THE WAY I REMEMBER IT

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Acknowledgments

The seed of this autobiography was a suggestion by my eldest son, James (Mike), who was spending some time with us while he was working in Franklin and trying to sell his home in Muncie. He said, "Why don't you write down some of your wartime experiences so your grandchildren will be able to know Grandpa a little better".

The first drafts were gone over by Arnold Picket of the composing room of the Rough Notes Co. and Nancy Doucette, the assistant editor, of Rough Notes Magazine. Nancy would say, "What does this mean? Explain it a little more so thirty years from now, someone will know what you are talking about." Then I would give it to Irene to check the spelling and the facts as she knew them.

When it came time to put this on the IBM, my daughter Theresa scanned the old text and I set about correcting all those errors that come up whenever a text is scanned. I have added some updating to the last page, and now I am wanting to add pictures. James (Mike) and Theresa have put some of the old pictures on disk. Without the use of my trusty TI-99/4A, it could never have happened.

BEGINNINGS

I was born at 2511 East Raymond Street, Indianapolis, Indiana April 6, 1921, the second child of Clara and Walter Stahlhut. I was named for my two grandfathers, Robert Riedweg and Fred Stahlhut. Grandpa Riedweg had come to America as a young boy, with his older sisters, from northern France. Grandma Riedweg was the child of German immigrants. Grandpa and Grandma Stahlhut were married and had one child before they came to America. My dad told us that when he started to go to public school, he was unable to speak English. German was always spoken in the home. Dad supported our family with income from the jewelry store he had started several years before my birth.

There were seven children in all, four girls and three boys. I was eight when the stock market crash of 1929 started "The Great Depression." Many families lost their life savings when banks closed their doors. Some of the banks never opened again and many that did reopen, gave investors only a small percent of the money that was in their accounts. Mother and Daddy had their hands full putting the children through Lutheran school and in those days it was hard just keeping food on the table. Daddy was able to save the business, but at times things looked pretty bad. Watch and jewelry repair were the main things that kept him going.

Besides the Depression there was another thing that affected everyone - prohibition. The federal government did not permit anyone to buy or sell any alcoholic beverages (booze). This may not seem like a very big thing now, but whenever you tell freedom loving people that they can't do something that most of them saw no harm in doing! That's just the thing they're going to do. It became a status symbol to make "home brew," as it came to be known, in the basement of people's homes. I never saw my dad when he had too much to drink, but I helped him make many a keg of home brew and when we finished he would make some root beer for the children.

Those were also the days of the bootleggers and the gangsters. Most notorious around here were John Dillinger and Pretty Boy Floyd. Once while seeking medical aid for one of his men, who was shot, Floyd and his men were cornered at a doctor's office on Barth Ave., just north of Raymond Street. The gangsters shot their way out, killing a policeman and escaping in a car, with one tire shot out. It was the big event at school the next day when we heard the eyewitness account from one of our classmates, who lived across the street from the doctor's house.

AS A YOUNG MAN

I graduated from Saint Paul School in 1935 and Manual High School in 1939. The effects of the Depression made jobs hard to get. I worked several places before going to work at Allison, a Division of General Motors in 1941. They were making airplane engines for the P-38, P-39, P-40 and the P-51. (The P stands for Pursuit. The letter F is used today and the aircraft is known as a Fighter plane.) The smell of war was in the air. The US was already drafting men over the age of 21, when along came the attack on Pearl Harbor. By February 1942 the draft age was lowered to 20 and that's when I signed up. It took until September 2, 1942 to get me in uniform.

It was in the spring of 1942, that I met a wonderful girl named Irene Eland. She was still in high school and while I felt she was a little young for me, I liked her and we dated for about five months. Most of the dates were on my motorcycle. One evening we were at a midget auto race in Greenfield when it began to rain. We came all the way back to town in a downpour. First we stopped at my house so I could put on dry clothing. Then I took her home to change. That was the first she knew that I had a car.

After I left for the service we began writing. At first it was now and then but it wasn't long before I was writing every day. She tells me now that she used to run home from school at noontime, each day, to see if she had a letter.

OFF TO THE AIR FORCE

Once in the service, I was sent to an aircraft maintenance school at Gulfport Air Force Base, Mississippi and at the end of that training I volunteered to go to an aerial gunnery school at Laredo Air Force Base in Texas. This was a five-week course where we were taught to fire everything from a BB gun to a .50-caliber machine gun. The last week of the school was exam time. We had to score passing grades in air-to-air firing or we failed the course.

For my first airplane ride I was given a .30 caliber machine gun and l00 rounds of ammunition. I climbed into the back seat of an AT-6, (The AT is for Advanced Trainer), a two-seater airplane with a mount for the machine gun.

Another AT-6 pulled a sleeve target for me to shoot at. On the way to the target area, the playful pilots scared me by touching wing tips as we were flying along. I hardly got started firing when my gun jammed. We had been trained to take care of situations like that, but what happened to my gun was something that had never been covered by instructions so I was allowed to continue, but it put me behind the rest of the class.

QUALIFIED AND PROMOTED

On the last day of firing a friend offered me some of his ammunition since he had already qualified. I thanked him but I said I didn't want to fly combat if I could not qualify on my own. Well I did qualify and I was awarded crew member wings and sergeants stripes.

I was then sent to Gowen Air Force Base in Idaho. While waiting to be put on a crew, I became impatient and signed up for cadet training. If I had finished the cadet training I would have become an officer. But before the training began, the B-17's arrived, so we started training as a crew. A crew consisted of 10 men. A pilot, co-pilot, navigator gunner, bombardier gunner, engineer gunner, asst. engineer gunner, radio operator gunner, asst. radio operator gunner and two armament gunners. I got the engineer gunner position, which meant I would be firing the guns in the top turret. We trained for several months at Gowen and then we went to an air base at Walla-Walla, Washington for more training.

During a typical day of training we would fly four hours and have four hours of class work. Every flight was a training flight during which we drilled on gunnery, bombing, navigation, cross-country or landings and takeoffs. There were some accidents. Airplanes crashed and men were killed, but such is the training for war. The instructors wanted us to get to know that airplane from one end to the other. Sometime during this training I was given the rank of Staff Sergeant.

During the mechanic school and gunnery school we were given very few passes and no furloughs, so when a notice was posted saying that 14 day furloughs could now be taken, almost all of us, who were in training to fly combat, went to the orderly room to sign up. We all wanted to go home one last time before the enemy had a chance to start shooting at us. (I say enemy because at that time we did not know if we would be fighting in the

Pacific or Europe). The officer in charge came out and, with a bit of red face, told us that the 14-day furlough did not pertain to us. It only pertained to those men who were running the base and the schools. He must have felt a little bad about it because a few days later all the men in flight training were given a 6-day furlough and they tacked on a 3-day pass, making 9 days in all. There was not enough passenger airline space for all of us, so most of us had to go by train. It took me 4 days to get home. I spent one day at home and then 4 days getting back to Walla-Walla.

OFF TO THE WAR

Shortly after I got back to Walla-Walla, we were sent to Kearney, Nebraska. It was the summer of 1943. Our crew was given a new B-17. The officers were each issued a .45-caliber pistol while the enlisted men got a new carbine and the engineer (that's me), got a new Thompson sub machine-gun with a new leather holster so it could be stowed in the ship. We were told that we were a part of the "Brooks Provisional Group", with orders to fly to Prestwick, Scotland. We were pretty much on our own. The radio operator kept contact with Kearney as we made our way. First we flew to Syracuse, New York, where we stayed about a week. During this stay, the officers were going to town whenever they wanted to, so one of the enlisted men got a hold of some blank passes and away we went. We had to see what we were missing.

One of our officers made friends with the photography officer for the base and he came out as we were getting ready to leave for Maine and took our pictures. He then took all our names and addresses and sent our folks a copy of the prints. Then it was on to Bangor, Maine, where we almost ran over a pickup truck when we landed. The driver turned from a taxi strip onto our runway as our wheels were touching down. We left the runway to the right while the truck took off to the left. I had never seen our pilot so angry.

