Appendix D

SEAWEED'S STORY

— Life in a Stalag Luft —

Lieutenant James W. Alwood ("Seaweed"), Pilot, 34th Troop Carrier Squadron, Captain Sam W. Suttle, and Lieutenant Frank E. Hayden, Navigator, were detached from the 315th to the IX Troop Carrier Command's Pathfinder Group and were captured by the Germans when their plane was shot down while dropping supplies near Bastogne during the Battle of the bulge in December 1944. After their release in 1945, "Seaweed" wrote this narrative about their experience in a German POW camp.

Captain Sam Suttle told me [Seaweed] about "Pathfinder". I didn't really want to begin with, but Sam said that there would be promotions. Sam and I got along great and had flown together once in a while. Finally, I just said "All right."

We trained with new navigation electronics, and were supposed to drop Pathfinder paratroopers to mark the drop zones before the main lifts came in As D-Day approached, our base was sealed - if you were off the base, you couldn't get back on, and if you were on, you couldn't get off. There was no outgoing mail, no telephone calls, absolutely no contact with the outside world.

On the night of the invasion, or rather the night before the invasion, we took off in flights of three and dropped the Pathfinder paratroopers, whose job was to set up Ts, lights and other navigational aids around Ste. Mere Eglise to guide the main groups of aircraft to their assigned drop zones. After doing that they were supposed to go out in the area and raise as much heck as possible.

We dropped our people a little after midnight. I was the co-pilot, flying the airplane from the right seat due to the particular formation we were in. As we were crossing the Channel, we could see tracers and anti-aircraft fire from the ground and it looked like a solid wall. Sam Suttle, the pilot, and I were looking at each other, wondering how we would get through. When we got to the shoreline, it was quiet, except for some tracers. As we continued in letting down to our drop altitude of 800 feet, we saw an aircraft hit and on fire going in. It bounced off the ground two or three times, and finally exploded. The plane was not from our group.

While we were going in to drop our troops, we could hear gunfire from the ground. Our navigator, Frank Hayden, couldn't see out, but could hear it and said over the intercom, "Sounds like there's a war on someplace." Frank was always real cool under fire.

We dropped our troops and as we were going out I noticed that the lead ship of the formation was going slower than usual for some reason. We were on the outside of the turn and I had to throttle back to keep from overrunning him. I still wonder how the guy on the inside kept from stalling. But we got out of there and into a cloud layer and back to England. None of our planes were knocked down, but we had taken a lot of hits. After that, we flew about two or three days without much sleep, flying into France. They gave us some pills to keep us awake. Most of us didn't take them because we thought that they would interfere with our mechanical skills and judgement, and would rather be a little sleepy and tired. I didn't know anybody who used them.

Then there was the Holland drop, Operation MARKET GARDEN, which ended up to be such a fiasco. I was on leave in the United States and arrived back the day of the drop, so I lucked out and didn't have to go. In addition to the American, British, and Polish paratroopers lost, we lost a lot of aircraft and men in our outfit, as had many other groups.

After things settled down for a while, we flew missions into Holland where we flew into fields just a few miles from the enemy lines. We flew in troops and munitions. It was kind of nerve-racking because you could get shot up on takeoff but fortunately nobody was shot down.

After MARKET GARDEN we returned to our "normal" duties; hauling freight and passengers, and trying to keep up with Patton. He was going so fast that by the time we got the fuel up to where he was supposed to be, he was gone and he had to stop and wait for more fuel.

And then came the Battle of the Bulge. Our troops trapped in and near Bastogne were surrounded by Germans and were running out of food and ammunition. Our Pathfinder Group was to re-supply them, but the weather wasn't cooperating. Finally, after three days of waiting for the weather to clear, we

were told that we were going in, despite the bad weather and fog. Our instructions: "If you're on instruments, drop at 1,000 feet; if you are in the clear, go down to 200 feet .... you will be facing a 40 MPH head wind over the target, and we don't want the supplies to fall into the hands of the Germans."

