

Excerpts from the Memoirs

of

Werner Mork

“Aus Meiner Sicht (From My View)”

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Other selections from these memoirs in the original German text can be found
on the website of the German Historical Museum:

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May 8, 1945 !

We were no longer part of a deployment, for us there were no more orders from above to obey. It was as though we were already written-off as nothing more than a laughable remnant, no longer combat-ready and no longer of any use. No one took any interest in us even though every hand was needed now if just to grasp at straws. Without us, Olmütz was lost on May 6, 1945. For us it meant that more than ever we were sitting in a mouse trap that could snap shut on us at any minute and then we would be stuck. Then in the very last days of the war, not very far from our Homeland, we would either bite the dust or become prisoners.

Then suddenly, the end of the war came. The new "Führer" of the remaining Reich that had once called itself the 'Greater German Reich,' Herr Admiral Dönitz, conceded the unconditional surrender of the government and the army. Now the Russian planes flying over us dropped leaflets instead of bombs announcing the capitulation and instructing us on how to behave now that a truce was in effect.

On May 8, 1945 it all ended. The war that started on September 1, 1939 was finally over. The years of destroying people and property were gone. Now what would befall us, the German people? How would I carve out a new life for myself? Would there ever be a possibility to do so? What would my fate be after having volunteered to enlist in September 1939 and serving in the RAD [Reichs-Arbeiterdienst: Work Brigades] and the army. Now I was happy that the Waffen-SS did not accept me when I tried to volunteer for that organization. I was also happy that I had survived all these years, that I was never wounded and that I was not a cripple. I was fairly healthy and only a little tattered, but I was alive. I had survived as a normal little private first class without any special rank, nothing more to add and without any special recognition. I was a 'nothing' in this great army, the Wehrmacht, and I wanted nothing more than to simply go home and to try to live in peace and to build a real life. I wanted to have a home and a family and to slowly forget the insanity of this war. But I also wanted to help build a democratic socialistic state that would forever be free from the madness of war. I had become a pacifist and swore to myself never to become a soldier ever again. My dreams of Utopia had not yet left me and I was convinced that in the new age to come Reason would reign in all nations and all peoples regardless of race or skin color. Young fool that I was, I believed that millions of others like me in all lands would renounce the insanity of war as a solution to political problems. My Utopian ideas were still with me and I was convinced that in this new age Reason would finally reign supreme among all the nations in the world.

Peace was here, but first we soldiers had to march into POW camps, there was no more direct way to get home. This dream was and remained for many not only a long-standing dream, it led many to their deaths in spite of the war's end.

Germany was in shambles. The Reich no longer existed. Our once so loved and honored Führer mocked his people and their sacrifices yet again with the observation that they deserved nothing better than this downfall. Then this criminal took the coward's way out by killing himself instead of standing up before the people and answering for his misdeeds.

All of the German dreams and wishes were totally wrecked. The good German character had brought boundless sorrow over the world which had its hands full now trying to heal from what the Germans and others had done to it. There were many parties responsible for the causes of this war, but not much was being said about them. The primary guilty party was Germany and Naziism as the originator of these massive genocides. The guilty party had been conquered and the world court could now sit in

judgment as self-satisfied, noble and just conquerors over the evil spirits.

[...]

The war was over, the Reich and the Nazi Party had surrendered unconditionally as ordered, but the old [military] spirit was not broken as I can well attest once I had entered the POW camp.

The Russian leaflets had informed us of the truce and told us what we had to do. We were willing to follow the instructions, but the Eastern Army's commander, General Schörner, was not ready to comply. Bloodhound Schörner wanted to use the cease-fire to consolidate what intact combat units he had left in order to carry on the war with the Russians even after May 8th. The insanity was not yet at an end, unbelievable as it may seem, many soldiers preferred to continue fighting rather than to go into the Russian POW camps. The men truly feared the Russian camps and Schörner was able to use this fear to continue with his private war until even that war came to an end. Eventually, even these units had to lay down their arms.

The soldiers who participated in this post cease-fire action had let themselves in for some major problems. From that point they were no longer considered by the Russians to be soldiers, but rather partisans and as such risked the death penalty for their actions. There must have been many horrible scenarios that played out, but not for Bloodhound Schörner who took off in the other direction in his Fieseler Storch aircraft toward the remaining Alpine strongholds. From there he wanted to try and convince the Americans to continue the fight against Bolshevism and the Russians. The Americans were having none of it and they turned him over to the Soviets.



General Ferdinand Schörner

The Soviets did not simply take him out and shoot him, this was in contrast to many of 'his' soldiers who continued the fight under his orders only to have him abandon them without conscience as he fled to Austria and left them to their fate. What shabby behavior for this true Nazi general, this dedicated follower of Hitler. His Führer had committed suicide, but he, the General Field Marshall, simply bugged-out under the conviction that his type was still in great demand, now by their one-time enemy, the Americans. They were all bastards!



Fieseler Storch Airplane

Things were different in our outfit. After the news about the capitulation our commander called us all together and addressed the group. First he released us all from our oath to the Führer which we had been required to take. We no longer had to observe that oath, and there was no new one to follow. Then our commander announced that we were free to go anywhere we wanted. He advised us to

consider sticking together rather than going off alone through hostile Czechoslovakia to find a way home. It was unlikely that the Czech freedom fighters would let any German soldier wandering alone pass freely. He invited us to stay together and cooperate to try and get back to the German border. We would have the use and protection of our vehicles and our light weapons to get us away from the Russians and toward the Americans.



*Oberstleutnant Otto Fondermann
- Our Commander*

After his speech we took an actual democratic vote and by that vote everyone agreed to follow the advice of our commander. He was still our commander and would remain so.

The next problem was to figure out which way we should go to get back home. A look at the map suggested that the shortest way back would be to go in the direction of Budweis and from there it would be a short hop to Austria. However, our commander had heard from our staff headquarters that this path would be full of difficulties along the way. In his opinion it would be better to head out in the direction of Iglau and from there continue on to Pilzen. It would take us away from the Russians and we knew that the Americans were already in Pilzen. Once again everyone voted on the plan. The voting was a very different and totally new feeling for all of us soldiers.

Next we destroyed every piece of equipment that was considered to be unnecessary ballast. We did not want it to fall into the hands of the Czechs. From all of the vehicles we selected two trucks and a Kübelwagen for the Chief. As weapons we would only take hand-held guns with a small amount of ammunition. We used hand grenades to blow up and burn all of the vehicles, weapons and munitions that we were not taking with us. During all of this we were lucky not to have a 'visit' from the Czech freedom fighters. That would have been very unpleasant.

We saw Russian aircraft fly over us again, but they did no more than drop more leaflets advising us that the cease-fire went into effect at midnight and instructing all German soldiers to remain in their current positions, lay down arms and await the arrival of the Russian units. Anyone still under arms after the

cease-fire went into effect would not be protected by the Hague Conventions of War. Instead, they would be considered partisans and would be treated as such, i.e. they would be shot.

In spite of the dire warnings in the leaflets, not one of us considered following their instructions. We did not want to wait for the Russians to arrive and we did not want to be without weapons and completely defenseless. We wanted to head West and to do so as quickly as possible. And we did not want to be without protection in a land where we had to deal with the Czechs, who would be quick to shoot and kill us if they could. We knew that they would not give us a 'free pass' to go back to our homeland, that was very clear.

So it was that we started out for Iglau. We got there at nightfall without any problems along the way and found the city to be in flames. There was no way to go around the burning city, we had to go through it. It was decided that we would simply have to step on the gas and race full-bore through the blazing streets. It was like driving through Hell, but in spite of the flames, rubble, downed telephone poles and other hindrances we managed to get through the town to the other side. Now we could continue on our way.



Iglau, Czechoslovakia

In the meantime dawn had broken and the new day, May 9, 1945, greeted us with a spooky sight. The cease-fire had been in effect for 24 hours but we and other German outfits were traveling the Czechoslovakian roads toward Pilsen in spite of the Russian orders to stay put and wait. The spooky part was that we were accompanied by Russian tanks and armor that were traveling along with us not far from the road. We were quite amazed at this, but at the time we did not know about the agreed-upon demarcation line that separated the American sector from the Russian sector. We also did not realize that we happened to be in the American sector. So it was that we witnessed the spooky sight of having Russian tanks rolling past only 100 yards from us without any belligerent actions whatsoever. The tanks that yesterday frightened us stiff, were today friendly escorts.

We weren't the only ones on the roads. There was a great deal of traffic and even more traffic jams due to broken down vehicles in the middle of the roads. As this bad situation got even worse, our commander directed us to a smaller side road that he felt would be less congested. Now that we were off the main road we had to navigate by maps and try to stay with the commander as he led us toward

our goal. In spite of the difficulties we did manage to stay together. Without too much trouble and with a certain light, hopeful anticipation we drove on to where we thought we were certain to bump into the Americans.

