



POW History of SGT Clayton Skoda, Troop B, 117th Cavalry Recon Squadron (Mecz)

3 September 1944 - Captured by the German *11th Panzer (Ghost) Division* in Montrevel, France. Our mission was to cut the roads; they were retreating. Got into town at 0600 that morning and took 80 prisoners and held half of the town. They kept bringing in reinforcements and surrounded us. We fought against great odds 'til 1710 when our captain surrendered the whole force. At 1900 five other boys and I were loaded on a tank and the entire troop was loaded on trucks and tanks and moved back toward Germany. That night we were put into a barn to sleep. We had no food that day.

4 September - Ed Leonard, Ben Raby, Allard and myself were loaded on a half-track with three Germans and started out for Germany again. Was treated very good by the three Germans. They gave us bread and cheese to eat and plenty of it, also cigarettes. Travelled all day. That night we stopped in (?) France. The Germans we were with moved right in on a French family and made themselves to home. The French family did everything they could for us after they found out the three of us were Americans. We were fed a chicken noodle soup that night by the Germans which was very good.

5 September - Moved on that morning, traveled all day 'til we got to Belfort. Was hauled all over the town as the Germans seemed to be looking for some Headquarters of theirs. We stopped on the street for a while and soon several of the French noticed that we were Americans and they were giving us all sorts of fruit, bread and cigarettes. The Germans started chasing them away at the point of a bayonet. Was taken to this German headquarters and from there loaded on a truck and taken to a little village where the rest of our unit was being kept in a barn. Slept in the barn that night.

6 September - Stayed in this barn until mid afternoon when we were all loaded on trucks and taken to Mulhouse. Seen boys that seemed to be 14 years to 18 taking basic training. Again was put into a barn for the night. Fed us coffee, bread and potato salad that night. (First place we were searched.)

7 September - That morning taken to the railroad station which was nearly all wrecked from bombs, loaded on a passenger train, destination unknown. Train was strafed by American planes. We all got out and lay in the ditches but were driven back in the train at the point of a gun and then locked in. Planes came over again and strafed and there was nothing we could do but lay on the floor of our car and pray that we were not hit. Never was as scared in my life as I was then. Luckily, the planes were just after the engine and not the whole train. They missed the engine but got the coal car. Moved on after the all clear and traveled most of the day 'til we got to Offenburg, Germany where we were taken to a garrison on the edge of town. Searched again, fed, and then put in a barracks for the night. Our beds were made of wood with straw mattresses.

8 September - Spent the day at this camp. Found out that there were more Americans that had recently been captured. Issued our first Red Cross parcel and a carton of cigarettes, first smoke I had in three days.

8 September to 12 September - was kept at this garrison and did nothing but sit around in an enclosure and go in an air raid shelter three to five times a day. Had bread and cabbage soup to eat all the time.

13 September - Given bread and cheese for a three day trip. The cheese was so strong and smelled so rotten everyone threw it away. Taken to the station and loaded on box cars and locked in. Traveled for a couple days and a night without getting out of the car more than twice. Left sitting on a side track one whole night in Frankfurt. American bombers were over that night and bombed Frankfurt. Luckily they were not after the railroad yards. Next morning started our slow journey again. Saw bomber formations several times that day.

17 September - Still on the train, saw fighters overhead and we just knew any minute they would be after the train we were on but they never strafed our train but did shoot down two German fighters right overhead. Pulled into Limberg about 1730. Unloaded and marched to a prisoner of war camp about a mile and a half from town. Nothing was given us to eat and we were put in a cold barracks to sleep without any heat or blankets. No sleep that night as was freezing all night.

18 September - Given nothing to eat that morning and taken over to where they had about 1,200 British and American prisoners of War. Fed us cabbage soup that noon, and night, very little cabbage, mostly water. Given one blanket that afternoon. Everyone slept in big tents, five tents with 400 to 500 in each tent. There was some straw to sleep on but men there before us had all of that, so we had to sleep on the ground. No sleep again that night because of the cold.

19 September - Given one loaf of bread for 4 men and a cup of coffee for breakfast, cabbage soup that noon and night, mostly hot water. Was registered that day. Found out our rations was two soups a day with 4 on a loaf of bread one day and then every other day five on a loaf. Sunday we got a slice of meat and a small piece of cheese. The soup was mostly cabbage soup but once in a while we got barley or pea soup. We were issued a few Red Cross parcels so got along fairly well. Was in this camp until Sept. 26th, when they shipped all the privates out to another camp and all the NCOs to another.

