

Off We Go...Into The U.S. Army Air Force

by Leon J. Peragallo

[Next Monday is Memorial Day, a time to remember those who have risked their lives, including especially those who died protecting our nation and its heritage. Mr. Peragallo, a lifelong Glastonbury resident, served in the Army Air Corps during World War II. He survived having his plane shot down, being wounded and living as a prisoner of war in Germany. He has donated a copy of his first-hand account of these experiences to the Glastonbury Historical Society and has given permission for this account to be published in the Citizen. Here is the first part of his account which will appear in 12 weekly installments.]



Leon J. Peragallo

Dec. 9, 1942—Enlisted in the Army Air Force, Hartford, CT. The same day we traveled by train to Fort Devens, MA for induction. At Devens we took physicals and many aptitude tests. We were issued uniforms, equipment and Dog Tags (metal identification tags worn on a chain around the neck). We were initiated into another world, but being 18 years old, I soon acclimated.

Dec. 18, 1942—We left Fort Devens by troop train and arrived at Miami Beach, FL. On Christmas Eve, we were quartered at the Cardozo Hotel on Ocean Drive at the beach. Edmund Postemski from Columbia, CT was my roommate. Early in the war, Ed was killed in action. Basic training was learning how to be a soldier—marching, close-order drill, shooting practice, etc. I was in awe, being just across the street from the beach.

Jan. 1943—Sent to Truax Field, Madison, WI for radio mechanic's training. While there, I passed an exam enabling me to join the Aviation Cadets. I wanted to be a pilot.

Feb. & March 1943—I shipped out to Jefferson Barracks, MO for classification and more testing. In March, I was sent to Cadet College Training Detachment at Jamestown College, Jamestown, ND. The training was

based on West Point style officer training, including liberal arts college courses, as well as flight training in a Piper Cub.

Sept. 1943—Sent to Santa Ana, CA Air Force Base for classification as a pilot, navigator or bombardier. After two weeks of testing, including mental, physical and psychological tests, I, along with 60% of my other classmates, "washed out." I was shocked and depressed, but I was O.K. when they told me that we would be trained for other positions on combat flight crews. I had a choice of training for Flight Engineer, Radio Operator or Armorer-Gunner. I chose Armorer-Gunner and was sent to the Army Air Force Tech School at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, CO. There we learned mechanics, function and repair of guns, bombs, turrets, etc.

Jan. 1944—We were sent to Gunnery School in Kingman, AZ. Here we learned more about the use and maintenance of .50 caliber guns, plus we practiced shooting all types of guns from B.B. guns to rifles, pistols, shotguns and machine guns. In Yucca AZ, we practiced in-flight target shooting from the ball turret on B-17s. A final test before graduating was to take apart .30 and .50 caliber machine guns and put them back together again—all while blindfolded!

Feb. 1944—I graduated from Gunnery School in Kingman, AZ receiving Gunners Wings and a diploma, so I was ready for assignment to a combat flight crew. I went home to Glastonbury, CT on a 14 day "Delay-in-route" to Salt Lake City, UT by train. Being at home for five days was great. Happy to be home, but sad to leave. Then after a four-day train trip we arrived in Salt Lake City. At the Salt Lake City Air Force Base we were assigned to flight crews for B-17s. My future position, as part of a ten-man crew, was as the Lower Ball Turret Gunner.

March 1944—My crew was sent to Alexandria, LA Air Force Base for flight crew training on B17s. Spent about two months on practice missions getting ready for combat.

May 1944—Our crew traveled by train to Kearney, NE to pick up combat clothes and equipment and a new B-17. We flew the new

B-17 to Presque Isle, ME for more equipment and then on to Gander, Newfoundland.

June 1944—On June 5th in cold and snow, we flew across the Atlantic landing in Belfast, Ireland on June 6th. (This was D-day, the day the Allies landed in Normandy, France to begin our invasion of Europe.) We stayed at a British Army base in Belfast for a few days before going by ferry across the Irish Sea to Edinburgh, Scotland. After a few days there, we went by train to the 8th Air Force Group in Stone, England to await assignment. In mid-June, we proceeded by train to Southwest England, stopping along the way to let off other crews.

Our crew boarded an Army truck, which took us to an air base where we had chow. The other GIs in the mess hall were very quiet and looked like zombies. They had just gotten back from a combat mission. We reboarded the truck and were dropped off at the 390th Bomb Group, 568th Squadron in Framlingham, located in southeast England about 70 miles from London. Here reality set in. We were about to do the job we had trained for—to fight the Germans and destroy their industry.

For the first few days, we stayed in Quonset Huts that served as the ground crew barracks. We replaced a crew shot down the day before. We settled in for a week, getting acquainted with the base and procedures and flying practice missions around the local area. The first day on the "hardstand" (place where B-17s parked) we got familiar with Angel in DiSkies, the ship we would be flying.

We watched the ships taking off on missions. One of these, a B-17, had a hard time getting airborne, just clearing the trees at the end of the runway. Then it dipped down below the trees and blew up in a burst of fire and a mushroom cloud of smoke. All ten men were killed. We always dreaded takeoffs because each ship carried 5,000 pounds of bombs, 3,000 gallons of fuel, plus about 40,000 pounds of ship and crew. It was "curtains" if your takeoff speed was inadequate.

We spent about two weeks training and flying practice missions, each crew member getting acquainted with his equipment. Pilots



Airman Peragallo in December 1942 while he was quartered at the Cardozo Hotel on Miami Beach where he received his basic training.

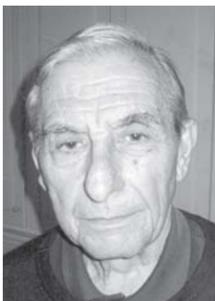
learned to fly in very tight formations. The practice flying was all done around southeast England. We became a nine-man crew because Joe Walker, our waist gunner, had flown during this period as a substitute crewman on a mission to Paris and had been hit in the head by flak. Joe survived but was mentally out of it and never again flew a military mission. With the additional training over, we waited anxiously for our first mission, using a flag system. A white flag meant NO MISSION TOMORROW. A blue flag was BE ON ALERT for a mission. A red flag meant MISSION IS ON. Soon it was.

[To be continued next week. There is a display of World War II military uniforms and other war memorabilia at the Museum on Hubbard Green. For more information or to join the Historical Society, please call 860-633-6890.]

Off We Go...Into The Wild Blue Yonder

by Leon J. Peragallo

[The following is the second of 12 weekly installments of an account by Mr. Peragallo of Glastonbury, about serving in the U. S. Army Air Corps during World War II.]



Leon J. Peragallo

Our crew flew its first mission on June 24, 1944. We were awakened at about 1 a.m., went to breakfast, then to a 2:30 briefing. All members of the flight crews going on the mission were there.

The Operations Officer explained plans for the mission using a large wall map showing the route to the target. Information was provided about the weather, how many enemy fighters we were expected to encounter, and about anticipated anti-aircraft batteries. We learned the position assigned for each crew in the formation. On this, our first mission, we were "tail-end Charlie," the usual position for an inexperienced crew. The C.O. gave a pep talk and the Chaplain, a blessing.

We then changed into our electrically heated suits. It would be about 60 below zero at 28,000 feet. Then we went to the ship, ready for take-off. We flew around England to assemble with our Group, our Wing and other 8th Air Force Wings. We slowly gained altitude and got into our assigned formation positions. At 12,000 feet we put on our oxygen masks. The process took about three hours of flying in the dark.

As dawn approached we were at about 20,000 feet. As far as you could see, B-17s with vapor trails were headed for the enemy. What a sight! There were over 1,000 aircraft on a mission to bomb an oil refining facility in Bremen, Germany. As we approached the target, I could see German fighter planes attacking B-17 Groups ahead of us. The sky was covered with flak bursts (black, puffy clouds).

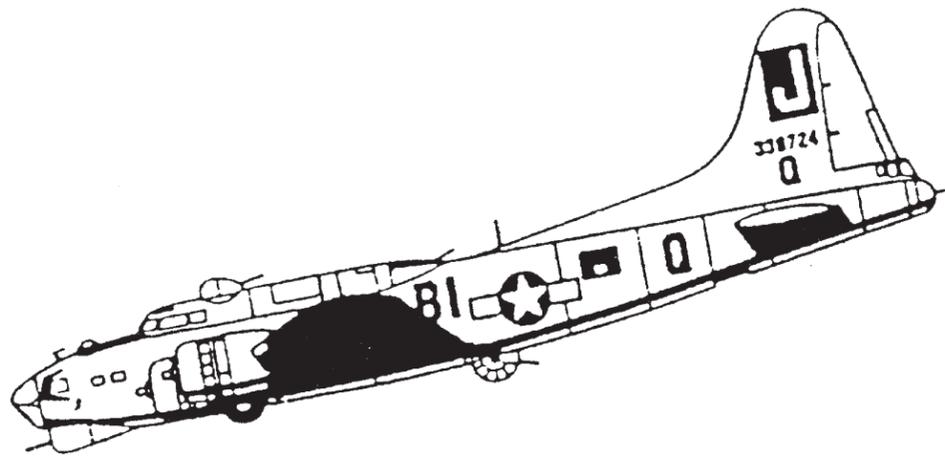
From the I.P. (Initial Point) on the bomb run

we had to fly straight to the target. At that point I started praying. I was scared stiff. In rotating the ball turret looking for enemy aircraft, my whole body was shaking uncontrollably, especially my leg as it pressed on the foot pedal that adjusted the gun sight. This was a "first-time experience" nervous reaction that occurred only a few times on subsequent missions. The flak was peppering our ship. Up ahead, two B-17s were spiraling down, airmen bailing out.

We finally dropped our bombs. It was my job to announce over the intercom, "Bombs away," because I had the best view. The ball turret where I sat was located on the underside of the plane, directly behind the bomb bay, so I had a good view of the bombs falling toward the target 25,000 feet below. If bombs did not release, the bombardier had to go into the open bomb bay to release them manually.

