

R. W. PETERSON

John--

If you run out of things to print you might want to use the enclosed. The disc is Microsoft Word, and you can keep it.

I think of what happened to us in Germany every year about this time. Over the years I have come to very different conclusions about the commander of an outfit. Thus the reflections about Cavender.

Best to you and yours for the Holiday Season.

Dick

A large, stylized handwritten signature that starts with a long horizontal stroke on the left, loops back up and over the word "Dick", and then continues with a cursive flourish.

Reflections on  
Charles C. Cavender, Colonel, U. S. Army Infantry.

I was with him from the birth of his regiment, the 423rd Infantry in Ft. Jackson, S. C. when the Regimental Colors were unfurled for the first time. I was with him in Tennessee, in Indiana, and in England. I was with him when he returned to Europe to face the German again as he had in 1917. And I was with him when the 423rd as we knew it, died.

In December 1944, Colonel Charles Cavender, Texan, West Point graduate, former World War I private, came back to Germany as the commander of the regiment he created and trained. With him into the Ardennes forests he brought men like me, physically tough, individually capable and ready for combat.

Only a few knew Cavender's innermost concerns about the overstretched positions of his beloved 423rd in the Division line when we replaced the 2nd Division. 40 years later in his notes to Charles MacDonald he expressed dissatisfaction with the task assigned. Wide gaps in the defensive line resulted from the blindness of the High Command and its refusal to acknowledge the dangers in the Ardennes. Cavender's thinly stretched regiment was forced to defend without Armor and its reserve battalion. "Good Luck," said the one commander who could help. "If they come, just slug it out with what you have," as he left a frustrated Cavender standing alone in the eleven mile wide Losheim Gap.

A massive and vicious German attack did come through that indefensible Gap. Ordered to attack the German and fight his way out of the noose they had drawn around him, Cavender's regiment fought alone. Promised help and supplies never came. With one battalion totally destroyed, he stopped the charge of his last remaining battalion against overwhelming odds. The 423rd and its sister regiment the 422nd held off the best the German Army could throw at them for three bloody days. Their struggle would only be properly acknowledged by the German whose sensitive timetable of battle was destroyed by the defeated regiments. As he surveyed wounded men needing aid, riflemen without ammunition, and a total loss of communication with Division, he accepted the abhorrent decision to surrender his command.

It meant putting his Army career on the line. The General's star he would probably earn in his second war was not an acceptable trade for more lives of his men. Cavender was a casualty of the battle in the Ardennes as surely as if a German bullet had struck him. The sacrifice he made for his comrades was heroic and unselfish.

*From Cavender*

Few know of his valiant efforts to alleviate the suffering of his men in the Stalags. The records of his personal battles with the Germans commanders are buried in still classified records. He argued, he demanded, he bargained to little avail. But he never gave up.

How many would have died on that hill outside Schoenburg if Cavender had not the courage to surrender? I know I live today because of him. His example and training served me in battle, in captivity and in the later competition of civilian life. I am alive because he cared.

Not until forty years after I first saw Colonel Cavender did I meet him personally. He was a major influence in my life, and he will always be. Charles Cavender, for the joys of my life I thank you. As an old Sergeant, I salute you.

Richard Peterson, I Co. 423rd Infantry

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File CCCavend

## REMINISCENCE AND RETURN

*Served  
a great story  
by N.W. Peterson  
for the movie*

Shortly before darkness fell on Good Friday in 1945 tanks from the 6th Armored Division roared down the main street of Stammlager IXA, Ziegenhain, Germany, liberating over 6,000 Allied prisoners of war, including me. We cheered them until we were hoarse, and begged for cigarettes and food. The tankers did not know they would find Americans in the camp, and had made no preparations for the starvation they discovered. They gave us all their own rations, promising to send more food and medicine to us the next day.

Forty two years later I returned to Stalag IXA. The cold afternoon light of spring in Germany contributed to the chill than ran down my back as I entered the main street. The trees which had been but pitiful sticks in 1945 now hid the buildings behind their 50 year old bulk. Only the clock tower could be seen as I approached what had been the main gate. An involuntary shudder went through my body. How often had I checked that clock praying for the hours to pass faster to bring us closer to meal time or liberation. Surprisingly the reliable German clock works still provided the right time.

The guard towers and the barbed wire are gone. Paving and the growth of shrubs and trees acted as camouflage for the desolation and filth I remembered. Some buildings now wore paint or aluminum siding. New buildings and homes sit

on what was the periphery of the camp including a handsome Catholic church, but Stalag IXA has changed little since 1945.

