

My Life as a POW

Jan. 2, 1945 - May 8, 1945

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This story should have been written much earlier in my life while dates, events were still fresh in my mind, and age had not dimmed it from my memory.

I will, however endeavor to recall and describe my days as a Prisoner of War in Germany during World War II.

Before I begin the actual details of my capture, I think it is important to give a brief preface of what led up to that day when my whole way of life changed so abruptly.

I went overseas during the month of August of 1944 shortly after my wife and I were married. I was sent as a replacement for someone who had been killed or wounded.

We landed in Scotland several days after boarding the Ile DeFrance, a former cruise ship owned by the French.

We were then transported to England where we spent a few weeks in training before being sent to the front. It was there that I was assigned to the 100th Infantry Division of the Seventh Army.

In typical army fashion, I was put in the infantry instead of a role for which I was trained. I was trained to be a field lineman, stringing wire for telephone connections from one outfit to another, which was very essential in combat.

I was attached to Company K of the 399th Infantry. A short time after joining my new outfit, my regular issued M1 rifle was taken from me and I was given a BAR, Browning automatic rifle. It was a big heavy weapon. It held a magazine with 30 bullets. It also included a belt that held several extra magazines. If you pulled the trigger and counted up to four or so, all the bullets were gone. In basic training, I had only fired this type of weapon one time. Now it became one upon which my life and that of many of my new buddies depended to stay alive. Little did I know or even dream that it would play a big role in my capture. That will be made clear in the pages that follow.

During the weeks that followed, we made our way through the Vosges Mountains in France. We battled all kinds of weather, mostly rain and cold. I think I spent more nights wet than dry.

Sometime around December 1 we arrived at an area near the town of Bitche located northwest of Strasbourg and near the border of Alsace-Lorraine and Germany. Bitche was a bulwark of the Maginot Line, a string of mostly underground fortresses along the German border.

We were told that we would likely be there for quite some time and to make ourselves as comfortable as possible.

My foxhole buddy and I, whose name I cannot recall, did just that. In fact, we overdid it, and ultimately it became the very reason which led to our capture.

We dug our foxhole deeper and wider than usual. We covered the top with pine boughs and limbs that made the roof almost leak proof. We found a bale of straw for the floor and some empty 1055 artillery shell boxes and we had paneled walls. We also found an empty five-gallon oil can. We punched a hole in the top and put an empty shell through the roof and we could have a fire. In fact, we were snug as two bugs in a rug.

In our great pride and exhalation for our good work, we could not foresee that in a short time, our comfortable foxhole would become our downfall.

I want to pause here to describe how our company was set up. There are four platoons in a company and four squads to each platoon. Upon arrival in the area, the first platoon was sent out a thousand yards to the west of us. They would serve as a cover for the rest of the company. Then we dug two foxholes halfway between the first platoon and the other platoons.

The people who were carrying the BAR's would move to the two foxholes in between to cover the retreat of the first platoon in case of an attack.

The month of December passed quietly without any skirmish with the Germans. Christmas came and went peacefully and we were grateful. We entered the New Year in the same way. By this time, I think most of us were beginning to believe we were going to get by without much trouble. Little did we know that was about to change.

On the first day of January 1945, I went with some others behind the lines for a shower, shave and clean clothes. It had been quite some time since I had enjoyed that luxury.

We came back to the company a little before dark. As we approached our luxury suite, my sergeant was waiting for us. He said, "Jim, the outfit to the north of us has been shot to pieces and there are only three or four of them still alive. They are cold, hungry, weary and need a good night's rest. You have the nicest and warmest foxhole in the outfit, will you give them your place and your rations! Go up and sleep in one of the BAR foxholes."

I said, "Sure, Sarge, we will go, but if there is an attack in the night, don't look for us back for that is a death trap." He smiled, patted me on the back, and said, "Oh! Don't let it be, just get out of there and come on back."

Famous last words. By daybreak, we were prisoners of war. It happened in the following way.

My buddy was always sleepy and could not hear well. At about four o'clock in the morning, the company sent a runner to tell us that a German patrol was headed in our direction, and to stay alert. My buddy was asleep on guard while I was asleep officially. They woke him up and told him about the patrol and he promptly went back to sleep.

About 5:00 a.m., I woke up and heard loud talking down in the woods and saw lights from cigarettes. My first thought was that they were Americans. However, as they came closer, I realized that I could not understand a word they were saying. Then I realized it was too late to run. We had to face whatever was to come.

