

at this time, but please tell her when I am able to find out something I will write. We were very glad to hear that Mr. Hoover came safely home, and that he remembered we had given him some food. I should like very much to give him a place to sleep, but that was impossible. The Germans followed close upon his heels. They passed our house when he was there. We felt sorry it was not dark yet in case we had found a place for him and we had hidden him. I should like very much to hear from Mr. Hoover himself. Please ask Mrs. Griffith for his address. I should be glad I shall write to him as soon as I know it. You wrote that Mrs. Griffith will send something to us which we need, but please tell her I did it for love, and not because we expected you or Mr. Hoover to make it good. I didn't even think about that. We have received a document of the American Gov't for the service we rendered to the American pilots. I should like very much to receive Mr. Hoover's address, and give our best regards to Mrs. Griffith.

Mrs. den Engelsman
B 140 Kwakkel
Zaamslag Teeland, Holland

This is a translation sent by the Chief of Police at Zaamslag:
Dear Mrs. Van Someren,

You have heard by a letter you received from Mr. and Mrs. den Engelsman that I should try to make inquiries about the missing pilot Griffith. I have made inquiries of many people. It has happened as follows:

That day that the plane was shot down, five men came down out of the plane. One was Hoover. He has been in the house of den Engelsman a few hours and went further. The following night he slept in the barn of a farmer, but the farmer didn't know that and the following morning he went farther without the farmer had seen him himself. The servant had told him that later on. Not Mr. den Engelsman nor the farmer know Mr. Hoover's address. Two other people were taken prisoner by the Germans. Another pilot came in the Schelde, and was picked up by a boat. The fifth pilot came also in the Schelde, but he was so close to the bank of the river that he got the chance to come ashore. He was shot by a mean German before he could quite reach the bank. The dead pilot was after that removed by a farmer to Zaamslag. He didn't know if it was a private or an officer or a Sergeant, he knew nothing about American military ranks. This farmer has explained to me that this boy he had removed was not a tall man and rather corpulent. In the vicinity where the dead body of this pilot was brought to someone told me the body of this dead soldier was probably brought from Zaamslag to Blessenge. I am very sorry I can't tell you anything else.

Chief of Police of Zaamslag
Bill Barerdse

This concludes the reports on the investigation of Griff. From what we knew, and the reports, Griff was the boy shot in the water and carried away by the farmer. However there were many planes shot

down that day. See copy of news story. Doris saved this clipping, as she knew that I would have been on that raid. For some reason it was the only clipping she ever saved.

Patrick Henry, the ball-turret gunner and the old man of the crew had been killed in his turret, so went down with the plane. Jones the tail-gunner was badly wounded in one leg. He had kept firing until his twin .50's were hit by a cannon from one of the fighters and blown completely out of his hands and also out of the airplane. The other gunners were wounded to some extent but the pilot and co-pilot were un-injured.

While I was in the Engelsman house, a young man burst in talking excitedly. I guessed that some Germans were coming so slipped out the back door and took off down a canal again. If I had of been discovered in the house, the Germans would have shot the entire family on the spot for helping me. I waded down the canal until almost 2300 hours [11 o'clock], and knowing that this was curfew time, I should hole up somewhere. I stepped out onto a road and found myself in sort of a village square. Groups of people were sitting or standing around, not so close that I was noticed by all of them, but some did look up at me as I passed. A few minutes out of the village I could hear wooden shoes overtaking me so I stepped through a hedge growing alongside the road. Two young men came by walking fast and apparently looking for me. I stepped back into the road and called to them. They immediately came back and started talking and motioning with their arms. I thought they were trying to tell me to go to a large barn that could be seen about a half a mile away. They would go around the road and join me later. The underground at last I thought. Upon arriving at the barn, I found that several huge work horses were bedded in the stalls. I started waiting for something to develop and the young men to appear. It began to get cold so seeing a well dressed scare-crow a short distance from the barn, I slipped out and borrowed his old shabby suit-coat covered with bird droppings. He evidently wasn't doing a very good job. It felt real good though. After waiting and watching for about two hours I thought that I must have misunderstood the two young fellows about where I was supposed to go. By now it was pretty chilly so I lay down between two big gray horses, saying a silent prayer that they wouldn't roll over on me and mash me like a bug. Soon their warmth made me so comfortable that I dropped off to sleep. It was a rather fitful slumber because every time one of my bed-fellows moved, I was awake and ready to jump clear. About day-light they struggled to their feet so I arose with them. Remembering an S-2 lecture concerning the underground in occupied countries, I recalled the advice to stay clear of prosperous looking farms, as very often they were collabourators with the Germans, and were allowed to keep their livestock. This definitely was a prosperous appearing farm. About eight big gray work horses here in the barn, and I could see many Holstein cows in a pasture outside. I started for the door to get away from here, when suddenly a man appeared in the door way with a forkful of hay. He dropped the hay and shook the pitch fork in a threatening manner. I had eaten some more Bennie pills so was

