

Russell A. Strong
2041 HILLSDALE
KALAMAZOO, MI 49007

Dear Russ, Ans 11/29/86

In Your Oct. '86 (Echoes)
Mention Was Made About 306th
Members, Who Survived As POW's
Being ENTITLED TO A NEW POW
MEDAL. NOTHING SINCE HAS BEEN
SND ABOUT THIS.

What Must Be Done To OBTAIN THIS
MEDAL? Your Help Will Be Very
Much Appreciated.

Shot Down Over
Hills, Germany
June 22, 1943
In Same Hut As
SAGAN, GERMANY AS
AL LA CHASSE.

KD

Sincerely,
1st Lt. EDWARD S. GAST
1120 COLONIAL RD.
LANCASTER, PA. 17603
(367th SQDN)



1st Lt. F. S. Galt - 367th Sq. 304th Bomb Group

Hills, Covert, June 22 1943

Pilot - Lt. J. W. Johnson

(1)

Copilot - F/O. H. M. Dunn

Bombardier - Lt. E. S. Coats

1st Mission with Lt. Johnson

Navigator - Lt. N. Simpson (Lt. W. W. Covert - 305th Night Ferry)

Engineer - L. B. Hansen

Wing Gunner - S/Sgt. Geo. LaRocio, S/Sgt. Mike Smith

Bell turret - S/Sgt. D. W. O'Connell

Tail Gunner - S/Sgt. Ross, G. Bell

Radio Operator - S/Sgt.

We were flying ~~to~~ ^{the low squadron of the group} ~~at the~~ ~~altitude of the~~ ~~squadron~~ and experiencing constant ~~fighter~~ German fighter attacks. ~~As~~ ~~soon~~ ~~as~~ ~~the~~ ~~target~~ - ^{LP} ~~was~~ ~~reached~~ - ~~knowing~~ ~~the~~ ~~bomb~~ ~~run~~ ~~I~~ ~~had~~ ~~to~~ ~~stop~~ ~~from~~ ~~my~~ ~~nose~~ ~~gun~~ ~~and~~ ~~concentrate~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~ ~~bomb~~ ~~run~~ when Lt. Johnson started shouting that there were (1) FW-190's coming straight at the nose (my position). The bomb run was set and ^{located in} I went back to firing the nose gun. The 1st fighter struck ~~the~~ ^{the} plane and ~~the~~ No. 3 engine started to smoke. As they came within the 2nd attack I shot the lead plane down but the other fighters raked us with 20mm cannon - one coming through the Plexiglass nose ^{down} knocking both Lt. Simpson, the navigator and me. And exploding just over our heads - immediately we were on fire. I can still see the pink smoke from the magnesium ~~the~~ ^{caused} by the explosion. Lt. Simpson was stunned (almost unconscious) ~~and~~ ~~was~~ ~~knocked~~ ~~out~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~plane~~ - I emptied the fuel extinguisher on the flames.

3

The chute popped open ^{Back of} ~~the~~ ~~chute~~ ~~at~~ ~~my~~ ~~location~~ ~~of~~ ~~falling~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~ground~~. ~~It~~ ~~did~~ ~~not~~ ~~look~~ ~~up~~ looking up at the chute I noticed the fire had burned through several of the panels and I was having problems trying to keep it from ~~coming~~ ~~collapsing~~ and had to keep pulling on the strands. I must have bailed out around 23,000 ft. ~~and~~ ~~forgot~~ ~~the~~ I have no idea how long it took me to hit the ground because I was having a constant battle trying to keep the ~~chute~~ ~~from~~ ~~slipping~~ ~~from~~ ~~my~~ ~~hands~~. ^{that was so low} I ~~was~~ ~~hard~~ ~~and~~ ~~rolled~~ ~~over~~ ~~into~~ ~~the~~ ~~chute~~. Only then

checking my survival items

did I realize that both of my flying boots were missing. This must have happened when the chute opened.

I landed about 5 miles from the target area near a Hutter Youth Camp. They must have seen me coming down and were waiting for me.

I was knocked down by several of them using wooden hand saws. I ~~if~~ I had not been for a ~~strong~~ ~~officer~~ (I believe he was a Hauptmann) I probably would have been beaten to death. The officer made me roll up my chute and carry it. They marched me through a small village where we nearly so they could see me out to the Williams. I remember being shocked at and spit on. I also remember dogs snarling on their leashes trying to get to me.

(3)

