Chapter1.

PROLOGUE: MY EARLY YEARS

I presume that I am as normal as the as the next person, since I remember so little of my early childhood. I was born in Brooklyn, New York, on January 5, 1925, although my mother disagreed with my birth certificate, which said January 3. Many years later, I finally got the government to acknowledge on my passport that January 5 was OK for me!

One of my earliest recollections was about falling in love with Lillian when I was about five years old. She was a beautiful woman, who owned a tricycle we both could share, and we started together in kindergarten. The romance did not last. It was in the depths of the Depression, and my father (Gustave H.) was already sick with Parkinson's Disease, and unable to work. My mother (Fannie Geller H.) was taking care of my sister Dorothy and me, and was pregnant with my brother Arnold. We had little money. All in all, it was not an auspicious beginning. We lived in the Bronx at that time, but shortly thereafter, moved back to Brooklyn. Most of my memories are of Coney Island and Brighton Beach, where I spent most of my early life. I went to public schools there (PS 100, and Abraham Lincoln High School), as well as Hebrew School, as demanded by my mother, until my Bar Mitzvah. I disliked Hebrew School, but attended daily, after regular public school hours, from ages 10-13. I know I fidgeted and misbehaved, and often received blows on the backs of my hands with a ruler, bestowed by my teacher for my unruly behavior. I did not return to a synagogue with any regularity for about 50 years after my Bar Mitzvah.

Most of my childhood was not very happy. I grew up essentially without a father. My father was a master machinist, and one of my earliest toys was a micrometer he brought for me from his shop. I did not have many toys, but I remember the micrometer and a toy cannon that shot corks at cardboard targets. I was probably six years old at that time. My father had been drafted for army service after America entered World War 1, and was stationed at Camp Upton in Long Island (as I was a generation later) for a short time, before he was released from service because of his essential work as a machinist and foreman, for a company involved in defense production. While still at home in my young life, he was confined to a wheel chair, and by the time I was 10 years old, he had been hospitalized, and remained so until his death in 1947. In those days, there was essentially no effective treatment for Parkinson's Disease. His disease was not the type often seen in older people. Rather, he had been infected with influenza virus during the epidemic of 1919-1920, and developed encephalitis, and subsequently, Parkinson's Disease, giving him a severe form of the disease at an early age. I have no doubt that my father was a caring and loving man, but he was broken and depressed because he could not care for his family. He was born in 1892 to a prosperous, educated Jewish family in the pre-World War 1 Austrian-Hungarian Empire. They were apparently petroleum engineers in the town of Drohobycz. (After WW1, it became part of Poland. After WW2, it became part of the USSR, and after the dissolution of the USSR, it became part of the Ukraine. Another branch of the family Heimberg (my great uncle's family) came from Vienna. My father emigrated to the USA about 1910, in his late teens. He had been called up for active duty in the army of the Emperor Franz Joseph, but did not wish to serve. Since conscripted service was for an indeterminate period of years, he left the

country. He was the only one of his family to emigrate, leaving behind his father (my grandfather) Joseph Baer Heimberg, his wife, brothers Jacob and Benjamin, his sister, and their families. Unfortunately, all perished in the Holocaust at the hands of the Nazis. Much of his history of the Heimberg family is documented in the files of the Holocaust Museum (Washington, DC). This wonderful family, whom I never knew, sustained us in the years before World War 2 (1939), by sending money to America to help support us while our family was on "relief", welfare, when we were all young children.

My mother, Fannie Geller, was born into a middle class family from Chortkov, a small town also in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Ukraine). This town was about 100 km from my father's birthplace,but they met in the USA. Her father had died of pneumonia in Europe at a relatively young age. His wife, my maternal grandmother Tillie, had two sons and three daughters. After my grandfather's death, the oldest son was sent to the USA to establish himself, and then was to bring the rest of the family to New York City, all prior to World War 1. My two uncles died in this country of infectious diseases before I was born. Momma had two sisters, Sylvia (Cohen) and Anna (Wexler). They were never really close, and were often argumentative. Although there were four cousins from these aunts, we lost touch, and I have had no contact with them since I was a teenager.

Momma had a soft spot in her heart for animals, mostly cats. We had several stray cats over the years, and she was the only person I have ever known who fearlessly bathed a cat! I learned about sex when Whitey gave birth to kittens. When I was about ten years old, we adopted a stray dog, a terrier mix pup, and he immediately became my dog (Pal). A few months later, I was walking Pal in a park near our home, when he had a

seizure. I bent down to pick him up, when he inadvertently bit me on the face. I carried him home, but he died a short time later. I was devastated. My face and lips became swollen, and my mother took me to the emergency room at Coney Island Hospital, a few blocks away. They cleaned my wound, and later came and picked up Pal's body. A week later, a diagnosis of Rabies (Hydrophobia) was made. I now owe my life to Louis Pasteur. I was required to take the Pasteur treatment, which meant that for 21 consecutive days, I received a subcutaneous injection of rabies antitoxin in the abdomen. I had to take the subway by myself (Momma was working) from Coney Island to downtown Brooklyn to the Health Department to get the "shot". This was exciting, but it always hurt my belly going back home. The only good part, was that I was released from school early each day, so that I could get to the Board of Health on time.

My mother, God bless her, worked endlessly to provide food, clothing, and shelter for her children. She worked in the home while we were on welfare, and as soon as possible, worked long hours in the garment industry as a seamstress. She found it hard to cope with all of this, and as a result, offered little emotional support and love to her children. The facts of ordinary life for her were too devastating. If I sometime appear cold and uncaring, I am my mother's child. The poverty, hard work, loneliness, in the midst of the national depression, was too much for her. Eventually, as she aged, she lived alone in an apartment, and shut out the outside world. None of us could do anything to change her outlook. I escaped by leaving home at age seventeen. Dorothy escaped by marrying early in haste, and subsequently, divorcing her husband shortly after he returned from the army. Dorothy, however, more than any of us, did what she could to help momma. As a result, as a teenage boy, I grew up mostly on the streets, with little

guidance from my mother, and none, of course, from my father. I learned little of social graces or behavior. I had to learn by myself, and that was often difficult and embarrassing. I was ill prepared to face the world.

My saving grace was my high school education. I discovered that I loved learning. I loved math and science, history, and languages (Latin, German, and of course, English), and my mother encouraged it. I also loved art and drawing, and actually won an art scholarship, for a weekly art class at NYU for a year. My social life in high school was nonexistent. I had no proper clothes, or money, except what I could earn, which put a damper on my social life. I guess I was a nerd or geek, in more modern parlance. I had little time for sports, and no sports equipment. My mother looked on sports as wasted time, and demanded that I fill any "free time" with a part-time job to help support the family. I did manage, however, to play beach football (no equipment, no shoes, one ball!) with friends, and an occasional pickup game of stickball on the city streets. On occasion, I managed to sneak into Ebbets Field to watch the Dodgers play. I also worked, at times, as a delivery boy for a drug store, sold ice cream on the beach, picked up balls on a golf range, made cloth-covered buttons in a factory, and was a carpenters assistant in a woodworking factory, among others. But we still managed to enjoy life without money. Swimming at the beach was only a walk away. I would frequently walk two miles to our local branch of the New York Public Library, and I was a ravenous reader. We could go anywhere in NYC for five cents on the subway, and the parks, museums and zoos were free. Local movies cost ten cents for a double feature, but I could not afford to go to my high school football games unless I sold pennants. It was only with each passing year, as a teenager, that I began to resent our poverty, and envy

those who had a father and more affluence. I guess I sublimated a lot of my envy by my academic and extracurricular activities (working in the Biology Laboratory at Abraham Lincoln High School as an assistant), and dreaming of going to college. I truly loved working in the biology laboratory, without compensation. My only reward was the Biology Medal on graduation. I still have it!

CHAPTER 2

NEVER NEVER LAND: BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

I finished high school in January 1942, two weeks after my seventeenth birthday and just a month after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I wanted to enlist in the navy at that time, but my mother begged me not to do so. Furthermore, the Navy required my mother's permission for me to enlist at 17 years of age. Whether this was the right decision was irrelevant, but as it turned out, I had a university to return to when I came back from the war. The Draft started at age eighteen.

My interest in chemistry and biology in high school made it logical for me to consider science and medicine as a future career. However, such a thought was a distant dream with no money for college, let alone medical school, and with lack of much public higher education in the state of New York. I also wanted to get away from home, and to be on my own. I could have matriculated at CCNY. I also won a scholarship to NYU, but in either case, I would have had to live at home, so, in my determination to leave, I refused either opportunity.

