of Brussels and where everyone was sick to the rich and soft British food that we couldn't handle.

When I left Camp Shelby, Mississippi, after the basic training, August 1944 to January 1944, we were entered into the existing 106th "Golden Lion" Infantry Division at Indianapolis, Indiana. Thus, we were a green division in many ways (and as MacDonald made clear) were sent over from England in November 1944 right up into the very front at the Schnee Eifel and then hit almost right away by several German Panzer and Army divisions--while we were strung out along a thin front some 80 miles long!

Clearly, MacDonald had to set the record straight in his 1984 book called A TIME FOR TRUMPETS (plus other later books and Gilbert's 1995 book). When I read Astor's book I wrote to Colonel Jones at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and he wrote back and sent your address and CUB news. We were both from Washington state altho I had never met him altho we were both on the Schnee Eifel on December 16, 1944. Small world.

Then, too, I met the hit-in-the-head with a huge white bandage all around his head and thought blind at the time-- Major William Desobry cited in MacDonald's 1984 book. I had talked to Desobry while prisoners at the Andernach, Germany, railroad station on December 19, 1944--and then read about him in MacDonald's 1984 book and exchanged letters with him in 1984 about our 1944 conversation in Germany. Desobry could not see due to the huge bandage that covered his eyes. With American Armored, he had been hit by a German shell. Thanks again.

Kenneth Larson

Kenneth Larson. Company K. 423 Regiment. 106th "Golden Lion" Infantry Division in Europe. 1944-45.

200 North Commonwealth Avenue
Los Angeles California 90004
February 26, 1997
(213) 383-7034

John B. Kline
CUB Editor
Apple Valley, Minnesota

Dear John:

I forgot to include this dust-jacket from the 1995 book by Oxford University Professor of History Martin Gilbert called THE DAY THE WAR ENDED: MAY 8 1945, VICTORY IN EUROPE. He had printed in the book one of my letters, and he sent me a gift copy in 1995.

One scene that I recall: I had been sent with a message to another group during the Battle of the Bulge, circa December 17, 1944. I entered an empty hut, and inside I discovered a brand-new box of American rifle M-1 bayonets left on a wood table or about 24 or so per box. Where did it come from?

We had to hike up a snowy hill during the battle, and we were exhausted from lack of needed sleep and constant movement. In the distance, I could see a burning American ammunition truck hit by German 88s and the driver killed. We had to walk around the truck to avoid the spitting bullets being shot out from the burning truck.

We walked along a dirt road on the Schnee Eifel, and a German shell hit the hillside near us. We hit the ditches. Many American soldiers abandoned their gas masks because they were so cumbersome. It was after this (when I had been wounded) that our company or group was hit by German artillery fire and Sergeant Henry was killed and the company executive officer had his leg blown away. I met him later in the prison hospital in the small German town where I stayed for a month before leaving for the large international Stalag 11-B prison camp about 40 miles north of Hanover, Germany, and where I stayed for about 3.5 months before being liberated by the British 13 Armored Division. About April 28, 1945.

I saw Major Desobry, and he wore a huge white bandage wrapped completely around his head except for his mouth and nose. He thought he was blind--he had to be guided and could not see. At Bastogne, he had been hit in the head by a German tank shell and his companion was killed (around December 16 or 17, 1944).

I saw a B-17 shot down and a fighter, and they bombed the canal near our hospital unit with British and American wounded. The bombs shook our building and lit up the walls with red lights--we were lucky they didn't hit us.

A wounded and bayoneted German soldier begged for water on the German Red Cross train, and the doctor said for us to not give him water. American records or German phonograph records played American tunes or swing orchestras.

I saw a German SS soldier who looked like a movie character, and we were given donuts by German female attendants. We sang aboard a German train, while we headed for the large Stalag 11-B. We heard GERman soldiers marching and singing in the cold wintry air and later saw their training buildings and slogans on the walls. Circa January to April, 1945.

Lucky for us, an American soldier and I searched a nearby German village after being liberated. We entered a large Woolworth-type building with many items. We were lucky that we were not shot by German guards or civilians because we wore American-type uniforms. This was about April 28 or 29, 1945. They flew us in a DC-3 military plane to Brussels, Belgium, and we took a train to Camp Lucky Strike.

We heard German planes fly over in the prison camp and saw the contrails of American bombers headed for German cities. We knew by radio about the advancing Allied armies, around April, 1945, and some prisoners left as non-coms to join the thousands of civilian and military personnel wandering the roads of western Europe around April and early May, 1945 (see the book by Martin Gilbert on this matter and events).

