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Abstract

Robert Bell Bradley enlisted in the United States Army in October of 1942 as an aid man. He spent several months training to be a first responder on the front lines of combat and learning how to deal with a variety of issues. He was then attached to the 30th Infantry Division and sent to England in preparation for operation OVERLORD and the D-Day Invasion. Two months later, he was captured by the Germans and this event began a year long journey filled with death and near misses. [1] While Bradley's experiences cannot speak for all prisoner of war narratives, his tale represents a unique story in which he traversed nearly all of Europe and became a part of several key events of World War II. Several characters make periodic appearances in Bradley's narrative, including Arley Goodenkauf, a fellow prisoner in Stalag III C, who plays a key role in said POW camp. As more and more veterans die, it has become increasingly important to share their stories so they are not lost. For such a prolific writer as Bradley, this is doubly important as he has recorded his memoirs for future generations but has left it up to historians to contextualize and interpret them. What follows is a first attempt at such an interpretation.

[1] Robert B. Bradley, "The Lost Battalion," *The Lost Battalion and Vermont Poems* (n.p. 1993), Musselman Library Special Collections; Robert B. Bradley, *Aid Man!* (New York: Vantage Press, 1970), Musselman Library Special Collections, 14-104.

Keywords

World War II, Aid Man, American, POW

A Different Way of Touring Europe: One Aid Man's Journey across Europe during World War II

**By
Abigail Currier**



Two hours after lights out when everyone was supposed to be in bed, the sound of a sole trumpet rang through the air, with the sound of “Taps” blending into the breeze. For the men listening, this song was an inspirational break from the monotony of their current life. It was a symbol of independence and spirit; these men were unbroken and refused to fully submit. All over the camp, the men waited for that night's performance to start. Every evening, the mysterious performer had to switch locations. If the guards ever figured out where he was playing, the punishment would be severe. For the past week, this impromptu concert, usually followed by a couple of other, more popular tunes, was taking place in the least likely place in the world; approximately forty miles east of Berlin in the middle of Stalag III-C.

A few weeks before, a prisoner smuggled a large box to Arley Goodenkauf and told him to keep it. Confused, he brought the package into his barracks and, after checking around to make sure no one was watching him, he carefully opened the box. Inside lay a dented, old trumpet. After trying a few quiet notes on it, Arley quickly realized it was incapable of playing music. For the next couple of days, he spent every spare moment testing the instrument and attempting to patch it up. Eventually one of his trial breaths turned into a serviceable note. Although the trumpet was

not going to win any beauty competitions, it could at least produce music. But Goodenkauf now had a serious dilemma. What was he supposed to do with a trumpet in the middle of a German POW camp? A trumpet is not an easy thing to conceal and with guards doing periodic checks of the barracks, they were sure to notice a trumpet sitting on his bed. His foot locker was not safe either; they were sure to look in there. Even if he could disguise it, what worth did it truly have? There were only two things that could give this trumpet value; its value as a tradable commodity or its ability to produce music. The trumpet was more of a liability than an asset because it was so hard to disguise. Because of this, few people would actually wanted it and it would not have a high trade value. Therefore, its worth lay in its musical capabilities. Goodenkauf had learned how to play the trumpet before joining the army and still knew some of the basics. But such activities were strictly forbidden by the Germans and punished severely. Was it worth it?¹

Morale was low in the camp; winter was quickly approaching and the men only had a few threadbare blankets to guard against the cold. Heat was nonexistent in the barracks and most of the men spent their days languishing on their beds. Many nights had been spent huddled together for warmth. Daily rations consisted of one bowl of thin soup, more akin to flavored water than the thick stew that these men were used to receiving back home, and a few slices of bread for the evening meal. This was barely enough food to survive summer with. The men were severely underweight and needed every ounce of body fat to help them keep in the warmth. The only thing that was certain was a cold future that could include frost bite on ears, hands, and toes.

¹ Arley L. Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoirs in Robert Bell Bradley Collection at U.S. Army War College Library and Archives. 8-9

German winters are bitterly cold and even more so when there is no adequate clothing or heating. The future looked bleak.²

Goodenkauf considered all of this and decided that the risk was worth it. While the men huddled together at night to stay warm, he thought that they deserved something positive in their miserable lives. So, he went out every night and performed for his fellow inmates. No one knew who he was and every performance took place in a different location to preserve his anonymity. The nightly music confounded the German guards, who desperately searched for the performer. After about two weeks, the Germans finally found the trumpet during one of their periodic raids of the barracks. The instrument was confiscated during a morning roll call and never seen again. However, the trumpet player managed to remain anonymous.³

These concerts were one of the very few positive events that happened to Private Robert Bell Bradley during his time as a Prisoner of War. Bradley began the war as an aid man with the 30th Infantry Division as a part of Operation OVERLORD and ended his war experiences trekking across Europe. While Bradley struggled to survive in Axis Germany, and later in contested eastern Europe, global events continued apace without him. However, these events would have serious and lasting impacts on his journey. Often on his journey to freedom, Bradley, and others, would get caught up in the fighting between The Soviet Union and the United States during the degradation of relations between these two super powers.

² Robert Bradley, "Interview with Robert Bradley." Interview by Ryan Adams. Musselman Library Special Collections. 19-21.; Robert Bell Bradley, "Thoughts Born in a Stalag," *A Collection of Poems* (n.p. 1988), Musselman Library Special Collections. 5; Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoir, 8.

³ Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoir, 9.

Within the medical corps, there were clear distinctions between the roles of the various medical personnel. The job of the aid men was to stabilize the wounded and get them to a battalion aid station or hospital. As such, their position during battle was on the front line, running into the line of fire, immediately assessing the situation, and responding appropriately as quickly as possible. Aid men had to be able to do everything the infantry units they were assigned to were able to do. To prepare for this crucial role, the aid men received hybridized training that combined the training of a regular soldier with intensive study of medical theory and its application. The training covered everything from how to properly wrap a wound to how to fire a wide variety of weapons, both domestic and foreign.⁴

However, there was a desperate need for medical personnel in the European Theater of Operations (ETO), so this all-important training period could often be as short as eleven weeks to increase the number of medical technicians available. When Bradley enlisted in October of 1942, there were 324,814 enlisted men in the Medical Department. By June of 1944 when Bradley landed in France, that number had jumped to 553,095 demonstrating that this shortened training had worked to produce a larger number of aid men. However, the ratio of enlisted men to soldiers had dropped from 73.5 for every 1,000 soldiers in 1942 to 69.2 in 1944. There was still plenty of room left for improvement.⁵

⁴ Bradley, "interview" 11-14; Robert Bell Bradley, *Recollect and Ponder Part I* (n.p.), Musselman Library Special Collections. 17-19; Vincoe M. Paxton and Stuart D. Rizika. "Soldiers of the Medical Detachment," *The American Journal of Nursing*. 45, no. 9 (Sept., 1945): 694.

⁵ There have been few historical studies regarding the roles of aid men during World War II. While the United States government published several voluminous books on the topic of the Medical Department during the second world war, especially during the Vietnam War era, these books rarely address the role played by the aid men and are very difficult for the lay person to understand. They are written in military and medical jargon that is often hard to

When Bradley enlisted in the United States Army in October of 1942, his only request was to be placed with a medical unit. Prior to enlisting, he had been enrolled in a pre-med program at the University of Maryland. Many of Bradley's friends and classmates had either enlisted or been drafted. Bradley did not want to be left out of the war and felt it was his patriotic duty to enlist, especially considering his specialized training. So, after his induction on New York Avenue, Bradley was shipped to Camp Blanding, Florida, where he completed his basic medical training along with thousands of other trainees.⁶ Basic training for aid men contained all of the usual parts of basic training for normal soldiers. However, it was expanded to include medical and surgical theory and their practical application.⁷ After passing the requisite exams, the aid men were assigned to different units. He was eventually assigned to the 120th Infantry Medical Detachment of the 30th Infantry Division. Their job was to move with the unit on their maneuvers and provide basic aid and medical advice. In Ocala National Forest in Florida, that meant tending to a

understand, so for general interest questions, these books should be avoided. Albert Cowdry's *Fighting for Food* is a good book on the role played by these men in actual combat, but neglects their training and the building up to getting these men prepared to fight. Modern books on Aid men and medics in World War II have tended to focus more on biographical accounts rather than comprehensive histories. While these books are good for very specific focuses and may be more engaging for the general public, they are not very comprehensive in general history nor provide adequate background on what is an understudied subject. Charles M. Wiltse, *Medical Department United States Army in World War II* (Washington DC: Office of the Surgeon General Department of the Army, 1963), 10-13, 60-165.

