

## The “Nice Kid”

In preparing to share his World War II experiences for the first time in over sixty years, Howard Sharpell pulled out two photographs of himself. In both, a soldier in uniform is the focal point. In Howard’s own words, one shows a “nice kid” who went into the Army in February of 1943. This young man is assuming a military position, standing “at ease,” with his legs slightly spread out and his hands clasped behind his back. His face is looking directly into the camera, with just a hint of a smile. Perhaps he is proud of who he has become, a member of the United States Army. Appearing to be every inch the properly attired soldier, his necktie hangs from a



buttoned collar. He seems ready to receive orders and to follow them. The other picture, again in Howard’s words, is of a “cocky son-of-a-bitch” who left the Army in November of 1945. This soldier is casually half-seated on what appears to be a short, wooden post or cement block. The shirt displays campaign ribbons. They furnish evidence of war-related experiences he might want to forget. He leans toward the right, with his arm lying on a slightly elevated leg. His left arm is bent at the elbow as his hand rests just under his belt. The long-sleeved shirt is unbuttoned at the neck, and he is tieless, two indications of his casual manner. His face is turned slightly to his left, with eyes looking off into the distance. He appears somewhat defiant. The stance hints at a soldier who, while carrying out an order, might question in his own mind the logic of it.

Howard knew he had changed from when he entered the Army to when he was discharged. His mother and father did, too. The following pages detail the story of an eighteen-year-old young man who left the military thirty-three months later, much older than his birth years indicated. It is a truism that war changes everyone touched by it. World War II touched Howard in a very different way than it affected most soldiers. The Germans took him as a prisoner of war (POW) in December 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge. He was not alone. Approximately 95,000 Americans were held by the Germans. More than 23,000 of that number were captured during the Battle of the Bulge. By the end of that five-week fight, the 23,000 represented “the largest single group of American land troops” taken by the Germans throughout the entire war.<sup>1</sup> Howard obviously would have preferred not to be in that distinct group. His months as a POW transformed him more than any other wartime experience. But first, we must look at the “nice kid” who joined the Army.

Howard’s family background factored into both an idyllic childhood and into his experience as a POW. He was born and raised in two of New York City’s five boroughs or subdivisions. Howard’s earliest years were spent on the island of Manhattan, his parent’s home when he was born on August 23, 1924. Even though his mother and father attended a Presbyterian Church, Howard was born in Misericordia Hospital on 86<sup>th</sup> Street, an institution run by a Catholic religious order of nuns. Dr. Heim, a staff member at the hospital and a family friend, delivered Howard. Those professional and personal relationships may have influenced the Sharpells’ decision to use Misericordia. Howard also believes his mother may have gone there because the hospital was close to where they lived. Yet the 1920s was a time of strong anti-Catholicism. Clearly, though, that type of prejudice was not shared by the Sharpells. As Howard

grew up, his family taught him to treat people equally. One can see from the choice of Misericordia Hospital that his parents practiced that belief before their son was born. His father and mother came from families that immigrated to the United States from Germany. Since Howard knew and was influenced by his grandparents, who they were should be noted. For the Sharpells, three generations called Manhattan home. Entries in the 1900 Federal Census indicate that Howard's paternal great-grandfather came to the United States from Germany. Adolph Sharpell, Howard's grandfather, was born in August 1860 in New York based upon the 1900 Census information. In that year, Adolph listed his parents as having been born in Germany, so the first Sharpell came over sometime before 1860. Howard's grandmother Louise Mederle Sharpell was also born in New York, but at one point her parents, too, had emigrated from



Germany. Because Louise spoke both German and French, Howard believes her family was from Alsace Lorraine, an area that either Germany or France controlled depending upon the time period. Howard remembers her as a stern woman whose manner came across as "dictatorial." When and how these two American-born children of German immigrants met is not known. Once they married, Adolph supported Louise and their two sons and daughter as a salesman, the occupation he listed in the 1900 census, although Howard remembers him as an employee who purchased material for his company.<sup>2</sup> Howard recalls his grandfather talking about thread counts more than once, so perhaps he worked for a business involved in the garment industry which was the city's number one trade.<sup>3</sup>

Adolph Charles Sharpell, Jr., Howard's father, was one of Adolph and Louise's three children. He was born on March 2, 1889. At one point in Adolph Jr.'s life, he acquired the nickname "Duff," but its origin has been lost in family history. Perhaps the name was first used in his youth, a way to distinguish the "senior" from the "junior." Howard knows that his father did not like the appellation "Adolph," so it could be he adopted "Duff" as an alternative name. While he did not come from a wealthy family, Duff became the first American-born Sharpell to attend college. (In the early twentieth century, sons in wealthy families rather than those in middle class ones went on to higher education.) Duff graduated from Springfield College in Massachusetts where he majored in physical education. In June 1917, soon after he turned

Duff top right



twenty-eight, Howard's father registered for the draft that Congress passed because of America's entry into World War I. As a single man, he still lived with his parents at that time.<sup>4</sup> On his registration card, Duff indicated he worked for the American Linseed Company, located in the Woolworth Building.<sup>5</sup> While over twenty-four million young men registered for the draft, seventy percent received deferments based upon economic or physical considerations. In the end, the military took only four million into the service.<sup>6</sup> Howard's father became one of them. Although he would not go overseas, Duff came to be

greatly impacted by what he saw serving stateside.

Perhaps because of his educational background, graduating from high school and college, the Army assigned him to its Medical Department. (His father told Howard that he served in "the medical corps.") It oversaw sanitation and preventative measures to ward off epidemics of diseases such as smallpox, typhoid, measles, and malaria. Doctors and other medical staff members vaccinated and examined the soldiers. The Army trained enlisted men, such as Duff, to assist the officers, and many would have been assigned to other Department work as well.

Barrack windows were screened, waste water properly disposed of, and pools of stagnant water eliminated. Duff might have helped in those tasks. The department grew dramatically during the war, and not just because of foreseen assignments. No, the number of soldiers in the Medical Department increased from less than ten thousand to over three hundred thousand due to the Influenza Epidemic.<sup>7</sup> It first appeared in the United States in the spring of 1918. Before it had run its course in 1920, an estimated 675,000 Americans died.<sup>8</sup> This number represents more than all the American military deaths in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam War combined.

In reality, much more than an epidemic struck the country. It was a pandemic, a global outbreak of an influenza virus that took the lives of at least fifty million people and perhaps as many as one hundred million throughout the world. Globally, accurate record keeping simply broke down due to the inability of countries to do or keep up with the paperwork documenting these deaths. What we do know is that over a two year period that began in 1918, the flu strain killed more human beings than any other epidemic in recorded history.<sup>9</sup> And these statistics are only for those who did not survive the pandemic. It is impossible to know how many became ill but did not die. One study estimates that the flu killed two to four percent of those who came down with it.<sup>10</sup> Doctors identified pneumonia as the immediate cause of death. Within the United States, the epidemic struck an estimated 2.5 million out of a population of 100 million.<sup>11</sup>

With the close living conditions that accompany military life, the flu hit the Army especially hard.

1533836  
A 2671014  
1-1-21

**Honorable Discharge from the Army of the United States**  
BROOKLYN RECRUITING STATION  
142 Ashland Place, Brooklyn, N.Y.  
OCT. 23 1919

One ~~silver~~ Victory Button issued  
to holder of this discharge this  
date.

*E. R. Keat*  
Major of Infantry

**TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:**

This is to Certify, That *Adolph L. Sharpell, Jr.*  
*Corporal Medical Department*  
*U. S. Army*, as a TESTIMONIAL OF HONEST AND FAITHFUL  
SERVICE, is hereby HONORABLY DISCHARGED from the military service of the  
UNITED STATES by reason of *Physical Disability* (Signature *E. R. Keat*) dated *11/11/19*.

Said *Adolph L. Sharpell, Jr.* was born  
in *New York City*, in the State of *New York*  
When enlisted he was *22* years of age and by occupation a *auditor*  
He had *brown* eyes, *blonde* hair, *fair* complexion, and  
was *5* feet *6 1/2* inches in height.

Given under my hand at *W.D. Base Hook Camp, Merritt* of this  
*11th* day of *August*, one thousand nine hundred and *nineteen*.

*E. R. Keat*  
Major Medical Dept, U.S.A.  
Commanding.

*22 yrs of age*

Form No. 825, A. G. O.  
25. Aug. 20-11-2010.

\* Insert grade and company and regiment or corps or department; e. g., "Corporal, Company A, 1st Infantry." "Sergeant, Quar-  
termaster Corps." "Private, First Cavalry, Medical Department."  
† Insert "Regular Army," "National Army," "National Guard," "Regular Army Reserve," or "Enlisted Reserve Corps," as the  
case may be.  
‡ If discharged prior to expiration of service, give number, date, and source of order or demerit of authority therefor. 4-10-11

(OVER)

In fact, the flu appeared first nationally in two Army camps in March 1918. Soldiers in Camp Funston, Kansas and Camp Oglethorpe, Georgia came down with it. By the time it had run its course in other camps, on troop ships, and in the European trenches, more than twenty-five percent of all American soldiers became ill with the flu. That equated to over one million men. What most do not realize is that in earlier wars, before the advent of penicillin and other modern medical advances, more military men died from diseases than in combat. In World War I, 57,460 died from disease; the flu accounted for eighty-two percent of those deaths. The number who died in combat is 50, 280. In Army camps, the epidemic hospitalized between twenty-five and forty percent of the soldiers. Close to thirty thousand died before they could even ship out to the European combat theater. In the

conclusion of one historian who has studied the flu's appearance and effect in the Army, it "depleted and demoralized troops."<sup>12</sup>

One of the men the epidemic greatly impacted was Howard's father. Duff shared stories with his son years later about what he had to do in handling the bodies of those soldiers who had died. Tellingly, Howard remembers Duff talking about his World War I experiences around 1936 as people feared that the origins of another war in Europe could be taking shape. He told his son about how he guarded the morgue where the victims of the flu epidemic laid. The "morgue" really was the gymnasium because the real base mortuary could not hold all of the soldiers who had died. The experiences Duff had in the Medical Department never left him. It still "depressed" him years later, a word Howard used to describe the lingering effect of the First World War on his father.

Duff met the woman he married, Lillian Trostel, at a tavern, but their encounter was more innocent than it first sounds. Like the Sharpells, the Trostel family had roots in Germany. They immigrated a generation later than the Sharpells. Entries in the 1910 Census provide immigration history on Howard's maternal grandparents. Lillian's father, William ("Bill") Trostel, had been born in Germany around 1875-1876 and arrived in New York City in 1888 or 1890, depending on which census entry is correct.<sup>13</sup> He came over as a child with his father Frederick, his mother, and four siblings. Lillian's mother, Anna Bosanko Trostel, had been born in Pennsylvania; both of her parents came over from Germany. Lillian was their oldest child, born on October 29, 1899. (Howard never met his maternal grandmother, Anna; she died of ovarian cancer sometime



Trostels--Lillian bottom row left

between the 1920 Census and the one ten years later.) Over the years of her childhood, Howard's mother grew up surrounded by a large extended family. In 1900, when she was only a year old, her fifty-eight year old grandfather, Frederick, and three of her father's siblings lived with Bill and Anna.<sup>14</sup> In 1900, the census identifies Bill and his brother Frank's occupation as a "beer bottler." Rose was a "laundress." In 1910 when Lillian was eleven years

old, the Trostel household also consisted of her parents and three siblings--a sister named Anna who was seven, a brother William, Jr. who was four, and another brother Walter who was a year old. In addition to Bill and Lillian's family, two of Bill's siblings still lived with them in 1910--Frederick who was then twenty-two and Rose, age twenty-four. Bill's brother Frank had probably married by then. Frederick worked as a railroad clerk, Anna as a "marker" in a laundry.<sup>15</sup>

By 1910, Bill progressed in the liquor business to the point where he was no longer just a "beer bottler." He now owned his own saloon, a fact that appears in the 1910 census. In 1920 when Lillian was twenty-one years old, Bill and Anna still had three children who lived at home, with only Bill's brother Frederick remaining with them.<sup>16</sup> Rose moved out after marrying Julius Heinz. Bill supported his wife and children by running his own tavern where, according to Howard, he was said to serve "the best glass of beer in town." The family lived above the business. A dumbwaiter carried food made in the Trostel kitchen down to the bar below. Howard remembers that his grandfather did not charge for the meal, only for the beer. As a daughter of the bar owner, Lillian served the food. That is how she came to meet Duff. In the 1920s, a Federal constitutional amendment prohibited the manufacture, sale, and distribution of alcohol. Bill continued to make his living in the liquor industry, however. His saloon became a

“speakeasy,” an establishment that sold liquor illegally. In 1933, another constitutional amendment repealed Prohibition. Bill could openly operate his tavern again. Howard heard stories of how New York City Mayor Jimmy Walker, entertainer Jimmy Durante, and movie star James Cagney frequented Bill’s saloon. Years later, Cagney even attended Bill’s funeral, obviously not holding it against Bill when he once threw Cagney out because the actor participated in a barroom fight.

Duff Sharpell and Lillian Trostel married on September 28, 1922. Like their parents, they first lived in the Manhattan borough of New York City. The Sharpell and Trostel families had made Manhattan their home at least from 1900 on.<sup>17</sup> That island is only twelve and a half miles long and two and a half miles wide at its most extreme points. Yet well over a million people lived on it.<sup>18</sup> According to Howard, he spent the first three years of his life in Yorkville, a Middle and Upper East Side area in Manhattan. His parents lived in an apartment on East End Avenue, across the street from Carl Schurz Park and along the East River. In Yorkville, Germans and Austrians were the majority population. For reasons unknown to Howard, his parents moved to the Bronx around 1927. It is the only New York borough on the mainland. True to his recollection, the 1930 Census places them in the Bronx. Howard turned six the year of that



census; his father Duff was forty-one and his mother Lillian thirty-one. Duff worked as a company “Secretary” in 1930, his occupation entry in the census.<sup>19</sup> That word is misleading, however, unless placed in its proper context. Duff worked as an officer in the firm, his position being that of company secretary. In an area Howard identifies as North Bronx, the Sharpells rented a house located at 3282 Perry Avenue. In that respect, they were different from the vast majority of Bronx residents. About seventy percent of the living accommodations in the Bronx were multi-family ones. Living in a single-family home, with its own tree-dotted backyard, the Sharpell’s accommodations distinguished them from others in the borough.<sup>20</sup> With this move to the Bronx, Duff and Lillian joined the Epiphany Lutheran Church. This change in denomination is another example of the ecumenical spirit that set Howard’s parents apart from so many others.

Howard remembers his childhood as “a happy time,” in which he spent a boyhood in the company of friends, parents, and grandparents. He began public school in the Bronx. He remembers attending PS (Public School) 56 and 80 in his elementary years. His father had always been very athletic, having played on the football and track teams in high school and college. Howard followed his father’s example. When he was very young, he played stick ball, using a broomstick and a rubber ball. Children used a reservoir not far from his home as an athletic field, playing ball on it; it had been drained specifically for this purpose. As he grew



older, Howard progressed from stick ball to baseball and football. His father’s love of sports proved infectious. In addition to baseball, Howard went into two other sports, track and football. He ran on a cinder track. Even though Howard was small in comparison to other football players, he was fast. He also caught the ball well. Howard recalls no elementary school crushes on girls. Rather, he enjoyed his time with other boys who he calls his “entourage”--Bud Moran, Tom Gaffney, John Borell, and Dan Deasy. They hung out together mostly in their high school years. The friends enjoyed sports, played around the neighborhood, and went to the amusement park at Rye Beach in Westchester County.

With his parents, Howard went to German American picnics at Breinlinger Park in North Bronx. He looked forward to Fourth of July celebrations held at other parks, especially the fireworks display. As Howard puts it, he did “crazy things” with fireworks. When it was still legal to be in possession of them, Howard set off one of the explosive devices under an empty tin can to see how high up in the air the container would go. He dropped cherry bombs down rat holes. When fireworks became illegal, Howard still managed to get hold of some. One time the police caught him, yet they only reprimanded him. The officers threatened to charge Howard the next time, which he explains “slowed me up.” For gatherings at Breinlinger Park or elsewhere, Lillian took German dishes that she learned how to make from her mother, such as pork and cabbage. But she never made them from a written recipe. When another woman inquired about how to make a certain dish, Lillian’s reply would be, “You just watch me.” Howard remembers those meals with a smile. She also served them on holidays. In his public school, Howard had a week off at Easter, the day before and after Thanksgiving, and another week off at Christmas. Howard, his mother, and his father alternated between Duff’s parents and Lillian’s for family dinners on the special days associated with those holidays.

Grandparents on both sides of his family influenced Howard’s childhood and adolescent years. As an only child, he admits to being “spoiled terribly.” The older Sharpells and the Trostels only added to Howard’s feelings of being much loved. Unlike many people, he was able to know and spend time with both his paternal and maternal grandparents. Howard points to a lesson Adolph Sr. taught him. It is that old adage about “turning the other cheek.” Howard



with Grandfather & Grandmother Sharpell

believes his grandfather learned that from living with Louise who could say cruel things to the people around her. Adolph always excused his wife’s harshness. As Howard explains, his grandfather “found a way to soften and accept it.” The accommodation Adolph made for Louise was, in Howard’s opinion, “a very obvious sign of their love.” Aside from her sternness, Howard recalls in particular one of Louise’s observations. She spoke English, without any trace of an accent. Yet she would say to her grandson, in German, “*Gelte regerte die welt,*” meaning “Money rules the world.” As he matured,

Howard learned the wisdom of his grandmother’s words.

Howard absorbed different lessons from Bill Trostel. Watching his grandfather put in long hours at his tavern set an example of the value and benefits that can come from working hard. As a young child, Howard remembers how he watched his grandfather carry kegs of beer up the stairs from the basement, allowing his large stomach to balance some of the weight of the wooden containers. Along with Duff, Grandfather Bill taught Howard to respect others who were different. Bill did not, for example, countenance anti-Semitism. This type of stance took courage in an era when prejudice against Jews was part of the national culture. Respect of others regardless of their religion or race came home to Howard when he became friends with one fellow student in particular. Howard joined a relay track team in high school where he met Rudy Sims, a black runner. They were, in Howard’s word, “inseparable.” In the 1930s, in both the North and the South, white Americans referred to blacks using what is commonly called “the N

word,” or “nigger,” a racially disparaging adjective. Howard took offense and showed it if he heard that word used in reference to Rudy. Surprisingly, what Howard did not learn from his grandparents was how to speak German. He picked up words and phrases from listening to them, but the senior Sharpells and Bill Trostel would not teach Howard German. Perhaps they wanted to insure his identification with American rather than German culture. That is why Howard took classes in the language while at De Witt Clinton High School.

In the early 1930s, before Howard began high school, he and his parents moved to an apartment house at 3220 Perry Avenue in the Bronx, not far from the house they had been renting. The effects of the Great Depression probably accounted for the move. Howard characterizes its impact on his family as “harsh.” His father had been the Vice President and Controller of Union Solvents, but it suffered in the general economic downturn. Duff secured a position with a New Deal agency, the National Recovery Administration (NRA). It originated in one of the historic pieces of legislation President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress to pass in June 1933, the National Recovery Act. That law created a system of industrial codes to regulate prices and production levels. The NRA implemented the new legislation. Yet the life of the NRA proved short. The Supreme Court declared the law that created the agency unconstitutional in May 1935. As such, the NRA ceased to exist on January 1, 1936.<sup>21</sup> After his job at the NRA, Howard’s father went to work for the National Dairy Products Corporation, the largest food products company in the United States.<sup>22</sup> He remained there until his retirement. When Howard reminisces about his father, he remembers in particular Duff’s inner strength. As Howard explains, his dad “never faltered. His faith was so strong that nothing adverse could affect it.” Duff drew on that strength when his son went off to war, especially when the Army reported Howard as missing in action. Duff’s fortitude set an example for Howard that he, too, would have drawn on in his darkest hours. The son also recalls certain sayings of the father--“don’t apologize, fight,” and “When in doubt, go ahead.” Most sons grow up wanting to emulate their father, and Howard would have been no different in that respect.



Duff and Lillian

Like Howard, Duff before him had also attended De Witt Clinton High School where he made a name for himself playing sports, especially track. His son followed in his footsteps. Howard began going down that path his first day at the school. Bill Cook, the head of the Physical Education Department and track coach, heard the name “Sharpell” called out by another staff member. Cook recognized it because he attended Springfield College with Duff. The coach directed Howard to go to a certain table where someone issued the freshman boy athletic equipment. Track proved to be his sport, as it had been his father’s. Wearing kangaroo leather shoes because of their light weight, Howard first ran the 220 (meaning 220 yards), but he was not fast enough, so he competed in the 440. Even though Howard became ill after every race, he still competed. He also ran in relay races. Howard met Rudy Sims on the two-mile relay. In practice and in competition, he and Rudy spent hours passing the baton back and forth. One year the high school team took the New York City championship in relay. Howard also played some football, but not on the De Witt Clinton team. Two of his boyhood friends, Bud Moran and Tom Gaffney, attended St. Brendan’s, a Catholic school. Its football team was named the St. Brendan Bombers and Howard played halfback. (The Sharpells were Lutherans, but that did not matter. Being with his friends did.) While Howard enjoyed his math and science classes, his

participation in sports defined his high school years more than his time inside of the classroom. While his father's love of it might have first directed Howard toward sports, he quickly learned that he, too, enjoyed such pursuits. In spite of his involvement in competitions at De Witt Clinton and St. Brendan's, Howard could not have failed to notice what was happening internationally by 1938 when he began high school.

Military aggression by Germany in Europe and by Japan in the Pacific brought about a debate in the United States regarding America's involvement in another world war, if or when one broke out. Because of his family background, it was German aggression that the Sharpells and Trostels discussed rather than what was happening in the Pacific with Japan. Led by Adolph Hitler who became chancellor in 1933, German forces moved into the Rhineland in 1936. The peace treaty that ended World War I designated this area as a demilitarized zone. In the next few years, Hitler also seized Austria and Czechoslovakia. England and France still hoped to avoid a war. As such, their first response to German territorial aggression was to negotiate with Hitler. Howard remembers the name "Neville Chamberlain" coming up "so often." He served as Prime Minister of England from May 1937 to May 1940. Chamberlain became identified with an appeasement policy, accepting Hitler's seizure of other countries in order to avoid another world war. Duff did not think the German leader could be trusted in negotiations. Others disagreed, some because they, like Chamberlain, did not want another war.

Living in a community heavily populated with German Americans, passions ran high. The national headquarters of the German American Bund, a pro-Nazi group, was in Manhattan. In uniforms, Nazis sometimes paraded in the streets of Yorkville. Within that community, many subscribed to anti-Nazi newspapers. In the spring of 1938, a fight broke out between Nazi sympathizers and members of the American Legion.<sup>23</sup> Howard remembers Grandfather Trostel voicing his belief that "Germany was being led astray by a devil." While their feelings were not as "intense" as Bill Trostel's, Howard's parents and maternal grandfather feared World War II would come. It did for Europe in September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. That action resulted in a declaration of war against Germany by England and France who now saw the hopelessness of appeasing Hitler whose desire to control all of Europe was no longer open to question. People in the United States divided into two camps, the "isolationists" who wanted no part in Europe's war and the "interventionists" who saw the danger Hitler posed to America's national security if Germany controlled all of Europe. President Roosevelt fell in the latter camp, yet the politician in him knew he had to diplomatically mold public opinion to support American entry into the war. Even though Duff did not trust politicians in general and Roosevelt in particular, he worried that America was waiting too long to act. Howard recalls a prediction by his father--"If we don't do something soon, bloody days are ahead [of us]."

Those "bloody days" began for Americans on Sunday, December 7, 1941 when Japan attacked the United States' Pacific Fleet based at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Over two thousand members of the American military were killed that day. After church, Howard and some friends had gone to see a movie. On leaving the theater, they learned of the attack. The next day, Congress declared war against Japan. Because of a military alliance between Japan, Germany, and Italy, the two European countries declared war against the United States in support of their Pacific ally. Within days of the Japanese assault at Pearl Harbor, America found itself involved

in a two-front war in the Pacific and in Europe. Howard graduated from high school six months later.

