



***A POW'S STORY***

***by bud santoro***

***4558 words***

## **Chapter One**

### **The Beginning**

**The time is late summer 1942, the place is Waterbury, Connecticut**

**It is the last few months of my final deferment before induction into the military service.**

**I am worried, wondering how to cope with military service, what would be the best way to survive, and so not really knowing why, I drive to Fort Devens, Massachusetts which I know is the first assembly area to which inductees in our area are sent. Driving through the public areas of the fort I am even more depressed and so I begin the drive back home, about 75 miles.**

**There is a soldier hitchhiking and I offer him a ride which he accepts and among many other questions I ask what he thinks is the best assignment in the army and without hesitation he says, "Get a job in the hospital, easy duty, little military discipline to conform to, and nice clean surroundings.**

**So, convinced that this is what I must do I decide that with my background in photography working in my father's portrait studio I would seek to become an x-ray technician.**

**The leading radiologist in town is Dr Sam Atkins whom I will come to learn is a man of great compassion and caring for his fellow man. I do not know him but driven by a compulsion to achieve my objective I go to his office and telling him my circumstances I ask him if he will "make me an x-ray technician". I will never forget the look of disbelief and yet concern that came over his face as he said, "You want me to make of you an x-ray technician? Well if you have the nerve to ask that of me I guess I have the nerve to try. But I want you to know I cannot make you an x-ray technician but I can make you LOOK like an x-ray technician. So I want you to come to the office afternoons three times a week. You will put on this white coat, follow me around, don't talk to the patients, don't touch the machine and watch and listen."**

**That is what I did until my deferment was up and it was time to say goodbye and thank the good Doctor Atkins. He shook my hand and said, "well there is one more thing that I can do for you. Here is a letter to my good friend Major Rubens, at Fort Devens. Do not open it but make sure he gets it."**

**What sequence of events followed I will save for another time. Suffice to say I was able to get the letter to Major Rubens and I was assigned eventually to the Fort Devens Station Hospital.**

**I do not know whether there is really a guardian angel as some people believe but surely this experience would seem to indicate so. The things that came about have changed my whole life.**

## Chapter Two The Stockade

The date is early fall, 1942.

I am on temporary duty as a stockade guard at Fort Bragg, North Carolina while awaiting reassignment to an evac hospital.

There was no coddling of stockade prisoners during World War II, pup tents on bare ground, cold showers at 5 A.M. followed by standing in formation outside the mess hall until the good conduct troops finished their breakfast and what was left was served to the prisoners followed by the worst of dirty jobs for the day.

As a consequence, these miscreants, deserters, rebels against authority, AWOL's, and troublemakers of the worst kind tended to regard the stockade guards as targets for their resentment and tried in many ways, some ingenious, to harass us. One of their favorite pastimes was making up insulting doggerel about each guard and I was included.

Sung in sing-song fashion after dark while we were patrolling the stockade perimeter, mine went this way:

Oh, I'd rather be a pimp and I'd rather be a whore  
Than a chicken s---t sergeant from the Medical Corp.

Sung repetitiously it was no more than an annoyance. They were in, I was out.

Now time passes and it is summer, 1945 and I am being processed for discharge at Camp Crowder, Joplin Missouri.

A whole lifetime, it seems, has passed, I have been overseas, in combat, wounded, a prisoner of war for 8 months, liberated and sent to England for rehab.

I am standing in line waiting for the commissary to open and from somewhere behind me I hear:

Oh I'd rather be a pimp and I'd rather be a whore  
Than a chicken s---t sergeant from the Medical Corp.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Surely from back there in the line someone is waiting to settle an old score.

Fists clenched, stiff with apprehension, I turn and am confronted by Zigmond Gonglewski, a great six foot three giant of a man and one of the more mutinous and rebellious stockade prisoners from those days back in Fort Bragg.

Looking down at me, his tough expression breaks into a grin. "Don't worry, Sandy, I learned my lesson and I stay out of trouble these days. And anyway you weren't such a bad guy"

We have a beer together, reminisce a bit, and go our separate ways.

