

The best way for anyone to learn about a topic is to hear a story. These stories could be summed up, but details could be left out. A summary wouldn't be near as good as the actual story, coming from that person. A summary would leave too many unanswerable questions. As with anything, memory fades over time; it's been about sixty years since these things happened to these men and they've forgotten things. These stories are to the best of their memories.

Earl Fitch enlisted the United States air force in June 1943. Before entering the air force, Mr. Fitch worked for airlines and fixed plane engines. After the war he went to school to study for an occupation in sheet metal work. This career, however, was never pursued due to postwar problems. He then worked for the United States Post Office as a mail carrier. Mr. Fitch retired after his hands couldn't take the cold anymore. He couldn't take the cold because, at high altitudes in the plane, it was so cold that now he just can't handle it. After the war he was never able to talk about what happened to him, until he could talk about it with others that were in the war. Now he is associated with the National ex-Prisoner of War Organization and the ex-Prisoner of War Legion, Prairie Land Chapter.

"On June 1, 1943, I went into the Army Air Force at Fort Snelling. I took my basic training at Lincoln Air Base in Nebraska. Then I went to Denver, Colorado for Armor school. I learned about the turrets on all of the planes. I then learned how to strip and fix machine guns. That included 30 caliber, 50 and 20 mm, and 37 mm guns. We went to Panama City, Florida for gunnery school after that. There we had to strip the 50 caliber machine gun and put it back together in one hour while blindfolded. Then we went to Springfield, Massachusetts, were assigned to a crew, and shipped to Charleston, SC, for training as a crew on a B-24 Bomber.

I was assigned to 455 Bomb Group, 470 Bomb Squadron at Cerginola. We flew our first mission about May 30, 1944. Our first mission was to Vienna (Austria), Budapest (Hungary), and to the Rumanian oil fields near Polesti. On June 13 James L. Brown was wound, he was hit in the back and in the arms a total of thirteen holes, but he survived. The tail gunner, Jack Brazil, shot down three ME-109's. In the waist of the plane, where I was, empty shells were all over the floor. One could hardly walk around. The plane got shot up so badly that we couldn't finish the trip. On our way back we saw the field where the fighter planes took off from, so we dropped our bombs down the center of the runway. After that, we got to fly in the front of the formation, instead of ass-end Charley.

On the twenty-second of August 1944 our mission was to Bleckhammar, Germany. We got hit bad on that trip, we had holes in our wings two to two and a half feet in diameter, one of the engines was knock out, and another caught fire. We left the group and were flying on two engines. We were heading back toward Italy on our own. We had been flying for about an hour when we were hit by German fighter planes. We bailed out at 16,500 feet, at 2:30 in the afternoon. We were about 30 miles south of Lake Ballantine in Hungary. While I was going down in my parachute, an ME-109 and P-51 were having a dog fight about a block away from me. Both pilots waved to me as they went by.

I landed on the side of a tree, and was barely able to get out of my parachute. I

had no shoes on and I was carrying my parachute, and I was unable to get up a hill. Hungarian civilians found me, none of them had rifles, they only had pitchforks. They asked me if I had bombed Budapest, "Boom, boom Budapest?" they asked me. I said no, of course, if I had said yes I think they would have killed me on the spot. There was an elderly man, a young woman, and a little girl about 12 years old. They all surrounded me so that they could strike me with their pitchforks. All of us ended up being captured, however, only one of us was injured.

The next day they took us to Budapest, Hungary. There I was put in solitary confinement for ten days. The room was about six feet square. There was one window that was near the ceiling. There was a little door under the main door which was how they would put food into my room. I did not see or talk to anyone during those ten days. There was no place to wash, and only a stool to go to the bathroom.

They then loaded us into a box car and hauled us enlisted men, noncommissioned officers, to Germany. This was about 80 km north of Stettin, Germany. The camp was near a railroad crossing. We had to walk about one and a half miles to the actual camp. The Germans used police dogs to guard us on the walk. Stalag Luft IV was the name of the camp.