In the fall of 1942, he began college. Fordham University, a Jesuit-run Catholic institution in the West Bronx, offered Howard a track scholarship. He entered as a chemistry major. Howard registered for science classes and also a course in German, building on the three years he had taken at De Witt Clinton. A classmate, Fred Ireland, recently returned from living in Germany with his father who worked there. Fred proved an enormous help to Howard by speaking with him only in German. In time, the two friends conversed easily, although in the



high school graduation

beginning Howard punctuated his sentences with the phrase, "*Bitte Sprechsien langsam*," meaning "Please speak slower." But more than academics was on his mind throughout this first semester. Howard and his friends felt the pull of war. "We were getting anxious," he recalls. Howard joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) at Fordham. As he explains, he enrolled "because I wanted to 'hit the bricks running' when I finally got into the fight." ROTC introduced Howard to military life as he learned how to march, drill, and salute. As he heard stories on the progress of the war, Howard's ROTC status undoubtedly made him think even more about his service one day in the United States military. Howard turned eighteen in August 1942, the month before he entered Fordham. Legally, he could enlist in the service without parental permission.

Howard, however, still discussed the idea of doing so with his parents, a sign of their close relationship. Understandably, his mother wanted her only child to wait. The draft had not claimed him yet, so Lillian did not see why her son needed to enlist. In contrast, his father understood his feelings. He himself, of course, served in World War I, and in 1942, Duff registered for the draft, as required by law. He was fifty-three years old.<sup>24</sup> Howard's father might have realized that for young men, military service during wartime acted almost as a rite of passage. Given what Duff knew of war's progression, he also believed, "The longer you wait, the tougher it [the fighting] is." Howard wanted to sign up with the Marines. He had friends who had joined that branch of service, and, as Howard admits, "I wanted to fight." But his mother refused to allow that. She might have been too aware of the heavy casualties Marines were suffering in the Pacific island campaigns. Howard followed in his father's footsteps when he pursued team sports, attended De Witt Clinton High School, and entered college. Now he followed Duff's example when it came to which military branch he chose to serve in. Howard decided to join the Army. He went to the draft board in his Bronx neighborhood where he pointedly asked a soldier, "Do you have my papers?" After receiving an affirmative answer, Howard directed the soldier to put them "at the top of the pile." At an induction center in Grand Central Station in Manhattan, Howard stood in a long line with other young men who also wanted to sign up. As he explains it, he was "voluntarily inducted," a phrase that appeared on his enlistment papers. Howard never told his mother about this. She always thought he had been drafted. Howard left Fordham University, and his athletic scholarship, in February 1943.

His stable world ended when he left home for military service. It was the type of world that had been lost for many members of his generation. During the 1930s, the Depression forced millions of families to pull up roots and move from one town or state to another in search of

work. Howard avoided that. He understands, in his words, that he was “spared the disruption and discomfort of the Depression.” While so called “hard times” touched the Sharpells, it did not strike them down as it had so many other families. Duff might have moved from one job to another in the 1930s, but his family did not want for food or shelter. Millions of others did. For fifteen of Howard’s eighteen years, the Bronx had been his home. He grew up surrounded by loving parents who placed in their only son all of their dreams for his future. Howard matured from a child to a young man in their embraces and in those of his grandparents. Stability had marked his first eighteen years. All of that changed with America’s entry into World War II.

Values instilled in Howard by two generations of Sharpells and Trostels served him well in the Army. His family taught him to respect others regardless of the color of their skin. Hunting trips to Hainesville, New Jersey made him very comfortable with rifles. Following the example of his father, sports showed him the importance of being a team player. Even childhood Fourth of July celebrations where Howard “did strange things with fireworks” gave him a foundation that he built upon when the Army assigned him to demolition as his specialty. And when he became a prisoner of war, Howard had an edge over other Americans caught in that situation. He was fluent in German. His grandparents spoke it in his presence. Howard studied the language for three years in high school and took a semester of it while at Fordham University. His bilingual ability gave him access to the world of his captors. Howard understood what they were saying as German soldiers enjoyed what they thought were “private discussions” in front of their prisoners. He thus had an advantage over other POWs. It helped him when he eventually escaped from a POW camp and made his way toward Allied lines. Howard’s experiences as a prisoner of war dramatically changed him. They explain his wartime transformation more than any other period in his military service.

### From Induction to Combat Engineer, What Followed After a “Voluntary Induction”

Howard held a special status more than once in the course of his military service. As noted earlier, he identifies himself as being “voluntarily inducted.” Howard uses that phrase to explain that he volunteered to go into the Army. This set him apart from the majority of those in the military during World War II. In spite of the outpouring of volunteers at enlistment centers after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, about two-thirds of those who served in the American armed forces during the war were drafted.<sup>25</sup> Howard, however, was in the one-third who actively sought military service. He began his time in the Army, though, like millions of other soldiers. He went through an induction process and then basic training. In both of those stages, he took a series of aptitude exams. Howard’s high scores set him apart from the vast number of recruits. As such, the Army placed him in a special program geared toward the most intelligent inductees based upon their scores in the aptitude tests--the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). When the military disbanded it, Howard was assigned to a Combat Engineer unit. He arrived in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) in October 1944. After landing in France, Howard served in Northern Europe for three months with his battalion. Then just as his enlistment and selection for ASTP distinguished him from most of his peers, Howard’s service set him apart again in mid-December when he became a prisoner of war. Even his time as a POW ended in an

exceptional way. Howard liberated himself when he successfully escaped from a German POW camp and reached American forces. His World War II service, though, began in a way common to every soldier.

Almost six million men served in the United States Army during World War II.<sup>26</sup> For all of them, including Howard, their formal entry was a two-stage process. The military changed their status from that of a civilian to that of a soldier when it processed them at first an induction station and then a reception center. For Howard, an area in Grand Central Station in Manhattan acted as his induction station late in February 1943. He recalls going up to a desk in “a large auditorium.” The draft board in the Bronx had forwarded some paperwork on him to the induction station. Howard’s military file grew somewhat thicker at Grand Central. An officer asked Howard some questions, but the big decision he had to make that day was which branch of the military he wanted to serve in. All branches--Army, Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard--were represented at the induction station. A Marine Corps gunnery sergeant tried to snare him. According to Howard, the sergeant looked him over and concluded, “You sure do not have to get a haircut.” (Howard wore his hair short and recently had a haircut.) The conversation with the sergeant has stayed with Howard all of these years, perhaps with some pride. The Marine Corps had a reputation as the most demanding branch of the military when it came to training standards. As such, it saw itself as an elite branch. The gunny looked Howard straight in the eye and announced, “From what I read and what I see, we’d like to have you.” Clearly, something in Howard’s file attracted the sergeant’s attention. Perhaps it was his background in sports and education. The military trains its members to see themselves not as individuals, but as members of a unit. Howard’s participation on track teams showed that he already had that outlook. It also showed that he was physically fit. Additionally, his academic background could have made him attractive to the Marine Corps sergeant. In 1940, the high school graduation rate for those Americans twenty-five years and older is estimated at 24.5%.<sup>27</sup> Howard had not only graduated from De Witt Clinton High School, but he also had a semester at Fordham University. His athletic and educational records, as well as his time in ROTC, might have caught the attention of the gunnery sergeant.

But even though Howard had wanted to join the Marine Corps before he showed up at the induction station, he had promised his mother he would not do so. He explained this to the gunnery sergeant who then sent Howard to the Army recruiter. A Tech Sergeant processed the paperwork to transform Howard into a soldier. As Howard recalls, he felt “disappointed” that he was not in the Marine Corps. He also knew, however, that he had honored his mother’s wishes; that proved more important to him than his own desires. (Howard did not even tell his mother about his exchange with the Marine Corps sergeant.) Before he left Grand Central Station that day, the military had also fingerprinted him and given him a thorough physical, which he passed. Howard still held civilian status, though, when he walked out of the induction station. He went home to await further orders. In about a week, those papers arrived. He was to report to Fort Dix, New Jersey on March 6, 1943.

Fort Dix served as Howard’s second and last stop in the induction process. During the war, the training facility acted as what the military called a “reception center” where recruits like Howard were formally turned into a member of the American armed forces.<sup>28</sup> Soon after his arrival at Fort Dix, Howard and other “selectees,” as the Army called them, were sworn in. At

that point in time, Howard ceased being a civilian. An officer read to the inductees the Articles of War, basically the military's criminal code.<sup>29</sup> They were then assigned to a company barracks. The military pointed out to inductees that privacy would no longer be a part of their daily life--"You eat and sleep, work and play, toilet and dress right along with a whole bunch of other fellows who are doing the same things." They also received their military clothing and personal supplies at Fort Dix. These items consisted of a "uniform, coat, shoes, hats, socks, underwear, razor, toothbrush, down to the last detail," all of which went into a barracks bag. When shown a list of these items that all recruits received, Howard smiled when he saw the word "razor." As he explains, "I did not shave regularly." But at more than one inspection, the sergeant bellowed at him, "I see little gold things here [on Howard's face]. Get them off." So shave he did, even though Howard did not think he needed it. Once the Army fitted Howard out, it would have directed him to mail the clothing he had worn to Fort Dix to his home, "free of charge," a standard procedure at the reception center. In addition to all of these steps in transforming Howard into a soldier, he underwent hours of testing at Fort Dix. Three different types of examinations were given to the recruits--a Mechanical Aptitude Test, an Army General Classification Test (AGCT), and a Radio Operator's Aptitude Test.<sup>30</sup>

Because of his later assignment to ASTP, Howard undoubtedly scored very high in the second examination area, the most significant one. The AGCT consisted of one-hundred and fifty multiple choice questions that focused on the use of the English language and on mathematical principles. The test had a time limit of forty minutes. Based upon a recruit's score, the Army placed him in one of five "classes." Most fell into Class III, with scores that ranged from 90-109. Two other categories ranged above and below Class III. At the low end, Class IV identified recruits who scored below 90 and Class V below 70. At the high end, where Howard probably fell, Class II designated inductees who received 110-129. Class I indicated a score of 130 or higher.<sup>31</sup> After the various aptitude tests were given, the recruits received a series of vaccinations and inoculations, injections against diseases such as typhoid and smallpox. The Army never gave these shots before the testing, just in case there should be a reaction that would impact the exam scores.<sup>32</sup>

At Fort Dix, as in other reception centers, inductees could sign up for a monthly allotment check which could be sent to their parents or wives. The military also offered a life insurance policy for up to \$10,000, for which premiums would be taken out of their monthly pay. Howard decided not to sign up for the allotment, but he did buy the insurance. During his stay at Fort Dix, his fellow inductees learned how to march and drill, exercises Howard already knew from his time in ROTC. In addition to these basic parts of military life, his peers at the reception center were taught some basic military courtesies, such as when and who to salute.<sup>33</sup> Again, ROTC had familiarized Howard with that, too. By the time he left Fort Dix, the Army decided on an initial classification for him based upon interviews and test scores. He would receive basic training (BT) and be further trained in antiaircraft artillery at Camp Wallace, Texas. According to Howard, he received no leave to go home after his induction was complete at Fort Dix. He left on a train with other soldiers for Texas.

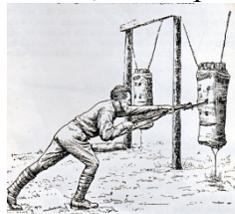
Howard arrived at Camp Wallace, located near Galveston, in the spring of 1943. Less than a year before, in the summer of 1942, about fourteen thousand recruits each day arrived at reception centers and training camps throughout the United States.<sup>34</sup> By the end of the war the

government had constructed two-hundred and forty-two training centers.<sup>35</sup> These fell into two groups--forts and camps. The former, represented by a place such as Fort Dix, were military installations that had been used prior to the war. The latter, such as Camp Wallace, might have been used by the military on a part-time basis or it could have been a new installation. As it turned out for Howard, Camp Wallace was one of forty-six new camps erected from the fall of 1940 through the spring of 1942.<sup>36</sup> Named for Colonel Elmer J. Wallace who died in France during World War I, it opened on February 1, 1941. The Army used it for BT and for antiaircraft training until April 1944 when the Navy took it over for one of its training centers.<sup>37</sup> At Camp Wallace, the Army trained Howard in BT and in antiaircraft artillery. It was also at this installation that he took more written exams that qualified him for ASTP. Looking back at his months at Camp Wallace, he stood out as a special recruit because of his scores on the aptitude tests he had taken at Fort Dix and additional ones at Camp Wallace. Howard's initial training period there, however, was not exceptional as he went through BT just like his fellow recruits.

Like all inductees in the military, Howard had to undergo at least thirteen weeks of BT.<sup>38</sup> The training included physically demanding exercises that recruits called "the daily dozen." The drill instructor (DI), a noncommissioned officer (NCO) such as a sergeant, ordered a combination of the following twelve exercises--side straddle hops [known as "jumping jacks" outside of the military], pushups, cherry pickers [bending from the waist and touching the ground with both hands], rowing exercises, side benders [with hands on hips, bending to the left and then right side], flutter kicks [lying flat on the ground, lifting both legs off the ground, keeping the knees straight, and then kicking one leg up at a time], toe touching, crunches [lying flat on one's back, knees bent and feet flat; with arms folded across the chest, raising the upper body], trunk twists [with hands at waist, bending left, right, back, and forward], in-place double time, standing leg lifts, and, finally, lying leg lifts. As an athlete and ROTC student, Howard had gone through such workout sessions many times, even if the particular exercises varied. These experiences made him stand out from the majority of other recruits. As such, the DI embarrassed Howard more than once by ordering him to show the other soldiers how a particular exercise should be done. While in ROTC, he had also been told to demonstrate certain exercises. Yet at Camp Wallace, he stood before not a small ROTC class, but an entire battery. Afterwards, the other recruits teased him about this. Some puckered their lips to indicate Howard was "kissing up" to the sergeant. BT's physical training also included formation runs of anywhere between one to five miles and forced marches of five to twenty miles while carrying what Howard identifies as a "full field pack," including a rifle with its mounted bayonet and a cumbersome gas mask. In BT, the men also went through obstacle courses and dug foxholes in a field (which the recruit had to refill with dirt once the exercise was over).<sup>39</sup> Obviously, Howard's athletic background made it easier for him to get through this daily regimen. In 1942, when Howard went through BT, it went on for six days each week, for a total of forty-four hours.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the physical conditioning of each recruit, BT included close-order drills, as well as training in hygiene, sanitation, first aid, camouflage, and chemical warfare.<sup>41</sup> When recalling BT today, Howard identifies the forced marches with his full field pack and the gas masks as two strong memories he carries with him. To introduce the recruits to chemical warfare, the Army used a chamber filled with gas. After a group of trainees entered it with their masks on, they had to take the gas mask off and read out the information on their dog tag before they could put their mask back on. Howard judges it to have been "a tough exercise." He also

vividly remembers weapons training, with some well-deserved pride. The Army issued him a bolt-action 1903 Springfield rifle. In BT, the DI taught recruits how to assemble, disassemble, and clean their rifle. At the end of the barrel, trainees affixed a bayonet. The sergeant hung dummies up to teach the soldiers how to use that weapon. In the preliminary instruction, the enlisted men lined up “in single rank” formation. They then practiced the basic moves used with a bayonet on a dummy hanging before them--the guard, thrusts, withdrawals, parries, and the jab.<sup>42</sup> DIs also introduced them to principles of basic marksmanship, firing positions, and how to estimate ranges for firing. At the end of this phase of BT, a soldier received one of three badges--Marksman, Sharpshooter, or Expert.<sup>43</sup> Howard scored high enough to qualify as an Expert



rifleman. For a “city boy” with a limited exposure to guns, this was no small feat. In weapons training, he also learned how to handle grenades, landmines, and booby traps.<sup>44</sup> If, in an encounter with the enemy, a soldier had no weapon, BT covered a topic identified as “unarmed defense.” The DI explained how to escape from body and

choke holds, knife attacks, and pistol threats.<sup>45</sup> Howard remembers that the lessons also included, in his words, “how to kill quietly and quickly.” Howard particularly recalls techniques for “unarmed defense” since he drew upon them when he saw combat months later.

After weeks of BT, graduation day finally came. With it, Howard received his next set of orders. They reflected what job within the Army his aptitude exams and performance levels indicated he was especially qualified for. During the war, the Army had about six-hundred and fifty positions it could assign a soldier to.<sup>46</sup> Months of BT was followed by weeks and perhaps months of additional training specific to the occupational assignment the Army determined for the BT graduate. (Military job classifications are known as MOSs, Military Occupation Specialties.<sup>47</sup>) For Howard, the Army assigned him to antiaircraft artillery (AA). Beginning in 1942, the Army was divided into three parts--Ground Forces, Service Forces, and Air Forces.<sup>48</sup> By the time World War II was over, Howard served in the first two areas, with his first MOS of antiaircraft artillery putting him in Ground Forces.

As with his BT, Camp Wallace served as the site for Howard’s AA training. Antiaircraft artillery protected ground forces and military installations such as airfields and harbors from enemy aerial attacks. Its origins can be traced back to the War of 1812 when British attacks against the American seacoast showed the nation’s lack of adequate defenses. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the military developed an Artillery Corps to guard the shoreline of the United States. In 1901, it was divided into two branches, Field Artillery and Coast Artillery.<sup>49</sup> The former prepared the way for the infantry by using its large guns and howitzers. The latter defended the coastline against seaborne invasions by operating large coastal defense guns.<sup>50</sup> By World War II, the antiaircraft force “was very much the poor stepchild of the Coast Artillery Corps.”<sup>51</sup> Three battalion units together composed an antiaircraft force in the years before the United States entered the war--a gun, an automatic weapons, and, lastly, a searchlight battalion. They used “a motley mix” of outdated 3-inch guns and single-barrel, water-cooled .50 caliber machine guns.<sup>52</sup> The German offensive across the Atlantic caused a reassessment of the Army’s AA abilities beginning in 1940-1941. With the breakout of World War II in Europe, the United States began to expand its AA capabilities. At the end of September 1942, the year when the Army assigned Howard to AA, the high command recommended that eight hundred and eleven

AA battalions be organized with over six hundred thousand men.<sup>53</sup> For about six months, Howard became one of those soldiers.

Howard's AA training focused on the 40mm Bofor antiaircraft gun and the .50 caliber machine gun.<sup>54</sup> Recall that before BT and AA, Howard had fired only a rifle on some hunting trips. Now, in AA, he really did fire "the big guns" of war. A Swedish company gave its name to the Bofors antiaircraft gun it manufactured in the 1930s. Utilized by both the Allies and Axis powers, it became the most commonly used AA gun in World War II. The antiaircraft units at Camp Wallace took advantage of beach areas along the Gulf coast for maneuvers. When Howard trained on the 40mm Bofors there, Howard learned aspects of AA that would have sounded foreign to him just a year before--"the firing table muzzle velocity" (2,800 feet/second), the maximum rate of fire (120 rounds/minute), elevation limits (it could be lowered or raised to a -5 degrees up to 90 degrees), and the various ranges for the gun (the Bofor could fire from 1,500 to 3,500 yards depending on whether the gun was slanted, horizontal, or vertical). In another part of training, Howard learned how to clean the Bofor, how to tear it down, and how to put it back together. Other AA soldiers teased Howard about how quickly he could do that, amazed at the ease with which he remembered how all of the parts fit together. As he recalls with a smile, "I liked that piece." Fourteen soldiers could make up the force behind one Bofor, but four could operate it in an emergency.<sup>55</sup> A "chief of section" headed each Bofor unit. Howard held that position, another example of how, in the eyes of those above him, he stood out from his peers.

In contrast, the .50 caliber Browning M2 machine gun required a much smaller crew to man it. Howard remembers just two soldiers being the norm. He was the gunner, in command of the M2 and the rest of the crew. As with the Bofor, Howard learned the maximum rate of fire (600 rounds/minute), elevation limits, and the ranges for the machine gun depending on whether it was slanted (600 yards), horizontal (1,800 yards), or vertical (1,700 yards).<sup>56</sup> During one maneuver on the beach, Howard fired a .50 caliber machine gun at an aerial target known as a "sleeve." The sleeve derived its name from its appearance from the ground as an airplane towed it. The target was made of white, tubular cloth, so it really did resemble a shirtsleeve. As the plane's crew slowly released the target by using a cable, the sleeve billowed in the air. Gunners on the ground, such as Howard at his machine gun station, fired color-coded ammunition at the target. One day as Howard was doing this, his foot slipped, but the resulting movement on his



part did not negatively affect his score. On the contrary, when the sleeve was laid out on the ground after the plane landed, Howard's firing hit the target with such accuracy that he received an expert rating for the .50 caliber machine gun. At one point, Howard was put in charge of the emplacements, meaning he prepared the positions where the guns would be placed. He soon received another assignment that resulted in his first promotion. Howard became Private First Class (PFC) when superiors appointed him as a member of the cadre, meaning a group pulled together from units already trained. The cadre, in turn, became responsible for the next class of AA soldiers. As he observes, "I became PFC before I knew it." He rose to the rank of corporal (CPL) when these AA soldiers completed their training. When a third AA group Howard worked with finished its period of instruction, he became a sergeant (SGT). In what Howard points out was "a short time," he went from private (PVT) to PFC, then to CPL, and finally to SGT. One to two weeks after making sergeant, Howard and a few other AA soldiers were ordered to show up at what he describes as a "hut" to take more aptitude tests.

Throughout his training in AA, Howard stood out from other recruits, hence his rapid rise in rank. He proved conspicuous in another way, too. Howard had some college credits from his fall 1942 semester at Fordham University. The vast majority of his fellow soldiers had no education beyond high school, if they had even completed that level. Of those who entered the Army in 1942, only 14% of them had some degree of a college education.<sup>57</sup> The scores Howard received on the aptitude exams he took at Camp Wallace, combined with his test scores on the AGCT, qualified him for ASTP, although he did not know it at that time. One day while at Camp Wallace, Howard received orders to report to the hut where he had taken the recent tests. Once there, a captain gave him a choice. He could stay with AA and retain his sergeant stripes, or he could report to the School of Engineering at Texas A&M College where he would take even more examinations. Howard received hints that another Army program awaited him if he passed this last scrutiny. What it would be, no one told him. As Howard explains, the captain “made it quite clear that this was an opportunity to further my education and, at the same time, open the door to further advancements in the Army. The real decision that confronted me at that time was whether this might delay my seeing the ‘action’ that I wanted.” Even though Howard showed great skill in AA, he saw it as “defensive action.” Howard readily admits that he “wanted offensive action.” A new assignment might give him what he desired. “I was told [by the captain] that further tests at Texas A&M would determine my direction. I accepted that challenge.” But whatever the new assignment would be, he would enter it as a lowly PVT, not even as a PFC.

Although Howard was not sure what awaited him, he had no problem leaving his stripes at Camp Wallace and heading back to college. Once he arrived at Texas A&M in College Station, he took more tests. Although Howard did not know it, the Army had designated the campus as the site for one of its Specialized Training and Reassignment (STAR) units. Candidates for a new program took some psychological and classification exams. In addition to these, officers and professors in various academic departments questioned the possible trainees. As Howard recalls, they inquired about his personal background as well as his knowledge in certain areas. A panel of professors decided whether the candidate was admitted to the new Army program or whether he was to be sent back to his military unit.<sup>58</sup> After a little more than a week living in a dorm, the Army sent Howard to the University of Delaware in Newark. There he became a member of an elite group, the ASTP.

The Army conceived of ASTP as a program for its most intelligent recruits. As such, Howard’s assignment to it should be viewed with pride. He became one of only 150,000 men in ASTP. The requirements were few, but most of Howard’s fellow soldiers did not qualify. Two of the criteria were not that selective--participants had to be enlisted men who, if under the age of twenty-two, had completed BT or a part of BT. These soldiers also needed a high school education or its equivalency, which eliminated many since, as noted earlier, high school graduation rates were not as high as in later decades. For those over the age of twenty-two, applicants who had attended college had to have majored in certain areas of study. What really worked to create a small pool of eligible soldiers was the demand that the recruit have an AGCT score of 115 (applicants for Officers Candidate School needed a score of only 110).<sup>59</sup> More than one consideration explains the creation of ASTP.

