The Evacuation of Allied POWs from Nurnberg to Moosburg, Germany

Colonel Walter "Pop" Arnold was the first commander of the 48^{5th} Bomb Group, taking command of the group as it was being formed in the United States. He was loved and respected by his men. Pop's daughter, Kathleen Arnold, shared this story with us. It's little wonder that Pop rose to the rank of Major General, with his ability to lead and his concern for his men, as evidenced in this wonderful historical document, written by Pop himself.

Preface

The idea for this brief history began with a conversation between General Albert P. "Bub" Clark and me. Like me, General Clark was a prisoner of the Germans during World War II. Also, like myself, General Clark participated in some of the prisoner evacuations conducted by the Germans as the Allies tightened their grip on the Third Reich during the closing months of the war. General Clark asked me to document the march of 1,875 prisoners from Nuremberg to Moosburg that I commanded in April 1945 because there was no other written account of it. My account begins from the time I was shot down and taken into captivity to the day of my liberation.

Major General (Ret.) Walter E. Arnold

The Beginning

By August 27, 1944, the Allied thrust had moved deep into France. In the north, the British I Corps reached the mouth of the Seine that day, while Canadian II Corps began to cross the Seine between Elbeuf and Pont-de-l'Arche. The U.S. XX Corps (3rd Army), with the 7th Armored Division in the lead, reached the Marne at Chateau-Thierry on its advance towards Rheims. The U.S. XII Corps advanced from Troyes, northeast toward Chalons-Sur Marne. In the south, the U.S. 3rd Division, moving along the Rhone valley, neared Montelimar. The American 45th Division pushed on from Grenoble toward Lyons. At Marseilles, the German garrison asked for surrender terms.

From bases in Britain and Italy, the Allies bombing offensive continued around the clock, the Americans bombing by day and the British bombing by night. It was on this day that 31-year-old Colonel Walter E. "Pop" Arnold, the U.S. Army Air Corps Group Commander of the 485th Bomb Group, set off on his final air raid of World War II. That mission began an odyssey that

would end with him leading 1,875 prisoners of war on a 100-mile march to a safe haven where they would spend the final days of the war.

The Mission

Col. Pop Arnold was to lead a group of forty-two, B-24 bombers on a raid from the group's home base in Venosa, Italy, and it would have been his 19th mission. Their mission was to bomb the synthetic oil plants at Blechhammer South, in eastern Germany. Today Blechhammer is called Blachownia Slaska, (Editor's note: This area is also in the vicinity of Kozle today, a more identifiable reference point) located in Poland. Col. Arnold's group encountered little trouble from a few German JU-88 fighters on the way and reached the target area on schedule. However, once over the target, the bombers experienced heavy, accurate flak, which grew more intense as they began their bombing runs. Col. Arnold was in the lead ship of the formation and suddenly his airplane received flak hits in the left wing, the left nose section, and bomb bay just seconds before they were to drop their payload.

All bombs got away on target; however, the B-24J aircraft named 'Junior' was heavily damaged. According to Arnold, "Flak first hit the two left engines setting them on fire, then it hit the left side of the airplane's nose, where the Navigator and Bombardier were. I was in the pilot's seat on the left-hand side when the flak broke all the glass and all the instruments."

At that moment, Col. Arnold didn't realize he had been wounded. "I felt like somebody hit me over the leg with a baseball bat. It felt like a charley-horse, but I really didn't mind it." He was more concerned with trying to guide his aircraft to safety, so he put the aircraft into a steep dive, losing 2,000 feet of altitude before leveling off. Realizing the plane could explode at any second, one by one, the crewmembers began to bail out. Arnold said, "All the gunners and the engineer said they were leaving the airplane. Then the Navigator and Bombardier came back and went out the bomb bay, leaving only myself and my co-pilot, Lt. Col. Bob Smith."

By that time, the airplane was out of control and had fallen out of formation. That was also when Col. Arnold realized he had been seriously wounded. "Bob Smith looked at me and said, 'You're hurt pretty bad.' I looked at my left leg and saw it was nothing but blood from hip to toe."

Col. Arnold and Lt. Col. Smith decided it was time to bail out. The two men made their way to the bomb bay, where ruptured fuel lines were spraying gasoline in every direction. Col. Arnold told Smith to jump, and once Bob was safely away, he too left the aircraft. As Col. Arnold drifted down, he watched the fiery airplane fall from the sky and crash.

Taken Prisoner

Col. Arnold parachuted into a forest, where he landed several feet off the ground in a pine tree. "I knew I had to get down and stop the bleeding." He used his teeth to unhook the medical kit from his shoulder strap and dropped it to the ground. He worked his way out of his parachute

harness and grabbed a smaller tree nearby. The tree bent under his weight, dropping him closer to the ground. He swung himself out and dropped down on his right side.