We peeled off and headed back to the base. Our Group got shot up a bit but no fatalities. However, our Wing lost two ships with 20 men. Upon our return we went to a debriefing with an intelligence officer. He interrogated each crew member about what they had seen. Getting back to the barracks at about 4 p.m., I was exhausted, but still alive. Thank the Lord! It had been 15 hours since breakfast—off we went to the mess hall.

June 29—Our next target was a synthetic oil plant near Leipzig, Germany. We went through the usual briefing and three hour rendezvous over England. This time there were well over 1,000 B-17s and B-24s on the mission. As we got near Berlin, German fighters attacked. Then the flak got heavy. One B-17 in the Wing above us blew up in flames. A couple of men with chutes passed right under my turret. On returning to base, we learned that one B-17 ditched in the North Sea near Holland. As Air-Sea Rescue was picking them up, German planes strafed them, killing the ball turret gunner and the navigator. Exhausted, we went to mess and tried to forget about it.



A picture of a B-17 bomber. Note the gun turret mounted on the underside of the plane, just behind the wings. This was Mr. Peragallo's position on the aircraft.

Destroying Buzz-Bomb Installations—Buzz-Bombs were German V-1 pilotless rockets. They were being used against London and other targets in England. We were part of a mission with over 1,000 planes sent to an area in France just across the English Channel to destroy V-1 launching facilities. The flak was heavy and accurate. We had many holes in our ship, Angel in DiSkies. Our Group lost two ships on this mission with 18 men M.I.A. (Missing In Action).

Sight-Seeing in the Alps—One of our missions was not to drop bombs, but rather supplies for the French resistance near the French-Italian border. We flew over France and over Lake Geneva, Switzerland to the drop area in the Alps. We flew in below the mountaintops where the containers full of guns, munitions and other supplies were to be dropped. Then the parachutes opened to land the supplies in the designated areas. We were so low that I could see the partisans gathering the supplies. It was scary in a B-17 flying below the mountaintops.

We then headed back home. We saw no enemy fighters or flak. There were about 24 B-17s on this mission which included two other groups besides ours. Although we spent about nine hours in the air, this had to be my favorite mission.

We Prayed—We went on more missions, always on the edge of disaster, but we were young and invincible. When we went into the target from the I. P., Clay Perry, our pilot, would page me on the intercom saying "Peragallo, start praying." I suppose that other crew members were also praying. I knew Warren Shea, our engineer, always prayed. "The Lord be with us."

The Air Medal—Sometime in early July each of our crew members received the Air Medal for our achievement in bombing missions against the enemy. When I got back home, my mother had a photo of her receiving a second Air Medal on my behalf at a ceremony at Bradley Air Force Base in Windsor Locks, CT. This was a morale builder for families of soldiers who were serving in the war.

by Leon J. Peragallo

[Mr. Peragallo, of Glastonbury, has written about his experiences during World War II as a gunner aboard an Army Air Corps B-17 bomber. This is the third of 12 weekly installments.]



Leon J. Peragallo

A Tight Fit—Being five feet six inches tall, I was a natural fit for the ball turret. Once in the ball, you were isolated from the ship, except for contact through the intercom. It was no place for someone with even a hint of claustrophobia. On some missions I was confined in the ball for as long as ten hours.

At high altitudes, with a temperature like 60 degrees below zero, the moisture from your breath would freeze in the bellows tube of the oxygen mask. One had to continually squeeze the tube to break the ice that was forming and keep oxygen flowing. A few minutes without oxygen would be fatal. We wore electrically heated suits which worked well.

There were two 50 caliber machine guns on either side of me with an electronic gun sight—a box directly in front of my face. It was controlled by foot pedals for lining up an enemy plane using lighted reticules in the sight to get the correct lead before firing the guns.

At times I liked having the best view of the action. Visibility was unlimited because the ball could be operated 360 degrees around and 90 degrees down. I witnessed lots of destruction of the enemy and, regrettably, terrible incidents involving our own crews and aircraft.

A Three-Day Pass—After about eight missions our crew went on a three-day pass to London. We had a great time. It was a relief to be away from combat. However, two German buzz bombs exploded near us, one by our hotel and another the next day while we were walking in Hyde Park. Each time we immediately hit the deck, a grim reminder that we were still at war.

Devastating News—When we arrived back at base, we got the news that our Wing had lost nine ships, four of them B-17s with 40 men from our Group. They had been hit real hard by German fighter planes. We were devastated. One of the crews that went down was from our barracks. Since our arrival, I believe that we had lost about 30% of our combat crews. We knew our days were numbered. We realized that at that rate we probably would not complete the 30 missions required before going back home to the U.S.A.

Back to Work—We were then sent on seven missions in nine days. There was the usual routine. Breakfast about 2 a.m. We could have whatever we wanted and as much as we wanted. We knew that we would be going without food for about 15 hours or that this could be our last meal. I usually had gone to bed early and prayed a lot. I managed to get by.

Off We Go Again And Again

Targeting Munich in Deepest Germany—

On July 11, 12 and 13 in 1944 we went on missions over Munich in southern Germany where the target was a BMW plant producing jet aircraft engines. This was a ten-hour round trip from takeoff to landing—a long time to be inside the ball turret or in any other position on the ship.

July 11—We were escorted by American P-38 and P-51 fighters part of the way and then we continued in the group of about 1,000 B-17s and B-14s to the target. The new P-51 fighters were important because, with their long range, they provided better protection than had been possible for bombers attacking distant targets. We did see some enemy fighters, but there was not much action. At the target, however, there was heavy flak, the worst I had ever seen. We dropped bombs on the target and got out of there as fast as possible.

On the way back, in about mid-Germany, we lost one of our four engines due to a mechanical failure. We couldn't keep up with our Group. We were alone and vulnerable, but that was part of the job. As we neared northern Germany, we met our P-51 fighters and were escorted to the North Sea. Personally I was never happier than when I saw them come alongside our ship. We got home safely and, during the night, the engine on our plane was repaired.

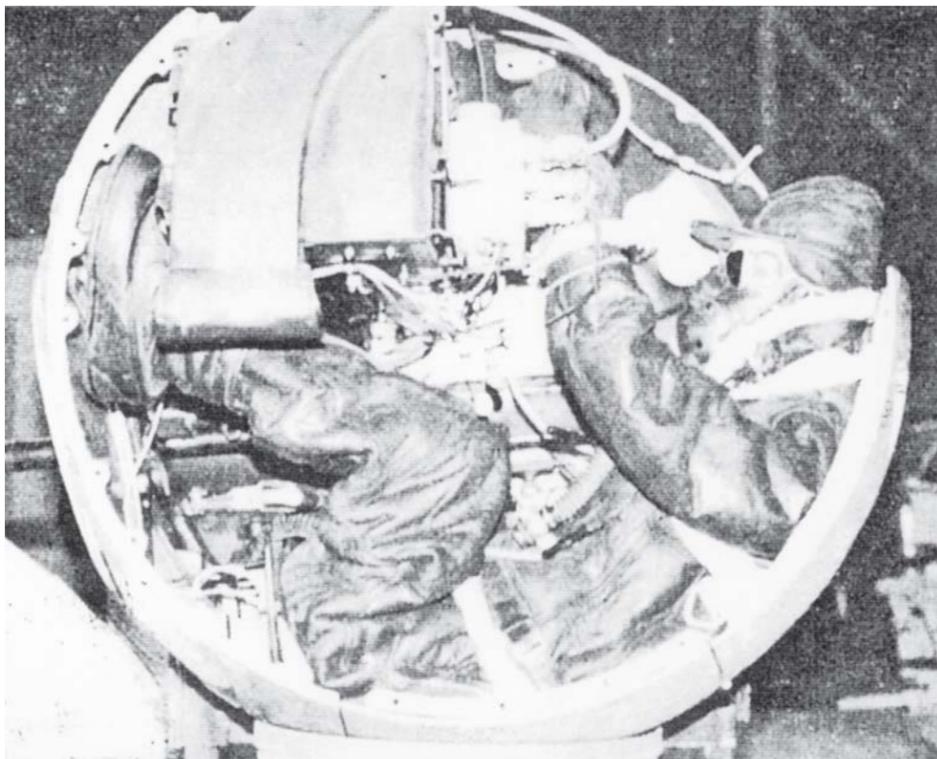
July 12—The next day, we went to Munich again and again faced heavy anti-aircraft fire as we went in to drop the bombs. Two ships were hit real bad and could not possibly return to England. They made it to neutral Switzerland where the crew members were interned for the duration of the war.

July 13—Tension was rising as we returned again to Munich. We were in the lead on this mission, in the high Group at 28,000 feet. Our Group took a lot of hits. Men bailing out went right by me. There were ships on fire, ships exploding and spiraling down—what a mess! A few statistics: Each day over 1,000 aircraft went out with over 10,000 men. Of these, each day an average of 66 aircraft were lost and about 7,475 tons of bombs were dropped.