After a short ride we came to a place where we were suddenly confronted by a barricade manned by armed Czechs. By force of arms we were forced to drive under their escort to a market square in their small town. Armed defense wasn't possible because we were so quickly surrounded by the Czechs. Our chief recognized this and forbid us to use our weapons. Once in the market square we were greeted by an ever growing crowd that had an evident threatening disposition toward us. Then the crowd noticed the Iron Cross that still hung around our commander's neck in spite of the Führer's death and of course with the swastika on it. As the crowd made note of this decoration and the other medals he wore on his uniform the fanatic crowd wanted to drag him from his car and hang him in the square.

Things began happening now with blinding speed. A rope suddenly appeared hanging down from the balcony of a house on the square and the cheering crowd wanted to see a Nazi hung. Then all of the other 'Fascists,' that means us, were to be killed. To my horror I once again experienced the fury of the women. These women were behaving like the ones I had encountered in Oldenburg in 1938. These women ranted in the most disgusting and obsessive way demanding to see the Germans hang.

We soldiers were stunned by the frenzied riot that we were helpless to stop. We couldn't do anything but await our fate and our certain death. Our chief was pulled from his car and forced to the rope that hung down from the balcony so that they could put it over his head and hang him from the balcony.

Suddenly, shots rang out over the square. It was machine gun fire going over the heads of the mob in the square toward the house with the balcony. We German soldiers were rescued by an armored American patrol who happened upon this shameful show. They put an end to the gruesome scene. The Czechs did not take it very well and a spirited argument ensued. The Czechs felt as though the Americans were stopping them from enjoying the spoils of war which included lynching Germans. The Americans paid no attention to them and declared us to be their prisoners of war. The Czechs made a final plea to at least be allowed to kill the fascist Iron Cross wearer.

In the end the Czech mob had to stand by and watch as the GI's formed up a new column with their jeep at the head, our vehicles behind and the American armored car bringing up the rear with its machine guns trained on the Czech crowd. We continued on our way, this time with an American escort. They took us to Tabor where they had a huge prisoner camp. There were already a large number of German prisoners in the camp.



American M8 Armored Car

In front of the camp we had to render to them all of our weapons which our escorts had let us hold on to up to this point. This was simply a security measure and not done out of any real fear for themselves. This rendering of arms was really a trashing of arms and everything was tossed onto a huge pile of discarded weapons. I tossed my carbine on the heap with great enthusiasm. However, I wanted to hold on to my handgun. It was a stupid thing to do, but no one noticed. I had the feeling that it might be useful to me, even if only to use it to kill myself! Everything was so uncertain, having the

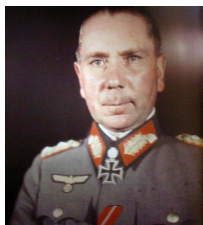
gun gave me a little feeling of control and security even if it was only some control over my own suicide. I was only doing what the officers were allowed to do. According to the Hague Conventions honorable officers could be allowed to keep their pistols. That was the case in the first days of the capitulation among the Americans, but they quickly changed the rules and disarmed the German officers.

They let us keep our vehicles which was a big surprise to us. To have a vehicle while being a prisoner was very rare. Somehow, everything in this camp gave us a very unsettling feeling without us being able to identify the cause. On our staff we had the incredible good fortune to have an Oberleutnant who had lived in America for several years and spoke the language perfectly. How great a good luck this was for us you will see very soon.

After conferring with our commander, our Oberleutnant sought to mix in with the Americans, chat with them and see what he could overhear. The talk between the Americans did not ring very well in our ears. He learned that this was just a receiving camp that would be turned over to the Russians in a few hours. From their HQ in Pilsen the orders had come down stating that all German troops who had fought against the Russians were to be turned over to them and not be held in American custody. This was in accord with the agreement reached by the high command of the two parties in Czechoslovakia. It was very bad news we were hearing from our commander now. It was an unexpected shock to us to learn that we were going to fall into the hands of the Russians after all. What could we do?

Our commander had a price on his head set by the Russians and he did like what he was hearing from the Oberleutnant. The commander called us together and told us to stick close to our vehicles, perhaps we might still make use of them. We needed to stay together and not disband, no matter what happened.

When we arrived in the camp the commander worked it so that our vehicles, purely by chance(!), remained close to the entrance of the camp. The Americans didn't like that but with the help of our American-speaking Oberleutnant we worked it out. So we camped out near the entrance of the camp in a strategic position just in case we might be able to profit from the location. Even if it ended up costing us our lives. We were determined not to simply let the Americans turn us over to the Russians without putting up some kind of fight. How we could manage that, we had no idea, nor did the hundreds of other German soldiers assembled in the camp. It seemed hopeless except that our positioning near the entrance might give us some sort of an edge.



*General Walther
Nehring*

Then suddenly a situation arose where our positioning benefited us and was the decisive factor. There was some quick movement in the camp as a motorcade of three German cars drove up to the entrance of the camp heading out. They paused near where we were. That gave our commander enough time to recognize 'his' general, General Nehring. They greeted each other and he quickly learned that the Americans were moving the General out to the US headquarters in Pilsen. The result of this quick exchange between the two friends had the result that our Regimental Staff was suddenly transformed into the General's personal staff. He made it clear to the Americans that these were "his people" that had to come to Pilsen with him. He spoke with the voice of command and our Oberleutnant acted as interpreter. The General worked it so that the Americans had to let this bigger convoy pass. Together with him we left the camp traveling in our vehicles as an 'escort detail' toward Pilsen...or so we thought.

We learned later that the Tabor camp was indeed handed over to the Russians just a short time after our departure along with all prisoners and vehicles. It was a very close call for us. We also heard that the transfer of the camp did not go smoothly. There were casualties, both dead and wounded, because many of the German soldiers would not allow themselves to be so easily handed over to the Russians.

We had the great good luck by pure chance to avoid this fate, just because two army buddies happened to meet each other and seized the opportunity to join us up with General Nehring's staff as they left the camp. The new convoy, with the General at the head, raced toward Pilsen where the Americans waited for him as well as certain other high-level Germans officers that were of interest to them. This was in contrast to the stinky little common soldiers who the Americans could care less about and who were left to their fate.

General Nehring seemed to know why haste was so important, but we were having a hard time keeping up with him. Our trucks were not up to it. Our commander realized this and decently elected to stay with his men as the General sped on ahead. For us the important thing was that we were able to get out of Tabor. We no longer needed the General's help, but we were very thankful to him for what he had done for us.

Once again we were on our own, setting out anew on our drive to Pilsen on the assumption that arriving there would keep us from falling into the hands of the Russians. If we met up with Czech freedom fighters we knew that we would have no weapons except for the officer's sidearms and my illegal Luger. We could only hope that things would go right for us. However, we did not get very far. We came on an American patrol which stopped us from continuing our run for Pilsen. It was good that our American-speaking Oberleutnant was still with us. He told the Americans about our close call in Tabor and asked them to let us continue on to catch up with General Nehring. The Americans wouldn't go for it, perhaps because by now night had fallen.

They took over command of our unit and once again we were traveling under the protection of an American escort. We did not particularly like where they took us. It was another receiving camp. Our Oberleutnant was assured that we were truly in the American sector now. We came into an area called Horazdovice, where, on the edge of town, a POW camp had been set up. There were already a large number of German soldiers there. The soldiers here were for the most part not combat troops. They were officers and enlisted men who worked at various headquarters who were collected by the Americans during their advance on Pilsen. They were deposited on a large meadow here as POW's. We were also delivered there and handed over to the heads of the camp. Night had fallen and they did not search us again, which was lucky for me since I was still carrying the Luger. We were simply dumped somewhere on the open field. Now we were the American's P.O.W.'s without ever having fought against them. But since we were in Czechoslovakia and the Americans were at our back and almost certainly would have come into conflict with us if the capitulation had not occurred we were of the opinion that we had done the right thing by fleeing into the hands of the Americans. They were on the side of the Allies, just like the Russians were!

However, the Russians did not share this opinion. They wanted all German soldiers who had fought against them, now that they had capitulated, to go into Russian custody as their prisoners of war.

We knew very little about the conflicts between the Americans and the Russians, but we would soon see evidence of their disagreements. This strife would end up having serious results for many German soldiers.

At this moment, however, we were happy that, thanks to the initiative of our commander, we had managed to make it to the American lines where we felt secure. And, of course, we were also happy that the war was finally at an end. We thought everything was decided and we did not give a thought to any disagreements between the Americans and the Russians. They had achieved their common goal, the destruction of Fascism, the German Reich and the German army. There were no longer any problems to deal with. It would only be a matter of time before they let us all go. We were of no use to them as prisoners, there was no more danger of us waging war because we were no longer soldiers. Even more, as prisoners we were a burden to them and in every respect a very expensive burden that had no value to them.