In 1940, French prisoners of war built Stalag IXA not knowing that for the next five years it would be their home. During the war years it held over 3,000 French soldiers. Included among them until he escaped, was Pierre Mitterand the present President of France. In January of 1945, 1275 Americans arrived from Stalag IXB. Later in the year about the same number of British and an assortment of prisoners from other Allied forces filtered into the camp. These emigre's swelled the population to over 6,000.

As I drove down the main street in 1987, the emotions that flooded over me were too much to handle. Memories of hunger, cold, fear, and hopelessness felt by dying prisoners of war rushed back with a frightening intensity. I almost fled back to my hotel, realizing that I needed some time to adjust before searching further into my past.

I found Roland Stimpel waiting for me at my hotel, the Rosengarten (built in 1620). Stimpel is a writer for the German magazine Stern. Horst Munk who was to be my host during my visit had told him of my coming. Roland wanted to explore Stalag IXA from the viewpoint of an American prisoner of war. He was doing a "then and now" article on the old camp which would appear under the title "Das Lager" in the August 1988 issue. Our visit had to be cut short

because of my weariness from travel and the effects of seeing Ziegenhain again.

I awakened about 4 o'clock the next morning. While taking a shower I realized that I had never experienced hot water in Germany before. I went down to the lobby, looking for breakfast. Deja vu - here I was ravenously hungry again in Zeigenhain, relying on someone else to feed me, and no food in sight. Four English businessmen were also prowling the premises grouching about a promised but undelivered early breakfast. I allowed that the feeding capabilities in Ziegenhain were always deficient to me.

Later in the morning I met Herr Wickert, the local bank manager who had answered some of my original letters asking about the old camp and a young man from Africa who would be his interpreter.

We proceeded to Stalag IXA, now Trutzhain, a village separate from Ziegenhain. There I met Horst Munk who is now a good friend and Rudiger Geil, a teacher who has a keen interest in the history of the camp. Roland Stimpel joined us. Fortunately Geil and Stimpel spoke excellent English to offset my poor German. We spent the day together exploring the old area. Trutzhain is now about three times as big as the original camp. There are many new houses around what was the barbed wire perimeter.

Rudolph Plotz lives in what had been a guard barracks unchanged since 1945. The American Army operated the camp as a prisoner of war enclosure and used some of the

buildings. On a wall an anonymous American GI painted the Statue of Liberty. Rudolph keeps the fading picture covered with opaque plastic. He is proud of the care he takes of it and worries about its deterioration.

In the early post war years the Stalag was a refugee camp. One of the old barracks, now an artificial flower manufacturing plant, was a synagogue and has a huge Star of David painted on the ceiling. On the walls not covered by shelves one can still see the white Greek style columns that had been painted against a deep red background.

The two and a half barracks in which the Americans lived are factories now. Corrugated steel siding covers the exteriors. The front doorways are closed in as are most of the windows. Both of the plants were closed while I was there so I did not get to look inside them.

The old kitchen across the street from the barracks in which 499 others and I lived is now a home for two families. It has a covered porch running its full length. The whole front is now painted white and there are pots full of bright flowers hanging from the eaves. The rear looks just like it did in 1944, except for an abandoned Mercedes in the yard.

In the back of "my" barracks only the latrine foundation remains. It was through the latrine the one unsuccessful escape effort was made. One man was killed in the attempt. No one escaped.

A small banking facility is in the building that was the revier (first aid hospital). The office building at the

main gate in which the commandant and his staff operated is now a restaurant and bar. On the wall is a large painting of the original structure.

The Roman Catholic church is in the shape of a pup tent in memory of the quarters used by French when they built the camp and its first church, Notre Dame. During the war there were two churches built in the Stalag. Six Priests stayed with the men during their captivity. Among them was Abbe Pierre Dentin of Amiens, France. He is still active in the church and with Les anciens du Stalag IXA, a group of French soldiers who were former prisoners.

In the new grade school built since the war is an excellent small museum. It was part of the effort of the late Paul Goudineau who started it as part of the reconciliation effort which built up friendships between former French prisoners and the local Germans. These people work for peace and understanding through regular visits both in France and Germany. I consider myself lucky to be a part of their comradeship. Horst Munk has done much work to upgrade and expand the museum since Goudineau died a few years ago.