light headed and feeling no pain. I mumbled Good Morning and walked past him being careful to stay out of reach of the pitchfork. He just stared at me and let me go. I started to go around the corner of a shed and could see a German staff car parked in front of the house. A black uniformed SS trooper was at the door talking to a man I think was the farmer. I quickly ducked back and keeping the shed between myself and the house I ran into a ditch with tall weeds growing on the banks. I followed the ditch until it turned the wrong way and just lay there until the car sped by me on down the road. I thought it safe to use the road again so I moved very cautiously down the road until I seen some people in the distance. I moved into a hay field and found that the hay cocks were made so there was an opening in the center. Poles had been tied together like a teepee, then the hay stacked against them leaving a nice hide-out in the center. I thought I could stay here until there was only one or two men in sight, then make my presence known. There were many people using the road now, walking and on bicycles evidently going to work. All of the men I had seen were wearing wooden shoes of course and baggy pants. Most of them also had on a light jacket or an old suit coat. I knew that I would be very conspicuous with my leather shoes and bird spattered coat but thought that I must be moving to keep out of the ever widening areas that the Germans would be searching. I waited until no one was in sight then took to the road again, taking evasive action when necessary to remain unseen. While in hiding, two young men walked by. I stood up and called to them. They immediately ushered me into one of the nearby hay-cocks. Talking and gestering they were trying to tell me something which I didn't understand. They gave me part of their lunches, a small loaf of French bread and about two quart of cold tea. I was glad to replace the stale water in my rubber water bag with the tea. One took off his old suit coat and after searching it thoroughly to remove any identification that it might contain, placed it over my shoulders, laughing about my scare-crow coat. Smiling and patting me on the shoulders they left me. I was sure they meant for me to stay put and perhaps they would return for me after dark. I lay there for awhile pondering what to do. I was sure if a German search party came along they would check out the hay-cocks and I would be had. Also thinking about the night before when I had misunderstood the gestures, I thought it best to keep moving. S-2 had told us that the Germans would start searching where they discovered the parachute, etc. in an ever widening circle each day for three or four days before they would give up. The best strategy if a real good hiding place could be found was to lay low until the search parties had passed by and had given up the initial search. Then come out of hiding and hope to make contact with the underground. What I had done so far I thought was that I was staying ahead of the searchers. This was too risky a procedure to last very long with out the help of the underground workers. I finally decided that with the suit coat, except for my leather shoes, I would blend in as just another Dutch worker. Leaving my sanctuary, I followed the trail to a well traveled road and walked along with the foot