After another five days or so we were off to Gander Lake, Newfoundland, where we waited a few days for good weather. A good weather forecast finally came, so we were on our way again. I don't know how many airplanes were there waiting for that forecast (seemed like hundreds). We took off at intervals. Each ship was on its own.

Darkness set in right after take off. We flew all night long. Daylight had come by the time we reached Prestwick. I understand some in the back of the airplane slept, but up front, we were busy all night. The navigator had his head in the blister, which was positioned in the nose of the plane, with the sexton, most of the time. The radio operator was calling Kearney, making reports and getting new headings from Prestwick. The two pilots and I were watching out the windshield and side windows.

At one point midway in the flight, another B-17, flying at our altitude, crossed our path a short distance ahead of us. It was going east southeast not the same heading as us at all. We never knew where it went. There were some stories about crews that missed England and landed in France. Since Germany still occupied France we didn't want that to happen to us.

ARRIVAL IN SCOTLAND

Shortly after daylight we saw land to our left. The navigator said it must be Ireland, and he gave us a new heading. We flew on above clouds and soon the navigator told the pilot, "Prestwick should be right under those clouds." We broke through the clouds right over the field. The first thing after landing was breakfast. While going through the chow line, I met my first Scotswoman. Her request was, "Do you have any American gum, chum?" There were many shortages in the British Isles at that time but it surprised me to hear someone begging for chewing gum.

After breakfast we were told to unload the ship because we would not be seeing it again. We were going to an advanced combat training school. During this short course I came down with what the British doctor called, "the grip." We would call it flu. They wanted to replace me with another engineer because I would be behind in my schooling, but my fellow crewmen went to bat for me and I stayed with that same crew.

THE 384TH BOMB GROUP

We went from that school to the 384th Bomb Group where we were put in the 544th Bomb Squadron. The enlisted men were quartered in a Quonset hut, a small tubular structure that slept 24 people, with three other crews. We took the bunks of a crew that hadn't returned from a bombing mission. Then we were shown around the base. It had a nice mess hall for combat crews only. We were given lockers at squadron headquarters and so on.

I remember the officer at the armament shop telling us that orders were, that no one was to carry side arms on a combat mission, but if we wanted one he would give us one before we left on a mission. His advice was not to carry one on raids over Germany. But if we did take one when bombing targets in an occupied country, we should give it to the first friendly person we met, if we were shot down.

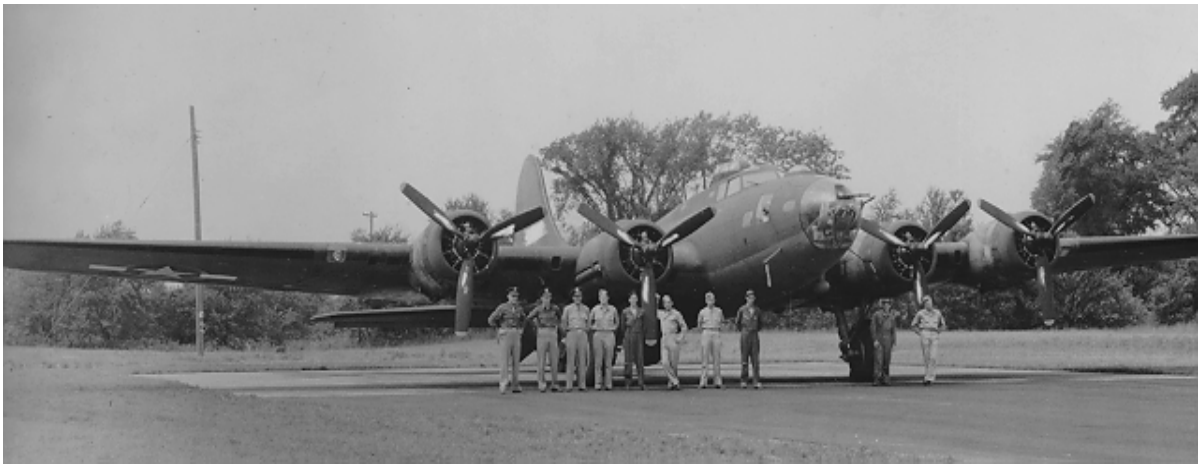
The 384th Bomb Group was made up of four combat squadrons, the 544th, the 545th, the 546th and the 547th Squadrons, a Sub Depot Squadron, Military Police, Chemical Company, Q.M. Company, Firefighters and Weather Squadron, which was all part of the 8th Air Force. They had started bombing Germany in June 1943 and by early August of 1943,

had already lost over 20 planes, which added up to over 200 men, dead, injured or prisoner of war.

MY FIRST MISSION

On August 15 I flew my first mission. One of the other crews had an engineer shot-up on the last mission so I was called on to take his place. My pilot also subbed on a different crew. It was a milk run (an easy raid). There was little flak and few fighters. Two days later, August 17, 1943 was the first anniversary of the 8th Air Force bombing of Germany (Daylight bombing). Prior to this all raids were done at night by the British to hold down casualties, so they wanted to make it a big one. Schweinfurt and Regensburg were to be the targets. The 8th Air Force was split in half. One half was to take one target and return home, while the other half was to hit the second target and go on to North Africa. The Africa half was given the B-17s that carried the most gas. The newer B-17s had what was called Tokyo tanks in the wing tips, which gave them a lot more fuel.

Our group was going on the shorter raid, so we ended up with the oldest B-17s in the 8th Air Force. They didn't even have enough planes for our crew, so we sat that one out. I was out on the ramp of the airfield when the planes of the 384th started to come back. It must have been a rough one. Planes came in all shot up. Ambulances were running out to take men off to the hospital. One plane came in with wheels up. What a sight that was! It slid the full length of the field on its belly. And then of course some didn't return at all.



Well, several days later, our crew went on our first raid together. I don't remember much about it, except that we were attacked by ME-109s and we saw a lot of flak. As we were approaching the English Channel, on our way home, one of the men in the rear of the ship called the pilot to say that we had a large hole in the horizontal stabilizer. The pilot sent me back to see how bad the damage was. I told the pilot it didn't look too bad to me. Not wanting to take any more chances than he had to, the pilot decided to slow our speed, leave the formation and make our way back to home base by ourselves. Further inspection of the damage when we were on the ground led us to believe that an antiaircraft shell must have passed through the stabilizer without exploding. Such an explosion could have taken the stabilizer or maybe the whole tail.

It was about this time that the radio operator and I were given the rank of Technical Sergeant.

Also about this time we were able to squeeze in a 48-hour pass to London. I saw many of the sights like Buckingham Palace, Big Ben and the London Bridge. I also had a chance to see what it was like to see this city during a blackout.

Back at the base, several skeleton crews were sent to a subdepot where aircraft were repaired. We were to bring repaired B-17s back to our base for more duty. As we were taxiing out, something began banging against the side of the plane. The pilot shut down the engine on that side and I climbed out on the wing to see what the problem was.

The rubber anti-icing strip on the leading edge of the propeller had pulled loose and was stretching out and hitting the fuselage. I trimmed the excess rubber off with a knife and we restarted the engine. On take off we had a "run away" prop. The prop that I had just worked on was feathered and it didn't take long to tell that it was the wrong engine.

The pilot took appropriate action but there were a few anxious moments, because taking off on two engines can be dangerous.

THE FATEFUL MISSION

Labor Day, September 6, l943 was our next mission, one I will never forget. We were awakened in the middle of the night. Briefing was the first step (remember I said that we had the oldest B-17s in the 8th). Well, the briefing officer told us that many of our ships could not hold enough gas to make it to the target (Stuttgart, Germany) and back to our base without stopping along the way to refuel.

We would be flying at about 20,000 feet, where it gets very cold, sometimes 40 or 45 below zero. This ship was older than anything we had seen in training. It was a B-l7E, with an old-type oxygen system that we had not used before and there was no place to plug in our electric heated suits (sort of like an electric blanket type deal, but a suit), so we had to dress very warm for the flight.