Meanwhile, I went to work for my "Uncle Charlie" Heimberg. He was really a second cousin or higher, of my parents generation, and from the Viennese branch of the family. My mother had moved the family again, a few months earlier, from Brooklyn to the Bronx. Charlie ran a small restaurant in the Bronx at the end of the subway ("El") line on White Plains Road. I worked the shift from 8:00pm to 6:00am as a short order cook and general handy man. Incredibly, I learned to cook simple fast food orders, make sandwiches, peel potatoes, cut French fries, squeeze orange juice, and sweep the floor! I

met some of the most interesting people during the few months I worked for Charlie on the swing shift. They were ordinary workers, business men "working late", and folks returning from a night on the town, police officers, prostitutes, gamblers, and petty criminals. Most came into the restaurant, the only place on the block open all night. They were awaiting bus or trolley connections to Mt. Vernon, New Rochelle, and other Westchester communities, and the restaurant was a convenient place to get out of the cold. It was quite an experience for a young innocent man. I had to do something to appear somewhat more mature, so I started smoking a pipe. The influence of the movies, no doubt. I suppose I was a reasonably good worker, but it was difficult until my body, finally, after a few weeks, agreed to let me work at night and sleep during daylight hours. One thing came through clearly from this experience. I did not want to earn my living as a short order cook.

During this time, I made inquiries about college education in New York State. I had had no guidance previously from school counselors, or from my mother. Momma, god bless her, encouraged me to get an education, but had no money to help. Poppa, of course, was hospitalized with deteriorating Parkinson's Disease, and had no income. I soon found out that there was a College of Agriculture at Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York, and that tuition was free to residents of the State. Moreover, many of the biological sciences were housed in the College of Agriculture. Was it possible that a poor kid from Brooklyn could become a student at Cornell University? There was one big catch! Preference for admission to the College of Agriculture was given to students who had been raised on a farm, and obviously, there was not much opportunity for farming in Brooklyn. There was one loophole, however! If you were not raised on a

farm, you could, nevertheless, qualify by accumulating “farm credits”. You would receive one credit for one week of fulltime work on a farm. You needed forty credits to graduate, and this requirement had to be fulfilled prior to the start of your senior year in college.

My high school friend, Raymond Dykaar, and I, having similar interests and similar finances decided we would study at Cornell. We each applied for admission to the College of Agriculture at Cornell, In late April, Ray and I left New York City and headed for Danville, in upstate central New York. We checked in with the NY State Department of Employment Security in town, in search of jobs as farm laborers. With the war on, labor was scarce, and so without any experience, we were hired immediately by the same farmer. We received room and board (rather primitive, and without indoor plumbing) and $20.00 per week, which was a fair salary at the time, and worked from dawn until dusk. This was a general dairy farm, so I soon learned to plow behind a mule, to milk cows, to herd cows, to clean out the cow barn and horse stables, to cut timothy and alfalfa, to do all the many tasks with haying, and, of course, to fork endless tons of manure, and spread it around the fields. It was working in the barn, in the haymow, with tears streaming down my face, that I realized I had “hay fever”. We also raised and harvested wheat and corn, and became tanned, healthy, and exhausted. The farmer, a relatively young man himself, lived with his mother, who did all the cooking. The farmer was deferred from the Draft because of his essential work. His mother was an excellent cook, and we gobbled up everything she prepared, and all we could get. And, of course, on Saturday night, we went to town, but didn’t do much, since we were already tired and milking time came early Sunday morning.

Spring passed and summer was half over. In August, we had not yet heard from Cornell (they, of course, had been told earlier of our adventures in farming). One hot sunny day, I was in the barnyard forking manure onto the spreader, covered with sweat, dirt, and an inevitable amount of manure, when we were told that there was a visitor to see us. A visitor? Who could it possibly be? As the visitor walked into the barnyard, I wiped the manure off my hands onto my blue jeans to shake his hand, as he introduced himself as an Assistant Dean of the College of Agriculture at Cornell. We were too dirty to be embarrassed. Clearly, he was impressed by our work, because in less than two weeks after he met with us and questioned us at length about our duties, both Ray and I were accepted as freshman in the class of 1946 at Cornell University. After Labor Day, we left for Ithaca to become college students. The semester started in mid September, and we needed to get situated. The only money either of us possessed was what we had earned and saved working on the farm, and whatever we had managed to put away previously. Altogether, I had about $350 in my pockets, but more important, had earned 18 farm credits. I only had 22 more to go!

CHAPTER 3

CORNELL UNIVERSITY (SEPTEMBER 1942-MARCH1943)

Ray and I arrived in Ithaca, New York by Greyhound bus from Danville, in September 1942, and started looking for a place to live. It became clear that we could not afford to live in the college dorms. With luck and with some helpful advice from the college housing office, we found a furnished room in the converted attic of an old house in College Town. This area of Ithaca adjacent to the campus, contained many old large homes, which were now used to house students off campus. It really was a bargain compared to others we had seen. The room was small. It could not have been larger than 12 x 12 feet, and contained two cots, two small dressers, one closet, and two small desks. At least, it did have a window through which we could see some beautiful mature trees in the area. The bathroom in the hall was to be shared with other students renting rooms on the same floor. The room cost $12.00 per month for both of us, and was close to the campus on an uphill climb, which became quite adventurous in the frequent icy and snowy winter weather.

We deposited our meager belongings in our room, and then went out to enjoy the warm early fall day, and the beauty of the Cornell campus. Certainly, Cornell must have one of the most beautiful settings in the country for a college campus. The campus was set between two gorges high on a hill overlooking magnificent Cayuga Lake and the town of Ithaca. The campus and hillsides were stunning in the early September sun, with a hint of autumn already in the air, and some early changes in the color of the foliage. In those days, the campus streets were lined with beautiful mature elm trees. Unfortunately, in later years, many succumbed to the Dutch elm disease. We walked to the social center of

the campus, Willard Strait Hall, which seemed to be crowded with students. It was quite apparent that many were well dressed, in comparison to ourselves, and, we assumed, they came from wealthy homes and were being sent to college, all expenses paid, by their parents. Probably, most students were in this category, but we later discovered that there were quite a few young men, who came from impoverished backgrounds and were trying to make it on their own. Many of them were Ag students like us! The place was alive with chatter, as we explored the building, gravitated to the taproom, and downed a few beers. It was a pleasant afternoon.

An immediate need for Ray and me was to find jobs to provide for room, board, and other expenses. My $350 would be exhausted rapidly for books, fees, and some necessary clothes. We soon learned that in early 1942, the Navy had set up a school for training officers at Cornell, most of who were domiciled in the Baker dormitories. The cafeteria in the Baker dormitory was used to feed the cadets, and it was apparent that kitchen help was sorely needed. This turned out to be a good opportunity for us. We worked one hour for each of two meals during the day, and received payment of three meals. The work consisted of washing dishes, pots and pans, or working at the steam tables, dishing out food. Our ravenous appetites took advantage of an "all that you can eat" payment arrangement. If we worked additional hours, we earned $1.00 per hour, a good wage in those days. Since we worked not less than four hours daily, we earned our food, and $10.00-14.00 per week, enough to pay for room board laundry, and various school expenses. We had to arise early each morning, to be in the cafeteria by 6:30AM for the breakfast service. It was a struggle to get out of bed each morning. We would climb up the hill to the campus, cross Cascadilla Gorge, and walk on campus down the

hills to the Baker dorms. Fall and winter weather comes early to Ithaca, and many a morning we trudged through the dark and constant snow to get to the dorm in time. Unfortunately, I did not have adequate proper warm clothing and boots to deal with the Ithaca winters. When classes started, I had to scramble back up the hill and Tower Road to get to 8:00 am classes on either the Arts and Sciences, or the Ag campus. It was tought, but there was little choice. With the job, and our studies, we had inadequate time to study, none to play. I often found myself falling asleep with a book in hand, trying to study.

I registered in the College of Agriculture for my first semester at Cornell, as a preveterinary student. My courses were rather diverse, including general chemistry, livestock judging, bacteriology, English grammar, and algebra. In addition, ROTC was required of all male students. I was lucky that my grades during that first semester at Cornell were sufficient to keep me from being "busted", expelled for academic reasons. I think I was always tired during that freshman year. Clearly, my grades didn't suffer because I was partying too much. That had to wait until I returned to Cornell at the end of the war. But that is another story. And so began my college career, in the class of 1946.

In retrospect, it is a wonder that I was able to get through all of this. I presume that it was because of my mother's influence on me. As far back as I can remember, I had an interest in animals and plants, and what I realized later to be biology and chemistry. My mother, although not an openly affectionate women, obviously cared for her children, and her vision for me was to be a scholar. Her dream had been for me to go to Vienna, Austria, to study medicine. Prior to World War1, Vienna had been a major world center

of learning in Medicine and Science. This was an unattainable dream because of our poverty, and, furthermore, was not possible with the rise of Nazism in Europe, the "anschluss" with Austria in 1938, and the beginning of the war in Europe in 1939. There is no doubt, however, that my mother's dream for me fashioned my own desire to get an education, even though there was no way that the family could finance it. It was a good thing I did not realize how difficult it would be, or I might have been easily discouraged.