Time heals.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Strafing**

**The time is January,1945.The place,somewhere in Germany in a boxcar on a siding. It is the second day of travel for us and we are awaiting resumption of the trip,sitting in near darkness,shoulder to shoulder around the perimeter of the freight car.**

**Suddenly we hear the roar of a plane overhead and simultaneously the doors are unlocked as our German guards scream "Raus!-Raus!".Get out!,Get out!**

**Marlen and I scramble up and push our way to the doors with the rest.Jumping down to the cinder roadbed,over two sets of rails.down a muddy bank, over a barb wire cattle fence,and about a quarter mile across a snow covered field before we stop, panting,to look back at an Allied fighter plane firing 50 caliber slugs the length of our unmarked freight train.**

**I look at Marlen and he is shivering violently."Scared?" I ask. "No", he says,"I'm cold."**

**Then I see he is barefoot, and even more remarkable,not a bruise or cut on his feet. Which is pretty good proof that the sensation of pain is a relative thing.**

## **Chapter 3B**

### **The Coal Caper**

**The time is late February,1945.The place is Stalag 4B,Germany**

**Marlen Hall and I are the only Americans quartered with a group of English and Australian fellow pows.**

**Many of the British and Australians are long time pows having been taken as far back as the North African campaign and they are street smart in ways to cope with pow life,further,they have a paternal feeling towards us as novice prisoners.**

**The room in the barracks to which we are assigned consists of three tiers of shelving which serve as sleeping facilities on the right and left walls, the rear wall is bare save for a window which looks out on a side yard space of about 20 feet and the barb wire fence which encloses the compound.**

**In the center of the room is a ceramic tile stove, two feet square more or less, which theoretically would heat the room providing its prodigious appetite for coal could be satisfied.Coal, incidentally which is NOT provided by our captors.**

**Beyond the aforementioned barb wire fence, outside the compound is some sort of boiler room or power house guarded by a sentry who circles the facility continuously.**

**The British,noting that there is always a scattering of coal alongside the building have determined that it is possible in the time the sentry circles the building,to leap out the window,snake through the barb wire,scoop up a sack of coal and be back just in time before the sentry is back.**

**Marlen and I are invited and in fact feel we should participate in filching the coal and I am taking my first turn.I have a haversack on my back and the moment the sentry turns the corner away from us I am out the window and through the barb wire.Well, not exactly as the haversack has caught itself on a barb and I cannot reach it to extricate myself.My frantic struggles do no good and I can almost feel the sentry's shot nut a steady voice in my ear says "hold on Yank,I'll get you loose" and with that I am free.Scotting to the coal pile I fill the sack and fly back to the fence where my saviour is holding the strands apart, up and into the window with the Brit following and in to safety all before the sentry turns the corner to our side of the building.**

**The coal is hidden in a bucket under a loose board in the floor.**

**A week later a German corporal accompanied by a private stamps in the room,goes straight to the loose board and pulls up the bucket throws it down and kicks it out the door and down the corridor all the while yelling about the thieving British and Americans while a couple of us follow retrieving the pieces of coal.**

**We never found out who informed on us and thinking back on it I dont even believe the German corporal really wanted to deprive us of the coal.He just went through the motions to assert himself.**

**There were times,I think,when our captors really didn't have their heart in the job and just gave it lip service.**

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Boxcar**

**It is late winter, 1945. The place is a prisoner of war camp in eastern Germany near the Polish border.**

**We are told by our German captors that evacuation of the entire camp will begin in three days. Simultaneously a messenger from the French compound arrives with word that the French pows wish to distribute foodstuffs they have been hoarding, (obviously a generosity stimulated by the knowledge that they would lose them anyway) and will so do on the day of assembly to board the boxcars carrying us to our next camp.**

**Keeping their promise the French are standing by as we form up on the day of evacuation, handing each one of the 600 American pows a sack containing 2 bags of jellied candies, 1 large chocolate bar, 2 boxes of cookies, 1 bag of dried figs, 1 bag of fig cookies, and 2 tins of meat.**

**We start on the march to the rail siding some distance away and I am unable to resist dipping into the sack of food, starting first with the chocolate, finishing that and downing 1 bag of candy, followed by the fig cookies and the figs. Marlen, my friend, keeps telling me I will regret stuffing myself and I tell him I don't care it's been 4 months since we have had anything but ersatz black bread and boiled potatoes and not very much of that either.**

**We arrive at the rail head and first I will describe for you how the German army transported its prisoners. Into each boxcar were crowded 20 or more pows, as many as possible so that sitting side by side around the perimeter hip to hip, shoulder to shoulder, no individual movement was possible. In the center was a pile of straw which was reserved for relieving oneself during the trip. A very small amount of light entered through a small grill at one end of the boxcar. The doors were shut and locked and we sat there awaiting the start of the trip. Now I begin to feel the onset of cramps, a protesting of my digestive tract because of the huge quantity of rich food, to which it was unaccustomed, and on which I had gorged myself. My body is demanding a bowel movement but I cannot bring myself to allow it, the train has not even started moving and we may be several days in transit and I simply do not want to be the first to use the center of the car.**