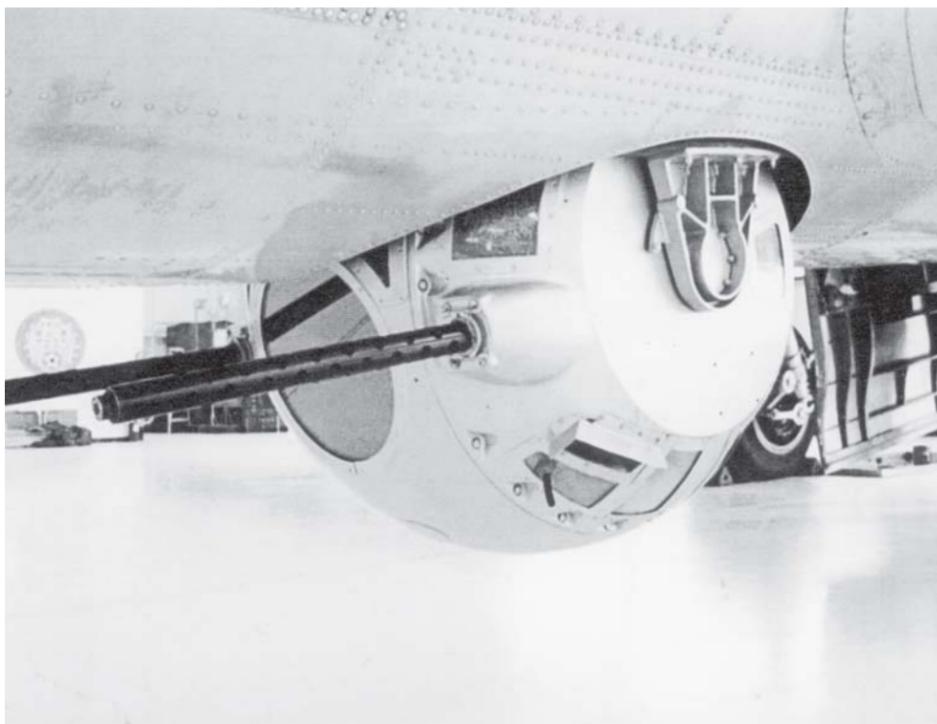
July 18—We went on a mission to bomb U-Boat submarine pens and other port facilities in Kiel, Germany. It was a short run to north Germany but, as usual, there was lots of flak.

July 19—The Schweinfurt Ball Bearing plant was the target. This had been one of the toughest targets in Germany. We faced the usual flak but no enemy fighters. One of our Group was shot down.

July 25—We flew to St. Lo, France to drop anti-personnel cluster bombs on German Infantry in a battle with the American Army. There were 1,500 B-17s on this mission, flying in on the bombing run at below 10,000 feet. That gave me a good view of the bombs being dropped in what looked like a quiet area below. I observed trucks, ambulances and some troops moving about. When we got back to the base, we were told that the bombs were dropped in an area of American troops. There were many casualties



A cutaway showing the ball turret gunner's position.



The ball turret protruding from beneath the fuselage of a B-17 bomber.

and deaths. This was, to say the least, sad and sobering news.

July 31—We went to Munich again, this time to bomb railroad marshaling yards. There were no encounters with enemy aircraft but, as usual,

we took a beating from flak. We got back to the base OK, with little damage to our ship. However, there were many casualties in our Group and among others on the mission. This was the last time our crew bombed Munich.

Just a “Milk Run” to France

by Leon J. Peragallo

[The following is the fourth of 12 weekly installments by Mr. Peragallo, a lifelong Glastonbury resident, describing his service as a crewmember on a B-17 bomber during World War II.]



Leon J. Peragallo

On August 2, 1944, our crew was awakened at about 2:30 a.m. to go on a mission. We were briefed as usual and went to our ships to prepare for takeoff. Soon our pilot, Clay Perry, got a call that the mission was scrubbed and we went back to the barracks. During the morning, I started writing a letter to my mother. I still have that unfinished letter. When I was missing in action, it was sent back to the U.S.A. with the rest of my things from the barracks.

Before I could finish the letter, we were ordered to the flight line without a briefing. Clay Perry briefed us on the ship. We were on a tactical mission to bomb a railroad bridge near St. Quintan, France. Normally this type of mission was flown by two-engine bombers. Everyone said it was “just a milk run,” meaning an easy target just across the channel. Only one Wing (about 25 planes) participated in what was our crew’s 16th mission.

As we approached the target at an altitude of about 12,000 feet, we lost an engine (one of four). The pilots feathered the prop and we continued on the bomb run, but fell behind our formation and lost altitude. At this point Perry asked each crew member individually what he wanted to do, either try to make it to a U.S. occupied airfield in France or proceed by ourselves to drop the bombs on the target and take our chances on getting back to England. All crew members voted to proceed to the target.

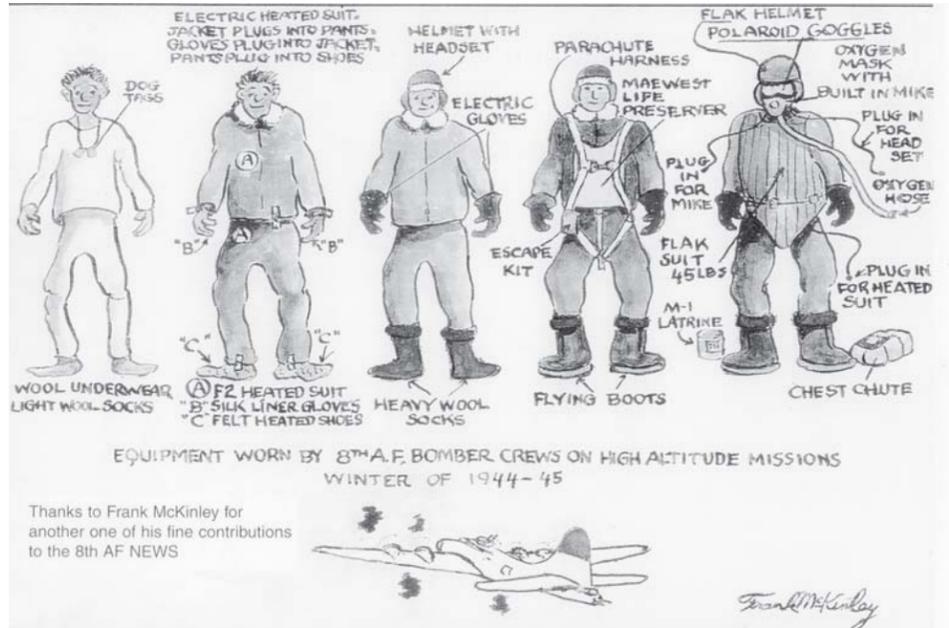
The anti-aircraft fire was heavy at this time and we took a direct flak hit and lost another engine. We knew we were in real trouble, but

we dropped our bombs and Stubbs, our bombardier, reported that it was a direct hit on the bridge. We were elated. However, we were losing altitude. Over the intercom, Perry ordered us to lighten the ship—throw everything out. He said that we would have to ditch in the North Sea.

He ordered me to jettison the ball turret. The first thing I did was take off my sheep skin flying boots and put on my GI shoes, as I had been trained to do in this situation. Then I proceeded to get rid of the ball turret. There was some difficulty in this because at first, I couldn’t break what were supposed to be breakable cast-iron hangers to cause the turret to drop out. I used the barrel of a 50 caliber machine gun and hit those clips with strength that I never realized I had and down went my ball turret. As I looked down, we were real low. I could see gardens, roof tops and rows of cabbage. While I had been working on the ball turret, other crew members were throwing out guns and other equipment, anything to lighten the ship.

That done, we each got into what we had been taught was the position for ditching. All crew members, except the pilot and copilot, were supposed to lay down on the radio room floor which was between the waist and the bomb bay. As soon as most of us were in position on the floor, there was a direct hit from an anti-aircraft gun on the right side of the radio room just above where we were lying on the floor. An incredible shot by the enemy, but by the grace of God we were all still alive. I had been hit in three places on my right leg. Campbell, the radio operator, got hit in his arm while it was around my head. Ryan, the navigator, got hit in the arm while coming out of the bomb bay. Hicks and Shea also got some flak.

In training we were told that if we ditched it would be a matter of seconds before the ship would sink. At this point I thought, this is it: it’s the end for me. Images of my mother, father, brother and sisters flashed in my mind, then a picture of Jesus. I remember thinking “Hope to see you Jesus.” Then we hit the water.



Flight crews on B-17 bombers were exposed to the elements at high altitudes. To be able to function and to have the best possible protection, they used the clothing and equipment shown here.

The water came in with the force of a high-pressure hose. We were almost immediately up to our armpits in water. To my surprise, we were still alive. “Thank you Lord.” I pulled the cord on my “May West” life preserver but it didn’t inflate because it was full of flak holes. We had to get out of there fast. Two inflatable life rafts were taken from where they were stored above the radio room. The escape hatch on top was opened.

I couldn’t reach the hatch. Two crew members shoved me up and Shea, who was outside, pulled me out. I slid down onto the starboard wing. The life rafts were brought out and inflated. We piled in, five in one raft and four in the other. The ship was still afloat and one engine still operating. When we had floated about 50 yards away, the Angel in DiSkies turned nose down and slowly sank into the North Sea.

I thanked God for letting us all live. Nine crew members shot down but still alive—very unusual. I was concerned about how my mother would take the news of me being missing in action, but relieved and grateful to be alive. There was a small first aid kit in the raft plus some survival food. My leg was really hurting and losing blood. We ripped off my right pant leg and tied up the wound with the cloth and made a tourniquet, which worked OK.

Thanks to the skill of our pilot and copilot who landed the Angel so well in the water, we all survived. It was late afternoon. We were about five miles from the European coast, hopefully drifting toward the English coast which was about 40 miles away. At daylight the next morning, we were out of sight of land. We’d had a rough night in choppy seas. We were all in a state of semi-shock, but still positive.

Captured by the Germans

by Leon J. Peragallo

[This is the fifth of 12 weekly installments from Mr. Peragallo’s account about his experiences in the Army Air Corps during World War II. It begins on the day after he and the eight others in his bomber crew ditched their shot-up plane in the English Channel.]



Leon J. Peragallo

About 24 hours after we ditched, we saw a boat on the eastern horizon coming toward us. Soon two Dutch fishing boats came alongside our rafts. A couple of Dutch fishermen wearing wooden shoes pulled us into their boat and quickly helped us below deck into a small cabin to hide us.