It was daylight by the time we got in the air. We climbed as fast as we could. Then came the test firing of our guns and getting into formation for the long flight to Stuttgart. It seemed like a long time flying back and forth across the target before we dropped our bombs and headed for home. We were attacked by ME-l09s (Messerschmitt) along the way but they pulled back when we were over the target because the ground support and flak were pretty heavy.

Something had knocked out one of our inboard engines, so the pilot, without warning the rest of the crew dove for cloud cover. I came down out of my turret in a hurry. When the pilot saw the look on my face, he called the rest of the crew and told them that we were still OK but he could no longer keep up with the formation on just three engines. We flew along for a while with three engines going and one propeller feathered, when the other inboard engine started acting up. It soon stopped but there was not enough oil left to feather that propeller so it kept windmilling.

I transferred all the gas from the two inboard engines to the outboard engines. Since we were now left with only two good engines we were using gas much faster than four good engines would. Put that together with what they told us before we left England, there was no way we could make it back home. The pilot asked the navigator to let him know when we were over France. We wanted France because we had a better chance of evading capture in an occupied country, so on we went.

WE BAILED OUT

Soon the empty lights came on for the outboard engines. The navigator said we were over northern France, so the pilot said that we should start bailing out. I never knew in what order we left, but bail out we did! The bomb bay doors were open so that's the way I went out. It was like the rushing of a mighty wind for a few seconds and when it quieted down, I pulled the rip cord. As I floated down I could see one parachute on either side of me, but soon I saw a B-l7 coming at me in a wide circle. Only two engines were running and it had a windmilling prop on one inboard that was making it turn. It had to be ours. It made about half a circle before it struck the side of a hill.

Then came my turn to land. The parachute I was wearing was a chest pack, 24 foot and it snapped on the harness, that I was wearing, in front, which left me hanging with my feet out in front instead of straight down. The first to touch the ground was my feet and then the base of my spine. I was knocked out and I don't know for how long. When I awoke some man took me to hide in a woods. He left and then the Germans came. It wasn't until many years later that I read what the Air Force had to say about that day in its "History of the 384th Bomb Group."

THE REPORT OF THE MISSION

"Our bombers had as their objective today the large German industrial city of Stuttgart, in the southwestern part of the country. However an overcast sky obscured the target from the wing in which the 384th's planes were flying and the Fortresses passed over the city without dropping their bombs. Targets of opportunity were selected on the return trip, although the seriousness of military damage resulting is doubtful. Captain Raymond Ketelsen, who led the formation, deposited his bombs on a German farm community, while another ship dropped their demolitions in a forest. The bombing was done helter-skelter, more to lighten the loads of the planes, rather than to inflict destruction, as gas tanks were running low after the long flight over the breadth of France into Germany proper.

When the Group reached the French side of the English Channel, practically all peeled off and made for British territory in order to get under the wire of rapidly emptying gas tanks. Only two planes made directly for their home station: Capt. Ketelsen's ship and 1st Lt. Philip Higdon's plane.

Then phone calls began to pour in announcing that other planes had landed at emergency fields, however when as a late hour had been reached, by which all planes should have been accounted for, five were still missing. Some are believed to have landed in Switzerland, while parachutes were seen over France. Still others may have ditched in the Channel. One, however, is believed to have gone down over the target. Flak at Stuttgart was described as intense."

The write-up goes on to name the crews that came back and tell how some crews dumped guns and anything else that was detachable from the planes to lighten them and enable them to attain home territory. Next they list the crewmembers of the ships that didn't make it back. I will not list them all but I will go on where they talk about our crew.

"Crews of missing ships-544th Sq. 2nd Lt. James J. McMahon, pilot, 2nd Lt. Rudolph P. Froeschle, co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Lesta E. Shackelford, navigator, 2nd Lt. Arthur H. Dinnodorf, bombardier, T/Sgt. Marcus A. Carr, radio operator, T/Sgt. Robert F. Stahlhut, engineer, S/Sgt. John W. Tripp, ball turret gunner, S/Sgt. George J. Kemp, tail gunner, S/Sgt. Schley H. Jessup and S/Sgt. James E. Savage, waist gunners."

They also list the crew that was next to us in our Quonset hut. I later met members of that crew. They did not bail out as we did. They crash landed when they ran out of gas and then they blew up their ship.

THE CAPTURE

The Germans who captured me made me sit at the bottom of a ditch until they could get transportation. The first stop was the Gestapo headquarters where they asked a few questions, nothing too serious to this point. Then it was off to the jail in Metz where I was put in a single cell overnight. While I was there I didn't see any other POWs.

The next morning I was put on a passenger train and taken to Frankfurt. Another crewmember, Jim Savage, one guard and myself were in a compartment. When mealtime came, the guard pulled out a sausage roll, his knife and some bread and made us some sandwiches. Soon we were at Frankfurt. As we were walking down some steps in the train station, a little old lady came up to us. She shouted something at me, which I couldn't understand and then she spit at me.

Once at Dulag-Luft in Frankfurt, I spent several days in a holding cell and then was sent to the interrogation center. After a talk with those "friendly fellows", I was put in solitary for the next 14 days. During that time, they called me back for another chat about five or six times. Each time I saw a different man but the questioning was always similar. He would offer me a cigarette and be very nice, then as I would refuse to answer his questions he would get more angry and threaten me. Turning me over to the Gestapo was a favorite threat. Not letting me out of solitary was another good one.

My wallet, wristwatch, a pack of cigarettes, escape kit (included maps, compass, emergency rations) had been taken from me before I was put in my cell. For meals, I was given a hot drink (they called it coffee), a piece of bread sliced about half the thickness of our bread, with a little margarine on it for breakfasts, a bowl of barley soup for lunch, then the breakfast meal was repeated again for supper. The room was very small with a bed made of wood (no springs, no mattress, no blankets, no pillow). When I wanted to go to the bathroom I had to turn a little handle that dropped a flag down on the outside of the door. The guard would come (at his leisure) and take me. He would then hurry me until I was back in the cell. There was no such thing as washing or brushing my teeth.

The window in my cell had bars and shutters. When those shutters were closed, it was so dark I could see nothing. I could hear voices in the cells next to me but I never tried to make contact. I kept thinking they might be Germans, trying to get prisoners to slip and give them some information.

On my 14th day of solitary I was again taken to be interrogated. The man said, "I'm going to send you on to a permanent camp. We now have all the information we need about you." He proceeded to show me a list of 10 men, our group and squadron numbers. I didn't let on that two of those names were wrong. That told me that two of our crew had not been captured.

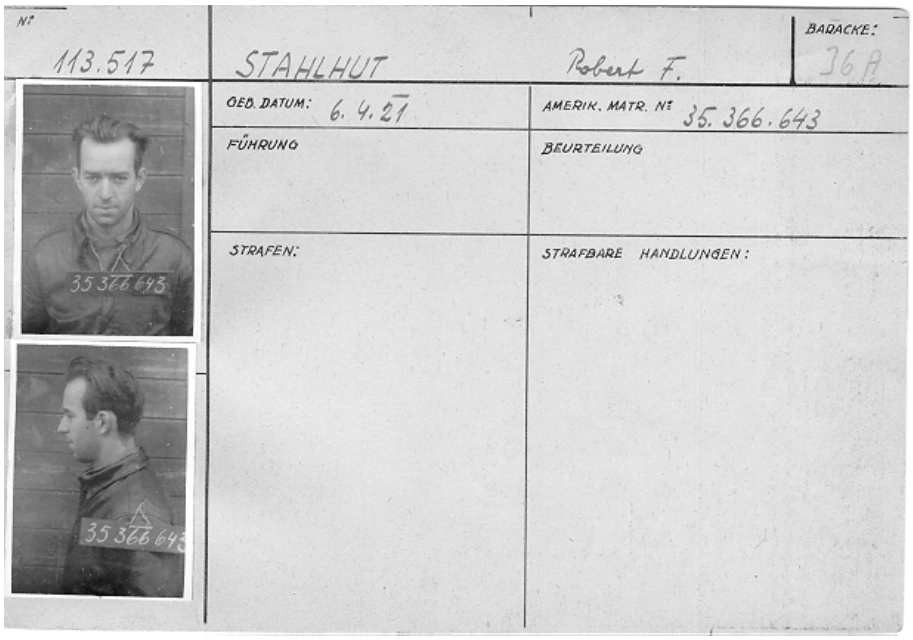
I was then taken to a camp nearer the center of Frankfurt. It was another holding camp, but unlike the other one, it was a very nice place. Meals were served four times a day in a mess hall. We could even take showers. I was told that representatives of the International Red Cross were brought to this camp to see how well prisoners were being treated.

