

Against Starvation, Grass Soup Tastes Good

Even grass soup tasted mighty good when the alternative was starvation, Pvt. Harry Nixon Jr., son of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Nixon Sr., 214 Ira avenue, discovered after four and a half months as a prisoner of the Germans.

Liberated by the 4th Armored division and now home on a 60-day furlough, Nixon recalls how he and his buddies spent many of their prison days working out elaborate menus of food that they were going to eat when they got back to the United States.

He lost 50 pounds during the imprisonment but has now regained most of it, thanks to very calory- and vitamin-potent meals which the army has provided since his liberation.

A former student of St. Mary's university and a former employe of The Light, Nixon went overseas with an infantry division in October, 1944, and landed at Marseille, France. He worked as a stevedore unloading food and munitions for several weeks before his unit went into action with the 7th Army in the Vosges mountains in Alsace-Lorraine.

Over-anxiousness on the part of his company to overtake the retreating German army caused his capture. The men had been told that if they took a certain village called St. Die, they would be able to sleep in the homes of that town that night. The weather was bitter cold, and Nixon's company, with warm beds on their mind, advanced five miles during the day, crossed a river and entered St. Die at nightfall.

They fortified several houses and prepared to spend the night there. But the Germans blew up the bridge behind them with 88 millimeter artillery, and then counter-attacked with Mark IV tanks. Nixon was in the attic of one of the homes with a light machine gun, but the bullets just pinged off the side of the tanks. Meanwhile, Nazi shells were crashing into the house and there was no alternative but for the Americans to surrender.

The trip to the German prison camp where he was finally interned was sporadic and harrowing. The Americans got no food for three days, but were put to work digging machine gun entrenchments on the Siegfried line



PVT. HARRY NIXON JR.
Grass soup main dish.

on the French side of the Rhine. Then they were transported alternately in trucks, box cars and regular German passenger cars to Glauchau in the center of Germany. American and British planes bombed them en route, and while friendly planes were a welcome sight, they also caused lot of anxious moments for the prisoners, who narrowly missed being hit by the bombs several times.

In Glauchau, they worked at a lumber mill which was manufacturing fabricated houses for the bombed out cities of the reich. They also planted potatoes, which the prisoners liked because they could always hide a few in their jackets to make potato soup later. Nixon states:

"When we were freed, I had more than 50 pounds of potatoes hidden in the camp for an emergency. I had worked so hard sneaking them in that I sure hated to leave them."

Grass, potato and pea soup constituted the main dishes when meals were served at all. Many times the prisoners went without

either food or water. Nixon declares:

"In our particular camp they weren't mean to us and I don't think they meant to starve us. But the communications in Germany were so disrupted that they just couldn't distribute supplies to everybody. The German civilians in the town where we were ate almost as badly as we. Transportation was so bad it took us seven days to travel 100 miles."

S.A. News - Aug. 1944

Service Men Visit College During Leave

Five St. Mary's University students now going through the army specialized training program at other colleges, were among a dozen or more exes who visited the campus last week.

The five, all San Antonians, are Pvts. Wendell Lienhard, Francis Baker, Miller Burkhalter and Harry Nixon, all attending Texas A. & I. at Kingsville, and Pvt. Robert Clarkson, attending Sam Houston S.T.C. at Huntsville. All are at home now on short between-semester furloughs.

Others who visited the campus were Lt. Col. Joseph B. McShane, just back from the battle of Salerno. Capt. John Salter, medical corps, returned on leave from the North Pacific area; Ensign Oliver C. Bosbyshell, back from destroyer service in the Pacific; Lt. Lyle Branstetter, returned from the Aleutians and on his way to a new assignment; Lt. Sam Davis, marine air corps' instructor; Lt. Vincent Kitowski, newly commissioned navigator; Pvt. Sam Ovenshine from Louisiana State University; Pvt. Claiborne Vernon from Ohio State University, and Pvt. Jack Brown from Camp Shelby, Miss.

Kelly 'lost company' survivor retires

By JIM MARTIN
STAFF WRITER

A member of World War II's "lost company" resurfaced to put in 32 years of federal service.