The cemetery holds no prisoner of war bodies any longer. One enters it through gates carved as stylized barbed wire strands. A monument in the form of a grieving woman carved by a French prisoner during captivity stands in a prominent place. A bronze plaque commemorates by name and year those who died from illness or killed in the two air



raids on the camp. The last air raid was on March 20, only a few days before liberation. Fifteen French men were killed and 42 wounded in the still unexplained attack by an American P-47. In a separate cemetery down the road over 600 Russians are buried. Both cemeteries reflect reverent care.

In 1988 I joined a memorial service at the French cemetery. Many German groups in colorful uniforms attended. Two men had on French Foreign Legion green berets and wore Viet Nam service medals. Prayers were offered for the souls of the dead and for the well being of the living by French and German priests. The burgermeister of the area and other governmental officials spoke quietly to the group. A unit from the German Army placed a wreath with ribbons of the red, yellow and black of Germany on the memorial. It lay next to the one with the red, white and blue ribbons of France put there earlier by the men of Le anciens du Stalag IXA. There was unity in the feelings of grief expressed for the dead of both sides. It no longer mattered in which uniform or conflict a son, father, brother, or friend had died. The group of old soldiers from all the countries and their families seemed to melt together in the mottled sun light under the trees. Any sharp divisions that may have existed dissolved in our common sadness.

Once I thought I would never leave Stalag IXA, and for years had no thought of returning. Two visits should be enough revisiting of the past, but something still draws me back. I will join the French once more in Ziegenhain this year to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the camp. I do not know precisely why I want to return again. It is not to visit the scene of some great personal trials. I think it is because the child who once lived inside of me died in that place. I want to walk where I lost him even though he is gone forever. Among those old barracks I may find the part of his soul that holds my feelings.

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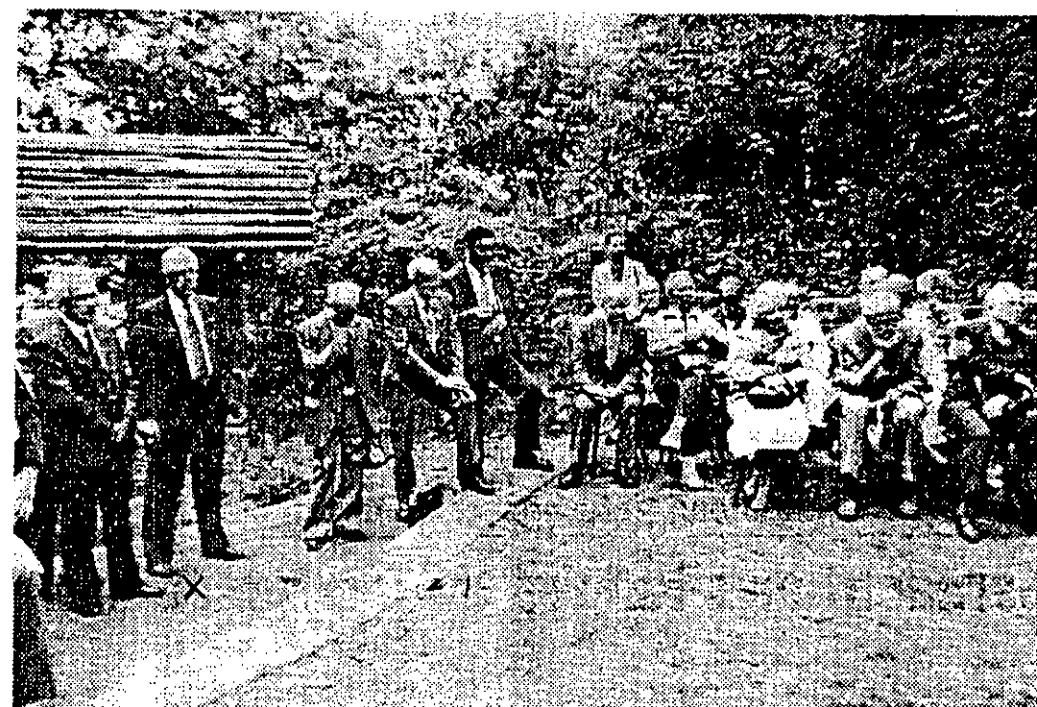
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ßer Neukirchen) Guntram Kestel, HNA-Ges-  
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Ziegenhainer Zeitung - Treysaer Zeitung  
Amtliches Verkündungsorgan für den