⁶ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 14.; Bradley "Interview," 28; Camp Blanding in Florida also became home to thousands of German POWs captured by allied soldiers. These men provided critical agricultural labor in nearby areas. Robert D. Billinger Jr., "With the Wehrmacht in Florida: The German Pow Facility at Camp Blanding, 1942-1946," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (Oct., 1979): 161.

⁷ Paxton, 694.

surprisingly large number of snake bites and other small injuries. As Bradley and the other aid men adjusted to their new role as unit care giver, they rarely, if ever, had to deal with any serious or catastrophic wounds. Instead, they had to fight against infection in the large number of cuts and scrapes the soldiers acquired daily on their pretend missions.⁸

Blisters were also a common problem, though not as prevalent during regular training as they were during maneuvers. All soldiers had been taught and practiced basic foot care routines that, if followed daily, prevented serious blisters. These routines included drying the feet out completely, applying powder to maintain dryness and then layering socks as a cushion. When going on short maneuvers in relatively dry areas, blisters were rarely an issue. However, on longer marches, or maneuvers that would occur later in training, this regimen would not be enough. Bradley and the other aid men spent nearly all of their time on these injuries. They eventually became so proficient at it that they even designed a special type of pad to apply to blisters to alleviate the pain and allow the soldiers to return to training as soon as possible.⁹

Preliminary training for Bradley's unit concluded with a multi-day hike through Ocala National Forest. They spent several days in the forest where the men were expected to spend all day marching, often wading through streams when they encountered them. No one had dry feet and Bradley and the other aid men spent the entire day repairing damaged feet. As soon as one blister was wrapped, another soon appeared. The aid men used hundreds of bandages as their world narrowed to the size of the next foot. Gauze, tape, next. Gauze, tape, next. Gauze, tape, next. It felt like

⁸ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 14-19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17- 20.

it would never stop. Meanwhile, Bradley's own foot was throbbing from a blister he had gotten the day before. Occupied with tending to the blisters of his unit, he had had no time to address his own wound. Later that night, Bradley was finally able to tend to his blister. At this point, he was completely worn out from all of his work that day. Not only had he spent the whole day bandaging feet, but every time Bradley stopped to help someone, both he and the wounded man fell behind. After patching up the soldier, Bradley had to run to catch up with the unit and the next wounded. It had been one of the longest days of Bradley's professional life. As he drifted off to sleep, Bradley's dreams were filled with feet mutilated by blisters.¹⁰

Although Bradley's practical experience was with minor wounds and injuries like heat exhaustion and snake bites, as an aid man he was expected to master a wide range of ailments. After completing basic training, aid men were required to give basic medical information and advice to the members of the unit they were assigned to shadow. This information was often sought on the spur of the moment and covered a wide variety of ailments and injuries. The aid men also had to give lectures periodically to whole divisions on various health related topics.¹¹ These lectures varied from the proper construction of a splint using nearby materials to proper field sanitation, including latrine location and construction and sterilization of mess equipment. The principle goal of these lessons was to train the men in how to care for themselves while waiting for an aid man to come.¹²

¹⁰ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 17-20; Robert Bell Bradley, *The Aid Man Infantry Team* (n.p. 1995), Musselman Library Special Collections, 8.

¹¹ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 16; Bradley, *Recollect and Ponder Part I*, 6.

¹² Paxton, 694.

After completing training at Camp Blanding in Florida and several weeks on maneuver in Tennessee, it was finally time for Bradley to ship out.¹³ He and the rest of the 120th boarded the *Argentina*, which was a part of a large convoy, including the larger troop carriers and the smaller destroyers and warship used as protection. Rumor had it that the entire 30th Division was on the convoy. Such large convoys were necessary to defend against attacks by German U-boats. German subs, which would attack single ships were reluctant to fire on large groups. The men docked at Firth of Clyde without too many issues. Luckily, the entire voyage had gone smoothly without any major incidents. The men passed the time in a variety of ways, including being sea sick for many of them. Boredom was seldom broken on the ship and Bradley was able to complete a fair number of poems during this time. Throughout Bradley's time in the US army, he wrote a large number of poems and used it as a way of expressing himself. He would continue to write after his discharge and self-published several books filled with his works.¹⁴

As preparations for Operation OVERLORD ramped up, the 30th Division was shifted from its original camp at Bognor Regis to just outside of Oxford to be closer to its embarkation point.¹⁵ There was very little to do at this camp but train and that got boring very quickly and rarely distracted the men for long. Baseball games became a popular past-time on the various bases throughout Europe. Not only did they keep the men on the base and thus prevented them from over running local towns, but it also

¹³ For Bradley and the 30th Division, training consisted of several weeks of basic at Camp Blanding, Florida and then being sent to the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee to go on maneuvers, which basically meant that the whole division spent days in the field, learning what it meant to be in a combat zone and what life on the front lines was like. Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 19-23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-27.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

occupied a large number of men. The games were often good forms of entertainment and helped to alleviate some of the boredom.

On June 6th, 1944, Bradley and the others on the base awoke to the sound of thousands of planes flying overhead. This was not entirely out of the ordinary, as the base was located next to an air base. However, this particular morning there were more planes taking off than usual. Rumors of a cross channel invasion had been circulating for months, but all of the men in Bradley's unit had assumed that they would be a part of the landing force. Why else had they trained so intensively back in the States? Surely they would not be left behind. But, at the same time, the large number of planes overhead seemed to indicate that they would not be a part of the first wave. And yet, no one had announced anything and there was still a possibility that this was not the major invasion. This could just as easily have been a probing raid before the main event.

Bradley and the others gathered for the daily baseball game as if it were any other day. The players took to the field as usual, but it was clear that their hearts and minds were not in the game. Each squad of planes that flew overhead drew the gaze of players and spectators alike. The outfielders were more interested in these planes than the balls that they were supposed to be catching. No one seemed to care how well the game was played that day. Suddenly, all of the radios in camp blared to life and the news poured out; the landing had been a success. The invasion of France had begun and the Allies were beginning their long march towards Germany and eventually the capital, Berlin.

After a moment of confusion, it sunk in; the 30th had been excluded from the initial landing party. After all their training and drilling, they would not be storming the beaches of France with the rest of the army. A few hours later, the order was passed around;

the 30th would be following in the wake of the 29th Division on the Omaha Beachhead. Two days later, the unit was loaded back onto ships and left England.¹⁶ After two years filled with training and waiting, the 30th was finally going into combat.

Two days after the start of D-Day, Bradley and his unit loaded on to a British ship and were sent across the English Channel and dropped at Omaha Beach. Even though fighting on the beach head itself had ended, the men still had to climb off the ships and wade/swim ashore. Artillery from the earlier fighting made this difficult for a lot of the men. Invisible to them, large craters had been created by shelling from the intense conflict, creating an uneven sea floor. The men would be fine for one second and then the next the weight of their equipment would drag them down as the sea floor dropped out from underneath them.

Eventually, all of the men made it to shore. They quickly formed into a column and headed up the road lined with hedgerows that the Allies had struggled to establish just days before. As they marched towards the 29th Division, the true cost and destruction of war rapidly became apparent. German corpses littered the sides of the road. Most were missing limbs or had some other horrendous wound. There had been no time to bury these bodies and the 30th could not afford to stop to dispose of them either, so they had to continue marching past these potent reminders of the cost of war. The Allied dead were even harder to see. These bodies had been hastily removed and, as a result, a lot of their equipment had been left behind, the most conspicuous of which were their helmets. A soldier never relinquished his helmet

¹⁶ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 46.

as it often meant the difference between life and death. For these men, it no longer mattered.¹⁷

At the second hedgerow, Bradley encountered his first real casualty of World War II. Taking a squad of six men with him, Bradley heard the call of a young soldier who had stepped on a mine that blew his foot off. Bradley snapped into action. Before he had even fully crouched down to examine the man, he had taken his belt with full medical kit off of his own waist and thrown it down beside the wounded soldier.¹⁸ Next, Bradley reached for the man's belt and quickly took that off too. Bradley then reached for the scissors that he kept on a string on his wrist and cut the ragged pant leg away from the wound. He reached for the man's belt and used this as a tourniquet, quickly stopping the blood pouring out of the gaping wound.¹⁹ Bradley then wrapped up the exposed flesh before getting the squad he had brought over to escort them back to the battalion aid station. Bradley had just successfully dealt with his first battlefield injury, but there was no time to stop and congratulate himself. Already, the call of 'aid man!' pierced the air and Bradley was off on his next case.