We were thinking in very pragmatic terms and perhaps in retrospect a little too pie-in-the-sky? Perhaps in truth we were very naïve and not very realistic. What did we know about what was going on in the heads of the Allies? It could also have been the case that they saw the ex-soldiers as a source of cheap labor for the Allies, a sort of slave labor to build the 'New Age,' and this would be our penance for allowing ourselves to be led by Reich's leaders. Nevertheless, the war was over, we had survived and now we were safe. There would be no more shooting and death, that was the main thing, everything else was secondary. Just as in all the years before we felt the typical soldier's fatalism coupled with the evident hope for survival and better times.

HORAZDOVICE: I Become a P.O.W. of the Americans

We were with the Americans, the Russians were gone and we believed that we would soon be taken back across the German border, which for us was not very far away. It would be so easy to move us there or so we thought in our innocent naivete. The next morning we 'newcomers' were able to see that this camp sat on an empty field without any possibility for shelter or housing. There was nothing but the naked earth of the empty meadow.

After taking another close look we also realized that we were in the company of a large number of German officers. All ranks were represented, even staff officers of every sort all the way up to Generals. There were also a great many military administrators, managers and all levels of quartermaster assembled here. The noisy 'elite' of the Rear Echelon. These masters of the rear wanted to retain the tone of command here just as if they still held the reins of power in their hands.

There was resistance by many of the common soldiers, and I was one of them. I was of the opinion that we had had quite enough of Prussian glory and grandeur following the total collapse of the state, army and party. From this point I felt myself to be a decommissioned Obergefreiter [Private First Class] and to demonstrate the point I did something that was looked upon as being unseemly and caused me to be shunned by the rest of the guys in my outfit. I demilitarized myself. I ripped off all insignia and marks of rank from my uniform including the winged eagle patch with the swastika and my private's stripes. I simply threw it all away into the muck, including the winged eagle.

This was looked upon gravely by my former comrades and their behavior toward me changed immediately. I was suddenly seen as having soiled our honor and betrayed our fatherland. I was disdained by everyone due to this act. They cut me off, letting me know that I was still part of the Wehrmacht and would remain so in spite of the capitulation. And me, poor fool, I thought that it was all over. We had been released from our soldier's oath which to my mind meant that we were pretty much out of the army. That wasn't to be the case and even Fondermann was not in agreement with my actions. The result of which is that I no longer existed for him. Forget all that we had been through

together, from this moment I was looked upon as being suspect and best avoided. Perhaps I was even a Communist as one fellow said to me right to my face. My comments that Fondermann had released us from our oath and also from service in a non-existent Wehrmacht were ignored. I was a traitor. No one knew me anymore. I was a blaggard and I was forced to find a place for myself outside the circle of my comrades and had to go off and find another place to lay down on the open field of the meadow.

This was my quittance for my totally un-military actions and unseemly behavior of independently leaving the army. I was now suspect, shunned and had to be content when the orderly clerk, on orders from the chief, made note of my expulsion in my pay book. That was before the Americans collected them all. That turned out to be a godsend for me.

After a few days in the camp it really came home to me how truly “impossible” my behavior appeared to my fellow soldiers. The officers, especially the staff officers, wanted to reestablish by-the-book military order and discipline. The enlisted men were to demonstrate respect for their superiors. The officers complained that the men were too casual and insisted that the men should greet officers with a smart military salute. It was not clear which military salute they wanted executed, the old-style salute or the one we were ordered to use after the July 20, 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler [The Nazi salute].



*Iron Cross 2nd
Class*

They wanted their mornings to begin properly with a morning roll call and they wanted enlisted men detailed to them as personal orderlies just like they were before the capitulation. Furthermore they wanted to bring back choral groups to sing army songs and folk songs to show the American captors something about the German military spirit. Even in this oppressive captivity it was important to maintain spirit and show the Americans what we were made of. So were the opinions of these 'high officers,' who were still true to the old military feelings. For them nothing had changed. They had not learned or grasped the fact that really and truly there was no more Wehrmacht. They wanted to continue on with the old army order and discipline with the same smart spit-and-polish. And add to it all---A song.

Those little changes would make them feel proud and superior once again and help them bear the recent misfortunes. They would show the Americans how a 'real' soldier behaved, even in defeat. It goes without saying that everyone would display their rank as well as all of the decorations that they had received from the now stone-dead Führer. That included every medal from the little Iron Cross 2nd Class to the German Cross in gold and the Knight's Cross with all the added embellishments that could be awarded. And all these medals were decorated with a Swastika. I shuddered to think what my comrades might have done to me if I had accepted the Iron Cross at Ortona and my fellow prisoners had seen me throw that away along with my other uniform markings. That would have gone very badly for me.



*Knight's Cross with
Crossed Swords and
Diamonds*

Besides me there were several other subordinates and they complained to the Americans about what the officers wanted to instigate and about their behavior in the camp. I wasn't the only scoundrel and traitor, there were a few more such poor pathetic creatures, these un-German types! The outcome was that the American managers of the camp made it clear that none of this new-military movement would be tolerated and the order went out that no signs of rank and no decorations were to be displayed. No exceptions. It hit our brave German heroes very hard. Added to all that was the order that from this moment one would no longer be required to salute any former superior officer. With that the whole

military world of our officers came crashing down.

In my haste to remove my rank and military marking it turned out that me, the Private First Class, had handled myself in the proper fashion. It made no difference. My former comrades made it clear that my presence in their circle would not be tolerated. I had to go off and find another place to flop, preferably as far away from them as possible. Thus began my very solitary life in camp which would be really, really crappy.

When I got my pay book back I found I had to listen to a lot of unpleasant remarks due to the note there that said, "No distinctions." It was said that it was no wonder that a slouch like me would behave so badly. It was evidence that I was never an upstanding soldier or even a good German.

The fact that I had freely volunteered for service no longer counted. My latest transgression was a betrayal that had to be expurgated! With this I was dismissed by everyone on the staff, including the chief whom I really liked and respected. But he was, above all else, a Soldier, even if he no longer had a Führer to follow. He was the typical career soldier who might find another 'Führer' to follow if he received the call.

I left the circle of my ex-comrades and trudged off to a far corner of the camp. There, with the help of another private, I dug a hole in the ground. This time it was not a defensive foxhole, it was the homespun shelter of a prisoner of war who was waiting to go home again even if there was no longer a home to go to. Holes were now the domiciles of all the POW's in Horazdovice, even the high ranking officers had to be content with a hole in the ground that they had to dig for themselves, most, for the first time in their military careers. We all camped out on the open field, some on the bare ground, in all weather. There was no shelter from wind and rain, nor from the blazing sun which was almost unbearable at this time of year. Our vehicles were gone now and beyond our reach.



*A POW 'Meadow Camp' or Wiesenlager in Germany.
Conditions were similar in Horazdovice*

The camp was guarded by a military police unit and the commander of that unit was also the camp commandant. The camp was encircled by a sturdy fence and well guarded by MP's who kept the barrels of their guns pointed toward the interior of the camp.

After I had in my own way demilitarized myself, I thought back on my youthful exuberance when I rushed out to enlist, and the wide gulf that separated me from the person I used to be. I was even more convinced now that the horror of this war would be a lesson for all the world against allowing war lust to ever take hold again. I quickly learned, however, that this was not the case for all of my old comrades. In a very short time a very ugly mood began to build that was driven by an intense hatred for the Czechs.

The reason for this is that we were beginning to hear stories about the atrocities the Czechs were perpetrating on the Germans in Prague as a result of the uprising. We heard the stories from soldiers

and German civilians who escaped from Prague, were eventually caught by the Americans and deposited in our camp. They told us of the beastly horrors visited upon the Germans in Prague, especially the women. They told us about the many dead who were simply murdered by the Czechs, just as they had wanted to lynch us. Those stories were just one of the things that got everyone stirred up, the other was the armed Czechs who camped out just beyond the cordon of the American MP's beyond the prison fence. They lurked there waiting for any German prisoner who tried to escape or for any German straggler who happened to come too close to the camp. These freedom fighters would kill them, then dump their bodies at the entrance of the camp, until the Americans took steps to prevent that. Mostly out of their own shock at the sight.

Emotions had come to a very explosive level and open opinions were expressed that these brutal murders had to be avenged, perhaps with the help of the Western Allies. Rumors abounded that the English and the Americans were turning against the Russians and a new war could breakout with the German soldiers fighting on their side. Certainly the Czechs would not get off scot-free. The majority of recently disarmed Landser [Landser: common soldier, enlisted man] were ready to volunteer and take up arms again against the Russians, but also to make the damned Czechs pay in blood for what they had done and were doing to the Germans.

The word among the so-called 'latrine grapevine' was that the Americans were already recruiting German soldiers into new combat units to go against the Russians in the inevitable war to come. This was not just believed, but embraced with enthusiasm and no small number of ex-German soldiers were ready grab their guns and with the help of the Americans carry on the fight against Bolshevism and finally put an end to the threat by these sub-humans thanks to the inexhaustible quantities of American materiel, guns and ammunition. The German Eastern provinces would once again be free and the way would be open again for Germany to conquer the Polish and Slavic lands that it needed so desperately. The pull of conquest in the East returned to many of those who just a short time ago were fed up with everything. With the massive power of the USA behind them they could bring 'their' campaign against the Russians to a decisive conclusion.