Harry Nixon's tour with the federal government, both in and out of uniform, closes out this week.

The 59-year-old leaves his post as chief of media relations at Kelly AFB Friday to join Trinity University's public relations staff.

Nixon's federal career began in 1942 when he enlisted in the Army.

Two years later, what was left of Nixon's company was cap-

tured in a small town in France.

"The Germans actually lured us into the town, then burned the bridge that was the only escape route," Nixon said.

It was under shelling by German tanks that Nixon earned the Purple Heart for a broken wrist.

"I was going down the stairs of a farm house to get the lieutenant when a shell blast knocked me down," Nixon recalled.

The men in Nixon's outfit swapped roles with 15 German prisoners they were holding in the farm house basement.

"We became known as the lost company because we disap-

peared into captivity overnight," Nixon said.

Nixon was listed as missing in action for more than three months before he was allowed to send a letter to his parents from a prison camp in Glauchau, Germany.

His memories of his five months as a prisoner of war are tinged with a certain fondness for his captors.

"One of our guards was 70 years old," Nixon said. "On Easter, his wife brought us a jar of goose meat."

The gesture made an impression because the Germans were

running out of food.

"You can tell the status of a town's food supply by looking in the trash cans," Nixon said. "The trash cans in Glauchau were always empty."

Forward elements of Gen. George Patton's 3rd Army rolled into Glauchau on April 15, 1945.

"We were lucky because Patton had orders to pull up at Glauchau," Nixon said. "The next town down the road was liberated by the Russians. They held the American POWs a month before sending them back to our lines."

Nixon's injured wrist, which

healed without medical attention, earned him a discharge from the service.

When the San Antonio native returned home, he worked briefly as a sportswriter for the *Express-News* and the *Light*.

Nixon cut short his newspaper career to become the administrative assistant to San Antonio's first city manager, C.A. Harrell.

"It was exciting work for a year, but our side lost the mayoral race and we were out," Nixon said.

Nixon went to work at Kelly in 1953 after a brief stint as director of public relations at St. Mary's.



PHOTO BY STEVE KRAUSE

HARRY NIXON & POW UNIFORM
... one of WWII's 'lost company'

War over early for reluctant POWs

By HARRY NIXON

We were going all the way. We were going to be the first Allied unit to cross the Rhine River into Germany.

We were going to invade the Nazi home domain and help put an end to the war in Europe.

It was Dec. 2, 1944. It was cold as we crossed the Muerthe River and entered the Rhine plain of Alsace.

The Vosges Mountains and the action there in the snow and ice were behind us. The roadblocks, the landmines and booby traps on the mountain passes were now to the rear.

Enemy activity had been harsh as we took several towns, but now things seemed still as we approached the small city of Selestat.

The weather was clear, but darkness was beginning to prevail as our Company B unit of the 409th Infantry Regiment entered the city. We were spearheading our 103rd Cactus Division drive, less than a dozen miles from the Rhine.

Then the Germans gave us opposition as we pushed toward the opposite side of Selestat. We overcame this and fought our way over the Lil River. There were no barricades ahead of us except the Rhine — we thought.

It was dark. That's when they hit us hard. They knocked the bridge out behind us with their vaunted 88s. We were manning the houses, using all available windows and other outside openings to defend ourselves.

We could hear the heavy roar of



HARRY NIXON
... POW finally free

engines and clinking of tractor-tanks approaching. Although I was a mortar man under regular conditions, I was in the attic of a house, using my carbine to help hold our position against the oncoming infantrymen.

Then there were two Tiger tanks in our company area. Heroically, but foolishly, a machine-gunner in an attic window opposite me opened up on the tanks.

That was all the Tigers needed to set them off. It was like the Fourth of July on the second of December as the tanks bombarded us. Shells blasted through our attic. Guys were getting hit all around. Our gallant



HARRY NIXON
... crossed the Rhine

machine gun that had battled insurmountable odds was silenced.

There was quiet. Our valiant opposition had ended. "Handy-ho" was the shout outside, as the Germans told us to surrender.