**However, as the severity of cramps increases I realize I cannot ignore them, and so I resign myself to getting to the straw pile. Marlen is on my right and I get up, as I do great paroxysms of violent bowel activity strike and I turn and face the wall supporting myself with both hands on the wall as I am unable to stand without propping myself up, nor can I move, and I realize I am not going to get to the straw. Rebelling violently against the restriction imposed on it my body takes the easier way out and I begin projectile vomiting in the almost total darkness, unfortunately most of it on Marlen who is unable to move either way and is protesting loudly. It doesn't take long for me to lose everything and when I am finally able to speak I tell Marlen how sorry I am to have thrown up on him and Marlen says: "Gee Bud, that's a relief, I didn't know you were vomiting."**

**Which only goes to show that no matter how bad it may seem, things can always be worse.**

## **Chapter 4C**

### **First Captivity**

**The Time is December 19th,1945**

**The Place is the village of Schoenberg on the Belgian-German border**

**Last night our captors said we would be sleeping in "the gasthaus" which sounded like it would be a good place to bunk down. Actually it was a barn and I decided I'd have no part of it so I went to the first house I came to and asked the lady of the house if I could sleep there. She said she didn't think it wise as German officers had taken over the house, but I persisted saying I would sleep in the kitchen and she relented, agreeing with some reluctance. She kindly gave me a slab of homemade bread and butter and as I was eating it I wandered to the door of the parlor where four German officers were noisily playing cards, slapping each card down with gusto and roaring with laughter as they exchanged stories. Spying me in the doorway one of them said, referring to Patton's slogan about going to Berlin, "yah, you are going to Berlin....with gun at your back !" To which I replied "No I'm not going to Berlin, but General Patton is." At which two of the officers got up grabbed me by the arms and flung me bodily out the front door. Not a bit intimidated by this I went around to the back door but the lady of the house refused to let me back in saying she feared the Germans would burn down the house if she let me back in. So I slept in the barn after all.**

**Even today over five decades later I am amazed at both my brashness and escape without a beating or worse at the hands of those German officers.**

**300 words**

## **Chapter Four- B**

### **Combat**

**The Time: December 18,1944**

**The Place: The Schnee Eiffel Forest**

**Last night we slept out in the open in a snow covered clearing,sleeping bags zipped up over our heads.**

**This morning breakfast was on the march consisting of cold K rations of cheese,crackers, and fruit bar.We have arrived at a wooded area on a hill and have engaged the enemy.The German gunners use a technique of firing 88 millimeter guns into the trees above our heads and the result is a rain of shrapnel from which not even a foxhole can provide cover. The crack of each salvo is followed by a tinkling rustling as the deadly shrapnel rains down on us. We have a lot of injuries and I am able only to provide emergency aid to stop bleeding and alleviate pain as I rspnd to calls for a medic. I am tending to about twenty casualties and realise they urgently need more intensive medical attention than I can provide. I climb up the hill to the 422nd regiment CP and tell Colonel Descheneaux that the casualties must be evacuated immediately. I see tears in his eyes as he says,"There'll be evacuation,sergeant.We are surrendering." I don't quite comprehend the enormity of what is to happen until I look about seeing company officers destroying weaponry and personal belongings.Lieutenant Myers places his wristwatch on a rock and smashes it with another stone saying,"Those b-----ds don't get this one!"**

**I go back down the hill and Private Tice one of our aidmen grabs my arm and says,"Sarge can I stay with you,I'm scared." "Sure" I say "lets take cover in this ditch until the firing lets up a bit." Five minutes later he gasps and clutches his chest. I pull open his shirt and see a very small clean wound in his chest and realise he has just died. A very small bit of shrapnel had penetrated his heart. Moments later all firing ceases.I am shaken by the tragic event of Tice's death, the terrible consequence of a cease fire that came minutes too late for him.**

**Now the enemy materialise from the cover of dense underbrush and we stand about hands in the air. A German rifleman confronts me and speaks too rapidly for me to undestand . He finally puts down his rifle and takes hold of my upraised arms and lowers them saying slowly in German,"You are not a combatant,you are a sanitater,medic, and need not hold up your arms."**

**We are formed up in a column and marched under guard to the nearby little village of Schoenberg.**

**450 words**



## Chapter Five

### Fall From Grace

The time is winter, 1945. The place is a prison camp in Germany.