On December 23, 1944, we took off. We were hoping that the weather would mean that we would have to fly on instruments because we knew that we'd be shot at – all the better that they would not be able to see us. As it turned out, it was clear as a bell, so we knew we were going to drop at 200 feet. Intelligence didn't have everything quite right; our initial point was laid out on a road and railroad. They were some ten miles from the drop zone and we briefed that they were in our hands, while they were actually held by the Germans. They really worked us over going in. It sounded like hail hitting the airplane. Hayden called up to us, "Say, can you give me some help with the check points?" I answered, "Frank, I can't see anything but tracers coming up." He reassured us that we were on target.

To drop our cargo, we had to slow to about 120 MPH. With the head wind we were down to a ground speed of about 70 MPH. We were kind of like "sitting ducks." C-47 transports were not protected by armor, self-sealing tanks, or guns. Consequently, the Germans didn't have much trouble hitting us at our speed and altitude, and, as we were dropping our cargo, one engine was shot out. Since we were only a few hundred feet in the air, we could see the Germans who were shooting at us. I was looking at three of them and could almost see the color of their eyes. It was a helpless feeling knowing that we couldn't return their fire. After diving a little bit to gain airspeed, we leveled off.

Before we had taken off from England, Sam and I flipped a coin to see who would fly the airplane. Sam won and I was sitting in the right seat, sitting there with nothing much to do, except watch all that stuff coming at us. Sam couldn't get his chest belt fastened. He turned over the controls to me and left the cockpit. Then, as we were turning away from the target, the other engine was shot out.

Sam told Frank, "We're going down, we lost the other engine." Frank had a cigar in his mouth and had been plotting our return course. All I heard were the words, "Oh shit!." He was cool as usual and sounded more disgusted that, anything else. Frank got up, went to the back of the plane, and braced himself I looked for a place to land and headed for a level spot up ahead. I thought that putting her down would be a "piece of cake." I had the plane level at 1 0 feet above the ground and was down to about 60 MPH. I had the gear up and suddenly, I saw nothing ahead of me. The spot that I had chosen to put the plane down on had dropped off into a canyon. This was not visible from the air at our low altitude because of the distorted depth perception caused by the snow cover. By that time I was only a few feet off of the ground I knew that if I tried to land, the plane would slide down the slopes of the canyon, picking up speed until it crashed into the trees at the bottom. That would injure, if not kill, us all. I elected to stay in the air and try to get over the brow of the hill.

I was able to hold her in the air and keep holding her, even though we were touching the ground. I thanked God we were still in the air. The last thing I remember was that the airspeed indicator read 60 MPH and we really weren't supposed to be flying, but I got her over the crest of the hill, and followed the slope down. I managed to get the airspeed up to 140 MPH and saw the trees ahead of me. I decided at that speed to try to go through the tops, knowing that I would probably stall if I tried to go over them. As we went through the tops and started up the other side of the valley, I aimed for a spot, a little knoll, up ahead, and prepared to land.

1 was barely above the ground and getting ready to set her down, and I was at that critical point where my airspeed was gone - 1 was committed. I could see that it was going to be a good landing, when I heard a loud voice right behind the pilots' compartment shout, "PULL UP"'

I had been under the impression that everyone on the plane had gone into the back end of the plane to prepare for the landing, only to find that Sam was standing behind me, perhaps to help. From his vantage point, standing up and looking down through the cockpit window, it evidently looked to him that 1 was closer to the ground than 1 really was.

Without the possibility of questioning his judgement, I followed his command, thinking that he saw something that I couldn't. As I pulled back the yoke, the plane stalled and we made a hard landing - so hard that the two engines just dropped off of the plane. Even though I was belted in,

wearing a flak vest and steel helmet, my head hit the instrument panel and I was dazed.

Naturally, the first things we feared were fire and explosion. As I was getting unbuckled, we decided that the best way out was through the escape hatch above the cockpit. Sam popped the hatch and was half way out, then quickly dropped back in. I was wondering what was the matter with him when I saw a German machine gun positioned at the top of the hill. The bullets were coming through the windshield and I then understood why Sam changed his mind. I jumped up and ripped half of my pants off on the throttle quadrant as 1 went to the back of the plane. I was flat on the floor, my leg felt like it was broken, though it was only badly bruised. My back ached and it turned out that my lumbar joint separated (this required civilian surgery after the war.) I lay there, trying to figure out what to do next.