Our company commander, seriously wounded, directed us to "fight to the last man." I wondered if that "last man" could be me.

Fortunately, our first sergeant, uninjured and with a clearer head, prevailed on him to let us surrender.

One by one, we filed down the mutilated stairway. Angry Bosch infantrymen outside, with their fingers

ready at the trigger, repeated the "handy-ho" instructions.

As we glanced over at the Tigers, with their turrets rotating toward us, we needed no further reminder. We complied, with our hands behind our heads.

The war was over for us. We were almost in sight of the Rhine, but we were not to cross it in glory. We indeed were some of the first American troops to cross the stream, but it was not in the manner we imagined. It was as prisoners of war.

Ahead of us was a slow, tedious and dangerous five-day, 175-mile box-car ride, undergoing American aircraft bombing, up the Rhine and through the Ruhr to the stalag (POW camp) at Limburg-on-the-Lahn, near Frankfurt.

In another camp, we later spent four months of forced labor, in a lumber mill at Glauchau, near Leipzig, Dresden and the Czech border.

On April 15, 1945, elements of the 80th Division of Gen. George Patton's army invaded our town and liberated us, just ahead of the Russians advancing from the other direction.

We had gone "all the way." We had been among the first American troops to cross the Rhine. We had "invaded" the heart of Nazi Germany. But it was not in the way we had wished.

However, we had survived the war and were able to get back home to our loved ones.

It had indeed been a good "home appreciation course."

My War--

...October 1996

REMEMBERING WORLD WAR II -- 50 YEARS LATER

...Oct.--Dec. 1944

- (Pfc.) Harry W. Nixon
Co. B, 409th Inf.
103rd Division
--Weapons Platoon,
Mortarman

I remember leaving Camp Shanks, N.Y., and New York City, and landing on the Troopship S.S. Monticello at Marseilles, France... A long night march from the dock to the hillside outside the city, where we camped in tents...A heavy rainstorm then washing our tents down hill...Going back to the Marseilles wharves several times, where we unloaded ammunition from cargo ships that were in our convoy.

I remember riding in trucks through Lyon and Dijon into the Vosges Mountains, where we went into combat action against the Germans.

I remember the hardships in the Vosges, our bedding down in foxholes in the frozen earth on the mountains--My foxhole mate was Pvt. Lexie Weeks of Kentucky--and waking up in the morning after a night of uncertain sleep to find several inches of snow on top of the shelter--half over our foxhole...The slush from the snow infiltrating our shoe-packs so that our feet stayed wet and we could feel approaching frost-bite.

I remember passing the captured city of St. Die, and the heavy enemy action at Stiege, with the Germans attacking down the mountain--and Lexie Weeks among those being wounded and sent back to a front-line hospital...Sgt. Ed Crossley of Michigan helping some of the guys carry their weapons so they could keep up with the company.

I remember our fighting our way out of the Vosges into the beginning of the Rhine Valley...A night crossing of the Meurthe River, single file over a narrow foot bridge...Going through the shattered Alsatian villages...Col. Teal Therrell, our battalion commander--from South Carolina--leading the way in his jeep...and on foot...barking out his orders.

I remember vividly the fateful night of Dec. 1 (and the early morning of Dec. 2) before our capture...Moving along the Ill River on the outskirts of Selestat...Hearing the eerie sound of a German motorcycle on the other side of the river, as we were inching our way along...Moving across the river, and fighting our way into the town...Capturing 10 or 12 German soldiers and placing them under guard in the basement of the house we had occupied...While on sentry duty outside the house, having a German soldier approach toward me--and surprising...and capturing...him...and placing him with the other prisoners.