traffic, avoiding to look at anyone and hoping that no one was looking at me. I felt better about my leather shoes now, as a few other men were wearing leather shoes also. Not brown oxfords with buckles, but leather shoes or boots. I had seen no Germans up to this point, and thought it was probably too early for them to be about. As I was going through a small town and crossing sort of a square, suddenly from around a corner came a whole platoon of them on bicycles. Maybe twenty or thirty of them in green uniforms and about an equal number of big German Shepherd dogs trailing them. I moved back into the crowd so my feet wouldn't be exposed and tried to act like a Dutchman. Most of them had stopped and were watching the Germans as they pedaled by. A short distance out of town a bicycle pulling a small cart with milk cans pulled up beside me. The elderly man said something about Yank so I nodded yes. We traveled about a hundred yards and he pulled off toward an old shed. Taking me inside he made me to understand that I was to stay there. He had a spooky look about him and I didn't feel that I should trust him. He went back the way we had come so as soon as he was out of sight I took off in the opposite direction. Looking back I know what I should have done was to hide out where I could keep the shed under observation and see if he returned with some German buddies or with other Dutchman. I traveled again but rather slowly as I was moving and hiding. I must have covered two or three miles when an elderly gentleman slowed down and allowed me to overtake him. He slyly looked me over and did a double take when he saw my oxfords. Again, I heard the word "Yank", so I nodded yes. He could speak a few words of English so he said to follow him at a distance and he would help me out. Success, I thought, I'm on my way home. After about an hour we came to a large canal with many boats. A big building seemed to be a sort of warehouse where the boats were loaded and unloaded. He walked to a boy who had just finished loading a wagon of wheat and talked a few minutes. He told me to get on the wagon and said "Good Luck". Then he was gone.

The boy could speak a little English and said there were many Germans here and it was very dangerous to be seen with me. I could see that I was an unwelcome guest, so kept quit. We saw a few Germans on bicycles, but as there were many wagons moving the same as us I didn't think it to be alarming. Laying on the soft sacks of grain in the warm sunshine, I was lulled to sleep by the clip-clopping of the horses hoofs on the pavement. It was afternoon and after about four hours, the boy awoke me. We were approaching a sizable looking town so he told me to take a small road to the left while he crossed a bridge and continued toward the town. Thanking him for the ride, I started walking again. After a few minutes my back was hurting so bad that I had to lay down, so going into some bushes, I took some pills and stretched out. After awhile I felt better so started hiking again, following trails when I could and avoiding people. I had been following my compass heading pretty well so felt that I must be quite a distance from the coast where most of the Germans were stationed. I should be nearing the Belgian border though and there would be a heavy guard there that

I must avoid. Finally after dark I was well past the town and my back was hurting so badly that when I seen a field of hay-cocks, I thought I should rest some more. The Bennies didn't seem to have too much effect on the pain now, so I started to realize that I wasn't going to walk much further. I was getting depressed and the situation began to look hopeless for the first time. I spent a bad night in a hay-cock there, hurting, cold and hungry. The pain kept me awake most of the night. I was up walking again at day-break and while following a trail, a boy on a bike passed me. He looked back and stopped, waiting for me to catch up. When I did, he drew a German swastika in the dirt and pointed at the town in the distance. Noticeing me eyeing the cigarette he was smoking, he fished in his pocket and handed me his package with four cigs left in it. With a "V" for Victory sign, he took off down the path. Well, here was another large town to avoid, so I chose the trails that would skirt the edge of it.

I took the last of my precious Bennies that morning. Walking and resting until about mid afternoon it started to rain. I saw an old empty shed along the road so went in it to get out of the rain. I noticed that I was in an onion field. I had eaten onions once before when I was very hungry and found them quite filling. I quickly gathered about a dozen and returned to the shed for my onion feast. My back was hurting badly and I was a little dizzy so thought maybe some food would pull me out of it. A few people went by but I decided not to deliberately contact them anymore. I felt that I had made enough contacts and received no real help, so I'd make it on my own. It stopped raining about 4 o'clock and I saw many German patrols returning to town. They were in pairs with a shepherd dog trailing them. When the road was deserted as far as I could see, I started walking again. After about a mile or two I felt as if I was going to pass out, so seeing a small shed like a scale house back off the road a short distance, I sat down and leaned my back against it. It couldn't have been the onions that made me sick as my stomach felt fine. Just my back and head wasn't right. I must have passed out for a while, because suddenly there were two German soldiers and their dog approaching about thirty feet away. I tried to get up but my legs wouldn't move and my arms felt numb. I managed to nod at them when they spoke and they pedaled on by. The dog stayed though just looking at me and sniffing. They pedaled about fifty yards before missing the dog, they stopped and called to him and one of them came back. Getting off his bike he said something to me, probably telling me to stand up. All I could do was look at him and mumble. Walking up to me, he shouted and when I did nothing, he bashed me alongside my head with his rifle butt. I fell over on my side and I guess my white plastic dog-tag chain was showing. Anyway he quickly reached down and flipped my dog tags out. He started shouting "Tommy Tommy", thinking he had just captured an English flyer. Trying to shake my head no, I said "Yankee", not wanting to be an Englishman any longer than I had to.

