

#20

Corbin B. Willis, Jr.

#20

OPTION # 1

(O.K. to Check-out & O.K to Make Copies)

Dear Mr. Conway -

February 16, 2001

Per my copy of 8th AFHS "Flight Lines", dated Feb. 2001 -- a request was made for copies of experiences from members of the 8th during World War II -- I read my experiences, before a meeting of the Historical Society held at the Beaverton Elks Club, about 3 years ago but never left a copy of the transcript I read -- you are requesting these copies from all members, so I've enclosed mine.

Last year, my oldest Granddaughter, requested to write her College Thesis, based on my POW experience, so I gave her complete rights to the story, so she could write her thesis, at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah -- her name is Minky Nelson, and her home address is: 290 South - 300 West, Brigham City, Utah (just in case you want to publish any portion of my experience, I think you will need her OK.)

Our crew (and its association with the 8th AF, in England) is listed on the website, as follows -- WWW. 486th.ORG -- Click on Albert I Pierce -- "the war experiences of the pilot and crew of the B-17 'Smoky Stove' -- it will list 8 selections: 1. Pilot Training (Lt. Pierce) 2. The crew - crew picture (I'm right front) - 3. The Airbase at RAF Sudbury (my picture this front) - 4. Mission flown - 5. Aircraft - 6. MIA 7. POW and 8. Liberation -

I'm South for the winter and expect to start back to Oregon, March 23 -- Home in April -

Hope this is useful to you in your history report!!

Writer address: 10249 Coachella Canal Rd # 463
Miland, Calif. 92257-9583
Tele: 760-354-1547

Corbin B. Willis

1
For information - To my grandchildren & family -

26

PREPARED BY	
DATE	Feb 10, 1991

I started my military career in Waver, Colorado - January 20, 1941 - as a private United States Army Air Corps - I advanced through the enlisted ranks from Private to Master Sergeant - I entered Aviation Cadets in 1943 and graduated as a Second Lieutenant in February 1944 - I was trained as a P-38 fighter pilot but the services needed B-17 pilots, so our class was switched to multi-engine bombers and we had a choice of B-17's or the Army Tank Corps -- take it or leave it ultimatum -- I became a B-17 co-pilot and trained at MacMill Field, Tampa, Florida and graduated in June 1944, and we were issued "a brand new B-17E at the factory in Michigan -- signed for it like receiving a vehicle from the motor pool -- then we flew to Newfoundland, then on to Dublin, Ireland -- when they took our brand new B-17E and assigned us to a real chunker of an old B-17 that was used in training flights, while they modified our new B-17E, for radar spider devices on each wing -- we flew the old chunker for our first two missions in July 1944 then finally got our B-17E back -- we flew it for another 18 missions over Germany until we were hit over Ulm, Germany and binged back at low altitude with severe battle damage -- we passed over Weising training airfield and watched as six Messerschmitts took off and came up to do battle with us -- the lead plane was painted red and the other were green color -- our best speed was about 100 mph, because of our battle damage, so we were an easy target -- the Messerschmitts pulled over to the sides out of range of our 50 caliber machine guns and the red plane lined up behind our B-17 and started his first pass -- the tail gunner fired his quad-50 caliber guns on it without damage but the attacking plane was firing and riddled our wings and fuselage -- the plane passed under the belly of our B-17 and the belly turret gunner's guns shot off the entire canopy and tail section so the Messerschmitt soared past our cockpit window looking like a cigar with wings -- it veered sharply to the left and spiraled down to the ground trailing smoke before it crashed --

We were astounded when the other five planes left us and returned back to their bases - we later found out, from our Intelligence, that the lead plane - in red - was a flight instructor and had the only weapons and the other planes had students - we were a learning process for them - luckily it was decisive in our favor - we proceeded on to the English coast and made an emergency landing at a RAF base - we all suffered from frost bite because our electrical system was shot out - and it controlled the electrical suits we wore to heat our bodies at high altitude - The RAF flight personnel helped us out of our B-17 and made us lay down on the cold concrete ramps to thaw out our limbs slowly - no one suffered any physical problems from frost bite as a result of this procedure, so we are thankful for what they did medically for us -!

On November ²⁴ 1944 we were on our 22nd bomb mission - only needed 25 tons of bombs on rotation - our target was Magdeburg, Germany - it was a ball bearing factory and military complex area - there were 1500 aircraft in our formation - not all on that target - and we were ⁱⁿ about the last third of that bomber stream, when we dropped our bombs over the target - we were hit by anti-aircraft shells - 88 mm - just as we left the target area - at 27,000 feet - we lost two engines - one on each side - and lost our oxygen supply so we dove down as quickly as possible into air we could breathe - trying to force the B-17 - with its high wing surface and great lifting capacity - to ~~lose~~ ^{lose} altitude quickly was not possible - the faster our speed down the more lift we created on the wings which meant it wanted to climb and not dive - The oxygen emergency bottle I was using ^{had} ~~was~~ only a ten minute supply and I used it up in about four minutes - with ^{adrenalin} ~~adrenalin~~ pumping and working the controls to force the plane down - my oxygen tank was exhausted, so the Engineer gave me his emergency tank and then proceeded on the catwalk before my seat - we finally got the plane down to about 12,000 feet before we leveled off - The Engineer recovered and was alert