"By then I was losing sight. The pine needles were the same color as the medical pack, but I finally found it and opened it up. I took out a bandage and sprinkled sulfa powder into the wound and bandaged it up." The morphine tube in Col. Arnold's medical kit had been punctured, so he could do nothing to ease the pain. Meanwhile, German troops closed in on him.

At the time of the raid, British POWs had been out working in a field and were told by their German guards to take cover in the trees when the bombing began. Unknown to many was the fact that there were six British prisoner of war work camps in the Blechhammer, Heydebreck and Odertal area. It was British prisoners who got to Col. Arnold first after he hit the ground, which was fortunate for Col. Arnold because by this time in the war, downed airmen could not rely on their German captors to protect them under Geneva Convention rules. A prisoner named Lance Corporal A. E. Wilkinson, taken as prisoner of war at Dieppe, Northern France, asked Col. Arnold if he had any weapons on him and if so, to get rid of them or the Germans would kill him. Col. Arnold only had a pocketknife, because he had left his .45 in the plane before bailing out. Cpl. Wilkinson took the knife plus Col. Arnold's escape maps and hid them before the German guards arrived. With the possibility that Col. Arnold may die from his wounds, he gave Cpl. Wilkinson his mother's address in Texas and asked him to write her and let her know what happened to him. After the war, he found out that Cpl. Wilkinson had indeed written his mother as promised. Also after the war, Col. Arnold received a package from Mr. Wilkinson and in it was his pocketknife that he gave to him that day long ago in the woods. "I don't know how Cpl. Wilkinson managed to hang onto my knife throughout the war, or how he remembered my mother's address, but I'm sure grateful that he did and what a nice guy for doing that!"

The Germans quickly captured Col. Arnold and took him to an old farm. While awaiting transportation to a field hospital, the Germans put him in a turkey pen for about two hours. During his wait at the farm, British POWs talked the Germans into giving them some disinfectant water. The POWs undid Col. Arnold's bandages and washed out his wounded leg. He was then transported to a field hospital, where German doctors initially proposed amputating Col. Arnold's leg. Col. Arnold was insistent that they not do that and pressed his rights under the Geneva Convention. The German doctors complied and from there Col. Arnold was transported to a small hospital in the town of Cosel. Arriving with a dangerously low pulse rate he remained bedridden there for three and one-half months. Today the town of Cosel is called Kozle in Poland.

Recuperating

Once he was safely at Cosel, doctors told Col. Arnold that all but one muscle had been shot away in his left thigh. A doctor taped the muscle together and put a splint on the leg. "He told me not to move for at least two weeks. He said I would walk again if I didn't move, in order to let the muscle grow." A few days later, a plaster cast was put on his leg for 6 weeks to ensure that Col. Arnold's leg remained immobile. Although the doctors' prognosis for his survival was good,

they were not optimistic that his leg could ultimately be saved and worried about gangrene and infection setting in. They told him if he managed to walk again, he would probably have permanent damage and be impaired. Col. Arnold was determined not to let that happen and he spent many hours lying in his hospital bed wiggling and moving his toes to strengthen his muscles and keep movement going in his leg. Through his strong will, determination and intensive physical therapy, not only did his leg eventually heal completely, he was able to march 100 miles later in the war and re-qualify for flight duty after the war. Col. Arnold's leg wound never debilitated or impaired him throughout the remainder of his life, although he carried a large 16cm x 12cm x 4cm scar on his left thigh.

From Camp to Camp

By November 1944, reports of heavy guns could be heard at the hospital indicating that the Russian Front was moving toward Cosel. In accordance with the Geneva Convention, the Germans evacuated Col. Arnold. He traveled on a German Express train with another American POW and a German escort. First, he was taken to an interrogation center at Frankfurt, where he remained for five days and nights in solitary confinement. While in solitary, Col. Arnold was interrogated under bright heat lamps, sleep deprived, and denied medical attention, in an effort to make him "crack." He was never let out of his cell or given the opportunity to wash or re-dress his wound. After solitary, Col. Arnold was taken across town to a Dulag and given new equipment. From there he was sent to Stalag Luft III at Sagan. Months later, he was evacuated again this time to Stalag XIIID, the large POW camp at Nuremberg, and then made a final march to Stammlager VIIA, at Moosburg.

The Bombing

While being transported from Frankfurt to Stalag Luft III, Col. Arnold found out first hand how devastating the Allied bombing offensive was. American bombers suddenly approached the train transporting Col. Arnold. "We were in the middle of a marshalling yard, and the train came to a dead halt." The Germans quickly disengaged his car and left it standing in the middle of the yard. "The people in my car, plus my escort, evacuated and walked away, leaving me locked up in my compartment alone." During the next hour, bombs rained down, eventually derailing the car. "There was fire and smoke all around the marshalling yard. When all was clear, my escort came back and released me." Col. Arnold was shaken but not hurt and had laid down flat as he could on the floor of the car to breathe air from the cracks in the car's floor.