I have found there is a compound for Italian prisoners, and, taking advantage of my Red Cross armband which allows me to visit other compounds I visit there frequently using my rudimentary Italian vocabulary.

I am regarded as somewhat of a novelty, an American who speaks Italian, and soon enjoy the friendship and confidence of the compound leader, an officer addressed as "Brigadiere". He is an expert in bartering, maintains a footlocker full of loaves of bread which he calls his "banco", and helps me sell various articles of clothing and other personal effects that Marlen, my friend, and I have pooled.

And so, from time to time I am able to supplement with bartered bread, our prison diet of a fifth of a loaf of German ersatz bread (about six ounces) and 3 or 4 golf ball sized half boiled potatoes.

About ten days have passed and Marlen and I have had no luck selling a sweater we had shared and we are so hungry. I ask once again for help from the Brigadiere but he shrugs and says, "Eh-business is bad. Nobody buys. But if you want I will take you with me and we make another try."

And so we go from compound to compound, French, Polish, Czech, Russian, each time holding up the sweater but no takers. I am tired and downhearted and I say, "Let's give up-it's hopeless-I'm going home" But the Brigadiere is undaunted and he says he will go on with the sweater and if he sells it he will bring me a loaf of bread.

I turn and start back but I cannot face the prospect of coming back empty handed. I feel Marlen is depending on me and, hungered to the point of irrationality, I go instead to the Brigadiere's barracks. There I tell Carlo that the Brigadiere has sold the sweater and will be back later and he, Carlo, is to give me a loaf of bread.

He does so and I hurry back to our compound where Marlen and I devour the whole loaf in short order.

Now with a full stomach I begin to realise the enormity of what I had done. Stealing is the ultimate crime in prison camp and is dealt with swiftly and without mercy.

I sit in terror, inwardly shaking, awaiting what I know must come.

An hour or so passes and one of the British lads comes in and says, "hey Sandy, there's a couple of Eyties at the fence wanting to see you." "I think, do I go? Do I hide? What can I do? I decide to accept whatever is due me, I just don't care anymore. So out I go and there is the Brigadiere at the fence and he is waving a loaf of bread! "Ho venduto, mio amico. I have sold it my friend, and here is the bread I have promised you".

I am stiff with fear as I approach the fence, anticipating the dreadful fate I deserve and I say, "Brigadiere I already have a loaf. I told Carlo you said to give me one. I'm sorry.....I'm sorry."

A great sadness comes over his face, he slumps, and he says, "Tu sei molto fortunato-you are very lucky-you understand what I would have to do if I had not sold the sweater?"

"Yes" I say, as he turns and starts to walk away, "and I would have deserved it".

It takes a long time after that to get back in his good graces, many visits to his compound, and eventually our friendship is renewed but I always felt somehow that things were never the same.

**I know to this day, fifty four years later, that it was the most regrettable wrong I have ever done. It can never be undone, and the regret will always be with me.**

## **Chapter Six**

### **Free At Last !**

**The time is late spring,1945.The place is German POW camp.**

**For days we have been hearing the rumble of artillery fire from the west and there are rumors that the Allies are advancing rapidly in our direction. Yesterday all but one of the German guards have fled, leaving one demoralised corporal in charge who reminds us continually that he always treated us fairly.**

**I am enduring my daily masochistic cold water shave using my only razor blade honed on the palm of my hand when one of the Tommies rushes in to the hut yelling."They're here! They're here!" I join the stampede out to the fence as the lead British tank in a fine dramatic move I shall never forget roars through the high wire fence.**

**Filled with the emotion of the moment, I rush forward as it rocks to a standstill and embracing the steel prow I kiss the cold metal. Total chaos is all about as tankers climb out of their beautiful steel chargers, grinning,embracing us, clapping us on the back assuring us that indeed our captivity ended.**

**By now the entire compound has gathered and the tank commander apologises for the fact that there will be a delay of a couple of days till transport arrives but meanwhile a field kitchen is to be setup and first priority will be proper food. In the interim,he says you are free to come and go as you will, and if in the nearby village you see anything you want take it. If a villager objects,there will be plenty of British soldiers about to back you up.**

**The results were incredible! I remember seeing one pow with a chicken tied to his straw pallet, another had a sack of sugar and was shining his boots with it,symbolism I suppose.**