enough to make as many adjustments as possible on the hydraulic and fluid controls to operate one or our remaining two engines -- We finally leveled off and could maintain our altitude at about 4500 feet and we headed toward France. Our route took us over Düsseldorf-Cologne Germany - population of 3 million people -- situated on the Rhine River -- The combined anti aircraft batteries on the Rhine river barges and the city guns totaled about 290 guns -- We were only doing about 90 mph and quite a 'sitting duck' target for them to shoot at -- our only advantage was the anti aircraft 88 mm shells have proximity fuses and an altitude fuse on them -- Under 7000 feet the shells will not explode, as the shells passed through the wings and fuselage without exploding but exploded above the aircraft -- I could look out my cockpit window and see where one shell had gone through the engine and I could see the ground through that hole -- Finally the engine caught on fire and the decision had to be made to abandon the aircraft as it would explode and destroy all of us with it -- The radio operator was hit by a shell passing through his hip and when we all bailed out, he was given morphine and bandaged and the waist gunner held on to him and pulled his rip cord after clearing the aircraft -- I bailed out and was surprised that I followed the aircraft in flight for quite a distance before heading down -- I could see all the damage to the underside of the plane and could almost count the rivets in the plane before leaving it behind -- I descended quite a distance with my rip cord in my hand before I realized the parachute was still in its pack -- I was wearing a chest chute -- as I had to feel it open and then it blossomed out above me -- I looked up and my combat boots were dangling above me for I didn't take the time to detach them before jumping -- We ~~took~~ ^{strapped} them to our parachutes as we wouldn't leave them in the plane after each mission as we wore heated boots while in flight -- these boots were later a 'god send' for the long distance we traveled later in Germany --

While descending, I looked down to see where I was going and saw a large agriculture field area with a lot of people gathered on one side -- it was a quiet descending you could hear the wind whistling past your ear but no real sense of movement downward -- being so quiet I could hear the voices shouting below and instinctively pulled the ridges to my canopy in a direct that would take me away from the crowd -- in pulling the ridges I caused the chute to oscillate back and forth and when I hit the ground I hit on my back -- luckily I had a padded back pad that was part of the chute harness -- the sudden stoppage numbed my whole body and when I got to my feet I was dazed -- I hardly got to my standing position when a farmer hit me square on the back with a shovel and toppled me forward -- when I started to get up I was hit in the face by feet and was knocked down again -- I have no recollection of the time frame involved because of my dazed condition but finally I realized the crowd was stepping back and I was being protected by a German Tank Corp soldier who had a machine gun and ordered the crowds away from me -- some of the farmers were screaming at him and he struck at least two of them to get them out of my vicinity -- I then removed my parachute harness and gathered my chute -- I had a 45 caliber revolver hidden under my heated suit jacket -- which I was required to wear because as Co-pilot I had to carry all the security codes we used for each flight in combat -- I then opened my jacket and showed this gun to the German Sergeant and he took it -- the crowd made way for us to pass and we walked about a half mile to a supply wire enclosure and I was put in there while the Sergeant went to make some telephone calls -- when he returned he had a German Soldier who was from Russia that tried to make conversation but I wanted no part of him and did not understand his mixture of languages -- I was also handed a piece of our B-17 -- from its wreckage nearby -- and asked what it was but only

recognized it as a piece of the radio equipment. Later on I was visited by a group of anti aircraft gunners and they were curious as to which one of them was responsible for shooting us down -- as if I could be able to identify one of their shells from another -- it did give me a chance to unfold my emotions and recover from the beating I took from the farmers -- I had black eyes on both sides and a swollen jaw area -- but still that initial shock on my back from my oscillating parachute dimmed any pain involved from the beatings, so I was really blessed on that count -- after a few hours I was marched to a local military sub-station and searched and everything taken from me except the clothing I was wearing at the time I bailed out -- I had retrieved my combat boots from my parachute harness, so was allowed to put them on and discard my heated boots which were impractical for terrain travel, as I discovered while walking on the agriculture cultivated ground -- My 45 caliber revolver was put on a table while I was being stripped down and searched and I saw a civilian reach in through the adjacent window and snatched it up and dropped with it -- One Army private screamed in my face -- snatched off my flight hat and ground it under his boot -- I retrieved the flight hat and put it back on my head and just looked at him -- could not understand what he was saying but I got his message clearly and noisily!!

Five of us survived the crash and four of our crew members were killed on the ground by the civilians -- The radio operator that was wounded in the plane was killed on a stretcher, on the way to a hospital by civilians -- they were mostly incensed by the British RAF ^{Pottum} bombing of Cologne for the last six nights -- you wouldn't really expect them to greet you with roses -- I understood their feelings -- I'm sure my own family would be cast these swinging and hitting in like circumstances -- we were loaded into the back of a German Army truck with six Army soldiers and we headed across the Rhine river bridge into Cologne -- It was nighttime and we had just gotten on the Rhine