Fighting remained intense and continued from hedgerow to hedgerow for the next two and a half weeks. Bradley was constantly in motion, trying to save as many men as possible and this gave him invaluable experience to not only recall his training, but expand it beyond all bounds. Even though he had hated somersaulting during training, Bradley quickly mastered it during his time in northern France. The easiest way to get to the wounded

¹⁷ Ibid., 46-48.

¹⁸ This was a common practice of aid men during WWII because it allowed them to access all their equipment at once, instead of having to reach around their waists to get at what they needed. The kits were placed specially on their belts to be more accessible when the belt was laid out than when it was worn. Bradley "Interview," 8-9.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4; Bradley, *Recollect and Ponder Part I* 17.

was to go over the hedgerows and he could not afford to lose any time in taking a less direct route. Minutes often meant the difference between life and death for these men and, unlike the helmets Bradley had seen earlier, these men could not afford to wait.²⁰

Bradley spent these weeks treating a large variety of wounds. The worst were the chest wounds. In order to put enough pressure on the wound to slow the bleeding, Bradley and other aid men literally threw themselves across the soldiers while attaching the bandage. When they stood up, the aid man's uniform was soaked with the wounded man's blood. But there was never any time to clean up. When he was able to make it back to camp, Bradley was barely recognizable. His uniform was soaked with the blood and various fluids of the men he had helped and caked with mud from all of his acrobats among the hedgerows. His shoes, as usual, were a complete mess. They were just as dirty as his uniform, but also shredded from all of the shrapnel and metal shards that he had stepped on throughout the day. The whole outfit would need to be replaced. Even when Bradley spent the night in the field tending to the wounded, a soldier would be sent to find him to bring replacement pieces for his uniform, saying, "Bradley, here's your shoes and a shirt."²¹ During this time, Bradley rarely slept, and when he did it was often in a fox hole that he dug himself. This constant action occurred unabated for several weeks and then continued into the month of August with only periodic breaks when the GIs made a break through. These break throughs brought a brief respite to the soldiers, but medical personnel and aid men continued working trying to help as many men as possible before the division moved to their next assignment.

²⁰ Albert E. Cowdrey, *Fighting for Life: American Military Medicine in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 253.

²¹ Bradley, "Interview," 10

The 30th Division eventually headed towards St. Lo, France. The Germans had mounted an unexpectedly strong defense there and the Allies were determined to break their lines. An army, mainly composed of Americans, had been massed just outside of St. Lo to confront the German Army. The offensive would begin with a massive bombing raid by the Allied air force to weaken the enemy and then the US Army would punch through the German lines.

The attack had already been delayed for several days because it was too rainy for the fliers to see anything. Finally, on July 25th, six days after the attack had been scheduled, Bradley was lined up with the men of the 30th when General MacNair came over to visit the troops. He stood talking with Bradley and some of the other men before moving onto the next division.²² In the middle of their conversation, he heard the drone of Allied planes overhead. Sooner than Bradley expected, he heard the whistle that meant the planes had dropped their load of bombs. The whistling was much closer than expected and Bradley quickly realized that there was a serious problem. The men ran for cover as bombs started to fall around them. Bradley sprinted to the right, his eyes set on a fox hole that would serve as a shelter. Out of the corner of

²² General MacNair stopped to talk with Bradley after he had patched up two GIs who had suffered a rather ironic accident. The men were already nervous because the day before, the US Air Force had attempted a bombing attack and one of the squads of airplanes had accidentally dropped their full load on the Allies instead of on the Germans. Communication got all tangled up and the men were pulled out of their entrenched positions and told to get into ditches and fox holes to await the attack. Fearing a repeat of the day before, these two GIs saw the same fox hole and both tried to dive in at the same time. Needless to say, this did not go well and they ended up stabbing one another with their bayonets. Bradley had just finished patching both up when General MacNair stopped by to chat. Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 65; Niall Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies*, (New York: Pegasus Books, 2015), 388-389.

his eye, Bradley saw General MacNair run to the left. A flash of doubt crossed his mind as Bradley wondered if he had made a mistake in not following the general. But, in situations like this, doubt could cost a man his life and Bradley could not afford to second guess himself. He managed to make it to the fox hole and ride out the bombing, which was mercifully short. As soon as they left, Bradley crawled out of his fox hole and set about healing the wounded. The wounds that he treated were the exact same as if they had been caused by German bombs but Bradley could not forget that these injuries were caused by friendly fire. The worst part of working on that field was watching all of the bodies being moved away. Many had suffered bodily injury from the explosions and that had caused their deaths. The most pitiful, however, were the men who had been buried alive when their fox holes or trenches were hit and the earth nearby covered up their openings, suffocating them. There were no marks on their bodies, but they were dead all the same. Bradley, at this point used to the most gruesome of wounds, could not stand to look at those corpses as they were brought back from the front lines.²³ While bandaging damaged wounds, word was eventually passed to Bradley that the attack was still on but his division had been pulled back because of their losses. He was to return to camp as soon as he could.

Back at camp that night, Bradley heard that General MacNair had perished in the bombing. Apparently, his body was so disfigured from the blast that at first it was hard to identify him. If Bradley had followed the general, his corpse would have been among those destroyed by the accidental attack. He realized

²³ The Americans killed 24 and wounded 131 of their own men on July 24th and 61 were killed and approximately 600 were wounded the second day by dropping these bombs in the wrong spot. Barr, 388-389.

how close he had come to dying and marveled at the instinct that had pushed him towards life instead of death.²⁴

Eventually Bradley and the remnants of the 30th Division made it to Mortain in France, the first town they encountered that was relatively untouched by the war. This would not last long.²⁵ Hitler had ordered Field Marshall von Kluge, the German commander of the Normandy Front, to prepare a counter attack against the Americans. Von Kluge decided to move his troops west towards the Allies and attack several areas, including Mortain, France and consequently Bradley.²⁶ When he reported for duty at the command center, a major and a captain from General Hobbes's staff, the commander of the 30th Infantry Division, stopped Bradley and told him to hold back. The officers looked at Bradley and said, "General Hobbes has looked into the data on the men who waded in on the beach head and you are the last one. You are to be moved to the rear for survival... you've done enough."²⁷ Bradley had basically been in constant action since landing on Omaha Beach over a month ago and as far as they were concerned, he deserved a break. While he chafed at the idea that he was not out there helping people, Bradley did admit that a break sounded like an enticing idea. Bradley spent the night at the second battalion aid station. He would not be allowed to rest for long. The next morning a report came in of a battalion stranded on a hill just outside of the town and there were reports of serious casualties. Bradley was pointed

²⁴ MacNair's body had been so destroyed that his corpse was only identifiable by the stars on his shoulders. *Ibid.*, 389.

²⁵ Bradley *Aid Man!*, 68.

²⁶ Barr, 383-391; Peter R. Mansoor, *The GI offensive in Europe; The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945* (Kansas: University of Kansas, 1999), 167-170.

²⁷ Bradley, "Interview," 15.

towards a jeep with a man leaning on it and told to take the man and the jeep to the hill to see what he could do to help.²⁸

Bradley hopped into the jeep and he and the other soldier started for the hill. The closer they got to the hill, the more shells and bullets started flying around. By the time they reached the base, both Bradley and the driver were crouched beneath the dashboard, desperate to avoid the swarm of ammunition flying above their heads. Enemy and friendly fire made the trip chaotic and threatened to kill one, or both, of them at every turn. Eventually, the driver had to stop and Bradley jumped out of the jeep. He grabbed two of the stretchers in the back and went searching for the nearest wounded. Almost immediately, a machine gun was fired right over his head, causing him to drop the litters and dive into a nearby ditch. Once the firing slowed, Bradley picked the litters back up and slowly made his way to two nearby rocks that had a small space between them. Four wounded were laying near the rocks, so Bradley worked on them from the limited protection offered by the rocks and prepared them to be moved to a less conflicted part of the battlefield. He managed to get the four men back to the jeep, despite the fact that two of them had to be carried in litters and the other two were seriously wounded. As soon as everyone was loaded into the jeep, the driver floored the accelerator and Bradley threw himself across the wounded to prevent them from falling out on the bumpy road. All six men made it back to the small church where Bradley had spent the previous night. It was now set up as the battalion aid station. However, command soon realized that their position was rapidly becoming imperiled and the order was given to pull out of the area. Bradley and the others left the church and the village altogether

²⁸ Ordinarily, aid men were not given jeeps because they might be mistaken for attacking forces and attacked by the enemy, so this was a strange occurrence for Bradley. *Ibid.*, 15-16

and moved to a house a few miles away down a dirt road. The men quickly reestablished their aid station and then checked their fox holes and slit trenches. After assuring themselves that everything was as prepared as it could be, the men crawled into their respective holes and fell into a heavy sleep. The men were awakened to the sound of “Raus! Raus! Raus!”²⁹ In the pre-dawn light, the men saw a series of shapes moving around them in the semi darkness. As the sun rose, it shined light on their new situation and the muzzles of a variety of weapons. While they slept, they had been surrounded by Germans and were now Prisoners of War.³⁰

Arley Goodenkauf was drafted into the United States army and assigned as a paratrooper. He was captured during the initial fighting on Utah Beach and spent several months being moved from one Stalag to another until he finally ended up at Stalag III C in September of 1944. He would stay there until the camp was liberated four months later by the advancing Red Army.³¹

Immediately after being captured, Goodenkauf was hustled into a small barn where he and the other prisoners spent the night. The next day they were force marched to a nearby town and loaded into trucks. From there they were moved across Germany, staying briefly in various camps for a few weeks before being sent onto their next destination. On August 24th, they crammed into boxcars and began another miserable trip, this time to Stalag IV B. Compared to the barns, tents, and trains that he had spent the past ten weeks in, this camp was a relatively comfortable place to stay.