We had eight people on board; the three extra were cargo pushers. One of them got hit by a piece of metal shot off of the airplane by a bullet. He was running up and down the airplane shouting, "I'm hit! I'm hit!" The wound wasn't bad; he had a trickle of blood running down his head. The strange thing was that every time he went by or turned around, the bullets seemed to follow him. Finally when he again went by Frank, he tripped him and told him to stay down or he would really get hit. The crew chief was near the door and a voice filled the fuselage, "Hey Sarge, go out there and tell 'em we give up." 1 didn't think that he would do it. This was confirmed when he replied "No sir, don't think I'll go out there, they'll kill me." The crew 'chief found a ten-foot long bamboo pole in the plane and he put a non-GI white handkerchief on the end. He waved it out the window and the firing stopped A German corporal came to the door, "Hands oop!- Raus!" and we did.

The Germans took us out through the back of the plane - the cargo doors were always removed for cargo drops. They lined us up by the tail assembly and started searching us. We were so close to our own lines that our infantry was shooting at the Germans while they were searching us. Their bullets were hitting the plane and everything but the Germans, shouted, "Down, down down." We all lay in the snow until the firing stopped. They took us out of there real fast but not before they looted the airplane of the cartons of cigarettes I had passed out to the crew before takeoff.

The mission was a fiasco right from the beginning: the field we had taken off from was not our own field - it was about a 100 miles south. Several outfits were taking off from the same one and we were weathered in. So, Sam and I flew back to our own field to pick up flak vests, cigarettes, candy bars, and I other things that we took with us on a mission just in case we were forced down someplace. We stayed there that night and loaded everything in a weapons carrier so we could drive back to the field the next day. When we got up in the morning, the weapons carrier was gone! We learned later that a couple of paratroopers who had "celebrated" a little too much the night before "borrowed" it. A few hours had gone by due to the delay and by the time, we got back to the field everyone else was taking off. We passed out the cigarettes had a quick briefing, and hopped in the plane. 1 had a crew list with me which I stuffed into my pocket along with a small book in which I had jotted down German radio frequency ranges on which we could home in when they were not being jammed. When we were shot down, and before they searched us, 1 got rid of the little black book. (I didn't want to take any chances with my other "little black book," so 1 had left it at the base.) I had forgotten about the crew list, and 1 became really worried because I'd figure they'd check it and I'd really be in trouble when we got to the prison camp.

Out of the thirty-nine aircraft of our Pathfinder group that took off that day, four were shot down at the drop zone. Due to battle damage, thirty-three aircraft had to land at the nearest Allied airfields in France. Only two made it back to our base in England.

After searching us, the Germans separated the officers (myself, Sam, and Frank) from the five enlisted men. They took us in one direction, the enlisted men in another, and we never saw them again. They took the officers to what they called their "control point," about a half of a mile away. That's where they began their interrogation with Sam, who we had to carry out of the airplane. He had injured his back, and we thought had possibly broken it, and had a probable broken knee. The Germans parked him on a hay pile in a barn. That was the last time I saw him until a 315th reunion in New Orleans some 40 years later.

From the control point they took us to a building. But then our artillery started and shells began landing around the house. Frank was sitting on a little table reading a magazine (surprise, surprise). There was a window behind him and a shell landed close by, blowing in the window. Frank, his usual self, just said, "I guess I better get on the

floor. When the shelling was over, the Germans brought us out of the house and took us down the road. As we walked, I saw what must have been some 30 or 40 German soldiers piled up like cord wood. It was below freezing and they weren't going to deteriorate. I have never forgotten that sight.

The Germans moved us further from the front. Eventually, we stopped at a farmhouse. They fed us there and it turned out that it was the last thing approaching a real meal that we had until we were liberated almost six months later.