STALAG 7A

Next, a bunch of us POWS were put in a boxcar for shipment to Stalag 7A. I had the misfortune to suffer from dysentery on the trip (we called it the GIs). There was no place to go but the open door of the train. Under normal circumstances it would have been embarrassing but I didn't seem to care. A German doctor gave me some powdered charcoal to eat and it took care of my problem.

That night the British bombed near us. The train stopped and the guards got out of their car and went into the ditch. Our door was locked, but we couldn't have gone very far if we were able to escape. They had taken our shoes from us before we left Frankfurt. The next evening we went through the same thing again. Our train was not hit, either time.

The next day, we were taken into Stalag 7A near Moosburg. It was there that I was photographed and given German dogtags. Each camp had it's own series of numbers. Mine was Stalag 7A 113517.



This camp was guarded by the German army (Wehrmacht). Our Air Force enlisted men had been trying for nearly a year to get them to send American Air Force POWs to a camp guarded by the Luftwaffe (German Air Force). Since we were "Army" Air Force, they were treating us like army.

I had been there only a short time when they put all 1,500 American Air Force enlisted men in "40 and 8" box cars (that's 40 men or 8 horses) and sent us to Stalag 17B, near Krems, Austria. Some thought escape might be easier from 7A so they traded places with prisoners from other countries. I knew of two Russians POWs who would be going along with us. A Polish American stayed close to them and tried to teach them English as best he could. Pronouncing their new names and serial numbers was the first thing they had to learn. It's not hard to understand how they made it through the number check, but how they got through the picture check, I never knew. There were even Americans trading

identities with other Americans. Only Air Force men were being moved. The Ground Force men would stay. (I didn't see the Russians again for about a year and by that time they could speak English as well as any of us.)

During our trip to Stalag 17B, attempts were made to find a way to escape. At last a door was forced open between the cars. While we were waiting for a good place to jump off, we came to the Danube River. Just across the river was the end of our journey. We were unloaded and marched the rest of the way to the camp. The first meal, at 17B was, as I remember it, pumpkin soup.

STALAG 17B

This Stalag 17B was a large camp, run by the army, but they put all the American Air Force enlisted men in the far corner with Luftwaffe guards. The prisoners in the camp were permitted to go from one part to another, but not the Americans. There was a large double fence with patrolling guards and dogs between them and us.

All the enlisted men from our crew, with the exception of George Kemp, who was never captured, were put into barracks 36A. Believe it or not the inside of that barracks looked a lot like the set of "Hogan's Heroes." Each barracks held about 150 men. A barracks chief was elected and someone was appointed to divide up any food that came to the barracks.

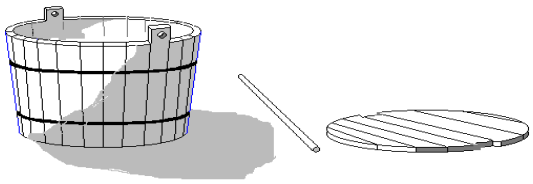
Much of the time we had Red Cross food parcels, food that was sent to us by the American Red Cross, through the International Red Cross. This was part of the agreement signed by the Germans at the Geneva Convention. The Germans started sending this food to a kitchen and mixed it with the soup they were feeding us. Sound good? Not so. Many times the potatoes were rotten and if there was any meat it was likely to have worms in it. It was a waste of good American food.

A huge cry went out from us, so the Germans running the camp started passing out the parcels to us. Each of these parcels was supposed to last one man one week. As the Germans handed them out they would jab each can with a bayonet. That was so we couldn't store up a supply of food for an escape. When we took them to our barracks, the first thing we would do was spread some margarine in those holes. This would keep the food edible longer.

A parcel usually contained a pound can of powdered milk, a can of fish, a can of corned beef or Spam, a can of powdered coffee, a D ration bar (chocolate), a block of cheese and three packs of cigarette.

We formed small groups to make it easier to cook and divide our food. Jim Savage and I kept our food together all the time we were there. Bread (that's what they called it) was sent to the barracks once a day. It was not sliced. It was cut into pieces, maybe six or eight men to a loaf. If it was fresh it didn't taste too bad but let it get old and it did not mold, it got hard as a rock. You could pound a nail with it.

Since there was only a small stove in each barracks and little or nothing to burn in it, the kitchen would send us hot water each morning to make coffee with. The hot water, soup and boiled potatoes were sent to the barracks in a big wooden bucket. It looked like a whiskey keg cut in half with two holes located across from one another. A wooden pole was then put through the holes and two men would carry it. When the kitchen had anything for us they would send a runner to each barracks. Now and then we would get some meat, like the time that bombs had killed some oxen nearby. There were times we were told that the meat we received was from horses.



Since there was no money in the camp, the barter system became a method of trade. Everything was valued by how many packs of cigarettes it was worth. Trade was conducted between the prisoners and the guards that came into the camp. One way guards brought things into the camp for trade without their officers knowledge, was to put it in the metal can that was made for their gas mask.

Trade was also conducted by Americans with other nationalities. I mentioned the double fence. Such a fence was all around the outside of the camp. About 10-15 feet inside the double fence was a single strand of barbed wire (known as a warning wire) mounted on top of posts, about a yard high. In the area between the double fence and the warning wire were signs posted. In the center at the top and bottom the word WARNING was printed in large letters. Between was printed these words, "ANYONE CAUGHT TOUCHING OR CROSSING THE WARNING WIRE WILL BE FIRED UPON WITHOUT WARNING"

One day an American was trading with a Russian in the next compound. The American threw some packs of cigarettes to the Russian but they didn't all make it across that second warning wire. The Russian thought he could beat the German guard so he jumped the wire and grabbed the cigarettes but the guard was too fast for him. He didn't make it back. The Germans left his body out there as a warning, long enough for all of us to see.

HUNGRY FOR NEWS

The Germans didn't permit us to have radios in the camp, so some of the men traded with guards to get the parts necessary to make crystal sets. It was not necessary to buy the wire needed for antennas. It was plentiful in the many heated suits that were worn by men when they were shot down.

We had an information system all our own and those gathering the news would not report anything as fact unless two or more crystal set operators received the same report. It would be written up each day and someone would go from one barracks to another to give it to the men.

When the news man would come in the barracks, he would look around the room for Germans. If none were sighted, someone would call out, "At ease, the news." Then a table would be slid into the center aisle for the news man to stand on and he would give us the news of the day. Many times we could hear that someone like Churchill or Eisenhower said that the war would be over in six months. That was a report everyone was ready to believe.

NEWS OF THE INVASION

When at last the invasion of Europe came (June 6, 1944), we heard it first from the Germans. They said, "We will throw them back into the sea".

They were never able to get that job done.

While many of our countrymen never made it beyond the beaches, others kept coming. Hand-made maps were soon posted all over the inside of the Barracks. We followed the progress of our liberators as they slowly came toward us.

I thought the Germans would quit fighting when their homeland was invaded but they kept at it for another 11 months.

With a new bunch of new prisoners that came into camp one day, was a man named Fred Wagner. His crew had shared the Quonset hut with our crew back in England. Every new prisoner had to tell his "Shot down story" a few times. Here is his. Fred had only a few missions to go before he would go back to the states on rotation. While returning from a bombing mission over Germany, the bomb bay doors would not go up automatically, so the engineer went to the bomb bay to crank them up by hand. When the walk around oxygen bottle he was using ran low on oxygen, he asked that another bottle be brought to him. Fred, being the nearest man took a fresh walk around bottle into the bomb bay. He disconnected his own oxygen, thinking he would be back in time to hook up again. Instead he passed out from lack of oxygen and fell out the open bomb bay doors. He came to in time to pull his ripcord and floated to the ground. A few days later the rest of his crew completed their twenty-five missions and went home without him and he spent the rest of the war as a guest of the Third Reich, with the rest of us.