When the British tanks approached firing and the main gate was attacked and thrown down, German guards tore off their uniforms and fled across the nearby fields. Probably with the thousands of others they walked back to their homes and towns, etc.

All of us in the camp at Fallingsbostel became irritated and some had fistfights over lack of needed food. Some camps seemingly had more food than others. We starved and lost weight; one soldier sat on his bunk with a blanket over his head lost in a dream-world. I wonder now if he later entered a mental hospital?

Enjoyed your CUB pamphlets and news. Don't recognize any names you listed on the Company K 423 roster. Thanks. Like many, I only gained contact by reading books and then writing to Colonel Jones in Georgia who sent me your CUB news.

My interest is mainly academic and reading books, etc. I am now 71 years old, married, retired graphic artist. My father grew up in or lived in Duluth, Minnesota, and Brandon and I was born in Fargo, North Dakota. But we

moved westward from Minnesota to Montana and then Seattle, Washington, where I attended Redmond High School. Thus, my grandparents came from Norway and settled in Minnesota around Pelican Rapids and Duluth and that area of 1870 or so Minneapolis, etc. I did geneology research back in the 1970s on my forebears back to around A.D. 1500 or so in Norway where Lars had a son named Lars-son and so Larson.

Keep up the good work.

I worked as a graphic artist in the Southern California aerospace industry and also with the State Lands Commission of the State of California. My wife is a retired librarian.

But we have to keep alert, watch for signs of the times, and watch and wait.

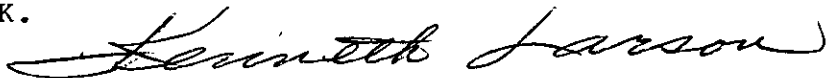
Many veterans have become homeless or drink or take drugs because they cannot cope with civilina life after the military. But I seemingly adjusted and attended the University of Washington in Seattle on the GI Bill. My brother Melvin was in the Merchant Marine in 1945 and went to China and Hawaii and worked in Alaska in 1942 as a carpenter with my father Clarence.

Oddly, America expected the Japanese to invade Seattle and the west coast after Pearl Harbor--but this never happened. We had blackouts and watchtowers in Redmond in 1942.

I only served two years as a prisoner-of-war status. That bullet just missed my spinal cord by one inch. Lucky. My helmet fell off after it hit the tree, and the soldier didn't call out and just shot blindly toward me in the dark on about December 17 or so, 1944. He apologized in the company command post right afterwards. "Sorry about that." No really we were all on edge due to lack of sleep, and that sole rifle shot must have woke up everybody at 4:00 A.M. on that dark morning on the hillside facing the Germans.

How much did they know about our green division just coming from England and our being stretched out some 80 miles along the Schnee Eifel? Eisenhower should have been like General Montgomery the Britisher and had a military house trailer up on the front line area. He was back in Paris at a wedding reception, I read in Astor's book. No wonder MacDonald had to set the record straight in his fine 1984 book A TIME FOR TRUMPETS and also later books based on research.

Kenneth Larson. 106th "Golden Lion" Infantry Division.
423 Regiment, Company K.



THE DAY THE WAR ENDED

May 8, 1945

VICTORY IN EUROPE



MARTIN GILBERT

THE CHURCHILL BIOGRAPHY

Volume III *The Challenge of War, 1914-1916*

Volume III (documents in two parts)

Volume IV *The Stricken World, 1917-1922*

Volume IV (documents in three parts)

Volume V *The Prophet of Truth, 1922-1939*

Volume V *The Exchequer Years 1923-1929* (documents)

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Volume VI *Finest Hour, 1939-1941*

Volume VI *At the Admiralty 1939-40* (documents)

Volume VII *Road to Victory, 1942-1945*

Volume VIII *'Never Despair', 1945-1965*

OTHER BOOKS

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The European Powers, 1900-1945

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My Own Furrow: The Life of Lord Allen of Hurtwood (documents)

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Atlas of the Holocaust

The Day the War Ended

May 8, 1945—Victory in Europe

Martin Gilbert

Henry Holt and Company
New York

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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