More and more people came to the conclusion that the Americans would turn on the Russians and chase them out of central Europe. They had come too far West and were now seen as a threat by the West! Rumors were rife that the US General Patton in his headquarters in Pilsen was already busy, with the help of German officers, in planning the campaign against the Russians. When I heard this rumor I thought back to General Nehring who had been ordered by the Americans to come to Pilsen with all due haste. Perhaps there was something substantial in the latrine-chatter? I couldn't grasp the whole idea, especially the changed disposition of many of the Germans, and above all that the Allies would suddenly have such a major falling-out. Nevertheless, the rumor mill kept grinding out more and more details. It was very hard to distinguish between the facts and the wishful thinking. We heard more and more about the friction among the Allies and even an undertone from them that maybe Hitler wasn't entirely wrong in his opinions about Bolshevism. The West was awakening to his warnings about the danger, if just a little too late. There was also a comment circulating attributed to Churchill saying, "We killed the wrong pig!" It was also Churchill who refused to order the disarmament of the German units in Schleswig-Holstein, leaving them fully intact, in spite of the many protests of the Russians.

In the camp there were spirited discussions about how after Stalingrad, Hitler should have negotiated a cease-fire with the Western Allies so that they could address the danger from the Reds. With the German bulwark against Bolshevism, the Soviets would have been chased back over the Urals. At the very least, after the Normandy invasion, Hitler should have understood the consequences and cut a deal

with the West so that Germany could have thrown its full power into the conflict in the East. Then we could have beat the Russians without foreign help. Then the Russians would have never breached the German frontier.

Everything that we had been through, things that each man experienced, seemed to be forgotten and they wanted to leap back into the fray and once again have a chance to be among the winners with a victory over the Russians and a victory over Bolshevism. All this just a few days after being forced into an unconditional surrender on all fronts of this unholy war. It took me a while to understand that this wasn't just the wrong-headed opinion of a tiny minority. It was in the minds of many, especially the officers, who said quite openly that it was going to be on again very soon, this time with us and the Americans together against Russia. What we, the Germans, had done to them, was successfully pushed aside in favor of this new crusade. The horror and misery that we had just lived through hardly existed anymore. The new struggle could now begin, this time in concert with the Americans, who needed us because we were the specialists in combat against the Communists. We were the experienced, battle-hardened fighters of the Eastern Front! The Americans would be totally dependent upon us! I have no doubt that the great majority of POW's would have freely volunteered, if one day in the camp the call had gone out to join-up.

The men who were clamoring for this were not Super-Nazis, not men of the Waffen-SS, they were normal, everyday soldiers of the defeated Wehrmacht whether officers or enlisted men who just a few days before wanted nothing more than to get out of the shit and go home. I truly could not understand the world anymore.

The behavior of "our" Americans in "our" camp was such that we had a hard time figuring out what they wanted. Now they wanted to identify the German outfits in the camp. There would be roll calls and investigations to try and find out if any of the prisoners were part of the Waffen-SS or if they belonged to the Wehrmacht's Brandenburg Division. The Russians were particularly interested in these spy and sabotage divisions. Nearly every day the Russians came into the camp with the Americans looking for these war criminals. Often they were successful and many men were taken to the other side.



Young Captured SS-Man Shows Blood Type "O" Tattoo

During the search for SS members everyone in the camp had to take off his shirt and raise his arms in the air. This way they could see if the man had his blood type tattooed under his armpit. This was a characteristic of a SS member. In the SS it was usual for the soldier's blood type to be tattooed there and it could not be removed. Now it was being used to ferret out the SS. The mark had become a stigma. Now I understood what good luck I had

to be turned away when I first rushed out to enlist in the SS in 1939. Above all I was thankful that I didn't get the tattoo, which could have happened even before being finally accepted into the organization.

My “partner” in this filthy meadow was a somewhat older man, a farmer by trade, who came from a town called Sandstedt an der Weser, and therefore a fellow countryman. [Mork is from Vegesack, also on the Weser river.] We got along very well and after a while this private first class told me a story I could hardly believe. It was the first time that I heard about the extermination of other people, of Jews!

In 1940 this Wehrmacht soldier(!) was a truck driver in Poland. One day he was assigned to drive a bus. The windows on the bus were all closed, locked and darkened. He was given the order to transport a busload of Jews who had been assembled by the police regiment stationed there. All he had to do was drive the bus. A co-driver was also assigned who belonged to the police regiment. The co-driver's job was to see to it that the exhaust from the bus was channeled back into the passenger compartment of the bus. After a certain drive-time the “destination” was reached. The dead Jews were unloaded into the open graves that were waiting for them and they were covered in lime. The driver had obeyed his orders and the brave police officer had done his murderous “duty.” His outfit stayed on this assignment quite a while and they were kept very busy with it.



'Death Bus' in Chelmno, Poland 1941

This was truly the very first time that I had heard of such exterminations, and at Horazdovice was also the first time that I heard about the concentration camps and the atrocities that occurred there. Up to that point what I knew of the concentration camps was that was where, from 1933 on, the Reich would put the enemies of the State. Political opponents would be in “protective custody” and hardened criminals would be isolated there until they were no longer a threat to society. Those camps I had heard about, but never the extermination camps. There were whispers about camps where Jews were executed, but that would only apply to those criminals who had been sentenced to death by the courts, Jews from the East who had committed crimes against German citizens. Even those rumors did not seem totally credible since a lot of it could be attributed to Western propaganda. What we were hearing now was not being entirely believed either. Many thought it was still propaganda from the victorious nations. There were a few among us who knew more because while they were in the East they had “noticed things.”

So he told me about this monstrous act, this mass murder of people, but it was not a criminal act since it was *only* Jews who were exterminated. He mentioned in particular that in his case it was not an SS unit that issued the order but a Wehrmacht unit who happened to have the requisite police regiment as well as the necessary vehicles and drivers for this death detail. My comrade said to me that he wanted and needed to talk about this in order to rid himself of it once and for all. We understood each other very well and we exchanged home addresses, promising to meet up again once we got home and to stay in contact. I could visit him anytime in Sandstedt. In late Summer of 1945 I rode my bicycle to Sandstedt to visit him and to see what had become of him. I knocked on his door without result. My comrade was no longer my comrade and his wife disavowed him, or else he was still incarcerated. I was told curtly to leave the farm, there was nothing to forage here and nothing to talk about! I do not know what the real reason for this behavior was. I never tried to make another visit. I threw away the slip of paper with his address on it and I can no longer remember his name. So I will never know if he was made to pay for his participation in the atrocities since the name of his outfit would be known as a result of the investigations. It is possible that this could explain the behavior of his wife, which

was so puzzling to me at the time. Or, it was also possible that he was at home when I knocked and did not want to see me again because of what he had confessed to me in the camp.

In my/our hole in the ground we lived somewhat dangerously because I still had my Luger. I buried it in the hole and could only hope that the Americans wouldn't take a notion to search our hole in the ground and perhaps discover the handgun. I still did not want to part with the pistol because I thought it might prove 'useful' if we had to escape from the camp. This stupid idea kept coming back to me because of the uncertainty of what was going to happen with the camp and with us. There were still murmurings that the camp would soon be handed over to the Russians and that the true demarcation line was still being argued by the Allies, but the likelihood was that this area would fall under the Russian sector. There was another rumor that the Czechs would be taking over the guard duties. That seemed unlikely but nothing seemed impossible in these times. Either one of these scenarios would be bad for us, so the thought of escape was always in our minds, in spite of the Czech freedom fighters lurking beyond the cordon of US troops. The German border was not very far from us and at night a man just might be able to make it. That is why I wanted to hold on to the Luger, it gave me a comforting feeling of security. I kept it even though it was really a danger to my life if I had been caught with it. The gun remained buried in the hole in case I needed to use it for defense or suicide. It never got used and perhaps years later some Czech farmer may have plowed it up and kept it as a souvenir of the war.



The Delousing Procedure

Our 'house' in the earth slowly became pig sty. The sun was an agony for us because we had no protection from it. Another agony was the nights sleeping on the bare ground once again because we had nothing to put down under us. It was particularly bad during rain storms. The water would flow in streams and pour into our hole. The sanitary situation in the camp was a catastrophe. It was a wonder that epidemics didn't break out, though a great many of us got sick. Those who did get sick got very little help except from German doctors and medics who happened to be part of the camp population. The Americans were not prepared for supplying medical care and there was very little in the way of medicine and medical supplies. The only good thing was the periodic delousing. The anti-lice-powder would be sprayed into our clothes from a big hose. It killed them but we still had to walk around with our pants and shirts full of dead lice. The delousing was good because all of the Landser who came into the camp from the front lines were totally infested with lice. For weeks there was no clean clothes or washing. It was no wonder that we were covered with lice. Our heads were full of these pests and our clothes were the nests and

breeding grounds for them and we had no defenses. It was a misery and we were at least thankful to the Americans that their anti-lice-powder freed us from these nasty creatures, even though they did it more out of their own interests than ours. We learned the value of DDT. Above all it reduced the danger of a plague breaking out.