Life was going on day by days when one day an American was brought into our camp. The next day when the Germans came backs to get him from the barracks, he was nowhere to be found. The story I heard was that he had escaped many times from other prison camps and this time he was being sent to a Concentration camp.

THE ESCAPE

Since no one knew where he was, the Germans became angry. The Luftwaffe ordered us all outside. While they were giving us a number and picture check, the barracks were searched. They kept us out all day.

The next day it was the German army's turn. Then the third day the Gestapo took over. Wagonloads of our things were taken from the barracks but they never found that American. These events became known in the camp as the three-day picnic.

One day a squad of guards came to one of the barracks and tried to take the men out of the camp. None of the Germans spoke English and the only thing our men could make out was that they were going to a Keno. Since no one knew what a Keno was, they didn't want to go. Some went out the windows. Others ran away when they got outside the barracks.

Those who went with the guards came back in a couple of hours. They had been taken to the guards' part of the camp where they had been made to view a movie. I got to see several of those movies. None were in English, though. They were French films with German captions.

It seems the Geneva Convention said that POWS were to be given money while they were being detained! So they could buy things at a PX. Since we had no PX, this was our captor's way of trying to comply with the convention. I wish we would have had a place to buy things. I was not able to brush my teeth for over six months and my beard got quite long.

The Geneva Convention required that leather soled shoes be given to POWS. The way the Germans supposedly complied was to take wooden shoes and tack pieces of leather on the bottom.

Lice and bed bugs were a big problem. To combat this the Germans sent us to the delousing facility about once a month. A whole barracks would go at one time. Haircuts came first (that's clippers over the top). We didn't have to worry about our hat sliding off for a while. Those bristles would dig right in to a knit hat.

Next was the shower. While we showered our clothing went into a gas chamber. (The gas made them stink for a week.) We could not linger in the shower because they would shut the water off soon after we got wet. They were not so fast about the clothing though. It would be a several hour wait and there were no benches or seats in the waiting room. We just stood around with no clothing on.

One day this all came to an end. Some fellows who didn't want to get their haircut put margarine mixed with sand in their hair. Well the teeth on the clippers flew. Those guys were made to shower first and then some new clippers were brought out and they were given the burr. But that was the last time any of us were given a haircut.

A year had gone by and we had seen little bombing, since Austria was so far from any American or English air bases. When the Americans and English started getting bases in France and Italy, things did pick up a bit. It was the English at night and the Americans by day.

I remember one night the air raid siren sounded and most of the men ran outside to the slit trenches. (It was not uncommon for many of the men to ignore the sirens and continue with what they were doing.) These trenches were dug in the compound behind the barracks, in a zigzag fashion so one could get protection from any direction. They were rather narrow and about 6 to 7 feet deep.

As we were out there watching the show we could hear two airplanes. We never saw either one but we could tell one was a British plane by the unsynchronized propellers and the rapid fire of his .30 caliber machine guns.

Then came the loud drone of the German plane and the slow but loud boom-boom of his cannon. If either was shot down that night we did not witness it.

The show we watched from the trenches was flares dropped by the British, which were to show planes that would follow, the way to the target. Then the target was lit up with many flares. That was referred to as a "Christmas tree". Once the bombing had begun, the fires started by the bombing would keep things lit up.

MENTAL STRAIN

Mental strain was a problem in the camp. One night a man in our barracks went crazy. He started yelling but he was soon calmed down by one of the other men. The barracks next to us had a man try to jump out the window after curfew. He would have been shot since there was a camp rule that did not allow anyone on the grounds after curfew. One time a man, in broad daylight, ran to the fence and started to climb over. When the guard leveled his rifle some of the guys called to him and told the guard that the man was sick in the head. That did no good. The guard shot the fellow anyway.

One night we heard gunfire and when I heard an infantryman in our barracks yell, "Hit the deck" that's just what I did. We soon heard Germans running around outside. It seems that two of our men tried to escape and they were shot. The shots also got a fellow in his bunk in the next barracks. The next morning we could see blood in the snow where the two were stopped.

Despite the bad things that happened, there were many good times. Take the time we had been out of food parcels for some time when rumor came that a boxcar had come into Krems for us. It was not food at all; most of it was toilet paper. The YMCA had sent along some sports equipment. Most of it was allowed but the Germans cut up all the baseball bats because they didn't want us to have any clubs.

Since we were all Sergeants, we did not have to work outside the camp. We passed the time by playing a lot of cards. Some would play poker all night after parcels were handed out. I always hated to lose, so pinochle, euchre and contract bridge were my games. Did you know there are at least 14 different kinds of solitaire? We would play so much at times that I would dream about cards at night.

There was a time in late 1944 when the most seriously injured prisoners of each side were exchanged. We were happy for those who got to go home but we would all liked to have gone home with them.

I can't remember the exact date, but in early April 1945, we began to hear the sound of big guns to the east of us.

ON THE MOVE

The Germans told us that the Russians were entering Wien (Vienna] and that they were going to move us to another camp north of Linz. We packed what we could carry. I made a pack out of the tops of two winter undershirts, crossed the arms and sewed up the neck. I was pleasantly surprised to see that it worked quite well. Many of the things that had been collected over the last year and a half were burned before we left.

For the next month or so we were on the road. The Germans divided us into groups of about 500 each. There were over 4,000 of us American POWS by that time. Each group had only a few guards. We could have slipped away rather easily, but I felt that while there was danger either way, the safest was to stay with a large group. (I have heard since, that Hitler had given orders that all POW's were to be shot)

We also had heard that the SS was patrolling around us to catch anyone who got "lost." One morning after spending the night in a barn, we were talked to by an SS officer. It seems, someone in our group stole come chickens. He did not look kindly on that practice and he advised us not to let it happen again. There were some threats made but since he only spoke German, we didn't take him too seriously.

The first day on the road was one of the worst. Most of us tried to carry too much, so the road was littered with overcoats and other things that became to heavy to carry. We were given a bowl of soup to eat in the evening. We had brought as much Red Cross food as we could save and carry, so we would dig into that a little.

Cigarettes were the main thing we used to trade with. One of our group used some cigarettes to trade for some eggs. He and his friend took out a pan, started a fire and got ready to fry them when he discovered that the eggs were hard-boiled.

I had another bout with dysentery (GIs) so I went on sick call. The Doc, 'an American officer', had set up shop at a house along the way. A woman there asked me where I was from. When I told her "America" she said, "Oh Canada?" I was surprised that she didn't know more about the U.S.A. but I guess she was partly right.

When the news of President Roosevelt's death reached us, the next question was, "Who is President now?" Most of us were prisoners before the last election so we didn't know who was Vice President. One of the newer men said that he remembered a man named Truman was running for Vice President when he left the states.

We were rounding a curve one day when three of our guys, in front of me, left the road and went under a small bridge. I did not think the Germans saw them but when we took a break a little later, we heard gunfire back in the direction of the bridge.

When we finally reached the Linz area we could still hear the sound of the big guns, so instead of going north to the new camp, the Germans took us across the Danube through town and then west. The bridge had some of our unexploded bombs lying there. We guessed that they were preparing to blow up the bridge by putting the bombs on top of their explosives.

The Germans had warned us before we got to Linz that the people there were eating grass because of the food shortage and since they had been bombed, they would not be friendly to Air Force men. I had been wearing an RAF hat until that time, so it had to go. We walked right down the center of the main street.

Only one other time had I seen this gang so quiet. That was the time we passed a group of Jews going the other way. They looked like the walking dead. Some had on good business suits. One man was straggling and the SS man would jab him with his bayonet.

This man appeared so far gone that he just turned around and smiled. I'll never know what happened to him, but I can guess.

We were on the road about a month when we came to a pine forest. The Germans had sent a group of Russian POWs ahead to clear a path so fences could be put up. They herded us into this area and we knew that this was the end of the line. We set up lean-tos or anything we could make. Snow would still fall at times so we wanted some kind of shelter. One group of guys was even using a hatchet to make a log house.