CONTENT

List of illustrations
List of maps
Acknowledgements
Introduction

- I Anticipations, 1940-1944
- II The Beginning of the End,
- III The Last Week of April
- IV The First Four Days of May
- V Further Surrenders, 5-6 May
- VI False Dawn, 7 May 1945
- VII Learning the News, 7 May 1945
- VIII War Recedes, 7 May 1945
- IX VE-Day Dawns, 8 May 1945
- X "The German War is at an end"
- XI Britain Rejoices
- XII Liberated Lands
- XIII Poland
- XIV Germany Prostrated
- XV Austria in Turmoil
- XVI Germany's Vassals Lose Their Heads
- XVII The New World
- XVIII Fighting Against Japan as the War Ends
- XIX VE-Day in Russia, 9 May 1945
- XX VE-Day Plus One
- XXI Trouble Brewing
- XXII Terrible Times: The Aftermath
- XXIII From VE- to VJ-Day

Epilogue
Maps
Bibliography
Index

"Martin Gilbert—our greatest living factual historian." —Paul Johnson

May 8, 1945, 23:30 hours: With war still raging in the Pacific, peace comes at last in Europe as, one half hour before midnight, the German High Command in Berlin signs the final instrument of surrender. After five years and eight months, the war in Europe is officially over.

If you were in Paris, it had ended nine months before, and if you were in Belsen or Dachau concentration camp, it ended with the arrival of British and American tanks in April. If you were serving in the Pacific, your war would not end until August. And indeed, for all too many, the realities of war—the dangers and uncertainties, the hunger and disease—would continue for weeks and even months to come. Yet, for people everywhere, this date took on a significance that has resonated for a half-century.

This is the story of that single day fifty years ago and of the days leading to it. Hour by hour, place by place, it recounts the final spasms of a continent in turmoil. Here are the stories of combat soldiers and ordinary civilians, collaborators and resistance fighters, statesmen and war criminals. Here are the victorious, the defeated, the liberated, and the long-subjugated. As with everything he writes, Martin Gilbert chronicles the personal stories as well as the public events, all in vivid, dramatic detail. Stretching across the face of Europe and into Asia, encompassing the United States, Australia, and the Pacific, this book brings alive the last moments in this all-consuming conflict.

The book is more than a moment-by-moment account, for Martin Gilbert uses every event as a point of departure, linking each to its long-term consequences over the next half-century. In this way, the

Acknowledgements

Peter Hewlett (London, seven-year-old child)
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Roger Highfield (Italy, British soldier)
Wolfgang Homburger (Britain, schoolteacher)
Henry C. Huglin (Pacific Ocean, American officer)
David Hunt (Izmir, Turkey, British officer)
Norman Hurst (England, schoolboy)

June Jacobs (London, schoolgirl)
Marjorie Jaffa (New York City, clerk)
Hans Jakobson (Sweden, brought by Red Cross from Germany)
Henia Jakobson (Sweden, brought by Red Cross from Germany)

Michael Katz (Cracow, Poland, a refugee from Lvov)
Ruben Katz (Lublin, Poland, thirteen-year-old survivor)
Edward Kanter (London, schoolboy)
Robert Kee (Germany, released British prisoner-of-war)
Charles H. Kessler (Wörgl, Austria, American soldier)
Grigory Kleiner (Perm, Urals, schoolboy)
Sholem Koperszmidt (Soviet Central Asia, working in a slaughterhouse)
Ruth Krammer (Chicago, schoolgirl, born in Germany)
Daniel M. Krauskopf (Germany, American soldier)
Robert Krell (The Hague, hidden child)

John Laffin (Australia, soldier)
Kenneth Larson (mid-Atlantic, returning American POW)
Isabella Leitner (reaching the USA that day, from Auschwitz)
Zdenko Levental (Sarajevo, Yugoslav partisan)
Leonard Levine (Pacific Ocean, American radio operator)
Dr G. Lewin (South Africa, refugee from Germany)
Marion Loveland (London, a 'Wren')
Mirko Lowenthal (Zagreb, British soldier with the Yugoslav partisans)
Lore Lilien (Jerusalem, working for Royal Air Force)
Hugh Lunghi (Moscow, British interpreter)

Ronald McCormick (Manchester, naval trainee)
Canon Frederick A. McDonald (Germany, American padre)
Noel Major (Britain, schoolboy)
Yakov Malkin (Lebanon, a prisoner)

Noel Mander (Rome, British soldier)
David Manevitz (Okinawa, American sailor)
Edmund Marsden (Shillong, Assam, British officer)
Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (London, schoolboy)
Vladka Meed (Lodz, Poland, survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto)
Benjamin Meirtchak (River Elbe, Polish soldier with the Russian Army)
Ernest W. Michel (Germany, working on a farm)
Benjamin Mirkin (Manchuria, civilian internee)
Herbert Mitgang (New York, *Stars and Stripes* reporter)
Seymour Moses (England, American army hospital laboratory technician)

(continued from front flap)

events of May 8, 1945, stand out in bold relief, mapping the world to come. The result is a compelling story of our past and a lucid introduction to our present by a consummate historian of our age. Indeed, if we are to understand the world we inherited in 1945, there is no better starting point than *The Day the War Ended* and no better guide than Martin Gilbert.