Nr. 158

x Richard Peterson



BEI DER GEDENKFEIER auf dem Trutzhainer Friedhof: ehemalige französische Kriegsgefangene  
ihren Frauen sowie aus den USA R. W. Peterson (2. von links), der auch im Stalag IX gefangen

Schwalmstadt (wlr). Beifall spendeten die Zuhörer auf dem Trutzhainer Friedhof, als am Samstagnachmittag Abbé Pierre Dentin aus Amiens bei einer Gedenkfeier im Beisein von zahlreichen ehemaligen französischen und eines amerikanischen Kriegsgefangenen im „Stalag IX“ ausrief, daß nie wie

## Ehemalige französische Kriegsgefangene

### „Wir richten unseren Blick

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der Haß und Krieg aufkommen dürften und stattdessen Völker-  
verständigung, Zusammenar-  
beit und Liebe vorherrschend  
müßten. „Es ist der Wunsch der

Welt von morgen und unseres  
gemeinsamen Herrn: Selig sind  
die, die Frieden stiften“, ergänzte  
der einstige Lagerpfarrer mit  
einem Bibelwort.  
Die eindrucksvolle Feierstun-  
de bei dem von der Kyffhäuser-  
kameradschaft Trutzhain mit  
Horst Munk und von den Fran-  
zosen gemeinsam gestalteten  
siebten Deutsch-Französischen  
Freundschaftstreffen erlebte  
ihren Höhepunkt, als nach dem  
Lied „Vom Guten Kameraden“

das schottische Lied „Should  
acquaintance be forged“ in  
Sprachen gesungen wurde  
als Franzosen, Kyffhäuser-  
glieder und Soldaten von  
Bundeswehr in Schwalm-  
Kränze am französischen  
renmal niederlegten.  
Zuvor hatte Bürgermei-  
Helmut George im Beisein  
Landrat Jürgen Hasheider  
des Kyffhäuser-Bundesvor-  
zenden Dieter Fischer (Arols-  
sowie von Oberstleutnant W

# GEMEINE

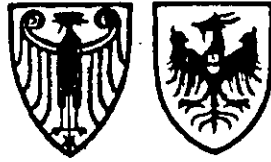
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Nr. 158 · Montag, 11. 7. 1988

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MEINE



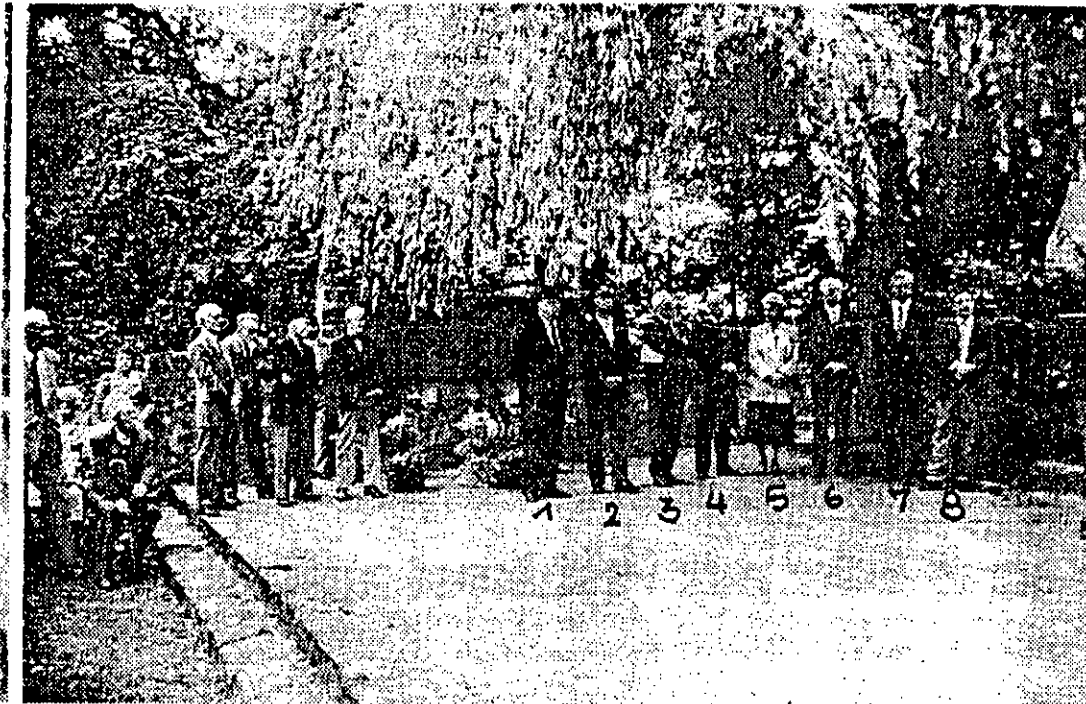
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Frielendorfer Zeitung - Neukirchener Anzeiger

