

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 he was captured by a Nazi patrol, marched to a prisoner-of-war camp, liberated by vodka drinking Russians and, in this week's chapter, taken to American lines and home.

Vodka Toasts And Home

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Every Russian soldier received a ration of vodka every day, and some of them had been able to find some liquor too. Accordingly the majority of them were pretty drunk most of the time.

While in this condition some of them had taken groups of Americans into the woods and had stripped them of all their valuables. Especially, did they prize the American wrist watches, which most of our men had managed to conceal by wearing them around their ankles. Then they forced Americans to dig their latrines.

Finally, several Russian soldiers came into our barracks where we had our sick. They forced our men to drink vodka with them and demanded all their cigarettes.

What I feared more than anything else was that some American might bust a Russian on the nose and that these "filles" undisciplined as they were, might turn a machine gun loose on us. We had come too long a way to lose men now.

I went down to see the Russian colonel who was in charge of the camp but found that he was drunk too. We were beginning to feel much less secure under the Russian than we had under the Germans, and we were wondering what we could do about it.

On the 2nd of May, 1945, an American colonel, who had been in a Belgian camp near Berlin, arrived at the camp and took command of the American compound. He was astounded at the treatment we were receiving from the Russians.

Although he protested vigorously, it seemed that we had no troops in the Russian army just weren't expected to be disciplined troops, and the damage to our sick and wounded became critical.

On the 4th of May an American captain drove up to the camp in a jeep. He received a rousing welcome from the men, for they thought that he would be leading trucks in to take us back to the American lines. From there, we felt sure, we could almost see the Statue of Liberty. However, the captain was on a special mission and had an interpreter for Russian and German with him.

The colonel asked the captain to take me back to the American lines with him so that I could explain our situation to some one who could do something about it. The colonel had strictly forbidden any American to leave the camp, for such were General Eisenhower's orders.

Nevertheless, each day a couple of dozen men would light out on their own towards the American lines, which were about eighty miles away in a direct line but almost a hundred and fifty miles by road.

The whole American compound was becoming quite surly over the delayed freedom men were beginning to fight among themselves, and our trouble with the Russians seemed almost inevitable.

Once on the road, the captain told me what his next mission was. He had been sent in to pick up a German scientist before the Russians got him. The German was a man of considerable importance, and the captain was determined that nothing was going to stop him from doing what he was sent to do.

The German slept soundly all night, probably the first restful night he had had since the Russians took this little city. I was glad to see as we went through the town that few, if any, had been as badly maltreated and humiliated as had I.

On the third day we met a group of ten American soldiers who had been prisoners and were now trying to get to the American lines. They had been having a rough time of it and were pretty hungry. The captain had a couple of G rations in the jeep.

The first of the maligned women was now accompanied by a certain was then. They even ate the crackers (known as "dog biscuits") and the soggy spaghetti (known to the soldier as "fish balls").

The captain then stopped a large wagon which liberated Poles were using to get home in, and he looked the wagon over. He was looking for the jeep I protested taking the wagon from the Poles. But the captain said he would have a better chance of getting the German scientist back to the American lines if he were mixed in with these air corps men, for as we approached the American lines, Russian interrogator officers got tougher and tougher, and passes were required.

He also reminded me that I was just a passenger on this trip, that he was running this show, and that getting his man back was the most important consideration. I liked his frankness, which was firm but not disrespectful.

With only four of us in the jeep, he said, one of us would likely be questioned; but with a wagonload of men probably only himself and whoever was driving would be questioned.

I felt very sorry for the Poles, but they were not as disheartened as I had expected they would be; apparently nothing could spoil their joy at their liberation.

We spent three days covering the last seventy miles of Russian-occupied territory. Every five miles or so we were stopped by the suspicious Russian police. The captain and myself would always go together to see the local commandant to get a pass.

This procedure usually involved drinking several vodka highballs with the commandant and discussing various aspects of the war, we were very liberal with our compliments to the Red Army's role in this final victory, and they seemed as pleased with the flattery as children at Christmas. Our interpreter apparently employed just the same time we finally let ourselves in through a window. We walked in the apartment for about four hours before our man finally showed up.

The captain stood behind the door as the German inserted his key into the lock. When he stepped in, he felt a forty-five stick in his back. The interpreter told the German to get into the American uniform that had been brought along for this purpose. As the German complied, he was told that he was going back to the American lines with us.

He was greatly relieved at that and said that he would be glad to cooperate in every way we had feared that we were Russians. I must confess that I was getting quite a schooling this out of my accidental participation in this adventure. Still, the whole thing impressed me as being even more "corny" than the usual Hollywood script.