My buddy, finally awake, said, "I will crawl out the back way and go for help." For some reason unknown to me, I decided to stay. He took off and I was left alone with my BAR rifle. It was too long to hide all of it. The barrel stuck out of the hole about a foot or more.

By this time, I knew I was in real trouble. I faced killing another human being or be killed myself, and I did not want to die.

I should have said earlier that day before I had cleaned the rifle, put it back together and was convinced it was ready to fire. I hunkered down in my hole as much as I could in the hope that I would not be seen and the patrol would pass by and I could escape.

Then a German Lt. spotted my rifle barrel and started toward me. He came within a step or two and I knew I had to do something. I raised up and swung the rifle around in his face. I pulled the trigger and nothing happened—it did not fire.

To this very day, I still do not know why. I was so sure it was in working order. The Lt. jerked his head back but instead of shooting me, he reached down, grabbed my arm and said, "Come out of there, you American pig," and pulled me out of the foxhole.

I actually had three miracles that morning. The first one was when my rifle misfired and the Lt. did not shoot me. The second one was that two 50-caliber machine guns were trained right on my foxhole.

After being dragged from my hole in the ground, I looked around to see if my buddy had gotten away. My last hope vanished as I saw him standing there with his hands over his head. He had a dumb look on his face as if to say, "This can't be happening to me."

Then a very strange thing happened that I never expected to see. The Lt. saw my buddy and the dumb look on his face and he put his hand on my shoulder and actually laughed. It is almost unbelievable, but for a second I did too. Then the laughter was over and our new lives began.

They had captured four other Americans and I have no idea where they found them. It was cold with snow about six inches deep and we were made to lay our faces in the snow. We were not even allowed to use the inside of our helmets, however we did whenever we could.

I did peek once and I saw something that almost stopped my heart. The Lt. had put one of his men in my foxhole with his rifle and he pointed it at us. I said to the others, "If you ever prayed in your life, now is the time, because we are going to be shot."

Almost immediately, I heard one shot and I asked who was hit and all said no one. Then I peeked again and saw to our left my sergeant standing behind a tree by my nice foxhole. He had seen what was happening, and with one shot from his M1 rifle 500 yards away killed the German soldier who was about to kill us. That was my third miracle of the day.

After we settled down from the scare of nearly being killed and given a new lease on life, we started to wonder what the next move was going to be. Then just when we thought perhaps the Germans were all gone, I said, "Let's get out of here." We started to get up but a shot rang out from the woods behind us. A sniper fired one shot and hit the kid behind me in the left leg. He was a field lineman and he had two batteries in his hip pocket. The bullet hit the batteries and glanced down into the fleshy part of his leg. He screamed with pain and yelled, "Don't leave me, don't leave me."

While we were trying to comfort him, the Germans surrounded us and all chance of escape was gone. We were now truly prisoners of war.

I never found out what happened to the young man who was wounded. He could walk some. I hope they took him to a hospital or at least to a medic. He may have been luckier than we were.

The sun was climbing in the sky and our journey into an unknown future began. It did so with a long day of walking. We must have walked twenty miles or more. We spent the first night in the underground fortress of the Siegfried Line where we were interrogated. They promised that if we would tell them what they wanted to know, they would make tapes of our voices and send them to our parents. When we refused, we were rather surprised that they did not try to punish the information from us.

We spent the first night in that great unbelievable concrete fortress. The next morning we were on the road again in what was to be a long marathon of walking for two weeks or more. The nights we spent in barns and other places along the way. I cannot remember much at all about those long, very tiring days.

On about the second or third day of our long journey, some of the numbness I had been feeling began to wear off and all of a sudden, it really hit me. I was a prisoner of the Germans and I might never get home again. Fear, such as I had never known, gripped my very soul. I thought about my wife of only a few short weeks and my parents. What would they think when they did not hear from me soon or learn that I was missing in action.

However, I did not have long to dwell on these thoughts. Soon we were forced to concentrate on our fate and the will to survive and some day return home. This became the uppermost thought in our minds.

The daily march continued, for exactly how long, I cannot remember. We would walk until we were ready to drop, then walk some more. The days and nights became intermingled and we lost all sense of what day it was or how long we had been walking.

Finally, when it seemed that the journey would never end, we arrived at Stalag IV B in Muhlberg, Germany. Here we were to be processed and sent out to other camps.