Walm-Eder-Kreis und die Stadt Schwalmstadt

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Montag, 11. Juli 1988



VOR DEM MAHNMAL, von Franzosen geschaffen und vor fünf Jahren restauriert, postierten sich Kommunalpolitiker, Pfarrer und Vertreter der Kyffhäuserorganisation zur Gedenkfeier. (Fotos:wfr)

## Ein US-Soldat nahm an Gedenkfeier teil in eine glücklichere Zukunft“

Der Klingenberg und mehrerer anderer führender Persönlichkeiten in einer ebenfalls ergreifenden Ansprache als Konsequenz aus der einstigen Feindschaft die Pflicht zu einem Miteinander in Frieden und Freiheit abgeleitet. „An dieser Stätte, die uns ein gemeinsames Symbol geworden ist, reichen wir uns die Hände und richten den Blick in eine glücklichere Zukunft, die Europa und Frieden heißt“, sagte George. Hoffnungsvolle Zei-

chen auf dem Weg dorthin seien Partnerschaften, wie die mit Loriot gepflegt.

Nach den von Jürgen Holland-Letz übersetzten Ansprachen, trat Abbé Dentin als Dolmetscher in Aktion, als Dekan Friedrich Malkemus verkündete, daß sich der Kirchenkreis Ziegenhain über die guten Beziehungen freue, die mit den ehemaligen Kriegsgefangenen gepflegt werden. Die Kyffhäuserkameradschaft und andere

Familien, die die Gäste bei sich aufnehmen, würden dazu beitragen, daß die letzten Gräben zugeschüttet und gute Brücken zwischen Brüdern und Schwestern in Europa gebaut werden.“

Der Gedenkfeier für die Toten des zweiten Weltkrieges war in der Maria-Hilf-Kirche ein ökumenischer Gottesdienst vorausgegangen. Am Vormittag hatten die Gäste aus Frankreich und den USA u.a. das Museum der Schwalm besucht. Am Sonntag schlossen sich eine Feierstunde im Dorfgemeinschaftshaus Trutzhain und eine Besichtigung des erweiterten Museums in diesem Gebäude an, in dem viele Erinnerungsstücke an das Stalag IX aufbewahrt werden.

1. Präsident des Kyffhäuserbund  
Dieter Fischer
2. Horst Munk
3. Pierre Dentin
4. Dekan Malkemus
5. Frau des Bürgermeisters George
6. Bürgermeister v. Schwalmstadt  
George
7. Landrat  
Hasheider
8. Ortsvorsteher  
Artur Renftel

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# SCHWÄLMER ALLGEMEINE SCHWALM\*BOLE

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Frieledorfer Zeitung · Neukirchner Anzeiger  
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 48, Tel. 313 Neukirchen, Papierwaren Lo-  
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 Georg Klister, Alfelder Str. 14, Tel. 4 4  
 Oberau, Schreibwaren W. Bernhart  
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8. 6. Januar 1990

## Ehemaliger US-Soldat schreibt Doktorarbeit über Gefangenschaft

# Dr. Richard Peterson aus Kalifornien hält Erinnerungen an Lager Trutzhain fest

Schwalmstadt (wir). Im Sommer 1988, als ehemalige französische Kriegsgefangene wieder einmal auf Einladung der Kyffhäuserkameradschaft Trutzhain auf dem dortigen Friedhof eine Gedenkstunde gemeinsam mit ihren inzwischen Freunde gewordenen Gastgeber begingen, weilte Richard Peterson aus den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika unter den Teilnehmern der eindrucksvollen Feier.

Auch er hatte, wie die ehemaligen französischen Soldaten, während des zweiten Weltkrieges im damaligen Trutzhainer Stalag IX A als Kriegsgefangener harte Wochen der Entbehrung auf sich nehmen müssen.

Der heute nahezu 70 Jahre alte US-Bürger kam nicht, ebenso wie seine Leidensgefährten aus Frankreich, mit Gefühlen des Hasses, sondern als Besucher, der ebenfalls Kontakte zu deutschen Menschen suchte und sie in Trutzhain fand.