River bridge when the air raid siren in Cologne sounded off - so our attention was directed toward Cologne and suddenly an RAF Mosquito Bomber came in over the bridge at about one hundred feet and dropped target flares at both ends of the bridge - we discovered later that General Patton had ordered all bridges across the Rhine spared regardless of their military value to the Germans, for they would have no way of advancing across the Rhine during the winter weather, without those bridges remaining intact." - From our grandstand seat on the bridge, we watched the British Lancaster Bomber drop - at about 6000' or lower - their blockbuster 12,000 lb bomb - these bombs were made from railroad tank cars filled with explosives - on fit in the bombay and when it was dropped you could hear the tumbling swirl as it changed ends in the drop - when it hit the city of Cologne, the whole city lighted up and this rumbling sound started and the shock wave followed after that - when the shock waves hit the bridge it shook like a dog shaking off water from its coat - We had to hold on to the sides of the truck for it bounced on its springs from one side of the bridge to the other - While ~~was~~^{were} recovering from this adventure, we watched as one of the Lancaster Bombers crashed at the end of the bridge on the Cologne side of the bridge - next to the Cologne Cathedral - a magnificent structure dating back many centuries - after the air raid was over and the all clear sounded - our trucks proceeded on the bridge to the site of the British Bomber crash and we picked up the seven survivors - I remember one of the crewmen had flesh burns on his face and was in immense pain - one of the crewmen wiped some oil from one of the engine cowlings ^{and smeared it} all over this crewman's face, then put a handkerchief over the burned portion to protect it from the air - After all were loaded on the truck, we proceeded on to the Cologne County Jail - upon arrival, we were surrounded by numerous militiamen - our original guards pointed out the five of us - Americans - and told the officer in charge - there are "Americasisch" - We were separated from the British.

and each placed in ^a cell that was completely empty -- no furniture, just 4
cement walls and a postage stamp type window for ventilation -- after a
few minutes in my cell they brought in a bale of straw and spread it on the
ground in one corner for my bed -- they took me to the German Officer Mess
Hall and fed me ~~ersatz~~^{ersatz} coffee -- made from acorn shells and chicory -- it was
sweetened with ersatz sugar and they gave me some Army issue bread that
was made from saw dust and potatoes -- I had some margarine made from
coal -- and some jelly of unknown composition -- I was also given some blood
sausage -- I did not feel inclined to eat the food at that time, because of my
emotional state, but did drink the coffee -- I put the other food in my
pocket for later use -- back at the cell the light remained on all night but
I didn't feel uncomfortable sleeping on the straw -- the next morning we
were all rounded up together and I found out the RAF British crewmen
had not even been given water and no straw for sleeping purposes -- I gave
them the food I had not been able to eat and they took it and thanked me --
We were put on a local street car, with a crowd of civilians, and taken to
the large railroad depot -- there we were taken into the basement and all
put in a concrete and steel coal storage area, until they could arrange
train transportation for us -- after several hours of no ventilation we
were all a mass of sweat -- and stinking -- but finally they opened the door
and we were put on a train to Weisse, Germany -- we found out this was the
interrogation center for all POW's -- we arrived at our destination and it
looked like a concentration camp in miniature -- tar paper barracks with
barbed wire enclosures -- we were each put in a cell about 8' x 10' with a
wire covered frosted window -- There was an encephalic steam heater and
a wooden burlap sawdust mattress bed and a thin lumpy pillow, without
a pillow covering over the original pillow -- all smelled and looked unclean
but I'm not sure we had much choice but to accept these accommodations.

we were all interrogated the following morning separately - in fact, with me
all departed Spain and anyone but Garcia - when we arrived we were
to go to the bathroom by jumping up a ladder over the highway - we
passed anyone or saw anyone enroute to the committee on the investigation
rooms - I must have been and the year about the training we received at
our base in Britain - The RAF had allowed some of their instructors
to be captured by the Germans and after they were interrogated by the
Germans they were liberated and flown back to England to see all of us and
asked to report when we became POWs - Thomas, nothing of anything about
their destination - we were told that the German intelligence service was
through and that any mention about anyone in the military service in the
United States in any newspaper or radio that was recorded and printed
Germany in their information service - as they would have a complete
database on the American capture - we were told they would have all the
information on our barracks and military installations, of our location
Sudbury, England - he never told any information we gave would be useful
by the other members in a clear case of words and intelligence - this
would be no physical force used even if they could use force and reports
in these questioning - we were also told that of your knowledge there was 3
days they had something on your part or you had given them information when
they needed to verify on identity -

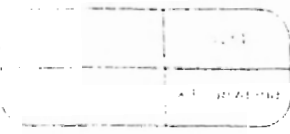
the names of our Operation officers - etc. - according to the Geneva Convention and
 the articles ratified by the various countries - Germany, USA, England, France, etc. -
 I only put down my name, rank and serial number and handed it back to him - he
 admonished me for not completing the remainder of the form and I told him I was not
 required to do so, only filling in my identification and nothing more - he ^{said} "I
 had the power to keep you there indefinitely" and I replied "I didn't think I was
 going anywhere anyway!" - he glared at me and left the room in a huff - I
 stood there for quite some time alone, when finally another German officer
 entered - a Major from the German Air Force - and said that the Lieutenant
 who had questioned me said I refused to fill out the questionnaire and I
 told him I was only required to fill out my identification and nothing more -
 he said we don't usually fill out these forms for lesser ranks but he would
 show me how unimportant it was by completing the form, hesitating at each
 answer to see my reaction - we were told by the RAF briefing unit that they
 would read confirmation of each question and answers from our facial expressions
 and responses - if we lied they would detect it from our expressions - so they
 taught us to practice non-expressive eyes and facial responses, even though
 the replies were either right or wrong, they would not reveal the truth - after
 he completed the form, he threw it carelessly aside, as if it was valueless, and
 picked up a folder with my name on it - he opened it and proceeded to give me
 a complete history on my entering the military service up to that date in time of
 interrogation - He asked me why I was in B-17's when I was trained for
 P-38 fighters - Our RAF Briefers told us never to answer with "yes" or "no"
 for they encourage further questions - always answer with "I'm sorry" which
 doesn't solicit a response of any sort - The Major went on to tell me about
 my wife and her assignment in the Intelligence Section in Wash. D.C. - then
 he told me about the officers from our squadron that had been captured before
 - when I did not respond to any of this he put it aside and became friendly and