We had to walk out to the road when we wanted to get some water. Just past the road was a bluff overlooking the Inn River. By climbing down the side of this bluff we could find springs pouring down to the river. The guards didn't seem to worry that we might escape. After all, where would we go?

AMERICAN PATROLS

One day some fellows came back from the bluff saying they had seen American patrols across the river. We continued to see them for several days so a delegation of prisoners and guards was sent over to see if they could come get us. The American officers told the Germans that they couldn't take us until the next day, so the guards remained on duty another day. They could have run now, but where would they go? The next day some jeeps came up the road, and the Germans were taken away.

The German food stopped at this point and we got nothing from the Americans for several days. Some of our men started walking to the nearest town and brought back a little food! So I headed for town too to get some food for Jim Savage and myself. The name of this town was Brenau, the birthplace of Adolph Hitler.

An American soldier gave some food to another fellow and myself and we headed back. This soldier said he was in the l3th Armored Division of the 3rd Army. While we were walking along we saw Russian Ex-POWs digging up seed potatoes in the fields to get something to eat. We stopped at a farmhouse and asked a lady for a drink of water. The lady seemed surprised that we wanted nothing more then water. She must have had many more visitors looking for food. Jim Savage stayed behind with our things and by the time I got back, the Americans had come in with trucks and hauled the whole bunch to an abandoned factory southeast of Braunau. Straw was placed on the floor so we had a nice dry place to stay.

THE TIDE HAD CHANGED

The factory had a wall around it and we would sit on top and watch the German soldiers come walking down the road in small groups, still carrying their rifles. When they would reach the American soldier posted at the corner where two roads crossed, they were told to leave their weapons with him and continue down one of the roads.

They would go on until they would come to a stockade. There they would be interned until they could be interrogated. It was a little sad to see these men, who just a few days before, had been soldiers defending their homeland against invaders. Now they

would be prisoners, just as we had been. I found out later that most of them were sent to their homes soon after they were questioned.

One day while we were waiting for transportation to fly us to France, we were entertained by USO troops. They asked at one point if we had any requests. Someone called out, "We want to hear that song, 'Don't fence me in'." The USO man didn't think we would want to hear a song like that, but he was told that we had never heard it, all we had heard was that it was a popular song in the states.

The American Air Force soon started taking us out. When it was my turn, a bunch of us were loaded on a truck and taken to an airport. On the way we went through Brenau and across the Inn River. The bridge was down, (I don't remember hearing them blow it). The American engineers had put in a pontoon bridge.

"THE WAR IS OVER"

We had to stay at the airport over night. That evening I heard Winston Churchill say on the radio that the war was over. The next day while we were waiting near the landing strip, I saw a small German airplane land. An MP jeep drove out and the Germans handed them their side arms. The Germans were then taken to a holding facility.

We were flown to France and then trucked from the airport to Camp Lucky Strike, which was located outside of Le Havre. On the way we stopped for a break. Along came a Red Ball Express supply truck, being stopped by an MP on a motorcycle, "Where do you thinks you are going? To a fire?" said the Military Policeman. Well, if we didn't know we were free before, we knew it when we heard those words.

At Lucky Strike we had a reunion with the officers from our crew. Because they were officers and we were enlisted men we had been imprisoned in different camps. Our pilot, who we hadn't heard from, had been caught in southern France sometime after the rest of us. He was trying to get into Spain at the time.

After a brief reunion, we were given a shower and new uniforms. The first meal I had at Lucky Strike wasn't enough, so I got back in line for some more. An officer came up from behind and tapped me on the shoulder. He said, "Haven't you gone through the line once?" I told him that I had. He said he would like to let me eat as much as I wanted, but someone had eaten so much that it killed him and they were being more careful now. "Sorry, no seconds."

HEADED HOME

Soon we were loaded on the SS LeJune, headed for home. Our first stop was Liverpool. Then we joined a convoy for New York. To keep us busy, (and I would like to think it helped out some), a bunch of us were put on what they called "Troop look out." We were divided into watches. Each one was stationed at a different part of the boat, (I know the Navy called it a ship, but since we were all Air Force, we felt it had to have wings to be a ship.

We were given headsets, so we could hear the bridge, radar, engine room and so on, talking to each other and binoculars so we could scan the ocean for enemy subs. The war was still going on in the Pacific and there were still some German subs that were not accounted for.

A big storm came up during our voyage to New York. Waves went over the top of those little escort boats. Our boat would rock so much that the propeller would come out of the water. It seemed like that boat was rocking every direction at once. At times we could not see another boat, even though we knew we were still in convoy. While we were on our watch duty we were glad to hear the radar room say to slow down or speed up. We knew then that they knew where those other boats were, even if we couldn't see them.

WE ARRIVE HOME

It was nice to see that Statue of Liberty when we came into New York Harbor. Some say there was a band to greet us. I don't remember one. We went on a ferryboat and then by train to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. After that it was Camp Attabury and then home for 60 days. After that I was to go to Miami, Florida for reassignment.

It was like a rest camp at Miami. Permission slips were given to married men and those who thought they might get married, so they could take their wives with them. I took permission slips with me although Irene and I had not discussed marriage. That next month we were together most of the time. I asked her to marry me and we were married on July the 11th l945. (Gosh that will soon be 45 years. Time sure does fly).

At Miami we were with Bill Boyer, who had been in the same barracks with me at Stalag 17B and his wife Betty.

Before we left Miami, the war was over in the Pacific. I was sent Stout Field at Indianapolis where the First Troop Carrier Command was based. While there I was made Master Sergeant and I was a crew chief on a C-47. In November 1945 I went to Bear Field at Fort Wayne, Indiana for discharge.

BACK TO WORK

As soon as I got home I went back to Allison to try to get my old job back. The man in personnel tried to tell me not to come back so soon, but I said I was ready to go to work now. Well, I went to work one day and the next day the whole plant went out on strike. I couldn't get unemployment compensation because I was a striker. A friend got me on at the round house of Pennsylvania Railroad.

When the strike was over I went back to Allison. Then came a layoff.

Next I spent a year at Harmening Engineering. They sold out and went out of business. Next it was Quality Tool and Die. About this time, December 8th 1946, Jacqueline was born. Then came another layoff. This went on and on from one place to another.

Soon it was l948 and I had not gotten a good start at a trade. I had long since decided that I had made a mistake by getting out of the Air Force so I went to the recruiting officer to have a talk. They said they could give me Staff Sergeant if I wanted to come back.

BACK IN THE AIR FORCE

March 1948 I went back in the Air Force. At first I felt like it was a big cut when I accepted two ranks lower than I had when I was discharged, but then I met a fellow who was a captain and came back in as a buck sergeant.

By the summer of 1948, after a lot of processing and going from Fort Knox to Scott Field to Hamilton AFB to Fort Lawton, I arrived in Alaska.

It was a little embarrassing the first time I saluted an officer in town. He told me that was not necessary off base since the war. On one of those moves I was the highest-ranking man in the group. Since there were two black men in the group two meal tickets were made out. The person who made them out made a mistake in the numbers. The one for the black men was for three and ours was one short. I talked it over with the men. I said I will go in the restaurant and see if they will serve blacks. If they say no then we will look elsewhere. We were in luck, the first one said bring them in.

TOUR IN ALASKA

Once in Whittier, Alaska we were put on a train for Fairbanks. Ladd AFB was home for the next year. Since there never was enough family housing for enlisted men, I had to buy a mobile home that was already on the base so I could bring Irene and Jackie up there.

The outfit was the 375th Reconnaissance, Very Long Range, Weather and Photo Mapping Squadron. It was made up of some B-29s. They were stripped of all guns and had one bomb bay gas tank and the other bomb bay with emergency gear. We were using the old crew chief system of maintenance. We had about 15 men including the crew chief for each B-29. I was on one of the engine crews.

The objective of the Squadron was a flight over the North Pole every other day. My job was engine maintenance, so when our plane was in the air, we were off duty. One day I will always remember proudly was when we changed an engine outside at 20 below zero. We had her running before we went home that afternoon.