26 September - Was given a loaf of bread and a parcel for two men and loaded on the train to be sent to an NCO POW camp. They put 35 of us in about 1/3 of the car and the German guards had the other 2/3 of the car. Was so crowded that everyone was in misery most of the time. Was treated fairly well by the guards and had more to eat on this trip than any other.

30 September - Pulled into Kustrin, Germany that morning and marched about 4 miles to the POW camp. Was issued one blanket and a mess gear. Was fed a mess gear full of potatoes that evening. All of the boys here us were out of smokes and were eating very poor. We found out our rations would consist of a cup of coffee or tea in the morning, mess gear of soup at noon, tea or coffee in the evening and 6 men on a loaf of bread every day except Sunday and Wednesday, when it was 5 on a loaf. We lived like that without any

smokes until October 17th when we were issued our first food parcel. I hope I never have to eat that little amount and do without smokes that long again as it was really hell. Our rations have been the same except that we have been cut down to a canteen cup of soup instead of the mess gear full. Also we get two or three spoonfuls of jam on Tuesday, a small piece of cheese on Thursday and two small pieces of meat on Sunday. Things in camp have been getting better as things are being better organized and we are getting food parcels and clothing and other equipment from the Red Cross quite regular. Thanksgiving we didn't have anything special to eat but they took the contents out of a few Red Cross parcels they had left over and put them in the soup so we at least had a good soup that day.

24 December 1944 -Was issued one Christmas parcel for every man for Christmas and lights were on all night Christmas Eve so everyone stayed up that night and ate and played cards. Nothing special Christmas day outside of we still done a lot of eating, all of course, from our parcel as we never got a thing more to eat from the Germans.

31 December - Issued a food parcel between two men so we could have something to eat New Year's. Cold and snowing.

1 January 1945 – A New Year and it is very cold and snowing. Nothing special doing today. Eating plenty from the box. Nels came over for a while.

2 January - Just sat around, today went over to see Nels tonight and played cards and listened to the music some of the boys were playing.

3 January - Played cards all morning and afternoon. Went over to see Nels and played more cards until they started playing Hillbilly music and we listened to that 'til lights out.

4 January - Tried to fix the outside door to our room but couldn't get the needed material so gave up the job. Shaved and am now waiting for tea call. Went and took a shower. Three air raids tonight.

5 January – Nothing doing today, played cards for awhile and read the rest of the day. Two air raids again tonight.

6 January – Same as yesterday didn't do a thing all day. Went over to see Nels tonight, he wasn't feeling well so came back early.

7 January - Played cards most of the day. Parcels didn't come in today 'til late, issue them tomorrow.

8 January - Snowing today and looks as though will continue. Played cards most of the day and evening.

9 January – Real cold all day, had a fire all day, first time this winter. Went to bed early as lights go off at 2000 instead of 2100 from now on.

10 January - Still cold and snowing. Went over to Block III today to see some of the boys and have addresses put in my book. Went over to 10 Co. to listen to the Hillbilly music.

11 January – Nothing happened today, just the same old routine. Went to bed early.

12 January - Same as yesterday, nothing doing. Went over to 9 Co. to see Fred Donato in the evening.

13 January - Sunday, so went to church in the morning. Afternoon went to the jam session in the rec. hall and watched a football game between teams made up of prisoners.

14 January - Issued a parcel today, took a shower in the afternoon, went up to see Nels for a while in the evening.

15 January - Chow was late today because of the air raid, three of them today. No roll call tonight and at the present am waiting to get on the stove. Nels came down to see me. We made coffee and talked 'til about 2300.

16 January - Spent the day as usual playing cards and reading. Went to bed early as there was nothing to do.

17 January - Rumors are good this morning. Russians are supposed to be on a big offensive. Played cards most of the day. Nels and I had coffee together last night then we talked 'til quite late.

18 January - Roll call was rather long this morning as the captain was there and everything had to be so-so before he would dismiss us.

19 January - Same old thing today two roll calls and that was all. Nels was down for a while and we cashed away some stuff because of the shake-down.

