



## An American POW 1945 in Hammelburg and Nuremberg

by Don B. Prell

I was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Anti-Tank Company, 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, 106<sup>th</sup> Division, and a POW at *Oflag XIII B* (near Hammelburg) from early in January, 1945, until March 27<sup>th</sup>, when a small force of US troops liberated the camp.

To his dying day, General Patton denied having ordered the assault to free his son-in-law Lieutenant Colonel Waters from *Oflag XIII B*. When asked about the affair he told reporters that he ordered the raid as a diversionary tactic.

After the tanks rolled into the camp we were told that the main thrust of the U.S. forces was still about fifty kilometers away. We were given three choices: climb on the tanks and half-tracks and ride out with them; stay in the camp and wait to be freed, or take off cross-country on our own and try to work our way to the American lines.

Colonel Waters was wounded in the raid and Colonel Goode, our camp commander climbed into the lead tank. About 200 other POWs climbed onto the tanks and half-tracks as the task force took off toward the U.S. lines. Most of the POWs just stayed in the camp. I and two other *Kriegies* [slang for POWs] gathered our meager belongings and took off cross-country. No way was I going to ride out on a tank and no way was I going to stay in the camp.

History records that the task force were at least five miles southwest of the camp when it were decimated the next morning. I and my two fellow POWs tried to work our way west from the camp and it is not surprising that within three days we were recaptured near Gemünden. We were separated from one another. In Würzburg, I was put on a coach train with a German *Leutnant* as my guard for the fifty mile trip to *Stalag XIII D*, the POW camp a short distance from Nuremberg. He was most cordial and wanted to give me his name and address, so that we might be in contact after the war ended.

Within a day after arriving at this POW camp, I became ill and was sent to the infirmary. I was kept there by an Australian doctor, while most of the POWs in the camp were force-marched away. A week later [around April 17 when the camp was liberated by U.S. troops] the German guards just disappeared and we were able to walk out of the camp.

The Australian doctor and I commandeered a motorcycle from a residence near the camp. I gave the owner a receipt from the U.S. Army and we took off going west.

At the time we were riding the motorcycle away the Australian who had been in the camp for much longer than I had said to me there were Russian POWs in a camp nearby, and that if they got loose, there would be one hell of a riot.

After a few hours we found troops from an American Armored Division. We were given some food and petrol and then took off for Paris, *Camp Lucky Strike* [U.S. military camp near Le Havre in France] and on a hospital ship which arrived in New York two days after VE Day.

*Note:* We received this eyewitness report in successive emails in June 2001 and edited it for our website.

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