THROUGH MY MOUTH FOR SEVERAL DAYS UNTIL THEY REDRESSED MY
BUENS AND THIS TIME MADE AN OPENING FOR ME TO BREATHE THROUGH MY NOSE.
I RECOVERED FROM PARANASAL BUT WAS STILL WEAK, AND ~~WAS~~ ^{WAS} KEPT IN THE
"INSANE" HOSPITAL FOR SEVERAL MORE WEEKS ~~UNTIL~~ ^{FOR} THE BUENS TO HEAR
SUFFICIENTLY BEFORE SENDING ME TO A PRISON CAMP. WHILE AT THE HOSPITAL
I WAS BEING TREATED BY A GERMAN DOCTOR, WHO HAD BEEN WOUNDED IN ~~FRANCE~~ ^{AMERICA}
AND ASSIGNED TO THIS HOSPITAL. HE TRIED HIS BEST TO BURNISH ME TELLING ME THAT
HE HAD HIS MEDICAL TRAINING AT SEARS HOPKINS IN BALTIMORE AND RETURNED
TO GERMANY IN 1938. I DID NOT FEEL I COULD BELIEVE HIM BUT HIS ENGLISH WAS
GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME TO UNDERSTAND ~~IT~~. HE TOLD ME HE HAD BEEN TREATING MY
BUENS WITH 'WHALE OIL'. I CAN REMEMBER ALMOST CLEARLY WHEN I VOMITED
IN THE BANDAGE HOOD I WAS WRAPPED IN WITH THE ONLY OPENING AT THE
MOUTH. THE STENCH OF THE 'WHALE OIL' SURROUNDED ME FOR SEVERAL DAYS
AND I HAD GREAT DIFFICULTY IN TRYING TO RETAIN WHAT LITTLE FOOD
I COULD SWALLOW (ONLY LIGHTS ^{AND BREAD} AND ~~VEGETABLES~~). ONE DAY HE TOLD ME
THAT MY NAME WAS ON THE LIST FOR THE NEXT SHIPMENT TO ~~FRANKFURT~~ ^{FRANKFURT}.
~~THE~~ SECURITY SYSTEM AT HÖTTEMARCK DID NOT APPEAR TO BE VERY
STRICT (FROM WHAT I COULD OBSERVE) ^{THE NEXT DAY AFTER THE JUMP AND CRASH} AND WAS ABLE TO WALK THROUGH THE
HOSPITAL GROUNDS WITHOUT BEING DETECTED. SINCE I WAS AMBIGUOUS I
~~WAS~~ ^{HAD BEEN} GIVEN PERMISSION (ONCE A DAY) TO WALK IN A PRESCRIBED AREA OF THE
HOSPITAL GROUNDS. AS ON MY PREVIOUS WALKS, ^{WHEN I WAS} ALWAYS WITH ~~AT~~ A
HOSPITAL ATTENDANT, I WAS DRESSED IN MY UNIFORM AND HAD STOLEN A ~~HAT~~ ^{BOOZY WOOL JACKET} AND A
~~HAT~~ ^{COYER} WHICH DID NOT FIT TOO WELL BUT MANAGED TO KEEP ~~MY~~ ^{MY} ~~LEATHER~~ ^{LEATHER} FLIGHT
SACKS. I HAD WITH ME (2) APPLES AND (1) QUART OF GERMAN DARK BRAND AND MORNING
KLSG. I WAS SEARCHED BUT DID NOT WANT TO GO TO A PRISON CAMP. HAVING STUDIED
GERMAN MAPS WHILE IN ENGLAND. I REMEMBERED THAT FRANKFURT WAS APPROX. 100
MILES NORTH OF THE FRENCH BORDER AND APPROX. 125 MILES EAST OF BELGIUM
THE HOSPITAL WAS ^{NOT MORE THAN A FEW MILES} ~~ON THE~~ ^{WEST OF} ~~FRANKFURT~~ ^{FRANKFURT}
IT TOOK ME SEVERAL HOURS TO CLEAR THE CITY AND THEN SEVERAL MORE HOURS TO

(6.)

Find I was running close to the ~~Rhone~~ Rhine River, I stopped under Lt Smeers
crossing dark and then walked in the direction of the river where I thought
I found a place ~~where~~ where I could sleep under Daybreak without being
detected. ~~I remember some~~ It was my plan to follow the river south
to ~~where the river~~ to the nearest French border. It was a long shot,
but we had been instructed to try to get to France where hopefully the
French underground or some sympathizers could try to help us get
back to England. I knew there had been some ^{British and} American flyers
~~and not speaking~~ ~~any~~ ~~German~~ ~~common~~ ~~language~~ from a few ~~common~~ ~~places~~
knowing only a few words in German and without any money it was the
only chance I could see. I remember being so nervous I could not sleep
but I must have been tired enough to eventually ~~doze off~~ ^{doze off} because
the next thing I felt was a rifle being pushed into my back and
(2) German soldiers shouting at me. It was just coming light and
I had ~~been~~ been gone less than 24 hrs. until that time they captured
me. I was walked a short distance ~~to~~ where I was put in a
truck with several other German soldiers. Even they did not know
immediately what was and took me back to the hospital where
I spent the rest of that day and night in a cell in the
basement ~~to~~ with only a door and no windows.
The only light was what came through the small barred ~~door~~
~~door~~ opening in the door when it was opened. I was
given nothing to eat or drink until the next morning when
I was taken to ~~the~~ another larger cell in the basement where
I was again questioned about my escape. I was told that if I had not
been captured in my uniform I could have been shot as a spy. I was
given a cup of ersatz coffee and 2 pieces of bread with
something of sugarless jam. Within an hour I was again put in

Key Camp IN
CAMPBLED

①

Barn
Cross Country

Dietary Hay
Stuffed With
Rats

A Truck ~~was~~ Taken to Dulag Luft Works Not too Far
From Frankfurt. ^{ONE} There I Was Immediately Taken To
A Car and Spent The Next 10 Days In Solitary
Confinement. I Remember Being Taken By Train With
Several Other American Prisoners To A Prison Camp
In Upper ^{SACRED} ~~SILESIA~~ ^{GERMANY} Called Stryka Luft III Where I
~~Was A Prisoner~~ ^{STAYED} Until Jan. 27, 1945 When We Were
Put ON A FORCED MARCH TO AVOID BEING CAPTURED BY THE RUSSIANS
We Were ¹⁴ Miles ~~20~~ OF THE CAMP. WE HAD BEEN ON
Half Rations For The Past Yr. AND WERE GENERALLY IN A ZERO
WEATHER POSITION. WITH TEMPERATURES ~~THE~~ ^{ZERO} ~~DOWN~~
AND HEAVY SNOW ABOUT WE MARCHED 40 KILOMETERS THE
FIRST DAY. I REMEMBER GIVING 3 CIGARETTES FOR A CUPFUL OF HOT
WATER AT ~~THE~~ GERMAN KITCHEN (SLEPT IN A BARN - TRIED
~~TO~~ TO GET WARM ENOUGH IN THE DIETARY HAY WITH RATS
TO GET SOME SLEEP.) THOSE CIVILIANS WERE GETTING RICH
SINCE A GERMAN CIVILIAN GOT NO CIGARETTES AND A GERMAN
SOLDIER IN COMBAT GOT ONLY 6 PER DAY. I REMEMBER A SMALL
COVERED WAGON DRAWN BY A BLACK OX STOPPING AT
THIS FARMHOUSE. A POLISH WOMAN HAD A SMALL BABY
WRAPPED IN A QUILT IN HER ARMS. ONE OF OUR MEN WAS
POLISH AND SAID SHE WAS TRYING TO GET SOME MILK FOR HER
BABY. WE FIGURED WITH ALL THE HAY IN THE BARN THERE MUST
BE A COW SOMEWHERE. SHE HAD NOTHING TO BARTER WITH SO
SEVERAL OF US EACH GAVE HER A PACK OF CIGARETTES. ~~THE~~
~~WOMAN~~ I REMEMBER THE TEARS RUNNING DOWN HER
FACE WHEN WE DID THIS AND IT MADE US ALL FEEL GOOD.
~~THE~~ CIGARETTES WERE BETTER THAN MONEY. WE WERE IN
A BLIZZARD THE 2ND DAY AND THE SNOW AND WIND