Sagan

British "Kriegies" (prisoners of war) met Col. Arnold at the gate of Stalag Luft III POW camp on December 3, 1944. Stalag Luft III was located near Sagan, Poland (now Zagan) and was one of five POW camps housing more than 2,000 men in each camp for a total of about 10,000 - 12,000 downed allied aviators. It was also the camp where the famous Great Escape of March 1944 took place and 50 of the 76 escaped British POWs were murdered by the Germans upon their

recapture. Also of note is the then Lt. Colonel "Bub" Clark was a senior ranking officer at the camp and the man in charge of all security for escape activities in the camp as well as organizing and conducting covert intelligence operations. He was known to all POWs as "Big S" and remained a POW for 33 months, despite many escape attempts. Col. Clark rose to the rank of Lt. General and was the Superintendent of the U.S. Air Force Academy from 1970 – 1974. At the age of 91, he is still living in the Colorado Springs area.

Two of Col. Arnold's flying school classmates, Colonel John Stevenson and Colonel Dick Klocko, were also POWs at the camp and he was brought to their barracks in the South Camp. Col. Arnold was still very sick, weak, had not bathed or had clean clothes all while in solitary confinement at Frankfurt. "I smelled pretty bad and was still in a state of confusion after my ordeal." "My leg was stiff and hadn't been cleaned, so none of the guys wanted to take me in with them!" He said, "We continued to walk down the barracks trying to find someone to take me in and finally, in Barracks 133, Room 9, at the very end of the hall were two black fighter pilots, Tuskegee Airmen, 2nd Lt. Charles T. Williams (Chuck) and 2nd Lt. Albert L. Young (Al). "They said they'd take me in and the first thing they did was take me down to the showers, wash me, re-dress my wound, get me clean clothes and made me a bed between their cots. If I'd known then what I know now, I would have asked to stay right there with those guys because they were so good to me." Col. Arnold stayed with the Tuskegee pilots for 3 days, and they cared for and nursed him. Once Col. Arnold was in better shape, he moved in with Colonels Stevenson and Klocko in Barracks 121, Room 7.

After the war, Col. Arnold visited Chuck Williams at his home in Los Angeles and met his lovely wife. He was pleased to find that Lt. Williams was happy, had a beautiful family, a good home, and he was running an auto garage in the Los Angeles area. He lost touch with Al Young but Pop often thought of the two Tuskegee airmen and is forever grateful to them for their kindness, compassion and generosity to him, a total stranger, when his own friends initially rejected him. (Editor's note: Al Young died in January 1945.) He considered his "little red-tailed friends" as his own guardian angels.

Col. Arnold described what life was like in Stalag Luft III, South Camp. "There was a lot of camaraderie amongst POW's. Guys liked to play cards, especially bridge, and would hold late night card games after lock down when everyone was supposed to be asleep." One night while they were having one of their late-night games, a German guard came in and caught them by surprise. The guard cracked the door to the room, stuck his machine gun through the crack and started firing in order to scare and break up the POW's. A bullet ricocheted off something and hit Steves in the kneecap. "He was sent to the hospital for surgery and after the surgery, one leg was slightly shorter than the other and because of this, Steves was unable to return to flying status after the war." Despite this, Col. Stevenson stayed in the service after the war and rose to the rank of Major General in the Air Force. Unfortunately, Steves died relatively young from cancer. Another one of Col. Arnold's friends at Sagan was Major David M. Jones, (Davy). Before the war, Davy was Arnold's best friend at the University of Arizona and they were in ROTC together. After college, they were in the Army reserves and both got assigned active duty for one year in an Army Cavalry unit in El Paso, Texas. Jones and Arnold pondered what to do

after their active duty and Davy heard they were recruiting for flight training at Randolph Field, Texas. Jones left El Paso to enroll in flight school at Randolph Field, and Arnold stayed in El Paso, telling his friend to let him know how things went at flying school. Within months, Davy wrote to Arnold and told him "the waters were fine" and to come on down. That was all Pop needed to hear and he left his hometown in El Paso to join his friend at Randolph Field flying school, where they both graduated as 2nd Lieutenants in 1938.

During the war, Col. Arnold knew Davy had been shot down early in the war and taken POW, but never expected to cross paths with him. Major Jones was second in command of a light bomb group attacking Biserta, North Africa, when he was shot down in December 1942, and had been a POW at Sagan for over 2 years. Col. Arnold was really glad to see his best friend alive and well at Stalag Luft III, South Camp. At the camp, Davy was a principal member of the South Camp secret escape committee, and in charge of planning, reviewing and directing escapes. He also organized getting secret information into and out of the camps. According to Col. Arnold, "Davy really knew the ropes. He was one of the top commanders in the camp and commanded one of the barracks in South Camp and he knew everything." "He was a real operator and still fighting the war from inside the camp!" Before South Camp opened, Davy headed the American team of diggers working on the Great Escape tunnel called "Harry." He was an outstanding leader of young men and continued leading the tunnel digging team until the camp was evacuated in January 1945.