Sometimes there were quite a few of us and other times only a handful. At one time there were some three to four hundred of us, mostly ground troops, guys who had been trapped in the Bulge. They were infantrymen and artillerymen, and most were in pretty bad shape because of the cold. Some had frozen feet and other maladies from exposure. The weather was some of the worst that the region had experienced, with a lot of snow and temperatures below freezing. We talked to the enlisted men and we learned that our chances of getting back to our lines were pretty slim.

At one point the column came to a fork in the road. One road went to the right and the other continued on. We walked a short distance and finally somebody hollered, "Hey! Where is everybody?" It was just like the "Keystone Cops" – the majority of the column had turned to the right and the rest of us marched straight ahead. Would you believe that we actually ran to catch up to our captors?

We slept in barns or bombed out buildings without windows. We had no blankets or covering, only what we were wearing when we were shot down. I thanked God that I wore my GI boots rather than my oxfords as I usually did. Frank had worn a parka, but they took that from him at the plane. We seldom, if ever, had a chance to take our boots off. We never had much to eat at any time. We were fed once a day, a bowl of very thin and watery soup, and were always hungry.

While we were some 15 miles from the front, our column had to wait for a column of German tanks. We were being marched down a hill and at the bottom was a bridge that the German tanks were crossing. When the bridge was clear, we marched down the hill, across the bridge, and up another hill on the other side. When we were half way up the hill, our fighters spotted the tanks.

They were P-38s and P-47s, and they started working over the tanks. We had a ringside view of all of this. When they were finished, they left except three P-47s. They began to circle us. There were some seven or eight officers in the column, all the rest were enlisted men. Frank and I were the only air Corps officers in the group, so the infantry and artillery officers turned to us "Do you think they know who we are? Do you think they know that we aren't the enemy?" All we could answer was, "I don't know."

Pretty soon they left. I could see them dropping down behind the hill and lining up with the column, so I knew what they had in mind. They didn't recognize us as Americans as they came on, line astern, popping over the hill and started firing. Everybody took off. We just happened to be in a curve in the road, and the first plane made one pass and quit firing. The other two didn't fire at all, no doubt realizing that we were prisoners of war.

We had scattered all over. While diving through a hedgerow I cut my. forehead on barbed wire. A lump appeared that would remain with me for a number of years. The Germans rounded us up and we were again on the road. I was impressed with the large hunks of asphalt that the .50 caliber bullets had blown out of the road. A German guard shouted, "For every guard that was killed, I'll kill an officer." An artillery officer pointed at Frank and me saying, "Air Corps ... Air Corps." If it was a joke, it was pretty poor and we didn't feel too good about it. Fortunately, none of the guards was hurt, and that was a threat that we could put behind us.

Occasionally we traveled by train or bus, but because of the blown up bridges and railroads, and the condition of the roads, we couldn't ride far, so we went mostly by foot. One night we were parked in a building that was pie, shaped, between a road and a railroad. There were only fifteen to twenty of us at that time. There were some Mosquito bombers flying around, waiting for somebody to fire at them so they could bomb them. Then a bunch of German tanks came rumbling by, so dose that we could practically have touched them. A Mosquito spotted them and went for them with bombs and machine guns. He hit .he building we were in and splinters were flying everywhere. We, of course, were all down on the floor but there was nothing to hide under. I don't know whether he destroyed any of the tanks or not. When we got into Germany they put three to four hundred of us in a

church with a big, high ceiling. It was attached to a prison. The guards simply locked us in and left. Then B-17s began flying overhead and soon bombs were falling. No bombs hit the church, but some were pretty dose and the building was shaking pretty good. The poor GIs who had a rough time because of frozen limbs or wounds were so frightened that they were running around the place like cornered rats. Frank and I got under a church pew figuring that it might break the fall of whatever might come off of the ceiling. Fortunately, nobody was hurt. It's difficult to choose what was my worst experience on the march, but looking back after all these years, it was probably that night trapped like a rat in the church. The fact that we were locked in, and that it was so crowded made it doubly frightening.

Finally we arrived in Frankfurt, where serious interrogation began. After being deloused, and having had our pictures taken, we were placed in solitary confinement. The cells were small rooms, eight feet long, four or five feet wide, with a small window high up on the end wall. The door was solid except for the guard's peephole. They had taken everything from me, so I couldn't doodle or do anything else to pass the time. During the middle of each night they took us out, one at a time, and across the street, where the interrogations were carried out.