→
Hermann Bannow
Brosime and Bannow

(9)

And there in no condition to ~~be~~ continue the march.
We also found out later that 2700 ~~of~~ our prisoners were
lost in the Blizzard and could not get to Muskham.
We were losing more men who could no longer walk. We had
to leave them behind as there was no alternative. We were
all too weak to attempt carrying them. ~~At last we saw~~
Just as we had thought we could not march another mile,
we saw railroad tracks and this gave us hope and renewed
strength. ^{Following the tracks} We eventually arrived at a town called
Sprumberg. Here we were ushered into a very large compound
surrounded by high fences. German trucks entered with
machine guns and we all thought there was going to be a
massacre. Colonel Jones told all of us within hearing
distance that if they started shooting our only chance
would be to try to go over the ^{nearest} fences. After what
seemed like an eternity, the trucks were removed
and we were told to fall into lines and each of us would
receive a cup of hot soup. Then we were marched to
the railroad tracks where ~~we~~ we were placed so to
a boxcar. The boxcar was assigned to had been hauling
horses and the floor was covered with ^{manure} ~~horse manure~~. It was so
crowded one half could sit at a time while the other half
stood up against each other. The stench from the manure
made us sick causing some to ^{vomit} ~~spit~~ over other prisoners
which added to the already impossible conditions in the
car. We decided the only way to try to improve these
conditions was for us to use our only blanket to cover the
floor. We later were told that ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~German~~ ^{German} ~~had~~ ^{had} ~~given~~ ^{given} the ~~company~~ ^{company} orders to kill all of us but that

Luftwaffe Commandant Refused To Permit It. ~~That~~
 We Were Left Locked In Our Boxcar At The Leipzig MARSHALLING
 YARDS. THE SIRENS WERE SOUNDING AN AIR RAID. THE GUARDS LEFT
 THE STATION AS OUR OWN P-51'S STRAFED AND BOMBED THE MARSHALLING
 YARDS. WE THOUGHT WE WERE ~~being~~ ^{being} BY OUR OWN PLANES BUT WE WERE
 LUCKY, ONLY (1) MAN IN OUR BOXCAR GOT KILLED WHEN A BULLET
 ENTERED WHERE HE WAS EATING SCANDINAVIAN SWINE. ~~The~~ THE TRAIN
 STOPPED OUTSIDE CHEMNITZ AND THE GUARDS LET US OUT INTO
 THERE WAS A HIGH BANK COVERED WITH SNOW. WE RELIEVED OURSELVES
 AND WERE GIVEN A CUP OF HOT ~~ESKIMO COFFEE~~ AND CLEANED OURSELVES
 WITH THE ICE COLD SNOW SINCE WE HAD NO PAPER. BEFORE THE TRAIN
 STARTED AGAIN WE WERE ISSUED A CUP OF HOT ESKIMO COFFEE AND A PIECE
 OF BEER BREAD. ~~As~~ THIS WAS ALL ACCOMPLISHED IN ABOUT
 5 MINUTES. AS ~~THE TRAIN STARTED AGAIN~~ WE WERE COMING INTO THE BOXCAR
 THE PLANE SUDDENLY STRAFED AGAIN BY ~~THE~~ ^{P-51} FIGHTERS. BULLETS
 STRUCK OUR CAR BUT THIS TIME NO ONE WAS HIT. SOME PERSONS
 IN OTHER CARS WERE KILLED AND THE DEAD MEN WERE LEFT IN THE
 SNOW AS WE STARTED UP AGAIN. THE ENGINE ~~BE~~ MUST HAVE BEEN
 KNOCKED OUT AS IT SPROUTED STEAM SO WE HAD TO WAIT FOR ANOTHER
 ENGINE. SOON WE ARRIVED AT MOOSBURG, NEAR MUNICH WHERE WE
 WERE PUT INTO ANOTHER PRISON CAMP ^{FOR THE NEXT MONTH} WHERE WE SLEPT IN TENTS WITHOUT
 ANY HEAT. IT WAS E. APPROX JAN. 31 OR FEB. 1. AND THE TEMPERATURE
 NEVER GOT ABOVE FREEZING. SOON WE WERE PLACED IN WOODEN SHACKS
 WHERE WE HAD PROTECT FROM THE COLD WEATHER OUTSIDE. I REMEMBER
 SEEING MY FIRST ~~THE~~ GERMAN JET FIGHTER. WE DID NOT KNOW MUCH
 ABOUT JET PROPULSION BUT WE KNEW THERE WERE NO PROPELLERS
 ON ~~THE~~ ^{THIS} PLANE. ~~IT~~ ^{IT} WOULD FLY OVER OUR CAMP JUST AFTER
 DAWN EVERY MORNING JUST TO SHOW US THEIR NEW INVENTION.

* Vermin, Fleas, Lice And Bedbugs, Cockroaches

The Pilot (11)

One Morning ~~One of them~~ Buzzed Us Too Low And Crashed In Flames Just Beyond Our Camp. We Could See The Smoke From Where He ~~crashed~~ crashed. One Day We ~~also~~ Saw An Old Ford Painted White. The Camp Commandant, Colonel Von Munsing Was Being Taken To Patton's 10th Armored Division, Which Was On The Outskirts Of Moosburg, To Surrender The Camp. The Next Day We Were Still Being Held Prisoner ~~and~~ When We Found Out That The Camp Commandant's Offer To Surrender Was Turned Down Because He Could Not Spend For The S.S. Troops. That Day We Saw The S.S. Flag Being Installed At Our Camp And All Hell Break Loose. The S.S. Troops Came Into The Camp Voracious ~~for~~ For Machine Guns And Shot All The Guards Who Had Previously Given Up And Surrendered Those Guns. ~~The Camp Commandant Was Dead~~ We Did Not Know If He Committed Suicide Or Was Killed By The S.S. Troopers. P-47's Were Sweeping The S.S.

