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William Behle of Valley City: Germany, World War II

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PRISONER OF WAR

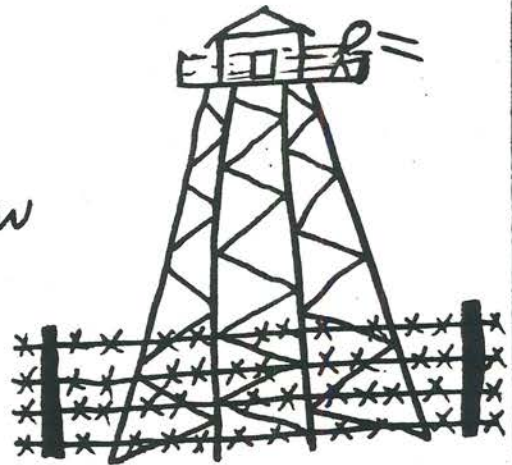
A TRUE STORY

BY: WILLIAM BEHLE

VALLEY CITY, N. DAK.

AMERICAN PRISONER IN EUROPEAN
THEATER OF WAR
GERMAN PRISON CAMPS
WORLD WAR II 1941-1945

BOOKLET PREPARED IN
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EX-PRISONER OF WAR QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name: *William B. Bogle*
 Current Address: *PO Box 141 Valley City ND*
 Address at time you went into service: *PO Box 601*
West Fargo, N.D.
 Birthday: *Feb. 3 1915*
2. Family: (spouse and children) *Wife & 2 children*
3. Work and educational experience prior to going into service?
Mostly farm work some Carpenter and radio mechanics work
4. Dates and place of entry into service? *St. Snelling Minn*
Sept. 15 1942

5. Summary of events from time of entry into service and until just prior to capture or entering status as a POW?

Had Basic training at St. Petersburg Fla. then was assigned to Army Air Corps Radio School at Chicago Ill. from there was assigned to Buckingham Army Air Base Gunnery school at Ft. Meyers Fla. then to Army Air Base at Salt Lake City Utah. then to Gowen Field at Boise Idaho. Then to 448th Bomb Group 713 sqdn for training as a Radio operator on B24's stationed at Wendover Utah

6. Unit, Country, time, area, weather, etc., at time event occurred which resulted in POW status?

With 98th Bomb Group. Stationed at Lecce Italy During a bombing raid on Steyr Austria on Apr. 2, 1944 We were attacked by German fighter planes just after turning away from our target, a German Messerschmidt factory. We were hit several times setting the plane on fire.

7. Describe military or other events that resulted in your POW status?

Except for the Chief Engineer who was hit by gunfire and killed while in the top turret, all of the rest of the crew parachuted to safety. Including myself I landed in the Niederen Tauern mts. about 1500 ft above the timber line. After considerable difficulty getting down some of the steep slopes I made it to the first farm just as it was getting dark.

8. Following your capture, describe what happened. How many men were involved? Where did you go? How did you go? What type of personnel (military or civilian) took control of you?

Realizing that I was having difficulty walking in the deep snow my captor gave me an extra pair of snow shoes. He was carrying on his back a number of traps and a rifle and directed me down the road. After walking another 2 miles we reached a house (apparently his home). There the lady bandaged the wound on my leg and gave me a bowl of potato soup - they were so good to me I was getting quite confident that I had been picked up by the underground.

9. Were you able to hide or escape? If so, tell what happened. Where did you hide? Food? Clothing? Water? Weather? Sleep? etc.

From Paragraph ⑦ I got behind the Barn a stone structure with a machine shed attached. I buried my parachute in the snow and was waiting for a man and woman to finish milking inside by lantern light which I could observe thru a crack in the rocks.

When a Austrian trapper who had been following my tracks in the snow appeared from the rear.

10. How did your escape end? Returned to U.S. control? Discovered by enemy?

He had picked up my oxygen mask which I had discarded coming down the mountain and also the zipper tab from my flying suit which caught on a tree which I was standing by.

11. Could you describe in sequence the various places you were interrogated and the methods of questioning the enemy used?