My second year in Alaska the 375th was moved to Eielson AFB, down the road about 35 miles from Fairbanks. At first the married men living at Ladd were bussed back and forth every day. I got to know some of the officers on that ride. I had been moved from engine crew to the engine buildup, so I had a new engineering officer. He told me one day that he was worried about a cutback and he might have to take a discharge or go back to his permanent rank. That would have put him back on a level with me. (The Korean War came along and fixed that up for him. He was once again needed as an Air Force officer).

The 375th had been having a lot of trouble with rebuilt engines, so a corporal and I were made a team whose duty it was to re-time very engine before it left engine buildup. Those meant re-set all valves, re-set distributors and synchronize injection pumps.

About once a month we had a surprise alert. One day they added something new to it. The infantry came in and invaded the base. I had just come back to the hangar after an errand when I was stopped by one of the ground force men. He asked me for the password. I said I didn't know it so he took me to the Provost Marshal who sent us to my Engineering officer.

Lt. German was asked, "Is this one of your men?" "Yes he is," he said. Before the infantryman was out of hearing, the Lieutenant said to me, "Sergeant Stahlhut, you are a bad boy." I said, "Yes sir, and before I go back to work, what is the password?". "I don't know, but we had better find out, don't you think?" was his reply.

It was at Eielson that I saw integration of the services, practiced for the first time. One day two black enlisted men came to the base. The base Commanding Officer was a Colonel from the South and the story we heard was that he sent them back to the base they had come from. Well it wasn't long before they came back again with orders from higher up that they would stay. From that time on, integration was taken for granted.

Irene had always said that she wanted to have 12 children but she had had several miscarriages. It looked for a while like we would be raising an only child. When she became pregnant again and it looked like she might lose that baby too, we took her to the hospital. She said that the doctors didn't pay much attention to her until she had gone about three days without losing the baby. Then they seemed to do everything they could to help her save it. That baby, born June 3, 1950, was James Michael.

About that same time I had trouble with pain in both legs. Many blood tests were made at the small clinic we had at Eielson AFB but they found nothing. They wanted to send me to Ladd hospital, so I told them that my wife was there now with a new baby and I was taking care of our daughter. They said that since I was able to control the pain with aspirins, I should wait until my wife came home and then go to the hospital myself. In time the pain went away, without my ever finding out what caused it. It didn't come back again until the fall of 1989. Then it went from one leg to the other and then went away again.

BACK TO THE STATES

The latter part of June we were on orders to go back to the states on a boat. With the start of the Korean War, that boat was needed to carry supplies to Korea, so the orders had to be changed. Our next orders called for Military Air Transport Service. Then they stopped all MATS flights. I checked around and the word was that I could leave by Troop Carrier Command, but they could not take dependents.

By this time a growing list was forming, with other families going back to the states. To make a long story even longer, they ended up taking several families to Elmendorf AFB at Anchorage where a Northwest Airlines plane was chartered to take us to Seattle. While we were in Seattle we visited my father's brother and his family. Uncle Eduard had come out to Washington State during the Depression and liked it so well that he stayed.

STROKE OF LUCK

We were waiting for a taxi at the guesthouse at Fort Lawton, Seattle, to take us to the airport for our flight home when I was approached by an officer. I was holding the baby while Irene was taking Jackie to the bathroom. He asked me where we were going and I told him Indianapolis. He said that would work fine. It seems he was on his way to Japan and since the Korean War had started he could not take his car along with him because the space would be needed for troops and supplies. His wife was in the hospital in Milwaukee, WI, near her people and he had no way to get his car to her. I told him I would be willing to drive the car through for him if Irene felt she could take care of the baby on that long trip.

Irene said OK, so the next day we were on our way to Milwaukee in a stranger's year old Ford. We had neglected to inform the folks at home of our change of plans. Can you imagine how they must have worried when we didn't come by plane the way they expected? The trip must have taken about a week longer.

As we passed through southern Montana we saw signs pointing to Yellowstone Park. Irene wanted to stop, but I said, "We'll come back another time.. I didn't realize it would take 55 years, but Irene didn't let me forget. We delivered the car to the officer's relatives in Milwaukee and then we took a bus the rest of the way home.

One of the first things I did when we got home was to see how my order for a new car was coming along. My brother-in-law, Bob Barker, had ordered it for me while we were still in Alaska. When the Korean War started he was told that the army needed all of the new cars.

The salesman at the dealer said that was not quite right. They would have three new cars to sell that week. They were not like the one I had ordered. The one I accepted was a standard model with a lot of extras that I would rather not have had.

After our furlough we drove to Shreveport, LA, where I signed in at Barksdale AFB. While I was there we changed from the B-29 to the B-50 aircraft, so it meant going to school in Georgia for training on the Pratt and Whitney engine.

I no sooner started to work at my new squadron, when I began to hear rumors that they were going to Puerto Rico. Air Force regulations said that an airman must serve two years in the states before he can be sent overseas again, so I thought I would not have to go. That didn't seem to be true in the case of a unit move, so away I went overseas again.

OFF TO PUERTO RICO

The new base was Ramey AFB, which is located at the very northwest corner of the island. American airmen had never been allowed to live off base there, but since there was not enough on-base housing for the large group that was coming in, they allowed us to hunt housing in town. The cost of renting a house went up very fast.

Puerto Ricans would rent their nice homes to us but the rent was so high that we had to double up to afford them. A friend of mine named Jim Herzog was married to a girl from Shreveport so Irene and our two children and his wife came by plane to San Juan. We picked them up and brought them to a furnished house in Isabela that we had rented. When we unloaded the car a bunch of our new neighbors gathered in the street to look us over. I'm sure we were a strange sight to them. In time we got used to many of their strange ways also. The houses had no glass in the windows, just shutters. Very few natives had cars. No buses ran between towns. They used station wagons for public transportation and they would load in as many as 15 at a time. The last three or four would sit on the tailgate.

Irene had sent our car by boat so we did have transportation. I always liked to wash my car each Saturday, so I took it to a one-man filling station in Isabela. There were two cars ahead of me, so I thought it wouldn't be long. Several hours later he got around to me. The reason it took so long was the procedure he used. He cleaned the inside of the car and put some black stuff on the floor mat, before he washed the outside, then he put it on a lift and sprayed the underside with oil to fight the rust. Plus this same guy had to pump gas and whatever else had to be taken care of at the station.

I decided to buy a garden hose and wash it myself the next time, so I went to a hardware store. There was only one man in the store and he spoke only Spanish so I walked around the store looking for what I wanted. I spotted a hose on a hook on the wall and I pointed to it. I paid for it and left.

LIFE IN PUERTO RICO

The next time I had occasion to go into that store they had a child to help them speak to the Americans. Children were taught English in the schools, but until we came to town, they had little chance to use that knowledge.

Much of our free time was spent at the beach. The weather was always great. We would have liked to take our Coleman camping stove along, but we could not find fuel to use in it. On a shopping trip to the larger city of Aerobic, I spotted some Coleman lamps on a shelf in a store. I asked the clerk where one could buy fuel for them. He said he didn't know.

The stores in the town in which we lived were all rather small. Most of the staples were sold from open bins, like they did in stores when I was a child. It was not unusual for a dry goods store to be no more than a shack with the upper half of one side hinged to make a counter so they could conduct business. Such a store was usually on the plaza. Every town had its plaza. Every plaza had a Catholic church.

We took a trip into the central part of the island one day. The town of San Sebastian was a beautiful town in a valley surrounded by sugarcane fields. From the distant hills the fields looked like grass.

On our way back we came upon a place on the narrow road where burlap had been laid on one side of the road and coffee beans were spread out to dry. If someone tried that here they would end up with crushed beans.

As I said before, there were very few privately owned cars on the island. If you were to have a flat tire or run out of gas you would not dare leave your car and go for help. If you did you may have no tires when you came back. Leave a car for a day and you may not even have an engine. I asked a Puerto Rican who worked with me in engine buildup on the base, why people acted like that and he said that people felt that insurance would pay for any loss so it was OK.