²⁹ In German, ‘raus’ means out. When the Germans found the medical team in the fox holes, they demanded that the men climb out so they could be properly captured. Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 70-71.

³⁰ Bradley, “Interview,” 17.

³¹ Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoirs, 2-8.

There were beds to sleep in at night, showers were available, and there was a delousing facility. After two and a half months of moving around the country, everyone had picked up a variety of tiny pests and finally they were able to get rid of them, if only temporarily. Best of all, at Stalag IV B the men were fed on a regular schedule. Although they never got enough food, it was a blessing to know when food was coming and how much to expect.

As Goodenkauf adjusted himself to this new place and the luxuries it provided, he compared his weight to that of the other prisoners in the camp. Among the American and British soldiers in his compound, his weight was roughly the norm. Everyone had suffered some weight loss due to being a prisoner for several months, but most were relatively healthy. The same could not be said for the Russians in the next compound over. The Germans barely fed their Soviet prisoners and, as a result, Goodekauf was living next to a compound of walking skeletons.³² This was a common trend throughout Germany. According to Christina Streit, “of about 5,700,000 Red Army soldiers captured by the Germans, only about 2,000,000 survived the war”³³ Most of the members of the Red Army that were captured were allowed to starve to death, violating the regulations set forth by the Geneva Convention.³⁴ At first, he thought that this oppression had created solidarity among the Russians. However, as he was soon to learn, that was not always the case.

³² Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoirs, 7-8.

³³ “Prisoner of War (POW),” *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*, accessed November 8, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/prisoner-of-war> Streit, 80-81

³⁴ Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929, Article 11. Accessed November 8, 2016. https://wcjp.unicri.it/db_legislation/docs/Convention%20relative%20to%20the%20Treatment%20of%20Prisoners%20of%20War_1929.pdf

On one of his first days at Stalag IV B, Goodenkauf lined up as usual for roll call. Across the yard, he could see the Russian prisoners doing the same thing. As he watched, two POWs emerged from one of the barracks carrying a third man between them. The third man appeared very frail and lacked the strength to take the offered food from the Germans. Instead, one of his supporters took the food. Arley's heart warmed at the sight of this unity and camaraderie. Even in the worst of times, people were still able to come together and help one another out. After roll call was finished, Arley hung around to see if the two Russians would be able to get their comrade to eat anything. Instead, he watched as the prisoners were dismissed and the two Soviets dropped their fellow POW on the ground and divided up his ration. Goodenkauf was furious that these two men would treat a fellow prisoner so unfeelingly. However, when the fallen man made no sound nor movement to catch himself, it suddenly dawned on Goodenkauf. That was no man lying on the ground. That was a corpse. He had probably died during the night and rather than reporting it immediately, the two prisoners had seized the opportunity and used his death to their advantage.³⁵

Arley felt sorry for the dead man. He deserved a better send off than being used as a prop in a scam to get a little extra food. But at the same time, he worried about his own future. The Russians must have been desperate to exploit their fallen comrade as they did. Goodenkauf was doing okay now, but his future was more uncertain than ever and he wondered if he could ever sink as low as those two Russians. For Goodenkauf and the other American prisoners, their future was anything but certain and there was no guarantee that in a couple of weeks they would not be in the same situation and the same choice would become an option.

³⁵ Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoir, 8.

Arley spent approximately three weeks at Stalag IV B. During that time, he saw similar scenes play out over and over where the Russians plotted and schemed to get more food. Everyone in the Russian compound was desperate for food and willing to do whatever it took to get a little extra. On September 18th, he and some of the other prisoners were loaded onto another boxcar and shipped to Stalag III C. As Arley changed camps, his future changed as well. Soon, both he and Bradley would come to know exactly what those Russians were thinking.³⁶

Bradley's life as a POW was about to begin. After waiting several days outside of Mortain, the Germans began to hustle Bradley and the others away from the small town.³⁷ Often, the men were forced to jog even though they preferred a slow pace to delay their departure as much as possible. It was clear to Bradley that the Germans were in a rush to get somewhere and they were not sure if they were going to make it. Years later, he learned that their goal had been to make it through the Falaise Gap before it closed. However, in the moment all that Bradley knew was that the

³⁶ Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoir, 7-8.

³⁷ Bradley was told by the Germans that they had tried for several days to negotiate a trade with the Allies for some captured German medics. In *Aid Man!*, Bradley questioned the validity of this argument but did remember being held at Mortain for several days. However, in one of his later books, *Recollect and Ponder Part I*, which was written nearly a decade later, he stated that he had received a letter from Major Mark J. Reardon who had found a note in the National Archives that was carried by a German corporal. The note offered to exchange prisoners. It was dated the day that Bradley was captured, so it is possible that the aid station was taken for the deliberate purpose of trading medical prisoners. He also recalls that some of the medical personnel were offered the opportunity to join the German Army as part of their medical team. Many of the men refused to join the Germans, but a few chose this option instead of going to a POW camp. This would indicate a serious lack of medical personnel within the German military and led credence to their story that a large number of them had been captured by the Allies. Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 72; Bradley, *Recollect and Ponder Part I*, 37-65.

Germans demanded that he run and that was the last thing he wanted to do.³⁸

The Germans were so desperate to reach their destination that they even commandeered a truck one morning to drive the prisoners across the French countryside and to German territory. There were a number of risks involved in being in a vehicle, including the frequent Allied bombing attacks that targeted modes of transportation. Bradley could not forget his bumpy ride in a jeep at the Battle of Mortain and how he and the infantry man barely escaped with their lives. He prayed that this ride would end better than that one had. As it happens, the road that Bradley was driven down was virtually deserted, making their vehicle easy to spot and target. Suddenly, the air filled with the drone of planes and the whistle of bomb being dropped. The driver was forced to take evasive action to escape the bombardment. He veered off onto a tiny dirt road and everyone dove off of the truck. The Germans organized the prisoners into lines and had them lay down in rows in the ditches along the sides of the road with a German soldier at each end of the line. All of the men braced themselves for impact. Luckily, the road the driver had selected had lots of tree cover and the men and vehicle were shielded from the eyes of the bombers. However, the fliers continued to target the main road that Bradley had been on trying to make it impassable for vehicles. The bombing lasted for the rest of the day, and into the beginning of the

³⁸ The Falaise Gap, also known as the Falaise Pocket, was a region in the ETO between the American and British armies. Initially, the two forces had been converging to form a wall that would trap a large number of Germans and prevent their escape into Germany. However, the American forces were moving too fast and some of their commanders feared overextending part of the line and thus weakening it. So, the Americans halted and left a large space through which many Germans escaped, including Bradley and his captors. Barr, 392-393; Bradley, *Recollect and Ponder Part I*, 37.

night as the Allies poured bombs onto the road in their pursuit of total destruction.

As the sun was setting, the noise finally stopped and it seemed like the bombardment had finished. The men slowly stood up, wary of another attack. Americans and Germans together looked at the damage that resulted from a few hours' worth of bombing. Trees had been destroyed and the road was barely recognizable. Bradley could not recall if there had been a stone wall along the roadside before, it certainly was not there now. Both the Germans and the Americans soon came to the same conclusion; it was suddenly more than possible that the Germans could lose this war. If the Allies brought that kind of destruction to the fatherland, Germany would be forced to collapse. For many of the Germans, this was a new thought, and a rather frightening one.