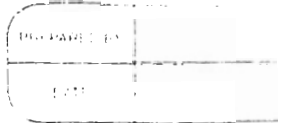
personal about his background - He and his brother were educated in Boston before the war - his brother remained and operated a felling station - he returned to Germany and entered the war at its inception - He then asked me which Candidate for the US Presidency, I preferred - I told him Roosevelt and he countered with " - We are hoping it will be Wiley, for your Roosevelt wants "unconditional Surrender" whereas Wiley will give us any terms we want!" - He said "here we have two powerful nations fighting each other - we are the military machine and you are the mass producer - with our military genius and your production - together we could rule the world!!" - He then showed me where his home was located in Germany - the walls were covered with American aerial maps - He said his home was about 7000 population - he showed me its location - he said there was a baseball diamond area across the tracks - that separated the town from the field - and the Germans had put fighter planes on that ball field, as they could take off on the parked ground without using runways and could be hidden in the trees for camouflage - He said our planes hit these aircraft with bombs but no bombs ever went over the railroad track - so they repaired the dirt field and kept it operational - the British came over and bombed the airfield but also pattern bombed the town out of existence - that's why we don't like the British!!" - I reminded him I had seen Coventry after London pattern bombed by the Luftwaf - German Air Force - so he dropped that subject - he then looked up the battle plans the Allied force had for the day I was shot down - he gave me the figure of 1500 bombers in our formation - which included medium bombers also - and said the Germany Air Force and ground anti aircraft batteries had shot down 157 bombers on that day - I told him that was less than 1% of the aircraft, so he dropped that subject and left the room - I had no

Further interrogation and was returned to my room via the library -- I was allowed to select a book to read -- I chose the "Prisoner of Zenda" -- and they took me back to my cell -- my interrogators knew a lot more about my avilase in England than I did and frankly most of us could care less that our Mentoring Office was Lt Billings and the Operations Office was Capt Burke -- I was delighted to be finished with the interrogation, for it was a case of nerves and stage acting that prevailed -- I for one was deeply indebted to our RAF Briefing for it set the stage and dictated our part in this event --

The days wore on and I was glad for the book -- during the day the floor ^{squeaked} constantly and I surmised it was someone pacing back and forth in the cell next to mine -- so having nothing to do and plenty of time to do it in -- I knocked on the wall and after a period of time the knock was returned -- so I scratched ^{or scribbled} on the wall and spelled out "Hi" in Morse Code and he returned the greeting -- Morse Code was not my forte but if it goes slow enough I can figure it out -- my answering service next door was not exactly a whiz at it either but together we managed to learn about each other -- he was also a 2nd Lt, also a Co-pilot but was on a B-24 Liberator Bomber when he became a POW -- He was on a bombing mission over the Ploesti Oil fields in Romania, when he was hit by anti aircraft fire and when their engines failed they were at low altitude and had to drop their bombs so the pilot toppled the bombs on a small village main street then crashed on the outskirts of this small street -- needless to say the villagers beat them all to a pulp and he managed to survive and be rescued by a member of the military -- he had been in the cell next to mine, for eleven days and they hadn't spoken to him once -- I couldn't believe a pilot could have been so stupid as to bomb a main street in town then crash land in sight of his bombing -- they were probably wondering what to do with him!! -- I told him that I was finished being interrogated and was told I would be

leaving with our surviving crew members the morning - when morning
 came they brought me a Negro slave that must have been used by everyone
 I put out my rubber before it cut them - before
 I left my cell still my "something" next door collapsed, I would leave
 my book behind the second command in the morning if I could find it
 Revere says to do something other than pass the floor - when they come to
 get me to leave they wanted the library book but still the system
 at the library - they didn't believe me and searched me and my room for
 the book - they saw my book my other matters on the floor but didn't find
 the book - after a while they returned and told me over to the
 then and looking at them to help me out and leave - I did not say "never
 could find it" he got the book and he did " -
 We were killed on a trap train with many other POW's - One NCO was
 shot and such air man getting to guard Jim POW's - our train traveled
 night and our guard left most of the time - I took out his pistol and spent
 it out of necessity but I know I would be unable to keep it on a trap train
 escape from a military trap train - The next day the German system
 changed our commitment attack up a commitment with me - his spoke
 German English - and he told me he had been educated in Vienna Austria
 and married in Vienna - he then told me of the many things that happened to
 King in his German, then translated into English - he cited the song
 "The Little Mermaid" and much to our surprise, he sang it to me in a
 beautiful baritone voice - he continued singing and he sang like he was
 parked on a railroad siding, then had to leave in rather the train yard
 The main track again - at one siding, I started a group of German
 women observing the ground area around our train - everyone dropped of
 their track and the number of our commitment - one woman and a child
 looked like a cigarette - the German had given each of the officers a pack





of "Old Gold" cigarettes and since I didn't smoke, I gave her the whole pack when she opened it to give ^{some} to her friends, it created a mob scene and the soldiers had to intervene -- when they wanted to know who gave the woman the cigarettes, I told them I did -- they took my name but wouldn't give me anymore cigarettes for the rest of the trip to Berlin -- I expected some repercussions from the incident, for they beat the woman involved, but that was the end of it --

