

LIFETIME MEMBER AMERICAN
EX PRISONER OF WAR # 22430--
OLD FORT SMITH CHAPTER
LIFETIME MEMBER DISABLED AM. VETS.
LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP AMERICAN LEGION
MEMBER 106 INFANTRY DIV. ASSOC.

Dec 31, 1989

James A McCamman

1521 No 25th

Van Buren Ar 72956-2911

Mr. Culp
Attention: John G. Kline, Editor
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Attention: News Editor

Since early free this year my mind has drifted back to
the fall of 1944, when my company, G, 423rd Infantry
Regiment of the 106th division sailed across the Atlantic
Ocean on the Queen Elizabeth and landed at Glasgow,
Scotland on the River Clyde. We were then loaded on a train
with small passenger cars. We were taken to a training
camp near Didbrook England with the nearest big town
called Cheltenham, England. It was here I met
Johnny Edward Allen who was with F Company, 423rd
Regiment. Johnny was from Columbus, Ohio. He became the
closest buddy I have ever known. We had a lot of fun
in England together and we landed at Leharve,
France and pitched tents in the mud that night.
At the time of the beginning of what became
known as the Battle of the Bulge we were billeted
in the home of a Belgium family in Boon, Belgium.
A young Belgium girl about my age who lived
in the same house would bring me milk each

morning. On the day all hell broke loose my Sgt. banged on the door and told me to load my rifle and ammunition belts, and fix bayonets as the Germans had broke through and were headed in our direction. ^{The Belgium girl said wait Jimmy, you've milk!} But the Sgt yelled out to hell with the milk. Hit the road!

During the days that followed we ran out of food and all but small arm ammunition.

Our outfit was never issued the heavy winter clothing or shoes. Many of us became weak and sick during the intense and cold fighting. In fact we nicknamed our division "The Hungry and Sick" (106th Division)

Around Dec. 14, 1944, Col. Charley Cavendar gave the order for the 423rd Regiment to surrender to the Germans. This was the saddest day of my life and I felt so ashamed to surrender even though it wasn't of my making. However we were given the opportunity to try to escape if we thought we could. I was suffering with a bullet wound in my right leg, scrapnel wound in my left side, and bayonet wounds which had cut off part of my left index finger and cut open the inside of my right arm. I was also bothered by my left ring finger which I ripped open when I held onto a tank that had been knocked out and had jagged parts. I felt faint from the loss of blood. I wanted to try to escape but I thought I would be a detriment to the others who had made this decision. I beat my rifle against a tree so it

1 couldn't be used by the enemy and then made a
2 boot trap out of it.

3 When the first German approached me I was in
4 a fox hole and he said "rouse" "Not knowing
5 what it meant I didn't move but in a much

6 storm voice he said "reversmitter" and jabbed
7 me with ^{his} bayonet at which I'mie I hid stamp. .

8 On the first part of the death march that follows
9 one of the guards told my elbow because it was
10 the size he wore, and I finished the march in
11 the ice + snow in my bare feet.

12 ~~the~~ American Prisoners of war as far as the
13 ^{with} eye could see in each direction marching super
14 into Germany. They would charge ~~the~~ German
15 guards about every eight hours, but they
16 marched no day and night without rest stops.

17 We would go to sleep holding our hands on the one
18 in front of us, then exchange. It was during
19 this period I saw the most dead Americans
20 lying in the fields and woods in the snow.
21 Their bodies were badly swollen. This added to
22 the sadness that I was experiencing from my
23 ordeal,

24 We didn't get anything to eat or drink during
25 this period and most of us missed the water
26 more than anything else, but, we did manage
27 to eat snow. Some jumped out of line to pull
up turnips in a field nearby but, they were shot

We were told that the ones that fell out of the march were also shot. Even though I was in intense pain I knew I had to make it if I ever ^{was to see} ~~seen~~ America and my loved ones again. After several days of marching they herded us into a church where we were packed like sardines. You couldn't even raise your hand up to your mouth it was so crowded. We learned later their original intention was to blow up the church. But, until this day I do not know why the order was changed. After leaving the church they marched us to a train terminal where we were loaded into box cars with standing room only. That night American planes bombed the tracks and several box cars with POW's was hit. In our box car a man by the name of Sam Johnson started praying and outside of the noise of the bombs all you could hear was his prayers. It gave each of us added strength and comfort and prepared us to meet God if that was our fate. Johnny & I got separated when we were loaded into the box cars and ended up in separate prison camps.