Which we were told so much about. As I became more confident and started looking about the first thing I observed was a big life sized photo of Adolph hanging on the wall. Soon a German soldier appeared and pointed to the door and we started another walk about 3 miles to what appeared to be a girls boarding school where we spent the rest of the night.

from Wendover field to Sioux City air Base
from there overseas to the 8th air force
at a base near Norwich England
from there to the 98th air force at
a Base near Lecce Italy from
which I made the mission where I was
shot Down

(QUESTION 5 CONTINUED)

12. Did you have a weapon on yourself when you were captured? Did it effect your treatment?

I did not have a weapon

13. Were you at any time considered a civilian or an enemy spy or a wrong nationality? If so, how did this effect your treatment?

No

14. When captured or escaping, what clothing or equipment were you wearing? What changes did the enemy make in your clothing?

*A British flying suit with American markings
my Escape Package flew out of my pocket when
my parachute opened.*

15. What was your first food you received after your capture and what was your food from that date on?

*A bowl of Potato soup.
Very simple and barely adequate*

16. Did your nationality, religion, or race have a bearing on your treatment from the enemy?

No

17. What was your impression of your captors? Were they arrogant, considerate, professional, troubled, confused, anxious, etc.?

*at first I would say that it was Professional
toward the end I would say it was both
Confused and anxious*

18. Were you alone or with others? How many? Same unit? Other units? Other services? Other nationalities, etc.?

Alone

19. At time of your capture, did you have higher or lower ranking persons with you? Did the difference in rank effect you?

no

20. Following your capture, how did you feel about your family at home, and at what point or time did you feel they probably knew about your POW status?

21. When did you receive your first letter, package or information that your family knew of your capture?

in about 5 months

22. In regards to your interrogation or questioning--was this conducted formally at a special camp or location? Did you have special or skilled interrogators? What did they want to know? How long were you there? Then where did you go?

I was interrogated at Dulag Luft near Frankfurt a special interrogation camp. the interrogators appeared to be skilled they appeared to want to know most about air force units & the rank of officers. Etc. I was there for 3 days and then was sent with about 200 others to our Permanent Camp Stalag 17-B near Krems Austria

23. How did you feel the war was going when you were captured?

in our favor.

24. Did you think you would eventually get home?

Yes Most of the time.

25. Did you have an opportunity to observe the enemy in combat, training, camp, or moving from one place to another?

Yes

26. Did you suffer any injury at the time of your capture? What was done about your injury or illness following your capture?

I got a gunshot wound in my left leg it was bandaged by Civilians when I was first captured the next day I was taken to a Luftwaffe base and a civilian female attendant removed the bullet and ^{rebandaged it}

27. At your permanent camp or camps, would you describe your conditions. Food? Living area? Beds? Food ration? Health? Water? Weather? Number of men? Guards? Size and location of camps? Organization in camp by enemy and by U.S. forces?

at Stalag 17-13 The food was simple and sparse living area adequate the ~~excellent~~ Bed mattresses were ~~no~~ Conducive to harboring lice and fleas. the health was generally good water was good some of the guards were good and others were quite ugly. The enemy organization in camp was not too good. The American organization was mostly by and for Cliques and special interest groups.

28. While in your permanent camp, did you know what was going on in the war? What did guards say about the ending of the war?

Yes I was quite well informed
The guards were reluctant to talk about the
Outcome of the war.

29. If you worked in camp or lived in work camps, please describe your daily transportation, work, food, punishment, etc.?

I did not work

30. Was your camp or camps ever bombed or damaged by the enemy or friendly military action?

No.

31. Could you describe your roll call or counting procedure in camp?

Roll Call was mostly counting columns of troops
in formation. about every month there was a dog
tag check.

32. What type of guards did you have? Age? Rank? Weapons? Number? Service, etc.?

Most of the guards were quite old in their
40s even 50s. all were in the Luftwaffe
Corporal was the most predominant rank.
Most carried an older model German Rifle

33. Could you describe your camp? Size? Fences? Guard towers?
Latrine? Ration distribution? Hours? Lock-up? Heat?
Recreation, etc.?