The first thing my interrogator told me was that in order to prove that I was not a spy, I had to tell him anything he wanted to know. I gave him only my name, rank, and serial number. He kept telling me that I had to prove that I wasn't a spy; and my reply would be the same. The process became slightly modified when he changed tack, "You have to prove you are not a spy. We know the letters on your airplane and if you tell us they're the same, we'll know you're not a spy." Well, I perked up when I heard that. There were no letters on our plane as it was a replacement, ours was out for routine maintenance. So I thought that I would see how far I could go with this, and kept giving him my name, rank, and serial number. He got mad and told me ”Go back to your cell and rot!"

During the middle of the following night they again took me for interrogation. The interrogator brought out a book on the 315th Troop Carrier Group as thick as a Sears and Roebuck catalog. He evidently didn't know that I had transferred to the Pathfinder Group, and proudly said, "See how much information we have?" He started by telling me where I had lived, where I went to flying school, the missions I had flown, and where I had been in the service. My thought was "My gosh," but then you consider how much of the information, but not all, could have been obtained from newspapers. I guess that I should not have been so surprised, but it was kind of astounding how much they did have. He had the names of all the officers, and most of the enlisted men. He said that since there were so many enlisted men it took longer to obtain that information. He told me what frequencies we used on certain missions. Once I said, "Well, you have more information than I do." Then he would go back to the letters on our airplane and I'd tell him, "I can't tell you that."

He didn't know that I was a Pathfinder, so I let him keep thinking that I was in the 315th. I was also worried about the crew list that had taken away from me when we were shot down. I'd thought that it might eventually show up and I'd be in real trouble. But it never did, and I don't know what happened to it.

Sometimes we'd just get to talking about other things. Once in a while he'd give me a German cigarette. He wasn't such a bad guy and he spoke perfect King's English. I asked him what he had done before the war. "I was selling machinery in England." I then asked what he would be doing after the war and he replied with a grin, "I hope I'll be selling machinery in England. I also asked him who would win the war, and he said, "Oh, you're going to win, probably in six months." He was right on that count.

He kept asking if I wanted to go to the main prison camp with Frank. I told him, "That'd be real nice." He then would say that I would have to give him the information he was looking for. "Well, I guess I'll have to stay here for a while." They had let Frank go around the second or third day. I was there for a total of eight and finally caught up with him at the prison camp.

While being transported to the camp, I was again subject to bombing and strafing by Allied airplanes. Once there were. a few of us, less than ten, guarded by a couple of elderly Viennese. We were put on a bus and told, "If people come after you, jump out the windows and we'll pick you up later." They told us that they didn't like doing this work and that their families were being held hostage in Vienna. I felt kind of sorry for them.

On another leg of the journey, we were transported in railroad freight cars (one of the few times we traveled by train). As night fell, we were in a Berlin marshaling yard. The guards locked the doors from the outside, and took off. That night, British bombers raided Berlin. The freight

car was shaken violently, and rocked, but it did not turn over as we feared it would. We weren't hit, and were disappointed that we were unable to view the surroundings after the raid. In the morning we were on our way again

I arrived at Stalag Luft I, located in Barth, Germany, on the Baltic, on January 17, 1945, 25 days after I was captured. There were 10,000 prisoners there, mostly airmen.

As we traveled across Germany we noticed signs with large red letters saying, "ESCAPE IS NOT A SPORT!" We didn't know what that meant until we reached the prison camp. They told us that the Germans had at first made a sort of sport out of escape attempts. If you managed to get outside the camp fence before they caught you, they figured it was one on them. But if they caught you inside the fence, it was one week in solitary confinement. But when the war started going against Germany, they decided escape was no longer a sport and they'd shoot anybody trying to get out. There were many attempts made, but we were told that only one man, a British airman, had ever gotten out of camp.