The first thing we did there was to go for a physical. They made us strip down and they gave each of us a shot. Of what or for what purpose we never knew. The shot itself was no surprise but the location of it was a great shock. Mine was given in the end of the left nipple on my chest. The pain was rather excruciating. It was given in that location for only one purpose, to torture us.

We were told next that a German General was coming to camp the next morning for an inspection. We were to be spic and span by early in the morning. Then we were divided into groups of twelve and given the necessary ingredients we needed for shaving.

This consisted of one pan of cold water, a wash cloth, a bar of soap, and a single-edged razor with only one blade. We drew straws to see in which order we would use the supplies. I was lucky; I drew the shortest straw and had to go last. The water was not very clean and the razor blade was very dull. I had about three week's growth of beard by this time. I found a pair of scissors and trimmed off what I could. I finished with the well-used blade. My face felt like a tenderized piece of steak. However, I stood the inspection anyway.

In the afternoon, we were marched to the railroad, which was very near the camp. We were herded into the boxcars. They put 92 men to a boxcar and locked the doors. We traveled four days and four nights without a drop of water or a bite of bread.

On the third day, they left our train in a large railway yard for obvious reasons. They were hoping that American planes would hit us. That is just what happened. A group of our fighter planes strafed our train, killed, and wounded several. We asked them to open the doors and remove the dead and wounded, but they refused. We traveled another day and at midnight, we arrived at our destination. They opened the doors and gave us ice water for it was very cold and snow was on the ground. The cold water caused us severe stomach pains.

The camp was a work camp. If you were a corporal or more, you did not have to work. I was unlucky again. I was a PFC, so here I was at a work camp.

The camp was located four miles from the small town of Koenigstein on the Elbe River. Little did I know what great affect that little town was to have on my life in the months that lay ahead.

The camp was Stalag VA. There were about 200 British prisoners there. They had been there for a couple of years. We arrived sometime around the early part of February. There were several hundred American prisoners. I never knew just how many exactly.

We were put in rooms of 25 to 30 men to a room in each barrack. Each room was supplied with double deck bunks. There was a low partition between them. The mattresses were made with straw and we were given one blanket. There were some tables for meals and they were often used to play cards. There was also a stove of some sort which we used when we could find wood to burn. The nights were cold. The toilet was an outdoor latrine, which we had to dig ourselves.

We arose about 6:30. Our breakfast was a cup of coffee, if you could call it that. It was made mostly of chicory, barley, and a little coffee. It was not good but it was hot. Then we went to work. They put us to work on railroads with picks and shovels. I am sure they never intended to use them. It was only a way to keep us under control. We worked six days a week.

We would go to work about 7:30 and work until noon when we stopped for lunch, their lunch. We worked until late afternoon. Sometimes we had to walk quite a way to get to work.

Shortly after arriving at the camp another prisoner and I organized a worship service, which we did each Sunday. My fellow churchman was a young man also from north Indiana. I will always be sorry that I did not get his name and address. He was a nice person but for some rather strange reason, none of us ever became very close, as you would expect in a situation like ours.

Before I leave the subject of Sunday worship, I should say that at the beginning, the Germans refused to allow us the freedom to worship. We did anyway and later they changed their minds. The services did not amount to much; compared to those we grew up with at home. However, it was the idea of getting together and thereby acknowledging our need of God in our lives. Most of us shared that one true common bond together. It is also interesting to note that the only song we all knew was "Onward Christian Soldiers." We sang it each time we met and we even sang it on Easter Sunday.

We soon settled into a rather monotonous routine, get up early, go to work, and come back again. This had become our new way of life. It was one that none of us was prepared for and how could we be? This was a world entirely different from anything we could ever imagine. This was war and we had lost the freedom around which our very way of life evolved.

Each one of us had to make perhaps the greatest adjustment we would ever have to make. We were no longer in control of our own lives. We were under the control of the Germans who had very little concern or compassion for human life as we know and value it.

We were their slaves and they were driven by the fanatical zeal of a ruler who was out to conquer the world and prove his race to be the master race. He had brainwashed them good.

That is enough of my own feeble attempt at being a philosopher. I must return to the intent of my story as a POW and the life I was forced to live there.

We had arrived at Stalag VA in the early days of February and remained there until the day before the war was over on May 8.

The guards at this Stalag were mostly ones who either had been wounded or sent here or transferred for some reason. It was quite evident that they did not like being there as sitters for American prisoners any more than we liked being held there. They seemed to be constantly looking for the slightest provocation on our part and they were eager to mete out punishment upon us.