The captain thought that we might more quickly reach the American lines by going south through Berlin. However, when we arrived at the outskirts of that city, it became clear to us that we would not get very far that way before our German friend would be interrogated by the Russian police who were stopping and questioning everyone.

We turned around and headed northwest, towards the Elbe river. Our first night we did not stop to sleep but caught what catnaps we could by taking turns driving. We stuck to the back roads as much as possible. The second night we stopped at an abandoned farm house, hiding the jeep in the barn.

Liquor of all kinds was flowing freely, and the table was loaded with "fried chicken," very well cooked, but too greasy for my paltry stomach. The man was almost too drunk to sign his name to the pass which he was now willing to grant.

But the girl kept telling him not to, for she said she didn't



Generals Eisenhower, Taylor and Ridgeway preside at presentation of Distinguished Unit Citation to the 101st Airborne Division at Camp Mourmelon, France, March 15, 1945. It was the first time an entire Division won the DUC award.

news that this was VE day. The captain turned his German scientist over to the G-2, and we parted.

The next day, after another king-sized steak dinner, we were sent to Ninth Army Headquarters at Hildesheim. There I was able to contact the Ninth Army G-2 and tell him the whole story of the situation at Stalag II-A. He said that General Eisenhower had had similar reports from other Stalags.

He said that negotiations were being held with the German prisoners of war immediately. The captain turned his G-2 fixed me up with a clean uniform and offered me the facilities of his quarters to take a shower, shave, and shampoo. That evening I flew to Paris.

The plane that flew us to Paris had six liberated Frenchmen aboard. They could scarcely control their joy at going home after those five long years of imprisonment.

I was afraid that the others might have gone on without me, presuming that I had been unable to get the pass. They were still waiting, however, and I saw the airman wink at each other as I stepped toward the jeep.

We finally arrived at Ludwigslust and were stopped for the last time at the bridge over the canal which separated the Russian sector from the American. The Russian guard stopped us and demanded another pass to get the American side.

The American guard on the other side of the bridge saw our predicament; he walked to the middle of the bridge and called to his Russian counterpart to meet him there. They went into a big discussion, and while they were talking, the captain stepped on the gas and over we went to the American side.

The Russian became quite excited and shouted for us to come back; but Uncle Joe himself on a bonded knee wouldn't have been able to accomplish that. Now we were really free!

The 82nd Airborne Division was occupying this sector, and we found that besides being one of the best fighting outfits in the world, they were also the most hospitable. Captain Larkin (fully CG of Baker Company) of the 82nd, took us right down to the mess hall and had the biggest steaks I had ever seen set before us.

He also gave us the great

At the first sight of the Eiffel Tower they let out a whoop and brought forth three bottles of wine — from under their shirts. They insisted (though it didn't take too much insisting) that all of us drink a toast to Paris.

I had often heard that Paris was "loved" by all we were in France, and I was quite moved to see these serious, emancipated, homesick men feast their dimmed eyes upon their beloved city in the world as is "dear to her native sons."

Our landing was delayed for about half an hour by the crashing of an English plane on the runway sometime that morning. As we continued to fly over the city, the Frenchmen pointed out the famous landmarks for us.

When we finally came down, we inquired about the plane that had crashed and "was still smoking" at the end of one of the runways. We were told that the two pilots and most of the crew had been liberated British prisoners who had died in the crash. The next day I said Mass for their intention although I had looked forward to a Mass for them during their own liberation.

In Paris I was given some pay and a seventy-two hour pass before I would retrain for Le Havre. When I met a group of men from my own outfit who were in Paris on furlough, we greeted one another like long lost brothers.

Their warm welcome, their healthy faces and strong bodies, their enthusiasm over Paris, their clear eyes and sure movements... I couldn't help contrasting these men who had come through the war unscathed with the haggard, dulled, color-overshooting group I had left at Stalag II-A. Please, God, I thought, help the G-2 and transportation section at Ninth Army to get them out of Neubrandenburg fast.

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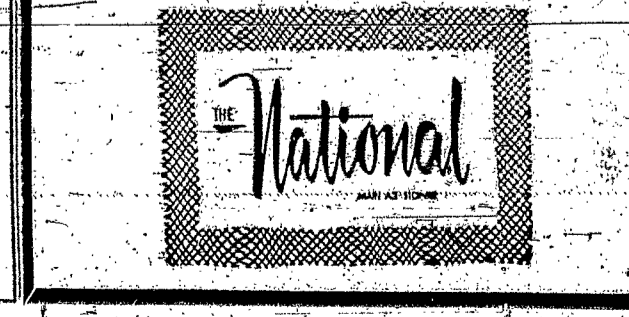


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