I remember artillery shells going over our house (and apparently knocking out the bridge we had crossed to get into Selestat)...Then

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the ominous grinding sound of several tanks coming down the street in front of our house...Trying to "dig-in" the onions and potatoes in the attic of the house...as the Gerry tanks rotated their turrets in the direction of the houses we were occupying...A B-A-R man in our attic (trying to be a hero) "opening up" on the tanks...The tank shells piercing through the roof above us (reminding us of the 4th of July...on the 2nd of December)...A sergeant next to me sending me downstairs (between shell bursts) with a message for another sergeant... but the firing resuming--and my getting knocked sprawling down the stairway and landing heavily on my left hand (my wrist later turned out to be fractured--after an examination following my liberation from a German prisoner-of-war camp)...A German tank commander yelling at us to "handy-ho"...and realizing our hopeless situation, filing out of the house with our hands in the air...The German tank guns--and the infantrymen's rifles--pointing at us as a warning not to do anything foolish...Our entire company (those who had survived) had been captured...Since communications had been knocked out, we disappeared from the "face of the earth"...We have been called the "Lost Company of the 103rd Division." I was "missing in action" three months.

I remember being lined up in the snow on the street outside the house, and the dozen or so liberated German POW's coming out of the basement and telling their comrades that some of our guys had taken their watches from them after capture...Demanding that one of our Jewish-American buddies, Pvt. Samuel Berkowitz, who could speak German, tell us that the liberated Germans wanted their watches back...Although it was a bitter cold Alsatian night in December, Berkowitz apparently almost was sweating as he told us, "For heaven's sake guys, if any of you have their watches--give them back!" After several watches were returned, the Geries, apparently being satisfied, started marching us behind their lines to the rear.

I remember the Germans bedding us down in a barn just outside Selestat...Waking us the next morning (with no food) and bussing us downstream to the ferry to cross the Rhine to Breisach, Germany, where they forced us to dig machine gun emplacements on the other side of the river to be ready for the anticipated early invasion of the Reich homeland by the Americans...(Seeing no wounds, or blood, the Geries would not believe I had an injured wrist, and forced me to dig--with the others--the emplacements along the east bank of the Rhine) ...Being bombed by our own planes in the town--on our way back from our unwanted (and illegal, according to the Geneva Convention) digging duties...With no food on the second day--finding an old, stale piece of brown bread in the hay of the barn in which we were sleeping, and, in hunger, eating the bread even though it had teeth marks in it--probably from the horse or cow that munched on it before me... We had hoped to be the first U.S. military outfit to cross the Rhine... We did cross the river, but not in the way we had envisioned...It was not on our own, but in the hands of the enemy.

I remember several days later (after finally getting some food from the Germans) being loaded on box-cars in the Breisach rail yard, and beginning our slow, painful ride (crammed in the cold, airy box-cars with only straw on the floor) through Karlsruhe, Heidelberg

and Mannheim toward the POW camp at Limburg--near Frankfurt...A friend to all of us, Pvt. Carlton Neumeister of Minnesota, who was "recruited" as an interpreter since he could speak German, being killed when the burp-gun of our German guard inadvertently discharged when the train lurched suddenly--shooting the little guy through the head...Our German guard frequently "taking off" and heading to the nearest air raid shelter in some of the bigger cities on the way... leaving us out in the rail yards, bouncing around like an egg-shell as Allied planes bombed the area around us...Five days (and several hundred miles) later, arriving at Limburg, and beginning our 4½-month stay in two German POW camps...and a final work detail in a lumber mill at Glauchau, Germany, from which I was liberated by General Patton's Third U.S. Army on April 15, 1945...

NOTE: Colonel Therrell, who we looked upon as a "tough cookie" in final training at Camp Howze, Tex., and in combat in France, ultimately gained our respect, along with those who followed him to the end of the war with the 103rd in Austria, as a real leader of men...Many of those who made it all the way through, say he was greatly responsible for their survival. At a 103rd Division Reunion at Hot Springs, Ark., in 1984, a GI who had served under him in Europe, was heard to say, "Colonel, I used to think you were eight-feet tall, but now I see you are no taller than the rest of us!"...The good colonel, who joined us at many of our reunions, died in 1994...