The Germans also quickly came to the conclusion that daylight was no longer safe. A group as large as theirs was sure to attract attention from fliers and there was no way to be sure that if they got caught in another bombing that they would all survive. Instead, even though it would be slower and more difficult, the Germans decided to move the prisoners only at night to avoid attracting another bombing mission.³⁹

After several weeks of forced marching through the German countryside, Bradley and the other prisoners made it to the French city of Amiens. While there, the men were kept in the city prison until they could be moved to their next destination. For the first time since being captured, they were given beds to sleep in rather than a barn floor. The men had finally reached a place where they could stay for a while and there would be no more marches at night to avoid allied planes. Instead, the men would be able to keep

³⁹ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 73-75.

regular hours and sleep at night instead of stumbling in the dark along dirt roads.

Bradley's first morning at Amiens was very rough as he and the other prisoners were woken early by the sound of German guards ordering them to fall out for roll call. After being counted, Bradley and the other men in his barracks were organized into a work detail and marched out of camp. Before leaving, the group was surrounded by guards, presumably to prevent any ideas of escape, and brought to an area of the city that had been heavily damaged by Allied bombers. Through a combination of elementary German and pantomime the guards explained to the men what was expected of them. They were to clear the zone of all the rubble created by the destruction. The Germans wanted the roads and walkways cleared to facilitate the moving of supplies and all of the debris sorted by material. Bradley and the others balked at this idea; Allied fighters had risked their lives to cause this disruption and the Germans were expecting Allied prisoners to clean it up. The point of these attacks was to slow down and hinder the German war machine; to force them to waste their own labor on correcting the damage. It was certainly not planned to give work to POWs. Bradley detested the idea of helping the Germans, so he, and the others, did as little work as possible while in the town. All of the men moved as slowly as they could. This was partly an involuntary instinct born of weeks of hunger; the men had become accustomed to trying to conserve energy at all times.⁴⁰ But this lethargy was also intentional. There was no incentive, monetary or otherwise, to complete a certain amount of work within the city so the men strove to be as unproductive as possible.⁴¹ The lethargy

⁴⁰ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 75-76.

⁴¹ According to the Geneva Convention of 1929, all POWs were entitled to some level of pay. The amount was generally fixed at whatever the POW's rank equivalent made but the rules varied depending on if the person in question was

was a part of this but they also had several other strategies to slow down work. Rather than all of the men using one central pile for the debris, each created his own piles away from the others. In this way, rather than efficiently moving everything to one central location, all of the debris simply migrated to a new home. It was often hard to tell what was a pile and what had yet to be moved so the same piece of rubble could move between several piles in one day as the prisoners tried to 'clean' it up. So, although the street looked like it was filled with motion nothing was actually being accomplished. Bradley and the others continued to do this for several weeks.⁴²

That morning started the same as every other morning at Amiens; with the call to fall out for roll call. The day before, Bradley and some of the other prisoners had been told they were being transferred and to be prepared to leave the next day. The selected prisoners followed the work detail as they left for the day. Instead of going to the street that was to be cleared that day, they were marched to the train station in town and loaded onto a box car. Once all of the prisoners had boarded, the train left for their mysterious destination. As the train started to move, gaps in the walls of the car let fresh air in. Bradley felt the coolness of the air as it passed by him and he knew that winter was not far off.

Once the doors to the car were locked, most of the men did not have the energy nor the balance to remain standing while the

an officer or not. Officers could not be forced to work while enlisted men could. However, the Axis powers tended to disregard the rules and did not often pay their POWs for their labor. When ex-prisoners, like Bradley, returned to the States, they were expecting to receive their back logged salary which the government had not made provisions for. Walter Rundell Jr. "Paying the Pow in World War II," *Military Affairs* 22 no. 3 (Autumn 1958), 121; Convention at Geneva, 27-34.

⁴² Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 75-76.

train was in motion. One by one, they began to lay down on the floor each trying to get their own space. The prisoners quickly realized that they could not lay down haphazardly where ever they pleased. There was simply not enough room in the box car unless everyone laid down on their sides in long rows all pressed together. Any movement created a ripple effect. They were all so close together that in order for anyone to move, everyone had to mimic it to create the necessary space.

Bradley quickly joined the rest of the men on the floor. He wanted to take advantage of the relative peace that existed within the box car and catch up on some sleep. However, peace was hard to come by considering Bradley was forced to roll over every thirty or so minutes to accommodate one of the other prisoners in the box car. He soon realized that it was going to be a long ride to where ever it was that they were going.⁴³

Upon entering Limburg, the men were sent to Stalag XII A.⁴⁴ Inside, their first stop was at the delousing stations where they took hot showers to kill off the bugs. At the same time, their clothes went through a special dryer to give the lice in the clothes the same treatment. Next, the newly cleaned prisoners formed a line in front of a long table. When Bradley finally made it to the front, a German officer thrust a piece of metal on a chain to him. Before he could examine it and ask what it was, the guards forced him along and the next guy in line was getting the same treatment. While hustling him away, the guards indicated that Bradley should put the chain around his neck. When he did so and let go of the piece of metal, he realized that it was a similar shape to his dog tag. Stamped into it were the numbers 86042. It was his POW identification number. In this and other camps, every POW

⁴³ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 76-77.

⁴⁴ Bradley, "Interview," 19.

captured by the Germans was assigned an identification number. Each number was stamped into a piece of metal and the GIs were expected to wear it at all times. This new tag always hit Bradley's regular dog tags and created a soft ping whenever he moved. Bradley and the others hated their tags because it felt too much like they were in the German Army. That clinking would follow him across Europe and served as a constant reminder of his capture by the Germans. After being processed, Bradley and many others were put on a train bound for places unknown.⁴⁵

After spending what felt like several days being moved from one train to another, Bradley and the other prisoners got off of the train expecting to be immediately herded onto the next one. Instead, they were surrounded by guards and marched down the road away from the train station. The guards led the men to the most desolate place that Bradley had ever seen. Dozens of short, long buildings were surrounded by fences topped with barbed wire. Placed periodically within the wall were guard towers, each manned by large spot lights and heavily armed Germans. The guards forced the men to pass under their gaze as they entered the gates of Stalag III C.

As Bradley took his first look at the camp, he noticed that there were no plants within the compound. No trees grew to provide shade nor any grass to carpet the ground. The Germans had even managed to defeat the tenacious weed that always managed to grow everywhere.⁴⁶ If a plant that had evolved to survive in some of the least hospitable environments in the world could not live here, how was a lonely boy from DC expected to make it?

⁴⁵ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 77.

⁴⁶ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 80.

Bradley and the other men were brought into the camp and processed. They were assigned to three room barracks with each room holding between twenty-seven and thirty-three prisoners. There was one lone bulb in each room to provide light at night. However, this only lasted until 9 o'clock when all the lights were turned off and the men were expected to be in bed. Just before lights out, the men would spend a few minutes catching all the lice and other bugs crawling on them and worked together to crush them using their finger nails. Along with the light bulb, the only other amenity in the barracks was a lone stove that rarely had enough coal. The men often spent the nights huddled together under thin blankets, hoping to survive the night. Morning brought little respite for the men, who were ordered out into the freezing yard to be counted. Those lucky enough to have some food were allowed to eat it and then they returned to their barracks to pass the day. When food was available, it was often of very poor quality. The prisoners got a small cup of watery soup made almost exclusively of sauerkraut for lunch. For supper, they would occasionally get a potato, turnip or rutabaga if they were lucky and a slice of bread, the equivalent of 1000 grams.⁴⁷ All of the food in the camps was very strictly rationed and controlled, as it was in the rest of Germany.⁴⁸ Due to this rationing, the bread that the

⁴⁷ Bradley, "Interview" 19-21; Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoir, 8.