My dad gave me a watch before he died in Indianapolis, Ind. which I treasured above anything I owned. The Germans was taking all valuables from American prisoners so I hung my watch on my dog tag to keep it from being taken. I almost made it

but, the other prisoners knew I had a watch and they asked me the time. When I opened my shirt a German guard saw the watch & demanded it. I felt almost like giving up my life for this watch.

It was around Dec. 24, 1944 when they marched us up the hill from Bad Orb, Germany to Stalag 9 B. Women & children jeered us as we walked along the road. Spitting and doing other acts of contempt.

I had my pant leg above my knee because of the wound in my right leg. About an 8 year old German boy kicked me in the middle of the wound; I almost passed out from pain, but, the German guard raised his rifle as if to shoot me if I reacted in anyway.

We arrived at Stalag 9 B Christmas Eve 1944. Up to this time and not until the next day were we given anything to eat during this entire ordeal. We went through interrogation and we was trained to give our name, rank, and serial number only. After each question I would repeat my name, rank and serial number and was slapped each time I did until I was slapped unconscious. I was told later by others that witnessed this that I was also kicked in the stomach while laying on the floor unconscious.

By now my feet had turned a dark purple

but they didn't have any feeling. An American doctor ^(POW) assisting the German doctor told me I had about a 50-50 chance of living if I didn't have my feet amputated. My answer was I would rather never go home than go there without any feet. They gave me exercises to do, raising and lowering my feet every few minutes to get the blood recirculating. When my feet finally began to get life back in them it hurt worse than I ever hurt in my life. It was almost unbearable.

They assigned us two men to a bunk which was only wide enough for one to lie on his back or stomach, the other would have to lay on his side. We switched off and on during the night. The bunks had a wood bottom, no springs with some straw on top of the wood. Each bunk received one blanket to protect them from the intense cold. We also received enough wood in the stove for about 2 hrs a day. The rest of the time we almost froze.

We received something the Germans called tea each morning. But, it had little taste & wasn't sweet. That was all we had until around one o'clock when we received one ladle of soup we would line up with our steel helmet, helmet liner or any other make shift holder for soup. We also carved wooden spoons to eat the

1 soup with. Sometimes the soup was so thin we
2 could drink it like water. And we did not re-
3 ceive anything else to until around 6 P.M. We
4 received one slice of bread and on lucky days
5 a pat of margarine or jam. This was our menu
6 day in and day out. I weighed [#]160 ~~pounds~~
7 when I was captured and 97 ^{pounds} ~~pounds~~ when I was
8 liberated. My bunk buddy Eddie Nouellet
9 from ~~Sharpsburg~~, PA weighed only 68 ^{pounds} ~~pounds~~
10 when liberated. I lost contact with Eddie
11 after returning to the states and would appreciate
12 any information anyone could give me concerning
13 his whereabouts or any other information.

14 I will recall some of the high lights that
15 happened during life behind barbed wire.
16 Early one morning all American prisoners was
17 marched out into a field during sub zero weather
18 We were told that some Americans had broke
19 into the kitchen and killed 2 German cooks.
20 and every hour so many Americans would be shot
21 until the guilty party were apprehended. I
22 don't know how many Americans lost their lives
23 during this period, but, I do know some froze
24 to death while standing in formation.

25 In our barrack one of the POW was heating some
26 water in a canteen to slave with but he left
27 the lid on the canteen, he put it inside
28 the pot belly stove and it exploded killing

3 POW's standing around the stove. Later one
of the German guards came in who could speak
fluent English. My buddy Eddie not knowing
this looked at the guard and said "Go Ka Boom!!"
and the guard answered "Yes it was a bad
accident wasn't it? Eddie was stunned to
hear him use English.

Most Americans learned to love this particular
German guard because he was kind and seemed always
trying to cheer up Americans. After our armies
crossed the Rhine and got near the prison camp
he would inform us of it. ~~3~~

One day an American fighter plane was having
a dog fight with a German Messerschmitt and
the German flew over the prison camp thinking
the American wouldn't fire at him but he
shot him down (the German) and ^{steady} bullets killed
POW's in one of the barracks and a latrine.

The Germans let us make a big POW sign
out of lime on the assembly ground and we
had no other instances after that.

I managed to keep my strength up some
by fighting to get potatoe peelings thrown at
of the German kitchen and cooking wild dandelions.
Sometimes we stood out in the cold for hours
waiting on the peeling. Normally when a prisoner
stopped getting hungry they would be dead in
a day or two from malnutrition. The other

big killer was spinal meningitis. Eddie was ready to stop eating and I forced him to eat and drink the juice of the wild dandelions. Later after the liberation he credited me for saving his life because of this.