In a very short time, a German Navy boat came alongside. There was a shouting match between the fisherman and the Germans who were angry that the Dutch had picked us up. Soon our entire crew was back on deck with the Jerrys (Germans) pointing their guns at us waiting for us to get into their boat. Then one Jerry shot a machine gun burst over our heads. We each moved fast into their boat which was lower than the fishing boat. I landed on deck on my side. It hurt.

The Germans took us to Zeebrugen, Belgium, where we were turned over to Luftwaffe (German Air Force) guards. At this time the officers, Perry, Sproul, Ryan and Stubbs were separated from us, the noncommissioned officers, Shea, Campbell, Sinclair, Hicks and me. We were all prisoners of war.

Two guards transported us to a hospital for medical attention. At this time, I was in bad shape. I could not walk or stand up without help. One of the guards went into the hospital to get help. After a while, the guard came out along with a doctor. The doctor was over six-foot tall, bald head, wearing a monocle and dressed in a dirty white lab coat that reached his ankles. He came out arguing and yelling with the guard.

Campbell, our radio operator, could speak a little German. The doctor was yelling at the guards for taking us there and saying he would not treat us because a few days before Hitler had given the order to kill all captured American airmen. (We had heard of the order back at base and that many civilians and military personnel were carrying it out.)

However, one of the guards went back to see if he could get someone else to help. We finally went into the hospital. I was laid down on the floor at the bottom of a long flight of stairs. People were scurrying around—nuns, other nurses and black uniformed SS soldiers. One of our guards finally got a medical soldier to help.

He proceeded right there to take the metal out of my ankle with his jackknife, also cleaned out some wires from my heated suit that were imbedded in my thighs by flak. Two large pieces of metal had gone in deep, one into my calf and the other into my thigh. They’re still there today. The medic had a nun get some bandages, which looked like toilet paper. He wrapped my leg with them.

I was still lying on the floor at the foot of the staircase when the same doctor who had refused us medical attention came back with a needle as big as a nail. He motioned for me to pull down my pants, gave me a shot in the groin and stomped off cursing and yelling. I guess it was a tetanus shot, and it must have worked because I didn’t get an infection. Because of poor nourishment, my wounds never fully healed until I got home to the good old U.S.A. Praise the Lord for the shot. It could have been a disaster without it.

Right after I was treated, we were taken to the train station. The guards had my fellow crew members load me onto a baggage wagon and push me to the track to board the train. It must have been a comical sight. In a few hours we were in Brussels, Belgium, where we were taken to the city jail which the Luftwaffe controlled. There we were separated and put in solitary confinement cells, each four feet wide by six feet long. Once a day, we were given a slice of black bread and a cup of water. We went

<p>CLASS OF SERVICE</p> <p>This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.</p>	<h1 style="margin: 0;">WESTERN UNION</h1> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">A. N. WILLIAMS PRESIDENT</p>	<p>1314</p> <p>SYMBOLS</p> <p>DL = Day Letter</p> <p>NT = Overnight Telegram</p> <p>LC = Deferred Cable</p> <p>NLT = Cable Night Letter</p> <p>Ship Radiogram</p>
<p>The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.</p>		
<p>Washington D.C. 11:23 P.M. 19 th. Check 45 Gvt.</p>		
<p>John Peragallo 656 Matson Hill Rd. So. Glastonbury Conn .</p>		
<p>The Secretary of war desires to express his deep regret, that your son Staff sergeant Leon J Peragallo has been reported missing in action since two August in the European Area .If further details or other information are received ,you will be promptly notified.</p>		
<p>U110 the Adjutant General</p>		

During World War II, telegrams were used to convey important messages promptly. Here is a copy of the telegram received by Leon Peragallo’s family informing them that Leon was missing in action.

to the toilet in groups.

I was there four days. On the second day, I had my first interrogation by an S.S. captain. As trained, I gave only my name, rank and serial number. They then put on a big show of yelling, threatening, etc. At this point I was thinking of my mother not knowing if I was dead or alive so I gave them my home address, but nothing else. (When I returned home, I learned that civilian wireless radio operators in the U. S. had gotten messages from Germany that I had been captured and relayed them to my family.)

On the fourth day there, they rushed about six of us out of our cells, including one American “hot shot” fighter pilot. As we approached the elevator, an English speaking guard yelled that we better give them all of the information that they wanted. The fighter pilot started arguing with the guards. The guards started to hit us with their rifle butts. The fighter pilot started pushing the guards and all hell broke loose.

A German officer came to the scene and told everyone to get into the elevator. We reached the ground floor and were marched into a courtyard where there were soldiers in black S.S. uniforms. The fighter pilot was going berserk and there was another big argument. Suddenly the officer yells, “Take them all over and shoot them.” They made us all line up against a wall in the courtyard. I thought, Here we go again, I’m dead. As we faced the firing squad, an airman next to me said, “What are we going to do now?” I said, “PRAY” and we did.

The firing squad aimed at us, they cocked their guns and the officer was about to give the command to shoot. Suddenly another officer came running out of the building yelling HALT! HALT! They then hurried us into a truck and off we went. Looking back, I decided it was all a hoax. The fighter pilot was probably a German, a good actor, but his uniform didn’t look authentic to me. However, the firing squad looked real. I thought for sure it was the end.

by Leon J. Peragallo

[Mr. Peragallo, a lifelong Glastonbury resident, has written about his experiences in the Army Air Corps during World War II. In this, the sixth of 12 weekly installments, Mr. Peragallo and some others, who are being held by the Germans as prisoners of war, have just faced what turned out to be a mock firing squad. Then they were immediately loaded into a truck and taken away from the jail where they had been held.]



Leon J. Peragallo

Off we went through the city of Brussels, Belgium to the railroad station. At this time I could walk OK by limping along. The guards gave us some bread and boiled water to drink. I was with Campbell, Sinclair, Hicks and Shea from my aircrew. We were being transported to a Luftwaffe interrogation center near Frankfurt, Germany.

With two guards, we traveled in a compartment on a passenger train. That night as the train was stopped in a railroad station, I could hear aircraft overhead. I knew that these were British bombers because they bombed at night and the Americans did it during the day. Bombs were dropping close by and anti-aircraft guns were shooting. Then there would be a sound like hail falling, but it was not hail; it was shrapnel coming back down from the German anti-aircraft fire. As the bombs were dropping closer to our train, we were rushed to a bomb shelter along with German civilians who gave us the evil eye and gestured and yelled at us.

As we left the bomb shelter in a mob, we got separated from the guards and thought briefly of escape. One of the guards was yelling in broken English "Where hiss mine boys? Boys, boys, comest do here, mine boys." But there was no good alternative to going back to the railroad car. It was stuck there for a long time because part of the track and station took severe hits from the bombing and had to be repaired. As we proceeded to Frankfurt, we saw the results of the bombing along the way—unbelievable destruction.

We arrived in Frankfurt's main railroad station in the early afternoon. There were all kinds of people there, German civilians and soldiers

Interrogated by the Germans

from all of the Axis powers. As we were standing waiting for the next move, German civilians encircled us yelling and screaming and some running toward us with their umbrellas to hit us. I figured we were in big trouble, but the guards cocked their rifles and yelled at the people, dispersing them. I respected the guards after that. They were old but disciplined soldiers doing their job.

We traveled to the interrogation prison by public trolley, along with civilian men, women and children. It took time and we had to transfer from one trolley line to another. At one stop where we stood on the street for about a half hour waiting for a trolley on another line, we were joined by another American airman accompanied by two guards. He had been beaten up by civilians and his hair was shaved off. He had two grooves on top of his head from bullets that were shot at him as he descended with his parachute and one of his ears was partly shot off. He was one angry airman but, at the same time, relieved to be alive.

At the interrogation prison, the guards turned us over to black-uniformed S.S. soldiers who immediately started to push us around and yell at us as they marched us through the main gate of the prison, a very sinister-looking place. Inside more nasty S.S. guards banged us around as we headed up a large corridor with cells on each side. Midway up the corridor, three men were standing alone outside of the many cells. They were our pilot, Clay Perry; our copilot, Harold Sproul; and our navigator, Charles Ryan. We caught on immediately that this was a trick to see if we recognized them. As we went by, we didn't look at them or say anything. We were, however, relieved to see that they were alive and well.

Each of us was placed in a solitary confinement cell. The cells were about six by eight feet with a straw-filled burlap sack on a frame bed. There was a small window with bars and a solid door. There were no lights. Later that day, the door was opened and a guard yelling "Essen" (German for food) poured out a scoopful of thick white soup from what looked like a small garbage can. There were maggots on the can but not on the dish that was given to me. The soup looked and tasted like wall paper paste, but I ate it. My days of being a fussy eater were over. At night we got a small piece of bread and a cup of "ersatz" (imitation) coffee. That was the daily routine, except on the

days they forgot the soup.

When I had to use the toilet, I banged on the door until a guard came. He balked at my request, pointed his rifle at me and steered me to the toilet—the dirtiest place I've ever seen. The guard kept his rifle pointed at me the whole time and, when I asked for toilet paper, he pointed at the wall which was being used instead of paper. This was not the Ritz. I laid down most of the time while in the cell. I hadn't washed in over a week. I still had my blood-covered fatigues with the right pant leg missing. I smelled like rotten meat—my wounds were not healing.

On the second day there, two guards with rifles took me to be interrogated. A captain greeted me in his big office sitting behind his desk. He was very cordial, spoke perfect English and asked me where I came from. When I refused that information, he said, "as far as I know, you are a spy and all spies are executed." I told him I wasn't a spy. Then he mentioned the names of my fellow crewmen. I told him I didn't know what he was talking about. I was going with name, rank and serial number only as per orders. Back to the cell I went. The captain and guards saw I was really hurting so they probably figured I would break down and tell them everything I knew.