During that first semester, I had little time to be a "freshman". Wearing the traditional freshman Cornell "beanie" (a small red and white cap) seemed ludicrous under the circumstances. As soon as I matriculated as a student, my name was put on various fraternity lists as a possible "rushee", but all the fraternities lost interest when they became aware of my family background, my religion, my lack of money and proper clothing, and, clearly, my lack of social graces. I, however, was a rapid learner. I even managed to play the rush game for a little while, and was able to get a number of free meals around the houses before the brothers caught on to my game. My membership in a fraternity would have to wait until the end of the war and my return to Cornell, when I associated with ∑AM, Sigma Alpha Mu.

As the first semester advanced, I tried my best to keep up with my class work, but the job requirements and lack of sleep were taking their toll. As the weather became colder, with more snow and ice, and as I became more fatigued, I became ill in mid November with viral pneumonia, and was hospitalized in the Cornell Infirmary for about two weeks, losing income and time from my studies. When I was released from the infirmary, I had to return immediately to my job and my classes, although there was a brief holiday between Christmas and New Years. Although I did not distinguish myself,

I somehow managed to pass my courses and even ROTC that semester. I still remember close order drill in our ROTC field artillery unit (and the Pershing Rifle drill unit) with my mind in a fog, and, I'm sure, a low grade fever for weeks on end. I was grateful for the end of the semester at the end of January.

On my eighteenth birthday on January 5, 1943, I had to register for the Draft. I was anxious to get into the fight, and with the difficulty of my situation at Cornell, I decided to enlist rather than wait to be drafted. If I volunteered, I could choose my branch of service. At that time, you enlisted through your draft board, which in my case, was in the Bronx at my mother's address. I did enlist and selected the army air corps, with thoughts of becoming a pilot. It was not until the end of March that I was finally called up for active service, and began what undoubtedly was one of the most defining periods of my life.

CHAPTER 4.:

THE ARMY YEARS FROM INDUCTION TO EUROPE

I reported to the draft board at 8:00 am on the morning of March 31, 1943. A group of us, escorted by army personnel, took the subway to Pennsylvania Station, then the Long Island Railroad to Camp Upton on Long Island. We took the oath of allegiance and thereby were inducted into the army. We were then rapidly introduced to the showers, the barbers, were given physical examinations, received our first uniforms, and were assigned to our barracks. We were a disorganized group, barked at frequently by noncoms and drill instructors, who had the notion of converting these civilians to soldiers. The days in camp began at daybreak, ended at dark, when we were exhausted and ready for sleep. I seemed to be always ravenously hungry. The food was plentiful, though not for the gourmet palate. During the next few weeks, we took various qualifications and evaluation tests, had extensive physical training, and the beginning of close order drill. I was now Private Heimberg.

After about three weeks at Camp Upton, I left by troop train with other men, all headed for the Army Air Corps, although we did not know the final destination. The train returned to New York City, then headed south to parts of the country I had never before seen or known about, except by name. The train left Penn Station, headed for Philadelphia, Washington DC, through Virginia and the Carolinas to Atlanta, and finally arrived in St. Petersburg, Florida. The trip to Florida took almost three days, with frequent starts and stops, and we did not have first class accommodations! Two men each shared upper and lower bunks, bathroom facilities were limited, but we were all young and most of us were glad to be in the service. Army trucks picked us up at the

railroad depot and we were transported to “Tent City”, a camp thrown together at the outskirts of St. Pete for basic training for the air corps personnel. The facilities were primitive, all tents without indoor plumbing, compared to an established camp like Upton, but here we were. At least it was warmer!

For the next few weeks, our activities were more of the same physical training, obstacle courses, close order drill, jogging. Shortly thereafter, we were moved from the tents to the Princess Martha Hotel in downtown St. Pete! The Air Corps had taken over hotels in various parts of the country, for housing during basic training. We did our close order drill and calisthenics in Miller Huggins Field, which the New York Yankees had used for spring training before the war. The hotel was stripped of anything resembling comfort or luxury, or regular hotel furniture, and was replaced with standard GI (“Government Issue”) spartan fare. I shared a ninth floor room with three other airmen, on two double decker bunk beds. We did a lot of running up and down stairs, since we were forbidden to use any of the elevators. They were reserved for the officers. The military is not a democratic organization!

Our first weapons were issued to us, the standard carbine, but more about weapons later. The Air Corps needed technically trained people of all kinds, for flight crews, maintenance, ordnance experts, medics, etc., so more time was spent in taking tests. The real training in the Air Corps would start after your assignment to one of these special areas. I wanted to be a pilot, and was given some additional testing, but this was not to be. A short time thereafter, our squadron commander called out a list of names at a formation, mine among them, and we were told to report to take a special examination. It turned out to be similar to a college entrance examination. Those of us who did well

would be informed later, but at the time, we were ignorant of its purpose. About a week later, I, and a few others, who did well on the exam, were told that the army was setting up an Army Specialized Training Program ("the ASTP") to prepare officers in various technical fields. They would be sending us back, in uniform, to various college campuses to study. I selected engineering, jointly with premed. This sounded too good an opportunity to turn down, so of course I accepted. The navy set up a similar program called the V12 program. In early June 1943, I was transferred from St. Pete to Blacksburg, Virginia, where I became part of the ASTP at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. St. Pete had been adequate for air corps basic training, but not for what was to come later. At any rate, I liked the town and did have passes occasionally to enjoy any off time in the bars, and with local girls.

VPI, at that time, was a typical southern academic military institution, all male, with a proud and traditional cadet corps. We army boys were thrown in with the cadets, and as you can imagine, the excess spit and polish did not go down very well with most of us. After a while, however, we thought we could outshine the cadets. At VPI, we were housed in dormitories, which were military barracks. I shared a small room with a fellow who turned out to be an anti-Semite from Wisconsin. We had more than one fracas. Ed Hanson was from Racine, my age, but from a more affluent background. I guess he was unprepared for a Brooklyn, New York, Jew. We eventually came to a truce, but certainly not to friendship. The main campus buildings at that time surrounded the parade grounds. Close order drill was a regular part of our daily activities, in addition to physical exercise, including a daily cross-country run.

School was set in session the day our contingent arrived! I soon was involved in calculus, engineering drawing, chemistry, English, and physics. The entire day was regimented. This was not the way college was supposed to be, but was a lot easier than what I had experienced previously at Cornell.. Reveille was at 6:30 AM. After washing, dressing, and preparing our rooms for inspection, we fell in at 7:00, marched to the cadet dining room, then marched to classes that began at 8:00, which continued until noon. After another march and lunch, we had classes and laboratories for another two hours, followed by three hours of regimented exercise. After dinner, we were expected to remain in our rooms for study until taps at 10:00 PM.

The most relaxing part of the day was mealtime. We would be seated at the dining room tables like real cadets, and were served our meals by young women who had been hired as waitresses. Everything was done by the numbers, and we had no choice in the matter. I'm sure most of us felt this as an obligation to the country at war, that we were lucky to be in the ASTP, and we tried to do our best.

On Saturday afternoons and Sundays, when not on duty, we occasionally got passes and could go to Roanoke, Salem, Radford, and, of course, Blacksburg. I rapidly learned to enjoy beer and square dancing. I was a great dancer after a few beers. We were able to meet local women, and I enjoyed the friendship of one young woman for the months I spent in Blacksburg. Unfortunately, I frequently greeted Sunday morning with a hell of a hangover.

The routine of study, exercise, close order drill, beer, and sex continued for months until it all came to a screeching halt on February 21, 1944. I managed to get good grades under circumstances far different than they had been at Cornell, and in the end, I

received substantial transfer credits from VPI to Cornell after the war. The War Department informed us that, due to military necessity, the ASTP, except for a few advanced medical and engineering students, would be closed down, and that we would be reassigned to the army ground forces. I had no option to return to the air corps as I would have preferred, and to apply for flight training. No doubt, there was military need for more infantrymen, but political pressure, I'm sure, had an effect on the army's decision to close down the ASTP. The navy resisted these pressures and the V12 program remained intact. Within a few days, the ASTP unit was closed down; we packed our duffel bags, boarded troop trains, and embarked for various destinations. By early March 1944, a good number of us from VPI arrived at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, and became members of the 84th Infantry Division. I was nineteen years old.

I was assigned to "I" Company, 2nd Platoon, 3rd Battalion, 335th Infantry Regiment, and my conversion to an infantryman began. The 84th Division had been reactivated earlier in the fall of 1942 at Camp Howze, Texas, where it started training in January 1943. It was at half strength when it moved to Camp Claiborne, after maneuvers in Texas and Louisiana, in November 1943. It remained at reduced strength until it was filled out by the ASTP boys. Half the Division, including all the noncoms, were men whose education at best terminated at high school, and the remainder were from the ASTP group. The original members of the Division referred to us as the "Quiz Kids". This at first produced enmity, then competition, but finally, collaboration and acceptance between the two groups when we proved ourselves to be good soldiers. We knew we were going to see combat, and we had to depend on each other.