In the fall of 1942, less than one year after the United States entered World War II, the War Department realized that the draft age would need to be lowered from twenty to eighteen in order to fulfill its manpower needs. No one knew, however, how long the war would last. The drafting of college-eligible young men would impact college and university enrollments. Those who would have been undertaking studies in higher education would instead be entering the military. A 1948 report on ASTP by the Army's Historical Division concluded that the program was "established primarily to ensure a continuous flow of technically and professionally trained men for the prosecution of the war." In other words, if the war went on for many years, without large numbers of college graduates, America would find itself at a disadvantage for many reasons.<sup>60</sup> The country, and the military, needed to ensure that colleges and universities continued to produce graduates. But even if the war and ASTP had continued for several years, the War Department did not envision all of the ASTP soldiers receiving college degrees or even becoming officers. At its core, the program was meant to guarantee specialists in four basic areas--science/math, engineering, medicine, and linguistics. As such, in September 1942 the Secretary of War approved ASTP to train some of the Army's most gifted inductees in these four areas. Three months later, the War Department formally established the program.<sup>61</sup>

However, some argue that the military created the program for two reasons aside from a desire to ensure the supply of men trained in vital, technical fields. College and university administrators would understandably be concerned with lower enrollments as the draft age drew on their freshmen classes.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, some see a cultural imperative behind the creation of ASTP. As one historian explains its origin, "It grew out of the notion that the cream of western youth had been slaughtered in the trenches of World War I."<sup>63</sup> By this reasoning, Washington, D.C. wanted to ensure that its most intelligent enlisted soldiers did not end up in ground combat units. But this rationale would never be clearly articulated. Instead, the government focused on the need to train specialists in vital fields. Yet even one participant in ASTP believed in this deeper reason for the program's creation. As Wendell H. Hall recalls, "It has never been admitted (and never will be) that the real reason for ASTP was to preserve a superior intelligence bloodstock."<sup>64</sup>

The year after its creation, 1943, proved to be the only full calendar year ASTP existed. That year, the Army took about 100,000 of its soldiers from its three major forces--the Army Ground Forces, the Army Service Forces, and the Army Air Forces. As part of AA, Howard came from the Ground Forces. (Because so many inductees who scored high on the AGCT went into the Service Forces and the Air Forces, the Ground Forces furnished proportionally less men to ASTP than those branches.) The Army also assigned approximately 50,000 new inductees to ASTP.<sup>65</sup> Congress set the total number of ASTPers at 2% of the Army's authorized strength, meaning no more than some 150,000 men could be in the program out of 7.7 million.<sup>66</sup> Three men who became famous were selected for ASTP--Henry Kissinger (who later became a National Security Adviser and Secretary of State for President Richard Nixon), Bob Dole (who served in the United States Senate and ran as the 1996 Republican candidate for President), and Gore Vidal (who became a well-known author).<sup>67</sup> The military distributed its selectees to over two hundred colleges and universities throughout the United States. About half of all ASTPers studied basic engineering.<sup>68</sup> Howard was in this group. As such, the Army sent him to the University of Delaware in Newark, selected as the site of one of ASTP's engineering programs.

With the drafting of eighteen-year-olds in November 1942, the University of Delaware suffered a predictable enrollment loss. In September 1942, five hundred and forty-five men attended that university. One year later, in the fall of 1943, that number shrank to just one hundred and thirty-seven. But ASTP increased the number of men on the Newark campus. The first eighty soldiers arrived in mid-June 1943. Like all ASTPers, the University of Delaware soldiers wore a shoulder patch identifying them as part of this special program. The patch's design displayed a sword of valor superimposed upon a lamp of knowledge. Over the course of the next ten months, about six-hundred more soldiers showed up in Newark. Howard was one of them, arriving in the fall to study engineering.<sup>69</sup> He lived with other ASTP soldiers in what had been a fraternity house. At first, Howard shared a room with two trainees, but one apparently left the program. During the weekdays, Howard attended classes from about 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. His fellow students were all ASTPers. In comparison with courses he had taken at Fordham, Howard describes the ASTP ones as "more intense." The content felt "accelerated" as the soldiers rapidly covered material at about double the normal college pace.<sup>70</sup> Colonel Herman Beukema, the Director of ASTP, acknowledged how demanding the program was--"Needless to say, the workload imposed on the trainee has been heavy, possibly too heavy,



when judged by normal education standards. It is safe to say that its demands on the trainee is higher than imposed by any other wartime educational training program now in force...[even including]...West Point and Annapolis."<sup>71</sup> For engineering students such as Howard, about twenty percent of them "flunked out or were unwilling to keep to the fast pace."<sup>72</sup> That could explain why Howard's two roommates became one.

While some courses were basic to engineering, such as physics, chemistry, and calculus, ASTPers at the University of Delaware also enrolled in an English class. In addition, they took a geography and a history course, the later entitled "Background of the Modern World."<sup>73</sup> All of these classes were part of the first phase of ASTP training. They fell into the Basic Phase that ASTP patterned on the first one and a half years of college. But because of the accelerated pace, the Basic Phase was to be over in just nine months. An Advanced Phase was to follow the Basic one.<sup>74</sup> Howard felt particularly pleased that units he completed at the University of Delaware could transfer to Fordham University, where he planned to return once the war ended. A Physical Education class naturally complimented his schedule, which as a soldier, made sense. Howard relished such a class given his background in sports. One of the instructors in that department recognized Howard from when he ran on the Fordham University track team in the fall of 1942. The instructor needed a runner for a half-mile stint in a two-mile relay race. He approached Howard, who readily agreed to participate. Howard spent whatever spare time he had at the track.

His time at the University of Delaware proved short, however. Howard successfully completed the fall 1943 semester there, but even as he began it, events in Europe moved to bring an end to ASTP. The Allied invasion of Sicily began in July 1943. Moving north through Italy turned out to be a slow, grueling advancement, laden with heavy casualties. Americans came to call the one-year campaign "up the bloody boot." With its European casualties mounting, the War Department re-considered ASTP. Early in November, military planners proposed a reduction for the number of soldiers enrolled in ASTP. It would go from approximately 150,000 to 30,000; the remaining trainees would be largely in the medical and related fields. In other

words, 80% of ASTPers, about 120,000 soldiers, would be reassigned.<sup>75</sup> Howard became one of them. But the Army required more than additional manpower. It needed a group of above average men that it could draw on for leadership positions, especially for positions as NCOs. The Army's Ground Forces in particular lacked such high caliber men to draw on.

Early in 1944, Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall pointed out to the Secretary of War "the outstanding deficiency" in the number of NCOs "who are below satisfactory standards of intelligence and qualities [of] leadership."<sup>76</sup> Soldiers discharged from ASTP could better those numbers. For all purposes, ASTP ended in February 1944. An Army report four years later by the Historical Division questioned the logic of this--"It seemed arbitrary, after repeated



a visit home  
during ASTP

declarations by the War Department of the importance of specialized training, [to] suddenly snatch away the young men undergoing such training, a select group numbering only 2 percent of the Army, for conversion into infantry privates."<sup>77</sup> At the same time, however, the 1948 report noted the dire need by Ground Forces of the type of men those trainees represented. As the report acknowledged, "The fact was that a crisis had been developing for two years in the ground arms...Qualitatively, the ground combat arms had been persistently denied a proportionate share of high-intelligence personnel. The extension of ground combat in the last part of 1943 made the consequences fully apparent. They could not be ignored on the eve of the invasion of France [June 1944]...The sacrifice of the ASTP was one means...of meeting the critical need for a speedy rehabilitation of the ground arms."<sup>78</sup> Trainees at the University of Delaware left the school in March.<sup>79</sup> Howard was at the university for six months, at which time he completed studies in basic engineering.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, he probably left Newark in March 1944.

The Army next sent Howard to Fort Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina where it assigned him to the 81<sup>st</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion which was part of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. As a result of this, Howard moved from his previous MOS in AA, which was part of Army Ground Forces, into the Corps of Engineers (CE), which served primarily in the Army Service Forces. But the CE straddled two of the Army's three parts. The CE could also be drawn upon to bolster Ground Forces, which is exactly what happened to Howard's unit during the Battle of Bulge.<sup>81</sup>

The Corps of Engineers existed as a branch of the Army as did infantry, artillery, and the cavalry.<sup>82</sup> Its roots go back to the late eighteenth century American Revolution when members of the French military traveled across the Atlantic to fight with the Continental Army against Great Britain for the independence of the thirteen colonies. French officers helped to organize the very first American engineers, which were three small companies. An act of Congress years later, in 1802, created the Corps of Engineers. It existed throughout the nineteenth century, but its real growth came with World War I when it went from 2,500 to almost 300,000 men.<sup>83</sup> One brigadier general, himself an Army historian, calls combat engineers "technicians of war."<sup>84</sup> Specifically what members of this branch of the Army did is clearly defined on the first page of the *Engineer Soldier's Handbook* printed in June 1943, less than a year before Howard joined the Corps of Engineers--"You are an engineer. You are going to build bridges and blow them up. You are going to stop tanks and destroy them. You are going to build roads, airfields, and buildings. You are going to construct fortifications...*You are going to make sure that our own troops move*

*ahead against all opposition, and you are going to see to it that enemy obstacles do not interfere with our advance.*"<sup>85</sup> Put another way, the primary jobs of combat engineers were construction and demolition to move American troops forward and at the same time hinder enemy movements.<sup>86</sup>

The combat engineers carried out their mission in a variety of ways. They mounted reconnaissance missions in areas where ground troops might be deployed such as river-crossings and bivouac sites. In so doing, the engineers might build roads, trails, or culverts. These "technicians of war" constructed bridges, marked out landing strips for light aircraft, and erected buildings. They also cleared obstacles, such as minefields, booby traps, debris, and roadblocks that hindered the forward movement of infantry forces. Additionally, the military charged the Corps of Engineers with responsibility for light, water, and power systems. The Corps performed demolition support for infantry units, a responsibility that became part of Howard's MOS.<sup>87</sup> As representative of the type of work combat engineers did, a twin-turreted castle became their service insignia. It acted as a visible reminder of the fortification work done by this branch of the Army. French officers who served in the first Corps of Engineers came up with the turreted castle insignia during the American Revolution. Supposedly, they modeled it after one of the gates that guarded the entrance to the French city of Verdun. The insignia appeared on a brass disc one inch in diameter on an enlisted man's collar. Officers wore a phrase on their coat button. Written in French, it read, "*Essayons*," translated as "Let us try."<sup>88</sup>

Howard began his training as a combat engineer at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. He arrived there in the spring of 1944 after the virtual disbanding of ASTP. Established in June, 1917, just two months after the United States entered World War I, Fort Jackson eventually became "the largest and most active [training center] of its kind in the world." President Andrew Jackson, a native of South Carolina, lent his name to the installation. Between the two world wars, Fort Jackson remained open. For over a decade, however, beginning in 1925, only the state's National Guard occasionally used the camp. This changed in 1939 when the federal government again took the area over to train infantry. The military built four firing ranges. It also laid out over one hundred, hard-surfaced miles of roads named for well-known leaders in the American Revolution and Civil War. Howard joined more than half a million men who trained at Fort Jackson during World War II.<sup>89</sup> When he arrived there, he reported directly to the 81<sup>st</sup> Engineers Combat Battalion. There Howard carried out the corps motto, "*Essayons*," as he learned the skills of the combat engineer.

Howard especially recalls lessons in "rigging" from his time at Fort Jackson. To master abilities in this area, NCOs taught soldiers how to use ropes as well as chains with blocks and tackles to move heavy loads. Howard also remembers exercises in the use of bulldozers and jack hammers. Their power understandably impressed a "city boy" who saw New York City construction workers employ such tools but who himself never used them. Howard came from a "white collar" background. Fort Jackson introduced him to the world of "blue collar" workers, albeit in an Army setting. Similarly, bridges span many parts of New York City. Now, in his training as a combat engineer, Howard learned how to make them. He particularly recalls lessons in building the Bailey and pontoon bridges. Engineers categorized the former as a "fixed bridge" and the latter as a "floating bridge." The British designed the Bailey one, made up of panels that together supported seventy tons on spans that measured up to one hundred and twenty feet. In

comparison, pontoon bridges held up between ten and twenty-five tons, although a reinforced one supported thirty-five tons of equipment coming across it.<sup>90</sup>

But as Howard acknowledges, his training as a combat engineer entailed much more than the above. In the beginning, NCOs introduced trainees to basic tools used by combat engineers. Most were hand tools such as axes, hatchets, and shovels. Compressed air from mobile air compressor units furnished power tools for items like clay diggers and pneumatic chain saws. At Fort Jackson, CE training also introduced Howard to the building of fortifications, the use of camouflage, and principles in tank warfare. Combat engineers could be part of an assault detachment in an attack upon a fortified position.<sup>91</sup> The use of explosives is basic to much of what the combat engineer does, and this became Howard's specialty. But before he learned the tricks of demolition work, Howard and his unit first had to complete more infantry training in Tennessee where the 81<sup>st</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion joined its infantry division. The 106<sup>th</sup> had been participating in maneuvers in Tennessee from January through March 1944. While there, Howard tried to transfer into a third part of the Army, the Air Forces, the only part to which he had not yet been assigned.

Because the terrain in Tennessee closely resembled Western Europe, the Army used that state for large-scale maneuvers throughout the war. As Howard points out, he arrived there "still a buck private" for his unit's field maneuvers. At least at one point, however, he impressed his peers and superiors when it came to tank warfare. At Fort Jackson, during his initial training as a combat engineer, instructors introduced Howard to tank warfare, especially how to disable one. The Army Field Manual (FM) for combat engineers likened soldiers who went after tanks to big game hunters who stalked elephants or lions. Seeking to allay the fear that the soldier is at a disadvantage due to the size of the enemy, the FM bluntly argued, "the advantages are with the hunter; he almost always is the winner; but there is enough danger in the sport to keep the hunter on his toes. With courage and determination the engineer can use his weapons to hunt down and destroy 80,000 pounds of fighting steel." The FM went on to list aspects of "the hunt" that combat engineers should remember:

- a. A tank is big—a large target.
- b. A tank is run by a mechanism which is breakable.
- c. A tank is armored, but there is a limit to its armor and our weapons are capable of piercing the heaviest armor.
- d. Tanks can't go everywhere. They can't climb steep banks, hurdle special obstacles, ford deep streams, or go through thick forests.
- e. Tanks are partly blind. They can't see as well as you can.
- f. They can't go over a mine undamaged.
- g. They are run by human beings—men as vulnerable to fire, lead, steel, heat, and explosives as a man out of a tank.
- h. Tanks are noisy; they can't 'sneak up' on you, and they can't hear most noises."<sup>92</sup>

The FM identified various weapons that could be used by "the hunter" against his prey. Two were antitank grenades and frangible (incendiary) grenades. During the field maneuvers in Tennessee, Howard put into use what he had learned. He used a hand grenade to disable an "enemy" tank in one exercise. The grenade was not a live one; a "puff of smoke" signaled when

it hit its target. Howard recalls that his throw landed at such a point on “the big game” that observers announced, “The tank is out.” Howard’s background in sports throwing baseballs and footballs unquestionably helped his aim that day.

Howard especially remembers how the weather made the exercises more demanding since “it seemed to rain constantly.” Crossing a field “in pouring rain” only added to the misery. The poor conditions explain an injury he sustained. At one point in the maneuvers, Howard and others proceeded to take a hill. In the process, he brought his rifle down with such “brute force” that when he hit a rock with the weapon, he hurt the thumb on his right hand. Howard had thought that he was lowering his rifle on a pile of mud, not rocks. When it became apparent that he could no longer handle his rifle because of this injury, superiors ordered Howard to go to the field hospital to have his hand checked out. An x-ray showed a fractured navicular bone, one of eight carpal wrist bones. After a doctor put a cast on his lower arm, the Army transferred Howard to a base hospital at Camp Forrest, Tennessee. He stayed there for thirteen weeks. While hospitalized, Howard admits he “did a lot of soul searching.” Recall that he had been an AA, ASTP, and CE trainee. After he first arrived in Tennessee, he wanted to transfer out of the ground war into the air war. Howard explains that he wanted to do this “to get away from the ‘smart a—college kid’ label” he received when he joined the 81<sup>st</sup>. Howard thus filled out an application to be an air cadet before he broke his wrist bone. His ultimate goal, if accepted, was to become a fighter pilot. While in the hospital at Camp Forrest, Howard received word that he had been accepted for cadet school, but the Army later rescinded that decision. As Howard understood it, someone in high command decided the military needed him more in the Corps of Engineers than in the Air Corps. By the time the doctor cleared him to return to his unit, the 81<sup>st</sup>’s maneuvers in Tennessee were over. His battalion had been sent to Camp Atterbury in Indiana, near Bloomington, for additional training and to await deployment as part of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Howard rejoined the 81<sup>st</sup> there. Combat engineers could specialize in one area, such as rigging, electricity, carpentry, or the use of jackhammers. Camp Atterbury is where Howard received his designation as a demolition specialist. His childhood fascination with explosives found a whole new outlet.

After Howard returned to his unit, he “fought hard” to prove himself. He still felt that not all of the other soldiers accepted him. Some of the regular infantry looked down upon ASTPers, seeing them as “whiz kids” who were smarter than the average soldier, which they probably were. One ASTPer remembers how some soldiers judged him and others as “college-trained gold bricks.”<sup>93</sup> Another ASTPer believes that the NCOs were especially rough on him and others who had been in the program--“Some of them [noncoms] took advantage of the chance to vent their frustrations and resentments on us, for we were a ready and visible target. Our arrival gave them a chance to get even for all the hurts, real and imagined, that they had been subjected to over the years by those they considered intellectually superior. They constantly referred to us as ‘college boys,’ and would from time to time ask sarcastically if ‘that was the way we did it in college.’”<sup>94</sup>

As luck had it, Howard found a mentor in the 81<sup>st</sup> who took him under his wing. He was Squad Sergeant Nicola “Blackie” Risoli. His dark skin, part of his Italian American heritage, gave him his nickname. Blackie taught Howard the technical skills of working with explosives. Howard’s mentor had learned some tricks, too, from his work in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a New Deal agency created in the 1930s to employ young men. Blackie joined it when he

was sixteen; he became quite adept at blowing up tree stumps that stood in the way of fire trails his crew carved out of forest areas.<sup>95</sup> This work during the Depression prepared Blackie for his responsibilities with the 81<sup>st</sup>. Combat engineers not only build things. They also blow them up. Demolition specialists within the combat engineers set charges to bring down trees that stood in the way of an advancing American Army. They destroyed enemy fortifications and even bridges controlled by the enemy that combat engineers might later replace with a Bailey bridge, or some other type. At Camp Atterbury, Howard learned the specifics of how to choose the right explosive, how much of it to use, and how to set the explosion off. Blackie was his primary teacher. While earlier training as a combat engineer had introduced Howard to demolition work, he learned it in detail under Blackie's tutelage--how to use the explosives TNT, nitrostarch, dynamite, and ammonium nitrate cratering explosives. Howard also was introduced to the intricacies of the bangalore torpedo (a metal tube or pipe filled with explosives). As a "demo man," Howard became an expert in choosing the right firing material to set the explosion off--caps, exploders, firing wires, time fuses, fuse lighters, detonating cords, and crimpers.<sup>96</sup> Howard showed superior capabilities in his work. Blackie and Platoon Sergeant Chuck Wheeler "really went to bat" for him in advocating a promotion for Howard. 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Altice, however, blocked their recommendations, seeing the former ASTPer as one of the "smart a--college kids." When Risoli received a promotion and took over the platoon, Howard took over the squad. But to use his words, he "never got the rank." Altice saw to that.

According to Howard, about half of the soldiers in his squad had some college education. The other half could not even read or write. Some might call men in this latter group "hillbillies, yet as Howard explains, "those guys knew demolition." For example, Howard and a few others who had been formally educated used a slide rule to calculate the size of the charge that should be used on a job. When "the college guys" were done with their computations, they saw that some of the "country boys," such as Barry J. Fortenberry, had come to the same conclusion. Soldiers such as Barry had grown up in Appalachian and Southern states where they used



Members of Co. B at Camp Atterbury; Howard middle row, 2<sup>nd</sup> from right

explosives to blow up tree stumps and remove rocks on family farms. They knew instinctively how much explosive and firing material to use. Howard and others came to admire these backwoods soldiers; they gave them lessons to help them learn how to read and write. By the time the 81<sup>st</sup> departed for the European Theater of Operation (the ETO), the formally and the informally

educated had learned from each other. In the next months, the men drew upon the knowledge they gained while in training. About one in every nine Americans in the ETO was an engineer.<sup>97</sup> Howard and the others in his unit joined that number in fall 1944. Their service changed them forever.

## A “Quiet Front” Turns Deadly

Those who study war, and those who experience it firsthand, know its transformative power, especially for the combat veteran. What he saw, touched, heard, and smelled can stay with him for a lifetime. “Triggers” can transport the veteran back to the war in a split second. Perhaps he navigates carefully through dense foliage that reminds him of terrain the enemy could have mined. A heavy, dark green winter coat could be identified with deep winter snow he trudged through, rifle in hand. The backfire from a car duplicates the sound of an exploding shell. The veteran might associate the smell from a decaying animal with the odors from battlefield casualties. Howard experienced five powerful moments in his European service---the first time he had to kill another human being, his one-man attack upon a German machine gun nest, his capture by the Germans, his months as a prisoner of war, and his escape from the enemy. One of these by itself would have been enough to keep the war close to the surface after he came home to resume life as a civilian. The cumulative effect of five such incidents is hard for a noncombatant to imagine. The first three took place in an area of the European Theater that Howard identified as a “quiet front.” Just days after the 81<sup>st</sup> arrived there, however, it turned deadly.

As with the nature of military service, Howard arrived in the ETO, fought there, and was captured as a part of a unit--Company B of the 81<sup>st</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion attached to the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. In fall 1944, Company B left Camp Atterbury as part of an advance group from the 106<sup>th</sup>. It arrived at Camp Myles Standish, located near Taunton, Massachusetts. The camp, named after a seventeenth-century leader of the Plymouth Colony, was one of several in the Boston area. A troop train on the New Haven Railroad brought the soldiers there. As Howard and others detrained, warnings emanated from loudspeakers that the camp was “a secret station,” and men were not to mention it in any communications home. Members of Company B hiked to the barracks, located about a mile away from the train station. In the following days, departing soldiers listened to lectures on topics such as ship security, censorship, and how they should conduct themselves once they arrived overseas. The Army issued them clothing appropriate for a cold climate. Howard recalls receiving goulashes. He also distinctly remembers that the medical staff gave them more immunization shots, another part of the process of preparing the men for shipping out. After packing their duffel bags and field packs, a New Haven Railroad troop train took departing soldiers to Boston, thirty-five miles away from the camp. Window shades were to be kept down during the trip. The men disembarked at the pier where they directly marched up the gangplank to their troop ship.<sup>98</sup>

Howard’s company, still part of the advance group from the 106<sup>th</sup>, left for England on October 8, 1944 while the rest of the 106<sup>th</sup> Division did not arrive at Camp Myles Standish until October 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>. It was not until ten days after Company B sailed that other parts of the 106<sup>th</sup> departed for England. (The division left the States in increments, beginning on October 18<sup>th</sup>; the last unit left on November 10, 1944.<sup>99</sup>) Howard remembers his troop ship took about seven days to cross the North Atlantic, following a zigzag route to ward off German submarine attacks as it neared the British Isles. As Howard explains, upon landing he understood why the Army issued the soldiers the goulashes. Two months before the official start of winter, torrential rain storms and the resulting mud that accompanied the downpours greeted the men of the 81<sup>st</sup> Engineer

Combat Battalion. While in England, the men of Company B did not enjoy any liberty time. Howard is quite clear on that--no trips to London or to other English cities. Arriving before the mass of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Company B of the 81<sup>st</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion left the British Isles weeks before the division did. Howard recalls the trip across the Channel to Northern France. He spent most of it in a truck in the hold of the ship where he guarded demolition equipment stored in the vehicle. After landing in Normandy, Howard's unit sailed on the Seine River before boarding trucks for the trip east. Even years later, Howard vividly recalls the snow and slush they traveled through. The journey took about five days before they reached their destination, St. Vith in Belgium.<sup>100</sup> That town was important militarily because five major highways and three rail lines came into it.<sup>101</sup> Howards clearly remembers spending Thanksgiving Day in that Belgium community. As such, he and others in Company B reached St. Vith a few weeks before the mass of the 106<sup>th</sup>. It did not arrive there until December 10<sup>th</sup>.<sup>102</sup>

One day later, the 106<sup>th</sup> assumed responsibility for the defense of the sector around St. Vith; the town became division headquarters (HQ).<sup>103</sup> The defense of St. Vith had been the task of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, which the 106<sup>th</sup> relieved. Howard and others found themselves in the Ardennes, a forest area that extends across France, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Howard calls the area a "quiet front." It appeared so because in mid-September American forces had taken the area over where St. Vith stood. But the Germans were not far away. Near St. Vith, the borders of Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany converge. Nevertheless, members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> spoke of a "country club" atmosphere because even though the Americans and the Germans fired at each other daily, that was the limit of encounters between the two armies.<sup>104</sup> The sector also included the Schnee Eifel, a thick, forested ridge inside of Germany's border east of the Ardennes and St. Vith. The Schnee Eifel was the westernmost part of the Eifel highlands, an area lying between the Rhine, the Moselle, and the Roer Rivers. The 81<sup>st</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion's primary task was to maintain the roads, removing snow and filling in holes made by artillery shells.<sup>105</sup> This was crucial work if supply lines were to be maintained. Howard recalls orders to his unit to identify and set traps. Additionally, the engineers laid more mine fields. Company B also had to dispose of unexploded ordinance, shells that had not detonated on impact.