To help his friend recuperate, one day Davy showed up with some ice skates and took Col. Arnold to a small rink of ice that the POW's had made and liked to play hockey on. Davy held Col. Arnold up and supported him as he pulled Col. Arnold around the ice. "This was my first experience with ice skating and I had a real good time." He said, "This experience made me realize I needed to start working my leg and get it functioning again, and I asked Davy if he would help me bend it. He did, and we worked together a lot." "I don't think I would have been able to do the march to Moosburg if I hadn't started working my leg with Davy. He was quite a guy."

Davy Jones was quite a guy indeed and most notably, he was one of Colonel Jimmy Doolittle's flight commanders on the historic Tokyo Raid in April 1942 for which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. He was the 5th bomber plane to take off safely from the deck of the USS Hornet, despite a leak in the bomb bay gas tank. He scored direct hits on a Tokyo power station, oil tanks and a large manufacturing plant. He flew on instruments until he estimated he was in the vicinity of Chuhsien and his entire crew bailed out without injury and was the first of the famous Doolittle Raiders to reach Chuhsien. He was able to escape capture with the help of the Chinese, however, Major Jones never managed to escape his German captors.

More Bombs

Because of the enveloping Russian Front, two months after Col. Arnold had arrived at Sagan, it was necessary to evacuate the prisoners again. Marching orders came down on the evening of January 27, 1945 during a camp theatre production of You Can't Take It With You. However,

because of his severe leg wound, Col. Arnold was among the sick, crippled and wounded left behind. Subsequently, the other 10,000 to 12,000 POWs at Sagan were marched further west in the middle of the night in freezing cold weather. "We were put in barracks and I was still pretty sick then. My leg was stiff, and I was down to 120 pounds or so." Eventually Col. Arnold's group was loaded on a train bound for Spremberg and from there they ended up in Nuremberg. The boxcars were built to hold 40 men but the Germans forced the prisoners to cram up to 60 men per car, which made even sitting down a trial. Their ordeal lasted for days which became more deadly as the days went by. "About two or three days out from Sagan, British or American fighters strafed our train. They incapacitated the engine and set fire to several box cars." The car ahead of Col. Arnold's caught fire, which began to spread to his car. "The cars were jammed to capacity. The POWs all scrambled to the small side doors, which were full of smoke. It was kind of `one for all and all for one'." Col. Arnold's leg prevented him from making a quick dash to the door. Instead, he sat and waited at the rear of the car for the rest of the prisoners to clear out. "I got stepped on and trampled in the scramble. As the crowd got thinner, I made my way out and got clear of all the explosions." Other prisoners weren't so lucky. In the mid-afternoon on February 4th, the train came to a halt in the marshalling yards of Nuremberg much to the joy of the prisoners. The two air raids while being transported by train left Colonel Arnold with an indelible impression, one that would shape a crucial decision he would have to make two months later at Nuremberg.

Bombing at Nuremberg

The Nuremberg POW Camp, Stalag XIIID was located less than 3 miles outside the railroad yards which the Germans knew were prime targets of the American and British Air Forces and therefore it was an illegal camp under the Geneva Convention. Not only did the POWs have to endure hunger, freezing cold, lack of adequate clothing, poor sanitation, no medical supplies or facilities, they lived with anxiety and fear of the frequent bombing raids by the Americans by day and the British by night. Many times, the raids were successive saturation raids lasting for days. During his imprisonment at Nuremberg, Col. Arnold served as commanding officer of one camp compound. It was during this period that yet another bombing raid created an indelible image in Col. Arnold's mind.

The raid by the Royal Air Force occurred during the night of February 27, 1945. A curfew was in effect and all prisoners were inside their blockhouses. Lights had been turned off and the men were preparing to bed down for the night. Suddenly, sirens sounded, warning of a bomber attack. Soon Col. Arnold could hear the sound of bombs exploding in the distance.

"The bombing got louder and louder, closer and closer. You could see fire from the explosions through the cracks in the walls and through small windows. The blockhouses were trembling and vibrating each time a bomb exploded." He arose from his bed and walked to the door at the end of the blockhouse, to get a better look at what was happening outside. "When I turned the door knob and opened the door to a slit, a huge explosion occurred, shoving the door closed, then sucking it out and me along with it." Col. Arnold quickly glanced at the guard tower. If spotted

by a guard, he would be shot; however, there was no guard and the tower was empty. "The sky was bright as day with fire and smoke, and the compound was in chaos," he said.