We, the ASTP boys, immediately started an intensive basic infantry training. We received our weapons, the M1 Garrand rifle. I was assigned to a rifle platoon, and had to learn to love my weapon. I cleaned it, learned to take it apart and put it together blindfolded, and eventually qualified as an Expert with the M1 (the highest level based on marksmanship). I qualified similarly with the carbine, and with the bayonet. Because I was the tallest guy in the squad I often carried the BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle). I also had to familiarize myself with the 30-caliber light machine gun. Even though we were not a heavy weapons platoon, the time could come when any one of us might need to use one. The same was true for mortars. Learning to use hand grenades was an obvious necessity, and we all were a little shaky before we threw our first live grenade. One of the more difficult training exercises was the obstacle course. You maneuvered on your stomach with rifle and field pack, through barbed wire, while at three feet above ground level, live ammunition was flying. You learned rapidly to keep your head and butt down. Somehow, I survived. Finally, we had extensive training with the bayonet and knife. We had to learn to use the bayonet and the rifle butt as parts of the same weapon. This to me was the most difficult, not the learning, but the thought of cold steel entering a body was frightening. We learned hand to hand combat with knives and bayonets, and how to disarm an enemy when you were not armed. This is easy to digest in training, but it was not the real thing. That was yet to come. We were being taught how to be killers, since, after all, that was what war was all about.

By this time, we were all in excellent physical condition, but there remained intensive field training, extended marches (about 25 miles) with full field pack, forced marches (double time), all of which drove us to the limits of our stamina. The swamps of

Louisiana became familiar territories for a bivouac after a hard day. Out in the field, we all became bait for chiggers and ticks. We spent many an hour, like monkeys, grooming each other using lighted cigarette butts to make the ticks back out with their claws relaxed! It was not pleasant, but very necessary. Needless to say, our personal hygiene could have been improved, but in a large way, my experience as a farm hand prepared me for some of this. We lived in dirt, breathed dirt, and prepared for combat. When we returned to camp, however, the barracks and ourselves had to be scrubbed clean, everything was spit and polish, and we had to stand for inspection and parade, before we could possibly be given a weekend pass. But there also were some small pleasures out in the field. Often, in the midst of a march or war game, we found ourselves in a watermelon patch. Nothing had ever tasted as sweet or salved your thirst as much as a watermelon, warm as it was, split open with a bayonet, and divided among members of the squad!

When we were fortunate, we would get a weekend pass, and go to Alexandria, the nearest town. There was little to do in town except walk the streets, try to meet women, or end up drinking beer for hours. I think the residents of Alexandria were not too happy to see all these soldiers descending on them. If we had enough time, a rare three-day pass, the place to go was New Orleans. I got there once. Most of the time we did not go beyond the camp gates, where a string of bars and prostitutes had set up shop. When we had time off, but were restricted to camp, we could get beer at the PX (Post Exchange), and the poker games would start. We had little energy for intellectual pursuits.

Part of our required education as soldiers was to view various films on venereal disease, how to avoid it and what to do if exposed. These films were very graphic and

surely frightening, but certainly did not restrain us from seeking out women! We were required to carry GI condoms when we were given passes. We also viewed a series of films on "Why We Fight", giving us a history of Nazi Germany and Japan, as interpreted by the War Department. We had lectures on what our duties as soldiers were, if we were captured. I don't think many of us considered that as a real possibility at the time. We knew from these talks that it would not be long before we would see combat. With the emphasis we had on jungle warfare, we thought we would be going to the Pacific.

In addition to regular infantry training, we began training as airborne troops. We were not paratroopers, but would be used as glider troops, if necessary. We had some parachute training, but no actual jumps, and learned how to lash down equipment to be carried in gliders. I guess we were fortunate never to have been used as glider troops in combat. They earned their nickname as "flying coffins".

As our training continued, D-day came and went. The infantry war expanded on all fronts. We finally received our orders, and in mid August 1944, the entire Division packed up for combat and moved to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. We assumed that we were heading for the European Theater of Operations (ETO), and this proved to be correct. At Camp Kilmer, we received some new weapons, and continued with physical training. All men in the Division at intervals received three-day passes. Those who could left for home, while others headed for a blowout in New York City. I, of course, went home to see my mother and brother Arnie. He was just twelve years old at the time, and looked up to his older brother in uniform. I also was able to see my sister Dorothy, then married to Milton Friedman, who was in the army quartermaster corps. I also managed one day for letting off steam with army buddies, and spent almost all of my

money. On September 18, we left Camp Kilmer for embarkation from New York City. The 335th Infantry boarded the "Sterling Castle", a British ship, and with the early tide, set sail. It was a beautiful sunny day as the ship headed out of New York harbor. We then began to realize that some of us might never see this scene again. As we passed the Statue of Liberty, the air filled with "balloons", as many unused condoms were blown up, tied off, and tossed into the air. A jolly scene! As the city receded in the distance, blankets were unfolded on deck, out came the cards, and the poker games began in earnest. I had about one dollar left to my name, which was of little value, so what else was there to do but to play? Stakes were only 5 and10 cents. I won the first hand, and, strangely, I had nothing but good luck that day, and won about $100 by time we finished playing. This turned out to be fortuitous, because as the daytime passed, the weather turned foul, and we were engulfed in a thick fog. Vision was very poor, and in the fog, we had a collision with another vessel. The prow of the Sterling Castle was so severely damaged, that the ship had to return to port. This quite unexpected turn of events brought us back to Camp Kilmer. It was another week, another three-day pass, and another Manhattan blowout, before we would embark again for Europe.

CHAPTER 5. MY WAR

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The trip to Europe on the Sterling Castle was an experience I will not easily forget. We slept in hammocks, with about twenty of us in one area. The hammock, of course, remained vertical while the ship rolled, but the sensation was just the opposite. I never did adjust to sleeping in a moving hammock, and I didn't do too well on the first few nights out. I often felt waves of nausea during the night, but I think it was the relative motion in the hammock, because I was never seasick while on my feet! Luckily, the seas were not very rough during the voyage. We tried to be on deck as much as possible, to get some fresh air between various drills and inspections. Of course, at these times, the decks were full of blankets spread out for poker and craps! We were traveling in convoy, and although the weather was gray almost the entire voyage, it was pleasant on deck, and we could see many other vessels surrounding our ship. Our ship and crew were British. The food was terrible, and it seemed to me that the smell of boiled cabbage and sausage permeated the Sterling Castle. There was no escape. After a week of this, we were only too happy to disembark.

As we approached Ireland and southwest England, the sun came out. When we entered the Irish Sea, the water appeared emerald green. Whatever the reason for its color in the early October sun, it was beautiful. The sea was calm with long low swells, as we made our way to port. We docked in the early morning of the next day in Liverpool. It was several hours before we could disembark, but we enjoyed our first view of a world new to us, England. The regiment finally left the ship, and marched to

nearby trains for a ride to the south of England. Our regiment was housed near Winchester in Quonset huts, so commonly used at the time. We remained there for about one month, continuing intensive field training exercises. We had little time off duty, but I did have one opportunity to take a train to London on a three-day pass. (It was quite different from my next visit, during the summer of 1961, when, as a biomedical scientist, I returned to London and the continent to participate in a scientific meeting.). In 1944, I was only interested in booze and women.

By November first, we were on our way to France. We crossed the channel on LCTs (Landing Craft, Tanks), and landed at Omaha Beach. The crossing on the LCT was an adventure in itself. The channel is not usually a place of calm waters. The LCT was crammed full of men and equipment, the swells were high, and the ship was less than stable and many of us became seasick. I guess I must have a strong stomach, since I escaped the mal de mer! We were on deck for the entire crossing, which lasted overnight. Sleep was intermittent. At least we could slip out of our full field packs and try to get some rest. Our company bivouacked near Omaha Beach for 1-2 days in a sea of mud before we were enroute again. Meanwhile, a truck convoy had assembled to move us as rapidly as possible into the line. We rode without any significant stops, through France into Belgium (Namur), then into Holland (Maastricht) where we remained for about two days. One of the wonderful memories I have of Maastricht was being invited with a few men from my platoon to a simple dinner in a private home. We shared our own rations with them, but it sure tasted different. We were being treated like conquering heroes, not the fresh inexperienced troops that we were.