We were on a very meager daily ration. As I have already indicated. We were only given something twice a day—coffee in the morning. There was no round loaf of bread for six or eight men. It was only a few bites for a hungry man and we were hungry. Then we were given a bowl of thin soup, which they called “skilly.” It was made mostly of potato peels and water. Sometimes we were lucky enough to get some potatoes. That was our entire food ration per day.

According to the Geneva Convention, each prisoner was to receive 2700 grams per day. We were given 700 grams. In addition to the daily ration, each person was to receive one Red Cross parcel per week. I can only remember receiving two or three in all the time we were there. When we did get a box, it was given to four or five of us to share. It was only a bit of this and a bit of that but we were grateful for every bit of extra food we received. It was a hard way to lose weight and what I did, did not help me.

Before I was captured, I was smoking a pack and a half of cigarettes a day. I had been trying to quit but I had not been able to do it. When I was captured, I figured I would have to quit because I would be unable to get them.

There were several people in camp who did not smoke and idiots like me would trade bread for cigarettes. I traded a third of my small piece of bread almost every day for one cigarette. I really believed that a cigarette before I went to bed would help me to feel less hungry. I was a fool. I really was my own worst enemy. I truly added to the bad condition I was in when we were freed. I paid the price.

Time goes on and we continued to work daily. The longer we worked the more hungry we became. We were constantly looking for anything we could find that was even reasonably safe to eat.

Often, as we worked along the bank of the Elbe River, I ate cabbage and potato peelings that came floating down the river. I was always a rather finicky eater at home, but I soon learned that if you are hungry enough, you will eat almost anything—and I did.

We soon discovered that the German farmers grew what they called stock beets. They fed them to their horses and cattle. They are what we in the States would call rutabagas. They were quite large. Some were yellow and some were red. The farmers would put them in mounds in the ground. It was easy to spot them in the fields from where we worked on the railroad tracks.

Every occasion we got we would slip away and dig one out and eat it. If we ever were caught, we would be hit by one of the guards. These rutabagas tasted very similar to our turnips.

Some farmers kept them in their barns, which incidentally, were attached to the houses. The barns were in general kept as clean as the houses.

One day as we went to work, we passed one such barn. There was a high brick wall around it with a wide gate in the front. As we walked past the barn, we saw a large pile of beets. All of us had the same thought—we wanted to get some of them.

When we reached the work area, someone suggested we draw straws again. Guess who got the short straw. It was so short I could hardly hold it.

Thus, it became my task to go get the beets. I am not ashamed to say I was very scared. I knew the risk I was taking because the guard over us was a mean one.

Someone gave me two bars of soap in case I had to barter. That made me even more nervous as I contemplated the possibility of running into someone. I waited until the guard was down at the other end of the line and then I started out.

It must have been a hundred yards or more. I made it to the barn without incident. Then as I entered the barn, it happened. Just as I approached the beets, the woman of the house came into the barn. She was as startled as I was. She did not scream or run away. After my heart settled down, I reached into my pocket and held out the bars of soap. I rubbed my stomach and pointed to the beets. She nodded and I picked up six large ones and put them inside my coat and started back.

As I reached the gate, my heart almost stopped. The guard was back where I had to go. I waited for a while until he moved away some, then I started back. I got almost there before he saw me. I thought I was in real trouble but he simply took the beets from my coat and pushed me back to work. I thought that was not so bad. I felt that I had been very lucky.

My trouble began when the other prisoners asked for the beets. He sliced them up and handed them out as they came by him. I waited for a while, then I got in line. I thought since I had risked my life to get them that I should at least get a slice.

That was what he was waiting for. He grabbed me and pointed his bayonet toward me. I jerked away and tried to run, but he caught me again. I fell on my stomach and he took his bayonet and put his foot on one of mine. He started jabbing my legs.

The bayonet was round and sharp as a needle. He went up on one leg and down the other for three or four rounds. I was lucky in that I was wearing lined pants and I was already skin and bones. That too was in my favor for I was not scarred.

He finally satisfied himself and left me alone. That was about 8:30 in the morning and I worked the rest of the day. I did not even get a bandaid when we returned to camp. To this very day if I was an artist, I could still draw every line in his face. I hated him with a passion. Time went on and I did not miss a day of work.

The next encounter occurred not long after Easter. The same guard that bayoneted me came to our barracks and said he needed a detail to go to their supply depot and bring back food. It was for the cap guards, not for us. I was picked to be one of the details.