The German camp commandant gave permission for the prisoners to leave their blocks during the raid. Col. Arnold organized his men and ordered them to dig slit trenches with whatever tools they could find. Soon, all prisoners were digging trenches, until there was a long slit trench. "I passed the word to lay low and for the men to cover their heads with whatever they could find to avoid being hit with falling debris. The sky was being lit up. You could see airplanes on fire, breaking apart. You could see parachutes coming down, some in full bloom and some in streamers, that is, parachutes on fire."

Fear, fright and panic swept through the men and Col. Arnold worked his way up and down the trench trying to bolster the men's nerve. "I saw men crying, yelling, wailing and praying out loud and on their knees in silence." While working his way up and down the line, a young airman came weaving up to him. "He was whimpering and crying. He threw his arms around my waist and fell to his knees, hugging my legs." Soon two other men came up to Col. Arnold. "They were in the same distress, completely lost and frightened not knowing what to do. They needed help, condolence, assurance, and pacifying. As the camp commander, they came to me." Col. Arnold gathered the three boys in and hovered over them. "I put my hands on their heads, hugged them in and told them that all is okay. Nothing is going to happen to you, Jesus Christ is here. He will protect us, He will help us, and we will not be harmed."

Col. Arnold's words had a calming effect on the three boys. After the raid, he found out that none of the boys knew how to pray. "They evidently had no religion. This proves that when everything is going well, there is probably no need for spiritual help. On the other hand, when a person encounters disaster, fright or possible death, and the chips are down, the average man seeks out supernatural help. He needs someone, something, a symbol, a mother, a God, to go to for protection and help."

Closing In

By April 1945, the Allied stranglehold on Hitler's Third Reich was drawing tighter with each passing day. On April 1, the U.S. 9th and 1st Armies joined up at Lippstadt, closing the circle around the rich industrial region of the Ruhr, trapping Field Marshal Walter Model's Army Group B and two corps of the 1st Parachute Army. On the Eastern Front, the 3rd Ukraine Front captured Sopron, a major road junction between Budapest and Vienna, near the Austrian frontier southwest of Lake Neusiedler. As the Allies advanced into German-held territory, Hitler's armies were forced into an ever-shrinking perimeter.

Thousands of Allied POWs were caught up in the confusion of the Nazi's mass retreat. The Germans evacuated the prisoners deeper and deeper into their own territory in order to keep clear of the battle lines that were closing in on Berlin. By early April, it was apparent that the massive prison camp at Nuremberg would have to be evacuated soon.

Marching Orders

On April 4, 1945, the prisoners at Nuremberg received word they would have to evacuate their compounds. Their destination would be Moosburg, another prison camp located 160 kilometers (100 miles) from Nuremberg.

Col. Arnold commanded one of the Nuremberg compounds and in his charge, were 1,875 POWs, all downed aviators including approximately 500 members of the British Royal Air Force. When the march orders came down, Col. Arnold was asked to supervise the evacuation of his compound by his commander, Col. Darr Alkire. "He asked me if I could handle leading the march because I was wounded and had a bad leg. Because my leg was stiff, there was a question whether I could walk that far. I had lost a lot of weight, but I was healthy." Col. Alkire, concerned about Col. Arnold's physical condition, wanted to put Col. Bill Kennedy in charge of the group. Col. Kennedy, who was planning to escape, didn't want his plans foiled by having to supervise an evacuation. Colonels Kennedy and Alkire agreed on a compromise. Col. Kennedy would go along on the evacuation for one day and if Col. Arnold was physically able to handle the job, Col. Kennedy was free to make his escape attempt. Col. Arnold quickly demonstrated that he was capable of commanding the evacuation and subsequently, Col. Kennedy made his escape attempt. However, Col. Kennedy was eventually re-captured, and spent the rest of the war imprisoned at Moosburg.

Refusing a Ride

As commander of the compound, Col. Arnold roused and organized the prisoners into blocks (a platoon-sized group). Each block had its own commander responsible to Col. Arnold. The prisoners were to be escorted by 87 German guards and about 20 to 25 sentry dogs. The Germans provided a wagon with two horses to carry equipment for the guards. They told Col. Arnold he could ride in the wagon if his leg gave him problems; however, Col. Arnold eschewed the offer and marched along leading his command. "I gave the order to march and we marched two to three miles, then we halted. The German commander of my column, Capt. Galadovich, started talking to me and I asked him where we were going. He said, 'We're taking the column down to the railroad station where we're going to get on boxcars, and take the POWs to Moosburg.'

Thinking back to the horrible crowded conditions on the boxcars and the two bombing raids he had endured in previous evacuations, Col. Arnold adamantly refused to go along with the German evacuation plan. "I didn't want to do that because I thought it was too dangerous based on my previous experiences. I told Capt. Galadovich our job is to get everybody to the destination safe and sound." The refusal surprised Capt. Galadovich, who told Col. Arnold he would have to confer with his commander, Oberst (Colonel) Braun, who was waiting in a town about a half-mile down the road.