Wherever There Was Any Resistance And Patton's Tanks Were Entering Our Camp Lopping Straws At Whatever Resistance They Encountered. There Was A Machine Gun ~~also~~ Being Fired From The Steeple Of A Church In Moosburg And One Of The Tanks Opened Fire And Crashed The Steeple Off The Top Of The Church. At This Point We Were All Lying Flat Wherever We Thought We Could Find Some Protection From The Bullets That The Germans Were Spitting Into Our Camp. The Action Did Not Last Very Long And We Had Been Liberated By Gen. Patton's 10th Armored Division. We Found Out That One Of The American Tank Commanders Brought His Tank Into Our Camp

Located ~~in~~
and ~~located~~ His Own Bedroom, ~~was~~ Had Been
A P-51 Pilot and ~~other~~ Personnel. ~~As~~ ~~the~~ ~~time~~ ~~as~~
~~the~~ ~~start~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~war~~ ~~we~~ ~~discovered~~ ~~the~~ ~~camp~~ ~~commandant's~~
Basement ^{was} Full of Red Cross Food Parcels. He had been
keeping them from us, ^{with many starving} some of our prisoners were ~~the~~
~~ones~~ hit, but I don't remember any being killed. When
we felt it was safe enough to leave our beds we saw
the American flag flying from the ~~main~~ ~~entrance~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~camp~~
I'll never forget how we all shouted, many were crying,
and ~~some~~ ~~were~~ ~~praying~~. ~~That~~ evening was jumping up & down.
We were all called to attention and told that the camp
commandant had committed suicide by swallowing
cyanide poison.

Gen Patton was only a few hours behind his advanced
tank units and he promised us we would all be
fired out of camp within 72 hrs. and we were.
I was taken to Camp Lucky Strike at Le Havre,
France where we stayed until enough transport
became available. I was put on a ship ~~bound~~
~~for~~ ~~the~~ ~~U.S.~~ ~~west~~ ~~coast~~ and arrived at Fort Dix, NJ.
June 3, 1945.

I had been sent down over Germany June 22, 1943
and returned to the States June 3, 1945

ENTERING THE IP OF THE BOMB RUN I HAD TO STOP FIRING MY NOSE GUN AND CONCENTRATE ON THE BOMBSIGHT, WHEN LT. JOHNSON STARTED SHOUTING THAT THERE WERE (6) FW-190'S COMING STRAIGHT AT THE NOSE OF OUR PLANE (MY POSITION). THE BOMBSIGHT WAS SET AND LOCKED-IN WHEN I WENT BACK TO FIRING THE NOSE GUN AGAIN. IT SEEMED LIKE ALL OF OUR GUNS WERE FIRING AT THE SAME TIME. THE FIRST ATTACK SHOWED THE PLANE AND THE NO. 3 ENGINE STARTED TO SMOKE. I BELIEVE ONE OF OUR GUNNERS, SGT. HANSEN IN THE TOP TURRET DID KNOCK DOWN ONE OF THEIR PLANES. COMING IN HEAD-ON IN THEIR SECOND ATTACK I HIT THE LEAD PLANE AND HE FELL OUT OF THEIR FORMATION BUT THE OTHER FW-190'S RAKED US WITH 20MM CANNON SHELLS. ONE CAME THROUGH THE Plexiglass NOSE JUST MISSING ME. BOTH LT. SIMPSON AND I WERE KNOCKED DOWN BY THE EXPLOSION AND IMMEDIATELY WE WERE ON FIRE. (I CAN STILL SEE THE PINK SMOKE FROM THE MAGNESIUM OF THE EXPLODED ^{IN CANNON} SHELL). LT. SIMPSON, THE NAVIGATOR WAS UNCONSCIOUS ON THE FLOOR OF THE BURNING NOSE. I EMPLOYED THE FIRE EXTINGUISHER WITH NO NOTICEABLE EFFECT EXCEPT THAT THE FLAMES WERE EVERYWHERE AND I KNEW MY HANDS AND FACE WERE BEING BURNED. LT. SIMPSON HAD CRAWLED TO THE ESCAPE HATCH IN BACK OF THE NOSE BUT WAS UNABLE TO OPEN IT. I REMEMBER LT. JOHNSON GIVING THE BAIL OUT ORDER WHILE HE AND F/O DUNN WERE FIGHTING THE CONTROLS TO KEEP THE PLANE FROM GOING INTO A SPIN. MY INITIAL ATTEMPT TO OPEN THE ESCAPE HATCH FAILED AND I FINALLY KICKED IT OPEN AND SHOVED LT. SIMPSON OUT THE HATCH. WHEN I RETURNED TO GET MY CHEST CHUTE TO ATTACH TO THE PARACHUTE I SAW IT WAS SMOLDERING. I QUICKLY FASTENED IT AND DROVE THROUGH THE OPEN HATCH

PAGE 2.