The 106<sup>th</sup> arrived just weeks before winter officially began. With an average yearly rainfall of thirty-five to forty inches, the heaviest downpours come in November and December. Heavy mists accompany the rain; they could appear before noon and then return before evening. Snow could be a foot deep, more so in drifts. Cold winds also marked winters in the Ardennes.<sup>106</sup> Howard remembers that "it snowed constantly. I could barely see ten yards in front of me." Unlike many veterans who recall the Ardennes that month, Howard does not remember being cold. He slept in his bed roll, atop a pile of pine needles he bunched up to give added insulation from the cold ground. Howard wore a woolen cap under his helmet and a heavy woolen sweater under his field jacket. "I was warm enough," he concludes.

Initially, the 81<sup>st</sup> functioned in its capacity as an Army service unit. One of the first assignments Howard remembers his company received was to clear out an old sports complex that HQ wanted to use. The engineers checked for mines and booby traps, which they did find. They also found a most uncommon booby trap. A German soldier had rigged up some human waste to fall on the first American who flushed a toilet by pulling on a cord that operated the overhead water tank. Ray Cisco became the unlucky recipient of the enemy soldier's goodbye

message. Howard and others in the group had a good laugh at Ray's expense. As Howard sees it, the German had to have had "a sense of humor." This light moment, however, might have unfortunately humanized the enemy to such a degree that attacks against Company B just days later come as even more of a shock to the unit. Another incident made Howard smile before he realized the dangers inherent in this "quiet front."

On patrol one day just after Thanksgiving, Howard's unit came across an old tavern. It had undoubtedly once housed beer to serve its clientele. Knowing the details of the saloon business because of his grandfather's establishment, Howard guessed that coils, used in a refrigeration unit to cool the beer, probably laid somewhere in the building. Howard wanted to use the coils to make the everyday lives of the men in the 81<sup>st</sup> Engineers more bearable. He describes them all as "raunchy from the lack of showers." If the men could locate coils, as engineers they could easily build a furnace to heat water for showers. When they returned from patrol, Howard asked Captain William J. Hynes for permission to go back to the tavern to look for the coils. With the officer's approval, Howard and Marlin Mahlin, one of the "country boys" in the squad, set out for the tavern in a jeep. They went through the crossroads the 81<sup>st</sup> had dubbed "the 88 Junction" because the Germans regularly fired 88 mm flak guns at the spot where the roads met. Howard and Marlin "made it through" that day without meeting any enemy fire. At the tavern, Howard "could smell old beer" stored in wooden kegs. Because he did not have the proper tools, Howard worked harder and longer than he should have had to in order to free the coils from the cooling unit. It turned out to be such a labor-intensive job the project became a burdensome one.

As Howard completed the extraction, the two soldiers sensed enemy action near them. Marlin and Howard heard incoming rounds from German artillery. The enemy was shelling the town where the tavern stood. Howard very gently put the coils into the jeep, but before they could drive off, a piece of shrapnel hit Howard on the inside of his upper thigh. He bled profusely. Marlin picked his buddy up and put him in the jeep. As Howard recalls, Marlin had "one hand on the steering wheel and the other holding my leg up high to slow the flow of blood from the hole ripped open by a piece of shrapnel." Marlin drove them back as fast as he could to their encampment. Howard admits he barely remembers what happened after he was wounded. What he does recall is thinking, upon his arrival at a field hospital, "maybe this is the end of it for me." In treating Howard, one problem immediately confronted the medical staff. Howard's blood type is AB, but the hospital had run out of that. Another patient, an African American soldier whose name Howard only remembers as "Clarence," was lying on another bed in the tent. His arm was broken. For Howard, Clarence luckily was also AB. A doctor directly transfused Howard from Clarence. Many others, if not most, white American soldiers would have had a problem with this procedure because of racial prejudice. Not Howard. As he amusingly puts it, "To this day, I tell people I have black blood in me." Howard returned to his company less than two weeks later. He found hot showers available to the men because of his and Marlin's escapade with the coils. Given that "luxury," Howard judged his wound to have been worth it.

Even though he was on limited duty because of injury, Howard still went out on patrols and performed engineer duties with his unit. One of the latter led to the most powerful war memory Howard carries with him to this day. The village of Bleialf stood in the sector the 106th held responsibility for. The 81<sup>st</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion received orders to repair a bridge in Bleialf. Howard and others were sent out to do so. While in the village, in Howard's words, "I

had my first run in with hand-to-hand combat. They call it ‘baptism under fire.’ ” In that one-on-one encounter with a German soldier, Howard’s training kicked in. He recalled lessons learned from the NCO’s demonstrations on “unarmed defense.” Howard survived that very personal encounter with the enemy soldier, but the German did not. As Howard quietly explains, “You never forget it [the first time you must kill someone]. But then, after the first time, it becomes routine, kill or be killed. You suddenly find yourself enjoying the battle.” Somberly, Howard judges that trip into Bleialf as “a turning point of my life, one of those things I have tried to forget...” What especially stays with Howard is the countenance of the German soldier--“...you never forget that face. He appeared younger than me. What the hell was he doing there?”<sup>107</sup>

As noted earlier, the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had responsibility for a sector of the Ardennes that included the Schnee Eifel. For almost three months, the only American military activity in the Schnee Eifel consisted of light patrols.<sup>108</sup> In fact, both United States and German forces used the wooded ridge as a rest area for troops who had seen battle and to sensitize untested soldiers to what one author called “the sights and sounds of war.”<sup>109</sup> The official history of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division describes life in the Ardennes-Schnee Eifel sector in mid-December as one without surprises--“Out along the front enemy artillery fire ranged from 88s to mortars. Occasionally a snow-weighted trip wire would explode a mine or booby trap to put edge on new and straining nerves. Occasionally our outposts would glimpse the enemy...The engineers began rebuilding trails; drivers began to learn the bad places in the roads like Purple Heart Corner, on the Bleialf-Schonberg road. And so they drifted for a few days while it snowed...life in general was miserable.”<sup>110</sup> Everyone in the 106<sup>th</sup> knew that soon the drive to the Rhine River would begin, signifying the invasion of Germany. What the Americans did not know was that Adolph Hitler personally planned a major offensive to stop the Allied movement. It became known as the Battle of the Bulge.

Hitler decided to use the Ardennes as the location through which his forces would mount the German offensive. The proximity of the Ardennes to Germany and the weather were two factors Hitler knew he could use to his advantage. The Allies could not detect the troops amassing in Germany; the snow and winds would make it impossible for Allied air support to bomb the land offensive. Hitler planned to break through the American lines in the Ardennes-Eifel sector the 106<sup>th</sup> manned, thus dividing the American and British armies. German forces needed to seize two Belgian towns that possessed critical road junctions--St.Vith and Bastogne. Once in control of them, the Germans would rapidly march northwest and retake the port of Antwerp. Hitler also wanted to break the American and British united front the two Allies shared when it came to the joint strategy they agreed upon to end the war in Europe. If Hitler could make his offensive costly enough, he hoped one or both countries would negotiate an end to hostilities, freeing Germany to focus on its Eastern Front in the war with Russia. On the morning of Saturday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, when the offensive began, St. Vith stood about twelve miles behind front lines. Two days later, enemy troops had penetrated fifteen miles into American lines. The north and south flanks held, however, creating a bulge in the line that gave the battle its commonly used name.<sup>111</sup>

“A Transformation,”

## December 16 – December 17, 1945

Howard remembers all too well how December 16, 1945 began for him. His telling of the story starts on Friday night, December 15<sup>th</sup>. Howard's squad had guard duty in a sector about three miles inside of Germany, just outside of the Ardennes. He and another combat engineer, Bob Saunders, received orders to make sure no German patrols infiltrated into the town of Schonberg, near St. Vith. As Howard observes, "Little did we realize how rudely it [guard duty] was to be interrupted." Around 3:30 A.M. on the 16<sup>th</sup>, Bob woke Howard up to take over the watch. The two were at their post for about thirty minutes when they heard the sound of enemy artillery. Soon the Germans "opened up with all they had in the way of artillery. It seemed the end of the world had come and all hell broke loose." By 5:15 A.M., Howard explains that the enemy "had the range of our town, and even though there was no reveille until 6:30, every man was up and on alert. An inactive front had sprung into flaming, flaring life."

The Germans launched the offensive over a seventy-five mile front in the Eifel, specifically the Schnee Eifel ridge, and in the Belgian Ardennes.<sup>112</sup> Howard's recollection places the beginning of the offensive a little after 4:00 on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>. The official history of the 106<sup>th</sup> Division states that at 5:30 A.M., a "barrage of all calibers...including 14-inch shells...came crashing all along the line and deep into the 106<sup>th</sup> Division's sector. The 14-inch shells were dropping in St. Vith, rocking Division headquarters...Although little damage was done to personnel, the sudden impact of shelling was a thing to fill the heart with terror."<sup>113</sup> From its HQ in Schonberg, the 81<sup>st</sup> attached one of its companies to each of the infantry regiments. Combat engineers now assumed the role of infantry soldiers. Howard's platoon sergeant, Butch Wheeler, told him that their unit was to move out in support of the infantry. Company B thus became part of the 423<sup>rd</sup> Infantry.<sup>114</sup> Around 5:45 A.M. Ray Cisco approached Howard and told him to eat a quick breakfast and then prepare to move out. Howard left behind all of his belongings, including his food rations and canteen. In an hour, as Howard recalls, "we were loaded on our trucks and Germany artillery was getting close hits." The enemy was knocking down houses in Schonberg. "By this time we were really mad at those Germans, destroying so pretty a little mountain town." Howard estimates it was around 9:00 A.M. when he and the others got off the trucks. They had orders to move up to a sector where Germans had broken through the American line. The engineers were familiar with the area because they had laid mine fields and booby traps there just a few nights before.

Howard's platoon was the leading one in a triangular wedge. As Howard tells it, "It just so happened that I was scout of the platoon, so I moved forward around 100 yards in advance of the wedge, all the while psyching myself up into a confident mood. All went smoothly until I tried to cross a clearing on the descending slope of a hill." At that point, "a burst of fire" went over Howard's head. He quickly looked around for a place to hide, but not before he signaled his platoon that he had made contact with the enemy. As Howard "hit the dirt," a burst of fire emanated from a shell hole about six hundred yards away. He fired tracer bullets at the position in an attempt to get a fix on it, after which Howard emptied his clip into the hole. Two German soldiers from another position nearby ran into the woods, but no one came out of the shell hole. When the CO of the platoon reached him, Howard was told to move out again. Before he did so, he went up to the shell hole. There Howard found three enemy soldiers. As Howard solemnly explains, "It was the first time I fired my piece at another human being. I didn't like the feeling

that came over me then.” That feeling was one of satisfaction. Even after more than six decades, Howard admits, “These are things I dread talking about.”

The platoon moved on to a wooded grove where Butch Wheeler told the men “to hold up and dig in.” Howard tried to make a foxhole, but the rock made that difficult. He managed to create a depression in the earth to shield him from enemy fire. With no Germans in sight and no action taking place, the men, Howard explains, “settled down to rest and eat.” It was around noon. About thirty minutes later, he continues, “a terrific mortar fire barrage began and we were pinned down like this all day. It wasn’t until about 4:00 Sunday morning that we dared to shove on. We moved to the outskirts of Purple Heart Town.” This is the name the Americans gave to Bleialf because all of the GIs who entered it sustained wounds, thus qualifying them for the military’s award of a Purple Heart. Germans occupied the town. Company B took up a defensive position on the Schnee Eifel ridge just east of Bleialf.<sup>115</sup> It was there that Howard risked his life to help others in his unit who were pinned down by the Germans. He received the Bronze Star for his actions.

In Bleialf, another group of soldiers from Company B were pinned down in a house by enemy machine gun fire. The group included men Howard knew and liked, among them Ben, Ron, and Ray. Howard heard the German machine gun, which he guessed to be what American soldiers called a “burp gun” due to the sound it made when discharged. He assessed the situation and announced to a fellow combat engineer that they had to take the gun out. But that soldier told Howard he was “cold.” The man made it clear he did not intend to leave his foxhole. Howard tried to enlist three others, but no one seemed willing to leave the relative safety of their position above the town. This angered Howard. He, too, was cold and scared. The soldiers Howard approached did not acknowledge this last feeling in their refusal to help the Americans under enemy fire, but they must have felt it. In a letter written decades later, Howard emphasized his feelings at that moment, “I was angry and wanted to do what we were here to do--fight!”<sup>116</sup>

Howard realized that if anything was to be done to save the men of Company B trapped in the house, he would have to do it alone. Howard reasoned that if he waited until it became darker, he could go on a rise and take out the gun himself with the two grenades he carried. He admits to being scared, but “I really had no choice.” Howard waited a short time and then proceeded with his plan. He made it to the upward slope from where he “heaved a grenade” into the machine gun nest. That action “surprised the hell out of the Germans.” The explosion killed two, but three still posed a threat not only to the men of Company B in Bleialf, but also to Howard whose action now made him a target. Before the 81<sup>st</sup> had shipped out from the States, the Army issued Howard a M1 Garand rifle to replace the Springfield one he had been using. He judged it to be less accurate than the Springfield, but the Garand had more firepower. Howard used it on the remaining enemy soldiers. Today he adds, “Thank the Lord for the rapid fire of the Garand.” Howard made it into Bleialf. But he could not find his friend Ben, thus he was not sure if he had saved him or the others. It was for his actions, irrespective of what happened to the engineers in the house, that the Army awarded Howard the Bronze Star. His citation, dated January 27, 1945, reads in part, “Despite the accurate fire of the enemy, plus a terrific artillery and mortar fire barrage, Pvt. Sharpel advanced on the position. Working his way as close to the enemy as he could, he rose to his feet and fired into enemy fortifications.” In his estimation, the

transformation Howard underwent in the course of the war began on Saturday, December 16, 1944. His time as a POW, he explains, completed it.

With orders to secure the ridge that overlooked Bleialf, Howard found himself and his fellow engineers in “a heavy artillery zone.” As he puts it, “the quiet front had suddenly come to life.” Howard dug in behind some haystacks. Other members of his unit were nearby. The Germans were not close enough to be seen, but the Americans heard the enemy saying, in German, “come here.” Finally Howard and the others in his squad saw the “Krauts,” who fired burp guns into the haystack area. Howard found himself and Tom, another soldier in his unit, alone. As he recalls, “The Germans had us now on three sides and rapidly converging on the fourth side.” As Howard and Tom changed positions to dodge enemy fire, “it became a game of ring around the haystack. Thank God for the firepower of the M1.” He and Tom decided to withdraw down a draw where a slope led to some bushes about two hundred yards away. As Howard adds with some amusement, he and Tom “crawled and crawled as fast as any lizard.” After going about one hundred yards, the two men decided to make a run for the bushes. Tom went first as Howard covered him, but the Germans still fired at Tom. “This really scared me. I was afraid for Tom.” Howard fired two rounds and took off for the bushes. Once he got there, he could not find Tom anywhere. Howard decided to move toward the direction of his platoon. It was getting light by now. Another member of his unit, Jim, spotted Howard and showed him a place to use for cover. It was then that Howard saw Tom, huddled in a nearby foxhole.

The first squad was on reconnaissance, but it returned to the unit after a German ambush. As Howard adds, “the Huns were moving toward our position.” His squad decided to set up its own ambush. After a few minutes of “impatient waiting,” the first Germans came into view. Still the Americans held their fire. Tom counted thirty-five of the enemy approaching them, most carrying burp guns. Howard summarizes the next minutes--“Our ambush was a noisy success. In less than three minutes we wiped out this threat to our right flank. What a bloody mess. What a terrible thing, but I guess I was changing. We were gaining confidence in our fighting ability. Maybe we were getting overconfident. Burp guns opened up on us from the direction of the haystack we had left earlier.” Howard was sent to try to outflank the Germans. When he got to the edge of the bushes, he saw four Germans with two burp machine guns that fired 1,500 rounds a minute That was three times faster than the speed of the American .30-caliber machine guns. After setting his sights from the safety a tree stump provided, Howard took aim at the first German gunner and then at the other three. He got them all. Looking back on this with honesty and sensitivity, Howard analyzes a “transformation” he was undergoing, yet one he might not have realized at that point in time. The change in him had begun on the first day of the Battle of the Bulge, Saturday, December 16, 1944. What occurred the next day completed the transformation. “Here on this Sunday morning I was rapidly becoming an efficient killer. What was happening to me? I was actually beginning to enjoy it. I kept looking for more targets...Kill or be killed. That is what had been drummed into us for so long. What bothered me was that I was starting to enjoy it.”

By noon on Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, Howard’s lieutenant told the platoon to rejoin the other platoons to reorganize. To do this, the Americans had to get over a nearby hill. Howard explains that, “This sounded easy enough, but it later proved differently.” Jim, a member of the unit, became the first to try for it. He got to the crest of the hill, but then was hit in the shoulder by

enemy fire. Jim dropped his rifle as he clutched his shoulder. The next enemy round hit him in the head. With a deep sigh, Howard remembers, "I heard him groan a little. Then there was quiet." Blackie volunteered to try next. He reached the crest of the hill although a bullet hit him in the wrist. Another haystack gave Blackie some cover. "Then it was my turn," Howard recounts, "But I figured here goes nothing." The former high school, college, and ASTP track athlete ran, as he phrases it, like that proverbial "bat out of hell." As Howard continues, "I reached the top of the hill. I heard shells buzzing around me and ran and ran, lower and faster. Just as I was about pooped, I spotted one of the 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon's machine guns' position." Howard leaped into the foxhole. Although he did not know the exact location of the Command Post (CP), he knew its general location. "I took off and ran again. Shells started buzzing again, hitting the dirt all around me." Howard felt some relief when he saw a corporal in the 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon, Ed, motion that Howard should join him in his foxhole. "It was a tight fit," Howard notes, "but it was protection [from the shelling]. The Lord indeed was with me this day." Some of the men from Company B of the 81<sup>st</sup> were in Bleialf, while others, like Howard, were isolated on a nose of the ridge north of the town.<sup>117</sup> Germans overran the town early on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>118</sup> Official histories explain in dry detail the fate of various units of Company B that day. One, for example, recounts, "...on the extreme right flank of the regiment, south of Bleialf, elements of Company B, 81<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion, were overrun [by the Germans]..."<sup>119</sup> Howard was in one of those "elements," and the details of what he experienced was anything but dry.

Looking around, Howard spotted Blackie near a haystack, dodging rounds as they landed close to him. Howard also saw a German in a tree behind his friend. The enemy soldier had covered himself with a camouflage cape, but the outline of his body gave him away. Howard took aim at the German. As he concludes, "I guess I added another notch to that rifle. Blackie waved to me. I had saved my buddy. That made it alright." Howard next looked in the direction of Bleialf, which he calls even today by its nickname, "Purple Heart Town." Howard continues, "I saw smoke coming from a window in a stone house a long way off. At last I had located that sniper who had been taking out our guys." Given the distance, however, Howard knew he might not hit the German in spite of his expertise with the M1. But as he adds, "I could make him pull his rotten neck in. I put a fresh clip of armor-piercing rounds into my rifle and peppered all eight rounds into that window." The sniper was not heard from again, whether it was from fear for his own safety or because Howard hit his target.

Around 2:30 P.M. on the 17<sup>th</sup>, Howard, still on a ridge overlooking Bleialf, heard tanks in the distance. He knew Company B's situation would quickly get even worse than it had been because they had no antitank protection. For about fifteen minutes, as Howard recollects, "We underwent a terrific 88 mm bombardment." Soon after that, an order came down to surrender. Howard remembers his reaction. "This was the biggest surprise of my life. What the hell are we doing, surrendering? I thought we were doing okay. But an order's an order. I reluctantly scattered the trigger housing of my rifle." Howard adds that he did not need to destroy any ammunition because, as he points out, "I only had one round left." Today he can still recall staring at that one round. Note that even though Howard recognized how low he and undoubtedly others in his company were on ammunition, he still reacted strongly to the order to lay down their arms. Howard's initial estimation noted earlier ("I thought we were doing okay") ran counter to the reality of the situation Company B found itself in. It became, literally, surrounded by the enemy. Eleven months later, the War Department conferred upon the 81<sup>st</sup>

Engineer Combat Battalion a Distinguished Unit Citation. In it, the military leadership recognized Company B for “displaying courage and initiative under heavy fire, until completely cut off from other units of the division.”<sup>120</sup> Yet that reality also could not accept what soldiers are trained to avoid--surrender to enemy forces.

Americans in particular have a difficult time accepting surrender. Their national culture enforces a “can do” attitude and an ability to overcome odds. History furnishes numerous examples of American military forces overcoming disadvantageous situations. In the early years of the American Revolution and the Civil War, for example, the Continental Army and the Union forces, respectively, suffered one defeat after another. Lacking in studies of American military history, however, is the story of prisoners of war. POWs were a part of every war the nation fought, yet their history was seldom studied and certainly not applauded. The image of the Alamo is what resonated with Americans beginning at a young age--death “with their boots on” rather than surrender. During the early months of World War II, people on the Home Front followed daily newspaper accounts from the Pacific Theater of the defensive stands American forces took on Wake Island and Bataan against the invading Japanese. Yet both battles ended with United States forces becoming greatly outnumbered by the enemy. On Bataan in April 1942, approximately 70,000 American and Filipino defenders of the Philippines were “surrendered” by their high command as their situation became more and more untenable in the face of overwhelming Japanese forces. (Many Americans on Bataan carefully use their words when describing what happened to them on April 4, 1942--they themselves did not “surrender.” Rather, they “were surrendered.”<sup>121</sup>) A similar situation confronted the leaders of Company B. Low on ammunition and greatly outnumbered by German forces, the only logical decision to make was to surrender. The mind had to understand this, but the spirit did not. In a 1998 letter to Ed Wojahn, another Company B combat engineer assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon, Howard shared with his old friend how he felt on December 17, 1944 when he wrote, “Ashamed is the way I have felt all of these years--about a surrender that angers me to this day. I was and I still am a fighter. I felt betrayed by the Corps and Division Commanders [because of their decision to surrender us].”

On that date back in 1944, Howard moved alongside of Tom as the men of Company B began to carry out the orders they had received. Both of them raised their hands into the air. Howard movingly recounts what happened next. “As we walked towards those Aryan bastards, I passed Jim’s body, and there was Bob. He had died on his knees, as if in solemn prayer. They told me this next one was Ray. His false teeth were all we had to go by. Next we passed Ron; his face was in the dirt, a bullet hole in his helmet. I had seen enough.” Spotting Blackie, Howard went over to help him. His buddy had been wounded, but Blackie needed assistance more because of the shock the wound resulted in than because of the injury itself. Even at this point, Howard remembers, “I still could not realize that I was a prisoner.” In what was undoubtedly a smart move, he did not allow his captors to know that he spoke and understood German.

The Germans assigned some of their soldiers, who Howard categorizes as “a couple of sad sacks or misfits,” to take the prisoners to the rear and into Purple Heart Town. As the Americans walked toward Bleialf, Howard realized how thirsty he was. They eventually reached their destination, a clearing. Suddenly, Howard experienced a moment of what he characterized as “joy” when he “bumped into Ben [another soldier from his unit]. I thought he had been killed.”