Col. Arnold ordered his men off the road to seek cover under the forest while they waited for Capt. Galadovich to return. When he did return, he informed Col. Arnold that Oberst Braun wanted to meet with him in the town. "He told me Oberst Braun would be in a restaurant and for me to come in there." Capt. Galadovich, his assistant Oberfeldtwebel (master sergeant) Reilman, Col. Arnold and two assistants walked into the town. "When I got there, I told them I'm not going in the restaurant because I may not come out alive. This was understandable at the time, and doesn't need any explanation because you couldn't tell what might happen. I told them I would meet Oberst Braun out in the street."

To Col. Arnold's surprise, Oberst Braun came out. Capt. Galadovich had informed Oberst Braun that Col. Arnold did not want to transport his men in boxcars. "We went over that again, and why. Oberst Braun understood and said that marching to Moosburg would be okay because he didn't think there would be enough boxcars anyway. There would be some delays and we would be in the boxcars for who knows how long before we got moving. He agreed with me and gave us every assistance he could. He gave us maps and told us of the perils and dangers of the SS troops, who would murder anyone, and also told us about the retreat of the German Army." After the conversation, Oberst Braun and his staff got into their cars and drove away. Capt. Galadovich and his staff, who were supposed to accompany Col. Arnold and his men on the march, got into their cars and also drove away. Col. Arnold never saw either man again, leaving Col. Arnold and Oberfeldtwebel Reilman to supervise the march to Moosburg.

Mr. Reilman

Although Mr. Reilman was a member of the Nuremberg staff, he and Col. Arnold had only a passing acquaintance. During the march, however, the two men worked closely together. Col. Arnold kept his men moving in an orderly fashion and Mr. Reilman did what he could to facilitate the needs of the column. "Mr. Reilman would go ahead of the column and smooth things out with the townspeople along the way. He would scout out places for the men to sleep, which was a big help to me." Each night Col. Arnold and Mr. Reilman would make sure all the men and their German guards had a place to sleep. Then they would find a place for themselves and plan the next day's march. "We shared a blanket the whole trip. We worked together well and I considered us fortunate that a man like Mr. Reilman was in charge of the guards. He was a good man."

The Plan

Avoiding the retreating Germans and the aggressive American fighter pilots, who strafed anything moving on German roads, were Col. Arnold's two main concerns. "I talked it over with Mr. Reilman. I said our job is to go through the back roads, where there's forest to give us cover. I said we'd proceed at a moderate rate because we wanted to get everybody there alive. He agreed."

Col. Arnold marched the column of prisoners through a little town and found a good place in the forest to bivouac for the night. "That gave me a chance to have a meeting with my block commanders. I told them how we would march and every night we would stop before reaching a little town. Mr. Reilman would ride his bicycle into town to talk with the mayor. He would tell them who we were and assure them there would be no danger. I also wanted the men to stay in barns and sleep on hay to keep warm." The next day, the column marched approximately six miles. At the end of the day, as planned, Mr. Reilman rode into a nearby town to talk to the mayor. "He introduced me to the mayor and everything went okay. They weren't belligerent, we weren't belligerent, and we all got along fine. We moved into the town quietly with 1,875 guys, the dogs, and the German guards. The people received us and we were put up and bedded down in old buildings, barns and stables."

The Massacre

Two days into the march, Oberst Braun's warning about the retreating German Army and roving bands of SS troops proved to be prophetic. Mr. Reilman, who scouted ahead of the column on his bicycle, reported back to Col. Arnold with some disturbing news. "He told me at the town ahead, the German Army was retreating through. He said we had to stop the march and get the men off into the pine trees and hide. He would go back and look at the situation and I told him I wanted to go with him."

Col. Arnold, his assistant, Bob Cox, and Mr. Reilman went back to town. Just outside the town, the three men got on their hands and knees and crept up to a vantage point where they could assess the situation. "The Germans were retreating and Mr. Reilman said we could tell they were Army from the yellow patches on their lapels. Mr. Reilman also saw SS troops in the town, who wore red patches on their lapels. In the middle of town, some of the army troops were retreating; however, the SS troops were telling the soldiers to stay. The army troops wouldn't stay and suddenly we heard a lot of machine gun and rifle reports, and one group of maybe a dozen army soldiers fell to the ground. We saw a massacre, a helpless killing."

The three men hurried back to their column. They spent an anxious night waiting to see whether the army retreat or the SS troops would run into them. "We stayed in the trees and gave orders to keep quiet. We couldn't do anything but stay there." By the next day, the retreating German Army and the SS troops were gone and had missed the column. "Once they were gone, we knew the town was open and safe. We proceeded into town and marched through there pretty damn fast!"