ENTERING THE IP OF THE BOMB RUN I HAD TO STOP FIRING MY NOSE GUN AND CONCENTRATE ON THE BOMB SIGHT, WHEN LT. JOHNSON STARTED SHOUTING THAT THERE WERE (6) FW-190'S COMING STRAIGHT AT THE NOSE OF OUR PLANE (MY POSITION). THE BOMB SIGHT WAS SET AND LOCKED-IN WHEN I WENT BACK TO FIRING THE NOSE GUN AGAIN. IT SEEMED LIKE ALL OF OUR GUNS WERE FIRING AT THE SAME TIME. THE FIRST ATTACK SHOOK THE PLANE AND THE NO. 3 ENGINE STARTED TO SMOKE. I BELIEVE ONE OF OUR GUNNERS, SGT. HANSON IN THE TOP TURRET DID KNOCK DOWN ONE OF THEIR PLANES. COMING IN HEAD-ON IN THEIR SECOND ATTACK I HIT THE LEAD PLANE AND HE FELL OUT OF THEIR FORMATION BUT THE OTHER FW-190'S RAKED US WITH 20MM CANNON SHOTS ONE CAME THROUGH THE PERIQUASS NOSE JUST MISSING ME. BOTH LT. SIMPSON AND I WERE KNOCKED DOWN BY THE EXPLOSION AND IMMEDIATELY WE WERE ON FIRE. (I CAN STILL SEE THE PINK SMOKE FROM THE MAGNESIUM OF THE EXPLODED ^{INCENDIARY} SHOTS). LT. SIMPSON, THE NAVIGATOR WAS UNCONSCIOUS ON THE FLOOR OF THE BURNING NOSE. I EMPTIED THE FIRE EXTINGUISHER WITH NO NOTICEABLE EFFECT EXCEPT THAT THE FLAMES WERE EVERYWHERE AND I KNEW MY HANDS AND FACE WERE BEING BURNED. LT. SIMPSON HAD CRAWLED TO THE ESCAPE HATCH IN BACK OF THE NOSE BUT WAS UNABLE TO OPEN IT. I REMEMBER LT. JOHNSON GIVING THE BAIL OUT ORDER WHILE HE AND F/O DUNN WERE FIGHTING THE CONTROLS TO KEEP THE PLANE FROM GOING INTO A SPIN. MY INITIAL ATTEMPT TO OPEN THE ESCAPE HATCH FAILED AND I FINALLY KICKED IT OPEN AND SAVED LT. SIMPSON OUT THE HATCH. WHEN I RETURNED TO GET MY CHEST CHUTE TO ATTACH TO THE HARNES I SAW IT WAS SMOLDERING. I QUICKLY FASTENED IT AND DROVE THROUGH THE OPEN HATCH.

When I went to Release the Chute I Discovered I Had Put it ON Upside-Down AND Had to Pull the Ripcord WITH My Left Hand. I Had Just Bailed Out When the Plane Broke Up. I Wondered How Many Had ~~Got~~^{Got} Out. I WAS UNABLE to Close the Bomb Bay Doors After the Bombs Had Released This Would Have Given Them Another Way Out. Some Weeks Later When I Arrived At Sparag Luft III Lt. Johnson Saw Me Come In AND Told Me That Nine Had Got ^{Out} Safety, Only the Engineer, Master Sgt. Hanson Did Not Make It. He Said One of the Screws Blew Off the Top Turcot Decapitating Him.

My Chute Popped Open Against the Back of My Leaning Front Seat. Looking Up At the Chute I Noticed the Fire Had Burned Through Several of the Panels AND I WAS Having Problems Pulling on the Straps to Keep the Chute From Side Slipping AND Collapsing. We Had Been Flying At 25,000 Ft. AND I Must Have Bailed Out At Approximately 23,000 Ft. I Had No Bail-Out Oxygen Bottle to Survive At This Altitude So I Delayed Pulling the ~~Cord~~^{Cord} Until I Thought It Was Safe Enough.

Struggling With the Shock Lines I Did Not See the Ground Before I Landed With A Jolt That Cracked Several of My Teeth. I Also Noticed That Both of My Flying Boots Were Missing From When the Chute Opened. My Feet Were So Cold I Had No Feeling In Them AND At First Could Not Stand Up. I Figure I Landed About 5 Miles From the Target No Bombs AND There Must Have Been A Hitler Youth Camp Within Sight of My Chute AND They Were Waiting For Me When I Landed. They Went Wild AND Started Beating Me With Wooden

Page 4.

HANDS OF SHOVELS AND RAKES. IF I HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE OFFICER (Hauptman) WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF THEM THEY WOULD HAVE BEATEN ME TO DEATH. THE OFFICER MADE ME ROLL UP MY COATS AND CARRY IT. HE AND HIS GROUP OF HITLER YOUTH MARCHED ME THROUGH A SMALL VILLAGE WHICH WAS NEARBY SO HE COULD SHOW ME OFF TO THE CIVILIANS WHO STARED AT ME AND SPIT IN MY FACE. I REMEMBER DOGS SCREAMING ON THEIR LEASHES TRYING TO GET TO ME. AS I WAS BEING PUSHED THROUGH THE CROWD OF CIVILIANS, THE GERMAN OFFICER POINTED OUT THE BODY OF A GERMAN FLYER HANGING FROM THE FRONT OF A CHURCH BY HIS MAE WEST. I WAS TAKEN TO THE LOCAL POLICE STATION WHERE THEY PUT ME IN BACK OF A TRUCK WITH ANOTHER OFFICER AND 2 GUARDS. WE ARRIVED AT A LUTHERAN BASE WHERE I WAS INTERROGATED AND PUT IN AN UNDERGROUND SOLITARY CELL. I WAS INTERROGATED REPEATEDLY FOR 2 DAYS. THE THIRD DAY I WAS IN SHOCK FROM MY SERIOUS BURNS AND RUNNING A HIGH FEVER (I COULD NOT GET WARM). THEY DECIDED TO DRESS MY WOUNDS AND SEND ME ON AN OVERNIGHT TRIP ON A TRAIN WITH AN OFFICER AND 2 GUARDS TO WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE AN INSANE ASYLUM WHICH HAD BEEN CONVERTED INTO A HOSPITAL FOR PRISONERS. THE NAME OF THIS PLACE WAS CALLED "HÖHEMARK" WHICH I LATER FOUND OUT WAS IN FRANKFURT. I WAS SERIOUSLY ILL WHEN I ARRIVED AND WAS TOLD I HAD PNEUMONIA. MY BURNS WERE 2ND AND 3RD DEGREE BURNS OF MY FACE, HEAD AND BOTH HANDS. MY HAIR WAS BROKE BURNED OFF MY HEAD AND MY RIGHT HAND SO SEVERELY BURNED THAT ALL THE TENDONS WERE EXPOSED AND HAD BECOME INFECTED. THEY CONSIDERED TAKING OFF MY RIGHT HAND BUT I WOULD NOT LET THEM DO IT.