That delight could still be detected in his voice sixty-seven years later as he shared this story. Howard and others watched Ben go through his pockets, discarding personal items he did not want the Germans to possibly take. They decided to do the same. But as it turned out, Howard did not have the time to do so. An enemy soldier took his watch but did not find the crushed pack of Camel cigarettes in his back pocket. The German did see, however, a small piece of paper Howard carried inside of his pocket-sized New Testament. Howard's mother had given it to him just before he left home in 1943 for Basic Training. The words, which Howard calls "a saying," were not in Lillian Sharpell's handwriting. Yet they obviously meant something to her--"Write your name with love, mercy and kindness on the hearts of those about you, and you will never be forgotten." Reading it, the Germans found the statement "funny," as Howard explains. At this point, he guessed that they were "interrogators" since they were able to read English. As Howard continues, they "laughed loudly. I think that it was then that my transformation, which started December 16, 1944, was completed. My attitude and outlook on life changed and I TOO found my Mother's words 'frightening' and, yes, 'funny.' " From that point on, Howard adds, the words his mother believed in no longer had meaning for him. "How I had changed," he quietly but firmly points out. Soon after this episode, Howard wrote his own "saying." It read, "Death stands above me, whispering low, I know not what into my ear. Of His strange language, all I DO know, there is not a word of fear." Decades later, Howard acknowledges these lines contain, "Strange words for someone barely out of their teens, but I guess that's war."<sup>122</sup>

In spite of what happened with the piece of paper from his mother, at one point early after Company B was surrendered Howard benefitted from an episode of compassion on the part of the enemy. Earlier that day, after attacking the German machine gun nest, incoming 88 mm rounds landed near him. Even so, he delayed jumping into a foxhole for cover because it was filled with ice and snow. Without protection, the impact from one shell knocked his rifle out of his hands. Shrapnel cut his wrists. Howard treated the injury himself using some sulfur powder and a gauze bandage from his first aid kit. He also used snow and ice to help stop the bleeding. After being captured, the Germans saw his injured wrists. A German medic cleaned it and put on a new bandage. At that point in time, Howard recognized the humanity in his enemy. But these soldiers were, as he identifies them, "front line troops" who tended to treat the prisoners much better than ones they encountered later. What Howard experienced over the next four months with the German guards who served "behind-the-lines" re-enforced his transformation even more.

### A Christmas Eve Realization: "We were not out of the war"

After a long walk down a road, the Americans reached a small church outside of Prum, a German city close to the country's western border. They spent their first night as POWs, a Sunday evening, in the house of worship. The circumstances of their situation as well as their location might have prompted prayer among the men, silent though it may have been. What Howard remembers about the sounds of that night is the "moaning of the wounded." Some hours before, when the enemy first gathered the prisoners together, Howard realized how thirsty he was. In the last two days, whenever there was a respite from the battle, he had no opportunity to

drink from his canteen since he left it behind early on the morning of December 16<sup>th</sup> when his unit moved out of the Schonberg area. For about a day and a half, Howard used snow as the source of his water, “drinking” it whenever he could. The men had not eaten since Saturday morning when the offensive began. Yet as Howard adds, “All the Germans gave us during the night [of December 17<sup>th</sup>] was some water. A long, cold night finally dragged by.” On the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Americans marched all morning before the Germans allowed them to stop for a rest. Throughout that day, the prisoners received no food or water. The guards, as Howard remembers, “kept telling us, ‘You will eat when you get to where we’re going.’” And, he points out, the Germans uttered this promise in English.

Late Monday night, the march ended when the men arrived at the German town of Gerolstein. They would stay there for several days. In Howard’s estimation, that name is one “ex-POWs will never forget.” The guards took the men to a warehouse. There Howard received his first food in about two and a half days. The meal proved to be a meager allotment, however, about five crackers made from a coarse grain and some German ersatz coffee. The Americans tried to fall asleep on the floor of the warehouse, but guards soon woke them up. The captors wanted to interrogate their prisoners. It was Tuesday morning, December 19<sup>th</sup>. As summarized by Howard, the men felt that “our job was to play dumb and stump the Hun and don’t tell [them] a damn thing except name, rank, and serial number.” Howard found himself, in his own words, “before an arrogant Nazi intelligence officer. He spoke perfect English, with only a slight German accent. I gave him name, rank, and serial number after which he proceeded to ask seemingly unimportant questions.” For example, the interrogator observed that Howard had blond hair. The German followed this by asking if the Sharpells were German. Howard remained silent. The Nazi officer, “defeated in his attempt to gain any information,” Howard continues, “let out a blood-curdling ‘Rous,’ [out] and I was removed from the room.” Note his use of the word “defeated” for the Nazi officer. For Howard and others, withholding any information from the enemy gave them a needed boost of pride and positioned the interrogator as the loser in this test of wills.

The next morning, Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, the Germans gave Howard and the other Americans more crackers and more of “that damned coffee.” Throughout the day, additional prisoners arrived. Howard recalls that the Germans gave the wounded some medical attention, “which consisted chiefly of cleaning the wound and covering it with captured American sulfur powder. They then wrapped it with white crepe paper.” Howard still had not let the Germans know that he could understand their conversations. As such, they spoke unguarded. In one of their exchanges, some Germans referred to a work party they would soon be rounding up. From what Howard overheard, the Americans were to repair part of the railroad line that Allied bombers had taken out. The prisoners would also clear out rubble from buildings destroyed by aerial bombing. Howard wanted to avoid work on that detail. He believed, “In our condition and on these rations, that would have proven disastrous.” Thus when Howard learned he was on “a shipping list,” to be sent out of Gerolstein, he judged himself as “lucky.” It appears Howard and others left the night of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Before departing, the Germans fed the Americans some water and hot flour soup. Howard explains that it “tasted terrible. Why it remained in my stomach I’ll never know. God, I thought I was going to throw it up when I was trying to drink it.” But he got it down. Before boarding the train, the Germans divided the Americans into groups of ten. They then issued the prisoners two packages of crackers and a can of fatty meat. This was to be

divided between the ten men during the journey. The Americans rode the train not on passenger cars, but in boxcars. These railroad cars became infamous in the recollections of POWs held by the Germans.

The World War I era boxcars were known as “40-and-8ers,” a reference to their capacity to carry either forty men or eight horses. Many World War II veterans became all too familiar with the French phrase for them, “40 hommes-8 chevaux.” Hitler’s government used the same boxcars to transport Jews and others identified as enemies of the state to concentration camps.<sup>123</sup> Howard judges them to have been “much smaller than our boxcars in the States.” In spite of their size, Germans still “herded,” as Howard puts it, about seventy prisoners into one car. There was barely enough room for any of us to sit down, so we took turns.” It did not take long before the men recognized that an issue aside from space confronted them. Howard identifies it early in his recollection of the train trip. “The problem of toilet facilities became acute.” In spite of the limited room, Americans decided to use one end of the boxcar as a toilet area. Howard points out, though, that “even this situation did not serve to hamper our appetites. We soon consumed the few rations allotted to us, and we hungered for more.” He also remembers the men suffering from “an unquenchable thirst. I resorted to licking the frosted metal rivets, the rivets on the walls of the boxcars where they tied up horses.” (Howard further explains that the frost came from the moisture in the breath of the prisoners.) He believed that “the Germans were doing their best to make beasts of us, but we were damned if they were going to do it.”

During the time Howard stood in the boxcar, he had been “testing” the door. It appeared that just one plank, nailed over it, kept it closed. As Howard continues the story of that train ride, “It wasn’t long before I managed to force it [the plank] loose. The train had slowed down, so I slip the door open a bit and dropped outside. It was dark. I landed on all fours in a clump of bushes.” Howard laid there quietly for several minutes, waiting for the train to completely pass by, after which time he crawled away from the tracks. Once he was at a distance from the rails, “I got up and ran deeper into the woods. My heart was pounding like a steam engine, but I was determined. I ran and ran.” Howard tumbled down an embankment right into a group of German soldiers who were eating a meal. They had been manning an 88 mm anti-aircraft gun position. The Germans did not, in Howard’s estimation, “know what to do with me.” For the first time since he had been surrendered, Howard spoke to the enemy soldiers in German; he felt safe in doing this since he knew he would not be with them for long. The question they asked him immediately was if he had any “smokes.” Howard gave the Germans his Camel cigarettes, crumpled from being so long in his back pocket. One of them then inquired as to whether or not he had eaten. When Howard answered in the negative, the German gave him some beef stew. If he could have done so, Howard confesses that he would have stayed with these front-line troops. As when he was first captured, he felt such enemy units treated the POWs better than Germans in the rear. After they took him to a Gestapo officer for questioning, Howard “was thrown back into a boxcar, but this time the door was really nailed shut.” Once again, he found himself with other POWs, squeezed into another 40-and-8er.

Howard admits that “keeping track of time was very difficult. One day seemed to run into another.” He believes the POWs rode the train in their boxcar for “a couple of days” before they stopped at a railroad switching yard. The date was Sunday, December 24, 1944. Seven days before, Howard and Company B had been surrendered. The German guards moved the men out

of the boxcar into a warehouse. Howard knows there were 399 of them because, as he explains, “we counted heads.” The building quickly became crowded, holding more men than it had room for. Howard tried to stay near a door, but he was forced deeper into the center of the warehouse. He found himself in the middle of the large room, near the chimney. The Germans distributed one blanket to each POW. The “bare floor” as he describes it, became their bed, but it proved colder than even the frigid December air inside of the warehouse. Howard conceived of an idea to make the best of their accommodations. He and another prisoner would share one of the blankets by laying it on the cement underneath them. Then the two would use the other blanket to cover themselves up. As Howard explains, “We paired up so we could have something under us as well as above us.”

That Christmas Eve night, the Royal Air Force (RAF) conducted a bombing raid on the railroad terminal. The bombs, as Howard recounts, “Kept coming closer and closer. The concussions from the bombs became, in Howard’s words, “terrific. Parts of the ceiling became loose, falling down on us.” Howard crawled into the chimney’s hearth to protect himself. In the chaos that existed after the raid ended, Howard made his way to the warehouse door and thought of escaping. But he immediately realized this was not the time or place for such an action. The Americans soon learned that some of their fellow prisoners became part of the casualties in two separate instances. Howard recounts one of these “direct hits,” as he calls them--“We learned that fifty-two of our officers in a hut next to the warehouse had been killed by one of the U.S. bombs dropped by the RAF.” A second “direct hit” occurred in the switching yard. The bombs fell on a few of the boxcars from which POWs had not yet been unloaded. The Germans ordered some of the POWs to dispose of the bodies. Howard, unluckily, became part of that work crew. As he remembers it, “It was a tough assignment. We were led [to the boxcar] to gather up the remains and bury them in a common grave.” He pauses in the retelling, adding just the singular word, “Tough” after the previous statement. Howard followed that word with the rhetorical questions, “To whom did this mangled arm belong? Whose foot was this? We did the best we could and this was far from enough. It was then that we knew that as prisoners we were not out of the war by a long shot.” Like so many other images, this one is seared in Howard’s memories. “I still see it today,” he quietly acknowledges. It helps to explain his understandable silence for so many decades on his wartime experiences.

The night of December 24<sup>th</sup> contained an especially poignant moment. The warehouse at one point became very quiet, each prisoner perhaps thinking of not only the enormity of what they had just survived but also of past Christmases. One voice broke the silence. A POW, at the far end of the warehouse, began to sing “Silent Night.” His voice, Howard remembers, was beautiful. Perhaps he had sung in a church choir back home. Soon all of the prisoners joined in. Even the guards at the door sang the song, in German, of course. Come Christmas morning, “The Christmas turkey and puddings were only in our mind’s eye,” Howard observes. The guards did have one gift for them, however. The Germans brought in bushel baskets filled with apples that they distributed to the men before forcing them back into the boxcars. This last leg of the journey took the POWs to one of the prison camps known as a “stalag,” an abbreviation of the German word *stammlager*, meaning “permanent camp.”<sup>124</sup> This first stalag, however, was not meant to be permanent. Howard and the others arrived at Stalag XIIA near the town of Limburg in western Germany, not far from the Belgian border. Defined by Howard as “a transient camp,” from

Stalag XIIA the Germans eventually dispersed the men to other camps deeper inside of the country. It was here, as Howard explains, that their captors began a file on each prisoner.

Howard describes a typical day at Stalag XIIA as one that began around 7:30 A.M., just when it was getting light outside in the first month of winter. Again using the word that in Howard's mind most accurately denotes the action taken, the Germans "herded" the POWs outside of their barracks for a roll call. The guards formed them into what Howard describes as "companies of one hundred men each." In such a lineup, the men stood in what he remembers was a "snow-covered field in columns of five." According to Howard, the roll call took one and a half hours to complete. Once that task was done, a few of the prisoners brought food to the assembled group. In detailing what one might be tempted to call a "breakfast," Howard voiced a small laugh when he recalled what the meal consisted of--"unsweetened lukewarm black ersatz coffee and a slice of bread that varied in size from a half inch to an inch in thickness." The Germans also gave the POWs "a small pat" of what seemed to Howard to be "mineral margarine." A special condiment might be added as he explains, "Sometimes if we were lucky, and the Germans got a little soft-headed because we were soft-hearted, we got a drop of what the Heinnies called jam. It was sweet." Howard also remembers in detail the next mealtime. "This was either what we called 'grass soup' or 'dirty cabbage soup' or 'pea soup,' although the pea was a singular one. If we were fortunate, we got some barley soup." The amount of soup never exceeded, in Howard's estimate, more than two-thirds of a canteen cup. The "dinner" given to the prisoners between 4:30 and 5:00 P.M. consisted of what Howard describes as "watery potato peel soup." The Germans doled out small amounts. On pointing that out, Howard adds, "Little did we realize what the future held for us," recollecting that in the weeks and months to come, some of their allotments would be even smaller as they moved on to other stalags. Once such a day ended, Howard explains that, "We had to try to sleep through a cold, bitter night on a hard, damp floor."

As if the psychological challenges confronted by POWs did not tax them enough, they also suffered from physical complaints caused by or aggravated by their status behind the lines. Howard became sick with an illness that in the States would not have been that dangerous. However, in the cold winter conditions of Stalag XIIA, and malnourished as he was, it could have proven fatal. Howard, in his estimation, "had picked up a bad case of bronchitis." One morning he fainted at roll call. When he awoke, he found himself in the camp hospital. But Howard balks at even calling it that. "Hospital? Believe me, it was one in name only. I felt sorry for those guys in the hospital and for the doctors, much more for those wretched pieces of humanity they had to attend [to]. Those doctors had no medical equipment and could render no more than first aid." The sleeping accommodations proved, however, to be an improvement over what the patients had in the barracks. In the hospital, they laid on single-level bunks beds. While the wooden boards were "hard on our bony frames, it was still drier and warmer than the damp stalag floor." The morning after he arrived in the hospital, another prisoner appeared in the bed next to Howard's. His name was Bob Chaffey, a member of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Bob was, in Howard's words, "destined to be my buddy for the duration." Howard and Bob remained in the hospital until the third week of January. By that time, Howard had read his pocket-sized copy of the New Testament twice. He also went through some of the Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries by Dorothy L. Sayers and several other whodunits. The title of one in particular struck him as ironic, *Hungry House*. While in what Howard calls "that poor excuse for a hospital," he

remembers that he “had time to think. My thoughts were but of one thing--escape. I soon learned the value of ‘liberty’ the hard way. Most Americans take their freedom for granted.” Howard never would do so again.

## A Family Waits and Prays

Throughout Howard’s first month as a POW, his parents and grandparents anxiously awaited news of him. The stories of what families on the Home Front endured during World War II is overlooked in general histories of the era. Volumes sit on shelves today that detail the everyday lives of the men and women in uniform. Some of them wrote memoirs. Yet aside from a small number of exceptions, no one asked the immediate families to describe their lives.<sup>125</sup> Continuing a custom begun in World War I, Americans hung Blue Star Banners in their windows. These “service flags” designated that a member of the family was in the military. Civilians in the States willingly participated in rationing, bond drives, and countless other activities on the Home Front in support of the war effort.<sup>126</sup> Families did all of this as they awaited letters from relatives, praying that no telegram arrived from Washington D.C. informing them that their loved one had died in service to the country. If this happened, the Blue Star on the banner became a gold one. What families of POWs and those Missing in Action (MIAs) suffered is a story in itself, different in significant ways from those who had a loved one come home. Relatives of those who served could follow, based on media reports, the movements of the



military divisions their family member had been assigned to. Relatives could plot such movements on a map, often laid out on the kitchen or dining room table. Once Japan or Germany captured a member of the American military, however, the certitude of where he or she was disappeared. “Not knowing” thrust families into a state of limbo. The government sent a telegram stating that a serviceperson had been declared “Missing in Action” to whoever the induction papers designated as the contact individual. Another telegram followed when, and if, the International Red Cross (IRC) received verification from Japan or Germany that an American had been taken as a prisoner. Duff and Lillian Sharpell received the first telegram, but not the second.

They knew, however, in mid-December 1944 that Howard might be a casualty. Word reached the States that the Germans had mounted an offensive in the area around the Ardennes Forest. At the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge, the media within the United States reported that Hitler’s forces had surrounded a new Army division. Government censorship prohibited the press from identifying that division, but families of those in the 106<sup>th</sup> knew that it had recently arrived in Europe. On January 18, 1945, just one month and two days after the Germans began their push through Allied lines, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson divulged some statistics on the fate of the 106<sup>th</sup>. While the Allies drove the enemy back, the cost just to the 106<sup>th</sup> had been enormous. Stimson reported 416 killed, 1,246 wounded, and 7,001 missing in action. It was much too early to know how many of those MIAs were POWs. That information came through the IRC, but only after German officials shared the names of those they captured with the international organization. It might be months before the IRC could forward these names to the

relatives of the missing. How families of those in the 106<sup>th</sup> responded to MIA news resulted in what one reporter in November 1946 judged to be “one of the most remarkable civilian volunteer agencies to appear during the war, the Agony Grapevine.”<sup>127</sup>

Duward B. Frampton in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the father of a corporal with the 422<sup>nd</sup>, began the grassroots effort to identify the names of those who the Germans took as prisoners from the 106<sup>th</sup>. He enlisted American civilians in this work. Frampton and volunteers who possessed short-wave radios tried to tune in each night to German propaganda broadcasts. Such shows often released the names of Americans taken as POWs. On one night, Frampton collected the names of one hundred and twenty-five men from the 106<sup>th</sup> that the Germans publicized as their prisoners. The Associated Press (AP) picked up on the work of Frampton and his network. The group became known as the Agony Grapevine. The name emphasized what the families were going through and the unofficial nature of what they found out. Once other areas of the country ran the AP story, more “branches” of the grapevine took root in communities far away from Pittsburgh. When a family member contacted Frampton, the two exchanged information in an attempt to whittle the 7,001 MIAs down to POWs numbers. Frampton sent letters to families who had contacted him. In the correspondence, he listed the names, serial numbers, home addresses, and next of kin for all of the men his grapevine identified as POWs based upon German radio broadcasts. Many times the Agony Grapevine told families that their loved one was alive, although a prisoner, “long before the War Department came through with an official confirmation.”<sup>128</sup> For those he could not provide information to, he urged them to continue to pray for the safety of their relatives. As far as Howard knows, his parents were not part of the Agony Grapevine. No one had to tell the Sharpells and the Trostels, however, to pray. They did that without any directive.

The Army reported Howard as missing in action as of December 21, 1944.<sup>129</sup> This was four days after his capture, a lapse of time that testifies to the confusion that marked the days after the Battle of the Bulge began. About six weeks later, on Thursday evening, February 1, 1945, it appears that someone in the Sharpell family attended a New York City meeting of the American Red Cross (ARC) because Howard still has the program from that gathering among the family papers. The specified purpose of the meeting was to share information with the POWs’ “next of kin.” In all probability, Duff and/or Lillian went. The evening began at 7:00 P.M. in an armory on 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Park Avenue. The head of the New York State ARC chapter called the gathering to order. After an invocation by a chaplain, seven speakers shared information with the audience. They were a lieutenant colonel from the Prisoner of War Information Bureau in the Office of the Provost Marshal General, a civilian consultant from the ARC’s Prisoners of War Program, and the Executive Secretary from the YMCA’s War Prisoners Aid office. In addition to these officials, four repatriated and escaped prisoners spoke. With the ARC giving more than half of the speaking positions to men who had been POWs, it sent a subtle message to family members in the audience. Their loved one, too, would come home. Baseball announcer Walter “Red” Barber facilitated a question and answer period after the seven formal presentations. We do not know if Duff or Lillian posed any questions.

About two weeks after the ARC meeting, Major General J.A. Ulio, the military officer in Washington D.C. who acted as the liaison between the government and POW families, wrote a lengthy letter to Duff. As the Adjutant General, Ulio notified relatives of all MIA and POW

servicemen and women as to their loved one's status. What is unusual about the February 17, 1945 correspondence he sent to Howard's father is the person who asked Ulio to write the letter. In his first line, the Major General identified who that was--"At the request of Mrs. Roosevelt, I am writing you concerning your son...who has been reported missing in action..."<sup>130</sup> Ulio took pains to convey an empathy to Howard's father. He explained that he understood "the great anxiety" the Sharpells were experiencing. Requests from MIA families, Ulio continued, "are probably the most distressing type of inquiries" the War Department received. The government could not answer such questions unless the Germans forwarded information they controlled. To date, none of the POW lists Ulio's office had contained the name of Duff and Lillian's son. The Major General cautioned that it could take "several months" before German officials furnished the IRC in Geneva with complete lists of those recently taken as prisoners. Ulio quoted at length from Stimson's January 18<sup>th</sup> statement citing the casualty numbers from the 106<sup>th</sup>. He hoped that "a great number" of the MIAs will eventually be reclassified as POWs. The Adjutant General ended the letter with a sympathetic note--"My heartfelt sympathy is with you during this distressing period. I fervently hope that an encouraging report concerning your son will soon be forthcoming." Duff wrote a short reply on his birthday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>. In it he thanked Ulio for the Major General's "very warm and informative letter." Howard's father informed Ulio that he "was confident that the military authorities are doing their utmost to locate men missing in action."<sup>131</sup>

One can only guess at how First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt became involved in this exchange. Howard believes the link may have been John Foster Dulles. He came from a family



Duff 1943

of statesmen. Dulles' maternal grandfather served as Secretary of State under President Benjamin Harrison in the late nineteenth century; his uncle held that same position in Woodrow Wilson's administration in the early twentieth century. (Under President Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1950s, Dulles, too, became Secretary of State.) During World War II, Dulles lived in New York City where he headed a prestigious law firm. He held no appointment in the Roosevelt administration, but he had many contacts in Washington D.C. According to Howard, Dulles and Duff served as trustees of New York City's Third Park Avenue Church. It could be that Howard's father asked Dulles for help in getting information on his son.

What the Sharpell family may not have realized is that obtaining information on MIAs after the Battle of the Bulge proved much more difficult than it had been earlier. Usually, Ulio's office accounted for more than fifty percent of MIAs within a few weeks or months of their disappearance.<sup>132</sup> But in the period after Hitler mounted his offensive, it became much harder to gain information from the German government for obvious reasons. Just the sheer number of additional Allied soldiers who became POWs during the battle--some 23,000--overwhelmed the bookkeeping process. While the various prison camps registered men such as Howard within their own bureaucracy, sharing that information with the IRC was not a priority with the Nazi government. The Battle of the Bulge failed to turn the Allies back and they continued their movement into Germany. Howard empathizes with what his mother went through in those four months of not knowing what had happened to her son--"Oh, how much she must have suffered. After all, I was her only child."

Along with the above letters, the Sharpell family papers also contain an ARC map of Germany that identifies the POW camps “based on information available to December 31, 1944.” Given that date, it could be that this map was distributed at the ARC February 1<sup>st</sup> meeting Duff and/or Lillian attended. How often Howard’s parents, especially Lillian, must have looked at that map, praying that her only child was interned in one of those camps. For families, having a relative who was a POW was preferable to having one as a MIA since it meant the person was alive. Duff and Lillian believed their son was a prisoner. Going down the full page of camp names must have overwhelmed the Sharpells as they tried to imagine where Howard was everyday and what he was experiencing. The ARC identified forty-two POW camps for enlisted men. As it turned out, Howard eventually went to Stalag IVB outside of Muhlberg. He arrived there after a second escape attempt that began with another ride in a boxcar.