**All about the compound pows were riding commandeered bicycles,wearing clothing taken from the villagers, eating all through the day on foodstuff taken from sullen but cowed villagers. The British army,upon learning that we had never received Red Cross parcels, was doing a house to house search in the town looking for any trace of Red Cross parcels which may have been diverted from the pows.Wherever they found a carton,empty or not, that house was demolished. A tough retaliatory action,indeed.**

**Two multi-story warehouses about a quarter mile from camp contained tons of material the German army had shipped back from occupied countries, perfumes.lotions,cigarette lighters,leather goods,household sundries. It didn't take long for the pows to get into it and take what they wanted, returning to camp arms loaded with "souvenirs", much of which they gave away. I was given a bottle of 1711 French perfume.**

**The Russian compound which was heretofore a source of almost any type of food,clothing, cigarettes,whatever you wanted to barter for, now announced that women were available!**

**Two days later we were put into British lorries and my last view from the back of the truck was of the village,two-thirds of the houses piles of rubble.**

**It had been an experience in which at times the will to survive was all one had for which to cling,**

## **Chapter Seven**

### **The Birthday party**

**The time is late spring, 1945, the place a convalescent hospital in England.**

**Two Red Cross ladies have learned that it is my birthday and have planned a picnic celebration for me and my friend Bob Dahleim at Barge Walk on Thames, Hampton Court.**

**It is a warm sunny day and the four of us are sitting at the river bank enjoying the rare wartime delicacies, deviled eggs and sweet biscuits provided by the hospital kitchen staff. There are many families taking advantage of the mild spring day and the peaceful riverside view.**

**Bob nudges me and says "Bud, look at that kid in the river". I do and he is definitely in trouble, flailing his arms and bobbing up and down in the water.**

**As one, we both strip off shirts and trousers and dive into the river, reach the lad and with him between us we make for the river bank. Onlookers who have gathered help bring him ashore and although he is getting rid of lots of water he had swallowed, he is not in much difficulty.**

**The rest of the afternoon passes with the incident forgotten and we return to the hospital.**

**To our astonishment next day two members of the local constabulary arrive to take us to the station house for a statement of the happening and Bob and I are a little uncomfortable with all the attention given us.**

**And it continues with Bob and I being awarded The Soldier's Medal and a commendation from the hospital commander.**

**Even more is to come when many many months later, having been discharged and totally immersed in civilian life with wife and child, there comes in the mail a handsome parchment scroll from the Royal Humane Society describing and lauding the event.**

**They say that for every person there comes a moment when the reason for their being becomes apparent. Could this have been ours?**

# Royal Humane Society

INCORPORATED 1874

Supported by Voluntary Contributions

BY ACT OF PARLIAMENT

By His Majesty the King

His Majesty's Secretaries of State

12th July 1875

Lieutenant Colonel William ...

It was Resolved Unanimously

That the following Testimonial of the Society should be  
on Parchment be hereby given to

Lieutenant Colonel William ...  
United States Army

In having on the 25th May 1875, ...  
at a moment of danger of ...  
East Wall, Hampton Court and where his ...

**Chapter 7B**  
**December 24th,1944**  
**Merry Christmas !**

**The place, Gerolstein Germany.**

**We are at the end of a three day march from Schoenberg and the Germans have crammed 1700 of us into a warehouse at the edge of a rail yard to await transport by boxcar to a stalag.**

**There is nothing to do but sit and wait, tired and dirty and barely enough room to sit on the concrete floor.**

**About mid morning we hear planes overhead, fairly low, and loud. Suddenly we hear and feel explosions and what looks like quicksilver beginning to ooze through the roof above. Realising the air raid is an attack on the rail yards and we are in an unmarked building almost as one the entire group of 1700 pows begin to compress and move away from the molten metal seeping slowly through the roof above us, and as each new silvery drip begins to show we move as one out from under it. It must have been a remarkable sight to see this huge body of men become a single entity and shape and reshape itself to remain clear of the dripping of molten metal. Incredible as it may seem not a single man was injured and the attack on our warehouse was over shortly.**

**The next morning our captors order us into three columns and I along with others, not knowing what they were up to, found places at the end of the column. A strategy that was ill conceived as our guards then announced a special treat for Christmas was to be given us, consisting of three barrels of molasses, one for each column. The barrels were pushed along the line and each pow having no spoon or other utensil, scooped up a palmful of the sweet syrup. Naturally by the time the barrel reached the end of the line there was nothing but trace of molasses left. Just enough to give one a taste.**



