

LOOK OUT BELOW!

By REV. (Lt. Col.) FRANCIS L. SAMPSON

To bring you up to date — Father Sampson, chaplain of the 101st Division, U.S. army paratroop corps, chuted into Normandy on D-Day and later into Holland where Nazi and American GIs faced each other in the closest battle action of World War II. Father Sampson, on an errand of mercy, drove his jeep into a Nazi patrol . . . to begin a new way of life as a prisoner of the Nazis.

Prisoners Of The Nazis

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A German lieutenant got into my jeep and told me to keep driving down to the bottom of the hill, where there was a little village.

The German soldiers there were having a time for themselves. They had broken into a small warehouse and were dragging the stuff out, smashing the canned goods against the wall, and looking through the other things to see if they wanted them. They had broken into a little school, had come out with musical instruments, and were blowing on the horns and beating the drums.

These men were either suffering from combat exhaustion (which sometimes affects men in this fashion) or they were drunk, or they were under the influence of drugs of some type.

The lieutenant took me aside and started questioning me, but I told him that name, rank, and serial number were all that could tell him. I had my division patch on my shoulder, however, and "got" clearly painted on the bumper of my jeep.

He seemed like a decent fellow and didn't press me any further. Then he took Adams aside and spoke to him for a few minutes. The lieutenant left us for a bit, presumably to call his commander about our capture.

As soon as he went, the soldiers started after the jeep. They threw out the two foot lockers of medical supplies and went through them, tossing sulfa drugs and penicillin into the ditch. I guessed that they might have real need of these things themselves before too many days had passed.

Chaplain Engel's Communion set was then tossed out, and a soldier took the chalice as a souvenir. I tried to rescue it without success.

Then they got the box of cookies my Aunt Millie had sent me for Christmas; they dove into these and made short work of them. It had taken considerable self-control to save those cookies for Christmas, and I felt like kicking myself now for not having eaten them as soon as they had arrived.

A mule-faced, boorish soldier grabbed my arm and yanked my wristwatch off. I told him that I was a priest, and an American captain and asked for it back. He just laughed. A couple of other soldiers began to argue with him, in my behalf I gathered, but without success.

I began calling for the German officer as loudly as I could. The fellow started to go away, but I followed him, still calling for the lieutenant. Finally, with what I took for German profanity, he handed my watch back to me.

(That was lesson number one in dealing with German soldiers. Yell at them, scream at them, get red in the face, distend your neck muscles, and be flushed with anger. The soft word never works. They seem to regard as weakness any order or demand that is not backed by the matted fist.)

The lieutenant returned and ordered my driver and me into an American half-track which they had apparently captured. We headed east.

The next fifteen days were to be miserable ones. The first several hours were to be interesting, however. Three young German soldiers in the half-track seemed decent young men. As one of them could speak some English, he became their interpreter. They all spoke about their families, showing me pictures of their parents, brothers and sisters, and, of course, their sweethearts.

All of them were Catholic and treated me with great respect. They wondered at a priest being in the army and said that although they had heard that their division had one chaplain (there are eighteen chaplains in a division in the American Army) none of them had seen him in two years of service.

Since I couldn't be sure that they were not after military information of some sort, I let them do the talking. They talked about everything during our five-hour trip.

I was amazed at their ignorance of the real issues of the war: How thoroughly the propaganda about the Jews and "American-British imperialism" had been swallowed.

On our way back to their rear we passed miles and miles of German armored vehicles and tanks moving westward. They

"Best look! The sun is out, perhaps you haven't heard the news. German all-weather planes have demolished the American and British aircraft during the last two days. Yes, it is the turning point; you Americans without your Air Force will be finished, don't you think?"

"I don't know," I said, not wishing to argue.

"You will see; you will see." Could he actually believe that the American Air Force could be destroyed by two German raids? I wondered. At any rate he was trying hard to believe it.

After this short interrogation our small group of about thirty Americans were marched the rest of the day and into the night until two a.m. when we were herded into a filthy barn on the edge of a Luxembourg village.

We remained there for about thirty hours. Despite my pounding on the door to demand food and water, the only response we got was an occasional laugh from the soldiers outside. I was the only officer in the group and knew that the men expected me to try to get their physical needs from the Germans. It was important that we maintain a degree of morale and discipline for lack of these things would give the German interrogators the opening they wanted.