20 January - No parcels again today. Maybe they will go late this evening. They went for parcels, but they will not be given out 'til tomorrow.

21 January - Went to church. Had early chow and am now going to write my letter home. Parcels issued this morning.

22 January - Same old story, nothing new and plenty of good rumors.

23 January - Same as yesterday (nothing) washed a few clothes and like to have froze my fingers.

24 January - Went to the laundry this morning, washed some more clothes. Inspection by German captain, our room was the best he had seen. Lights went out at 1900.

25 January - Room orderly today - no lights at night anymore as front lines are getting too close. Soup is late today because of no coal.

26 January - Very cold and stormy. No coal for barracks anymore - means no more cooking.

27 January - Drew clothes this morning. Clothes sent by the Red Cross. Went to the jam session this afternoon and going up to see Nels tonight.

28 January - Things were the same old thing today; soup call and two roll calls,

29 January - Lots of rumors today that the Russians are getting very close. Hope it's true. Nels was down for a while tonight.

30 January - Issued out a lot of stuff today as they think we are going to be evacuated soon. That is all they talked about around here today was that we are going to be evacuated. Hope not.

31 January - Were awakened at 0400 this morning and told to pack all our stuff as we are going to be moved out of here at 0700. Started to move us at 0700 but the boys in the other compound are giving them a hard time. They get them out of one room and they run into another room. Jerry finally got things under control and started us out of camp. Got down the road about 3 miles and were fired on by machine guns and shell fire from Russian guns. Several of our boys were wounded and some killed and a good many were cut off. Russians found out who we were so held their fire. Were taken back to the camp and was everyone was happy to know we were cut off. Was back in camp only a half hour when we got bad news that they were going to try and take us out a new way. Started out and got on the edge of camp when the Russians fired again. We all took off and went back in the compound and took for the air raid shelters. In about an hour the Russians took the camp with very little resistance from the Germans. Spent most of the night in the air raid shelter. That night was quiet but was afraid the Germans would throw in artillery.

1 February - Today has been a lot of air activity by German planes. They are strafing and dive bombing Russian equipment and columns. Everyone is afraid they are going to bomb this camp. They dropped one bomb here in camp; one American was killed and 6 injured. Things quieted down some tonight. Some incoming artillery fire, but it is not bad.

2 February - Things are quiet early this morning, but as time passed on there is more and more air activity. Got some news just now and things seem to be progressing fairly well. Hope that is true. Plenty of planes overhead and things are really hot around here. Went up and slept with Nels tonight so we would be closer to the air raid shelter. Made one trip down there at 0100.

3 February - Things were little better today; quite a few planes again, otherwise things were normal. Went to the warehouse and got some potatoes and had a big meal. Got orders to be ready to move out at 1700 and moved out promptly. Walked all night cross country and plenty of mud; rough going, but we didn't mind as long as we were going back. Stopped in a German town at 0300. Moved in all the houses and went to bed.

4 February - Got up and we all started a search for food. Found plenty of canned goods: tomatoes, plums, meat, bread, beans and a lot of other canned goods. The fruit really tasted good after not having any for 6 months. Right now we are frying steak and getting ready for a big meal. Got the steak fried and was it delicious, first fresh meat since have been a POW. We are going to stay in Zardorf tonight and find out what takes place tomorrow.

5 February - Had a good night's sleep on a day bed. Cook fixed breakfast for himself, Nels and I. We had sausage, potatoes, bread, butter and molasses and coffee, breakfast fit for a king. Laid around 'til noon and then fixed dinner, even made sugar doughnuts. Got orders

for everyone to move back to Landsberg; to go whenever you please and to go in small groups. Sixteen of us left Zarndorf at 1530 and walked as far as Vietz where we went to bed in a barn.

6 February - Got up at 0700 and started on our march to Landsberg. Went about 3 or 4 miles and went into a German home that had been vacated and started to prepare breakfast. Found some oatmeal, meat, potatoes and fruit. Needed milk for the cereal so I went out and milked two cows. First time I milked a cow since September 1942. Ate and sat around 'til 1100. Then started on our journey. Walked 'til we got 2 miles from Landsberg and went to another vacated house for then night. We fixed supper and what a meal: potatoes, sausage, beans and peas, bread, coffee, canned strawberries and pears. Got through shaving and washing and am now about ready for bed.