Most of us had dysentary most of the time. The barrack was split in half with a small area in the middle with several buckets to use as toilets, but, most of the floor in that area was about 2 inches deep with human waste.

We were allowed 4 cards and 1 letter each month and I used my free allotment, but, to my knowledge only one letter was received by my mother. They gave us one shower during the whole time we were prisoners of war. We still had on the same clothes we was captured in when we was liberated.

To show American humor when we was standing around nude to take the showers Eddie started laughing. When asked why he was laughing he said "We all look like Popeye's Olive Oyle."

In our barrack we established a nightly ^{worship} service at 7 P.M. where we would pray, read scriptures, and sing hymns. I believe this helped to sustain me during these trying periods.

During the cold severe winter we would pray for warmer weather. But, when warmer weather came we became infested with all types of lice and vermin. They laid their eggs all up and down

the seams of our pants and shirts. Most of us would rather have the cold weather than the torment caused by these vermin.

I wrote a daily diary of life behind barbed ~~wires~~ ^{wires} using some of the paper they gave me for toilet paper. I have misplaced it but when I do locate it I will send it in to be published. Eddie Doulet would fill in my diary on days that I did not feel like writing. One of the happiest days of my life was when American tanks pushed over the prison gates and liberated us prisoners. The commanding officer asked us to sing God Bless America and after it was over, he said he had never heard it sung with such feeling in his life.

We went through about 4 delousing showers using kerosene the first time. They burned every stitch of clothing and everything we had. They issued new clothing. We then were sent to Camp Lucky Strike France where they wanted me to enter the hospital, but when the rest of my group loaded on the Admiral Graf Spee (a captured German ship) I slipped on with them. We were given 3 weeks leave followed by another three weeks Army paid vacation at Miami Beach Florida where we received treatment and rehabilitation. ~~to~~

I was then sent to Ft Chaffee Arkansas in June 1945 and received my discharge Nov 1945.

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I was told I had 3 choices on applying for a discharge. (1)st choice I had more than enough points needed (2) Disability sufficient for discharge (3) Being an Ex prisoner of War. I chose the latter and made my home in Fort Smith Arkansas although I was born and raised in Montgomery Alabama up until I went in the service I met a fine Fort Smith girl ^{Annalie Cobb} and married her and we were blessed with 3 fine boys. The first Allen Lee second Gordon Frederick and third Mark Candler.

I started work at Ft Chaffee as a civilian after discharge, later I transferred to the veterans administration and when they closed their office in Ft Smith I started work with the Post Office and remained until my retirement January 1988.

Another thing that changed my life I lost my youngest son Mark Candler through a tragic accident. Under the stress and strain that was still lingering from my prisoner of war days I couldn't cope with losing Mark. My wife ^{and I} Anna lie began to drift apart and it ended in divorce in 1972.

I consider myself lucky because I met Roberta Hill and we were married & I began to get my life back together again. I have nothing but praise for both of these women as I feel they are among Americas best.

My oldest son Allen has a son named Kevin and Allen is working with the Postal Service in North Little Rock, Ar. Allen's wife is Linda.

Gordon Frederick graduated from the University of Tennessee as a Doctor of Dental Surgery and is practicing at Joelton Tennessee. He has two sons Gordon Zachary and Gordon Linn. Gordon's wife is Dale.

I have a step daughter, Anita June Dodson who is married to Ronnie Dodson. He works for the Postal Service in Fort Smith, Ar. They have two children Jennifer M. and Adam N. Dodson.

My best buddy Johnny Allen and I continued to write each other through the years. We called on the phone and met in St. Louis, Missouri for a wonderful reunion. We both enjoyed every minute of it.

In December 1987 I received a Christmas card from Johnny's wife Mae Allen saying that John had passed away October 2, 1987. It brought me much sadness. Johnny or I either one would have gladly given up our own life for the other. (Johnny named one of his sons James Allen after me.)

Recently I felt like I walked through the "Valley of the Shadow of Death" for the second time in my life as I had a quadruple by pass surgery on December 11, 1989. During this tense period I wrote this attached poem, "Seasons Change" which I hope you will publish. As soon as I find

IMAGE NO.	
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PREPARED BY	
DATE	

1 the daily diary I wrote as a prisoner of war.
 2 I will forward a copy to you.

3
 4 Sincerely
 5 James A. McCommon

6
 7 P.S. Please send me 10 publications of the
 8 issue that carries this article, along
 9 with a statement for same.
 10 Thanks !!!

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