The guy who dreamed up the show "Hogan's Heroes" must have been a prisoner in a Stalag Luft, because our camp looked pretty much the same. However, it was not very comical and the German officers and guards were not Colonel Klink or Sergeant Schultz. The barracks on the show were almost exact replicas of where we lived. At night. guard dogs ran through the camp and underneath the barracks, growling and snarling, not like the friendly ones on the television show.

I had hoped that we would get better food than we had been getting but it wasn't much better. Our food consisted of one small loaf of black bread for seven men and a thin, watery soup. A lucky one might find an occasional piece of horsemeat in theirs, but such "prizes" were few and far between. It was usually just a piece of rutabaga or potato ... very thin. It wasn't much, but when we got our Red Cross packages once a week it helped a lot, even though the Germans insisted that four men share each parcel, instead of a parcel to each man as protocol dictated. This was the only time we saw dairy products of any sort - powdered milk and sometimes some cheese. We had to live off the German fare and that got pretty tough.

The parcels helped but, for my first two months, we didn't get any Red Cross parcels. A lot of the guys were falling over at morning and evening roll calls because of malnutrition. The Germans told us that the parcels weren't coming through because our fighters and bombers were shooting up the roads and railroads, which was probably true. We found out after we were liberated that there were 15,000 parcels in a storage area near the camp. But, in the meantime, we tried to keep in physical shape just in case an opportunity to make a break came.

One day, the COs came around and wanted to identify the biggest, strongest volunteers in each barracks. I naturally volunteered and discovered that when the time came, the volunteers would rush the guard towers and take them over.

We later learned that Hitler thought that if we were all cremated and sent back home in cans, the bombing might stop. Supposedly Goering was the one who stopped that idea from being carried out.

Nothing was easy in Stalag Luft I. Each barracks was given seven lumps of coke in the morning and this was to last for 24 hours, for both heat and cooking. They did not last very long. Everything was divided among the 21 men in our barracks. Once we had a can of Spam and it was divided 21 ways with everybody looking over the shoulder of the poor guy doing the cutting to make sure that all portions would be equal.

There was one fellow, I believe he was a bomber pilot who was wounded when he was shot down. They put a steel plate in his head, and that might have caused him to be a little unbalanced. When he got his ration, be wouldn't eat it until the other 20 guys had finished theirs. He would then eat his, with the 20 guys who were still hungry sitting there watching him. But no one interfered with him because we all felt sorry for him.

The Germans would spring a surprise search on the barracks, always looking for something specific. If we had something that we shouldn't have- had, but it wasn't what they were looking for, they'd ignore it! All they seemed to care about was what they had on their minds at the time.

We didn't get too many showers. I only remember getting one, and that was a cold one. They turned on the cold water just long enough for us to get wet. Then they turned it off just long enough for us to get soaped down (with what they called "soap"), then turned on the water for one more minute so we could rinse. It's surprising how long a minute is when you are standing

under cold water. One night, Frank and I used a barrel outside the barracks that had some water in it so we could get a little of the grime off of ourselves. We learned that it was a really tough way to take a bath in the middle of February

After a while we found out that the Russians were getting closer. Someone in the camp had a radio. I didn't know who, but a slip of paper would be sent around with the news; the front lines are at so-and-so, etc. If you were caught with it, you were supposed to swallow the paper.

Then one day we noticed a lot of traffic moving west... cars, people wagons, bicycles, and so forth. This went on for a few days and we knew something was up. Then one morning we woke up and all the Germans were gone! No guards or Germans at all! We were free, so we went out of the camp that day to see what was around us. We just went to the nearby Baltic shore. There, on the beach we saw two women and three infants. They looked as if they had a picnic on the beach – and then committed suicide. The German people were deathly afraid of the Russians; and some of them came to the camp to ask us to come and live with them, hoping, of course, that the Russians would leave the civilians alone. They knew that the Russians would rob and rape like many of the Germans did when they were going through Russia. There wasn't anything we could do to help them.