F. eralstein

Mission Narrative

**John Shirk, Bombardier, wrote the following after completing his 2nd mission, the group's 146th... SECOND MISSION - Gerolstein, Germany 50° 12' N 6° 44'E - SUNDAY DEC 24th, 1944 Time: 6Hr 25 Min - Bomb Load 24x250 GP = 6000lbs: Target - Marshalling Yards This was the largest Air Raid ever made by any nation and it was a great sight to see. We could see our fighter escort consisting of P51s and P47s. We didn't see any flak thank God. They say that while planes were over the target there were still more just taking off back here in England. Our C.O. also flew this mission. Our group put up 62 planes of which 59 went over the target even "Big Pete" All the crews in our hut flew today. G.A.F fighters attacked several groups but not ours. We saw one jet. Only dropped 12 bombs**  
Details of Aircraft Loss

Mission Label

**Mission #146 Daun-Gerolstein-Ober, Ger 12/24/44**



## Chapter Eight The Final Chapter

The time is May, 1945. The place, a US Army convalescent hospital in England. After four weeks of medical checkups, debriefings, dietary rehabilitation, supervised recreation and just plain coddling we are going home. The rumor is that xpows are to be discharged on arrival stateside.

We arrive, after a tedious trip by ship, at Fort Dix, New Jersey, welcomed by a representative of the base commander and are told a steak dinner awaits us.

As we file into the mess hall we are stunned to see the food servers are healthy well fed German pows. As we file down the serving line the xpow ahead of me tells the pow food server to put a second steak on his plate and foolishly the server says, "Nein, nein, only vun", foolishly because the next thing he knows he's on the floor, our comrade has leapt over the counter and is brandishing a fist as he says "I'm taking no more from your sort". He got his second steak and for the next two meals we have at Fort Dix no German pow food servers are visible.

Apparently discharges are not immediately forthcoming, we're told that first we are to be sent to Lake Placid, N.Y. for R&R, additional debriefing, and feel free to bring our wives along. If you wish to drive there vouchers will be provided for fuel and food enroute. Lake Placid turns out to be a great place for loafing, posh accommodations in one of the deluxe inns, and not much to do. We want our promised discharges and after three weeks the army tells us that there's been a change and there will be no discharges but we will be assigned in our home town or very close to it but first we are to go to a reassignment center, Camp Crowder, in Joplin, Missouri just for a very short time. Again, feel free to drive there and take your wife along. So, disappointed and with some beginning misgivings about ever getting a discharge off we go to Joplin, a fifteen hundred mile jaunt, and check in, xpows are lying around the barracks and I ask how long they've been there, four weeks, three weeks are the answers. It's looking really dismal. We are allowed to live off post but have to be in camp from reveille to taps to be available when our number comes up for reassignment. So we settle into a delightful apartment over a gas station, nice except when the air compressor kicks in which is about every 90 minutes. Then dishes in the sink rattle in accompaniment to the low rumble of the compressor. Actually we are lucky to have the place as rental flats are at a premium.

A tedious, frustrating, five weeks later our reassignment does indeed come through. A base hospital in Taunton, Massachusetts, by no means near our home in Connecticut. Furthermore we hear that those with a medical specialty, mine was xray technician, would be retained in the service regardless of their qualifications for discharge due to the need for medical treatment of returning soldiers.

Determined to make a desperate effort to get recognition of my eligibility for discharge based on length of service, incarceration, and medals awarded I report in to the CO in Taunton and make immediate request for an interview with the Adjutant General. This is a request that cannot be denied, the AG is the enlisted man's legal representative and must be available on request.

My request granted, I go immediately from the CO's office to the AG's office in Boston. I tell the AG, a kindly white haired major, that I have more than enough accumulated points for discharge but no one will count them, points for almost four years of service time, eight months of prison camp, the Purple Heart, the Soldier's

Medal, plus a wife and child. Gently raising his hand to stop my outpouring the major says, "Well sergeant, we'll just count them right now, I see you have your service records with you." A brief perusal of my papers and he says, "Sergeant, you go back to Taunton and while you are enroute I'll talk to your company commander and you'll be with your family tonight." I am delirious with joy and upon my return to Taunton the company commander greets me with discharge papers in hand saying, "I'm sure you won't mind if we dispense with the formality of a presentation of your Purple Heart at a company formation. Good luck sergeant, and well done." And so I return home to joyful wife and parents, and this chapter of my life, a maturing, learning, experience has closed and a new one begins.

Total approx. 3500 words