The American Compound at Camp comprised of about 80 acres in 4 different units all connected. There were guard towers in all of the corners and one at the main gate. There were double barbed wire fences about 4 ft apart and then another single warning wire about 100 feet inside. The latrine was of the old outhouse type that had to be pumped. There was burning over much of the time. Rations were distributed once a day. There was no heat. My recreation was mostly walking the fence line. Others had their own.

34. Could you describe the men close to you or the men you knew best?
How did you get along with them?

I got along with the men close to me
Very good.

Most of them were trying their best in a
difficult situation

35. Could you tell about epidemics or sickness in camp? What were the medical facilities? How were you medically treated in camp?

As a whole the health was very good. I presume it was because the populace could not get out and contact the many diseases. There were some Infantry medical orderlies and an Infantry Medical Major. who conducted what medical service there was. I never took advantage of any of these.

36. Were any prisoners killed in camp or taken from camp and disappeared?

Not that I know of. but one was shot while escaping.

37. Could you describe the ration or food distribution system? How much? Fresh, canned, stale, dried, etc.? Local foods, Red Cross parcels, parcels from home, trade with guards or civilians?

The German ration was mostly potatoes, Rutabagas and (turnips in season), dark bread and some meat mostly horse meat some lard. (once a day) Red Cross parcels averaged one parcel per person every 2 weeks.

Trade with guards could be quite rewarding but there was so much rivalry between M.I.S. if one had more than the other that in the end it really wasn't worth it.

38. Describe the type of work or responsibilities you were assigned within the camp from friendly or USA prisoners?

Group leader for distributing food

39. What were some of the things that kept you going while in camp?
Your health? Age? Faith in U.S. Armed Forces? Religion? Family?
Aid from other prisoners?

I feel that I got along better than most
1 because I was older than most. 28 yrs -
I could manage my eating habits better
I did not smoke so had the cigarettes for trading
material.

40. Did any prisoners become mentally sick or irrational in camp and were they removed?

Not that I know of

41. Did you have any secret radios, newspapers or outside news sources in camp from which you received information? What information did the enemy give you?

there were many crystal radios in camp
you could get the German newspapers -
which were surprisingly accurate if you
read between the lines

42. Did you have any serious illness in camp?

no

43. Did you have any riots in camp?

44. How did you first know that war was coming to an end?

I was already in allied hands.

45. What were some of the tricks you played on guards?

46. What about escape procedures and methods used by you or others that you have knowledge of or direct information about?

There were many escape procedures, some good, some not so good. The camp was located north of the Danube river and any escapee had to head toward old Germany where any help was nonexistent. Most that escaped had to give up for lack of food.

47. Were you ever bombed by friendly or enemy aircraft?

No

48. Describe any special train or ship trip you took while a prisoner?

The most memorable was the trip from Judenbourg Austria to Frankfurt Germany. We had to change trains at Mannheim Germany while walking from one station to the other. The civilians were very hostile. I remember one old lady in her late seventies I would guess who would sneak behind us and kick whoever she got close to in the butt. The German guard told her to stop it and when she continued he grabbed her by the neck and threw her down on the sidewalk.

49. When were you close to death or felt all was not worth living and you probably would die or be killed?

Never

50. Could you tell about any special religious observances by the enemy or special occurrence when they relaxed or tightened security rules?

51. Would you describe in detail any particular holiday, if observed, by enemy or prisoners, such as, New Years or Christmas.

the 4th of July 1944 we had Boxing matches Baseball games. The German officers spent most of the day there just as if it was one of their own.

52. How did you feel about food in camp? How did enemy food agree with you? What was food? What were utensils? What did you make to eat with? Pots, pans, cups, plates?

The German food was very plain and of course very short we were issued 1 spoon the rest of our utensils were from canned goods in red cross parcels and what we made and traded for

53. Were you aware of any other American or Allied POW camps in your area? Civilian camps?

No

54. In reference to your mind or yourself, how do you feel you held up in camp? Did you suffer periods of depression, crying, hysteria, headaches, loss of memory, etc.? How about the other men in camp? How do you feel you and others were able to live without nervous breakdowns?