--Harry Nixon
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Addition to:

REMEMBERING WORLD WAR II -- 50 YEARS LATER

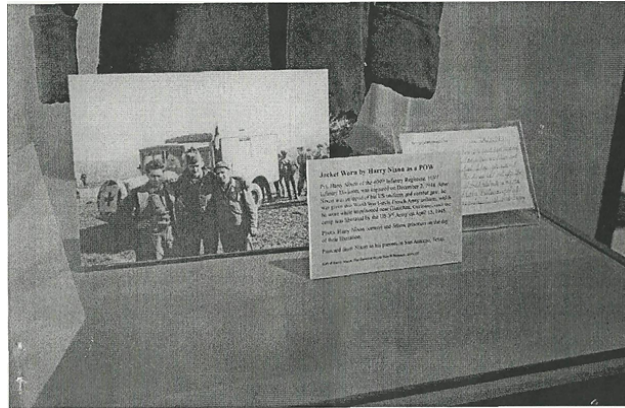
I remember not being able to use our mortar in the Vosges Mountains, even though this was our primary role. Since we could not secure a "field of fire" to fire our weapon, we became "carbine infantrymen." The heavy foliage in the mountains did not give us an open area from which to fire our mortar.

Larry N. J. O.

Recognized for military service by receipt of:

- Bronze Star
- Purple Heart
- Combat Infantryman's Badge

...Prisoner-of-war mementos, such as French Army uniform issued by Germans to replace U.S. GI combat gear, are displayed in the World War II Memorial Museum, adjacent to the Steven Stoli Playhouse at 11840 Wurzbach Road (and Lockhill-Selma)...Later at National World War II Museum in New Orleans, LA...



Jacket Worn by Harry Nixon as a POW

Pvt. Harry Nixon of the 409th Infantry Regiment, 103rd Infantry Division, was captured on December 2, 1944. After Nixon was stripped of his US uniform and combat gear, he was given this World War I-style French Army uniform, which he wore while imprisoned near Glauchau, Germany, until the camp was liberated by the US 3rd Army on April 15th, 1945.

Gift of Harry Nixon, The National World War II Museum, 2010.257

Harry Nixon (center) and fellow prisoners on the April 15, 1945, the day of their liberation.

Postcard from Harry Nixon to his parents in San Antonio, Texas.





PVT Harry W. Nixon with fellow former prisoners-of-war and captured German POWs in field following liberation on April 15, 1945 by General Patton's Third U.S. Army.

by Harry Nixon
Pvt., Co. B
409th Inf. Regt.
103rd (Cactus) Div.
...World War II...

All the Way

Toward the Rhine Marched Company B of the Onehundred-and-three,
A ray of joy filled the hearts of the haughty infantry,
As the Captain cried--
"Come on men, Germany's just on the other side."

Months of hope and fear were about to be rewarded;
"Home by Easter," a raw-recruit retorted,
For the recruit had just joined the Company,
From a rear-eschelon area where all was not jumpy.

Oh, he had heard the stories
Of brave infantry men and all their glories,
But he had never seen the flash of rockets in the sky,
Nor felt the rumble of hot steel landing nearby.

Even grizzled veterans began to share the hope,
Though, long since they had found that war was no joke;
Comrades who had fallen 'neath the pall of smoke,
And nights when they themselves thought they'd ne'er see the
light of day's cloak.

But now on this cold day of December First, 1944,
Their march up the Rhone from Marseilles was about to be no more;
The hedgerows had been crossed, and the snowy Vosges engrossed,
And the land of Siegfried was very close.

The sign on the post said "Strasbourg--10 km."
To the Yank this meant the long trail was about to end;
The happiest Yuletide in years
Was about to replace their fears.

Then the Captain said: "Gotta make Selestat before we go to bed,"
That didn't sound so bad, for Selestat was just ahead,
And after being on the go for days,
Hot chow and a sack would find a welcome place.

The column-of-files march into Selestat,
Seemed strangely silent with no rat-tat-tat
From Heinie burp-guns on the way,
Nor bar-u-m from deadly Gerry 88 to flay.

But thoughts of the Hun were secondary,
To men who were going to the land of the Gerry;
At about midnight desolate Selestat was reached,
Not a sound or movement greeted the marching feet.