About eleven p.m. the second night a German intelligence officer came to the door and called for me. He said that he had known that there was an officer in our group (which I knew was a lie), and that I would have received better treatment if he had.

He started his interrogation. When I told him that name, rank, and serial number were all I could give, as he well knew, he proceeded to tell me all about my outfit. My jeep had provided my regiment number. He spoke a bit about the history of the 101st Airborne Division, the part it played in Normandy and Holland, who our division commander was, and who our regimental commander was. He was a few months behind on that; he didn't know that Colonel Johnson had been killed in Holland.

After he had interrogated the rest of the men, he called me back in, saying he couldn't find our children, Wolfgang and Tania. This was taken out of the Church in Germany.



Both Allied and Nazi forces captured prisoners in hundreds in the close combat of the continental North Europe fighting. While Father Sampson was held captive in a stalag, U.S. troops captured Nazi treasurer Franz Xaver and his son Franz Jr. in May 1945.

the Sappitzze. That is the tallest, that it was the only stable and sensible organization in a world gone mad. The Church in Germany came through the war, and without any apparent effort to draw me out. I didn't get it, unless I was simply being used as a soundboard for his emotional jag; he probably got some relief from vocalizing his frustrations and homesickness.

He finished by telling me that he was sick of war, and that he could quite possibly be executed if the Gestapo knew what he had told me. I actually felt sorry for the poor guy.

In the morning we started to march again. No breakfast. No lunch. We stopped late that night at a restaurant, supply depot and were each given a cold boiled potato and a small green apple. By this time we had joined about four hundred other prisoners and were split into two groups. That night we slept in a tiny church and were crowded enough to keep fairly warm.

Again no breakfast the following morning. We marched until dark. No noon meal and no supper. This time we stayed in a large, dismantled factory and slept close together trying to keep warm, for the weather was bitterly cold.

The next day American planes came over, literally thousands of them. In tremendous waves they came from the west from the south, from the north. They looked like great swarms of bees. I'd have given anything at that time to see the face of the interrogator who had said that the German all-weather planes had knocked out the American Air Force.

The American prisoners tried to hide their elation from the guards. We passed a long German motorized column moving up to the front, and as we did so, some P-40s began to strafe the mechanized troops and vehicles. The weather had cleared perfectly.

Following our guards we due spoon out our supper, skirted the road for the next several miles. What a treat! I have never had those planes did one vehicle after another went up in flames. The German casualties were so great that we

Then a comparison of the various religions of the world.

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beaten and had lost the war when she was driven out of Africa. America was more civilized than Germany, but Germany was more cultured than America, England was the real cause of the war, Russia the real menace to future civilization.

Germans were home-loving, kindly, and unwarlike people, but the Nazi regime was ambitious, insanely so. Germany might have won the war had its stupid leaders been content to sleep and would like to talk with me. He offered me coffee and bread and cheese. I said that I should like some very much if he were offering it to all the men with me. That I considered it very unfair treatment of prisoners not to give them any food or water for nearly thirty-six hours.

He called a German soldier and had one loaf of sliced black bread and a pail of water sent in to our men. He regretted that no supplies or provisions had come through yet for prisoners; we were too close to the front, and his own men had barely enough for themselves.

He assured me that at our next stop we would well fed, lie that was to be repeated by other German officers many times and was to get very monotonous during the next two weeks.

For three hours until dawn the interrogator—amazed me with the strangest monoglotic language I had ever heard. He had been a merchant in Hamburg, had a family, and delighted in showing me a hundred or more pictures of his wife and children, relatives, friends, and so on.

"See here is my wife, Inge, with Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland; or had they invaded England, which could have been done without great losses, or had Russia been left alone until England was defeated. Then a comparison of the various religions of the world.

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gave me a look that said he was afraid of German reprisals against us.

We had walked from Belgium all the way across Luxembourg, and on Christmas Day we walked without breakfast or lunch to Prum, Germany. We were herded (how more than eight hundred of us) into the large auditorium of a good-sized school were Hitler's and Goering's pictures covered the front wall.

We were told that we were going to be fed, that the food was being prepared. We expected that even the Nazis might remember that this was Christmas night. Our supper consisted of one half of a boiled turnip, a half slice of bread, and a cup of warm water. Nothing else.

NEXT WEEK —
Worms in the soup.

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