The depot was about 2 miles away. As we approached, we could tell they were baking bread. The smell was delicious and made our hunger even more unbearable. We hoped that just maybe they would reward our efforts with a piece of bread. However, no such luck. They were baking those long Vienna loaves that were almost irresistible. I was selected to carry them back to camp. The guard brought out five or six loaves in a big porous sack. Then he went back in and cut one in half. He placed the sack on my back just over my left shoulder. Then he put one half of the cut loaf in the sack with the others. The other one he held up in front of my face. He ran his hand over the open end and he took a stick and measured it. Then he placed it on my shoulder close to my face where I had to smell that great aroma all the way back to camp.

When we got back to camp, he hurried over to me and took the sack from me. He thoroughly examined the half loaf, very sure he would find I had at least taken a few crumbs out of it.

However, try as he might, he had to conclude that I had passed the test. I did not even touch it. He was truly disturbed. I was afraid he would still stab me again. He finally glared at me and turned away. I must admit that it took all the willpower I possessed not to yield to the temptation.

By this time, we were into the middle of April. The Russians were getting close and the Germans decided that we should quit working and remain in the compound. They were greatly afraid that the Russians would kill them.

We had a strong feeling that the war was about over. We would climb on top of our barracks at night and watch the bombing of Dresden. We could see flashes as the bombs hit. Watching that gave us the courage to believe that soon we would be free.

The time came sooner than we expected. It was on Sunday, May 7. The guards came into the barracks and told us they were going to take us back to American lines and give themselves up.

Before we left, they brought skilly (soup) in big pots and said we could have all we wanted. We ate and they lined us up and started us on the march that should take us through the town of Koenigstein.

We were afraid we were going to be killed instead of taking us back to our lines. However, as the leaders crossed the bridge and turned toward the city, we realized we were going toward freedom. In addition, we sang our favorite song, "Onward Christian Soldiers." Now we had real hope of going home.

The walk to Koenigstein was a nightmare for me. I could hardly walk by this time. I cannot remember a single thing about that march.

When we reached the town, I could not go any further. They left another prisoner and me (whose name I do not know) in the barn of a civilian who had some connection with the camp. He put us up in the hayloft. At about 4:00 in the morning, the owner came up and told us the war was over. He also brought us a pint jar of canned beef. It was the first solid meat we had received since we were captured. We lost it after we ate because it was too heavy for our weak stomachs.

It was a nice gesture on his part—a nice thing to do. I still regret that I did not get a chance to see and thank him for his hospitality.

The next morning as we left the barn to go looking for food, we saw a Russian troop convoy coming down the street. We were standing on a bank. The young Lt. leading the convoy saw us and halted it. He got down from his vehicle and came up to us. He wanted to know what happened to us. I rubbed my stomach and touched my cheeks. He seemed to understand.

We could not understand his language but we got the distinct feeling that he wanted to help us. It was plain to see that he was upset by our condition.

We saw him again later that morning as we were walking. He looked at my shoes, which were in very bad condition. He made one of his men sit down on the street and he took his boots off and gave them to me. Then he gave my worn out ones to his man. That was a big surprise to me.

After we left him, we resumed our search for food. Little did I know that decision was to change my very life and ultimately my future.

We walked down the street for a rather short distance. We came to a house with a white picket fence around it. A couple was sitting on their patio by the side of the house. They saw us and motioned us to come up. We sat down at a table and the woman gave us a cookie and some peaches.

It is at this point that the story becomes complicated. The events as I remember them at times will differ in some instances from those that we learned later. I will handle them separately.

Now back to the couple. As we sat there, the same Russian Lt. appeared for the third time the same day. I remember him looking at me and I thought he told them to keep me because I was sick. However, it happened, it was the beginning of an amazing turn of events that was to save my life.

Before going into the house, one of the four daughters of the family came up the path carrying some eggs in her apron. It must have been quite surprising to her to see two complete strangers about to enter her home. However, she showed no animosity toward us. In fact, the first thing she did was to take my filthy clothes off me just inside the door and had them burned. She put some of her father's clothes on me.