In the camp they put us in a barracks. We were twenty to a room, but the rooms had a divider every other room. They had seltzer or wood shavings on the floor. We each had two blankets, one to lay on and one to cover up with. There was no running water and no way to heat the well water. When it got cold out, we got three bricks of coal to heat the room. Then we could heat a one pound coffee can of water to bathe in. We had to wash our clothes with cold water. We had to go without anything we washed until it was dry. To eat we got a half of a Red Cross parcel a week. A Red Cross parcel contained one pound of powdered milk, one small can of instant coffee, one fourth a pound of cheese- Velveeta or American, one fourth of a pound of a cube sugar, one D. bar of chocolate, some margarine, six crackers, five packs of cigarettes which we used for money, one can of Spam or some kind of meat, and one pound of either raisins or peanuts.

The Germans gave us a cup and a half of German coffee or tea in the morning. At noon we got a cup and a half of soup. In the evening we had about a cup full of boiled potatoes, but nothing to put on them. Then we got a small loaf of bread which had to be divided between five individuals. The bread was made of about 10% sawdust- at least that's what the Flight Surgeon said. At sunset, we got locked in our barracks and the windows were boarded up. I celebrated my twentieth birthday in prison camp.

On the sixth of February 1945 we started to march west across German. We took everything we could carry of our belongings. They marched us about eighteen to twenty miles a day. If we were lucky, we got about one pound of boiled potatoes a day. They put us up in barns to sleep. We were broken up in bunches of about 500 men. In our compound there were 2,500 men. There were four compounds which totaled about 10,000 men. Some were English, Canadian, and French, as well as American.

We stole some of the food the Germans fed their animals with and we ate that.

We would also steal small pigs, chickens, ducks, and lambs. We cooked them over an open fire, without any seasoning, and then ate them.

It was getting near spring, actually it was April, and I hadn't had anything to eat for three days but some instant coffee and three pinches of snuff. There wasn't any cattle food left to steal. We found some potatoes and carrots in a pile of manure by a barn. We scraped them off and ate them. We could not take any of our clothes off because the lice would carry them off. We had not been able to wash or bathe since we left camp two months earlier. The Kohlrabies we would steal would give us a bad case of diarrhea if we didn't cook them. We would build a fire to heat water for coffee, then, as soon as the wood ash would cool, we would eat the ashes. That helped relieve the dysentery or the runs.

While we were on the walk, they put us in a tent camp with some Indians from India. We were there for about a week to ten days. Then they hauled us by box car. We were in the box car for not quite two days. In order to lay down, we had to lay on our sides, all facing the same way. When we wanted to turn over, we all had to turn over. We had nothing to drink or eat, and no place to relieve ourselves. The box cars were not marked, so our Allied planes could have strafed us at anytime. The planes would not know we were in there, and we were locked in so we wouldn't have been able to get out.

On the twenty-sixth of April 1945, they walked us through the American lines. All I can remember of the outfit there was that they had a wolf patch on the shoulders of their uniforms. That was the insignia of the American ground forces that liberated us. We walked across a river into the town of Bitterfield, Germany. The first night the U.S. troops gave us K-rations to eat because that was all they had.

The night, Norman Ball, a radio operator in my plane crew, and I sat in a school house in the boiler room. We found a room full of potatoes, so we baked the potatoes in the boiler fire, just like when we camped.

While we were at camp, we threw all of our old uniforms in a fire and they fixed us up with a shower, new uniforms, and deloused us to get rid of the lice. We stayed there for about two or three weeks. They then flew us down to stay in Nancy, France. I spent about another two or three weeks there. Then we were sent to Camp Lucky Strike in La Harve, France. There we were loaded on a ship headed for the United States. We landed in Norfolk, Virginia, and continued by train to Fort Snelling. I got home on the twenty-fifth of June 1945, two years and twenty-four days after I enlisted."

Adam Klosowski enlisted in the air force in 1942. Sixty percent of all air force bomber crews enlisted. He worked as a farmer and as a production worker before enlisting. During WWII Mr. Klosowski and other prisoners, tried to escape from a box car while riding to a different camp. Due to this occasion the nerves in his back are damaged. When returning to the United States, he worked at a steel plant. He also operated heavy equipment, then he worked as a dairy farmer. He became a member of the POW organization in Duluth and he also joined the ex-POW's organization throughout the state.

"I was a waste gunner on a B-17 operating out of a base in Sudbury, England. The eighth air forces had many bases in England and did the bulk of the bombing in