⁴⁸ Rationing all over Germany began in 1939 before the fateful invasion of Poland but increased dramatically after the failed invasion of Russia. Desperate for food, the Germans had originally planned on utilizing their conquered territories as an unlimited supply of food and other crucial supplies for the German War Machine. This plan ultimately failed, in no small part due to the intense fighting that these regions suffered. In order to acquire the necessary food, the Germans in 1942 decided to invade Russia, a comparative bread basket to the food that Germany was operating with. The initial invasion was projected to last approximately three months, after which all of the food of Russia would be made available to the Nazi Regime. As history tells us, this was not quite

prisoners received was often of extremely poor quality. Flour, and grain in general, were in high demand across Germany, so the smallest amount possible was used to create the prisoners' bread. To supplement the meager amount of flour used, the Germans mixed saw dust and wood chips into the batter to thicken it and prepare it for baking.⁴⁹ Although nearly unpalatable, when the men were starving, it was better than nothing. The occasional snap pea, if they had any, was reserved strictly for Sundays. The call of 'Meat!' was a cause for celebration as meat had become a precious commodity within the camp.⁵⁰

During their forced march to get to Stalag III C, food had been a rare commodity and the men often went days in between meals.⁵¹ When Bradley finally arrived at the camp, he expected that they would be fed on a more regular schedule. While this did occur, the amount of food that the men were receiving was minuscule compared to what their bodies required. The American POWS never reached the level of starvation experienced by the Russian prisoners, who were specifically targeted for starvation and deliberately received an insufficient amount of food. Red

accurate and the Germans never successfully exploit the food reserves they imagined were waiting for them in Russia. Instead, rationing ramps up and seriously affects POW. Combined with the sharp increase of POWs in the early 1940's and this overall lack of food supplies, POWs were fed the bare minimum. The Nazis believed that any food given to POWs was taken from the mouths of German citizens and this was unacceptable. Lizzie Collingham *The Taste of War; World War II and the Battle for Food* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012), 164- 359.

⁴⁹ At the beginning of Bradley's internment, the wood used in the bread was often taken from fresh trees, meaning it was free of chemicals. Towards the end of the war, even this became limited and the Germans resorted to using processed woods. Bradley speculates that they may have needed to resort to telephone poles. Regardless, this change had a major impact on the men's health as their diet now contained a wide variety of poisonous chemicals. Bradley, "Interview," 19.

⁵⁰ Ibid.; Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoir, 8.

⁵¹ Bradley, *Aid Man!* 76; Goodenkauf Unpublished Memoirs, 7

Cross packages often contained gifts of food and the POWs used this to supplement their diets and fend off starvation.⁵²

Unlike Amiens, there was no work required of the prisoners at Stalag III C. Other than falling out for roll call when called, nothing was expected of the men and consequently they had a lot of free time on their hands. The prisoners learned to adapt and found activities to occupy themselves. Some of the Red Cross packages had included packs of cards, so many of them passed their days sitting on the floor of the barracks playing cards. Bradley occasionally played a hand or two, but when the stakes got too high he left. Often, the men cleared a space on the floor and put pieces of straw in the middle. For some, that was all that they had to bet with. For others, that was the highest they were willing to go. The games were supposed to just be a fun way to pass the time. It was when the men threw down cigarettes or food as their bet that some of the lower betters left, including Bradley.

During one card game, Bradley was sitting on the floor of the barracks with some other men playing a round of poker. The betting was very low stakes. So far, only straw had been thrown into the betting circle. After several rounds of this, another prisoner joined the group. The new comer was given the honor of placing the first bet. Instead of grabbing a nearby piece of straw, the new prisoner took a cigarette out of his pocket and placed it in the small clearing. His audience paused, unsure of what to do next. Bradley and one of the other men quickly got up and left the game. Bradley

⁵² By October 1941, Soviet POWs in Germany were specifically allotted fewer calories than the minimum number needed to survive. Over 3,000,000 Soviet POWs perished in German POW camps, approximately 57% of the total number of Soviet Prisoners. Only 3.5% of American and British POWs died. Christian Streit, "Soviet Prisoners of War in the Hands of the Wehrmacht," in *War of Extermination; The German Military in World War II, 1941-1944*. Ed. Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann (New York: Bergahn Books, 2000), 81-82.

went to search for one of the few books that were available at the camp. Even though he had read most of the ones that the prisoners had access to, anything was better than wasting cigarettes on such a pointless activity. While he walked away, the rest reluctantly reached for their own packs. For many cigarettes were too valuable to risk in such a way. They were the only form of currency among the prisoners and worked with some of the guards. Bradley had even heard a rumor that a prisoner with a full carton of cigarettes could bribe his way not only out of the camp but also out of Europe. As such, many men, Bradley among them, requested large numbers of cigarettes when they wrote to their families. No packages ever arrived and the prisoners assumed that the guards had stolen them because of their valuable contents. Red Cross packages did occasionally contain cigarettes but there were never enough to make a whole carton. Regardless, Bradley held onto that dream and jealously guarded his supply.⁵³

Cigarettes were also better than cash inside of a POW camp. A few slipped to one of the guards equaled a few extra pieces of food that night or some other small comfort. Extra coal for the furnace or another bottle of soap could make the difference to a Prisoner of War. Bradley lived among these men for several months and knew just how desperate they were.

Some of the men in the camp were desperate for things other than food or small comfort. These men were addicted to smoking. Tobacco had always been readily available in the army.⁵⁴ For many of the men, Stalag III C was the first time that they were

⁵³ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 84-87

⁵⁴ Smoking was a part of everyday life in the 1940's and it remained a part of life even when Americans left for combat. Even the rations given to men in combat often contained a few cigarettes. At night, however, the men were forbidden from smoking because the glow of the lit butts was known to draw enemy fire. So, the army provided tins of tobacco so the men could still get their fix without giving away their position. Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 86.

without a steady supply of the substance. Many did not know how to handle it and some went to drastic measures to get the fix that they craved. When Bradley first entered Stalag III C, he had noticed how barren and lifeless it was. Initially, he had blamed the lack of flora on the Germans, but he later found out that it had actually been caused by some of the heavy smokers in camp. In their desperate need, several had gathered up all of the plants and dried them out. They then tried smoking the leaves, often with poor results. However, that solution did not last very long. Once the plants were gone, the men started chipping away some of the posts and beams inside of the barracks. They took the resulting wood chips and tried to smoke them in crude pipes. This too did not end well but that never stopped the prisoners. In some areas, their carving was so extensive that posts became unstable and the other prisoners had to force the smoker to stop for everyone's safety.

The smoking of wood chips was the act of a man in need, but it was not the most desperate thing that Bradley witnessed. While in the camp, he saw several prisoners trading their rations to other prisoners for some cigarettes. In an environment where their next meal could literally make the difference between life and death that action alone told Bradley how desperate some of these men were.

As one of the aid men in camp, Bradley was expected to, and felt obligated to, help the sick and wounded as much as he could. Even though he rarely had any supplies, he tried to offer what assistance he could. Due to this compassion, Bradley spent many nights sitting with the smokers when their newest experiment went horribly wrong. Although he could not provide any actual medical aid, he offered what encouragement he could.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid., 84-87.

After days filled with hearing rumors about the advance of the Soviet Army, on January 31st, Bradley and the other prisoners got the order they had been dreading. The next morning the entire camp would be evacuated. Prisoners were expected to gather their belongings and be prepared to move out immediately following roll call. Across the compound, in the rec hall, Goodenkauf and the other performing prisoners realized that their time had come. For several weeks, they had been digging a hole to store supplies and hide in.⁵⁶ That night, they moved their belongings into the hole and the following morning Goodenkauf and the others climbed in. Another of the prisoners put a metal plate over the hole and moved the stove onto it to cover and disguise the opening.

Meanwhile, the prisoners outside of the rec hall were doing all that they could to delay their departure. They were successful for over two hours. However, at approximately 10 o'clock, the guards set up machine gun nests within the camp. The prisoners were given two choices; either they could form into a column and move out, or the guards would open fire. A column was quickly formed and the prisoners were marched out. They followed the road out of the prison gates. For many of the men, this was the first time in months that they were not surrounded by fences and barbed wire. Even though the men wanted to stand and look around at land not enclosed by fences, the German soldiers kept forcing them along. The Germans needed to make it away from the Stalag before the Russians arrived. Unbeknownst to them, an advanced

⁵⁶ At first, the men had hidden the dirt in a hay stack outside of the rec hall. However, a few days into digging, one of them overheard a guard telling another guard that he thought the stack had grown a little. Digging stopped immediately. They were only able to start digging again when snow started to fly and they could use the snow to hide the dirt. The hole was finished only a few days before the order was given to evacuate. Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoir, 9-10.

unit of the Russian army had come up to the camp and surrounded it with tanks. The column of POWs was marched straight into a line of Russian tanks.⁵⁷

The Soviet army saw the first line of German guards and a large column of men marching towards them. Thinking that these men were all German soldiers, they opened fire. Guards and prisoners alike dove into the snow under the sudden barrage of tank fire. The Germans quickly gathered up their charges and herded them back towards camp. The prisoners followed without any issues as the thought of immediate death put any plans of escape out of their minds. Several of the prisoners were forced to help some of their comrades back as they had been wounded during the onslaught.⁵⁸ Once back behind the wire fences, the Germans hurried to organize a second evacuation. All of the prisoners were lined up again and the Germans prepared to march them out of camp using a different gate.