By November 9, we (the 335th Regiment) were temporarily detached from the 84th Division and reassigned to the 30th Infantry Division. The war began in earnest for us. We were on our way to the line near Aachen (Germany), and were to have our baptism of fire in the Siegfried Line. The Siegfried Line was a well armed line of bunkers, fortifications, and tank traps that was the western wall of protection for Germany. As we disembarked from a truck convoy, and started to advance on foot toward the front, the reality of what was happening began to sink in. The sounds of distant artillery became louder. It was a gray overcast day, which added to our apprehension. We began to see bodies of German soldiers by the roadsides, and could hear the noise of small arms fire. We were close! I did not know how others in the Company felt, but I was scared to death. What was going to happen to me? Would I survive? Would I be man enough to do my duty as an American soldier? I must not let my buddies down. Would I become a casualty? I was filled with self-doubt. All of us must have been having similar thoughts, but we were soldiers, and could not admit our fears to one another. Later, after we had been in battle, it was easier to admit our feelings. The rotting bodies we passed didn't help raise my spirits. At least, I didn't shit in my pants. We finally reached our destination, relieving a Company of the 30th Division on the line. It was dusk as we took over their positions and prepared for the night in the existing foxholes. After a cold meal of K-rations, we prepared for the night. My squad was in a forward position, and as the BAR man, I was out front. Chambers and I, in the hole, stood guard duty, two hours on and two off for our first night on the line. The first night was quiet, the silence broken only by occasional small arms and mortar fire. We were in a defensive position on high adrenaline alert, learning what infantry combat was about. For the next two weeks, the

line was relatively constant. On most nights, we went out on reconnaissance or combat patrols, usually 2-3 men, or the full squad (about 10 men). Sergeant Valuenzuela, our squad leader was a man I trusted. A Mexican-American, he had been with the outfit since its activation. In February 1944, when the 84th Division was filled out with the ASTP boys, he proved to be a competent friend. Now in combat, we trusted one another. In those few weeks, I changed from an untried infantryman to a combat veteran, actually doing what had been drilled into us in the months since we joined the Division. I learned what it was like to fire the M-1 or the BAR at a target other than a "bullseye".

The entire month of November had been cold, wet, and cloudy. Everything was colored grey. By Thanksgiving Day, we even had a few snow flurries. We had hopes for a hot meal, since we had not had one since we took over the sector of the frontline. Thanksgiving could be the occasion! Instead, all I got was a mess kit with a serving of cold green peas. Nothing else! Sgt. Storm, our supply sergeant, was as ineffective in combat, as he was back in the states. Sitting in my foxhole with cold peas, in damp, cold weather was not my idea of how to spend the holiday. At least I enjoyed a cigarette.

Then came that fateful day. While my regiment was attached to the 30th Division, the 84th had already taken two towns, Geilenkirchen and Prummern, on the way to the Siegfried Line. The 335th returned to the 84th Division on November 26, and our regiment was to lead the attack on the Lindern-Beeck area. The attack on Lindern was really the first major offensive for our regiment. From our patrols, we expected heavy resistance, and this proved to be the case. The 3rd Battalion (mine!) was to take the offensive, and Company I (mine!), along with Co K, was to lead the attack. The point of the attack was to be the 2nd platoon (mine!). We were to lead the way. We started off in

the dark cold of 6:00 am November 29, 1944, and rapidly advanced several hundred yards toward Lindern, but the Germans soon hit us with mortars, artillery, machine guns, and small arms fire. We were ordered to dig in and hold as best as we could, in a defensive position. By the time it was light, it became apparent that our platoon officer, Lt. Kellerman, had us isolated on relatively low ground, with fire pouring in from several directions. It was an untenable position. We could not advance or draw back. I was lucky to find an old mortar hole half full of water. I slid into it and used it as a foxhole. Hopper was about five feet from me when he was hit in the throat and died. I was using the M1 on this attack with bayonet fixed. We were ordered to hold our positions and not retreat. We held out like this without relief, and without artillery or mortar support for several hours, until we were without ammunition, surrounded, and Germans were coming from all directions. Kellerman gave the order to surrender, as they came at us shouting "Hande Hoch"! I stood up, dropped my weapon, and was taken prisoner. Only then did I realize that most of the platoon was dead. Why they didn't kill me on the spot I'll never know. Bodies of my friends and buddies were strewn around where they had tried to dig in. I did not know then, but learned later, that our battalion reserves came in shortly thereafter and retook the area from the Germans, and that our regiment had taken Lindern by the next day. But for me it was small comfort!

At the time I felt that I had let my country down by surrendering, and I honestly felt ashamed of what had happened. Even today, I feel the same way. I would have preferred to continue in active combat rather than become a POW. It was not right for my active combat duty to have lasted less than one month. This may be faulty reasoning, but that was my true feeling then and now. To this day, I blame Kellerman for what

happened. As for me, I had sustained three small shrapnel wounds, on my right thigh, my right hand, and a nick below my right eye. I remember that there were about ten of us alive, the remnants of our platoon of thirty-seven officers and men. The Germans disarmed us and started marching us to the rear. I did not know what was to come, but I did know that now I was MIA, missing in action. I wondered what my family would think about this. I knew that it would not be long before my mother would receive that telegram from the War Department informing her that I was missing in action. There was no way I could let her know that, at least for now, I was still alive.

It never occurred to me back in Camp Claiborne that I would become a POW. We had been instructed how to behave under the circumstances, to give the enemy no information other than name, rank, and serial number, but none of us really thought it would happen to us. Being killed or wounded was a real possibility, but being taken prisoner? Not on your life! It brings to mind the old joke that there are three ways to get out of the infantry: killed, wounded,and missing. Two out of three isn't so bad. Being taken prisoner also reminded me that, back in Camp Claiborne, when we were on maneuvers on a map and compass course, Kellerman did not do as well as many others in the platoon.

In German hands, we had already been divested of all our weapons. Now they took our helmets, watches, wallets, all personal effects, and all our cigarettes. They removed any photos we had, rings, and anything of value. At least for the moment, they allowed us to keep the clothing on our backs, but even this was to change soon. At their forward command post, they interrogated us, but there was little information they could obtain from the enlisted men. They knew what Division we were, sporting our

Railsplitter shoulder patches. Kellerman had been captured along with us, but he was soon separated from the men, and that was the last I saw of him. Other Americans that had been taken prisoner joined us, and we then started a march that would take us eventually to northeastern Deutchland. What started for me as an attack on the Siegfried Line in the direction of Koln (Cologne) became a forced march as a POW toward Dusseldorf. It was depressing. We were also very apprehensive about what might be coming. I also had the additional concern that I might get special treatment because I was Jewish. I did not know whether it was wise, but I decided to get rid of my dog tags, which I did as soon as I could. Imprinted on the dog tags was an "H" for Hebrew, so that the American army could give me a proper headstone if I had died in battle! I also did not want to let it be known then that I had reasonable fluency in German. (I had studied German for two years in high school, was fairly familiar with Yiddish, and had developed some fluency in spoken German, learning from some distant cousins who were refugees from Hitler's Nazism). We were among the first American troops in Germany, and I guess the population at that time still fancied they might yet win the war, eventhough it was going badly on two fronts. They were not generally friendly as we marched through one village after another. At one point, a grenade was thrown at our group, which by now had grown to about twenty-five. Luckily, it was a dud and did not explode. It probably disturbed our German guards more than us. We marched the better part of three days with little food or water, until things became a blur. On the second day, we stopped for a rest in a turnip field. They allowed us to dig up some turnips with our bare hands, which we did, scraped off the dirt, and ate. On the third day, we arrived at a railroad yard filled with the typical box cars of the Reichsbahn, the kind that during World War 1 were

called “forty and eights”, since each would hold forty men or eight horses. They put us in a boxcar with half a loaf of a dark sour bread and a canteen of water, and then locked the doors. There was little comfort! The floor was strewn with straw, which helped some, but there was little room to move about. We could either sit or stand. There were no windows, except one on the door to view the world outside. There were no toilet facilities. We definitely were not traveling first class. Eventually the train started to move, and most of us fell asleep. We were the walking wounded. Most of us had some wounds, albeit minor, but we never received any medical attention. The wounds on my leg and face became infected and started to drain. It was impossible to clean them.

It was hard to tell day from night. The best thing to do was sleep. The half loaf of bread had to be eaten slowly, since we didn’t know where or when our next meal would come. We would be let out once daily from this prison, to urinate or defecate in some field. Unfortunately, this was inadequate for most of us, and the boxcar became foul and rather aromatic. At many times during this trip, the train was halted in some railroad yard, no doubt sidetracked for more important cargo. Our most frightful time occurred when we were halted during an air raid. While we wanted our boys to inflict as much damage as possible, we did not want to be the target. Fortunately, we were not hit, but it delayed our transport, and made our guards somewhat less friendly. It was difficult to tell where we were, but some signs suggested we were in a railroad yard near Hannover, where we remained for about two days. In all probability, the bombing had damaged the rails. When the train started moving again, it continued in the same general direction. We would get more bread and water about every third day, and so it went for almost two weeks.