One of our most distinguished historians, MARTIN GILBERT is a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, and the author of more than twenty works of history and biography as well as twelve historical atlases. As the Official Biographer of Sir Winston Churchill, he is the author of six volumes in the official biography and the editor of twelve volumes of Churchill documents. Among his books are the one-volume *Churchill: A Life*, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, *The Holocaust*, *The Second World War*, and *The First World War*.

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Martin Gilbert—our greatest living
biographical historian." —Paul Johnson

May 8, 1945, 23:30 hours: With war still
raging in the Pacific, peace comes at last
in Europe as, one half hour before mid-
night, the German High Command in
Berlin signs the final instrument of
surrender. After five years and eight
months, the war in Europe is officially
over.

If you were in Paris, it had ended nine
months before, and if you were in Belsen
or Dachau concentration camp, it ended
with the arrival of British and American
troops in April. If you were serving in the
Pacific, your war would not end until
August. And indeed, for all too many, the
realities of war—the dangers and uncer-
tainties, the hunger and disease—would
continue for weeks and even months to
come. Yet, for people everywhere, this
date took on a significance that has
resonated for a half-century.

This is the story of that single day fifty
years ago and of the days leading to it.
Hour by hour, place by place, it recounts
the final spasms of a continent in turmoil.
Here are the stories of combat soldiers
and ordinary civilians, collaborators and
resistance fighters, statesmen and war
criminals. Here are the victorious, the
defeated, the liberated, and the long-
subjugated. As with everything he writes,
Martin Gilbert chronicles the personal
stories as well as the public events, all in
vivid, dramatic detail. Stretching across
the face of Europe and into Asia, encom-
passing the United States, Australia, and
the Pacific, this book brings alive the last

KENNETH LLOYD
LOS ANGELES, CA
APRIL 20, 1995

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The Last Week of April

village of Dongo, when he was caught and shot dead by Italian partisans. Also shot, in reprisal for the killing of fifteen Italian partisans in Milan nine months earlier, were fifteen of those who had been captured with him, including Alessandro Pavolini, the Secretary of the Fascist Party, and four Cabinet Ministers. His mistress, Clara Petacci, was also shot.

The partisans took the bodies of Mussolini and his mistress to Milan. There they were hanged, upside down. That afternoon representatives of General von Vietinghoff signed, at Caserta near Naples, the unconditional surrender of all German troops in Italy. In Moscow, a British officer, Hugh Lunghi, who was serving with the British Military Mission to Russia, went with some of his colleagues, with the news of the surrender of the German Army in Italy, to the Soviet Ministry of Defence. 'We were greeted with a surly, couldn't-care-less, acknowledgement: this attitude was reflected in the Soviet press where the news later rated a paragraph or two on the back pages, if that. The Soviet media, for ever in the past clamouring for a "Second Front" in France, had always treated the Allied campaign in Italy as a sideshow.'¹

The news of Italy's defeat percolated throughout the regions Mussolini had once aspired to rule. In Somalia, a member of the British Colonial Development Survey, Nigel Viney, was in a remote area 'having breakfast with my little gang of helpers,' he recalled, 'when an old man came walking along through the bush. I gave him a cup of tea. Before he left he said to me, "By the way, Mussolini is dead." When I got back to my base, about sixty miles away, they said to me, "Oh yes, it was on the nine o'clock news last night."²

In the areas of Germany that remained under German control, Nazi resistance was collapsing. On April 28 there was excitement in the Allied armies when Munich Radio announced that the 'Bavarian Freedom Movement' had taken over from the Nazis in the city. The radio even gave out vital intelligence for the Allies with regard to the location of Field Marshal Albert von Kesselring's headquarters at Pullach, six miles from Munich. It was, however, a false dawn. Later that day the Gauleiter of Munich, Paul Giesler, came on the same radio frequency to announce that 'the activities of the traitors have been stopped'.³ For Munich, the war would go on for another forty-eight hours.