This time, the Germans barely made it past the fence before they saw Russian tanks on the horizon. Once again, the men ran back for the relative security of the camp and the Germans prepared to defend the camp against the invaders. Meanwhile, the prisoners were permitted to wander around the compound and many returned to their barracks. While in there, Bradley watched as the Russians overran the camp and defeated the few Germans who tried to defend the Stalag. The Russians executed nearly all of the guards as they swept through the camp. However, German reinforcements quickly arrived at the compound and opened fire on the Russians. The POWs were caught in the no man's zone of a battle with the Germans on one side and the Russians on the other. Bullets and artillery shells flew through the air from both

⁵⁷ Goodenkauf, Unpublished Memoir, 10; Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 91.

⁵⁸ Bradley, *Recollect and Ponder Part I*, 40; Bradley, "Interview," 18.

directions, making any area outside a serious hazard. Bradley and another man inside his barrack tried to sneak a look outside through their window and came face to face with a German fighter pilot. The flier was down so low that Bradley's head was about even with the barrels of the machine guns attached to the plane. Both men dropped to the floor moments before the gunner opened fire. It was at that moment that Bradley, and many others, decided that the camp was too dangerous to stay in and made preparations to leave.⁵⁹

The next morning, nearly all of the soldiers retraced their steps from the day before and walked out of the gates of Stalag III C, but this time for the final time. The large mass soon divided up into smaller groups as everyone migrated towards their friends. This arrangement also worked out better for foraging needs. The Russians had few supplies and preferred to live off the land. They expected the former prisoners to do the same. It was easier to forage with a group of ten men than with a group of a hundred, so the men broke apart.⁶⁰

Bradley eventually joined a group of seven to nine other GIs. The group contained a mixed cast of characters, including a man who spoke English, German and Polish, an Irishman who was very handy and a Mexican who was very adept at survival. Together they started what was bound to be a very long walk.⁶¹

As Bradley and the others made their way across Europe, they realized they were going to need to find a source of food, and quickly. They were completely on their own and had to adapt to survive. The Russians had not prepared to liberate any POW

⁵⁹ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 91-94.

⁶⁰ Bradley, "Interview," 22.

⁶¹ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 91-94.

camps and consequently had no infrastructure in place to deal with them.⁶² The men spent most nights in abandoned barns, sleeping in the hay. The Russians, who had moved through the area some weeks before, had eaten all of the available food. All that was left was the feed bin for the livestock. This was barely palatable food as the grain it contained was very coarse. However, the men stewed it with large amounts of water to make an oatmeal substitute that served their needs. The men ate this meal as often as they could because the Russian Army had left no other option and food was scarce. The Russians had moved through the Polish countryside like a plague of locust until nothing was left; no produce nor livestock had survived their onslaught.⁶³

The only thing that seemed to have survived were a few chickens scattered in various areas. These were often unavailable as they were often already claimed by Russian soldiers staying nearby and being caught with one of their chickens was paramount to a death sentence. One night though, after they had finished their evening gruel but before they had bedded down for the night, the men decided that they wanted a little meat to round out their meal. On their way to the abandoned house they were spending the night in, the men had passed a chicken coop and had seen a few chickens milling around outside. Even just talking about having meat made some of the men salivate; they had not had any for several weeks and that which they had had was of a questionable nature, whose origins were unclear.

The men all gathered together to discuss their strategy. It would not be enough to simply walk into the coop and grab a chicken. Even if they managed to grab the animal by the neck and silence it, it would still flap its wings and wake the other birds who

⁶² Michael Jones, *After Hitler: The Last Ten Days of World War II in Europe* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2015), 74-75.

⁶³ Bradley, "Interview," 24

would then set up a ruckus. Under normal circumstances, this would not be an issue, but the noise would inevitably wake a nearby Russian who would roll over in his sleep and let loose a burst of gunfire at the chicken coop to dissuade potential thieves. The unarmed men wanted to avoid this fate at all costs.

One of the men in the group, a Mexican, was particularly adept at catching chickens and explained the correct procedure to the rest of the group. Rather than killing the bird inside of the coop, the trick was to slip a finger right under the feet of the chicken along the pole it was roosting on. The chicken's feet would then instinctively curl around the finger and the thief would be able to walk out of the coop with the sleeping bird on his finger. Once far enough away, the animal's neck could be rung and preparations for the feast could begin.⁶⁴

Bradley and a few others followed the Mexican's suggestion and managed to capture several chickens unobserved and prepared a thick stew with hearty amounts of meat. As they were sitting down to eat, a loud noise sounded outside of the building and the front door came crashing down. Before the men could run for cover, a Russian patrol, made up of both men and women, streamed into the room with all of their guns aimed at Bradley and his men. One of the women demanded to know if the men were Germans. Based on the way the rest of the soldiers were deferring to her, Bradley determined that she was probably their commanding officer. Giving her the wrong answer at this point meant death by firing squad. Germans were forbidden from gathering and if these soldiers thought for a moment that Bradley and his men were German, they would shoot without asking any further questions. Better a dead mistake than a live German. Bradley and the others in his group all started yelling

⁶⁴ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 95-96.

‘Amerikansky’ at the top of their lungs. They assumed that it meant American in Russian, but none of them were sure if it actually meant anything. It had worked with earlier patrols and they desperately hoped that it would work now. Bradley saw confusion enter some of the Russian’s eyes and many of their stern faces softened. However, the guns were still pointed at the group and Bradley had run out of ideas. Suddenly, the Irishman in the back called out, “‘Give her a chorus of ‘Pistol Packin’ Momma’!’”⁶⁵ All of the men started singing the popular tune. The Russians were stunned; they were unprepared for this new line of attack. Suddenly, the officer in charge broke into a huge grin and started laughing. She lowered her weapon and holstered it. Her soldiers followed her lead and put their own guns away. The atmosphere quickly changed from one charged with tension to one of revelry. The Russians started celebrating and a quiet dinner developed into a fully formed party.

As the party started to get into the swing of things, Bradley noticed one of the female soldiers slip out the front door. She returned moments later with one of the extra gas cans that were stored on the backs of all jeeps. For the British and the Americans, these tanks were for storing emergency gasoline. For the Russians, they were for emergency vodka. Bradley had seen Russians getting

⁶⁵ “‘Pistol Packin’ Momma’!” was a popular song in the 1940’s and consequently all of the men in Bradley’s group was familiar with the lyrics. The chorus of the song goes

Lay that pistol down Babe, Lay that pistol down,
Pistol Packin' Mama, Lay that pistol down.

The song itself describes a man drinking at a bar when his female companion finds him and accuses him of cheating on her. She confronts him armed with a gun and the man tries to talk his way out of the situation. She subsequently catches her man back at the cabaret, this time dancing with a blonde. The woman returns with a gun and kills the blonde and then turns on her husband. He tries to talk her out of shooting him too but it ultimately unsuccessful. “Pistol Packin’ Mama by Al Dexter, 1943,” *Luftex.com*, accessed Dec. 10, 2016, <http://www.luftex.com/aldexter.htm>; Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 96.

drinks from these tanks and knew that they had contained a toxic mix of gasoline and vodka that kept the Russians going but made every other soldier ill. The girl put the tank down on a table. Another girl saw the tank and poured herself two glasses. Seeing Bradley, she made a beeline straight for him.

Bradley started to worry again. Not only did he rarely drink, but when he did he certainly never ordered a cocktail of vodka and gasoline. The girl tried offering him the drink several times and each time he refused he got increasingly nervous. Bradley never forgot that the Russians were often trigger happy and that they were armed and he was not. After several tries, the girl became frustrated and started yelling at him that he had disrespected Mother Russia, Stalin, and all things Russian. At the same time, she grabbed one of the submachine guns that one of her comrades and brought in and began waving it at Bradley. She kept threatening to shoot and he knew that she was more than capable of it.

Suddenly, one of Bradley's men ran up to them. He had seen what was going on from across the room and thought he could help defuse the tension. The man started talking rapidly to the girl in Polish, trying to explain the situation. Bradley watched as her expression changed from one of anger to one of confusion and then she suddenly burst out laughing. Shaking her head, the soldier wandered off, still laughing, to a knot of other Russian soldiers. She started chatting with them and turned around to point at Bradley several times. When she finished her story, they too burst out laughing.