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FINALLY THEY SPREAD THE WITAWAX I WAS TOLD WAS WAX OIL. MY HEAD WAS WRAPPED INTO WHAT LOOKED LIKE A HOOD MADE OF BANDAGES. THEY LEFT ONLY OPENINGS FOR MY EYES AND MOUTH. I HAD TO BREATHE THROUGH MY MOUTH. MY HANDS WERE ALSO HEAVILY BANDAGED. THE FOUL OOR OF THE WAX OIL MADE ME SICK AND I ALMOST CHOKE TO DEATH WHEN I VOMITED INTO THE HOOD. AFTER THIS HAPPENED THEY RELEASED MY FACE AND HAND WOUNDS AND THIS TIME CUT A SMALL SLIT FOR ME TO BREATHE THROUGH MY NOSE. I WAS CONSTANTLY NAUSEOUS FROM THIS HORRIBLE OOR AND WAS HAND-FED LEMONS AND CEREALS WHICH I HAD TROUBLE RETAINING. THE GERMAN DOCTOR WHO ATTENDED ME AT THE HOSPITAL HAD BEEN WOUNDED IN AFRICA AND TRIED TO BETRIEN ME BY TELLING ME HE HAD RECEIVED HIS MEDICAL TRAINING AT JOHNS HOPKINS IN BALTIMORE. EVEN THOUGH HE SPOKE ENGLISH WELL ENOUGH FOR ME TO UNDERSTAND HIM I RESISTED BECOMING HIS FRIEND. SEVERAL WEEKS LATER, AFTER HAVING MY BANDAGES REMOVED FOR THE LAST TIME, THE DOCTOR TOLD ME THAT MY NAME APPEARED ON A LIST OF PRISONERS NEXT TO BE SENT TO A PRISON CAMP. I HAD LONG SINCE FULLY RECOVERED FROM PNEUMONIA AND NOW THAT THEY DID NOT THINK I NEEDED ANY FURTHER MEDICATION FOR MY BUENS THAT NEEDED SPACE FOR OTHER WOUNDED PRISONERS. SINCE I WAS AMBULATORY I WAS PERMITTED TO WALK IN A PRESCRIBED AREA OF THE HOSPITAL GROUNDS WITH AN ATTENDANT. I WAS ALSO CAPABLE OF DRESSING MYSELF IN MY FLYING CLOTHES AND LEATHER SACKET. THESE WERE THE ONLY CLOTHES I HAD BESIDE THE SINGLE HOSPITAL GOWN IN ONE PIECE. THAT DAY DURING MY WALK I WAS EXTRA CAREFUL IN NOTICING THAT THE SECURITY WAS ALMOST NON-EXISTANT. EARLY THE FOLLOWING MORNING AFTER THE INITIAL BED CHECK

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I Stole A Pair Of Black Pants And A Brown Smoker Which I Slipped Over My Flying Suit And Leather Jacket. I Observed That Most Germans Liked To Wear Hats Or Caps So I Found A Badly Worn Hat Which I Believe Was Either Discarded Or Not Worn For A Long Time. It Was Slightly Large For My Head But Would Stay On. All The Previous Night I Stayed Awake Trying To Remember What My Work Would Be In Attempting To Escape. I Remember Studying The Maps Of France And Germany While At Our Airbase In England. I Knew That Frankfurt Was Less Than 100 ^{Kilometers} ~~Miles~~ From The Closest Border Of France To The Southwest And Belgium Approximately 125 ^{Kilometers} ~~Miles~~ East Of ~~Frankfurt~~ ^{Frankfurt}. I Knew That ^{British} ~~British~~ And American Flyers Had Escaped Previously By Getting To France Where They Got Help From The Underground And French Civilians Who Were Not Afraid To Help Them Get Back To England. It Was Mid-Morning And Some Of The Prisoners Were Taking Their Morning Walks. I Walked With Them And Through The Hospital Grounds Without Being Stopped (Although I Was Not Sure I Had Not Been Seen). With Only 2 Apples And A Chunk Of Hard Black Bread I Found Myself Free Of The Hospital But Severely Handicapped With Little Knowledge Of German And No Money. I Was Very Scared But Determined Not To Be Put Into A German Prison. My Destination Was The Nearest French Border Which Was On The West Side Of The Rhine River (Approx 100 Kilometers Away). Since The Hospital Was On The Opposite (East Side) Of Frankfurt My Largest Obstacle Was To Circle The City And Then Head To The Nearest Point Of The River.

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It Was Getting Dark By The Time I Was What I Felted A Short
Distance From The Ridge And I Found A Place In A Field That
Had Been Dug Up. I Thought Several Mounds Of Dirt Would Keep
Me From The View Of Anyone Who Might Be Lurking In The
Area. During The Day It Was Very Hot With The Exact
Climate I Was Wearing But At Night It Kept Against The Cold.
I Was Still Scared And I Remembered Being So Nervous I Could
Not Sleep. However, I Must Have Eventually Fallen ~~Asleep~~
Into A Sound Sleep From Slight Exhaustion. I Was Jolted
Awake By The Muzzle Of A Rifle Which Was Painfully
Struck In My Back. There Were 2 German Soldiers And
Across The Field I Noticed A Truck With Other Soldiers
In It. It Was Just Getting Light And I Had Been Tired For
Some 24 Hrs. They Waxed Me To The Truck And Put Me In
Back With The Other Soldiers. One Of Them Wanted My Leather
Flight Jacket Which He Noticed When That Seized Me.
I Would Not Give It To Him And He Struck Me In The Face.
One Of The Other Soldiers Came To My Rescue And Pulled
Him Away From Me. It Was Evident To Me That They Knew Who
I Was And Had Been Looking For Me. I Was Taken Back To
The Hospital Where I Was Interrogated By A German
Officer And The Doctor Who Had Previously Tended To
Injured Me. I Spent The Rest Of The Day In A Large
Cell In The Basement Of The Hospital Where I Was Told
If I Had Not Been Captured In My Uniform I Could Have Been
Shot As A Spy. I Was Given A Cup of Ersatz Coffee But Nothing
To Eat. Within An Hour I Was Put Into A German Car
With A Red Cross ^{Gestapo} Besides The Driver There Were (3)

Page 8.