Corporal Jim Herzog and his wife Betty shared the house with us during our stay on the island. It was a three-bedroom home. We had two bedrooms and they had one. Irene and Betty were both expecting at the same time. When our daughter Frances was born September 3, 1951, Irene asked the nurse if she was sure she had given her the right baby. Our first two babies had both been bald and this one had long black hair. The nurse told her she had better take this one because it was the only one they had at the hospital.

When I went back into the service, it was for three years. Then came the Korean War, and President Truman signed an extension of one year. I had planned to stay 20 years but in that last year I changed my mind. One reason was that I had seven years in and five of it had been over seas. That included the year and a half in POW camps. Then to top it off, rumors were flying about another move. This time it was to North Africa where there would be no place for dependents.

HEADED HOME TO STAY

Irene had worked for The Rough Notes Co. and my sister, Elinore, was working there at that time. She told me of a chance at an apprenticeship, so I decided to leave the service again.

We had our choice of transportation, but since Irene had never been on a boat, I decided to come home that way. We would have a cabin instead of a hammock in the hold, like other trips I had been on. It was a smooth trip to Cuba, but when we were out on the Atlantic Ocean a storm came up.

ROUGH PASSAGE

Another boat radioed us that a crewman was sick and they had no doctor so we turned around and went back to help. By the time we reached them the storm was so rough that they couldn't transfer a doctor to the other boat so they had to go for port, and we turned around again and headed for New York.

We were not too frightened until the workers on our boat started complaining about the unnecessary risk. the Captain and crew were putting us through. Irene and I would take the baby to a cabin where onboard baby-sitters would take care of her while we ate with our other two children in the dining room. The boat was rolling so much at one point that I held on to one of the kids while Irene held the other and the food went flying across the floor. It was sandwiches after that.

We were not allowed on deck, during the storm, so we spent most of the time in the cabin. The baby would be in a crib and as the boat rocked she would slide back and forth. Soon she would turn sideways and begin to roll. We would then have to jump up and pick her up.

When we left Puerto Rico, we were traveling with an airman and his German wife and their small boy who had never seen his grandparents in the states. The boy had long curly hair. The mother was very proud of that hair, but the closer we got to New York, the straighter the hair got. That poor woman was doing everything she could to make it stay curled. I'm sure the grandparents loved that kid, even if he did have straight hair.

We docked at Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn, where I took a GI bus to Manhattan to pick up the new car we had ordered while we were in Puerto Rico. Irene took the children to a guesthouse to wait for me. On my way uptown we passed Macy's and Gimbel's. I don't think. Irene has ever forgiven me because she didn't get to go shopping.

OUR NEW CAR

At the General Motors office they told me I would have to go by subway to the place that had my car. After two subway rides I reached Bates Chevrolet. At that time, cars going to Puerto Rico all had leather seats but no heaters or turn signals. The heater had been installed and since they were required by New York law, turn signals were also put

on. Bates had registered it in New York using some hotel for my address. They directed me back to Fort Hamilton. I was surprised to see that it was a fast highway next to a river that took me past the skyscrapers to the Brooklyn Battery tunnel. Then it was just a short way to Fort Hamilton.

INDIANA BOUND

It was early March of 1952, we finally left for home. It had snowed during the night. We didn't get far when we found out that the new heater was not working. This was on a Saturday morning and no Chevrolet service departments are open. I stopped at a filling station, where a mechanic looked at it, but he was not able to fix it. While we were there I heard on the radio that the New Jersey Turnpike had a 50-car pileup. I was glad that we were not headed that way.

We went along until it got too cold for us so we stopped at a motel. The next morning I got a pair of pliers and a screwdriver and went under the hood. I found that the Chevrolet agency hadn't finished hooking up the heater. I hooked it up and we had heat in the car the rest of the trip. It was a little late though, the baby (Frankie) was already sick. At one point she made quite a mess on her mom. We had to stop at a filling station for Irene to change some of her clothing. We took her to the doctor when we got to Indianapolis.

THE ROUGH NOTES COMPANY

After my discharge from the Air Force I went in to see H. Ellis McCammon at Rough Notes. He put me to work on the night shift. I would be the third apprentice printer. Dave Sheets was number one and he was gone to the Navy. Gordon Miner was second and he was soon to go into the Navy also. I was the only apprentice for a while. I took money instead of vacations in those days. Working the night shift at Rough Notes, I got a second job moving furniture.

ADDITIONS TO THE FAMILY

Irene still wanted to have 12 children, so we proceeded along in that direction. Next was Robert John, September 29, 1953, then Sandra, May 5, 1955; Theresa, August 7, 1956, Thomas, May 22, 1958, and Jeffrey, August 21, 1959.

OUR NEW HOUSE

About this time we built the house at 6706 W. Ralston Road. We had bought three acres of land several years before. The shell was put up by Midwest Homes and we subcontracted some and did a heck of a lot ourselves. We moved in before it was finished.

We sold our previous home in Beech Grove to help pay to finish this one. After Jeffrey, came Joanna, May 13, 1961. Next came the marriage of our oldest-but wait Irene was expecting again. Stephen was born August 23, 1966 and Jackie was married August 27, four days later.

OUR FAMILY GROWS UP

In the years that followed we had our ups-and-downs but the ups always out-weighed the downs. The girls were able to have their ponies and horses. The boys had their sports. Five of the children have college degrees, one has two degrees, two have masters and two others have taken college courses.

Jackie, our oldest girl, waited until her five children were all in school, then she went back to school to become an LPN.

Mike had a college scholarship for vaulting with the track team and his high school record has never been broken. He graduated from Eastern Kentucky University.

Frankie is a sister in the Dominican Order. She graduated from Villanova University and is now doing Retreat work in Virginia.

Bob had a scholarship for diving with the swim team. He graduated from Eastern Kentucky University with a Masters Degree.

Sandy went four years at IU and four years at Montana state. She is now a nurse with the National Health Service in Kotzebue, Alaska.

Terri lives in west central Kentucky with her husband and five children.

Tom went to the state in diving. He graduated from Indiana University Purdue University and is now teaching grade school and coaching high school swimming and diving. (He has had one state champion diver and several in the state top ten.)

Jeff went to the state swimming meet as a freshman and sophomore. One of his high school records is still standing.

Jody won championships in 4H dog shows, obedience class in the township, county and State Fairs and lives in Plainfield with her husband and four children.

Steve tried for four years, without success, to beat Mike's pole vaulting record. He also went to the state several times in swimming. He won championships in 4H dog shows, obedience class in the township, county and State fairs..

We never did make the 12 children, but we gave it a good try. Steve was number 10 and as of this writing (June, 1990), the old man, (that's me) has been retired for one year and we have 26 grandchildren.

It is now, February 1997. I am in the process of moving this Biog. from the Texas Instruments computer to the IBM, so it is only appropriate that I bring it up to date with a few changes that have taken place since I last wrote.

Jackie and her Husband Mike Cesnik live in Ellettsville, near Bloomington IN. Of their five children, all have left the nest except the youngest, who will be graduating High School soon. She works for a Doctor, in Bloomington.

Mike and his wife Tena live in Franklin, IN with their two children. He works for Indiana Gas.

Frankie is now the treasurer of her congregation in Elkins Park, on the north side of Philadelphia, PA.

Bob and his wife Deb live in Fort Thomas, KY with their four children. He works for Cincinnati Milacron.

Sandy is a nurse at a hospital in Billings, MT and has just bought her first house.

Terri lives in Indianapolis, IN with her five children. She is going to school and working for Indiana University, Purdue University in Indianapolis.

Tom and Kathy live in Johnson County just south of Indianapolis, IN with their three children. He is still teaching school. They work with Amway and Tom plans an early retirement.

Jeff and Monica live north of Danville, IN with their five children. He still works for AMR-Combs at the Airport. He also would like to retire to a second job. (Clown Around Pony Parties)

Jody and Randy Collins live in Decatur Township, Indianapolis, IN with their four children. She just started to work for McDonalds.

Steve and Dee live in Boone County, south of Lebanon, IN with one child. He just graduated from an Engineering course at Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis and works for Indiana Mills and Mfg. Inc.

We now have thirty grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