Much later, I was to wonder about putting on another's clothes without giving me a bath first. I must have been almost as filthy as my clothes. To this day, I still did not know how I was cleaned up. Ursula was the daughter with the eggs. She asked me if I wanted one and I nodded. She sat me down on a couch in the kitchen while she fried the egg. I ate it, but as soon as it hit my stomach, it started coming back up. I was mortified. I started to go to the door but she made me go to the sink, where I lost it. I started to clean it up but she pushed me back on the couch. Then she did an amazing thing. She did not get a spoon or a paper towel or anything else. She picked up the egg I had just lost with her bare hands. I could not believe what I had just seen.

I was a total stranger. She had just met me, I was an enemy of their country, and her family had just taken me into their home. This is an indication of the wonderful family that took me in.

I should say something about the prisoner who was with me when the family took us in. I do not remember ever seeing him again except that I am sure they took him in also. The alternate version which I deal with later will shed some light on this matter.

After the incident with the egg, they put me to bed. I do not remember anything at all for a long time. I always thought that I was only there for one week. I was to learn differently many years later.

The family's name was Richter. They had four daughters, which I alluded to a little earlier in the story. They took them out of their room, put them in the attic, and put us in their room.

I do not ever remember being fed, bathed or anything else except occasionally I was vaguely aware that someone would be sitting by my bed from time to time.

I cannot begin, in any way, to say what a great experience it was to be in their home. The tender loving care they gave me was as great as I would have received from our family at home.

The amazing thing is why they were willing to take in total strangers and enemies of their country, which had just defeated them in war.

The only day I really remember while I was there, was the day I left. I was able to be up and around some and the family had prepared a special noon meal before I left. They had potatoes, meat, gravy and other things I cannot remember. They also invited several of their neighbors to eat with us.

That was another amazing thing about my stay there. Almost from the first day, people in the neighborhood took great interest in the fact that the Richter family had taken in two American soldiers who had been captured by their army.

Several people came from time to time with food and items of clothing. One young woman living nearby brought me a very pretty shirt. Her husband had just died recently and she wanted me to have it. The family dressed me in it as the army was coming to get me that day.

When the army came to pick me up, they brought a truck and an ambulance. The Sgt. with them said, "If you can sit up, get in the truck. If you can't, get in the ambulance." I did not want to go to the hospital, so I asked a couple of the guys already in the truck to sit tight on either side of me so I could stay in the truck.

We were taken to a camp called Lucky Strike. The camps to receive POW's were named after cigarettes. We were to be processed there; to be given physicals and shipped home from La Harve where the camp was located.

As we arrived at the camp, the German POW's were eating their lunch. Their menu was steak, potatoes, gravy and all the trimmings. What a stark contrast to what we received. However, that was as it should be. Those prisoners should not have been fed less than the Americans around them should.

Our very sparse food was in large measure because the Germans in general did not have a great supply of food for themselves.

The first day at Lucky Strike, I was sent to get a physical. I had to walk to the hospital. As I was starting out, a Sgt. in a jeep stopped and asked if I wanted a ride. A jeep is quite low to the ground but I could not lift my legs high enough to get in by myself. The Sgt. came around and lifted me into the jeep.

The doctor took one look at me and said, "Son, you're going to the hospital." However, I begged him not to make me go. I said that I wanted to go home. He thought for a moment and said that he would mark on my record that I would be hospitalized as soon as I reached the States. However, when I got back to Camp Atterbury, there was no mention of it on my record.

I would have been much better off if I had agreed to go to the hospital at La Harve. I would have been put on a soft diet for a while until my system was able to handle heavier food. I might even have gotten home much earlier. I had to wait six weeks to get a ship. I really paid the price for that decision for a long time.

I failed to mention that on the day before I was captured in January of 1945, I weighed 165 lbs. When I came out even after being in the Richter home, I weighed 100 lbs. even. While waiting for the ship home, I had resumed smoking and I traded cigarettes for pastries from a baker friend.

We finally sailed from La Harve some time in early June. It took 8 days to reach the States. During those eight days, I ate about six boxes of candy bars all by myself. From May 8 until June 22, I went from 100 lbs. to 185 lbs. When I finally arrived home, I looked like the Pillsbury Dough Boy. Probably people would look at me and think, "He surely didn't have such a hard time after all."

I arrived at Camp Atterbury near Indianapolis some time around June 21. I was coming from orientation leading to my discharge when I saw my wife, Elma, standing some distance in front of me. Then I fully realized I was home. I prayed for this day for so long. I was afraid many times that I would not see her and my family again.

I tried to run to her but my legs would not obey. She met me and as I held her in my arms again, I knew I was the luckiest man alive. She was and is my very life. Without her, my life would not be complete. God had answered my prayers.