We were sent to Stalag Luft III ^{Sagan, Germany} 92 miles south of Berlin -- it was supposedly the show POW camp for Berlin -- our Commandant was on speaking terms with ^{Goering} Goering -- the third ranking position in the Third Reich, under Hitler and Goebbels -- The highest ranking officer ^{a general} in our POW camp was on a hunting expedition with Goering when war was declared, so they were close friends and Goering visited our General often and of course our treatment was better as a result --

We started our day at sunrise -- varied ^{with} the season -- and started our roll call -- "Appel" as they were called -- It would take a good hour to finish roll call for the 7000 plus POWs -- after roll call we started our breakfast and our tea -- The Germans furnished us with a bread -- I mentioned it before -- made of saw dust and potatoes and could be stored in warehouses for years without a problem -- it tasted like sour dough bread and was only really palatable when toasted -- we had toast and ersatz (imitation) jam and margarine -- the tea we got out of a Red Cross food parcel from India and England -- We also shared a box -- eleven pounds -- from the Red Cross -- one box which was supposed to be for one person, was shared by four -- all cans were punctured, so they had to be eaten and would not save -- this was to prevent hoarding food that could be used for escape purposes -- many escapes when caught had food they had saved, so when each was returned back to the camp, our rations were further reduced, so needless to say we had organized escape committees to screen

Any potential escapees, to see that they realized all the consequences involved - if the Committee approved the plans, then we all saved food for them, they also supplied clothing and money that was acquired in barter with the guards and some civilian personnel in the camp -

Our rooms were small and held from eight to ten ^{officer} POW's - Our beds were stacked two or three high and we had one long eating table with benches and one wood stove for heating and cooking - The beds had wooden slats to keep you from falling through to the lower beds and we were issued two horse hair blankets and a pillow with a straw mattress - speaking of mattresses - I had a legacy from my interrogation cell in Weise - I got "scabbies" from that pillow or mattress - The remedy was to shave my head and use a sulfur and glycerine solution daily for weeks on end - The cold got to my bald head and I had to wear a stocking cap, even to bed, to keep my head warm - Those bed slats I mentioned served another mission - The gate of our stove was lifted out at night and a crew entered the tunnel being dug under the barracks - Those bed slats had to be used to shore up the sandy soil to prevent its collapse - When it came my turn to give up my bed ^{slats}, it required using one of the horse hair blankets as a hammock nailed to the sides to support my weight - I remember that I was losing weight rapidly and had little real strength, so when I was given the ten nails necessary to hold the blankets into place, I was able to only pound in seven and that was the end of my strength - I sat on the floor and actually laughed, it struck me so funny, that I didn't have the energy to pound ten nails into place!! - The tunnel construction also required all of us to sew in extra pockets to hold sand and dirt that had been removed from the previous night's work on the tunnel - We would walk around the parade ground each morning lifting out a little sand and dirt to mix in the gravelled parade ground as there was no means of getting rid of it in the barracks area - We also had a radio carved into the interior

Of our bunk bed frames and each night we listened to the BBC (British Broadcasting system) each night -- another bed frame contained a wireless set for transmissions but we used it sparingly, as we had to use the electricity from the Germans and it caused the lights to flicker and when that happened, the Germans routed us out of the barracks and we had to spend hours on the parade grounds, until they finished searching our various barracks -- ~~to~~ ^{while} we were in these long periods on the parade grounds we prepared our tea, using small burner burners that we made from various styled cans -- they ^{were} so efficient we could cook on a handful of paper or wood, so we also left our barracks to cook our meals or heat our tea -- incidentally, neither the radio or wooden ^{was} ever discovered while at Sogon --

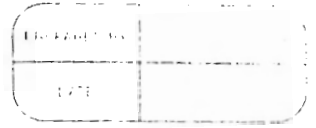
On one of my evening trips, on the parade ground, I noticed a lot of dandelions -- back home my mother used them in salads, so I took a large washbasin and collected it full, to eat -- everyone always was curious, when food was involved so they saw our group eating this salad -- we all shared -- so after that there wasn't a dandelion left on the parade grounds -- I also discovered a lot of snail in the wooded area, where I went one wood walk, so I gathered 50 of them in my salad sack and we split ~~it~~ them into two groups, and the first day we boiled them before eating them -- they were horrible and slimy -- you could squish them out of their shells and eat them -- we did eat them -- but the following day we fried them in mutton tallow -- ~~or~~ ^{our} candle -- and they tasted just like fried shrimp and delicious -- that was the last time I found a snail to eat -- another time, the Commandant's dog disappeared and we all shared in dog meat soup -- the Commandant searched the entire compound for that dog but didn't even recover its collar -- don't know if that was eaten or not!! --

Our food supplies were always low and each day, ^{meal} ~~main~~ ^{was} ~~was~~ ^{an} event -- we cut cards to determine the order we could ^{for} ~~close~~ ^{dessert} ~~the~~ ^{at} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~end~~ ^{of} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~day~~ ^{the} ~~day~~ ^{day} --

some other speciality -- in preparing the dishes, for each day, ^{our} room chef (?) would put them on our trays or dishes and there probably wasn't a grain's difference in weight but to our eyes some looked much larger than others, so we relished using the cards to select at random -- property was sacrosanct and no one would dare steal -- we had quite an honor code and protection of all our rooms property and personnel --