Because of the lack of sanitation and medical care I wondered then and even now that my health held up and particularly that I did not suffer another malaria attack. It would not have been treated in the camp and I know it would have killed me. I was spared everything...but hunger.

Food was a huge problem mostly because the American unit guarding us was a combat unit and was simply not set up to provide meals to such a huge number of prisoners. The population in our camp was always growing and was far beyond the intended capacity. The American supply logistics were overwhelmed. We suffered frightfully from hunger and thirst and the situation made me think back to Baumholder [Mork had witnessed the suffering of Russian POW's in a camp in Baumholder in 1941]. Now I felt in my own body what it meant to have hunger and not be able to satisfy it. The anguish of hunger soon became unbearable.

We also saw the first famished, the first to die from starvation. It first hit the youngest soldiers, the children who had been stuck in a uniform and sent to battle the Russians. Children soldiers like I had seen slaughtered in Steinau an der Oder. There were many 12 to 14-year old kids who were either in the Volkssturm or who were manning the anti-aircraft flak guns. They were urchins who in the final hour volunteered to fight for the Führer, Folk and Fatherland. Many of these children died of hunger before the Americans did something to curb it. For many, however, it came to late. These kids in the uniforms that were too big for them had managed to survive the war only to die a gruesome death from starvation.

Even among we 'old' soldiers there were many deaths due to malnourishment. We did not know what was going to happen and most believed that we would simply be allowed to starve. The so-called food ration came out of an aluminum pot and consisted of a red broth 'cooked' from Italian tomato conserves with nothing added. The conserves were tomato pulp and came from Wehrmacht storehouses. The big 5-liter cans were tipped into the cauldron then mixed with a lot of water, i.e. diluted. After it was warmed it was served as our "warm meal." Twice a week we got a loaf of fresh American white bread that three men had to share. This piece of bread was immediately gobbled down because we were so hungry then we had to wait for days until the next portion, if we lived that long. It was many weeks until the food supplies got better, though they were never adequate. The starvation deaths continued.

I, too, suffered from the anguish of being constantly hungry, I felt myself getting weaker and on the verge of giving up. My despair gave me courage, and this was dangerous. I did not think much about it, I just wanted to find a way to help myself and my friend, even if it ended up getting us killed. Our hole was located not too far from where the American GI's had set up their field kitchen. That was where they had their warm meals each day. We could do nothing but sit there with our growling stomachs and watch them eat. However, we also saw them toss the remains of their meals in a rubbish pit near the field kitchen. Every two days they would dump a load of chlorine in the pit. All prisoners were forbidden to approach this pit. The nearby guards had orders to use their weapons if necessary to enforce the order.

Nevertheless, I had gotten an idea stuck in my head. As my hunger grew to the point where I could not stand it any longer, and I couldn't think straight anymore, I set my crazy plan in motion. I was at the point where I didn't care any more what happened just as long as I could get one good meal. Then they could kill me. My buddy thought it was an insane idea, but he wanted in.

In the next days I studied the area around the refuse pit very carefully while making sure that the guards did not notice my increased attention to the spot. I thought my plan had a chance of succeeding. The next step would be to collect the empty tin cans we would need.

One evening it was possible to slip out in the darkness with three tin cans over my arm. I crawled on all fours over the meadow toward the refuse pit under the eyes of my pal who acted as lookout to make sure the coast was clear. I got to the rim of the pit without being seen and slid over the side. Then I

dug through the filth, trash and stink looking for food scraps that I stuffed into my tin cans. I soon got out of the pit first, because I couldn't stand the smell any longer and second, because I heard American voices coming closer. Slowly and quietly I crawled back to the hole in the ground I called 'home.' My plan had worked perfectly, we were not detected by the guards. We now had three tin cans full of priceless garbage and we were ready for a feast!

We made a small fire and heated the cans with the scraps that had some fat attached. In this way we made a sort of "Fat Pot" that even had a little meat in it. All that was lacking were some side dishes to make a truly tasty feast. We took care of that when the sun came up. We picked dandelion leaves to make a lovely dandelion-spinach salad. Then, we didn't simply eat it, we gobbled it down. Neither of us gave much thought to what might result from this gluttony, especially from the heavy fat that we were not used to. We contracted horrible diarrhea and nearly shit ourselves to death. What we had so thoughtlessly gobbled down, the unaccustomed fat and filth from the refuse pit laced with chlorine from the previous day could have killed us. However, we survived the torture and continued to eat our garbage for several days, but in much smaller portions. From that we found out that dandelions were good eating, and not just for rabbits.

I now knew what it meant to be hungry, what it meant to go without food and I knew what men were capable of in their drive to relieve that hunger. Now, for the first time, I could really understand what I saw in Baumholder among the French POW's and especially among the Russian prisoners. I had wallowed in the muck of a refuse pit in this disgusting mixture of food scraps, human waste and chlorine without even thinking what happens to garbage when it bakes in the hot sun. The effects of this feast were not good, but we survived it, and perhaps the contents of the pit even saved our lives. At the very least it enabled us to through the coming weeks in better stead.

One of the worst things about the camps was the great uncertainty we experienced not knowing what was going to happen to us next. From the sporadic information coming into the camp we found out about the four Occupation Zones and that the establishment of these zones was sure to delay our release. For us that meant more weeks of hunger and a greater chance of starvation.

As if this were not enough, now tensions began in the camp between groups of the prisoners. The Americans had to resort to firing their weapons to keep order. A deep rift opened up between the Germans and the Austrians who no longer wanted to be Ostmärker [Ostmärk: After Hitler annexed Austria to Germany in 1938 it was referred to as Ostmärk.] and now acted as though they had always been against Hitler, even though they had medals decorated with the Swastika stuffed in their pockets. They wanted special treatment in the camp and a special area designated for them. They established a unified front against their comrades from yesterday. They had closed ranks and that led to bloody confrontations where knives suddenly appeared. This was unheard of among German soldiers.

This example by the born-again Austrians gave other groups ideas. Soon the ex-soldiers from Luxemburg, Alsace and Lothringen began hanging out together which produced more bad blood. Now they were all the oppressed, forced into service by the Nazis against their true will. This was nonsense as I knew very well for myself after speaking with men from those areas all through my hitch in the army from Baumholder and later in Africa. Now, however, they insisted that is the way it was and they sat back and waited for the Americans to give them special treatment. They did not get any special treatment, but the conflicts with the Reich-Germans did not subside. There were even cases of manslaughter and there was talk of kangaroo courts. The armed intervention by the Americans was unavoidable.

In this instance I was glad that I was not mixed up in this business and that I had been shunned by nearly everyone and forced to find my own little place on the edge of the camp.

One thing that still bothered me was the behavior of the commander toward me, I just couldn't understand it. Soon though it became clearer to me when I noticed how he and a number of other officers seemed to form a union with a very noticeable air of arrogance toward their fellow prisoners. This clique gather together regularly for 'private conversations' that the commander also took part in. Since everything took place publicly in the open field of the camp everybody could see what they were doing. They were becoming officers again. They even differentiated between active officers and reserve-officers. These 'old comrades' changed into a very uncongenial officers-clique that wanted to go their own way in the camp. They, too, seemed to have forgotten the recent past and wanted to again play the role of the German-Prussian gentleman.

Then things got really bad when it became known that the American commandant of the camp, a Lieutenant Colonel in an armored division, had been an officer in the German army up until 1934. He was a Lieutenant serving on the staff of General [Kurt von] Schleicher and he had to flee the country at the last moment after Schleicher was assassinated for his involvement with the so-called Röhm Affair. He emigrated to America, became an officer in the army and fought against Germany. This became known in the camp after the American commandant mentioned it in a conversation with a German officer. Everyone in the camp showed their clear disdain for this man who they viewed as a traitor to his own native land.

Our former officers found it unbearable to obey the orders of this scoundrel who had fallen into the bottomless pit of betrayal. We little people in the camp knew about this because there were those who made a point of sewing mistrust against this traitor. This weighed heavy on the entire camp.

Nevertheless, it was the American commandant who was the one who took it upon himself to improve the conditions for the young child-soldiers. He reserved food from American stores to supplement their rations. It may have been this good deed that was the cause of our officer's shabby behavior, because they were expecting special treatment also from officer to officer, so to speak. However, this man did not do the officers any favors, instead he cared for the children, the same ones who had been so misused by the German officers in their struggle for Führer, Folk and Fatherland. The American, this ex-lieutenant in the Reichswehr, could not understand, not grasp the wave of animosity against him as I later learned when my neck was nearly in the noose.

In the camp there was near panic over the special area that the Americans set up outside our normal space. The entry to it was opposite the main entrance of the camp. It was set up to house members of the Waffen-SS and the Brandenburg Division and other such controversial special units of the Wehrmacht that both the Americans and the Russians were hunting. The Russians would help themselves to inmates of this camp and the Americans would freely hand them over, not wanting to hold on to them themselves.