I felt that I managed quite good

55. How do you feel other American POW's behaved or acted while in enemy hands? Please do not name an individual by name if you feel their behavior was not correct or up to the standards you set for yourself.

56. Towards the end of the war, what were first signs that the war was coming to an end in our favor?

*The crossing of the Rhine river
And the swift Russian advances from the East*

57. How did the enemy guards or administrative personnel treat you towards the end of the war or when it was apparent the enemy would lose the war?

They were more talkative and kind

58. Could you describe how your POW status ended?

We were camped in a forest near Bremen when units of the 5th Army came and removed the German guards.

59. When or where did enemy guards leave? Did guards say or do anything at the end of the war?

60. What did the American staff at the camp do at the end of the war?

Was already liberated

61. At the end of the war, where did you move? What was your food? Your health? Your morale?

62. Could you describe some of the confusion that took place when you were liberated at the end of the war? Time, place, friendly or enemy forces involved, food, health, morale, POW discipline in camp, contact with U.S. military forces, etc.?

When the 5th army unit disarmed the German guards the American Major, an Infantry medic who was the highest ranking officer and was supposed to be our Commander, took off and shackled up with a German woman. So there was no one to requisition food for us. There were two days when we did not get any food except what we had saved or could steal.

63. After liberation or the war ending, what happened? Did you move as an individual or group, go by foot, train, bus? Where did you go, to another U.S. camp?

We stayed at an abandoned German camp and then were flown to Le Havre France for the trip back home.

64. What happened at your camp prior to returning to the States? Did U.S. military officials interrogate you, examine you physically, give you food, clothing, etc.?

We were issued new clothing at Camp Kilmer, NJ.

65. How, when and where did you arrive back in the United States? Did you stay at some camp? Did you go home by train?

I arrived back in the U.S. in June 1945
and stayed at Camp Holman N.J. for 1 day
and then departed by long train for Ft. Smith
Main.

66. What things today remind you of prison life in your day to day living?

The smell of Diesel smoke, at that time there
were no diesel engines in use at Frankfurt and Mannheim
Rail yards at night when the Royal Air Force was bombing them
the fear of getting hit and the smell of diesel smoke is one that I will
never forget,

67. Do you have any complaints about how you have been treated since your POW days?

Really not.

The huge proliferation of the left since world war 2 gives me serious doubts whether it really was worth while

68. Do you have a picture of yourself prior to being a POW, preferably a picture in uniform? Do you have a picture of yourself following the war? Do you have a picture of yourself and your family recently taken, or taken within recent years? Any or all of these pictures would be appreciated. They will be returned to you after we have made copies of them.

69. Do you have any copies of telegrams from the War Department or the U.S. Government regarding your becoming a POW? Or your release, or war time status as a POW? These or copies of these would be appreciated. If you wish them returned, they will be sent back to you.

NU

70. Do you have any letters or copies of letters you sent home or received from home during war or during period you were a POW? These or copies of these would be appreciated. They also will be returned if you so indicate in your reply.

*Yes - Am including one with this letter
you may retain it*

71. A few POW's were able to return to the U.S. or home with a few articles they may have made, been given or in some way secured in POW camp. Some of these could be: paper notes, camp regulations, clothing, cigarette lighter, insignia, hand made pans or pots, special cans used in camp, small tools, etc. If you have any of these, we would appreciate a picture of them. If you desire they could be sent with this report and we will take a picture of them and return them to you if you so desire.

I had saved a whole pack of German Newspapers from the invasion the death of Franklin Roosevelt and many others but the last week we were camped in the forest it rained or snowed most every day and they all got soaked so was forced to throw them

72. The above questions or suggestions are limited and you may write or explain many items not included; therefore, feel free to express yourself in any manner you desire.

I do have a Copy of a Book entitled Krieges Memorial written by a fellow prisoner Ben Phelps, as I do not have a family to leave it to I would be willing to give to the Library if you do not already have another one like it

Sincerely Wm. Behle

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