Officers With Luckers. They Took Me A Short Distance From Frankfurt To A Place Called Durlag Luft. One of These I Was Immediately Placed Into Solitary Confinement For 7 Days. From There I Was Taken By Train With Several Other American ^{Flying} Officers To A Prison Camp At Sagan, Germany In Upper Silesia Called Stalag Luft III. Here I Met The Other (3) Officers Of My Crew. It Was Hard For Me To Believe That None Of Them Had Been Injured During Our Last Mission. Here I Remained A Prisoner Until Jan. 27, 1945 When We Were Put On A Forced March To Avoid Being Captured By The Russians Who Were Within 14 Miles Of Our Camp. Our Location Was Halfway Between Breslau And Berlin And We Had No Idea Where We Were Headed. We Had Been On Half Rations For The Past Year And In A Weakened Condition. With The Temperature Below Zero And A Heavy Coating Of Snow On The Ground. Heavy Snow We Marched 40 Kilometers The First Day. We Had Tried To Prepare Ourselves For This Environment But Could Only Take With Us What We Could Carry Without Being A Burden To Our Already Mentioned Conditions. We Had Saved Cigarettes And Choc. "D" Bars Which Contained A Lot Of Vitamins. Each Had One Blanket And An Extra Pair Of Socks. Most Of Us Had Shoes That Were Broken Down And Leaked. I Remember Giving A Friend Girl (3) American Cigarettes For A Cup Of Hot Water At A Farmhouse Along The Way. Only A Few Of Us Were That Lucky, The Guards Stopped Her And Ran Her Into The Farmhouse. That Night We Slept In A Barn Trying To Get Warm Enough To Sleep In The Dirty Hay With Rats Running About.

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American Cigarettes Were Better Than Money And We Guarded Them Very Carefully. German Civilians Received No Special Allowance And Combat Soldiers Were Given Only (6) Per Day. I Remember A Small Covered Wagon Was Stopped At A Farmhouse Driven By A Polish Lady Who Was Holding A Small Baby In A Quilt. She Was Trying To Get Some Milk For The Baby And They Would Not Accept The Occupational Money She Had. We Knew There Had To Be Cows Around Because Of All The Hay In The Barn So Several Of Us Started Giving Her A Few Cigarettes So She Could Get Some Milk For Her Baby. Soon Others Contributed Cigarettes And The Woman Started To Cry. She Knew She Could Buy Almost Anything She Needed With What We Had Given Her And It Made Us Feel Good To Know, Even In Our Own Circumstances, We Were Helping Someone Else. We Were In A Genuine Blizzard The 2nd Day And The Snow And Wind Slowed Our Progress Immensely. By This Time All Of Us Had Frozen Shoes And Wet Feet. We Were Stopped And Told The "Guns" Took A Week To Turn In The Blizzard And We Had To March Back To Poslan. The Stupid Bastards Had Us Walking In A Circle For Hours. This Was A Severe Blow To Our Morale, Which Was Already Very Low. Many Thought Of Giving Up And Not Going On. We Stopped At A Town Called Muskau Where We Were Herded Into What Had Been An Old Glass Plant. We Were Out Of The Wind-Driven Snow But The Floors Of The Plant Were Covered With At Least An Inch Of Black Soot. We Tried To Get Some Rest And Couches All Night. The Third Day Saw Our Numbers Becoming Fewer And Fewer. Many Had Stopped To Rest And Did Not Get Up Again. I Recognized A Good Friend Of Mine From Sagan.

His Name Was Joe Gaudet, A Navigator From Boston. We Were In The Same Block At Stazag Luft III. Joe Had Stopped To Remove His Frozen Shoes And Try To Get Some Feeling Back Into His Feet. He Could No Longer Walk. I Thought He Would Catch Onto The Column After He Rested Awhile. However, I Was Told By Someone Else Who Knew Him That Joe Froze To Death And The Guards Refused To Pick Him Up And Left Him In The Snow. Some Other Prisoners Were Lucky Enough To Be Picked Up And Put Into Wagons That Followed Us.

The Third Day We Were In Terrible Physical Condition And Refused To March. No One Even Stood Up When The Guards Threatened To Shoot Us. Finally The German Commandant Gave In And We Spent The Night At The Glass Factory But Were Once Again On The Road At 5 A.M. The Next Morning. We Later Found Out That We Were Given The Extra Day To Rest Because The German Guards Were In Bad Shape And Were In No Condition To March. We Were Also Told That 2700 Of Our Prisoners Were Lost In The Blizzard And Could Not Get To Muskau. We Were Losing More Men Who Could Not Walk And We Had To Leave Them Behind. We Were Too Weak To Try Carrying Anyone. Just When We Thought We Could No Longer Walk (Our Legs Refused To Respond) Someone Had Sighted ~~The~~ Railroad Tracks. This Gave Us Renewed Strength And By Following The Tracks Arrived At A Town Called Spremberg. Here We Were Us Herded Into A Very Large Compound Completely Surrounded By A High Wire Fence. Within A Short Time Several German Officers With Men At Machine Guns Entered The Compound.

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It looked like they were going to kill us all rather than continue the march. Colonel Jones told all of us within hearing distance to run for the nearest part of the fence if they started shooting. We could see there was an argument going on between the German officers. Soon the trucks left and we all tried to relax. Colonel Jones told us later that the Führer (Hitler) had issued an order for the Gestapo to kill all POWs, however, the Luftwaffe Commandant refused to let this happen. He then had us line up and were given a cup of hot soup. Then we were marched to the railroad yard and placed 50 to a boxcar. The car I was assigned to had been hauling horses and there was manure covering the entire floor. It was so crowded that only half could sit down while the other half stood against each other. The stench from the manure made us sick causing some to vomit on other prisoners, which added to the already impossible condition in the boxcar. We decided the only way we could help to improve those conditions was for each of us to place his only blanket on the floor to cover the manure. We were loaded in the boxcars and the guards left us at the Leipzig Marshalling Yards when the air raid sirens went off. Our own P-51 fighter planes were strafing and bombing the Marshalling Yards. We thought about the irony of being killed by our own planes after all we had gone through. But we were lucky, only (1) man in our car was killed more the bullet had entered the car. Some others were killed and were left behind in the snow.