The next day I was questioned by the same officer who tried to put me at ease by telling me he had relatives in Chicago. He asked me questions. I answered "I don't know." He showed me a book, told me what outfit I was in, and named officers, speaking of them on a first-name basis. He knew more about the 390th Bomb Group than I did. He then got angry and said to the guard, "Take him to the cell and let him rot." So rot I did for six days. Several times I was awakened by guards coming into the cell at night, knocking me off my cot with rifle butts and yelling things like "Tell the captain what he wants to know." They scared the living daylight out of me but it was normal procedure. I could hear the same thing going on in the cells around me and often that sounded even more violent.

I spent many hours praying for my parents and family. I also played mind games. I pretended I was back home. I went around to all the houses to visit and talk to the people I knew on Matson Hill. I analyzed which of all the girls I remembered would make the best wife. I decided it was Fran Canepari, although I hardly



Shoulder patch worn by those, including Mr. Peragallo, while serving in the Eighth Air Force. Note the figure eight incorporated in the design.

knew her. Back to reality, I could hear people leaving and new ones coming in. I thought they had forgotten me.

Eventually, I was taken to see the captain again. There were more question and threats. He then explained that I had two choices. I could answer the questions and go to a prisoner of war camp where there would be recreation and good food, or go to a "concentration camp where you will stay until you die," that part being yelled at the top of his lungs. I was so angry at the intimidation that I didn't care what happened. I stood up and yelled back at him. I swore at him and said that I didn't care what he did with me, I wasn't talking. He called the guards who roughed me up a bit and back in the cell I went.

That night I was released from solitary confinement. In the dark, I was led to a small building with, to my surprise, Ray Sinclair, waist gunner on our crew. The building was totally dark. Everyone was relieved and happy to be out of solitary. A few guys were asking questions like "what outfit were you with." They were normal questions, but not in an interrogation prison, so we clammed up, knowing they were German plants trying to get information. One giveaway was that they couldn't talk baseball as every American soldier could in those days.

Life as a Prisoner of War in Germany

by Leon J. Peragallo

[The following is the seventh of 12 weekly installments from Mr. Peragallo's account about serving in the Army Air Corps during World War II. On August 2, 1944, Mr. Peragallo was wounded when his plane was shot down.



Leon J. Peragallo

He was captured by the Germans and interrogated for a few weeks. Here he is sent to a prisoner of war camp.]

On the day-long trip to the camp where I was to be processed as a Prisoner of War (P.O.W.), I was on a passenger train in a group with Sinclair and Hicks from my flight crew and other captive airmen. Upon arrival, we were registered and given clothing supplied by the International Red Cross. I was issued a German P.O.W. dog tag number 4264, two thin blankets, a British Air Force overcoat, a G.I. (U.S. government issue) shirt, a knitted sweater, a pair of G.I. olive drab pants, one set of long underwear, a helmet liner to use as a knit cap, and a tooth brush. I retained my original pair of shoes, shirt and flight jacket (which I still have) but I got rid of my bloody overalls with the leg cut off to make a bandage and tourniquet after I was wounded.

We got to clean up, wash and shave. Our bombardier, Stubbs, and our navigator, Ryan, were also there, but I never again saw our pilot, Perry, or our copilot, Sproul. The P.O.W. camp leaders were an American colonel and some British officers. Wearing appropriate uniforms, they looked authentic, but the word was that they were Germans. They looked real and talked real but, in my opinion, didn't seem like real P.O.W.s. The food consisted mostly of International Red Cross food parcels. We were there a few days and then marched to the local railroad station where we were put in box cars, each with two guards. There was plenty of room and we had food.

A couple of days later, we arrived in St. Wendel, a small town in Luxemburg. In St. Wendel they grew tobacco for cigarettes. The Germans had converted tobacco sheds into barracks. There were four sheds surrounded by gun

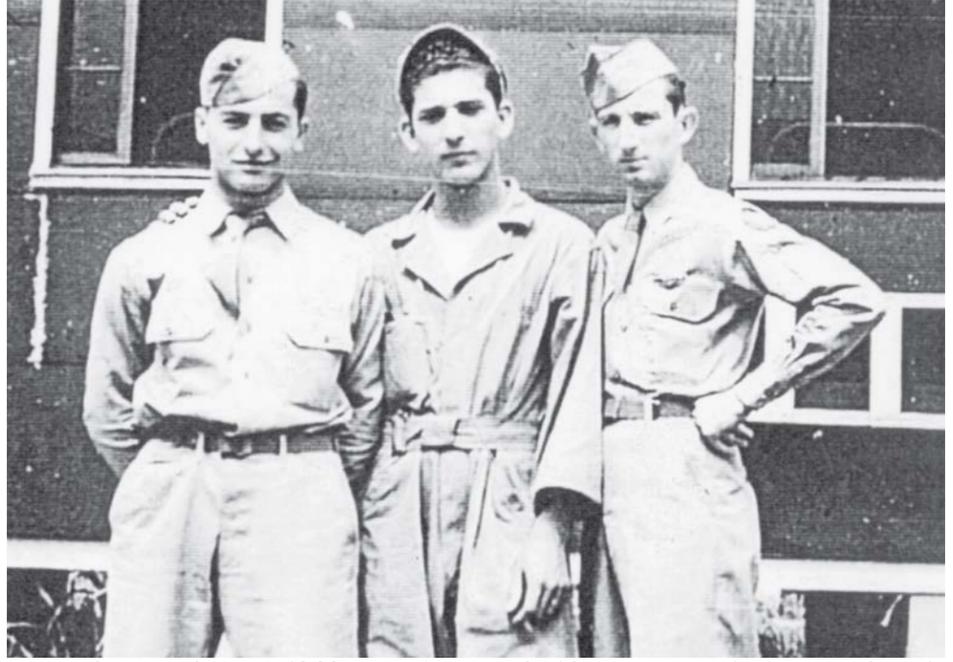
towers and barbed wire. Italian soldiers were installing barbed wire and there were German infantry guards with about 200 P.O.W.s. Except for being confined, things were not too bad. There was sufficient food and shelter.

About two weeks later, we were taken to a narrow-gauge railroad siding to be loaded onto cattle cars. These were called 40-and-8s, meaning they could hold 40 men or 8 horses. They were approximately eight feet by 20 feet inside. Hundreds of people were waiting at the track. Many were Jewish, Polish or Russian slave laborers waiting to board. It was bedlam. As usual lots of pushing, shouting and rifle butts swinging.

The guards counted us as we entered the cattle cars. Each car had about 26 to 30 men in each end with two guards in the middle, between the two side doors. Each section of the car was separated from the rest by a barrier of chicken wire laced with barbed wire. We were ordered to take off our shoes and belts which were piled in the center with the guards.

As we settled into our section we immediately realized that we had to take turns sitting down and standing up. It was real torture. Some were wounded and could not stand. I was still hurting, but less than some others. Each section had a bucket for human waste. At night everyone just collapsed and with no light the bucket usually overflowed. It was a nauseating, maddening situation. There was much tension and conflict among the men. Some had dysentery; some passed out. One P.O.W. was carried out. I believe he was dead.

The train stopped daily for hot water and some sort of green mush for food. The guards dished it out through the wire into tin cans, which we had brought from the previous camp. We were so hungry that any food was gourmet. Along the way we went through cities that had been bombed. We went by an Opel auto plant that appeared completely destroyed. The destruction cheered us up some, but the trip was a real nightmare. At times I thought I was in hell. I learned that the human body and mind can take a lot of punishment. Also I observed the worst side of human nature—bad temper, crying, desperation and panic. I realized that the conditions we were forced to endure caused this, but I vowed to God that I would try not to get into that low mental condition. I prayed of-



Happier days in May 1944 at the Alexandria Air Force Base in Alexandria, LA. Author Leon Peragallo (on the left) with two other ball turret gunners during training.

ten and know that God pulled me through.

The trip lasted seven days and, in that time, we never left the train. We all suffered stiffness and aches and pains from lack of movement. On the afternoon of the seventh day we stopped at a small railroad station called Gross Tychow in German-occupied Poland where Stalag Luft IV was located. The guards gave us our belts and shoes and roused us out of the cattle car. We were greeted by nasty, black-uniformed S.S. troops with barking dogs. We were immediately told to run, but we could hardly walk, not having taken a step for a week. It was a bad scene with vicious dogs and the guards yelling and waving rifles with bayonets attached.

I ran at the beginning but fell back and was hit with rifle butts a few times. It's amazing the energy you get from rifle butts hitting your body, so I did manage the three-mile trip to the camp OK. (When we got into camp we heard that earlier incoming P.O.W.s who failed to run fast enough were severely bitten by police dogs and

injured from bayoneting by the S.S. troops.) As we entered a camp gate, we were roughed up by an almost seven-foot-tall soldier we called "BIGSTOOP." His job was to yell, insult and push us around. He was especially rough on the Jewish G.I.s in our group. Each P.O.W. was interrogated by the Luftwaffe staff, by English-speaking Germans posing as American P.O.W.s, and by real American P.O.W.s testing to see if we were Germans. I was confused by all this and was very quiet through the whole procedure. Finally we got some food—bread, potatoes, soup. WE WERE HUNGRY!

We were put in tents because the barracks were full. There I met George Bertuzzi from Matson Hill. We had been in the same class from first grade through high school. It was a happy occasion and we did a lot of reminiscing. Meanwhile more American airmen were coming in. Some were from crews we had trained with in Alexandria, LA or in the Air Force tech schools I had attended.

Life in a German Prisoner of War Camp

by Leon J. Peragallo

[The following is the eighth of 12 weekly installments from a description of serving in the Army Air Corps during World War II by Mr. Peragallo, a lifelong Glastonbury resident. On August 2, 1944, Mr. Peragallo was wounded in the leg when his plane was



Leon J. Peragallo

shot down. The next day, he was captured by Germans. In this account, which begins over a month later, he has just arrived at Stalag Luft IV, a German prisoner of war camp in Poland.]