After weary men had bedded down for the night,
 With only a token outpost to left and right;
 The stillness of the cold Alsatian night
 Gave no semblance of a night fight.

Little did the slumbering soldiers know,
 'Twas really the calm before the blow;
 For war is not a quiet, peaceful affair,
 As the green recruit was soon to be aware.

With rumbling cannon and crashing shell,
 Milton had drawn the setting well in his picture of Hell;
 Without warning the dreams of sleeping doughboys were complete;
 Weary men postponed their sleep, a date with destiny for to keep.

The startled men of Company B grabbed their guns,
 To meet the threat of the vengeful Huns;
 The shelling came not only from the front,
 But from the side and rear also came the brunt.

Minutes seemed like hours to rock and vet alike,
 As the dreaded rumble of tanks sounded through the night.
 The roar of SS's stopped, but the Tigers of the Gorry jungle,
 Kept right on coming with their steady rumble.

Fear clung to the hearts of men,
 Who only hours earlier thought only of the glories of the win.
 The Captain said: "Get ready, guys,"
 Don't let 'em take us by surprise."

But it was too late for surprise,
 You could tell that by one look in his weary, gray eyes,
 Men of all faiths began to pray,
 To their God, each in his own way.

The Gorry Tigers crept stealthily toward
 Their American prey up forward;
 Then from north, east, south, and west,
 They came upon some of Uncle Sam's best.

Like brave, true soldiers they opened fire,
 But M-1 and B-A-R could not conspire,
 To beat off cannon and heavy gun,
 Mounted on Ruhr steel of many ton.

Grys of anguish and of pain
 Came from officer and private the same,
 As American blood began to flow,
 So that Democracy soon might grow.

The Captain himself was not immune
 To the hot lead of the machine-gun tune,
 In torture, he cried anon,
 "Never give up, men, fight on."

But as casualties mounted and the tanks came on,
 The Top Sarge implored, "It's our one,
 Our one and only chance,
 To keep from resting forever in France."

So, to save the lives of his fellow-men,
 He ordered a halt to futile rifle and pistol din.
 Soon the German tanks stopped their fire too,
 And an enemy officer ordered all to Hhahoy-hoo."

All who could walk dropped their arms of steel,
 And went forward to meet the German's zeal;
 With hands raised high in the air,
 Their fear-filled stare met the German's glare.

In broken English, the surviving few
 Were told to march to the rear, and knew
 That the war was over for them,
 As it was for their brave Captain.

The boy who was a rookie only a few hours before
 Was now a hardened veteran but wanted no more;
 All bid a silent and solemn adieu" to their friends
 Who would never see the bright daylight again.

They marched back through enemy line,
 Fast sneering Heinkies most of the time,
 Till soon they seen on a sign,
 Just one more kilometer to get to the Rhine.

Their objective was now almost within sight,
 But their dream was as dark as the blackest night;
 They had hoped and prayed for this day,
 But not to realize it in this way.

Then they came to the broad, speeding river,
 And many of the men had a noticeable quiver;
 Had only a cold, empty feeling,
 Like that of far-off voice pealing,

The voice of a loved-one at home,
 Or one you've only met in a poem.
 "Could this be just a poem now,
 Why, I just don't see how--"

It couldn't happen to me,
 Why just an hour ago, or two, or three
 I was thinking about crossing this river
 In honor and glory, but now consider--"

They crossed the Rhine, the boys of Company B, One-O-Three,
 Though not with joy and thoughts of victory,
 But with cold steel bayonets at their backs,
 And only ~~shivered~~ ^{filled} despair to pack.

But soon the despair was to pass away,
 As Spring came and God produced a bright new day.
 The thoughts of war and battle were almost forgotten,
 Though in strange and enemy land.

Only the thoughts of better days that were ahead
 Came to the men in their beds,
 And soon their way was won
 By the all good and merciful one.

The war was over and men went back to their home,
 Never more for to roam;
 Even the lad who had been a raw-recruit
 Got back for many Masters to retribute.

As hope was restored to the world,
 And the flag of peace unfurled,
 Let us all pray to Him it shall stay
 Flying high to guide us on our way.