Confused and still a little worried, Bradley turned to the other guy to ask what he had told the girl. Chuckling, the man responded that he had told the soldier that Bradley was from a crazy Baptist sect whose church forbade him from drinking

anything other than water. Bradley started laughing at the absurdity of it and the rest of the night passed without incident.⁶⁶

Several weeks later, their Polish guide led Bradley and the rest of the group into yet another small town in the Polish countryside. As they were trying to get their bearings, several Russian soldiers emerged and surrounded the group. Bradley was used to this and explaining that they were Americans, Americanskys, and just wanted to return to their countrymen.⁶⁷ As he prepared to deliver his speech, Bradley noticed that none of the Russians had their guns pointed at the group. This in itself was strange considering how all the way from Stalag III C to here any Russian soldiers they had met had assumed the group was German and only quick thinking and smooth talking had kept the group from an early grave. For some reason though, these soldiers were trying to get Bradley and his friends to follow them. This too was abnormal as the Russians usually preferred to shoot onsite instead of trying to relocate their victims. Although wary of some sort of trick, Bradley knew that when angered, a Russian's first instinct was to shoot and Bradley certainly did not want that. He and the others resignedly followed the soldiers. They were led to a large compound with a train station at the center. At first, the men feared that they had been brought to another POW camp. Sensing a trap, Bradley and the others started to worry even more. However, an interpreter was quickly brought over and explained to the

⁶⁶ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 95-97

⁶⁷ Bradley admitted that for some reason, the Russian soldiers seemed to believe that he was the leader of their particular group and he was always the one being interrogated when the group was stopped. When the men were walking through Europe, these constant interviews confused and bothered Bradley, but looking back years later, he finally realized that the Russians had assumed that he was the group's leader. Bradley, "Interview," 27.

bewildered group that this was a collection center. From here, the men would take a train to Odessa and from there a ship would return them to Allied lines.

Hardly believing that their ordeal was over, Bradley and the others allowed themselves to be herded onto a flat car. The men spent most of the trip believing that there had been a mistake and that there was no way they were really headed home. Others feared a German attack against the train and prepared to flatten themselves on the ground to avoid gun fire and bombs. At one point, the men even discussed the best way to jump from a train. Wandering in the wilderness was preferable to getting shot or recaptured for some of the men. Despite the various fears, the worst enemy the men faced was the cold. The cars they rode were meant for cargo and had not been designed for human passengers. Consequently there was no insulation and the men huddled together for warmth. However, soon even that was not enough and they resorted to using plywood, tarpaulin or anything else they could find as blankets. By the time they arrived at the next station, the men looked more like a pile of garbage than actual human beings.

Bradley and the others had been told they would need to switch trains part of the way through their trip to Odessa. They stopped in a small town and were moved to their next vehicle. The new car they were loaded onto was absolutely gorgeous. It was the first train that Bradley had been on since being captured that had been designed and furnished with humans in mind. There were large piles of fresh straw for the men to sleep on and a furnace in the center of each car to help the men warm up. And, best of all, none of the cars were overcrowded. Each only contained about twenty or so men and Bradley knew from bitter experience that a car such as this could hold far more than that. Everyone got their

own space and were all able to spread out for a nice nap within the car.

As the train neared Odessa, the temperature inside of the car steadily dropped. Despite the heat created by the furnace, many of the men started to feel the cold. Their car was not fully insulated after all. When the train stopped and the doors opened, Bradley saw the reason why. While they had been traveling, a snow storm had blown into Odessa and worked itself into a blizzard. The snow was falling fast and heavy, making it very difficult to see anything. The men quickly gathered together and followed their Russian guides away from the train station. Scared of getting separated after making it this far, the men stayed within hands reach of each other as they were led down the street to a large building. Heavily armed Russians stood outside of the building and watched as the former prisoners filed past. They were shown to a room where the men were expected to sleep on the floor together. At this point, Bradley and the others were used to this arrangement and quickly drifted off.

The next morning, Bradley expected to be woken early for roll call, but no such call came. Every day at Stalag III C had begun with roll call and it felt strange to be back under guard and not need to fall out. The men were left to their own devices until after lunch when the Russians took them outside, still under guard, to walk around several blocks for exercise before returning to the compound. Walking around Odessa, Bradley saw the destruction wrought by German fliers and saw the large piles of rubble that used to be buildings. For a moment, Bradley flashed back to Amiens and thought that he was expected to clear the area of rubble. When he paused to look, it was a Russian voice yelling for him to catch up, not a German one. Bradley had to remind himself that he was looking at Russian buildings, not German ones and no work was expected of him here. He quickly fell back in line. The

guards stayed with the men all day and all night both to act as protection and to ensure that the men could not leave. Negotiations were underway with the Americans and the British and the Russians did not want to lose their bargaining chips. Bradley and the others had survived Stalag III C and a trek across Europe in their pursuit for freedom. Now, they were stuck back under guard by a foreign power without any control over their own lives. Bradley and the others hoped that this really was the end of their ordeal and not the start of a new chapter.⁶⁸

Eventually, the men were given the good news; a ship was waiting in the harbor to take them back to their own lines. Negotiations had broken down between the Russians and the Americans, but the British, who also had former prisoners waiting to be returned, had sent a man to negotiate their return. The British were more successful than their American counterparts and the Russians told their captives to expect to leave shortly after meeting with the British representative. Bradley and the others were more than excited to leave, as bombings on Odessa had picked up again and they desperately wanted to escape before they became a part of the rubble covering the city.

The next day, all of the men were marched from the building they had been staying in and were brought down to the docks. On their way there, they passed a large, gleaming ship. The Russians told them, filled with pride, that that vessel was going to take Premier Stalin to Yalta to meet with other officials. Next to the Russian ship was the British liner that was to take the men home.⁶⁹ Even though it was not as new nor as shiny, Bradley and the others believed that their ship was more magnificent than whatever vehicle Stalin chose to cross the Black Sea in.

⁶⁸ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 100-102.

⁶⁹ Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 103

The trip itself was relatively uneventful and after more than a day at sea, the ship finally docked at Naples, Italy. British officers soon took charge of the men and checked them over. The men were all interviewed and given medical exams and then fed. During the exam, those with the worst medical cases were immediately separated and flown to hospitals in the U.S. to give them the best shot of surviving. The rest of the men were forced to wait for a ship that would return them to America. The GIs took advantage of the brief holiday and went off to explore Pompeii. Bradley, however, could not join them because he had cut his foot and it had become infected, making it very difficult to walk. He instead spent several days in bed, resting up and taking medicine to kill the infection.⁷⁰

Several days after their arrival in Naples, an American ship arrived to take the men home.⁷¹ Once aboard, the captain of the ship spoke over the loud speaker and explained the situation to the men. The ship would be sailing alone across the Atlantic alone and would not be a part of a convoy. Many of the German U-boats that normally would have threatened them had already been destroyed by the Allies and those that still survived would not dare attack such a large ship. Regardless, the captain was going to make the run as fast as possible as this would also decrease the likelihood of attack and would not stop for any men who fell overboard. The ship would not be stopping for anything, so everyone that wanted to return to the US had best stay on the ship. For the entire trip, the men got nervous whenever the ship hit a wave, fearing that they would be thrown overboard and abandoned in the ocean.

Eventually, the ship made it back to the United States, with all of the men it had left Italy with, and everyone quickly

⁷⁰ Ibid., 105

⁷¹ Bradley, "Interview," 29.

disembarked. Bradley and the others were again loaded onto trains and taken to various camps to be processed. Bradley ended up at Fort Meade in Maryland where he was interviewed again, this time by Americans, and then given a furlough to visit home. He took the train into DC and got off at his usual stop. Walking down New York Avenue to his boyhood home, Bradley felt isolated from all of the people he passed. None of these people had watched people get blown apart by both Allied and Axis bombs in Europe. They would never know the joy of winning the meat lottery and finding that one scrap of meat at the bottom of their stew in the middle of Germany. And, Bradley was fairly certain, none of these people had ever been threatened with a machine gun for not drinking a vodka and gasoline cocktail. In short, none of these people had his war experiences, and although he could spend the rest of his life trying to explain it to them, they would never truly understand what he had gone through.⁷² Nothing could accurately convey all of his experiences to these strangers and no matter how hard he tried, a gap would always exist between him and civilians. For the rest of his life, Bradley tried to bridge this gap by talking and writing about his experiences. He published multiple books filled with his writings and poems through which he tried to convey all that he had seen, heard, smelled, touched and tasted. Short of bringing people back in time with him, this was the closest that Bradley could get people to what he experienced and Bradley was determined to share all that he knew.⁷³

⁷² Bradley, *Aid Man!*, 105-107

⁷³ Bradley, "Interview," 30-31.

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