Typical American GI

By the third day of the march, the German guards and their American prisoners realized they were in this ordeal together. "These guards were older men who had fought in the war, and now were back on guard duty. They were getting tired. Their food was getting low, and feeding the dogs was a chore."

To no one's surprise, the American prisoners soon took their German captors in. "The typical American GI is ingenious and adaptable. He is understanding and friendly as heck. It wasn't long before the German guards were part of us, and the dogs, too. We all went as a group and there were no more sentries or dogs to bother us. We were now just one big group."

The Mass

Four days into the march, Col. Arnold noticed that on either side of the road were statues of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. Curious, he asked Mr. Reilman about the significance of the statues. Mr. Reilman told him there were a lot of Catholics among the local residents who were very religious. "Being an Episcopalian, I felt good about that." The column entered the town around midday on Sunday. The significance of the situation wasn't lost to Col. Arnold, realizing it was the Easter season. "I felt there was a need for some kind of prayer. I decided to stay in that town for the night, and told Mr. Reilman I wanted to find a church." The two quickly found a church, but the door was padlocked. "I asked Mr. Reilman to try to get the church open. I wanted to give the boys an opportunity to go to church." Mr. Reilman located two Catholic priests and brought them to the church. Col. Arnold asked them for permission to use the church, and asked if the priests would say mass. "They were apprehensive, suspicious, and wouldn't open the church. They also refused to give mass. I was disappointed and didn't know exactly what I was going to do. I told them there were many Catholics among us who would like to receive mass. I said this church was a house of God and should be open to all and they had no right to deny us the chapel and prayer. I told them it would be a sin not to open the doors and they were committed to say mass." Despite Col. Arnold's words, the priests remained reluctant. "I said, okay, if you won't give us mass, unlock the doors, open the church, and I'll give the sermon." By that time, word had spread among the column there was going to be a church service. The men began to gather around the church. "I knew I'd be a poor substitute for a Catholic priest or Protestant minister, but I felt I could give a lot of comfort to everybody once we were inside the church. It wasn't too long before the priests relented and opened the church doors. They filled the fountain with holy water, welcomed the men into the church, and offered worship to the congregation of many religious backgrounds. The men filled the church and overflowed into the courtyard. "It was a glorious day. The men felt good to be in the Lord's house, even though they were in a foreign country during wartime. Afterwards, the priests apologized and told Mr. Reilman they had never given mass to so many. The typical GIs had made their impression."

Feeding The Men

Although the column did not have an abundance of food, there was never a serious problem providing the men with enough to sustain them. "Everyone knew how to handle the food situation." Midway through the march, the food situation improved greatly once the column managed to have Red Cross packages diverted its way. "We missed a couple of days of Red Cross parcels, being trucked from Switzerland on the autobahns, because we were taking the

back roads. Once we discovered this, we got some trucks diverted our way and pretty soon we had more Red Cross parcels than we could carry."

The prisoners used the extra parcels to trade for eggs, fresh vegetables and such, with the local townspeople and farmers. Sometimes, the prisoners just gave the locals their extra parcels. "It created a lot of good will. From that point on to our destination, we had a lot of food."

The Casualty

Col. Arnold divided his time between leading the march and monitoring the progress in the middle and trailing ranks. "I would go off on the side and let the column go by," he said. "I wanted to talk to the rear point and see how the boys were doing." Near the end of the march, it became apparent that one of the men was suffering badly. "There was a Navigator in the column who was really hurting. The boys had been taking care of him, but he was getting awfully tired and sick." Col. Arnold had the ailing Navigator sit down on the edge of the road to rest. "I sat down with him and stayed with him, maybe an hour or so. He died right there in my arms. I blessed him." The boy's body was wrapped up and loaded onto the wagon. It was taken into Moosburg that ironically, was only one day's march away. His was the only death recorded during the march.

Arriving in Moosburg

The column reached Moosburg on April 15, 1945, after a 12-day march of avoiding allied bombers and fighters and the retreating German army. Led by Col. Arnold, the prisoners marched through Moosburg up to the gates of the enormous prison camp. "When we came to the main gate, Mr. Reilman talked with the German guards. He came back and said to me, 'They have barracks and they have tents.' The barracks were old, dirty and crowded so I told Mr. Reilman we weren't going to stay in those buildings. I said we wanted the tents; however, I wanted a lot of straw and hay brought into the tents. They did that and brought us large bales of hay that they distributed to each tent. We marched in and that's where we stayed until the end of the war." The American commander of the camp was U.S. Army Col. "Pop" Good. He had organized the American POWs into six battalions. When Col. Arnold's column arrived, it was designated the 7th Battalion.