As the days got colder, we lost most of our body fat and my legs became nothing but bones, so I had to sacrifice my sweater's warmth to make a doughnut shaped pad under my hips in order to sleep at night -- laying on my back created moans and loud disapproval, as I fashioned the doughnut, so I could sleep at night without a lot of pain and noise --

Everyone attended all events en force -- we had little theatre production -- put on by the POW's -- and we had church services and lectures -- it was strange to see the POW's knitting or sewing up their holes ^{in clothing} during those outings -- I learned to knit, so I could patch up the holes in my sweater -- a funny letter to one of the POW's was posted on the bulletin board -- The mother had sent him a sweater for Christmas and he mentioned, to her, it shrank when he washed it -- so she wrote back and admonished him that sweaters had to be "dry cleaned" not washed!! -- we all laughed at that remark -- Many letters were shared because many of us never received any letter while in prison camp -- In fact, I received all my letters after the war was over when the sacks of mail piled in the prison camps were found later -- for morale reasons, they were not given out to many POW's, by the Germans, for their own nefarious reasons -- I for one did not receive the information about losing my first wife, until I arrived in the USA -- I was listed as missing in action and the telegram sent back to my parents, ^{and wife} said the following personnel died on the aircraft -- listed the four killed by the civilian and said the fate of the other crew members is unknown, as the bomber blew up --

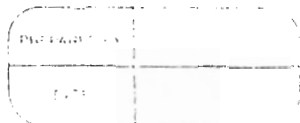


Forget to mention, I was assigned Krejci's uniform # 878C (POW # 8780) and the picture they took for my identification card and file, showed my black eyes and swollen jaws - quite a momentous - I was actually able to get a hold of these documents, when we were released -

The clothing I wore, when I was shot down, was the clothing I wore for my entire POW experience - ^{The German} I took out the wires inside my heated flying suit and gave me the shell - I sewed these two parts together & jacket and pants to make a jump suit because the gaps created drafts of air and it worked better for warmth together - We were issued a G.I. issue overcoat captured from our ground forces also a scarf and a stocking cap - I had my combat boots, so I was in pretty good shape for the cold -

One of the main events, we all engaged in, was a bridge tournament - card game - we had such a value on chocolate bars that they became the medium of exchange and barter - chocolate bars bought houses and cars as well as ^{as} many other items of value ^{& prizes} - after my liberation, I would not eat chocolate candy bars for many years because of this value barter situation - I was actually offered seven candy bars for my boots, or our long cross country trek to outrun the Russian advance - these chocolate bars were a craving at first, then it took time to overcome and change my way of thinking - the chocolate bars were found with the American and Canadian Red Cross food parcels and we would divide one with four others, so we could have a taste of chocolate each night for a week -

Christmas was quite an event and we saved our bread and sugar to make one big cake for the event - we constructed the baking pan out of old tin cans and so when it was finally Christmas we even fermented some prunes to make some ^{very} potent alcohol - which became our downfall on fruit, for we got one of the guards (forwards) in our camp drunk and we had our fruits withheld for a long period of time as a result - the guard got drunk and fell into the large cement water reservoir used to fight fires - he almost drowned but would have died happy!! -



The Russian Armies were advancing over the Oder River toward Berlin and we were in their path of advance, so all 2,000 of us were put out on the road toward Munich - a ~~couple~~ hundred miles I think -- We started out in a column of four wide and finally it dragged back for miles, as we had little strength to fight the ^{zero} sub-zero weather and walk for any distance -- We had to stop often and when we did some POWs fell down face first in the snow and we had to revive them and get them on their feet to keep ^{them} from freezing -- my best friend had to be constantly helped and it used a lot of my reserve strength to practically carry him at times -- We had only the food we carried and that ran out in about three days, so I survived on one box of sugar cubes (8 ozs) for 6 1/2 days -- We stopped en route at a large glass factory and after giving presents for tea, they couldn't get many of us started again, to walk, so we got to spend two days there to help recover from our shuffling walk -- We passed a lot of refugee civilians fleeing the front lines and some of us gave them some food for they were starving and pulling cart load of their household goods -- Irony isn't it? (GA)

When we arrived at Moosberg ^{Stamper} ~~VIA~~ -- 40 miles North of Munich -- we had lost quite a few POWs on the march but I have no idea how many -- We did hear shots but rumors persisted in their cause -- The Germans demonstrated many times their feelings about Americans, so I don't believe the POWs were executed when they failed to get up after each rest stop -- if they tried to escape into the surrounding woods they were hunted down and shot were fired -- The Camp was a shock -- POWs from all parts of adjacent countries and other parts of Germany were congregated in this final POW camp -- We totaled 133,000 when we entered -- The area we were assigned was originally used by the Russians --

The latrines were overflowing and excrement flowed down the steps in rivers of smelly fluids -- because we were Americans and often the ^{area} camp was quickly cleaned and honey tanks -- pump trucks used to getting out the septic systems -- drained the tanks under these restrooms and lime was used to block any

Contamination on the ground and floors -- the barracks were so crowded that the benches were four high and a person had to enter the aisle sideways to get in -- when the weather warmed in March many of us chose to live tents outside to escape the cramping and stench --

We were all encouraged by the news we received on our hidden radios -- we managed to bring them piece by piece with us in toilet articles and sewed into seams of coats -- the Germans gave us little information of value in their written communiques on our bulletin boards and we could not let on we had first hand information of the war's progress, for fear they would find our radios -- we were overjoyed when General Patton headed our way from France and we tipped off the fact we had that information and had one of the most strenuous searches on our barracks we had ever experienced -- they found one of the radios but luckily we had a final one remaining -- we spent almost a day on the outside of our barracks while they tore it apart -- The Germans realized we still had knowledge of General Patton's advance but didn't conduct further searches for they were reaching a point that no food was available for about 70 W's, so they stopped feeding us -- General Patton learned of our plight and spearheaded a column toward our camp and on April 29th 1945 liberated our camp --