7 February - Got up early, ate breakfast and went on into Landsberg. Went to this so-called collecting point and hung around most of the day, but there was no one in charge- and no one knew where we were to go or what we were to do (From what I can see the Russian Army has no organization whatsoever). Went back out to the same farm for the night.

8 February - Went back into Landsberg and hung around that Headquarters and they told us to go to Friedberg and there we will be taken care of. No one was put in charge nor did the Russians furnish a guide. Got into Friedberg 1700 and found the Headquarters, but that's all we did find out. They don't have any place here for us or any transportation to take us to any collecting point, in fact, they don't even know where there is a collecting point. Found us a house to stay in for the night and found some food. Fixed supper and then went to bed early as we were all very tired.

9 February - Slept late this morning. Fixed breakfast and just laid around the rest of the morning. This afternoon we are going to the Russian headquarters to see if we can get any information whatsoever. It gets mighty tiresome roaming around and not knowing where to go or what to do. Nels and I went down to the headquarters and all we found out was that we are on our own till we get to Warsaw. Talked with French captain and he told us he had heard there was an International Red Cross in Kreuz, so that is where we are starting for in the morning. Going to spend tonight in Friesberg again.

10 February - Started out early on bicycles for Kreuz. Traveled all day; only time we stopped was to fix the bicycles. Got into Kreuz at 1700 and started looking for a house. Found one but very little to eat. Russian tank crew came in the house to talk, found out we didn't have much food so took us to the place they stayed. They gave us plenty to eat and plenty of vodka to drink.

11 February - Got up rather late today as I didn't feel none too good after drinking all that vodka. Went over and ate breakfast with the Russians. Spent the rest of the day lying around. We are going back over and eat supper with them Russians at 1700. Tomorrow we are startling out for Bromberg, Poland. Went over and ate with the Russians, they had 4 girls there with them and they were just as drunk as the men. We went to bed fairly early as we plan to get an early start in the morning.

12 February - Got started early, went 13 kilometers and crossed the border into Poland. Went a few more kilometers and came into a town called Filehne and found that Polish

people were taking care of all refugees and prisoners of war and from this town you can catch trains going back. We spent the day here and are going to spend the night here and try to get a train tomorrow.

13 February - Went to the station and hung around for a while and found out there would be no train 'til tomorrow so we went back down to the place where all the Americans are staying and spent the day.

14 February - Went to the station again this morning and was told again there would be no train today and maybe none tomorrow. This is getting awful disgusting running to the station and back all the time. If no train comes in tomorrow we may try and hitch-hike out of here or start walking.

15 February - This makes our 3rd day in Filehne, Poland and still haven't been able to get a train. Went down to the meat market and bought 6 steaks and 4 rings of liverwurst. Going to start out walking again in the morning.

16 February - Still sitting around waiting for a train. Been here all day and going to stay tonight, Cook and Bain went down after some meat, so we will have something to eat again tonight. Don't know what our plans for tomorrow will be.

17 February - Finally caught a train at 0430 this morning rode all day, but don't get know where as train goes slow and travels only half the time.

18 February - Had a rough night sleeping, too many people in the car. Travelled all day again, but ain't making any better headway. Looks like we will be on here again tonight.

19 February - Still going slow and we are out of food. Maybe will get off in the next town and see if we can find food. Got off in Lodz and a Red Cross girl came to the train and took all the GIs to a place where we were fed and given a place to sleep,

20 February - Went down town and looked around and tried to find a little information as what to do. Found a theatre, but didn't go as it was getting late. Staying in the same place.

21 February - Laid around all morning, went downtown, talked with four different Polish men that could speak English. Saw a nice looking cafe so went in and got us a cup of coffee. When we got ready to pay it cost 30 zlotys which was equivalent to \$12.00 in our money. From what we can find out our best bet is to stay in Lodz as they are trying to get an American Representative to come here. Had soup tonight, ate four bowls. Going to try and find out about writing home.

22 February - We were down town early this morning, went to the bank and changed marks for Polish money. Called on our friend at the post office; wrote letters home. Returned to the Red Cross and spent the rest of the day.

23 February - Did nothing today but lay around and smoke and sleep.

24 February - Played cards in the forenoon and in the afternoon went to the show. First show I had seen for 7 months. Really enjoyed Bing's singing. Two of the girls...