## Stalag IVB

During his hospitalization at Stalag XIIA, Howard’s friends from Company B had been transferred to camps deeper inside of Germany. Late in January, the same thing happened to Howard and Bob. They saw their names on “a shipping list,” as Howard calls it. The two were glad to leave Stalag XIIA. Howard recalls with disdain, “We had had enough of this hellhole.” One idea continued to dominate his thoughts --escape. As he thinks back to that early winter in XIIA, “I was going to get out, but how, how? I was desperate, yet determined, determined to return to my lines. I didn’t care how I did it. I was going to [do so].” Late one afternoon, Howard and Bob boarded a train. Howard did not use that verb, however. He always uses “herded” whenever he refers to POWs getting on the trains. It is a word more indicative of the lack of control Americans had over their movements, the crowded conditions they encountered, and how the guards too often treated them like animals. With an audible tone of disgust in his voice, Howard explains what happened when the Germans took him and the other prisoners to the rail yard. “It was the same as before, crowded, damp, cold, [and] dirty.” Some straw lay on the floor, but the dominant cover was horse manure from the animals that had been shipped in the 40-and-8er before the POWs used it. The Americans added human waste to the stench. According to Howard, “Nine-tenths of the men had diarrhea and upset stomachs. Our steel helmets had been taken from us, and with them went our ever-ready commodes. You can imagine the mess in that boxcar after a few hours.” As in Stalag XIIA, the Germans provided the prisoners with the barest of food provisions. Even after all of these years, Howard recollects that allocation down to the smallest detail. “The Germans had given us each a slab of cheese about the size of a silver dollar and a small loaf of bread, to be divided between six men. This meant we had the difficult task of dividing and cutting that bread.” But then correcting himself, he wonders if one can even call the loaf “bread.” As Howard thinks about it, he continues. “What bread? Forty percent sawdust and seemingly fifty percent moisture. Your guess is as good as mine concerning the remaining ten percent.”

Just like in his first boxcar ride out of Gerolstein, Howard focused on the door that kept the prisoners inside. He knew it could also be a way outside. Howard “worked on that door,” he recounts. It was evening, and the darkness gave him cover. “Again I had the door open, again I was outside. It was cold and my limbs were stiff and weak. This time I waited until the train was

completely gone. When I could no longer hear it, I took off.” Howard slept in the woods that night. Early the next morning he found a jacket with the German word *landsarbeiter*, meaning “migratory worker,” imprinted on it. He wore the jacket over his Army uniform and went through a small town that he came upon. Because of the cover the jacket gave Howard, and with his ability to speak German, he did not worry about being identified as an escapee. After sleeping in the woods a second night, the next day he went into another town, some miles south of the first one. Unfortunately, it was there that Howard had one of his most brutal beatings, and it was not from any camp guards.

He shares the story with details that have not been forgotten with the passage of time. “As I walked down one side of the street, I noticed that everyone else was on the other side. I was getting suspicious when I saw six members of the Hitler Youth [organization] crossing onto my side of the street, about thirty yards in front of me. I kept walking. They reached me and grabbed hold.” More members of the gang converged on the scene. Howard quickly realized why he had become their target. People in the town had been ordered to walk on only one side of the street. And Howard had picked the wrong side. At one point in the confrontation, someone removed Howard’s jacket, exposing his United States Army uniform. Once the Hitler Youth group saw that, they became even more incensed. As he continues, “My captors now formed a column of twos and had clubs. I was told to run down the middle. To me, this was the old-time Indian gauntlet.” In spite of his weak legs, Howard ran as fast as he could. But he could not escape the punishment the Hitler Youth seemed determined to administer to him. Howard explains the moment when the young men who confronted him gained the upper hand, “I got about halfway down the line when I felt a sharp pain in the back of my head. Everything went black and the next thing I remember is waking up in what proved to be a police station.” Howard believes he was unconscious for several hours. When he regained consciousness, he suffered from “a very severe headache.” He also had difficulty focusing his eyes. The back of his head “hurt very badly.” These were probably aftereffects of a concussion he endured from the beating. The symptoms persisted for the rest of the day. The effects of the physical abuse in that gauntlet run stayed with Howard for years.<sup>133</sup> After giving Howard some black ersatz coffee and hot soup, local policemen took him to the railroad yard where they put him in yet another boxcar filled with other Americans.

After three days in the boxcar, the train arrived at *Muhlberg-am-Elbe*, the German city of Muhlberg on the Elbe River. Located in eastern Germany south of Berlin, Muhlberg lay about twenty-eight miles east of Leipzig, a major manufacturing center for the Third Reich. In September 1939, the very month and year that World War II began in Europe, the Nazis opened a camp for internees some five miles outside of Muhlberg. It became known as Stalag IVB, which holds the dubious distinction of being the largest POW camp in Germany.<sup>134</sup> At one point, the German military interned as many as 16,000 prisoners there, even though the camp was meant to hold no more than 10,000.<sup>135</sup> Howard estimates he arrived at Stalag IVB at the end of January 1945. He admits that his “spirits were down,” but, he adds, “I still, still kept thinking about escape. I had to. I would rather be dead than endure this.” As if being a prisoner by itself was not difficult enough to deal with, the treatment the POWs received on their arrival humiliated them even more. Howard describes it--“Once inside the enclosure at Stalag IVB, we all underwent a delousing shower. Our clothes went one way and we the other. After a short shower, our clothes were returned to us after they had gone through a gas chamber [to kill lice

that might have been on them].” The German guards assigned each man a number. Camp authorities issued Howard and the others a POW tag that they were to wear, bearing their identification number.<sup>136</sup> Howard’s number was 320151.

A central avenue that ran east-west bisected Stalag IVB, dividing it in two. Barracks on each side of the avenue housed the prisoners. (The English POWs called the buildings “huts.”) After the men showered and dressed, the guards assigned them to their quarters. For Howard, his turned out to be a “hut occupied by British NCOs.” He estimates over one hundred “Brits” lived in the building. A few, perhaps seven, Americans joined them. Howard still remembers the number given to this building, 47A. To his surprise and delight, Bob Chaffey from the hospital at Stalag XIIA was also in that hut. They spent the next few months talking about history and math. Bob, like Howard, had been in his freshman year of college when he entered the Army. Howard believes that talking about these subjects, “kept our minds busy. It kept us from thinking about the war.” As it turned out, the two friends had to bunk together because there was only one bed available. The Germans gave each prisoner a blanket. Sharing the covers would keep Howard and Bob warmer. If the sleeping conditions conformed to what Howard had experienced at XIIA, the food did not. That surprised him. As Howard describes it, “The food situation was a bit rougher [than Stalag XIIA]. Early in the morning we were given a cup of the usual ersatz coffee. Not until noon did we receive a ration of soup, the same thin brew with maybe a little more water. [Unlike the meals at XIIA,] there were no potatoes in this soup. Instead, they were given to us [on the side], all two of them. This [meal] was followed by some German mint tea in the afternoon. Sometime after [that], we were given the same small bread ration [as at XIIA] and that mineral margarine. This was all until the next morning.” To eat his food, Howard used a spoon carved out of a piece of wood. One of his fellow POWs, a Brit named Bill Bramley, worked as a butcher before the war. He had a large knife tucked in his sock; for some reason, the Germans never confiscated it. The blade fashioned the spoon Howard used.

American Red Cross (ARC) packages supplemented this meager food allotment, although not greatly. These boxes weighed eleven pounds and contained nonperishable items such as prunes, raisins, coffee, tea, corned beef, sugar, dried milk, oleomargarine, biscuits, cheese, canned tuna, and chocolate bars.<sup>137</sup> Altogether, the ARC shipped over twenty-seven million of these packages to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland, which, in turn, distributed them to the POW camps.<sup>138</sup> In both war theaters, however, captors did not always deliver the packages; Germany proved more cooperative than Japan in this respect.<sup>139</sup> Howard recalls receiving only two parcels during his two and a half month stay at IVB. Both arrived at the same time. The packages were from the ARC and were given to the Americans. Howard remembers tags inside of the boxes, one with the name “ASA” (American Salvation Army) and the other “B’nai B’rith,” the Jewish community service organization. The handful of Yanks in 47A turned the two boxes over to the British hut commander who distributed the food around to everyone in the hut as fairly as he could. The hut commander melted down, for example, the hard chocolate bars to make a hot cocoa drink everyone could share in. Along with food items, the Red Cross always put cigarettes in the box. Regardless of whether the POW camp was run by the Japanese in the Pacific Theater or the Germans in the European Theater, the cigarettes became what Howard defines as the “standard currency in a PW camp. Instead of smoking mine, I bartered them for extra bread. The German guards were suckers for American cigarettes. They loved them.” Howard and Bob pooled their cigarettes once to trade with another

prisoner, a Norwegian police officer. He gave them a box of oatmeal in exchange for the “smokes.” Howard ate the oatmeal uncooked, with no liquid in it. He supplemented his diet, too, by using dandelion plants. To the amusement of the Brits, he gathered some on camp grounds. Howard describes what he did with the plants--“They are fairly good, although bitter, when boiled down. I guess anything tastes good when one is starving.” Approximately three thousand prisoners died in the camp, probably many if not most from starvation.<sup>140</sup>

Howard still suffered from headaches as a result of the concussion the Hitler Youth gang dealt him. Blackouts, also from that concussion, hit him every week or two; these always occurred at the height of a severe headache. Howard was never sure how long he remained unconscious; he estimated once that it may have been about thirty minutes. Bob wanted to report the blackouts to the POWs’ medical officers, but Howard would not let him, fearful of being sent out of IVB to an unknown destination. Aside from these health problems, a persistent cough, probably the remnant of the bronchitis he came down with in XIIA, bothered Howard. And like most of the POWs, regular bouts of diarrhea plagued him. In spite of all of this, Howard remained determined to successfully escape from Stalag IVB. Until that could happen, he resigned himself to life in the camp.

Howard’s assignment to 47A put him with English prisoners who ran that particular hut in a very organized fashion. A British officer who held the highest rank in 47A was in charge. He organized the prisoners in work groups. Some of the men gathered wood to stoke the pot-belly stove that stood in the hut. Other POWs built, and regularly dismantled, a contraband radio they used to follow the progress of the war. They often took it apart to hide the individual pieces from the guards. With information from news broadcasts, the prisoners regularly updated a European map they hung in the latrine. On it, the POWs followed the progress of Allied troops with strings emanating from west to east. Howard remembers this map and how the guards often went into the latrine to look at it. They emerged shaking their heads. The Germans were puzzled by what the Nazi propaganda machine reported on the war and what they saw on the POWs’ map. Aside from this responsibility, some other men in 47A had a different job--they divided the German food rations as well as the Red Cross packages between the men. As much as he could spare to do so, Howard saved some of his allocations for his next escape attempt. The first two had been from a boxcar. This third one would be from Stalag IVB. And, Howard resolved to make this one a success.

A dental problem led to his escape. While in the camp, he lost a filling from one of his teeth. Howard worried about what would happen to that cavity given the poor dietary conditions in Stalag IVB. He considered stuffing the cavity with chewing gum, but he did not have any. One day he mentioned his concern about the tooth to a guard. These men tended to be older, and Howard, using his German, conversed with one of them at length. It was to this guard, and only to him, that Howard spoke in the language of his grandparents. In fact, Howard called him *grossvater*, the German word for “grandfather.” Why just him? Howard explains that he was the only guard Howard trusted. As he recalls, this grandfather was “nice and gentle. He looked out for us. I don’t believe he was a member of the Nazi Party.” The guard had been a baker before the war. More than once when *grossvater* watched over the POWs, Howard saw an opportunity to escape. He never did so, though, stating, “I feared they would take it out on him.” After he told *grossvater* about his tooth problem, the guard pointed out that there were some American

and British doctors as well as dentists who treated the POWs. They used one of the huts at the far end of the camp. This conversation went smoothly until the guard mentioned that the dentists used foot pedals to power the drills. Howard had a hard time understanding that sentence in German, but as he adds, "*grossvater* finally got the message through to me." A week or so later the guard obtained permission for Howard to visit the medical hut. Another German took him there. Once they arrived, Howard sat in a chair where a young-looking American dentist began to work on his cavity.

As he labored on the tooth, the dentist asked Howard several questions. Had he attended college? If so, where did he go? Howard, although suspicious of the questioning, thought that his time at Fordham was not secret information, so he answered that question. He even mentioned the ASTP semester at the University of Delaware. Once the dentist heard that, he stopped his work and told Howard that he, too, had gone to the university in Newark. He attended the school for his pre-med studies. How the dentist pronounced the name of the city immediately caught Howard's attention. He said the name, phonetically, as "New-ark." That signaled to Howard the man really had been in Newark. The dentist peppered his patient with more questions about the university. He explained that he had not visited the campus for a long time. The dentist wanted to know if some aspects of the school were still unchanged. Was, for example, Dr. Dougherty, the head of the Physics Department, still there? When Howard replied that the professor was, indeed, still teaching, the dentist observed, "Wasn't it a shame that such a nice-looking man had such an ugly duckling for a daughter?" Howard sprung into action at that statement--"I shoved his hand out of my mouth and I said, 'Wait a minute. His daughter was the best looking dish around. Everyone in Sigma Phi Epsilon [the fraternity house where the ASTPers stayed] was on the make for her.'" In a matter-of-fact way, the dentist simply responded, "Okay, you passed." Obviously, the dentist was testing Howard to see if he really was who he purported to be. The Germans sometimes infiltrated the POW ranks with one of their own, who spoke impeccable English. Such a spy could tip off the guards to questionable activities within the camp. Once the dentist knew he really was speaking with an American, he asked Howard if he had ever thought of escaping from the camp. "And," as Howard dramatically points out, "that is how I met the chairman of the Escape Committee."

April 13 -April 18, 1945,  
"The Lord Was With Me"

Eventually, Howard met again with the dentist who was joined by other members of the Committee. In the course of his initial conversation with the dentist, Howard had been asked if he spoke German. He replied in the affirmative, but Howard also explained that none of the guards knew that except for *grossvater*. Once before the Committee, it wanted to know if Howard spoke "Low" or "High" German. This distinction refers not to class but to geography. Howard explains that High German is spoken mostly in northern Germany whereas Low German is used in the central and southern parts of the country. Given the location of Stalag IVB, Howard's ability in High German was a perfect fit for the civilians he might encounter as he made his way west. As in previous aspects of his military service, Howard set himself apart from others once again. His decision to break out of the camp and his knowledge of the German

language, the “right” one for the geographic area he found himself in, were two factors that must have worked in his favor in the eyes of the Escape Committee. It concluded that Howard was a candidate worthy of assistance. The Committee helped Howard in three important ways. First, the Escape Committee equipped him. Second, it gave him a specific destination, a place where, if he reached it, he would meet up with American forces. Third, it provided crucial aid in the logistics of the escape itself. Double barbed wire fences, guards, and searchlight towers manned by machine-gunners surrounded the camp.<sup>141</sup> Howard recalls that dogs patrolled the strip of ground between the two barbed wire fences. Over his months at IVB, he saw to it that the animals got to know him. Howard sometimes stood with his back to the inner fence. He spoke softly to the dogs. Slowly, he slipped his hands through the chain link fence to pat them. In so doing, the dogs smelled Howard. This habit helped him on the night he broke out.

Howard escaped from Stalag IVB on Friday, April 13, 1945.<sup>142</sup> He had been held by the Germans for just four days shy of four months. The Escape Committee outfitted him with several items. It gave Howard a small amount of water carried in a container made to hold a toothbrush. He also received some German money. The food the Committee supplied him with consisted of bread, chocolate, and salted, sliced turnips. Howard was furnished with two clothing items, a heavy, dark green sweater that covered his Army uniform and a pair of British boots. Lastly, to guide him to his destination, the Committee presented him with two things. One was a magnetized needle. The Committee instructed Howard to drop the needle in a round puddle of water. When it floated, the needle would point north. The other object was a map on a piece of silk cloth. It identified the local terrain Howard would be traveling through.

The Escape Committee identified the small village of Liebertwolkowitz, southeast of Leipzig, as Howard’s ultimate destination. As he remembers it, “I had directions where to go, where to stop, who to see, who was friendly, who I could talk to, [and] who I shouldn’t talk to. I knew I had to move from Muhlberg all the way to the outskirts of Leipzig. They told me it was about thirty-two kilometers.” Howard therefore had to travel about twenty miles when he was not in the best shape. On entering the Army, he weighed one hundred sixty-six pounds. He knew his weight went down during his time as a POW, but he did not know how much. Once he reached American forces about a week after he escaped, a hospital stay confirmed he had lost about one-third of his body weight. In other words, when Howard began that long walk to Leipzig, he weighed one hundred and twelve pounds. Howard blames two factors, “diet and diarrhea,” for the weight loss. Upon his arrival in Liebertwolkowitz, the Escape Committee told him to hide in a large picnic area. Howard was to wait there for elements of the 69<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division that was approaching Leipzig.

Aside from supplying and directing him, the Committee helped him to break-out of Stalag IVB on the day of the escape. It was to take place at night for obvious reasons. Showing him a short list of days that related to who would be on guard duty, the Committee gave Howard a choice of which evening he wanted to make his break on. Howard chose one that the Committee thought was not the best selection. The guard who Howard would have to confront that particular night was younger and stronger than Germans who would be on duty the other evenings. But Howard stayed with his choice. His reason was a very personal one. This guard had a history of abusing *grossvater*. Howard wanted to make sure he no longer did so. So Howard chose a departure night when he could, in a way, even the score for the older guard who had shown so

many kindnesses to him. At the same time, Howard would ensure that the cruel guard would never again hurt *grossvater*. On the night of April 13<sup>th</sup>, a handful of POWs created a distraction to get the attention of guards in the part of the camp from which Howard would flee. As he moved toward his exit, only one person, in Howard's mind, stood between him and the outside--the brutal, hated guard. Howard shares what happened next--"Yes, dear God, forgive me. I killed him. I actually felt good, yet frightened because of what I had become." Like other moments in his combat service, this one has haunted him for sixty-six years. While Howard thus dealt with the guard who patrolled the ground between the two wire fences, dogs still roamed the area. But the animals did not bark at Howard as he quietly made his way through the strip. A black German shepherd came over to him. It recognized his scent from the times Howard had put his hand through the fence. It sniffed him and left him alone after Howard gave the dog "a small piece of bread," he explains, "that I could ill afford."

After his escape from Stalag IVB, Howard walked for miles, using the magnetized needle to direct him toward Leipzig. On Sunday, April 15<sup>th</sup>, two days later after leaving the POW camp, he passed through a town where he heard voices coming from its church. As Howard recalls, "I heard the singing of the hymns. I knew the hymns. I heard the words they were singing. They were in German, but I knew the words." Howard made his way toward the church. He easily identified it as a Lutheran one. Howard knew it was dangerous to approach the old building; a POW could be executed as an escapee. Recall that he wore his United States Army uniform underneath the green sweater. As Howard points out, "If I had been caught, dressed that way, I would have been shot on the spot." But something drew him to the religious gathering. He felt compelled to stop there. Quietly, Howard slipped into the last pew at the very back of the church. He took comfort in the religious service, as well as in the warmth of the building filled with so many people. When parishioners passed around the collection plate, Howard put all of the German money the Escape Committee had given him into it.

As the pastor began giving out communion wafers, Howard decided to receive the sacrament with the village's congregation. He knew this meant taking an even greater chance that he would be discovered. Where he had been sitting afforded him a semblance of obscurity. If he walked up to the altar, he would clearly be exposed. Weighing all of this, Howard nevertheless felt the need to receive the communion wafer. He did so, but the pastor did not pass the chalice, with wine in it, to any of the congregants. Instead, he said, in German, "I drink for all of you." Apparently, there was not enough wine for everyone. Howard returned to his seat at the back of the church. Once the service ended, the pastor greeted congregants as they exited the building. When he saw Howard, the clergyman looked directly at him. With his hands, the pastor made the sign of the cross in the air, clearly directly it toward the American who interpreted the gesture this way--"He gave me his blessing. He knew. But he let me go." Howard is not sure the pastor knew he was an escaped POW, but he believes the clergyman sensed he was in trouble. In Howard's mind, this German was trying to give him spiritual help. The pastor had already done so in another way, though. To Howard, the communion wafer, representing the body of Christ, gave him the strength he needed to go on. As he concludes, "I knew the Lord was with me."

Howard believes it may have been in this same town that another incident occurred that he vividly recalls, although he is not sure of its exact location. He associates the name "Naunhof"

with this second event, a community located about sixteen kilometers southeast of Leipzig. This location places Naunhof in the same geographical area as was Howard's ultimate destination, Liebertwolkowitz. As such, he could very well have passed by it. Whether the incident happened in Naunhof or in another place is not as important as what happened. Howard witnessed an incident that speaks to the response of everyday Germans to the atrocities in their midst. As he passed the outskirts of the town, Howard saw a barn burning. Civilians gathered, watching flames consume the structure. Women covered their faces to ward off the terrible odor emanating from the fire. Howard recognized the smell as burning flesh. Individuals in the crowd made references to "Jews." It appeared that some Jewish people were being burned inside of the barn. Howard did not hear any screams coming from the building, so whoever was inside probably had already died before the fire began. What is significant about the event Howard witnessed is that he observed a crowd that was clearly disturbed with what it saw and smelled. Immediately after the war, a debate began as to what German civilians knew about the murder of Jews inside of the Nazi concentration camps. The debate also included questions about the level of complicity these civilians should bear based upon that knowledge. Howard's recollection gives evidence of one episode where Germans knew something was happening. The clear disapproval Howard remembers hearing in their voices should be entered into the historical record.

Howard believes he arrived at Liebertwolkowitz late on Monday, April 16<sup>th</sup>. He found the picnic area the Escape Committee had told him to locate. He was to hide there as he awaited the arrival of units in the 69<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Upon seeing the location, he at first thought he was hallucinating. The grounds could definitely be used for picnics, but it really was a beer garden, and not just any beer garden. Recall that when Howard was growing up in the Bronx, his family regularly went to Breinlinger Park run by the local German American community. In the days after his escape from Stalag IVB, Howard remembers how he "struggled along the paths and roads" toward Leipzig. As he did so, he often thought back to his childhood. Some of those memories included Breinlinger's. As Howard explains, he especially recalled "the fun and good times we youngsters enjoyed--the rides, the games, and the 'fun food.' I remember my parents laughing and dancing. I remember the smell of all the different kinds of food and, of course, the buckets of beer."

When Howard reached the picnic area at Liebertwolkowitz, it was "quite dark." The park was deserted. Howard still proceeded cautiously. He entered a ticket booth where, as he explains, "the strain of the 'forced march' caught up with me. I had reached the appointed destination at last. I must have collapsed and slept in that ticket booth for who knows how long. When I woke up it was daylight and I could see that the place was deserted, but it looked familiar. I had been here before, but how? I thought I was 'loosing it.' I wandered around, saw the swings, the tables, the pits where the foods were cooked, even the rows of seats in front of the stage. I then spotted the 'lighting booth' high above and behind the seats. This was a good place to hide and watch for the promised 69<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. It was dry and fairly warm. I drifted off to sleep again, but this time I woke up with a start, all sweaty and cold. I remembered why I knew this place. It was a replica of Breinlinger's. I wasn't going crazy."<sup>143</sup> Howard reasons that the Germans who built this beer garden later immigrated to the United States. The family settled in New York City where it built the Breinlinger Park Howard grew up with. Once again, as at the church service

the Sunday before this, Howard felt that God was with him--“The Lord was with me. It had to be that way. How else could I have made it?”

Howard remained in the beer garden throughout the next day, Tuesday. Then early on the morning of Wednesday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, five days after he escaped from Stalag IVB, Howard heard the sound of artillery shells landing nearby. The Escape Committee’s information had been correct. American forces were nearing the outskirts of Leipzig for an attack upon the city. Somehow the Committee learned that Liebertwolkowitz was to be the assembly point for units in the 273<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment. That regiment had been one of those leading the movement of the American First Army from the Rhine into the heart of Germany. Howard understood that the buildings he had used for shelter would now become targets of American fire. He thus left the beer garden. Howard shares the story of what happened next. “I decided to hide in the open field in back of it [the beer garden] because they [the Americans] would probably bomb the hell out of it. Well, it certainly was a good idea, but a little while later a few more hits were close to the building behind me. It was early afternoon, I think, when I was spotted by someone as I was sneaking towards the beer garden again.” The soldier who saw Howard turned out to be a member of the 273<sup>rd</sup>. A tank rolled slowly behind him. Howard recognized the armored vehicle and the soldier’s uniform as American. At first, Howard “thought this was going to be it” because the lead tank, in his own words, “almost blew my head off before hearing me scream a few obscenities.” Those indecent words clearly identified him in the soldier’s mind as an American. Once the G.I. realized who Howard was, he motioned for the tank to come over. Howard continues the story of what happened next. “Before I knew it, there was a whole gang of them around me, holding me up. I was crying because I was finally back with my own troops. They fed me [and] gave me a cigarette. I lit the cigarette and I almost passed out. I got sick because they were feeding me so much. They wanted to be so good to me. But they had to go on.”