“Normal” prisoners could also find themselves in this special camp if the Americans thought them to be troublemakers or if they were involved in some 'shady business.' I will have more to say about my involvement in such things later. The word was that the Americans were not going to screw around with problem cases and would simply hand them over to the Soviets.

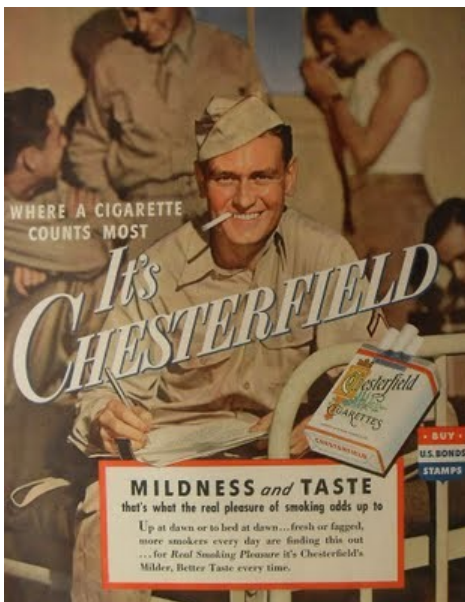
In addition to the ravenous hunger, nearly everyone in the camp was suffering withdrawal symptoms from cigarette smoking. In the first days in camp our pockets were full of cigarettes from Austrian Tobacco Company in Vienna. Now we were out and there weren't any more coming into the camp. For a heavy smoker, and I was one at the time, to be so suddenly out of smokes was unbearable to us. Even worse was that we had to smell the cigarette smoke coming from the American guards and other GI's. Most of the guards were Negro, there were very few whites among the enlisted men.



Cigarette Pack - Austrian Tobacco Company

In spite of all the body searches we had to submit to, we still had some personal items that could be traded to the GI's for cigarettes. This black market was strictly forbidden but actively pursued as long as we had things the GI's wanted. You better not get caught, either Landser [enlisted man] or GI. For us, the Germans, it meant being sent to the special camp.

I experienced such withdrawal from nicotine that the smell of American cigarette smoke would drive me crazy. I had the opportunity to come in contact with a black prison guard who, with the help of hand gestures, showed an interest in my wedding ring, but I did not want to part with it.



Chesterfield Cigarettes

Then he made me understand that he would also take German money, although I could not figure out what German money would be good for in Czechoslovakia. It soon became clear that in lovely Germany he already had a German sweetheart that he met earlier when his unit paused there for a while. Though it was still new and unusual for me to think of American soldiers having German girlfriends, I was glad to help supply him with Reichmarks, if it would get me some smokes. I still had my solder's pay on me and it had not been taken from me during the searches and I gave the GI the princely sum of 500 RM, for which I awaited a good supply of cigarettes. I only got one pack of Chesterfields and I had to be happy with that. There was no one to complain to. He had the power to bend me to his will. I also did not know if the money would have any value or be of use to me, so away with the money and here with the cigarettes.

With trembling fingers I lit the first Chesterfield and deeply inhaled the heavenly smoke. Unfortunately, on an empty stomach and after being off cigarettes for weeks the effect on me was worse than the very first cigarette I ever had when I was a kid in Lobbendorf. I got nauseous at first, but soon got past it. I savored each fag down to the last ember. Then I was out again, and all my money had literally gone up in smoke. My smoking problem suddenly resolved itself to my favor and I no longer had trouble getting smokes. More about that shortly.

Regarding the GI, we all wondered at these strong, well-nourished soldiers and especially at their easygoing ways and their casual relationships with their officers. At least that was the impression we

had of the US Army as we got to know them at this time. This was very different from the Prussian-German ways in our Wehrmacht. We no longer wondered how these brawny men had managed to conquer us. We thought that the American military services were totally different from ours. We/I did not know at that time that all armies in the world are oppressive and pretty much the same.

By this time it was the end of June 1945, but conditions had not improved in the camp. Exhaustion, physical and spiritual weakness prevailed. A nearly boundless hopelessness weighed upon us and a bad mood engendered by a nervous irascibility made everything more difficult to endure. Depression and suicide were daily events. We lived a sort of twilight existence without caring about anything any more. If tomorrow we were to die, then that would be OK too.

A horrible end would be better than this horror without end. The brutal sun of summer that we had to endure without any shelter did its worst and drove us to a terrible apathy. Sickness increased, mostly stomach and bowel complaints, there was always the risk of epidemic. Fear reigned in the camp and it oppressed us to the point where we all had thoughts of suicide and my thoughts kept going back to the pistol I had hid.

Possibilities for personal hygiene were minimal. There was a little pond in the meadow where you could drag yourself as best you could. It was an effort to get undressed and get in the water. There was not soap to be had. You might dunk your clothes in the water only to put them on wet. There was no other choice. Going around naked in the blazing sun would cause more problems than pleasure. I was growing thinner and could only wonder how I was managing to do as well as I was considering my past health problems. I was, although, having trouble moving about, I would get dizzy and my balance was off. In the state I was in I would often think of the past and of my youth, which was only a very short time ago. I was from a generation that had been deceived. We had been celebrated and made to feel valued then we were sent to the front as cannon fodder, supposedly for the good of the Fatherland. Unfettered anger grew in me against those who had so shamelessly betrayed us and used our love for our Fatherland to further their own ambitions. For these bastards we volunteered to go to our deaths, ready to die for our Fatherland. Now I hoped that in the future, if there was ever again a reason for living, there would never be a repetition of such a crime. That was my last remaining hope, even though it was still hard to have anything resembling a hope.

Five years of my youth had been wasted in a war. Five years that I could never get back, even though it was partly my fault since I volunteered for the army. On July 3, 1945 I became 24-years old. This birthday in a POW camp was not a very happy one. My only birthday wish was that mankind would live in peace and never more carry on the wars that turned them to horrible brutality and destroyed their humanity. That was my yearning wish on this day. That and also the hope that I would be able to go home, although that prospect seemed remote at the moment.

Shortly after my birthday at morning roll-call I was singled out and ordered to go at an appointed time to the interrogation tent that the Americans had set up. When I heard this I was speechless, even though I knew that I was not guilty of anything. I could not think what would cause them to call on me. I was terrified of the 'special camp' that so many had gone into without ever coming out.

My heart sank. I couldn't make any sense of the summons I was subject to. At the set time I found myself at the interrogation. I entered into a large, taut living tent furnished with tables, chairs and some shelving. I was shown a chair and sat facing three American officers who would 'chat' with me. There was no language problem since all three officers spoke perfect German. They wanted clarification on a few details that they had gleaned from their examination of my pay-book which had been taken from

me some time back. They had noted that I had freely volunteered for the army which was clear from the serial number in the book preceded by the letters "Fr" for "Freiwilliger." They were puzzled by the fact that I was still only a Private First Class in spite of being a volunteer and in spite of my long years of service. They thought it odd that I was never awarded any decorations and even declined a medal because I thought I didn't deserve it. Since these facts together were not easy to understand, they began to suspect that I might be an extreme Nazi and my case needed further scrutiny.

It took several hours, but I managed to convince them that their suspicions were wrong. At first they did not want to believe me, but after I told them pretty much the whole story of my life up to that point, they finally came around. As the discussion continued on they offered me coffee and cigarettes! In the course of the conversation the three Americans told me that they were Jews and that they were born in Berlin, but their parents had emigrated to America before it was too late. They jokingly referred to themselves as belonging to the so-called Berlin Textile Jews as many of the Jews were called since there were so many in the clothing business. Without holding anything back I told them about my childhood friend Heinz Herz and my behavior toward his Uncle. [Prior to the war Mork had allowed himself to be caught up in the Nazi propaganda. One day in his radio shop he rudely refused to serve his childhood friend's uncle because he was Jewish.] After telling them this, they no longer regarded me as a fanatic Nazi.

As I left the interrogation tent they gave me loads of chocolate and cigarettes. The three Jews promised me that I could look forward to an early release from the camp as soon as the first releases were authorized. This promise was kept and I thank these men, members of a group that we wanted to exterminate, for saving my life. I could not have held out in the camp much longer. I would either have collapsed or have been handed over to the Russians.

From these three Jews I also heard more details about their commander the ex-lieutenant in the Reichswehr. It was so peculiar that there should be four ex-Germans leading an American military unit. I was very thoughtful as I made my way back to my hole in the ground. My buddy was happy to see me. Things could have gone very differently. I shared the chocolate and cigarettes with him, we had no more need of the black market.

It wasn't until a few days later that I realized how good my luck had been as a result of the conversations in the interrogation tent. Word went around that what we had feared the most was about to happen. The word was that all German soldiers who were engaged with Russian units as of May 8th would be finally and irrevocably handed over to the Russians. This was an essential part of the agreement hammered out between the Americans and the Soviets and had to be adhered to. We could see with our own eyes that this was not just a rumor when a large Russian detail arrived to take control of the camp.