The Train Stopped Outside Of Chemnitz And The Guards Let Us Out Where There Was A Very High Bank Covered With Snow. We Relieved Ourselves And Cleaned Ourselves With The Ice Cold Snow Since We Had No Rags To Use. Before The Train Started Again We Were Issued A Cup Of Hot Ersatz Coffee And (1) Slice Of Black Bread. All This Was Accomplished In A Very Few Minutes. As We Were Getting Back Into The Boxcars (1) Spray P-51 Strapped Us, None Of Us Were Killed But The Pilot Got The Engine As We Saw It Spinning Stream. We Remained There Until Another Engine Was Backed Into Our Train. Soon We Arrived At A Place Called Muesburg, North Of Munkh. This Was To Be Our Last Prison Camp. We Were Pushed Into Tents Where We Tried To Sleep That First Night. It Was About Jan. 31 Or Feb. 1. There Was No Heat In The Tents And The Temperature Was Well Below Freezing. The Next Day We Were Placed In Wooden Shacks Where We Could Rest From The Cold Outside. I Remember Seeing My First Jet Aircraft From This Camp. We Know Very Little About Jet Propulsion But We Could See There Were No Props On This Plane. This Single Jet Aircraft Would Fly Low Over Our Camp Early Every Morning Just To Show Us Their New Innovation. One Morning The Pilot Was Too Low In Buzzing Us And Crashed In Flames Just Beyond Our Camp. We Could See The Smoke Rising From Where He Had Crashed. Then One Day We Noticed A Ford Painted White In Front Of The Camp Commandant's Headquarters. The Camp Commandant, General Von Munsing Was Doing

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TAKEN TO THE ADVANCED UNITS OF PATTON'S 10TH ARMORED DIVISION, WHICH WAS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF MOOSBURG, TO SURRENDER MOOSBURG AND OUR PRISON CAMP TO THE HIGHEST RANKING ^{AMERICAN} OFFICER. THE NEXT DAY WE WERE STILL BEING HELD UNDER GUARD. WE FOUND OUT THAT CORONEL VON MUNZING HAD AUTHORITY TO SURRENDER HIS TROOPS BUT NOT THE U.S. TROOPS WHICH WERE ALSO IN MOOSBURG. HIS OFFER TO SURRENDER WAS THEREFORE TURNED DOWN. WHEN WE SAW THE U.S. FLAG BEING INSTALLED IN OUR CAMP ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE. THE PRISON GUARDS WHO HAD ALREADY HAD DOWN THEIR RIFLES AND PISTOLS WERE ALL USTAKED INTO THE CAMP YORLAGER WHERE THEY WERE ALL GUNNED DOWN BY THE U.S. TROOPS. P-41'S WERE STREAMING THE U.S. WHEREVER THEY SAW ANY RESISTANCE AND PATTON'S TANKS WERE ENTERING OUR CAMP. A MACHINE GUN HAD BEEN FIRED INTO THE CAMP FROM A CHURCH STEEPLE IN MOOSBURG. ONE OF OUR TANKS CRASHED THE STEEPLE OFF THE CHURCH WITH A SERIES OF SHOTS. AT THIS POINT WE WERE ALL LYING ^{FLAT} ON OUR STOMACHS HOPING NOT TO GET HIT. THE ACTION DID NOT LAST VERY LONG AND THE TROOPS FOLLOWING PATTON'S TANKS TOOK OVER. ONE TANK COMMANDER WAS ABLE TO LOCATE HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, WHO WAS MARRIED TO HIS SISTER AND KNEW HE WAS BEING HELD CAPTIVE AT MOOSBURG. THE G.I.'S FOUND THE CAMP COMMANDER'S BASEMENT FULL OF AMERICAN RED CROSS FOOD PARCELS WHICH HE WAS KEEPING FROM US WHILE HE WAS STILL BEING HELD CAPTIVE BY OUR TROOPS, CORONEL VON MUNZING

Page #.

Took His OWN Life By Swallowing A Cyanide Capsule.
General Patton was only a few hours behind his advanced
tank units. When he arrived at our camp and saw
the deplorable conditions we were held in
captivity he cursed Hitler and all of the
German bastards. He told us we would be out
of the camp within 72 hrs. and he was.
I was flown to Camp Lucky Strike at Le Havre,
France in a DC-3. I can still vividly see all
the prisoners shouting and crying when the
American flag was hoisted over the gate at
the camp entrance.

We stayed in Le Havre until transport was
provided. Along with thousands of other
prisoners I boarded a troopship and later
arrived at Fort Dix, N.J.

I had been shot down over Germany June 22, 1943
and returned to the States June 4, 1945.

I still have the leather A-2 flight jacket.
Although badly blackened, beasted and
searched, it saved my life from more serious
burns. My burns are still noticeable but
greatly improved over the years and I still have
minor problems from the frostbite which I
got during that forced march. When I first returned
home Mr. Nicholson, who was an English teacher, wanted to write
a book about my experiences. I could not do this then, but
now after all these years I can tell it to you. - Ed.

Edward S. Gast
1120 Colonial Road
Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17603

5/24/89

Dear Russ,

CONFIRMING MY PHONE CONVERSATION WITH YOU LAST EVENING, I AM PUTTING THE ENCLOSED IN THE MAIL TO YOU TODAY.

ALONG WITH THE COMPLETE LISTING OF OUR CREW MEMBERS I AM SUBMITTING A SYNOPSIS OF SOME OF MY EXPERIENCES.

I HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO ALLOW MYSELF TO DISCLOSE ANY OF THIS INFORMATION PREVIOUSLY. EVEN MY WIFE AND CHILDREN HAVE NOT BEEN TOLD ANY OF THESE DETAILS.

NOW, AFTER OVER 40 YRS., AND HAVING READ THE MANY ISSUES OF "306TH ECHOES" AND MORE IMPRESSIVELY YOUR OWN PUBLICATION, "FIRST OVER GERMANY," I FEEL I CAN GIVE SOME OF MY STORY TO YOU. I HEREBY RELEASE THIS TO YOU FOR WHATEVER PURPOSE YOU SO CHOOSE. IF I CAN BE OF ANY ADDITIONAL HELP, KINDLY LET ME KNOW.

SINCERE PERSONAL REGARDS,
Ed. Gast