### Fast 300 Seiten

Davon zeugt ein dickes fast 300 Seiten zählendes Buch. Im Din-A-4 Format liegt es im Hause von Horst Munk, dem Vorsitzenden der Kyffhäuserkameradschaft Trutzhain. Es handelt sich dabei um eine ganz besondere Schrift: Richard (in seiner Heimat Dick genannt) Peterson hat es als Kopie einer von ihm verfaßten Dissertation an seinen „Freund“ geschickt, der „als Soldat für sein Vaterland so hat leiden müssen wie ich für das Meine“.

So steht es auf der ersten Seite handschriftlich in der Doktorarbeit zu lesen, die der Verfasser erst im fortgeschrittenen Alter vorgelegt hat und die Erlebnisse gefangener amerikanischer Soldaten im zweiten Weltkrieg zum Inhalt hat.

Dr. Peterson, der jahrzehntlang als Bankfachmann in östlichen Staaten Amerikas an führender Stelle tätig war, hat bei der Universität für Humanistische Studien in der kalifornischen Stadt San Diego promo-

viert. Seinem deutschen Freund, dem Empfänger des letzten Entwurfes der philosophischen Abhandlung, bekundet er hohen Respekt vor dessen Hingabe für den Frieden.

Horst Munk hat sich, wie der Amerikaner in Trutzhain erfahren konnte, nicht nur um die wiederholten Begegnungen mit „Combattants anciens“ mit Erfolg bemüht, ihm ist auch die Einrichtung eines kleinen Museums im Bereich des ehemaligen Gefangenenlagers zu verdanken.



DR. RICHARD PETERSON

In dieses Lager kam Dr. Peterson vor genau 45 Jahren. Bei der Ardennen-Offensive der deutschen Wehrmacht war er an belgischen Grenze kurz vor Weihnachten 1944 in Gefangenschaft geraten und danach zunächst im Lager Bad Orb hinter Stacheldraht gekommen. Von dort wurde er Anfang Januar 1945 mit einem Transport per Güterzug nach Treysa gebracht, von wo die Gefangenen bei eisiger Kälte bis zum Stalag IX A marschieren mußten.

Der Amerikaner, zu jener Zeit Unteroffizier, schildert in seiner Doktorarbeit in allen Details seine Erlebnisse und Empfindungen. Bis zum Einmarsch seiner Landsleute am 30. März 1945, es war Karfreitag, wurde Peterson in Trutzhain festgehalten.

Vor der Befreiung hatten die Gefangenen, so geht aus der Abhandlung des Autors her-

vor, etliche schicksalhafte Stunden zu überstehen. „Die Luftwaffe“, so schreibt der Amerikaner, „war nicht immer freundlich. Treysa war ständiges Angriffsziel für unsere Kämpfer, die über den Bahnhof strichen und ihn bombardierten“.

### Tieffliegerangriff

An angenehmen Vorfrühlingstagen wollten die Gefangenen draußen vor den Baracken stehen und die Aktionen der Flieger beobachten. Plötzlich flog eine Maschine heran, und der Pilot - der vermutlich in einem Wachturm des Lagers einen Fliegerabwehrposten erblickte, jagte über das Lager hinweg und feuerte aus allen Rohren. Wie sich Dick Peterson erinnert, wurden einige seiner Landsleute bei dem Angriff verletzt und etliche französische Gefangene getötet.

Als sich die US-Truppen am 30. März Ziegenhain näherten, konnten die Kriegsgefangenen viele Häuser sehen, aus deren Fenstern weiße Flaggen wehten. Am frühen Nachmittag rollten Panzer der 6. US-Army von Ziegenhain her auf das Lager zu. Dazu Dick Peterson: „Wir schrieten und brüllten vor Erregung angesichts der amerikanischen Truppen. Als sie stoppten, fragten erst einmal viele von uns, was draußen in der Welt passiert sei“.

### Erfolgreicher Banker

42 Jahre danach kehrte der inzwischen als erfolgreicher Banker in seinem Land tätig gewesene ehemalige Infanterist nach Trutzhain zurück, um hier einige Recherchen anzustellen und sich vor Ort an jene Zeit zu erinnern, die seine schwerste im Leben war. Nun hat er sein autobiografisches Werk als Doktorarbeit abgeschlossen.

Wie prominent Dr. Peterson in seiner Heimat ist, mag jene Tatsache erhellen, daß er seit 1985 in dem weit verbreiteten Buch „Who ist Who in the West“ aufgeführt ist.