We were getting weaker and filthier. The wound on my right thigh was infected and draining pus. The wound below my left eye was getting worse. It was puffing up and interfering with my vision. Near the end of the second week, we passed a town called Neustrelitz, and shortly thereafter came to Neubrandenburg. By this time, I could not see at all out of my left eye, and the wound had broken open and was draining some foul smelling material. On the outskirts of the town, we entered a "Stalag fur Kriegsgefangene" (Camp for Prisoners of War), and, finally, got out of the boxcar. Neubrandenburg is in the northeastern part of Germany, in Landkreis Mecklenburg (Province of Mecklenburg), directly north of Berlin, about half way to the Baltic Sea. It was not the best part of the world in which to spend the winter of 1944-1945.

CHAPTER 6

SURVIVAL IN MECKLENBURG

When we arrived at the stalag, the Germans marched us into a barracks, removed our uniforms, coats, and shoes, and replaced them with old threadbare clothes of much inferior quality and weight. The new clothes gave us less protection against the cold than did our GI uniforms. The coats were thin and very lightweight. Our shoes were replaced by clogs, constructed of wooden soles and canvass tops. The barracks, of which there were about twenty, were built of wood, and were made to house about fifty men. There were no beds, but rough bunks, built with planks, doubled or tripled above each other. There were no mattresses or pillows, and inadequate numbers of thin poor quality blankets. In some cases, gunnysacks filled with straw were available as mattresses. The only heat was from a small pot-bellied stove, when fuel was available. There were no toilet facilities or showers in the barracks, but there was plumbing for several cold water spigots. The “toilet facilities”, outdoors in a central area, consisted of several large slit trenches with planking over it to allow you to sit. Even though lime was added to it frequently, the odor was always present. At least the slit trenches were covered by canvas tenting. Nevertheless, sitting on the pot was a chilling experience. Since we were not supposed to be out of the barracks at night, chamber pots were then used as toilets. It had been easier to keep clean out in the field on bivouac in Louisiana, than it was in POW camp. The facilities we had were far different than what was available to German POWs back in the States. There was a central “parade ground”, where we were required to fall in for various formations. The whole compound was surrounded by a double row of fences, and by guardhouses at various strategic spots. We were told that any

individual caught between the fencerows would be shot on sight. What a bleak, dismal place. On one side of the compound, separated by the fences, Russian POWs were imprisoned, but it was almost impossible to communicate with them. Before we had gone overseas, we had been told that it was our duty as American soldiers to attempt to escape. This was easier said than done!

For at least the first two to three days in camp, we were not sent out on work details. This was of help, since some of us were quite weak from the ordeal of the past two weeks. Sleeping the first night was difficult for me. I had been assigned to a bottom bunk, which had no slats, so I slept on the floor without pillow or mattress, but with a light coarse blanket over my clothes. My wounds were still bothering me. The only way we could clean ourselves was with a cold water "sponge bath". We had no soap. We could not shave at first, since we lacked razors, soap and hot water. Food was not much better than it had been in the boxcar. Twice daily, we received some dark malodorous soup, which had some unknown materials floating in it. Turnips or rutabagas were occasionally added. Its taste was awful, sometimes bitter, but we needed to force ourselves to eat. Since the soup was the only hot water we had, we used it, occasionally, to shave with, when we did get safety razors from the International Red Cross (IRC). The soup was served with some dark sour bread, which I believe had been baked with some sawdust included. But one had to eat. Within a few days, I developed gastroenteritis, which at that time was simply the "shits". No one in camp was immune. I had some degree of enteritis during my entire stay as a guest of the German government.

In these bleak surroundings, during a particularly cold winter in northern Europe, our daily routine in the stalag was generally as follows. We would arise at about 6:30am, fall out in the parade ground in formation by barracks for role call. After this, we had our delicious breakfast, cleaned up the barracks (mostly removing the "honey pots"), and then assembled outside for work details. Officers were in separate camps, and, according to the Geneva Convention, were not required to work. All enlisted men, however, could be forced to work, as long as it was not in a job "directly connected to the war effort". The German treatment of American and allied POWs generally did not adhere to these rules, and for the Russians, never did! The work parties took up most of the day outside the camp. We spent lots of time working on the railroads (the DR, Deutsche Reichsbahn), repairing roadbeds, moving rails, cleaning up debris. Another job, which was very difficult, was loading pine logs onto railroad cars. The logs had been cut into approximate five-foot lengths, about 8-10 inches in diameter. They were obviously heavy, yet we had to load them by hand onto the open flatbed boxcars. It was cold, often snowy, always wet or damp. We had inadequate clothing, poor shoes, no gloves, and we were not in the best of physical condition. These two work details were the most frequent I was assigned while I was in Neubrandenburg. There was no way to get out of the cold. The armed soldiers, who were guarding us, at least had warm clothing, coats, and boots! In the winter of northern Germany, it became dark before 5:00pm, and so our day ended. On return to the stalag, we would have another meal of stinking soup, and usually fall asleep from exhaustion.

During these weeks of forced labor as a POW, it was obviously necessary to communicate with our guards even to urinate. I could not remain silent, and so I began

speaking in my halting, but adequate, German. The guards were surprised and so were my fellow inmates. Quite naturally, I rapidly became their spokesman. To the guards, I was their "Dolmetscher in Kriegsgefangenenschaft", their interpreter for the POWs business. It was a good way to learn the language, and I must have become fairly proficient in it, because I even began to dream in German. However, I always had to remind the guards to speak "deutlich und langsam", clearly and slowly, so that I could understand what they were saying. Of course, I would have preferred learning the language living and studying in a peaceful Europe, as had been my mother's dream for me. Being the interpreter for the group in no way made the work details any different for me. It just gave me additional things to do. I've had some occasion to use the language in later years, when I traveled to German speaking countries as a scientist. It came in handy when I went back to Cornell after the war, since I passed my language requirement by written and oral examination without taking a course.

As the month of December wore on, I was still without medical aid. I had enteritis, draining wounds, and I had developed a cough and fever. Fortunately, the wound below my left eye was less puffy as the drainage continued, and I could now see with that eye. The constant cold was a problem. I was always tired, without adequate rest or food. I was not aware at that time how much weight I was losing. At any rate, I was not going to give in. Someday I was going home!

The thought that it might not happen for a long time became apparent just before and after Christmas. All of a sudden, it seemed that hundreds of American soldiers had been taken prisoner, and were arriving at the stalag. What was going on? Our guards told us that there had been a successful German offensive, and that their troops had

broken through the American lines, and were racing back through France to the west. There were, we were told, large numbers of American casualties, many killed and taken prisoners. The area of the attack was the Ardennes, south of where the 84th Division had been. This was the " Battle of the Bulge", which the Germans launched on December 16, 1944. I later learned that the 84th played an important part in the US counterattack, which finally defeated the German offensive. I wished I could have been there with them. For those of us who were POWs at the time, it was distressing, and it seemed as if the German attack might prevail. This, in fact, was what they tried very much to convince us. To be specific, the Germans let us know of their victorious attacks, and that they were driving the Allies "back to the Atlantic Wall". Furthermore, they invited all of us to join the German army, to fight on the eastern front, to help in the victorious defeat of the Russians. If we did so, we would be able to go home after the final victory of the Wehrmacht (the army). I don't think there were any takers of this generous offer.

Shortly before Christmas, the International Red Cross inspected the stalag. I don't think the inspectors did anything but walk around the camp with some German officers. At any rate, we were allowed to write one letter each to our families back home. Supposedly, the IRC would see to its delivery. To the best of my knowledge, my mother never received such a letter. What she did receive about two months after I was MIA, was a second telegram from the War Department stating that I was alive and a POW. There was some benefit, however, of the IRC visit. The IRC inspectors distributed food packages, which also contained soap, cigarettes, and sundries for shaving and personal care. This was a blessing, so we thought. There were a number of canned food items, which we expected to hoard and save for several weeks. Each POW received an

individual carton, which contained manna from heaven. Our good fortune, however, was short lived. Shortly after the IRC left the camp, the Germans came around to each of us, opened each carton, and punctured each can of food with their bayonets. The reason given was that we could use canned food in an attempted escape. No doubt this was true. But nevertheless, the fact that each can was opened meant that it would spoil within a few days if not consumed. We tried to save what we could, leaving food outside (our refrigerator!), for as long as possible. What was inevitable was that we had to consume the food rapidly. Also, the inevitable result was that we became sick, stomachs upset, vomiting, paying the price for gorging after partial starvation and horrible nutrition. There was no alternative, and this sequence of events was repeated a number of times during our captivity.