After this brief celebration with Howard, battalions in the 273<sup>rd</sup> continued to move into Leipzig to assume their role in what became known as the Battle for Leipzig. The German commander in the city surrendered to the 273<sup>rd</sup> early on April 20<sup>th</sup>. The regiment moved out that same morning, heading east again. As Howard wryly observes, “They left and there I was. Everybody going one way and I was trying to head the other way [west].” Unknown to those American soldiers who had just met up with Howard, they were destined to play a role in one of the most historic moments in the European Theater’s history of World War II. Just five days later, the 273<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment met up with Russian soldiers in the Soviet Union’s 58<sup>th</sup> Guards Division near the German town of Torgau on the Elbe River. In so doing, the two Allied armies divided German forces. A photographer captured the moment as American and Russian soldiers shook hands. This constituted the first meeting of the two Allied forces on German soil.<sup>144</sup>

But days before that historic event, the 273<sup>rd</sup> had left Howard back in Liebertwolkowitz. As he concludes, “Unfortunately, they did not know what to do with me. There was no plan, no instruction on what to do if there was an Ex-POW to be found.” Soon after the 273<sup>rd</sup> moved out, Howard spotted a Red Cross ambulance, but it drove right past him. Howard decided not to let something like that happen again. In what he thinks was a few hours later, he took the situation into his own hands. As Howard tells the story, “I saw another ambulance coming so I did the best I could. I just laid down across the road and the ambulance had to stop. A medic got out and

looked at me. I told him I had been a POW.” That announcement got Howard into the ambulance where the driver took him to an evacuation hospital. The medical staff gave him a brief physical. Howard took a bath. He laughs in recounting that luxury, “Oh, boy, what a dream that was.” After eating, a doctor administered what Howard thinks was a vitamin injection and ordered him to get some sleep. Although his bed was just a cot, to him it was another luxury as the bath had been. He describes the cot as “warm and soft and I had a pillow.” Howard is not sure how long he slept, but when he woke up, he explains, “I was sick to my stomach. I threw up. I guess I could not handle the food. My stomach had shrunk.” After donning a new, Army uniform, someone drove Howard to a local airstrip where he boarded a C-47 transport plane for one of the “Cigarette Camps” on the northern-western coast of France.

### A Son Returns Home, “Prayers ARE Answered”

The aircraft flew him to Le Havre where a large area had been set aside for repatriated POWs, or as the military called them, Returned Allied Military Personnel (RAMPs). Before the war, a French aerodrome stood at the site. Once German troops moved into northern France in 1940, they expanded the airfield. After the Battle for Normandy in the summer of 1944, the Americans used the camps to process soldiers, including RAMPs, for their return trip to the United States. The site also temporarily housed men on leave and served as a staging area to transfer troops from the European to the Pacific Theater. The military divided the transit camp into individual ones named after American cigarettes, such as Camp Camel, Camp Pall Mall, and Camp Chesterfield. Howard ended up in the largest of these, Camp Lucky Strike. Situated on approximately two and a half acres, the Army Corps of Engineers set up more than twelve thousand large, olive drab tents lined up on both sides of the runway. The airstrip became the main boulevard in the camp. The tents, with wooden floors, offered RAMPs beds with pillows and fresh sheets; showers stood nearby. Camp Lucky Strike alone had been equipped to handle about fifty-eight thousand men, but each week one hundred thousand might be found there.<sup>145</sup> Howard underwent, in his own words, “an intense debriefing” and “several physicals.” That is where he found out exactly how much weight he had lost. It would not have taken Howard too long to enjoy some of the amenities at the camp--movie theaters, mess halls that served ice cream and hot dogs, Red Cross stations with “Donut Dollies,” and even bars that opened for three hours in the evenings.<sup>146</sup> For Howard, he wanted the ice cream much more than the beer.

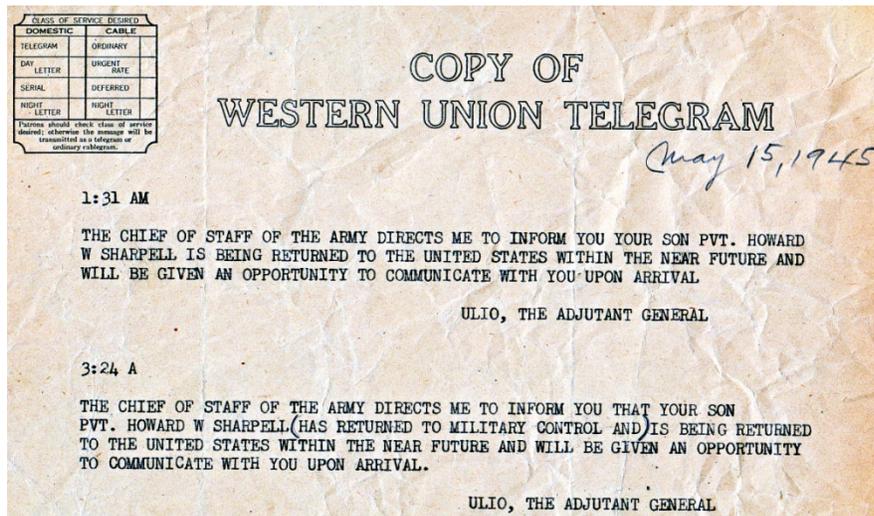
While Howard was at Camp Lucky Strike, Ulio’s office in Washington D.C. sent a telegram to Duff and Lillian informing them that their son had been “returned to military control” on April 18, 1945.<sup>147</sup> This phrase can be found in similar telegrams sent to other families of MIAs or POWs. Later, when Howard saw the wording of this notification, they struck him as “cold words for such a meaningful advice.” Recall that the Sharpells did not know if their son survived the Battle of the Bulge. Until April 18<sup>th</sup>, the Army had classified Howard as MIA. The Germans never forwarded his name as a POW to the IRC. The story of how Lillian heard that her son was not only alive but safe was one the family shared with Howard upon his return home. The telegram arrived at the Sharpell residence on the same day Ulio’s office sent it out, Sunday, May 6<sup>th</sup>. Howard explains what happened next--“My mother had already left for church and my father

was still at home when the telegram arrived. He immediately left for church. He was president of the church council at Epiphany Lutheran Church and also served as usher taking up the collection. My mother was seated with her friends in their usual pew. After the collection, my dad placed the telegram into the collection plate and took it up to present to the pastor. Pastor looked at the telegram, turned to the altar, then turned around and read the telegram to the congregation. This was the first time that my mother heard that I was no longer MIA. Her reaction was as expected. The entire congregation stood singing, 'Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow.' ”

In the same week his parents received the May 6<sup>th</sup> telegram, Howard boarded a ship bound for the United States. It left Le Havre as part of a convoy early in May. He remembers being in the middle of the Atlantic when the vessel received news that Germany had surrendered. He thus celebrated what would become known as V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day), May 8<sup>th</sup>, on board the ship. With some amusement, Howard recalls that a German submarine surfaced to surrender to the American ships once it learned that the war was over. During the voyage across the ocean, Howard, in his own words, “stayed away from everyone.” He spent hours and hours on the deck, way at the very front of the vessel as it moved through the water. As he explains, “I didn’t want anyone to see me blackout.” Howard recalls how much the quiet scenery and the smell of the ocean appealed to him. The ship landed in New York City. Howard remembers passing the Statue of Liberty--“We were all on deck, cheering, crying, so happy to be alive and back in the United States. [We were] also wondering what was in store for us now. After the reception with the fireboats and their hoses streaming water high into the air, it all became a blur.”

Although he does not recall the details of what happened after the ship docked, Howard ended up at Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. A bus probably transported him and others from New

York City to the camp. He does recall, as he says, “numerous physical exams and interviews with what I thought were Army Intelligence officers. I did my best to conceal the headaches and blackouts. I did not want anything to delay or even prevent me from going home.” It was probably one of the intelligence officers who directed Howard to sign a military document at the



camp on May 15<sup>th</sup>, one that other POWs also signed. In it, he promised, even after he returned to civilian life, not to disclose any “military information.” to “unauthorized person[s].” A “directive” from the Secretary of War described in detail what that information consisted of--names of those who helped the prisoner to escape, activities within the POW camps that could be classified as “intelligence activities,” and acts of sabotage the men attempted. Coincidentally, on

this same date Ulio's office sent the Sharpell family a second telegram. In its entirety, it reads, "The Chief of Staff of the Army directs me to inform you that your son Pvt. Howard W. Sharpell is being returned to the United States within the near future and will be given an opportunity to communicate with you upon arrival."<sup>148</sup> Unknown to Duff and Lillian, when they read this Howard was in nearby Camp Kilmer.

However, Howard is very clear in his recollection that, "at no time were we permitted to try to contact our families. We weren't even told about the telegram sent advising them of our safe return 'to U.S. military control.'" A sixty-five day furlough Howard received soon after he arrived at Camp Kilmer would offset this lack of communication. He had over two months until he was to report on July 20<sup>th</sup> to the Hotel Dennis in Atlantic City, New Jersey for reassignment. Dressed in a new uniform, Howard set out for New York City. His own words best describe his reunion with his parents, "That day in mid-May moved at such a snail pace. I thought that I would never reach my station on the NYC subway taking me back to the Bronx and my mother

C E R T I F I C A T E

I certify that I have read and fully understand all the provisions of the Directive of the Secretary of War, AG 383.6 (24 Mar 45) OB-S-B-M, Subject: "Publicity in Connection with Escaped, Liberated or Repatriated Prisoners of War, etc.," and will at ALL TIMES hereafter comply fully therewith.

I understand that disclosure to unauthorized person will make me liable to disciplinary action for failure to safeguard MILITARY INFORMATION.

I realize that it is my duty during my military service, and later as a civilian, to take all possible precautions to prevent disclosure, by word of mouth or otherwise, of military information of this nature.

Name (Print) Howard W. Sharpell Signed Howard W. Sharpell  
Rank Pvt A.S.N. 3287912 Date 13 May 45 Place Camp Kilmer  
Unit C & B 81st Engr (C) Bn Witness \_\_\_\_\_

and father. On the way up the hill to my folks, I came upon a young lad who I recognized as a little kid, a runt, several years earlier. He looked at me, carrying my duffle bag, and in a voice no longer that of a runt, he shouted, 'Jesus Christ! I thought you were dead.' This was my first inkling that maybe no one knew that I had survived."

Once Howard arrived home, he realized his parents had been expecting him because of Ulio's May 15<sup>th</sup> telegram, but aside from the very general statements in it, Duff and Lillian knew nothing about his arrival in NYC or his stay at Camp

Kilmer. When Howard rang the doorbell that day, his arrival surprised his parents. As Howard continues the story of their reunion, "The greeting that day with my mother and father was something I will never forget. Tears of joy, crushing hugs, and squeezes seemed to go on endlessly. It was then that I learned that until that telegram arrived [from Ulio, dated May 6<sup>th</sup>], all they knew was that I was 'Missing in Action.' The Germans had not reported me as a POW. How my mother handled that 'Not Knowing' and the grief she endured only mothers could understand." Howard admits to being somewhat surprised that Lillian had his room "all clean and ready for the return of her son." In all probability, the room had been like that since Howard's last visit before he shipped out. That had occurred early in 1944 when he attended ASTP classes at the University of Delaware. Over a year had thus passed since he and his parents

had last seen each other. His mother, like all the other mothers of MIAs and POWs, undoubtedly kept her child's room ready in anticipation of the return home the family prayed for. And, as Howard notes in sharing the story of his homecoming, "Prayers ARE answered."

The joy of that family reunion spilled over to the next months as Howard spent his furlough at home. As he recalls that time, "Those days in May, June, and July 1945 were a constant celebration--unending gatherings and parties. My weight returned to the one hundred and sixty-six pounds I was before I left the U.S. for Europe in October 1944. Maybe I was not the lean fighting machine as before, and I was also not the nice young, caring kid that left for the Army in February 1943." His parents noticed the change. Howard's tone often became harsh. His mother quickly picked up on that. Lillian also became concerned with her son's attitude. Howard seemed to no longer believe in apologizing; he appeared more willing to fight than make amends. As Howard explains, before the war he was "easy going." But "the transformation" he underwent during his time in Europe changed his nature. At any moment, he was ready to "draw a line in the sand" when challenged. If someone stepped over it, that individual paid a price as Howard confronted him or her. Duff handled the change in his son differently than Lillian did. He was more accepting of it. Howard describes his father "as a voice of reason." Perhaps as a man and as someone who also experienced the reality of war, the transformation did not concern Duff as it did Lillian. Duff might have seen the change in Howard's personality as a growth toward manhood.

With his grandfather Bill Trostel, Howard initiated some honest conversations. One concerned the fact that Howard learned Bill did not believe his grandson would make it back from the war. Duff and Lillian always believed he would, but not Bill. In their discussions, the grandson and the grandfather learned something about each other. Bill explained to Howard that what might appear as his lack of faith in his grandson was really Bill's understanding of "the harshness of the Germany military." He did not think Howard could survive it. On hearing that, Howard replied, "You underestimated me, and you do so now, too." In another of their conversations, Howard said in German to Bill, "Don't antagonize me." Put another, perhaps more straightforward way, Howard describes his attitude that summer of 1945 as one of, "Don't mess with me." Throughout his sixty-five day furlough, Howard shared few of his wartime experiences with his family. He did not detail his time in combat before or during December 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, he was silent on the surrender itself, the subsequent boxcar rides, the beating by the Hitler Youth, and life in the two stalags. One aspect of his escape from IVB that he did share was the story of the two Breinlinger Parks. He thought, perhaps, that his parents would appreciate the almost miraculous nature of that coincidence. Howard even concealed from his family the physical effects of the concussion he suffered at the hands of the Hitler Youth. His headaches and blackouts continued. Howard hid both of them. He masked the pain he felt from the headaches. A few times he recalls being close to blacking out, one time in church. But Howard had come up with a way to stop himself from losing consciousness. He sat down and hung his head between his legs. When he did this in church one Sunday, people thought he was praying.

Once his sixty-five day leave ended, Howard reported to Atlantic City for reassignment. With the war in the Pacific still going on, because of his background in demolitions he expected the Army would attach him to a Combat Engineer unit for the planned invasion of Japan. Once Howard arrived in Atlantic City, Army life did not prove that busy there. As Howard explains,

“The only real duty besides interviews and meetings was standing in formation on the boardwalk for all the vacationing civilians to witness. It was at one of these formations that I was called ‘front and center’--in front of all those vacationers--and presented with the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star. Needless to say, I was embarrassed further when I overheard a woman in the crowd say, ‘And he’s such a baby!’ ” Finally Howard’s orders came through. On September 1, 1945 he was to report to a Combat Engineer Battalion at Fort Belvoir, Virginia where he would receive the rank of sergeant. Yet with Japan’s surrender in mid-August, the Army rescinded those orders. Instead, it sent Howard to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps Area Command at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey to await discharge. That did not happen until November 11, 1945.

Months earlier, Howard had been told that the war was over for him. When he met up with soldiers in the 273<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment on April 18<sup>th</sup>, one of them made such an announcement to him. Howard confesses he hated hearing that phrase. He had wanted “to fight and to lead.” He did that on December 16-17, 1944 when the Battle of the Bulge began. His memories and his Bronze Star attest to that. But Howard feels he did not have enough opportunities to do so. Looking back, it is clear that the war was not over for him in April or in November of 1945. It is still not over for him today. Memories of the good times Howard experienced during his service can easily take him back to 1942-45. There was the camaraderie he shared, for instance, with men such as Blackie Risoli, Barry Fortenberry, and Bob Chaffey. He also had fun (yes, “fun”) learning how to fire the Bofor. In a similar vein, Howard enjoyed the demolition work that became his specialty as a combat engineer. And he took satisfaction in his time at the University of Delaware where he was back in college, back in track meets, and back home during some weekend visits. For veterans of any war, there is always a “light side” to their service. The brotherhood, the training, and ASTP are examples of those good times for Howard. But as with all wartime service, there was a dark side, too. It insures the war is never really over for the veteran. For Howard, it includes the killing of enemy soldiers, the decision by higher ups to surrender Company B to German forces, the boxcar rides, his encounter with the Hitler Youth, and his life in two prisoner of war camps. The cumulative effect of those negative experiences was to transform Howard from a young man who he characterizes as “a nice kid” to a real “cocky SOB.”

To Howard, this change was the greatest impact World War II had on him. He recently decided to share the details of that transformation--how and why it happened--with others. As he phrased it, “I think I finally want to talk about my experiences...They should be put down somewhere...I have resisted [doing] this, [but] the time is now.” Why “now” relates to mortality. Over the decades since World War II ended, family and friends questioned Howard about his service. He always resisted fully answering those inquiries. The dark side of the war explains his silence. Now, however, at age eighty-seven Howard feels his own mortality. Like other members of the World War II Generation, the time to record his story for History is now. And, as Howard has said more than once, he wants to do so “honestly.” He has done that. In the process, he brought forth memories that would have been much easier to leave in the past. Yet Howard spoke of them in an attempt to be as forthright as he could be so that family, friends, and others who read his story have as truthful of an account of his experiences as possible.

Today a thick forest covers the ground where the Nazi government built Stalag IVB. The one remaining building whose ruins testify to life in the camp is, perhaps fittingly, the latrine

block.<sup>149</sup> Looking at the acres where the stalag stood, one would not be able to guess the history that transpired there. Similarly, looking at Howard Sharpell today, one would not guess the emotional terrain he has navigated since war's end. It is marked by memories he decided long ago were best left unspoken of, until now. In generations to come, the emotional landscape that lies beneath the personal histories of the war will be lost, just as the outlines of Stalag IVB are covered by over sixty years of forest growth. Written military records stored in places such as the National Archives will document what happened and where it happened. Historians will speculate on why it happened. But the official histories cannot convey feelings as do the personal testimonies of those who fought the war. If veterans who were there share their stories while they can still do so, a more complete history of World War II could be recorded for posterity.

## Epilogue

In the year after his discharge from the Army, Howard made two decisions that were life-altering. One was educational and one was very personal. Of course, that year did not begin with such serious thoughts. Howard's departure from the military occurred just a few weeks before Thanksgiving 1945, a day when he and the entire country could give thanks for the end of World War II. Certainly Germany and then Japan's surrender were in the minds of American families as they gathered around the holiday table. The Sharpells and the Trostels would not have been any different. They had reason to be especially grateful since their loved one was home from the war and with them on that Thanksgiving Day. In the months after his discharge, Howard remembers "celebrations of my safe return and many, many parties with friends." The timing of the discharge with the holiday season lent even more reasons to be joyful. Due to what the Army diagnosed as a "post concussion state," a reference to the lingering effects of the beating he endured by the Hitler Youth, Howard received a monthly disability allowance. It afforded him spending money to do what his wartime service had denied him--he enjoyed life. Howard was twenty at the time of his discharge, but he felt much, much older. He felt, too, that he had lost his youth in the war, which was true for him and others of his generation.

After several months, in Howard's words, "getting adjusted to civilian life," he decided to visit Fordham University. Recall that he had left there early in 1942 when he enlisted in the Army. Howard remembers very well what happened on that visit--"I entered Dealy Hall on the campus. I saw Father Torres, one of my Jesuit teachers. He looked at me, yelled something, I think in Latin, and ran to me. He took me in his arms and tearfully said, 'Prayers are answered.' Before I could recover from that embrace, there was Father Donnelly, Father Quiltey, and so many others I had known. The prayers and shouts of joy attracted a huge crowd of students and professors. I was overcome with the emotion of those moments that I shall never forget." Howard, a Protestant in respect to religious affiliation, returned home to a Catholic institution that adopted him as one of their own. The religious community at Fordham prayed for his safe return as had his biological family. Howard met with the university's Chancellor, Father O'Malley, to, in Howard's explanation, "discuss my future. I told him that I wanted to return to Fordham." Federal legislation, known popularly as "the G.I. Bill," paid for returning servicemen to attend college. Howard and Father O'Malley knew about this, but the priest urged Howard not to wait for a formal re-admittance to the university or for the federal government to process his

paperwork under the G.I. Bill. As Howard recounts, “He invited me to sit-in on all the classes I’d like as an honored guest of the university. I could take tests if I should choose to, but what was



at Fordham

important was that I should rest. He wanted me to get used to going to class and to study once again.” Before he left Father O’Malley’s office, the Chancellor directed him to visit the gym and see Jack Giegengack, Howard’s old track coach. As the priest told Howard, “He’s expecting you, so don’t disappoint him.”

Howard saw Giegengack that same day. The coach, as Howard explains, “assigned me a locker and asked if I needed anything. We discussed track and decided to put off making any plans for awhile.” During the winter/spring semesters of 1946, he availed himself of Father O’Malley’s offer to sit in on some classes. In the Humanities, Howard audited a Creative Writing class, one in

English Literature, and a course on Religion with Father Quiltey. In the sciences, he went to some Physics classes, the Chemistry lab, and a math class. Howard formally returned to Fordham in the fall semester of 1946.

In the months after his discharge, Howard joined some community activities to pass the time. He became part of a few neighborhood sport teams, just as he had in his youth. He played softball, football, and even roller hockey. Yet as Howard confesses, “It soon became obvious that I no longer had the speed and abilities I once had, but I tried.” Aside from these physical activities, he joined the Luther League, an organization of young people, at Epiphany Lutheran Church. Early in the fall of 1947 it hosted a dance and invited other Luther Leagues associated with churches in the surrounding area. The event was held in Epiphany’s basement. At that social gathering, Howard met the “gal” he would marry, Virginia “Ginny” Thomson. He shares the amusing story of their first encounter--“It was during a lively Polish Polka that two gals from Calvary Lutheran spun wildly in front of the table at which I was seated. One of them slipped and slid under my table. She looked up at me, smiled, and said, ‘Hi.’ I don’t remember replying. I do remember going over to their table to ask if she was okay and didn’t hurt herself. Virginia Thomson said, ‘Heck no. Wanna dance?’ ” Before the night ended, Epiphany’s pastor either purposely or by chance saw to it that Howard found out where Ginny lived. Howard continues the story of that first meeting--“Later that evening Pastor reminded me that Virginia and Faye were from Calvary Lutheran way across town and had to get here by the local bus. ‘It would be nice if you would drive them home in that convertible you just got--hint, hint.’ Naturally I listened to Pastor. I offered and they accepted the offer. That was a Friday evening. The next day my Dad said I had a phone call from a ‘Virginia and Faye.’ He said that it [the two names together] sounded like a law firm and that I should be careful returning the call.”

Undeterred, Howard called back the number his father gave him. Until he heard Ginny’s voice, he was not sure who he was speaking to. The night before, Howard had told the two gals that he attended Fordham University. On the phone, Ginny asked if he would be willing to take them on a tour of the campus. As Howard continues, “I went along with this excuse and arranged to pick them up at Calvary after church on Sunday. Yes, Virginia became ‘My Ginny’ and the rest is history. We saw each other regularly from then on. I knew then that this was going to be the one to be with the rest of my life. I kinda got the idea she felt that way, too. ” When asked what was it about Ginny that made her different from others he had dated, Howard indirectly referred to memories that sometimes occupied him after the war, “She hid nothing. She was bright and cheerful, always smiling. At that time in my life, I needed that.”