The liberation didn't come cheap, for many POW's died in the fighting to take over the camp -- Adolph Hitler had ordered all POW's executed and the ^{German Army} ~~Intelligence~~ that guarded our camp would have complied but the German Air Force would not allow it and took over the camp as its guards -- They surrendered the camp without a fight but the German SS troops fired from their compound and the returned fire from General Patton's tank column hit POW's in their barracks and killed some of them --

General Patton's Chief of Staff's son was in our camp and the first tank through our gates was his and he carried his son in his arms out to his tank -- there was hellum -- everyone was crying and rejoicing -- We all

wanted to know when we could go home -- Patton came into the camp riding on the back seat of his jeep -- what a target, with his chromed helmet and his pearl handled pistols -- he looked us over and saw our physical condition, so he told his supply officer that each man would have a square meal that night out of the 7th Army's rations -- he was quickly taken aside and told that our stomachs would not take heavy food, it would kill all of us -- with bullets!! -- He asked what we could tolerate and was told we consisted mainly on soup -- so he ordered soup kitchen set up and we had such a potent soup that for three days I could barely hold water on my stomach -- it was too rich -- it killed some POW's -- he allowed the Red Cross containers to come in with doughnuts and coffee -- it killed a few more POW's -- he gave us candy bars -- it killed a few more POW's -- finally they realized, experts needed to advise on what to feed us, so they decided to air lift us to a location where they could control our diet, until we were recovered enough to survive --

They needed a typist to prepare the manifest for the flight -- air lift -- so I volunteered to be a typist -- I was given a pass to go anywhere in or out of the camp so I entered and left by the main gate -- I worked in the German Commandant's Office and had access to the German file, so I extracted all the locator cards of mine and my friends who wanted them -- I also sneaked about some military rations, to my friends, until I got caught and they fired me from my typist job because they couldn't trust me not to steal their food!! -- quite a reputation to live down!! -- I used that pass to go into block 4 and see the effects of the crematoriums -- you could smell it for ten miles on the approach to the extermination camp and the sight was unbelievable!! --

We left on the third day after Patton left the area -- we went by Army trucks to a German Airfield outside ~~Frank~~ Munich and there first POW's to be captured, ^{the British} were allowed to be flown into London -- within 1 1/2 hours they were all dead of overeating -- so we were then flown to Camp Lucky Strike

outside Le Harve, France and fed a ration of 13 types of rice -- eggs in rice -- cheese in rice -- tomatoes in rice etc -- because Rice was the easiest of all foods to digest -- it expanded our stomachs and caused us to be full, so we all responded well to this diet, over the ten day period before we boarded ship in ~~the~~ ^{Le Harve} harbor, for New York -- I again used my pass to go into Paris and get a free tour guide to see the sights, before going back to Le Harve and the ship --

We were assigned to a German luxury liner that operated out of South America -- it was converted to a military troop transport and all the port holes were covered and welded shut -- we had forty officers to a room and were far more crowded than in our POW barracks -- if you slept on your side, your elbow hit the bunk above you -- The ship was so crowded that only one third passengers were allowed on deck at a time to prevent capsizing -- this was fine until we encountered rough seas -- only about two or maybe three of us did not get sick from the pitching and yawling action and the room was one mass of vomit and odors -- I knew that I had to keep something on my stomach, at all times, so I went to all the regular meals -- We ate standing up with mess trays that fit into slots -- because there were so few of us they gave us almost anything we wanted to eat -- as we were eating our trays would ~~try~~ ^{try} to move back and forth in the grooves, so it was a challenge -- it was also a challenge to live with the smell of vomit and not give it all up!!

One time, on deck, I observed the many cargo vessels that formed our Convoy -- The German submarines had not surrendered as yet, so we moved in Convoy protected by destroyers -- I noted one bad storm day, one of the small cargo vessels would disappear into the ocean trough, then the swell would crash down on top of it -- then the ship would appear again and finally ^{bob up and} would perch on top of a crest, with propeller spinning above the water, then the process would be repeated -- what guts they must have to

survive that pounding - once the alert was sounded and we were all confined to our quarters - The Destroyers dropped their depth charges and it sounded like a sledge hammer beating on our hull - The feeling of being trapped below deck was terror to many and I felt there was little I could do to alter my situation and I prayed to my God for calmness and deliverance - it evidently worked, for we all survived after the attack -

We arrived in New York harbor with a fanfare of fire boats and harbor tugs spraying water into the air - they had a large sign painted on the warehouse, at the wharf we docked, that read "Welcome Home POW's" - We were all a batch of weak sisters - our emotions ran rampant - We could hardly wait to disembark, but waited for the band to strike up their music - "Don't Give Me in" and "Candy" were both hit songs ^{popular} while I was in POW camps but they were appropriate for the occasion -