There were two other benefits from the IRC visit. The first was that they distributed bibles, New Testament, St. James version, of course. Being Jewish, this was the first time in my life that I had looked at a Christian bible in any depth. As of this time, the Germans had had no knowledge of my Jewishness, nor did I know whether it would make any difference in the treatment I received in their hands. In fact, during my initial interrogation at the stalag, the Germans asked me if I were of German descent, since I had a good German name ("ein Gutes Deutsches Name"). Being young and belligerent, I replied that I was not, but that my grandparents came from Austria (Ostereich, literally the Eastern Empire). Their reply was that it was "ganz egal", completely equal, the same thing. They did not question my religion. The bible I received was the only book I had available all during my imprisonment. Out of curiosity, I started reading the New Testament. I was a little put off in my reading by some

derogatory statements about Jews, and that the New Testament essentially replaced the Old Testament, the bible as I knew it. Nevertheless, I had sufficient interest, curiosity, and time for me to continue reading. I certainly did not become a bible scholar, nor do I now remember much of what I had read. But what I do know, is that reading the New Testament while I was a POW gave me peace of mind, made me think a lot about its content and message, and wonder why there was so much hatred against Jews if Jesus was Jewish. The message of Jesus as Messiah was beautiful, and I wanted to believe it. Was he really the Messiah, or as Jews believe, are we still waiting for him? Jews, of course, believe that when the Messiah comes, he will usher in the Messianic age, when the kingdom of heaven will be established on earth, and that has yet to happen. My current thoughts are that, had it not been for St. Paul, there would now only be one religion, Judaism, in which Jesus would remain as a central figure and prophet. So much for Philosophy!

Christmas 1944 came and went. The only difference it made in my life was that several of my fellow prisoners sang a few carols, trying to remind all of us of home and peace. Amazingly, the German guards, mostly older men, seemed to treat us, for a few minutes, like human beings. Even more astounding, strains of “Silent Night” were heard over the loudspeaker systems in the barracks, with German lyrics (Stille nacht, heilege nacht, alles schläft, einsam wacht…). It seemed so incongruous to hear this music in these surroundings, in our circumstances.

A few days later, January 5, 1945, was my twentieth birthday. This did not do much to cheer me up! I wondered then, and often, until the war ended, whether I would

survive this place, and whether I would live to see another birthday and to return home. Certainly, the will was there.

Toward the end of January, I was selected with others to go on a work detail outside of the main stalag. We were taken by train under guard from Neubrandenburg to the town of Güstrow in Mecklenburg, and from the Güstrow railroad station to a stockade, where we would spend the nights. Within the stockade was a barracks for about twenty POWs, plus facilities for the guards, who, for the most part, were older men, some veterans of the first world war, and somewhat more inclined to treat us with "benign neglect". The food was no better, we still wore the same rags, and had the same toilet facilities, but the building was warmer. During the day, we were put to work. For a few weeks, our job was to make concrete bricks in single molds. It was dirty, cold, outdoor work, and we had little protection from the cold weather. We were marched each day to the work area about 7:00 am, spent the day outside mixing the concrete and pouring the molds. There was no time for rest, except for a short break for "lunch", usually a piece of dark sour bread, and a bowl of some nondescript thin soup. It was tiring work, and we were not allowed back in the barracks until after sundown. Escape from the work detail was unlikely, since we were heavily guarded, poorly clothed, and not in the best physical condition. After a few weeks of brick making, we were put back to work in the railroad yards near Güstrow. As before, we unloaded pine logs from infinite numbers of flat bed cars. I think that during the last year of the war, the Germans were dependent on wood as a major source of fuel, and it undoubtedly came from eastern Europe still under German control. During my captivity in Güstrow, the camp commandant, learning that I could speak a little German, asked me if I would teach him

some English! It was better than boredom, so I started to give him some rudiments, as he corrected and helped me some with the German language. And so time went by. Life in Güstrow was not easy, nor very different from the main stalag in Neubrandenburg.

Several weeks later, I developed a cough and a fever, and was not feeling well. I received no medical attention, and was required to continue as usual. My cough got worse with time, and gradually I was aware that I was constantly bringing up sputum, and eventually the sputum was tinged with blood. I just had to do the best I could. I guess I was young enough and strong enough to survive this episode. It finally got to the point where they sent me back to the main stalag to the "lasaret", the medical clinic, such as it was. I stayed in the "hospital", which was not different from the other barracks in the camp, for about one week. At least I didn't have to go out on work detail. They told me that I probably had tuberculosis, but I didn't receive any medication or special treatment. (This diagnosis was confirmed much later, when I was back in American uniform. At that time, there was no specific drug treatment available anyway. I know now that the tuberculosis bacillus is always in our bodies, but the disease comes out when resistance and the immune system is weakened. Today, it is the most common killer of people infected with the AIDS virus.). After this respite, I was put back on the train and returned to the stockade in Güstrow, and the usual work routine. The cough and fever continued, but at least by this time my shrapnel wounds had mostly healed spontaneously. Obviously, I survived that winter. I would like to assume that God had made other plans for my life.

Some time, about mid March, the commandant came up to me, and asked me why I had not told him that I was Jewish! I was dumfounded, and asked him why I should

have told him anything but my name, rank, and serial number. He seemed to be annoyed with me, and mad that the whole matter had come up. He apparently found it necessary to tell me that he was not a Nazi, he had nothing against Jews, but they had informed him from the main camp that Jews were not allowed on these outside work details, and that I would have to be returned to the stalag. He, I thought, was also annoyed that his English lessons would cease. I am sure that they learned of my religion from the International Red Cross, who, primarily, appeared to be working with the Germans. I immediately felt more concerned for my safety, and wondered whether I would get back to the main camp in one piece. By this time, we had become aware of atrocities against the Jews in Europe, although we did not yet know of the extent of the holocaust. My stay in Güstrow was about to end, so I thought. I was taken back to Neubrandenburg, but by early April, I was back again in Güstrow. This was the end of the "Jewish Question" for me, and as far as I know, for any other Jewish American soldiers in the prison camp. I guess they needed my labor more than anything else.

A large foundry that manufactured various auto/tank parts was located in the environs of Güstrow. Bombing raids by our air corps were, therefore, an occasional problem. I think, but am not sure, that there was also a small arms plant near the railroad yards. A B17 raid in this area near the middle of April gave me an opportunity to escape. We were working in the railroad yards, this time replacing rails and concrete crossties that had been damaged or destroyed in previous raids, when warning sirens sounded a bombing raid. The bombing created a lot of confusion as explosions ripped the plant, about 1000 yards from where we were. Bombs also fell on the railroad tracks somewhat closer to us. All was noise and confusion as the guards tried to get to safety without

losing their prisoners. In the midst of this, I managed, with another POW, John Giducci, to slip away from the work detail unobserved. I had not known John at all until I returned to Güstrow the last time. We, of course, had no food, warm clothing , or weapons, and no immediate idea of what to do, except to get away from the area, and in that, we succeeded. The only thing we knew, was that the Russian (Soviet) troops were pushing westward, and we had heard some rumors that they were perhaps within 100 miles of Neubrandenburg, and to the south, Berlin. We would try to head east, and see if we could meet up with the Russians. After all, they were our allies!

CHAPTER 7.

ESCAPE

Confusion can often be a friend, as it was for us, because the bombardment from the B-17 raid allowed us to escape from the work detail. Gustrow was a relatively small town. The railroad we were working on was bordered on one side by a wooded area. Bombs now started falling closer, within 300-500 yards from where we were working. They were aimed, I suppose, at the foundry (more about that later) as well as the railroad. The two aging guards with us wanted to get out of harms way, as did everyone. The bombardment seemed to be getting closer, and we needed to seek shelter, but God knows where that might have been. We were told to run in the direction from which we had come, away from the falling bombs, but with the nearness of the woods, that seemed a better option. In the confusion, noise, and explosions, John and I ran toward the woods as fast as we could, and kept going and going. When we finally stopped, we realized that we were alone, and at least for the moment, not being followed, so we thought. After resting for a while, the question was what to do now! We had no food, no weapons, no money, and wore clothes that would easily identify us as kriegsgefangenen, but we had no intention of returning to the stockade. We continued until we saw a clearing, and with care, tried to determine compass directions from the fading afternoon sun. If we went anywhere, it had to be toward the east. For the moment, we remained hidden in the woods, waiting for nightfall.

The only information we had about the war was that the Soviet lines had advanced, were now in Germany, and we thought, might even be within 100 miles of us. As it turned out, they were considerably closer. Our plan was to move as rapidly as

possible to the east, under cover of darkness. Much of the surrounding area was agricultural, with open fields, clumps of forested area, and isolated farmhouses. We needed to avoid villages entirely. We had to live off the countryside, eating what we could dig up, steal where possible, and drink water wherever we could find it. At one point, we broke into an isolated farmhouse, stole food, a sidearm with some ammunition, and a couple of sweaters, before we were seen by the farmer. He was more surprised than we, but I told him (auf Deutsch) that we were American soldiers. He did not try to resist us, and we left. I suppose, like many Germans by April 1945, they knew the war was ending for them, and that they were defeated.