One Saturday in December 1947, it became evident that Howard was serious about Ginny. A blizzard hit New York City. Buses and even the old trolley lines ceased operations. It was too dangerous to drive an automobile. Yet Howard and Ginny had a date together to go to a movie that night. Telephones still worked in spite of the bad storm. Howard phoned the Thomson home and told Ginny he was coming over regardless of the weather, even if he had to walk the eight miles. As Howard picks up the story, “Well, that was what I did. I got on my old army winter clothes, wool knit sweater and cap. Pulled up those boots over the heavy socks and off I went. Mom and Dad thought I was crazy, but they knew that when I made up my mind, there was no stopping me. It was still snowing quite heavily, but hell, I was the guy that fought in that brutal snow at the Battle of the Bulge. I just put myself in that ‘forced march’ mode and trudged through the snow banks. I don’t know how long it took because I was in that mode when I reached 2506 Woodhull Avenue. Ginny’s dad met me at the door, took a good look [at me], and let me in. He called Ginny and before she came downstairs, her dad handed me a shot glass with his favorite Scotch. Wow! That hit the spot so he got me another which I suggested he drink. He did!” Because of the blizzard, Howard and Ginny did not go out. Instead, they had dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Thomson.

As Howard concludes the story, “It was just after midnight when I was about to trudge back home when Ginny’s dad showed up with ‘one for the road’ for me. I downed it, kissed my Ginny goodnight in front of her grinning dad and left for that 8 ½ mile trek. I got as far as Allerton Road, only a few blocks from Woodhull, when I came across a huge garbage truck stuck in a snow bank. I could see that he could get free if he turned hard left and rocked forward and back a few times and then slow forward. I motioned to him to roll down the window. He did and then said, ‘Hey, is that you, Sharpell?’ Wow, it was Johnny Finnoccio from the 81<sup>st</sup> Engineers.” The two veterans recognized each other right away. Three years earlier in the Ardennes area, Johnny drove a truck filled with nitrostarch explosives for Howard’s demolition team. Howard finishes his account of this December 1947 evening, “After a few choice words and rocking the truck out of the snow bank, Johnny asked me what I was doing out on a night like this. I filled him in on my visit with Ginny He said that he had a load of ashes to deliver not too far from where I lived, so ‘climb aboard. I’ll take you home.’ You should have heard Ginny’s dad when he heard that I got home on a garbage truck.”

Howard and Ginny dated for three years before they married. He graduated from Fordham with a B.S. in Communications in August 1948, eight months after the December blizzard. Soon after that, Howard went to work for RCA in public relations. He and Ginny wed on October 14, 1950. They moved more than once as Howard advanced in the company. They first lived in their hometown, New York City, where he worked at RCA’s corporate headquarters at Rockefeller Center. When the company transferred him to its offices in Camden, New Jersey, he and Ginny moved there. From Camden, the Sharpells relocated to RCA’s International Division in Clark, New Jersey and eventually they ended up at the company’s office in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Howard remained with RCA until 1970. In those decades, he and Ginny had three sons, Robert, Kenneth, and Dechert. In 1970 Howard left RCA for Panasonic where he remained until his retirement in 1993 at the age of sixty-nine. The company had moved the Sharpells to the San Diego area of Southern California where Howard still lives today. In 1996 cancer took the life of their son Ken. Another tragedy hit Howard when he lost his beloved Ginny in October 2010, just



thirteen days after they celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary. Seven months later, Howard decided to put down on paper the story of his World War II experiences. He was, in his words, “Alone now, alone with my thoughts.” Family is close by; it includes great-grandchildren in addition to grandchildren. Twice a month, Howard attends a meeting of ex-POWs, most of them from World War II. He also worships weekly at a church in his community. He lives alone, though, missing Ginny’s effervescent personality. Howard’s determination and resiliency, in the face of all he experienced in the war, and in spite of his personal losses, are lessons for us all.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lewis H. Carlson, *We Were Each Other’s Prisoners: An Oral History of World War II American and German Prisoners of War* (New York, 1997), pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>2</sup> The 1900 Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed May 17, 2011). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Howard are taken from conversations between him and the author from May 2011-September 2011.

<sup>3</sup> The Federal Writers’ Project Guide to 1930s New York, *The WPA Guide to New York City* (New York, 1939; 1992 edition), p. 160.

<sup>4</sup> Howard’s father, Adolph Sharpell, is listed in his parent’s household in the 1920 Census, so he probably lived there in 1917, too. The 1920 Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed on May 16, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed May 16, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Carol R. Byerly, *Fever of War: The Influenza Epidemic in the U.S. Army during World War I* (New York, 2005), p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Information on the tasks assigned to the Medical Department and on its size are taken from Byerly, *Fever of War*, pp. 51 and 45 respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Byerly, *Fever of War*, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (New York, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Byerly, *Fever of War*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Byerly, *Fever of War*, p. 5 and p. 33 respectively.

<sup>12</sup> Information and statistics in this paragraph are taken from Byerly, *Fever of War*, pp. 6, 2, 10, 7, and 8 respectively.

<sup>13</sup> The 1910 and 1920 Censuses lists 1888 as his year of immigration. The 1900 one has 1890. [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed May 17, May 17, and May 30 respectively).

<sup>14</sup> The 1900 Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed May 30, 2011). The siblings were Frank, age twenty-three, Rose, age fourteen, and Frederick, age twelve. Howard remembers the fifth Trostel sibling as “Ann,” who was younger than Bill.

<sup>15</sup> The 1910 Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed May 17, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> The 1920 Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed May 17, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> The 1900, 1910, and 1920 Censuses list Manhattan as the home for both families.

<sup>18</sup> *The WPA Guide to New York City*, p. 52. For 1938, the population on Manhattan Island was 1,688,769 ( p. 52).

<sup>19</sup> The 1930 Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed May 16, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> *The WPA Guide to New York City*, p. 510.

- 
- <sup>21</sup> Otis L. Graham, Jr. and Meghan Robinson Wander (eds.), *Franklin D. Roosevelt: His Life and Times* (Boston, 1986), pp. 275-276.
- <sup>22</sup> [http://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/lehman/chrono.html?company=national\\_dairy\\_products\\_cor...](http://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/lehman/chrono.html?company=national_dairy_products_cor...) (accessed May 31, 2011).
- <sup>23</sup> *The WPA Guide to New York City*, pp. 251-252 on the pro-Nazi and anti-Nazi activities in Yorkville.
- <sup>24</sup> World War II Draft Registration Cards, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed May 16, 2011).
- <sup>25</sup> David M. Kennedy, *The Library of Congress, World War II Companion* (New York, 2007) p.163.
- <sup>26</sup> Michael E. Haskew, *The World War II Desk Reference* (New York, 2004) p. 178 identifies 5.9 million men as the “peak strength” of the Army during the war. In addition to that number, the Army Air Forces numbered 2.3 million men (p. 178).
- <sup>27</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-24.pdf> (accessed July 18, 2011). For an explanation of the various ways high school graduation rates can be calculated, see <http://wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/05-03-22.01pdf> (accessed July 18, 2011). By the end of the war, the average G.I. had finished a year of high school (Lee Kennett, *G.I., The American Soldier in World War II* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1987; 1997 paperback edition, p. 23).
- <sup>28</sup> Two publications from 1944 explain the induction process in detail. One is entitled *Answers to Important Questions for the Potential Inductee and his Dependents*, published by the Oregon State Defense Council. Information in it was compiled by the Army Service Forces. A second one is *Introduction to the Armed Forces: Suggestions for Pre-Induction Informational Meetings* published by the U.S. Office of Civil Defense. Both are available at <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/exhibits/ww2/services/induct.htm> (accessed June 17, 2011).
- <sup>29</sup> Kennett, *G.I.*, p. 34.
- <sup>30</sup> Descriptions and quotations on what happened to recruits at the Reception Center are taken from the U.S. Office of Civil Defense, *Introduction to the Armed Forces*, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>31</sup> Kennett, *G.I.*, pp. 34-35 explains the AGCT and the five classes.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34 on the injections and also see U.S. Office of Civil Defense, *Introduction to the Armed Forces*, p. 24.
- <sup>33</sup> U.S. Office of Civil Defense, *Introduction to the Armed Forces*, p. 24.
- <sup>34</sup> Kennett, *G.I.*, p. 46.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- <sup>36</sup> Kennett, *G.I.*, pp. 42-43 for statistics on the forts and camps built during the war.
- <sup>37</sup> Information on Camp Wallace is taken from <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utcah/01953/cah-01953.html> (accessed July 20, 2011). The camp was declared “surplus” in 1946.
- <sup>38</sup> Gordon L. Rottman, *US Combat Engineer 1941-45* (New York, 2010), p. 14 refers to a thirteen-week Army Mobilization Training Program for BT, although he notes that it could take three weeks longer because of “insufficient training areas and ranges.” The U.S. Office of Civil Defense in its 1944 *Introduction to the Armed Forces* gives seventeen weeks (p. 28).
- <sup>39</sup> Rottman, *US Combat Engineer*, p. 16. Definitions of the exercises can be found at various physical fitness web sites.
- <sup>40</sup> Kennett, *G.I.*, p. 53. By 1944, the Army increased BT to forty-eight hours.
- <sup>41</sup> Rottman, *US Combat Engineer*, p. 14 and the U.S. Office of Civil Defense’s 1944 *Introduction to the Armed Forces*, p. 28 identifies other subjects included in BT.
- <sup>42</sup> War Department, *Basic Field Manual, Bayonet M1905, FM23-25* (Washington, 1940), p. 3.
- <sup>43</sup> Rottman, *US Combat Engineer*, p. 14 on weapons training.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> War Department, *Basic Field Manual, Unarmed Defense for the American Soldier, FM 21-150* (Washington, 1942).
- <sup>46</sup> U.S. Office of Civil Defense, *Introduction to the Armed Forces*, p. 28.
- <sup>47</sup> Rottman, *US Combat Engineer*, p. 9.
- <sup>48</sup> Kennett, *G.I.*, p. 46. See also U.S. Office of Civil Defense, *Introduction to the Armed Forces*, p. 30.
- <sup>49</sup> For a history of AA, see <http://www.skylighters.org/introduction/index.html> (accessed July 21, 2011).
- <sup>50</sup> U.S. Office of Civil Defense, *Introduction to the Armed Forces*, p. 30.
- <sup>51</sup> <http://www.skylighters.org/introduction/index.html> (accessed July 21, 2011).
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* In 1943 the Army separated the antiaircraft force from Coast Artillery.
- <sup>54</sup> Howard highly recommends the following web site for information on AA in World War II: <http://www.antiaircraft.org/weaponsindex.htm> (accessed July 21, 2011).
- <sup>55</sup> <http://www.antiaircraft.org/40mm.htm> (accessed July 21, 2011).

- 
- <sup>56</sup> <http://www.anti aircraft.org/50mg.htm> (accessed July 21, 2011).
- <sup>57</sup> <http://astpww2.org/main/procure.htm> (accessed July 27, 2011). This is a 1948 report by the Historical Division of the United States Army on ASTP.
- <sup>58</sup> Louis E. Keefer, *Scholars in Foxholes, The Story of the Army Specialized Training Program in World War II* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 1988; revised edition, Reston, Virginia, post 1996 publication), p.28. Keefer was an ASTPer.
- <sup>59</sup> <http://astpww2.org/main/procure.htm> (accessed July 27, 2011). Additional information on eligibility is taken from Keefer, *Scholars in Foxholes*, pp. 24-25. Unlike other programs in this time, blacks were integrated into ASTP.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> John C. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood: The American Combat Soldier in World War II* (New York, 1998), p. 13.
- <sup>64</sup> <http://nuspel.org/rem2.html> (accessed July 20, 2011).
- <sup>65</sup> <http://www.astpww2.org/main/procure.htm> (accessed July 27, 2011).
- <sup>66</sup> Keefer, *Scholars in Foxholes*, pp. 27-28, p. 2.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 78, 194, and 169 respectively.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 45. Keefer identifies 227 colleges and universities as participants in ASTP in mid-January 1944 (p. 112).
- <sup>69</sup> <http://www.udel.edu/aboutus/munroe/chapter9.html> (accessed July 28, 2011). Approximately one million students enrolled in colleges in 1941. That number went down to 600,000 in 1942, and it dropped by another one-third by the end of 1943. Keefer, *Scholars in Foxholes*, p. 8.
- <sup>70</sup> Keefer, *Scholars in Foxholes*, p. 76.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 87.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 81.
- <sup>73</sup> <http://www.udel.edu/aboutus/munroe/chapter9.html> (accessed July 28, 2011).
- <sup>74</sup> The length of the Basic and Advanced Phases, as well as the curriculum, is explained in Keefer, *Scholars in Foxholes*, pp. 21-22.
- <sup>75</sup> <http://www.astpww2.org/main/procure.htm> (accessed July 27, 2011).
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>79</sup> <http://www.udel.edu/aboutus/munroe/chapter9.html> (accessed July 28, 2011).
- <sup>80</sup> Howard's Enlistment Record that accompanied his Honorable Discharge on November 11, 1945 places him at the University of Delaware for a six month period (1943-1944) and has the phrase "Basic Engr.-Completed" on line 41 of his enlistment record. Copy.
- <sup>81</sup> Kennett, *G.I.*, pp. 46-47 explains the three parts of the Army from 1942 on and how the CE falls into two of the three.
- <sup>82</sup> Rottman, *G.I.*, p. 4.
- <sup>83</sup> The history of the Corps of Engineers can be found in the War Department's publication, *Basic Field Manual, Engineer Soldier's Handbook, June 2, 1943, FM 21-105* (Washington, D.C., 1943), p. 2.
- <sup>84</sup> Alfred M. Beck, Abe Bortz, Charles W. Lynch, et al. *The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Germany* (Honolulu, 2002; reprint of 1988 edition), p. v.
- <sup>85</sup> War Department, *Basic Field Manual, Engineer Soldier's Handbook*, p. 1. Italics in original citation.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 137.
- <sup>87</sup> The various tasks of the Corps of Engineers is taken from Rottman, *G.I.*, p. 38. Its responsibility for light, power, and water systems is found in the 1944 U.S. Office of Civil Defense, *Introduction to the Armed Forces*, p. 31.
- <sup>88</sup> The description, and history, of the insignia worn by the Corps of Engineers is found in the War Department's *Basic Field Manual, Engineer Soldier's Handbook*, p. 143 and in Rottman's *G.I.*, p. 24.
- <sup>89</sup> The history of Fort Jackson is taken from <http://www.jackson.army.mil/Area/FtJHist.htm>. (accessed July 31, 2011).
- <sup>90</sup> Details on the Bailey and pontoon bridges are found in the War Department's *Basic Field Manual, Engineer Soldier's Handbook*, pp. 109, 113.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid. The tools used by an engineer are explained on pp. 4-19. The basic training learned as a combat engineer is taken from the Field Manual's Table of Content.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

---

<sup>93</sup> Keefer, *Soldiers in Foxholes*, p. 175.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>95</sup> Nicola Risoli, "Nicola Risoli: A Prisoner of War of the Battle of the Bulge," *EX-POW Bulletin*, March 1996, p. 33.

<sup>96</sup> War Department's *Basic Field Manual, Engineer Soldier's Handbook*, pp. 78-81 lists the type of explosives, explains the bangalore torpedo, and details the various firing materials used in demolition.

<sup>97</sup> Beck, *The Corps of Engineers*, p. 565. Statistically, as of April 30, 1945, the "total theater strength" in the ETO was 3,065,505. Of that number, about 10.5% were combat engineers (323,677).

<sup>98</sup> Information on Camp Myles Standish is taken from a profile of the camp by Lt. Colonel Danny M. Johnson, U.S.A. (Ret.) at [http://99div.com/olddirect/camp\\_myles\\_standish\\_massachusetts+cb3johnson+43616d702...](http://99div.com/olddirect/camp_myles_standish_massachusetts+cb3johnson+43616d702...) (accessed August 27, 2011).

<sup>99</sup> Departure dates for the advance units, one of which was Howard's, and the 106<sup>th</sup> as a whole are taken from Colonel R. Ernest Dupuy, *St. Vith, Lion in the Way: The 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington, D.C., 1949), p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> The mass of the 106<sup>th</sup> departed from England on December 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> (*ibid.*, p. 9). Like Company B of the 81<sup>st</sup>, it, too, went by truck from Normandy to St. Vith. The length of that trip, five days, is cited in Stanley Frank, "The Glorious Collapse of the 106<sup>th</sup>," *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 9, 1946, p.70. Howard's earlier trip was probably similar in length.

<sup>101</sup> Dupuy, *St. Vith*, p. 1.

<sup>102</sup> <http://www.indianamilitary.org/1061D/Reports/53-106thAAR-12-1944> (accessed August 27, 2011).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid* and Dupuy, *St. Vith*, p. 11.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas J. Riggs, Jr., "An Engineer's Seven Day War," *The Cub of the Golden Lion*, July-August-September 1995, Vol. 51-No. 4, p. 19. Riggs commanded the 81<sup>st</sup> Combat Engineers Battalion while Howard was assigned to it.

<sup>105</sup> Beck, *The Corps of Engineers*, pp. 461-462 on the location of the Schnee Eifel and the task of the 81<sup>st</sup>. The topography of the Schnee Eifel is also described well in Hugh M. Cole, *United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 40.

<sup>106</sup> Climatic conditions are taken from Charles B. MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (New York, 1985; 2002 edition), p. 28 and from Cole, *The Ardennes*, p. 46.

<sup>107</sup> Sixty-seven years after this incident, Howard did not want to look at, even in a cursory way, the War Department's WW II Basic Field Manual on *Unarmed Defense for the American Soldier*, even though he poured over the pages of other Field Manuals on different aspects of BT.

<sup>108</sup> Frank, "The Glorious Collapse of the 106<sup>th</sup>," *Saturday Evening Post*, p.70.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Dupuy, *St. Vith*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>111</sup> Kennedy, *World War II Companion*, pp. 599-600 on Hitler's goals and p. 601 on origin of common name for the battle.; Dupuy, *St. Vith*, p.2 on the importance of St. Vith and Bastogne; Cole, *The Ardennes*, p. 272 on St. Vith's location in respect to American lines.

<sup>112</sup> Dupuy, *St. Vith*, pp.1-2.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>114</sup> Riggs, "An Engineer's Seven Day War," pp. 19-20; Dupuy, *St. Vith*, p. 14.

<sup>115</sup> Dupuy, *St. Vith*, p. 51.

<sup>116</sup> Howard Sharpell to Ed Wojahn, March 9, 1998. Copy.

<sup>117</sup> Dupuy, *St. Vith*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, p. 165.

<sup>119</sup> Cole, *The Ardennes*, p. 165.

<sup>120</sup> Dupuy, *St. Vith*, pp. 249-250. In a December 1999 letter to Howard, Ed Wojahn observed that out of their entire company, only thirteen soldiers were not captured on December 17, 1944. Ed identifies most of them as truck drivers. Copy. Marilyn Estes Quigley in her book, *Hell Frozen Over: The Battle of the Bulge* (Bloomington, 2004), states that "171 enlisted men in 3 platoons and 5 officers went to fight in support of the 423<sup>rd</sup> Regiment in Bleialf." By the time they moved back from those positions, only 44 men and 2 officers remained, with the rest having been killed or taken as POWs (pp. 90-91).

<sup>121</sup> See, for example, Morgan Thomas Jones, Jr., *Ensnared in a Spider's Web: A World War II POW Held by the Japanese* (Santa Fe, 2009), pp. 104, 108

<sup>122</sup> These three quotations--the "saying" from Lillian, Howard's "saying," and his last statement--are taken from an e-mail Howard wrote to Marilyn Quigley, February 25, 2004. Copy.

---

<sup>123</sup> Norman Bussel, *My Private War: Liberated Body, Captive Mind: A World War II POW's Journey* (New York, 2008), p. 161 on the boxcars. See also, for the phrase "40-and-8ers," Thomas Childers, *In the Shadows of War: An American Pilot's Odyssey Through Occupied France and the Camps of Nazi Germany* (New York, 2002), p. 383.

<sup>124</sup> Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*, p. xxvii.

<sup>125</sup> Home town newspapers of those killed, captured, or missing might run stories on those left behind, especially on widows with children. One of the rare instances when the public followed the details over the course of the war of one family's loss can be found in the story of Thomas and Alleta Sullivan of Waterloo, Iowa. They lost all five of their sons in November 1942 when the Japanese sunk the United States ship the young men served on together. Tom and Alleta went on bond drives throughout the country as part of how they dealt with this tragedy. See, for example, the March 1944 article by Mrs. Sullivan in *The American Magazine* in which she shares her loss. The best book on the Sullivans, John R. Satterfield's *We Band of Brothers: The Sullivans and World War II*, 1995, is as much a story of the parents as it is the sons .

<sup>126</sup> The most comprehensive volume that explains the sacrifices Americans at home experienced during the war, and how they supported the war effort, is a dated but valuable book, Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (1970; second edition 2003).

<sup>127</sup> Stanley Frank, "The Glorious Collapse of the 106<sup>th</sup>," *Saturday Evening Post*, November 9, 1946, pp. 33-75. The story of the Agony Grapevine is take from this article.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>129</sup> Major General J.A. Ulio, The Adjutant General, to Adolph C. Sharpell, February 17, 1945. Copy. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) maintains an online web site that offers information on members of the military during WW II. One of the databases is on American POWs. Dates the individuals were reported missing are given.

<sup>130</sup> Ulio to Sharpell, February 17, 1945. Copy.

<sup>131</sup> Adolph C. Sharpell, Jr. to Major General J.A. Ulio, March 2, 1945. Copy.

<sup>132</sup> American National Red Cross, *Prisoners of War Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 12, December 1944, p. 6.

<sup>133</sup> Among his personal papers, Howard has a copy of an August 15, 1945 Army medical report that details the long term effects of the beating he endured from the Hitler Youth gang.

<sup>134</sup> <http://www.ww2museums.com/article/433/Prisoners-of-War-Camp-M%FChlberg-Stalag-I...> (accessed September 17, 2011).

<sup>135</sup> <http://www.wartimememories.co.uk/pow/stalag4b.html> (accessed September 17, 2011). This web site has personal stories from some of the prisoners as well as requests for information from relatives of POWs. See also <http://www.gcjonline.co.uk/Stalag%20IV-B.htm> (accessed September 17, 2011) on Stalag IVB's location, size, capacity, and layout. This site explains what is left today of the camp in respect to buildings and memorials.

<sup>136</sup> For the recollections of a member of the 70<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Stan Lambert, who was also held at Stalag IVB, see [http://www.trailblazersww2.org/units\\_275\\_accounts\\_lambert2.htm](http://www.trailblazersww2.org/units_275_accounts_lambert2.htm) (accessed September 17, 2011).

<sup>137</sup> <http://www.redcross.org/museum/history/ww2a.asp> (accessed September 21, 2011).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> The number who died, but not the major causes of these deaths, is taken from [http://www.ww2museums.com/article/433/Prisoners-of-War-Camp-M%FChlberg-Stalag I...](http://www.ww2museums.com/article/433/Prisoners-of-War-Camp-M%FChlberg-Stalag-I...) (accessed September 17, 2011).

<sup>141</sup> Tony Vercoe, *Survival at Stalag IVB: Soldiers and Airmen Remember Germany's Largest POW Camp of World War II* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2006), p. 42.

<sup>142</sup> Howard's personalized state license plate is "POW 13." Russian forces liberated Stalag IVB on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, ten days after Howard liberated himself.

<sup>143</sup> E-mail from Howard Sharpell to Marilyn Quigley, January 20, 2004. Copy. Quigley details some of Howard's escape story in *Hell Frozen Over*, pp. 233-235. Quigley's interest in the story of the 81<sup>st</sup> Combat Engineers is personal. Her uncle was one of them.

<sup>144</sup> Information on the 273<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment is taken from its unit history on the official web site of the 69<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, <http://www.69th-infantry-division.com/histories/273.html> (accessed September 27, 2011).

<sup>145</sup> Thomas Childers, *Soldiers from the War Returning: The Greatest Generation's Troubled Homecoming from World War II* (Boston, 2009), p. 110.

<sup>146</sup> For information on Camp Lucky Strike, see *ibid.* as well as pp. 43, 111-112. In addition, Childers gives some history of the camp in another of his books, *In the Shadows of War*, p. 402. A very detailed web site is <http://www.skylighters.org/special/cigcamps/cmplstrk.html> (accessed September 25, 2011).

---

<sup>147</sup> Adolph C. Sharpell, Jr. to Major General J.A. Ulio, May 11, 1945. Copy.

<sup>148</sup> The May 15, 1945 document, the Secretary of War's directive, and the May 15, 1945 telegram to the Sharpells are in Howard's possession, among the Sharpell family papers. Copies.

<sup>149</sup> <http://www.gcjonline.co.uk/Stalag%20IV-B.htm> (accessed September 17, 2011).