Among those liberated by the British on April 28 were several thousand Allied prisoners-of-war in Stalag 11-B, near Fallingbommel. One of them

¹ Hugh Lunghi, letter to the author, 22 September 1994.

² Nigel Viney, in conversation with the author, 27 October 1994.

³ Geoffrey Dennis (editor), *The War of 1939*, Caxton, London, 1946, p. 261.

The Day the War Ended

was a nineteen-year-old American soldier, Kenneth Larson, who had been born in North Dakota, and had spent his childhood in Washington State, on the Pacific. He recalled the first moments of liberation: 'I saw a tank charging through the hills and German guards running across the fields tearing off their uniforms. We were fed food given out from a British Army truck. Another American soldier and I had the bright(?) idea of visiting the nearby village near the prison camp. We saw a military training facility with slogans on the walls and also entered what seemed to be a large storage warehouse. Inside, we found all sorts of department-store items. I took some gold-coloured silverware but left it on my bunk when we were told to depart from the camp and take trucks to a nearby airfield. Our visit to the nearby village was not a very good idea - because the other soldier and I could have been shot by Germans or by guards or by civilians or police, etc. We were dressed in old military clothing, rubber boots, etc. We were lucky.'

Fifty years after his liberation, Larson retained vivid memories of captivity. 'We were not mistreated or hit with rifle butts but all suffered from lack of needed food. We slept with one blanket on hard wooden slats on bunks, ate out of tin pans, drank cold water, had some Red Cross parcels from Sweden or Switzerland, were kept distant from Russian soldiers who later escaped through the barbed wire to loot a large German warehouse and who came walking back near our encampment with large bags of wheat slung across their soldiers. Also, American officers were kept in separate compounds. I was an ordinary American Infantry soldier with the 106th "Golden Lion" Infantry Division that was hit first by the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge, December 16th, 1944, near Belgium and Luxembourg.

'We were strafed by Allied airplanes while in German trucks headed for the prison camp in the small German village (but we weren't hit when we jumped out of the trucks and headed for the ditches). I saw German V-1 rockets at night and in the daytime and heard them as they headed for France and England. I saw Allied-German dogfights in the air, bombers shot down, experienced a close bombing at night of a nearby German canal (the building shook and the sky was lit up).

'If the European war had continued, would we have starved? I don't know. We all lost weight badly, and there was little real food. In some cases, men went out in work projects to nearby cities and under guard to work at jobs - and they had better food. But I never did this. It might have been better if I could have stayed at the hospital in the small German town - but one never knew just what to do because everything was changing and life was so unexpected.'

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The Last Week of April

Larson had been severely wounded during the Battle of the Bulge, by what is now called 'friendly fire'. As he was walking back in the dark to his slit trench and his sergeant 'a tree branch hit my metal helmet and knocked it off. Startled, I called out or said something. Just at this moment, an American soldier heard me. Without calling out or saying anything, he raised up his rifle and shot me in the dark. His rifle bullet (M-1) hit me in the right side and almost sliced the spinal cord. I saw a red flash like electricity, and I felt weak and then fell down on the ground.'

The sequel to his wounding was something Larson could never forget: 'Some American soldiers picked me up and carried me to the nearby command post of our company,' he recalled. 'One can imagine what the effect of the solitary rifle shot had on the troops in the slit trenches up ahead on the side of the hill. I lay on the floor, the soldier apologized for hitting me, and I was carried on a stretcher down the hill. I was taken to a kind of wooden hut and left there with other wounded. I don't know where the others came from, and I heard later in the camp that the next day our company had been shelled by German artillery while walking along a road and men had scattered. Sergeant Henry had been killed and the company executive officer had his leg blown off. The next day the German soldiers came in, and we were taken prisoner.'

One episode while Larson was a prisoner-of-war had brought him a moment of good cheer. 'On one chilly and damp morning around February, 1945, I happened to take a walk up to the main gate of the large international camp made up of American, British, Russian, French, and other nationalities. My spirits were very low, and I was cold and hungry. Just at that moment, a loudspeaker perched up on top of the main gate burst out into song, and I heard the marvellous voice of Bing Crosby singing Irving Berlin's song called "Blue Skies". When I heard the words and music, my morale went up and I knew then that I could hold on and make it through to the end of the war.'

'Losing weight and getting more and more touchy and irritable, and even trying to cook grass on simple handmade stoves, and toasting bread near the stone fireplace within each prison hut, we heard over the radio the news that President Roosevelt had passed away in early April, 1945. We watched as massive fleets of Allied bombers passed over in the blue skies on their way to central Germany. At night, we heard what were probably lone German military scout planes pass overhead.'