There was near panic in the camp, and I thought of my Luger buried in my hole. However, our American commandant, the reputed traitor to his people, quickly called us out to assemble and told us that he was not ready to simply hand us over to the Russians, with the exception of the 'special camp' and certainly not by merely giving them the whole camp lock stock and barrel like the Russians wanted. This man, who the German officers called a traitor, took it on his own head to defy the Russians and kick them out of the camp where they were already getting themselves set up.

But the Russians stood their ground at the entry gate, refused to move and repeated their demand that the camp be handed over. This was a very critical moment. The US commandant directed the barrels of his weapons toward the Russians along with the help of several machine guns that were now manned

by GI's. There was no possible way for the Soviets to misunderstand that the Americans had the say here and nobody else. As long as they were here, this was *their* camp and the prisoners here were *their* prisoners. In addition the commandant insisted that their investigations had indicated that all of the German soldiers in the camp were facing the American armies when the cease-fire was called not the Russian lines.

So said the American Lieutenant-Colonel, the traitor to his people, as the German officers still called him.

This “evil traitor” became the advocate and rescuer of German soldiers. It was not something he had to do, rather it was the strength and courage of a man who was acting in direct contradiction of his orders from his superiors. This spirit of a free man was not something he learned in the German Reichswehr. This was not a legacy of his Prussian past as a Reichswehr-Offizier.

Things now became frenzied in the camp, even among the Americans, it affected them also. No one knew how it was going to play out regarding the Russian demands. Were we going to be moved out, maybe to a spot over the German border? This opinion took hold as we saw a number of American trucks pull up that we figured would be used to move us out, probably to another camp. It was now being said that in spite of intensive efforts the Americans would not be able to completely empty the camp and a large percentage of the internees would end up having to be handed over to the Soviets after all. I heard about this later in the camp that I was sent to.

My great good luck was that the Jewish interrogators were true to their word and I was loaded into the first transports to leave the camp. I was called and ordered to go to where the trucks were being loaded. First out were the “child-solders” then the wounded, sick and the German civilians who had escaped from Prague. I was on the first truckload of “normal” POW's. For that I thank the Berlin Textile Jews! They had done this for me, a German soldier, who they had every reason to hate. And the ex-Reichswehr Offizier let me go, agreeing to my early release from the camp in Horazdovice.

The ride in the trucks went at a breakneck speed. The Negro driver acted as though it were some kind of truck race. We were packed tightly together in the back of the truck not able to sit and we thought the driver had forgotten that he had a cargo of human beings aboard. It wasn't a case of racing enthusiasm, he was under orders to get us to our destination as soon as possible so that he could get back and load as many more prisoners as he could. They were trying to get as many German soldiers out as possible. In spite of the hellish pace, we got to our destination safely. It was a gigantic camp near the town of Eger [Cheb, Czechoslovakia]. This camp had around 100,000 Germans interned, not only soldiers but also civilians. It included many who had fled from Prague, mostly German women and girls.



German POW's Loaded in American Trucks



Blitzmädchen at Moment of Capture

The women were in a separate part of the camp and they enjoyed very agreeable special attention from the GI's. It included long standing contacts stamped with personal contacts. This extra attention for the young women also profited us. We, the child transport, were debarked near them. They took pity on us and treated us to the good things they had received from the GI's such as chocolate, cigarettes, coffee and other savory items. The non-German behavior of the women had already led to an explosive tension between the women and the German soldiers. The Landser couldn't understand how these women had been so quick to throw themselves at the American GI's, and now had obtained food and drink all under the noses of the German soldiers. These 'dames' had only recently been Blitzmädchen, that is to say Luftwaffe Signal Corps helpers. Others worked as Flak gun crews and other

female support positions in the Wehrmacht. There were also many civilian women and girls in the camp who fled the Czechs. These women were rebuked by the German soldiers for selling themselves to the GI's in such an unseemly manner. They were whores who gave themselves to the Americans after being the playthings of the German rear echelon up until the end of the war.

Those of us arriving from Horazdovice had one big problem and that was the question of what was going to happen to us now that we were in this gigantic camp. We were very doubtful about our situation, but we heard that the camp had its own transportation connection to the German homeland. The camp had its own railroad spur and waiting trains headed toward our homes. Priority for transport were the women, children, sick and wounded, but also some demobilized soldiers. That gave us hope since we were part of the "child transport" evacuees. We were also concerned about the overcrowding in the camp. It was already overflowing before we even arrived here.

We just had to be patient and at any rate the conditions here were better than Horazdovice. There was more to eat, and not just watered-down tomato paste, but real food. None of us were accustomed to such good food, but we got used to it real quick.

Our group was treated as a closed unit, and as such it was registered, kept intact and given a specific place in the camp. I stood out as somewhat out of place among the children and the sick people, but I belonged to the group and I stuck with them. After a few days something happened which was considered unusual. Our group was called together and we were examined by a medical doctor. It was rather quick and perfunctory exam. We were declared "Physically fit," and everyone received a "Certificate of Discharge." This paper, dated July 14, 1945, finally ended my service in the "Greater Germany Wehrmacht." I was out of the army, as the paper so beautifully put it, discharged. My previous civilian profession was indicated as "Techn.Buss.Employee." I had to sign the document and seal it with my fingerprint.

My military service began on June 18, 1940 and now on July 14, 1945 that service ended. That duty had lasted five years and one month including two months in the RAD [Reichsarbeitsdienst: Reich Labor Service] in Worpswede which I also entered on an 18th, April 18, 1940. Now I was a free man who could do what I wanted, without having to obey any orders. It was a strange feeling. I had to get back home as soon as possible. What was unusual in our case was the quick exam, and discharge that

left us such a short time in camp and put us so quickly on the way toward home. It was good to be part of the children's group, even though at 24-years I was a right 'old' kid.

It was unbelievable that I had had the great good luck to be released from the POW camp and could now make my way home. For this good luck I thanked the circumstances that eventually brought me to the interrogation tent at Horazdovice under suspicion of being a Super-Nazi. My contrary behavior in the army which came out in the course of my interrogation convinced them that I was far from being a fanatic Nazi. Also it was my former army "comrades" in my last unit cutting me out of their group as a bad apple, a worthless waste of manpower that didn't deserve to live. This failed soldier was headed home, back to the Homeland, which would not be possible for many of the guys I left behind for quite some time to come.

I was discharged from the army as a Private First Class, not even a Corporal in spite of my long military service in wartime and not even nominated for promotion. A note could have been made in my pay book, but I had already blown that chance.

I never made anything of my self in the Greater-German Wehrmacht, not even sergeant in spite of the opportunities to do so. I did not become a combat officer, because I was fed up and chose to decline the training for the position.

I was without medals and had no commendations, which was unusual for a Landser who had served for five full years during wartime. That was not normal. There was obviously something not right about this very unusual Private.

After starting out as an enthusiastic volunteer, I came back as a nobody who wasn't even worth bringing home. I had done nothing for my Fatherland, if I had I would not have been so 'naked.'

I had not been an exemplary soldier and if German had have won, I don't think I would have been looked upon very favorably and who knows how it would have gone for me?

I was not a good soldier and not of much use to the Wehrmacht, but my 'service' allowed me to see a lot of Europe, but I saw it with 'other eyes' than was usual in the Army. I really 'got about' as one puts it so well. I was in Belgium, Holland, France, Italy, North-Africa and the islands of Sardinia and Corsica. At the end of the war I got to know a part of Eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia, although not under very good circumstances. The Army opened my eyes to a more critical way of looking at things. My 'getting about' was service to the military, but it wasn't always negative, there were positive elements to it. I found new horizons especially in relation to war itself which I now saw as a criminal criminal act, and I no longer saw it through the perspective of Nationalism or Patriotism. This new understanding was totally positive. It changed me and transformed me. I was no longer blindly nationalistic and I had lost all traces of sympathy to the National Socialistic spirit of the time. The war made me into a different person and so I have remained. I have become an absolute Pacifist and will never more be a friend of militarism anywhere in the world.

On the Long Way Home

We were loaded onto a freight train that was partly made up of open cars! The engine and the cars no longer carried the banners saying, "The wheels must roll for Victory." That was all over. The wheels were rolling, but this time with beaten German soldiers that had nothing left to fight for much less to

conquer. We rode across the German border toward the North and saw once again the German towns and countryside, but also what had become of them. Rubble, ruins, hurt people who for the most part did not bother to even look at the passing soldiers. They had bigger problems. We ex-soldiers had imagined our return home from the war very differently. We had imagined beaming victors greeted by jubilant throngs of admiring citizens. There would be glorious victory parades all over Germany and especially the parade to end all parades in the national capitol of Berlin attended by Hitler and the national leaders from all points of the Greater-German Reich. And now, now we came back pathetic and innerly destroyed to the land that was once the great and proud Reich. We came back to rubble-filled landscape where the survivors vegetated like human rubble in a land of misery.