In April 1945, the war was coming to an end and prison camps in northern and central Germany were being evacuated south to avoid advancing American and British forces. Stammlager VIIA at Moosburg, Germany, was a collection point, and the camp was a large one, holding 130,000 U.S. Army Air Corps, French and British POWs. Stammlager VIIA was a disaster. It was a nest of small compounds separated by barbed wire fences enclosing old, dilapidated barracks crammed closely together. Reportedly, the camp had been built to hold 14,000 French prisoners. In the end, over a hundred thousand POWs of all nationalities and ranks were confined in the area. Towards the end of April, General Patton's troops were getting close and the POWs at Moosburg were seeing more and more U.S. aircraft passing nearby.

Liberation

On April 29, 1945, U.S. Army General George Patton's troops liberated the prisoners at Moosburg. Two days later General Patton paid the POWs a visit. Pop remembers that day as if it were yesterday. "He drove through the main gate, standing straight up in his vehicle, with two ivory-handled pistols on either side of his hips, wearing his helmet with four stars across the front. What a sight! Other combat vehicles followed and they were completely surrounded by all the POWs. Everybody was laughing and waving their arms with all kinds of happiness." The excitement in camp was indescribable. Men climbed up on the roofs of the huts and even on the wire to get a view of what was going on. When they spotted an American flag going up on one of the more prominent buildings in Moosburg, they knew for sure that the war was over for them.

Reilman's Farewell

A few days after Patton's troops took over the camp, an Army captain who was loaded with German equipment walked up to Col. Arnold. The American officer handed over a saber, pistols and a pistol belt, and told Col. Arnold that he had been asked to deliver them by a German guard named Reilman. Col. Arnold asked the officer to take him to Mr. Reilman, and the two set off to a gate at the far end of the camp. "By the time we got there, Mr. Reilman had already been taken away and I never saw him again. I thought it was sad that we didn't get to say good-bye." To this day, General Arnold often thinks of Mr. Reilman. "I knew he was an insurance salesman before the war, but I really didn't know much else about him. I never even knew his first name." "I was very honored that Mr. Reilman chose me to surrender to. He kept us alive on the march and I had great respect for him." Col. Arnold gave Mr. Reilman's things to some guys who were interested in those sorts of war souvenirs, but often wishes he'd kept some memento of Mr. Reilman's.

Luck of the Draw

It was left to Col. Good to decide the best way to evacuate the Americans. Col. Good decided to leave the camp one battalion at a time. Col. Arnold said, "He called the seven battalion commanders to a meeting and I was battalion commander No. 7. He told us the battalions would leave by a draw of cards. He held up a deck of cards, and said the highest card would go first, the next highest second, and so on." Two British padres were each asked to shuffle a deck of cards. They placed the shuffled decks on a long table, where the battalion commanders one through seven, were sitting next to one another in numerical order. Col. Good selected one of the decks, and asked the padres to shuffle the deck and place it back on the table. Col. Good cut the deck and then took the top card and placed it in front of the commander of battalion No. 1. Col. Arnold was the last commander to get a card and when his turn came, Col. Good drew the king of spades. It was the highest card, thereby giving Col. Arnold and his men the privilege of leaving the camp first.

Going Home

U.S. Army trucks started the evacuation early the next morning. They drove the troops to a small airstrip at Landshut, about ten kilometers northeast of Moosburg. From there, U.S. Army Air Corps C-47s flew the former prisoners to Paris, where they went through a U.S. Army processing center called Lucky Strike. After they had been processed through Lucky Strike, the ex-POWs traveled back to the United States aboard ship. However, with transportation routes jammed and flights backed up due to the large volume of POWs, Col. Arnold found his own way out of France and flew from Paris to London with his good friend, Colonel Irving "Bull" Rendle, a Wing Commander in the Eighth Air Force in England. On May 19, 1945, Colonel Arnold, a liberated Prisoner of War sailed from England aboard the medical ship, M. S. John Ericsson, and arrived at New York, in America on May 29, 1945. God Bless America! American POWs--Lest They Be Forgotten!

Addendum to Moosburg document Dated October 19, 1997 Provided by Major General W.E. Arnold

During World War II, Col. Arnold also flew 5 bomber missions in B-17s. In 1943, he delivered 29 B-17 aircraft and their crews to Cairo, Egypt, while assigned as Commander of the Arnold Provisional Group out of Sioux City, Iowa. While there, he led a group of 19 airplanes to targets in North Africa and was frequently met by German fighters. Once he was strafed head on by a German fighter and he sustained damage to the plane, but was able to deliver his bombs and make it back to base safely. He said they flew in box formations with 5 or 6 planes in the group and German fighter planes would always pick on the tail guys or guys on the outside of the box. The Germans would also wait until the planes were on their way back after delivering their bombs and pick on the hit or wounded planes. Pop said there were probably just as many planes lost on their return trips as lost over the target.