Two weeks after arriving at Stalag Luft IV, we were moved into a newly-completed compound called Lager C. At full capacity, there were four lagers, "A" through "D," each holding about 2,500 prisoners, so there were about 10,000 P.O.W.s in Stalag Luft IV.

We were marched into the new lager which consisted of ten barracks, four latrines, and one building for the guards, cooking and administration. The guards put us in columns of four, which became "combos" that bunked in the same area and shared food. Our combo had Kaz Rachak from Colorado, Clovis Kennedy from Louisiana, me and, later, John Lord from Illinois. By the way, the true Lord was with us, too.

We were assigned to a room which housed a total of 22 men. We made our beds on the floor out of wood chips with one blanket. Each room had a small table and one coal stove. The Germans rationed the coal so that, in the cold weather, the temperature never exceeded 40 degrees, causing us to keep our clothes on day and night. For seven people, we were supplied with a loaf of black bread every other day, one small bowl of potatoes each night and imitation coffee every morning. Each loaf of bread was cut up by one of the seven in the group. We took turns cutting. It was difficult to cut seven pieces exactly the same. Sometimes there were arguments, which is just what the Ger-

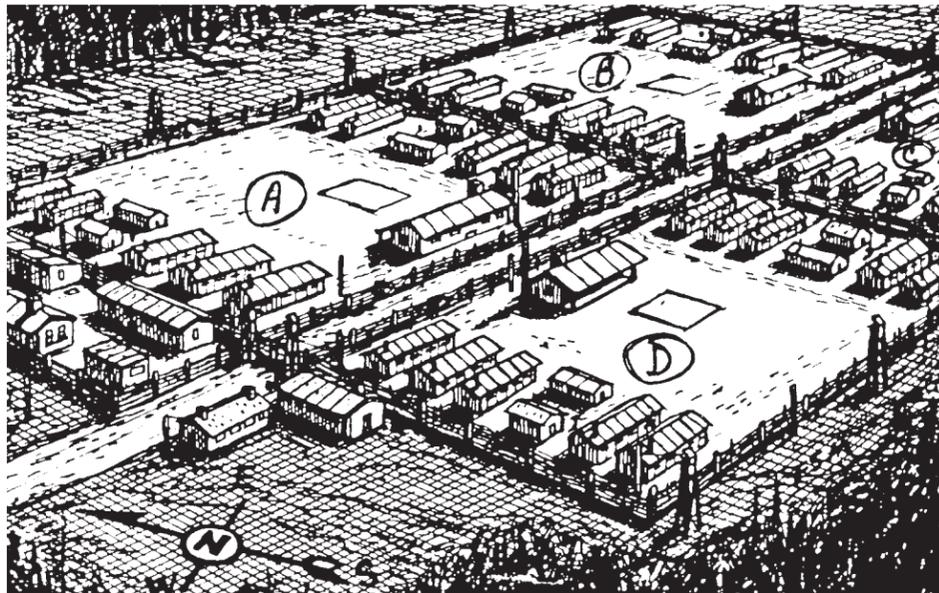
mans wanted.

They did a lot of similar things to keep everyone frustrated and on edge. Each Red Cross food parcel also had to be split up. About once a month we got these parcels, which were shared, one parcel for each combo of four men. The parcels consisted of a few packs of cigarettes, one can of powdered milk, chocolate bars, jam, peanut butter, pate, corned beef, spam, salt and other things. Cigarettes were used as money to barter for food. The Germans also supplied what we called "Jerry Jam," something like raspberry jam but synthetic, and margarine—both excellent when you're hungry. I remember having a few specks of horsemeat in a thin soup a couple of times. Most of our nutrition came from the Red Cross parcels.

Lager A, B and C held American airmen. Lager D held Russian and British as well as American airmen. Each building stood on three-foot-high wooden poles to avoid tunneling. At night we were locked in. Outside were many dogs running around, so there was not much chance for escape. We were called out for formation and body count two or three times a day. Sometimes a P.O.W. in the back row would duck down so the count would be wrong. Then it had to be done over and over with the Germans getting increasingly frustrated and angry. All in all, considering the situation, the lack of food, the crowded conditions, the cold and not knowing what would happen or what was going on at home, it could have been worse.

During the first month we had Catholic church services outside, between barracks 2 and 3. The priest was British and about five feet tall. It was said that he had bailed out to be captured, to minister to the P.O.W.s. However, the Germans broke up the service one day and we never saw him again.

We were allowed to read a German newspaper which was translated by German speaking G.I.s. The news was all propaganda and lies. American airmen were called terror flyers, gangsters, killers, and criminals recruited to kill children and civilians. They claimed that Germany would soon win the war and that New



A drawing of Stalag Luft IV, a German camp for its air force prisoners of war. This drawing was put together after the war by American prisoners held there who had survived the ordeal.

York City had been bombed with much destruction. President Roosevelt was called "Rosenfelt," an indication of their anti-Semitism. There was also a makeshift secret radio which provided accurate reports about the war. Certain P.O.W.s went around to barracks leaders to spread the news.

As time went by, I could feel myself going downhill, losing weight and getting despondent. I could see most of the bones in my body and had lots of dizziness and weakness. I had to lie down a lot. I tried to walk the perimeter once a day. I did a lot of praying and thought mostly of food, Mom's cooking—apple pie, ravioli and other treats. In the first days of February 1945, we suddenly received more food than usual. We got hot breakfast cereal and good quantities of bread, potatoes and Red Cross parcels. Then, on February 6th, we were told that we would be leaving the next day, evacuating by foot.

It was snowing and cold, slightly above zero. I recall saying to Kaz Rachak, "We'll never make it." My leg was not healed but I could walk OK. We were evacuating because the Russians were coming west and the Germans did not want us getting back into the war. Knowing the Russians were on the way was good news because that could shorten the war. I made a knapsack out of an extra shirt. We each had two thin blankets and food from Red Cross parcels. I had my original G.I. shoes, long johns, G.I. pants, my heated suit cover jacket that I was wearing when we ditched, a Royal Air Force overcoat and a knitted G.I. cap. Kaz, who was clever, made a hat and knapsack that looked like they were manufactured.

[There is an exhibit of World War II military uniforms and other war memorabilia in the Museum on Hubbard Green. For more information or to join the Historical Society, please call (860) 633-6890.]

A Forced March West

by Leon J. Peragallo

[The following is the ninth in a series of 12 weekly installments of an account about serving in the Army Air Corps during World War II by Mr. Peragallo, a lifelong Glastonbury resident. On February 7, 1944, Mr. Peragallo was wounded in the leg when his plane was shot down. He was captured by the Germans and began a forced march from a German prison camp in Poland west toward Germany. The Germans moved their prisoners to avoid having them liberated by the advancing Russian armies to fight again against Germany.]



Leon J. Peragallo

Yelling German guards awakened us early in the morning and rushed us out of Lager C, where we had been since late summer, to the entrance of Lager A. As we stood in formation the guards kept yelling at us to close ranks to be counted, while the barracks were being searched for any P.O.W.s (Prisoners of War) who stayed behind. Having a sense of humor, we all bayed "baa baa" like lambs. We felt like lambs being led to the slaughter, but the humor was good for our attitudes.

It was an icy cold day. As we stood waiting for the order to march out, hundreds of refugees came walking into the camp. I shall never forget that sight. There were Jews, Russians, Asians, men and women. Those without shoes had cloth wrapped around their feet. Some had very little clothing. It was a shocking sight. Only God knows how they ended up. Would we be in that shape soon?

We finally started the march to wherever. The snow was coming down quite hard, but we kept moving ahead. Unbelievably, some of our fellow P.O.W.s were throwing out canned goods from their Red Cross parcels to lighten their loads. Rachak and I picked up several cans, which proved later to be like gold. Along the way we had occasional ten-minute breaks and then back on the road.

The commandant of Lager C was Captain Weinert. He led the march standing in a wagon pulled by oxen. He was a tall man dressed in full uniform, wearing a long blue leather coat. He had great military bearing, but riding in an ox cart? The message for us was that Germany was in bad shape. If we could just hang in there, the war would soon be over.

On we went. It was getting colder, it was getting dark, and our feet were sore. We had no idea where we were or when we would stop for the night. We finally came to a farm. The guards herded us into a barn and again we went "baa baa baa" as we were being locked in. The first night was in a cow barn with plenty of hay. The first thing I did was take my shoes off and take care of the bloody blisters on my feet. Kaz Rachak and I combined our food as we had in Lager C. It was the best way to survive. The guards and farmer provided us with boiled water from a boiler used for the animals. All water had to be boiled before drinking. That first day, we had walked about ten miles.

After a few days of marching, we were running out of food in our packs. Most of the travel was in the country, so we usually stayed in barns at night. One night we slept in an open stall with cows. The animals provided some heat, which was a plus. Another time, after a long day's march—about 20 miles—we stayed at a pig farm. We were very hungry and the farmer was cooking potatoes for the pigs. We asked the guards if we could have some and they said no, they were for the pigs. After some argument, the farmer finally agreed and slung a pail of small potatoes on the pig pen floor.

Approximately 20 of us flung ourselves down on that floor and in a few seconds all those potatoes were gone. I ended up with a handful of potatoes, straw, dung and dirt. I was real hungry and it was like a gourmet meal. That night we slept on the floor in the pig area. We were learning that to stay alive, we had to adapt to humiliating situations.