Our trip to freedom was a very oppressive journey. Our mood was not very happy because of what we were seeing along the way. We were all afraid of what we would find when we finally got to our homes, if they even existed any more.

We heard of the final end to the war in Europe, but we also heard that the war still raged in the Far East. We were surprised that the Japanese were still battling on, but we didn't really care anymore. For us the important thing was that 'our' war was over.

There were some difficulties with the composition of our transport. The difficulties were due to the partitioning of Germany. It was so that in the Russian, French and English zones no German soldiers had been discharged yet. This was a problem for me because Bremen was in the American enclave but did not have its own discharge office. Nevertheless I was quickly released from the British zone with the note that I would be making my way to Bremen. I would take it on myself to do so, but the main thing is that I was no longer a POW. After getting past that, the other problems would be manageable.

I finally got off the freight train in the British Zone in Wunstorf near Hannover. It was at a compound of the former Luftwaffe airfield. At last I was able to get out of that stinking freight car where the human excrement had been piling up because we had been forbidden to leave the rail-cars even when we stopped in a rail station.

I had additional problems with the British about the next leg of my trip because they did not think that my destination was appropriate. With the help of a German soldier who was working with the British we came up with a solution that was not quite correct and nearly on the verge of being illegal. We reset my destination city as Oldenburg because it was nearly the same as Bremen! [The two cities are actually 30 miles apart.] It was helpful that I was able to say that I lived in Oldenburg before the war although time-wise it was not entirely correct. Nevertheless, it worked and I soon found myself on an English truck headed toward Oldenburg. This ride filled me with a lot of melancholy thoughts as I remember the great times I had in Oldenburg during a past that now left me with nothing but nostalgia.

My trip ended at the Horse Market Square just a few steps from my old domicile. I stood in the familiar square as one who had very little to hope for. I thought back to November 9, 1938 and to the people I saw standing there on that day in the Square. Jews who had been



The Horse Market Square in Oldenburg

rounded up during the night and who stood there much like I did now with no idea as to what was going to happen to them. It is so strange how things can turn around in life. Back then I was happy young man full of hope for the future and now here I was on the same spot burdened with a load of misery. It was the same square, named Adolf Hitler-Platz during the Third Reich, but always called Horse Market Square by the locals. I had to wait now for events that might possibly get me all the way to Bremen if I could pull them together.

This was going to be difficult. I had to do it because of the requirement that I had to report to my home town, primarily in order to get ration cards which could only be obtained by reporting in as directed. I wanted to pull my hair out. I was just a few kilometers from home having problems with regulations that made no sense to me. At least I was in my own Germany and not trying to do this in some foreign land. I couldn't figure it, but what did I know about the new rule under military law and the bureaucracy they had imposed on the German world?

But in Oldenburg there was a very resourceful Landser who was charged by the British with handling the formalities associated with getting German soldiers discharged. This Landser found a way out for me, even if it was a little round-about. The solution was to have me report to the town of Berne which was still in the Oldenburg district, but not too far from my real home town of Lesum. There I could surely get my documentation transferred to the Work Bureau in Bremen and that would put me in compliance with the regulations. Then I could go home to Lesum and be authorized to get my ration cards there. First I had to figure out how to get to Bremen. That would not be easy since all of the bridges over the wide Weser river had been destroyed. Be that as it may, I started out that same day for Delmenhorst as the first leg of the trip hoping that I could figure out what to do next after I got there.

I could have used my time in Oldenburg to visit the 'Old Firm' and the Ursins family who ran the firm. [Mork worked for them before the war in their radio and electronics salesroom.] Perhaps that would not have been a very good idea given all that had happened since I worked there and given Paul and Emma's association with the Nazi party. Besides, the helpful Landser had suggested that I get moving as soon as possible. So I had to skip making visits, even to my old apartment which was only a few steps away across the square. My current situation was not conducive to making social calls, I had to try somehow to get to Bremen and for as tired and weak as I was that would take all my remaining strength.

Along with some other ex-soldiers I set out by foot, accompanied by my melancholy memories of my short but brilliant youth. We hiked over the Hunte Bridge toward Delmenhorst. There was no other means of transportation. We walked as quickly as we could but the curfew hour caught up with us while we were still en route. German men simply could not be out on the streets and roads after curfew. The penalties were very harsh. We were close to Delmenhorst and found people to take pity on us and invite us into their homes for the night until we would be allowed to travel again at daybreak.

In talking with them we did not hear much good news about the local situation. There were hardly any bridges left standing over the Weser river and towns, like my hometown Lesum, took heavy damage during the fighting in the area. We could not get any concrete information about details because the news outlets no longer functioned. This was very bad news for me. I was quite depressed as I made my way toward Bremen. I needed to get to the Weser river then figure out some way to get across.



Ruined Bridges over the Weser River in Bremen

With the help of a ride in a horse wagon I managed to get to the Weser Bridge. I saw that it would be possible, though with considerable difficulty, to climb over the ruins of the bridge and get to the other side like some others had already done. I got to the other side and made my way to the rail station to find out that trains were running to Lesum and to Vegesack. The bridge over the Lesum River was once again usable, thanks to the Americans who also needed the bridge to get supplies from Bremerhaven to the occupation forces in Bremen and the southern part of the American Zone.

As a discharged soldier, as a troubled something-or-other, half starved, totally bedraggled, totally exhausted and on shaking legs I stood in what they called the Bremen Railroad Station and looked for the train that would take me to Lesum. That was assuming that I could still manage to climb into the railroad car and not keel over.

How things had changed in contrast to the times when I had passed this way full of good cheer, or when I had wanted to volunteer to join up to serve Führer, Folk and Fatherland. There was also the time when I came through here full of expectations, ready to enjoy some leave time before debarking for foreign lands.

Now I stood here in the Bremen Station waiting for a train that would carry me into new uncertainties, into a world that was strange for me. The only reference point I had was the wife waiting for me in Lesum. The whole rest of it would be a new and strange land for me and I would have no help to find my way. My mother would have been a great help to me, but she was no longer living, and I could not expect much from my father. He was dealing with his loneliness and it would be very difficult for him since he, too, relied on my mother for guidance and counsel in life decisions.

I was going back to my wife. Up until our marriage, we had lived a carefree life together where we saw ourselves as great lovers. We were now man and wife. We got married so that we could enjoy the comfortable feeling of being a married couple that would live on in peace and happiness. But that was not to be. Now, in a very different world we had to deal with one another daily and try to build a new life that we could not imagine or even know to be possible.

My wife lived in her parent's house where I was a stranger and did not know how to act. I had no one to turn to for help on how to deal with the very new and different circumstances I now found myself in. My wife and I were callow and inexperienced and now we were expected to build a life in a world that was not only uncertain, but also lay in ruins. We had no idea how we would make ends meet or how to go about building our future. There were no landmarks to give us perspective.

I thought hard about our future but still had no clue that would allow me to say, "This is it, this will get me through to a good life." These thoughts did not get me very far except to the point where I said to myself it will happen. The most important thing right now was to get back home where that new life would begin.

An air of uncertainty hung over everything, especially over how I would manage to earn a living. That seemed hopeless. How would it be possible to support a wife and possibly a child? How could we tackle the challenge of making that life for ourselves, a life of peace and happiness? All we had was a very vague hope for a better life. How could we overcome the obstacles without becoming bitter?

Among all of these thoughts I also realized that even during the war I had always been 'cared for.' During the whole war I never had to worry about providing food and shelter for myself. The army did it all for me without effort on my part. Before I joined the army, it was my parents who took care of those needs for me and let me go about my existence carefree.

These depressing thoughts weighed heavily on me as I climbed onto the train that would take me to Lesum. The same Lesum that I had left with such anxious emotions, but with the resolution that, in spite of anything that might come my way, I would be headed to a 'new life' even though I could not imagine what that life would be like. It really would be a new life for me after this terrible war that I had survived and now for me in August 1945 was finally over. There was no question of excited expectation. I did not feel like I had the strength or conviction to start a new life much less a happy new life.

[...]

With anxious anticipation I climbed down from the train and slowly made my way down the narrow path to Hindenburg Street, then below to Schneider Street, past the coal dealer Bielefeld, cross the street to the corner where the grocer Brüning had his shop. Between the grocery and Lindemann's butcher shop I saw a womanly form that I recognized. It was Ilse who was shopping for whatever her meager ration coupons would allow. When she noticed this man coming toward her, she had some trouble recognizing me. I did not look very much like the Werner Mork who left shortly after Christmas 1944 for Frankfurt am Oder in Eastern Germany. When I left I was classed as "Garrison Duty Only" due to my health, but once on the Eastern Front I was, overnight, reclassified as "Fit for Combat Duty."

When Ilse finally recognized me she let out a loud cry. So loud that people came running to see what was wrong. When they saw what it was all about, everyone crowded around to take part in the return of a soldier from the war. Everyone wished us well and congratulated us on my early release from the POW camp which was still a rarity in August 1945.