Sure enough, the Russians came the next day, May 1st. “May Day”, to them was like Christmas and they were celebrating. They were all drunk. We thought the guy leading tire tanks was a colonel, but it turned out that he was a corporal, and he was mad at us for not ripping up the camp. We had been told not to because the camp would be used for displaced persons, so we didn't do anything. So the Russians said we could go! Go where? Our Colonel talked to him and he said that he didn't care where we went, and we had two hours to get out. The Colonel told us to pack what we had, which wasn't much to speak of, and stand by, and he continued to talk to the corporal. In the meantime he told us to rip down the guard towers. About six hours later the Russian corporal sobered up and decided we could stay.

These troops were Mongolians, the spearhead of the Red Army. They carried machine guns and were on bicycles, on horse, on tanks, etc. You didn't mess with them! They were nuts for watches. They'd ask you what time it was and when you'd instinctively look at your watch, that is, if you managed somehow to keep it during your captivity, they'd put a gun in your ribs and take the watch. These were our Allies?

The following day, ethnic Russian soldiers came in and took over. They brought in a bunch of potatoes and, of course, we were hungry as heck, so we over-ate. I ate a bowl full of boiled potatoes, and they came up as soon as I got them down. I wasn't used to so much good food at one time.

On the radio that someone had in the camp we heard the BBC say that as soon as we Americans (and presumably, British) were liberated, aircraft would be sent to come in and take us out. But we sat there 15 days! In the meantime, some of the guys took off and somehow got in touch with our people to tell them where we were. We were talking to a General one day, waiting for the B-17s to come in and get us. He told us that he'd been up the last couple of days and nights getting the airlift organized because, "We didn't know you people were here."

We were taken to Camp Lucky Strike in France. There, we were given physicals, proper food, and fresh uniforms. From there we got on a boat and returned to the States.

We were sent to Santa Monica, CA, which was set up to receive prisoners of war. We were there for two months - what a holiday! Anything we wished for was provided. Then Frank and I headed home in my dad's Dodge coupe. Except for a run in with some policemen who seemed to be a little bitter against officers, we took turns driving day and night, and came home to civilian life.

Letter to William L. Brinson “Billy”

from Frank Hayden, May 23 1945 (France)

Dear Billy,

Hope you got the card I sent you from the P.O.W. camp but have doubts as the Kraut mail service is (or was) none too good. It was a disappointment to find you boys gone after getting out of Germany. We had been looking forward to seeing the old gang again and talking the situation over. Rumors give Trinidad or West Palm as your location but for lack of information, I'm using the old address, hoping that this will reach you without too much delay.

Seaweed and I have been together the whole time

since our little one-way trip last December. We are still in the dark as to Sam Suttle's whereabouts and condition, however, as we had to leave him in a German aid post when we were marched inland after crash landing. Sam was the only member of the crew to be injured - a badly wrenched or possibly fractured back. He didn't seem to be in too bad shape when we left him so we are hoping he is okay. Have been trying to get news of him but so far no luck. The "Weed" and I are in fine shape and are getting fat on this GI chow.

Stalag Luft I - Barth, Germany - that cheery little spot on the Baltic, has been our home for the past few months. The Russians arrived May 1st liberating us and two weeks later we were flown to this huge tent metropolis (an ex-POW, processing camp near the Channel in the Le Havre area) via B-17 of the Eighth Air Force.

Naturally, we were all quite happy to see the last of the Jerry guards, barbed wire, etc., and to be out of Germany completely. Now we're all anxiously looking forward to getting out of this damn continent completely and home.

Tents, crowded conditions, the inevitable chow lines, shot lines, etc., and that. going home tension make for a situation here that is far from ideal. We have been here ten days now which plus the two weeks waiting to be evacuated makes a total; of twenty-four days "prisoner of the Allies" time. But the weather is nice and the chow is making us fat while we are lying around and we'll be undoubtedly getting home sometime this summer so things are pretty rosy, comparatively speaking.

Two boys from the Group — Kenhoff and Joe Gejecki — showed up at Barth after your last do. They brought in some bad news of others that we know. I'm hoping that the crews of the planes he talked of got out and back. HB's radio operator and crew chief also came to Barth, but you probably have more dope on all this than I.

Well, Billy, it is getting dark and as all these tents are without lights scribbling must close. Hello to all the boys and please write soon giving me all the latest poop (use home address).

As ever,
Frank