We continued heading east for the next week or so, trying to avoid confrontations with civilians. Our luck held and we were able to avoid patrols of Wehrmacht troops. I'm not sure how far we had gone, perhaps 25 miles or so, when we began to hear the rumble of artillery in the distance. The front seemed to be advancing to us faster than we to it. The next problem facing us was to get to the Soviet lines without being killed either by the Germans or Russians. We went as far forward as we dared, staying off the roads, and finding cover in the woods as best as we could. We were dirty, tired, hungry, but young, foolish, and taking chances on survival. I continued to have the same chronic cough as ever, but this was of small matter compared to the total problem. The only thing that made sense to us was to dig in, as deep as possible (we had obtained a small shovel from a farmer's barn), and let the lines of battle pass over us. We hoped we could then present ourselves to the Soviet troops, and identify ourselves as American POWs. We never complained about having to dig this foxhole. It was relatively shallow and covered with brush. We had some hard bread with us, and a canteen of water, which

could last for about three days. I knew the lines had passed us when we could hear soldiers speaking in what I assumed was Russian. It definitely was not German. We were miraculously still alive, despite the warfare that had rapidly moved over us.

We decided that the only course of action was to stand up, walk erectly toward the voices, and try not to act as if we were German (and, therefore, afraid of being killed by the Russians). We saw a clearing and a road about 100-150 yards ahead, a large Russian tank, and a squad of soldiers. We walked directly toward them, and within seconds, we were seen, and numerous weapons were aimed in our direction. We continued to walk up to the tank, and, in fact, started to examine it, when we were surrounded by the dumfounded troops with weapons at the ready, wondering who these two idiots walking toward them might be. They spoke no English, we spoke no Russian, and I certainly was not going to try my German with them. The only thing we could think of saying over and over again was "American, or alternatively, Americansky" ! They may have understood, but we were searched, my weapon confiscated, and we were placed under guard for about 30-60 minutes, until an officer came up to us, and we repeated our mantra. Finally, he asked me in German, "Sprechen sie Deutsch?". I answered "Ja. Wir sind Amerikanischer soldaten und kriegsgefangenen, und von Gustrow lager hatten wir abgefluchtet". We continued a primitive discussion in German. Apparently he understood me, since shortly thereafter he brought out a bottle of vodka and several glasses, and started proposing toasts alternatively to Stalin and Roosevelt. With each toast, of course, we were expected to down a jigger of vodka. Remember now, we were in miserable shape, and hadn't had a decent meal in months. It did not take long to become completely soused, to pass out, and to get some needed rest!

And so we stayed with this tank unit for the next two weeks, and returned with them to Gustrow. We were unable to get any better clothes, but we had food, and it was clear that the war was over for us. It probably would have been safer for us to have remained in Gustrow in the first place, but it was our duty as soldiers to attempt to escape, and rejoin our units if at all possible.

We were in Gustrow for VE-day.

CHAPTER 8: FROM GUSTROW TO CORNELL

Earlier in Gustrow, I and other POWs had been forced to work in a foundry. Now that Germany had surrendered, the owner of the foundry invited a few Americans, including me, to his home (despite the fact that the town was now being occupied by the Russians). No doubt, he had expected to be arrested by the Russians, which I believe, happened soon thereafter. The foundry owner had two attractive daughters, and he asked us to take them back to the American lines, rather than have them fall into the clutches of the Russians! After the way the Germans treated the Russians, he had reasons to fear for their safety. Of course, we refused his request. I remember the incident not only because of the girls, but also because they had an extensive record collection of popular American music.

The Russians soon rounded up all the American POWs in the area, and transported us to Luneburg, west of the Elbe River, where Canadian troops welcomed us. The Elbe River became the boundary for what became, for many years, East and West Germany. It was here with the Canadians that I was washed, deloused, given clean clothes (Canadian army uniforms), and for the first time in many months, a decent meal. We stayed with the Canadian army for a few weeks, until early June, enjoying our freedom and their hospitality. I guess I did not realize how thin I had become, until my mother pointed it out to me back in the states! Finally, the Canadians handed us over to the American troops, and we were flown in army DC-3 aircraft from Luneburg to “Camp Lucky Strike”, a tent facility near Le Havre, France, which was set up to receive many of the returning American POWs. It was great to be back again in American uniform. I had

assumed that we would be returning to our original outfits, since, although the war in Europe was over, there was more to come in the war with Japan. However, we were to remain at Lucky Strike until transport was arranged for us to return to the States. During this time, we underwent medical exams, and were interrogated about our imprisonment. It was here that I had the honor of meeting and shaking the hand of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. He was visiting the camp to check on conditions, and to bolster our joy of being repatriated. There were many times as a POW that I doubted I would survive, let alone ever to return to the USA, so meeting the General gave me a wonderful feeling of coming home. We remained at Lucky Strike for a few weeks, but, unfortunately, were not given passes to leave camp, or blow off steam in Paris.

We finally boarded ship at the port and headed west. I'm not sure what vessel it was in "civilian life", but it was an ocean liner, taken over during the war by the Navy, repainted in navy gray, and definitely not fitted out as a cruise ship. I had the pleasure of sleeping in hammocks both going to and returning from Europe, but we were on our way home! The weather at sea was perfect, and after a week en route, we disembarked in Boston, and were transferred to Ft. Devon.

After a two day layover, I was given a months furlough, and took off as fast as possible to New York City. This was about a five-hour train ride, coming into Grand Central Station in Manhattan. My mother knew that I was on my way home, when I telephoned her from Boston. She was living in the Bronx, near Mosholu Parkway, with my brother Arnold, who was 14 years old at the time. My sister, Dorothy, was living in

Queens while her husband (Barry's and Gail's father) was in the army. I took the subway to the Bronx, hauling my duffel bag. What I remember most about that homecoming was my mother's concern about how thin I had become. Needless to say, she plied me full of food, much of which I could still not eat. I lived at home for several weeks, running around, mostly going downtown, trying to look up old friends, or make new ones. Being in uniform did not hurt in this regard. I was in NYC through the end of the war in Japan, and got caught up in the crowds celebrating in Times Square. Shortly thereafter, I was ordered to The Lake Placid Club in upstate New York, which had been taken over by the Army as a rehabilitation hospital. It was a great vacation! We ate exercised, gained weight, canoed, hiked, and looked for women. It was hard to believe that this was the army. But all this ceased after about one month, when I was ordered to Ft. Meade, Maryland. I thought I was going to be reassigned to another infantry unit, but instead I became a clerk doing useless work in a quartermaster company. I became bored, restless, a "goof off", and wanting to become a civilian again. I had absolutely no interest in my work, and I'm sure I became a screwup. That whole period was a blur. The only thing that made it sufferable was frequent passes to Baltimore, where we spent most of our time in the bars and burlesque houses, and chasing after women. This went on until late October, when at Ft. Meade, I got into a tussle with a server in the mess hall. It happened that the servers were German POWs, who had been well taken care of here, and were veterans of the Afrika Korps, when German prisoners were still shipped to the USA. This particular POW was serving food, and when I asked for a larger serving, and he refused me, I guess I went beserk. I grabbed the guy over the counter, yelled at him and took a swing or two at him, but did not do any damage. I was stopped by an officer,

restricted to quarters, and threatened with a Courts Martial. It was then, I guess, that my company commander (not a combat veteran) became aware that I was a repatriated POW. A few days later, I was told that I would be discharged. The great day soon came, and on November 30,1945, I was mustered out of service, given an honorable discharge and a partial disability.

I returned to NYC, stayed with my mother until the New Year, then headed north to Ithaca, New York, to see if I could restart my education at Cornell University. The fact that I had previously been a student at Cornell allowed me to be automatically readmitted. This was very critical, since thousands of veterans, as well as recent high school graduates, were competing for admission to college. For the next two years, it was almost impossible to be accepted for admission at any major university if you were not a veteran. But now, living costs, and education expenses were available to me, to a significant degree, through the GI Bill, and other acts of Congress affecting disabled veterans, for which I was qualified. Although I still needed to work part time, I would be able to devote myself primarily to being a student. Despite this advantage, it took me months to adjust to civilian life, even though I had been out of the army since December. At first, I could not concentrate, and would waste lots of time partying,, drinking, smoking, and not studying during that first semester back at Cornell, until my grades began to suffer. There was a real possibility that I would be "busted", expelled for academic reasons. I was fortunate enough to befriend other Jewish combat veterans, and we helped each other. I came to my senses and realized what I really wanted. I had rented a room back in College Town, but soon thereafter, we veterans reopened, cleaned, and repaired the ∑AM fraternity house, which had been closed during the war, and we all

moved in. It was not your typical frat house. We all helped and needed each other, and a place to live. All of the brothers worked in the fraternity at one job or another. There was no differentiation between servers and those being served. I worked as a waiter at the same time that I was social chairman of the House. In this atmosphere, I was able to come back down to earth and get on with my life. A new phase of my life was beginning, and I wanted to fulfill my dreams of getting an education and becoming a scientist. Over the next few years, I would be able to study and work at Cornell, Duke, Washington University, and Vanderbilt. I have been a very fortunate man.