We were taken to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and we all headed for telephones to call our loved ones - they had rotary telephone booths about as far as the eye could see and each one had a line in front of it - I remember they had ^{hand}ed us cartons of milk, while I was standing there waiting, and it tasted like Ambrosia - wonderful stuff - I finally got a telephone and tried to call my wife in Washington DC, but our telephone had been disconnected and I was unable to locate her through the locator files, so I called my parents in New Jersey and got my mother - I did not believe it was me, so the operator in New Jersey - who placed our calls for us - finally convinced her it was not a hoax, so my mother proceeded to cry for about eleven long minutes before I could get a question in edgewise - I asked about my wife but she lied and told me she was not sure of her location, so I would have to go to Colorado and when I arrived she would have the location - I then boarded a train - after getting my uniform - I now weighed 121 lbs - down from 165 lbs - so the uniform I was issued lasted only a

few weeks before I outgrew them - my Mother was determined to fatten me up with steaks, she hoarded flour rations, and she had tons of sugar she hadn't used during rationing but couldn't bring herself to pass it up when it was available -

I arrived in Denver in about three days, by train, and at the train my Mother told me that my wife had remarried in my absence and had started a family - that was the most painful experience I had as a POW - I accept all the experience of combat and being a POW but was not prepared for that shock!! My Mother and Father hovered over me day and night to try to make me happy and finally I accepted the fact of the situation and set my course for my future - I filed for divorce from my wife, under the only statute of law allowed in Colorado - "Adultery" - When the baby was born it was born in my name because the other marriage was null and void - the father upon remarriage had to adopt his own son - There are some of the ^{tragedies} ~~tragedies~~ of war that take a definite bite out of personal emotions -

With my Mother's cooking and doing practically no exercise, I shot up to 185 lbs with a flabby fat tuck around my waist - We were allowed to stay home for 60 days to recuperate, and my eyes were always bigger than my stomach, because of our privation as POW's - However, we reported to Santa Monica, California, to an ocean beach hotel set up for returning POW's and they whipped us back into military shape and new uniforms - I went on to become Finance Officer and a pilot -

I returned to flying - went on to fly 57 Combat missions in Korea and was a flight leader and test pilot - then in later training, I flew B-29's, bombs, KC-97 tankers - F121 Parichute transports in Newfoundland and C-54's in Arctic Resupply - I wound up with 3300 hours of flying training & combat

I retired on February 27, 1961, at Mt. Home AFB, Idaho at the 1 year old and as a Major, USAF - ^{with the} With love - Corbin B.?



Name: Willis

Vorname: Corbin Barker

Dienstgrad: 2. Lt.

Erk.-Marke: 8780 Krasgefl. 1. Lw. 3

Serv.-Nr.: 0 - 824 025

Nationalität: USA

Baracke: 1-3

Raum:

Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben *Willis, C.B.*



Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke:
 Nr. 8780
 Lager: Krgsgeflog.d.Lw.3

Kriegsgefangenen-Stammlager:

Des Kriegsgefangenen

Name: WILLIS
 Vorname: Corbin Burkam
 Geburtstag und -ort: 20.12.22 Colorado
 Religion: Prot.
 Vorname des Vaters:
 Familienname der Mutter:

Staatsangehörigkeit: USA
 Dienstgrad: 2. Lt.
 Truppenteil: USAAF Komp. usw.:
 Zivilberuf: Student Berufs-Gr.:
 Matrikel Nr. (Stammrolle des Heimatstaates): 0-824 025
 Gefangennahme (Ort und Datum): Simuldsorf 2.11.44
 Ob gesund, krank, verwundet eingeliefert:

Lichtbild		Nähere Personalbeschreibung	
	Größe	Haarfarbe	Besondere Kennzeichen:
	<u>1,88</u>	<u>d. braun</u>	
	Fingerabdruck des rechten Zeigefingers		Name und Anschrift der zu benachrichtigenden Person in der Heimat des Kriegsgefangenen
		<u>Bernice H. Willis, Sp. 2/c U.S.N.R.</u> <u>Wave Ctrs. 2. Bks. 22-113</u> <u>Neh. and Mass. Aves.</u> <u>Washington, D.C.</u> <u>0828 C.B. 5175</u>	

Personal-Beschreibung:

Figur:
 Größe: 1,88 m
 Alter: 20.12.22
 Gesichtsfom: oval
 Gesichtsfarbe: gesund
 Schädelform: lang
 Augen: braun
 Nase: groß
 Haare: dkl. braun
 Bart:
 Gebiß: i. d.
 Besondere Merkmale:
 Deutsche Sprachkenntnisse:

February 19, 1991

Dear Dad,

I just finished reading your history. It was fascinating! I have to admit I was a little worried about reading it - for fear it would be too hard to think of you in those conditions. Although it was an awful experience for you, you wrote about it with a sense of humor - looking for the good in even the worse of situations.

I remember bits and pieces of these stories, as you have shared them over the years - but now to have the whole story written down - it means so much. Thank you for taking the time to share that with us.

As you wrote of your experiences, and the things you did for others, the way you reacted to the stress and pain - I saw you - the Dad the example you have always been to me. The word to describe you is integrity. Your willingness to share what little you had - it's the example you always set for us. I am so proud of you Dad - what you were then and what you are now.

When you shared your pain at the end in finding your wife remarried I cried for you, having faced so much to come home to that. But I'm glad it happened, because then you had to find Mom and begin this family. We believe you choose your family before coming to earth - I'm sure if I watched you from the pre-existence (or earth life)

I was proud, and praying for your strength
to endure.

Thank you again for writing down this history
we will always treasure it. Your grandchildren,
and future generations will know ~~the~~^{their} Grandpa
from this history. Who you are has come through
these pages.

I love you Dad!

Love,
Carrie