Larson was held captive for four and a half months. As for so many prisoners-of-war, it was a painful experience, making liberation a moment of miracle. 'I felt then that the Lord had protected me and that somehow I had been lucky enough to get through and back to America. Many

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The Day the War Ended

others didn't – as witness the many crosses in Europe on military burial fields.¹

Among those still under German control on April 28, and being marched westward, were several thousand women who had been held in Ravensbrück concentration camp north of Berlin. 'It seemed at that time,' one of their number, the Vienna-born Susan Eckstein, recalled, 'as if all of Germany was running westward. During a rest stop on a roadside some young German air force soldiers started talking to us, and when we asked them where they were going in such a hurry, they answered, "To our liberators, the Americans." They were obviously petrified of falling into Russian hands.'²

Freedom came on April 29 for more than ten thousand Allied prisoners-of-war, including those from Eichstätt who for the past two weeks had been on the road. They had been brought together at a vast camp near Moosburg. All ten thousand had been marched away since mid-April from the advancing Americans, and some from the Russians further east. Eichstätt had been overrun by the Americans only two days after the prisoners had been taken out. Major Elliott Viney recorded the events of the liberation of Moosburg in his diary: 'It is difficult to write much, things happen so quickly and are out of date in ten minutes. Last night we took over the camp and the Germans are standing by to surrender. An SS division are said to be (a) gone in the night (b) digging in outside. It poured all yesterday and I read Boswell all day. The wire is coming down in places so I walked through a hole. The chaos at HQ is indescribable. At five this morning the South African provost company went on duty and the camp is full of white armbands and patrols and our men are in the perimeter sentry boxes. I got up for my shave at 6.30 and cleaned my boots to the sound of gunfire.'

'After breakfast the fun started. There are planes all overhead and two P-51 Mustangs came very low and rolled; we all cheered like mad in the open. Now there is a mass of machine-gun and rifle fire – certainly it is flying over the camp and cleared the Lagerstrasse pretty effectively just now. There are big bumps very close now. 12.00 AMERICANS HERE.'

As Major Viney was writing up his diary it was announced that on the previous night the camp commandant had sent for the Senior Allied Officer among the prisoners-of-war and taken him to an SS general who proposed a 'neutral area' around the camp, and then went on with a Swiss intermediary for about three miles, where they met the commanding

¹ Kenneth Lloyd Larson, letter to the author, 19 September 1994.

² Susan E. Cernyak-Spatz (formerly Susan Eckstein), letter to the author, 28 October 1994.

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The New World

> Among those who were on their way to the New World on VE-Day were several thousand American servicemen, returning home from Europe. One of them was a former prisoner-of-war, the nineteen year old Kenneth Larson who had been liberated by British troops on April 28. 'I was in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean aboard an American troopship that had sailed from Camp Lucky Strike near Le Havre, France,' he recalled. 'We were headed toward New York City and the Statue of Liberty. On May 8, 1945, the captain of the troopship announced over the ship's loudspeaker that the war in Europe had ended. We broke into cheers and looked forward to reaching New York City.'

The actual announcement, Larson remembered fifty years later, 'was not an overwhelming celebration. We heard the announcement, let out a cheer, and went back to our duties. We might have been hit by a torpedo from a German submarine when we approached New York, but we weren't. Our morale was higher, and the experience in the German prisoner-of-war camp forty miles north of Hanover was a thing of the past. We were returning to America and home.'¹

Another American serviceman who was crossing the Atlantic on VE-Day was Irving Uttal, who later wrote: 'I was returning from the UK to the USA on the *Ile de France*, a former luxury liner. I had completed the last of thirty-five B-17 missions over Germany with the 390th BG of the Eighth Air Force on 11 April 1945. My tour consisted almost entirely of English winter flying - fog, icing, minimum daylight - which grounded operations in the previous years of the Eighth in England.

'I was delighted that my crew survived without a casualty when the Eighth's loss rate was 3.5% per mission. I hated and feared combat; yet air warfare had infused me with an opium-like addiction, which left me craving more and suffering withdrawal pains as I lay in my bunk on my ship.'²

Another ship, the *Brand Whitlock*, was also crossing the Atlantic as the

¹ Kenneth Lloyd Larson, letter to the author, 19 September 1994.

² Lieutenant-Colonel Irving L. Uttal, letter to the author, 12 December 1994.