Shattered Dreams

"It's chocolate cake for me when I get home,"
 "Just give me some lemon pie and I'll never more roam."
 These and other visions filled the cold, damp air
 As men, American men, sat pair in pair
 Dreaming of the day when they'd be home again,
 Home again where men are men,
 And not vassals of a "master" race and state,
 As was now their unhappy luck and fate.

These men were once happy and free,
 Talked and laughed just like you or me.
 But that was before they went to war,
 To find what a democracy really was for.

They had not known in days now past,
 But now they were finding out at last;
 In America there was plenty throughout the country,
 But here these men were prisoners of the enemy.

They had fought hard in France and Italy,
 Fought until captured by the dreaded enemy,
 And hustled off to dingy prison camp,
 Where vermin was thick and ground was damp,
 And a high barbed-wire fence,
 Foiled every thought of freedom pretense,
 Where German conqueror stood outside,
 And snarled at the place where the Yank abide.

But with unsurmountable American spirit and pride,
 The Yanks thought not of their untimely subside,
 Only of brighter days ahead,
 When there will be no more dread,
 And people will again be happy and free,
 Not forced to bow to Hitler on bended knee,
 But able to sit down at a man-sized meal,
 And think when they've eaten enough how full they feel.

But now thoughts of food were all in dreams,
 Of pies and cakes and candies, it seems;
 For a "kriegsgefangen" in "Deutschland" had little,
 A hunk of black bread and soup from a kettle;
 But as long as a Yank had thoughts of his land,
 Where there was plenty for all, no empty pan,
 He was satisfied for he knew he'd someday be back,
 Away from disease and starvation, but when was not exact,

What meals those Yanks did conceit,
 Steaks, stews, and roasts with gravy on top;
 They had their menus fixed up for a year,
 When back to the U. S. once more they would steer;
 Mouths would water at the mention of fried chicken,
 At the thought of hot dogs they'd drool like the dickens;
 Then the German guard pushed in the tin,
 "What is it--no, not grass soup again."

Christmas Mass in a German Prison Camp

The day dawned cold and clear,
 Just like any other time of the year,
 When snow is on the ground,
 And sleet and ice is to be found.

But there was something special about this day,
 At no other time did one feel quite this way;
 With thankfulness in his heart
 To Him above for the joys he does impart.

Then someone in the crowded room said, "Merry Christmas,"
 And the feeling of happiness inside was impressed;
 Yes, it was Christmas Day here,
 But, strangely, some shed a tear.

On this happiest of days, why would one feel sad?
 Well, maybe it was not one of the most merry he had had;
 Not only was he away from home and family,
 But far from country and in the clutch of the enemy.

These were American prisoners-of-war,
 Captured in Africa, France, and the Saar;
 While fighting for the country they hold dear,
 And the right to celebrate this holiest day of the year.

The cold, wooden building took on an air as happy as can be,
 When there is no peace in the world and you are not free;
 And the shout was heard, "Oat-meal for breakfast,"
 This one day of the year even the Germans were compassed.

After the small tin of oat-meal was eaten
 Most of the sadness was beaten,
 But there was still an emptiness of soul,
 That mere food could not control.

As all sat around on cold, damp floor,
 Thinking of Christmases of years before,
 A Yank GI came into the room,
 And said, "Catholic Mass next door soon."

The Kellys, Wotikakis, and Lombardis all were called to their faith,
 And even Luther Jones and Calvin Smith did embrace
 The spirit of the day and went right along,
 To join the others in prayers devout and strong.

Though the priest was from London
 And the words were in Latin,
 All were united in one common cause,
 To give thanks to God and his laws.

That faith in peace and freedom
 Had no bounds in sect or religion,
 But encompassed the whole group,
 As they prayed and knelt in a stoop.

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When the last "Amen" was complete,
All had a good feeling that was replete
With happy fullness of body and soul,
That only one Being could rightly control.

So a day that started off with some sadness,
Ended with a sincere "Merry Christmas" and much gladness;
Although the circumstances were dark,
With God's help each had a new joyful spark.