(All the above was taken from a book that I posted in camp & on our trip through Germany and Poland. After we were in the Russian's hands we could keep no books to log every day, so balance is written through memory.)

We were waiting for more Allied prisoners to come in to Lodz, a Major took over the forces and was doing all the dealing with the Russians and they promised him when we had 500 men together they would haul us to Odessa. We rode in class from Lodz for about 5 hours and then were unloaded from the passenger train to a freight train. We figured the only reason we were loaded on a passenger was to show the Poles and Germans what good treatment they gave the Allies. These box cars were fixed up for hauling troops, they had a heating stove, double wooden platforms for us to sleep on with straw mattresses. They had a Russian field wagon for a kitchen. We were served soup, the only difference between what they gave us and what the Germans fed us was that the soup was thicker.

We knew as soon as we were in American hands we would be issued new clothing so we started selling the clothes off our backs. The train would stop in villages, we'd sell our clothes and buy eggs and cheese and any other kind we could find. I sold a woolen scarf for \$4; a wool shirt brought \$12. Another kid sold a pair of German boots for \$30. We sold to Russian soldiers as well as civilians. It was extremely cold in Russia, we didn't get to see much of the country as we traveled we had to keep the box car doors closed because of the weather. The people we did see looked almost as hungry as we did. We noticed women doing men's work in the railroad yard. Our stove set in a sand box and one night we built such a hot fire that the box caught afire. The Russians had to stop the train and put the fire out. They made an awful fuss about it, but we couldn't understand what they said so it didn't matter to us.

After we arrived at Odessa were marched over to a big old building and were bathed and deloused there. We stayed there that night. Couldn't get out to see the city as we were heavily guarded by the Russians. We moved again to a funny looking place, they had a big mess hall and then in the yards were houses instead of barracks. They were furnished with just a stove. We had to sleep on the floor; however, we received our first American food, and were issued new clothing. Four days later we were marched by the Russians to the docks and loaded on a British ship the "*Duchess of Bedford*". I was as glad to leave the Russians as I was the Germans.

We left Odessa on March 14th on my first ocean voyage without a convoy. We sailed alone. The British issued us new clothing and loaded us 5 pounds, about \$20, and we got to buy our first candy in the PX and other things we hadn't seen for many months. Our first stop was Istanbul, Turkey. Our ship stayed there for that night and next day, leaving the following evening. A British sailor showed me the seven mountain peaks that they call "the Seven Sisters". Then when we went through the Dardanelles, he showed me the monument built for the British that died during the last war trying to get up through the Dardanelles.

We then came through the Aegean Sea along the coast of Greece. We stopped at the seaport of Valletta in Malta where we saw a lot of half sunken ships that were ruined during the awful bombing of Malta. Valletta looked badly wrecked from our boat. We could see some of the destruction. While we waited in the harbor we watched a convoy being formed. We were guessing they might be going to the Pacific. We followed along the coast of Africa back through Gibraltar to Marseille, France to unload the French prisoners. Then we went to Naples. We got in to Naples and were greeted by a band playing and since we

wore the first bunch of liberated prisoners to come back, a lot of soldiers came down to gawk at us. We had to stay on the boat until about noon, so asked the band to play new songs that we hadn't heard.

Of course, the Red Cross girls were on hand and gave us each a "buddy bag" – we called them "comfort bags". We were hauled to a building that was set up for incoming POWs. We had the best of chow and care. We were processed there and got paid \$100 back pay.

On March 31st we loaded on the "Ameriposa" and started our journey home. The last day at sea, we knew a sub was close to us because our ship kept changing its course every 9 minutes. We were without a convoy and we all started sweating. How awful if we would get sunk just a day from home after all we had been through.

We tied up in Boston about 0800 April 9th. There was a band again, and by the way George Hinn was praying in that band that night. We drowned the music out with our cheering and hollering and we were mad that they wouldn't let us off to step on that grand old U. S. soil. We had to wait until the next day. After we reached Miles Standish, first in everyone's mind was to call home.

It was all a big wonderful thrill, but nothing to compare with the exaltation I felt when I finally reached Rushville and saw my folks, and all those people and that band. It was by far the greatest thrill of my life. I saw a lot of the world and, to me, there is no place like Rushville, Nebraska.

Separated from Service July 7th, 1945 at Fort Riley, Kansas.