We had to put whatever food we had inside our shirts so no one could steal it during the night. There is not much honor when men are hungry. Kaz and I didn't smoke so we had ciga-

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This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.	1214 A. N. WILLIAMS PRESIDENT	DL = Day Letter NT = Overnight Telegram LC = Deferred Cable NLT = Cable Night Letter Ship Radiogram
The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.		
Washington D.C. Sept. 1, 1944		
John Peragallo 657 Matson Hill Rd. So. Glastonbury Conn.		
Report just received through the International Red Cross states that your son Staff Sergeant Leon H. Peragallo is a prisoner of war of the German Government, report further states that he is wounded. Letter of information follows from Provost Marshal General.		
Ullo The Adjutant General		

Families of prisoners of war received news about their loved ones from official sources as in the above telegram. Sometimes the same news arrived faster from underground sources.

rettes we had saved from the Red Cross parcels to trade for bread and other food. There were days when I didn't think I would make it to the next stop, but I prayed a lot, always thinking: put one foot in front of the other. Many fell out sick or from lack of nourishment. Others just gave up. Some were put on a wagon pulled by oxen. After a while that wagon disappeared and men that fell out were just left in nearby villages where many died. Among those who died were two buddies from crew training in Alexandria Air Force Base—real sad.

At every stop there was roll call and a head count—German-speaking P.O.W.s would interpret for the guards. We usually traveled in groups of about 200 and sometimes in groups of about 50 to 100. With the smaller groups it was easier to find barns and easier for the guards to handle the P.O.W.s. Most of the time we slept in hay lofts, but occasionally we were outside.

One day when it was just freezing and there

was drizzle and sleet, we were marched up a long hill to a white hospital building. Many of us who were sick or wounded needed medical attention, food and water. The P.O.W.s kept arguing with the guards while we were kept standing outside in the rain from morning until mid-afternoon, without medical attention, food or water. Another German performance; another day of misery.

We continued the march going west through countryside, small towns and cities. Most of the civilians we saw along the way were Polish or Russian slave laborers who worked on farms and in factories—men, women and families. Once we were given some potato pancakes by a Polish family. I found the Polish to be the most friendly and generous. They gave, even though they did not have much to give. As weeks went by, we got thinner and weaker from the lack of food, dysentery, frigid weather etc. But we kept moving and praying.

End of Our Forced March

by Leon J. Peragallo

[The following is the tenth of 12 weekly installments by Mr. Peragallo, a lifelong Glastonbury resident, describing his experiences as an American airman during World War II. On February 7, 1944, Mr. Peragallo, who had a leg wound and was a prisoner of the Germans, began a forced march from a German prison camp in Poland westward to Germany, ahead of the advancing Russian armies. Here, beginning in early March 1945, is how the forced march ended.]



Leon J. Peragallo

the Germans, began a forced march from a German prison camp in Poland westward to Germany, ahead of the advancing Russian armies. Here, beginning in early March 1945, is how the forced march ended.]

One day we were awakened before dawn and moved out fast to walk all day in the ice and snow, until about ten that night. Someone said that we had gone over 60 kilometers, about 40 miles. We figured that we had walked for over 16 hours. It was raining as we came into a town where we were ordered to run.

Run, after a day of walking? Up ahead was a wagon pulled by an ox with a German dishing out some sort of soup. Get this picture: the wagon was moving; we were running; I was holding out my tin can to get a small scoopful of soup from the German. The guards made us run down the cobblestone road to town. How we were able to run, I'll never know.

The reason for all this was to catch a boat to cross a body of water. However, we were too late. The boat wasn't there. Instead, we were herded into an open lot which was frozen solid, to sleep outside with some sleet and snow falling on us. Fires were not allowed. We were forced to lie down where we had been standing, in a field that was littered with human excrement from groups that had come through before us.

Many said "Don't take off your shoes," but I did. My feet were bloody. I cleaned them as best I could, warming them with my hands. Kaz and I each had two blankets plus all the clothes we were wearing. It had been a bad day and it was a bad night. I kept waking up to wiggle and rub my toes to keep them from freezing. Next morning I managed to get into my shoes which were under the blanket with me. That was the roughest night since we started on the forced march. I did get some sleep, from pure exhaustion I guess. Kaz and I had a slice of bread from under my shirt—the last food we were carrying. We were marched to catch the boat that we missed the night before, but it never came. So off we went on the road again.

We were back to the usual procedure, walking all day, sleeping in barns at night and getting very little food. During one period soon after the 60 kilometer march, we walked for three straight days without any food or water. For some reason we were not allowed to have water although we were going through farm

areas. I remember wondering, "How can we last with no food or water?" but we continued. I was walking and praying; my body was growing weaker but my faith was getting stronger. God was with us.

On the fourth day after the long march, we stopped early at a farm where we were given a potato and some hot water. Almost immediately, I threw up. However later, thanks to Kaz, we were given another potato and it stayed down. As we continued onward, our pace kept getting slower and slower. We were pushing each other along. There was no alternative but to go forward. A few days later it got warmer and we proceeded to pick some of the lice out of our clothes, but many lice remained. From then on, picking lice was a daily procedure.

Like most of the others, I developed dysentery again, probably from the water, and it was really giving me trouble. One of the guards gave me some charcoal to eat. That seemed to take care of it temporarily. On we went, putting one foot in front of the other, realizing that the human body can take a lot of punishment.

As we kept pushing westward, it was the same routine: walking all day and in barns or outside at night. At one stop, Kaz and I obtained a little food supply. We spotted bags of wheat seed in a barn where we were staying. Kaz and I filled our pockets and the inside of our shirts with the wheat. We had to chew it a lot, but it was food. Then, in searching around the barn, Kaz found an old coffee grinder. We could now grind the seed which made eating it much easier. We were now in the business of trading ground seed with other P.O.W.s for other food, that is when we could find someone with food to trade. Kaz Rachak took the coffee grinder back home to Denver. We often discuss the episode of the seed and coffee grinder.

In early April, we came upon an area where there were three or four large circus tents, each about 100 feet long surrounded with barb wire fences and towers. Each tent had P.O.W.s of different nationalities—Americans, British, Arabs, Indians, Moroccans, Italian Alpini, French Indo Chinese and Burmese. Many had been captured in Africa, three years before. They were in better physical shape than we were. The Arabs had makeshift stoves on which they cooked rats or anything alive that they could capture for food. They were ingenious.

Small groups were let out of the compound with guards to get a certain kind of bush for bedding in the tents. At this compound, the Red Cross food parcels were rationed out, so we finally had something to eat. The Red Cross parcels included cigarettes and, being nonsmokers, Kaz and I traded them for food. Before we got to this area, I believe that I weighed under 100 pounds. After about a week there, I developed severe stomach pains and went to see Frank Paulus of Simsbury, CT who had been in the prison camp in Poland with me and was now a lead man in the tent area. He convinced the Germans that I needed medical attention.



Today, it is difficult to understand how all-consuming World War II was. With the economy on a "war footing" and with so many people in the military, the war touched the lives of all Americans. Entertainment, for instance, often focused on the war, and the "war effort" employed people and images from the entertainment industry. Here is a copy of the certificate that Corporal Peragallo received when he graduated from a course in aerial gunnery, complete with Bugs Bunny to give what was a serious matter a light touch.

The Germans led me and others out of the tent area to a World War I P.O.W. camp where I was to get medical attention. I was in a group that included Joe Panasuk from Boston, MA. We had been in the same room in the prison camp in Poland. We were put in a small barracks that was filthy beyond description. Here we received no medical attention at all and very little food. With the others, I tried unsuccessfully to get back to the tent area. (Until the sum-

mer of 1946, I did not see my buddy, Kaz, again.)

My stomach pains continued. Just as I began thinking that I might never leave that hell hole alive, a German sergeant asked if anyone could drive a truck at another camp. Joe Panasuk said to me, "Let's say yes. Maybe we can get out of here." It sounded crazy, but what did we have to lose? So we accepted—anything to leave the place.

Driving a Truck as a Prisoner of War

by **Leon J. Peragallo**

[The following is the 11th of 12 weekly installments by Mr. Peragallo about his service in the Army Air Corps during World War II. He is a lifelong Glastonbury resident who, on August 2, 1944, was wounded in the leg when his plane was shot down. The



Leon J. Peragallo

next day he was captured by the Germans. This account begins early in April 1945. To get away from a particularly bad prison, Mr. Peragallo, suffering from a leg wound, malnutrition and stomach pain, has volunteered to work as a truck driver.]

The next morning four of us so-called “truck drivers” were taken out and marched about eight miles to a railroad station. All kinds of people, mostly Germans, were there. As the train came in, we were told by our guards to board an open box car while it was still moving. We climbed up on top at the end of the box car and then jumped in and landed on bicycles that filled most of the box car. There we were laying on top of bicycles. Seems humorous now. We stacked some of the bikes to make a resting area on the floor. We traveled until about noon the next day when we arrived at Lubeck, Germany, a port on the Baltic Sea.

The guards turned us over to another set of Luftwaffe (Air Force) guards. With the addition of a few infantrymen captured at the Battle of the Bulge, there were about six of us. We were taken to a kind of inn-restaurant-nightclub which was serving as living quarters for truck drivers, among others. We still had German guards, but the whole operation was run by a Swedish man on behalf of the International Red Cross.

Our job was to drive trucks delivering Red Cross Food parcels to P.O.W.s (Prisoners of War) on the march as we had been. To me, this was a dream come true. Suddenly I had all that I wanted to eat and drink, clean clothes, a clean bed and, best of all, we were deloused. NO MORE LICE! I weighed in at 90 pounds. I

had been 145 pounds when I was captured. I also had a bath for the first time in three months and I changed clothes for the first time in over two months. I had really STUNK. A short time after we arrived we heard on German radio that President Roosevelt had died and that Harry Truman was president. This was sad news, but we were optimistic knowing that the war in Europe would soon be over.

Our first job was to repair the trucks, Volvos from Sweden. I helped put on a head gasket and did other repairs under the guidance of a G.I. from New York City who was a mechanic. I then drove on three trips along with another driver and a guard. We would pick up Red Cross parcels at a warehouse in Lubeck and deliver them to a destination where there were P.O.W.s in fields and barns who were still walking.

On the first trip, I met Ed Borc of Shelton, CT. We had lived in the same large room at the prison camp in Poland. What an unreal experience that was. I asked about Kaz Rachak, but no one knew his whereabouts. Get the picture, skinny me handing out food parcels that I would have almost killed to have a few weeks earlier. The odds against this happening must be tremendous—God works things out!

The delivery runs out to the P.O.W.s were risky. The British were now pouring it on in that part of Germany. They were constantly strafing with Typhoon fighter planes. It didn't matter if there was a red cross on top of the truck, they strafed anything that moved. In one incident, a P.O.W. from Pittsburg, PA (forgot his name) who had been captured in Africa and had been a P.O.W. for over two years, a truly good man, was strafed and killed by a Typhoon. His P.O.W. partner and guard survived. They held a funeral for him a few days later at a cemetery in Lubeck. The city's mayor presided in a top hat and all. All the drivers and guards were there. It was very sad, a scene that I'll never forget.

The Mayor of Lubeck owned the place where we were staying. Knowing that the war would soon be over, he was very good to us. One night he came to our quarters to announce “Der Fuhrer ist tod,” meaning “Hitler is dead.” I'll never forget that—GREAT NEWS! A few days



An aerial view of the center of the German city Lubeck at the end of World War II showing bombed-out buildings in the foreground.

later, the British 3rd Army was approaching Lubeck. We could hear the guns. We were told by the Swedish man in charge to take the trucks and pick up parcels in town. I was one of the drivers accompanied by a German guard. When we got to town, things were being shot up. German civilians tried to stop us to pick up wounded. They put a wounded man in the back of our truck.

Next British tanks came charging through the streets. This is what I was waiting for. The guard in our truck gave me his pistol and bayonet. He was now my prisoner. The British took over. Back we went to our quarters to have a celebration, without the guard and without the body in back of the truck.

The next day we went to town. Along with a Canadian P.O.W., we found a four-door convertible, a 1935 Ford V-8 in good running condition. We had plenty of gas intended for the trucks. I did the driving, taking a tour of Lubeck

with Russian slave laborers. Other P.O.W.s confiscated Volkswagens and Jeeps.

In town there were mountains of guns, Lugers, rifles, all kinds of guns and weapons. I could have had a fortune in guns. Many ex-P.O.W.s took as much as they could carry. I ended up with the bayonet and a backpack from one of the German guards who stayed at our quarters. As for guns, I couldn't stomach them anymore. Back at our quarters, everyone was celebrating and everyone had guns. There an Italian doctor shot himself in the foot—just as in the common expression. There were other accidents. Some of our former guards stayed with us for a few days—no longer enemies. Such a war.

[There is an exhibit with World War II uniforms and other war memorabilia in the Museum on Hubbard Green. For more information or to join the Historical Society, please call 860/633-6890.]

Going Back Home

by Leon J. Peragallo

[The following is the last in a series of 12 installments by Mr. Peragallo about his service in the Army Air Force during World War II. He is a lifelong Glastonbury resident who, on August 2, 1944, was wounded in the leg when his plane was shot down. The



Leon J. Peragallo

next day Mr. Peragallo was captured by the Germans. He suffered from malnutrition and other abuses until May 5, 1945 when the British liberated the city of Lubeck, Germany, where he was being held captive. This account begins just after that liberation.]

All U. S. enlisted men who had been P.O.W.s (Prisoners of War) in Lubeck were taken by truck to the town of Lunenberg, Germany by the British. We stayed in a former German barracks, ate in British mess halls, got new American uniforms and started to live again. The British had taken over this town and the German army base there.

A week later the British took us to an airbase near Hamburg where we got on British bombers for the flight back to England. The former P.O.W.s who had served in the infantry were all enthused about flying in a large bomber with guns and all. For me it was like flying another mission; I was uneasy the entire flight. We landed at a British airbase where we were greeted by R.A.F. girls, each escorting a P.O.W. as we got off the plane. I hadn't seen such pretty women in years. We had a good reception before being taken to a hospital in Manchester, England.

We were now back with Americans—good food, clean clothes and medical treatment. We were also free to go to town. Then I had a recurrence of my stomach pains, fever etc. I was in bed for two weeks with hepatitis. I was very weak. Other former P.O.W.s there had the same condition, probably from contaminated food. The fillings that had fallen out of my teeth were replaced. Before getting to Lubeck, I hadn't been allowed to brush my teeth for over three months. I started to put some weight on again.

Partially well again, I persuaded the doctor to let me go to Grovesnor Square in London where the Air Force had a staging center for airmen returning to the U.S.A. I soon received my orders and money. A G.I. ambulance took me to the Manchester railroad station. Off I went to London, traveling alone. At Grovesnor Square I was fitted with new uniforms and also had liberty—a good time fraternizing with other former P.O.W.s from the prison camp in Poland and the “natives.” It was great to be free again!

After about two weeks we got orders to go to Glasgow, Scotland. We traveled by train to

the point where we boarded the ocean liner, Queen Mary. There were about 20,000 G.I.s aboard. Chow lines and eating continued around the clock. Our group was way below deck sleeping on hammocks four high. About five days later we arrived in New York City with the Statue of Liberty in sight and 20,000 G.I.s happy and yelling. Surely a great event—happiness and victory. Hard to believe, we were finally here in the good old U.S.A.!

It took about four hours to get off the ship and onto trucks that took us to an Army processing base in Kearney, NJ. We ate like gluttons and were served in the chow line by German P.O.W.s, a revolting development. After a few days in Kearney we went by train to Fort Devens, MA for summer uniforms and supplies. German P.O.W.s tailored our uniforms. I couldn't believe it. I wondered what would have happened if the Germans had won the war. Where would a P.O.W. like me have been?

Then, together with a few other liberated U.S. P.O.W.s, I boarded a train for Hartford, CT where my mother, brother John and his wife Olga were waiting. This had to be the happiest moment of my life. The first food I had to eat was Mom's apple pie. I had been dreaming of this moment. I ate the whole apple pie, caught up on family news and learned that my father was in the hospital with a stroke and related problems. It was like a dream, being back home on Matson Hill Road. I was putting on weight, but it was mostly bloat water. Still not in good shape physically, but I was REAL HAPPY TO BE HOME!

After about two weeks at home, my orders were to go to Atlantic City for rehabilitation. There I got a physical and was interviewed about my internment in Germany. My military records were brought up to date and I was awarded a Purple Heart for wounds received in combat. We stayed in hotels right on the Boardwalk. The freedom was great. I felt like a tiger let out of a cage. We had lots of fun and adventures on the Boardwalk.

Soon I went home again on a 30-day leave. Being home was like a dream come true. I explored the farm, seeing and appreciating the beauty of it all, as I never had done before. During my leave in August, 1945, atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. What a relief—THE WAR WAS REALLY OVER. Prayers were answered. Praise the Lord. Together with a few high school buddies who were also home on leave, I celebrated V-J Day, the end of World War II in Hartford. The streets were packed with civilians, soldiers, sailors and airmen. Those in uniform were treated as heroes. This certainly was one of the biggest and happiest events I ever witnessed. I could hardly believe it. The war was really over. Thank you God!

When my leave was up I returned to Atlantic City for more rehabilitation, which consisted



In America, the victory in Europe, which became official on May 8, 1945 (known as V-E Day) was celebrated, but with the knowledge that war continued to rage in the Pacific. On August 14, 1945, the Japanese surrendered on what was known as V-J Day. In the United States, that day was celebrated, often with great enthusiasm. However, the celebrating was not over. In Glastonbury, for instance, there was a “Welcome Home Celebration” for the troops on the weekend of June 29-30, 1946. Part of that celebration was the gathering on Hubbard Green, shown above.

of having a good time socializing on the Boardwalk. The next move was to Cochran Air Force base in Macon, GA. I was there for about three weeks being processed for final discharge from the Army Air Force. That happened on November 9, 1945—the end of my military career.

I was happy to get back home and grateful to be alive, but adjusting to a different world was tough for me. I kept looking back and forward, not knowing what to do or how to react to civilian life. I was living with my mother who was laid off from her job at Pratt & Whitney. She worked there for two years during the war. For the rest of 1945, I helped out on the farm.

During the war my brother had sold my car, a 1934 Chevrolet two-door sedan, which I'd bought for \$40 in the late summer of 1942. Without a car I had little social life. Occasionally I borrowed Uncle George's truck or car or my brother-in-law Ray's, car. When there was no vehicle to borrow, I walked. After walking 500 miles in Poland and Germany, I was an expert walker. Before being discharged from the Air Force, I had received my back service pay that had accumulated while I was a P.O.W. After discharge I received 10% disability pay for wounds received in action, which I still receive today. Also, the State of Connecticut paid

service veterans \$20 a week for 52 weeks. It was called the 52-20 Club.

During January 1946, both my father and grandmother died. I was hardened to death while in the service, but family deaths are hard to take. In February, 1946, I enrolled in a trade school to learn the printing trade, using the G.I. Bill of Rights to pay for the training. However, during the summer of 1946, baseball was my main focus. I loved the game. On December 12, 1946, I got a job as an apprentice compositor at Finlay Bros. Printers. Under the G.I. Bill, at first I received extra pay above my normal hourly rate. Coincidentally, Finlay's address in Hartford was 390 Capitol Avenue and I had been in the 390th Bomb Group. From compositor, I eventually became Vice President/Manager of the company which doubled in size during my 33-year tenure.

I did finally get together with Fran, the girl I remembered while in solitary confinement. She was more than I dreamed of. We were married on January 15, 1949. We have been blessed with two sons, one daughter and seven grandchildren. It was a long hard journey from December 9, 1942, but there has been much happiness since. We have been truly blessed by God! Thank you Lord!