They held a conference after deciding that I couldn't move and one took off toward town. The other one that had tried to knock my

head off took out a first aid kit and dressed the wound. Then straightening me out he put his rolled up slicker under my head to make me more comfortable. These soldiers belonged to the Wermacht or ground army. Lucky for me, they weren't the SS.

After about an hour, four soldiers and some civilians returned with a two wheeled cart. Loading me in this and pulled by the civilians we entered the town. We stopped at a large building that I would take to be the City Hall but it was now the German soldiers quarters. I was getting some feeling back in my arms and legs, and my head had quit spinning. I could sit up now so they set me in a chair and gave me some barley soup and bread. A Sergeant came in that could speak a little English, he had learned it while a POW in England during World War I. His favorite expression to me was "For you der var ist ofer". I would hear this quite often during the next two years.

The Wermacht soldiers were very different from the SS. They were made up of draftees like our Army, while the SS came from the young fanatics who were raised in the Hitler Yugen camps [Hitler Youth]. They entered this service when about school age and graduated at eighteen years old. They were taught only the Nazi Doctrine, and were very vicious. They were completely devoted to Hitler and his Mein Kampf. Later they were considered soldiers at twelve years old and put on the front lines. Very few were captured as they had been schooled to fight to the death. Not all German youths were forced into this program. Only the fittest, mentally and physically were accepted. I seen many of these camps or schools throughout the country. The boys wore uniforms and marched in formation wherever they went, carrying spades rather than rifles. Even the sentries carried these shining square pointed shovels. There was something significant about them, But I've forgotten what it was.

After eating I was given some pain pills and a cigarette and locked in a small closet with a thin pad and a blanket. I fell asleep almost immediately, but was awakened several times by the sounds of ant-aircraft fire. Guess they were shooting at English bombers as they went about their work.

The next morning I awoke very sore and stiff. I was given some more pills that helped the pain, but made me dizzy. I remember thinking they were probably some kind of dope pills that would make me talk. After a breakfast of hot mush and black bread, I was moved to an office and set in a chair. A few minutes later I heard "Heil Hitler", being shouted all over the place. A tall SS Officer burst into the room. The soldiers with me leaped to attention, so I thought they expected me to stand up at least. I did manage to stand by holding to the chair, but this wasn't good enough. One of the other SS with the officer slapped me a few times, saying "Achtung, Achtung", [Attention]. After the Heil Hitlers stopped, the Wermacht Officer told them my back was hurt so they allowed me to sit down again. This SS Oberst [Colonel], spoke excellent English and started asking me questions. To what Group did I belong?, When and where was I shot down?, What did I do with my flight clothes?, where did I get the civilian coat?, etc. I started

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LUFTGANGSTER #1618 6/25/43

repeating my name rank and serial number which slightly infuriated him. He said if I didn't answer his questions he would have me shot as he had done yesterday to some American Flyers. He started with a long list of names, presumably those captured in the last three days, and I was to tell him when he came to a member of my crew. I didn't tell him, but he had Horr, Roberts, Chapin, Hodston, Clark, Jones and Mandel who was flying in Orin's place that day, so I knew they had all been captured.

I found out later that twenty bombers went down that day, so that would mean there were two hundred airmen to be accounted for by the Germans. After cursing and threatening, he said it didn't matter anyway if I wouldn't talk, he already knew what crew I belonged to and named them all off including Griffith and Henry. Evidently someone had talked or the spies in England had given them the info. After this interrogation, I was loaded into a car and driven to a small prison camp several miles away. I saw some of my crew in the yard as we drove to the Headquarters building but didn't have a chance to talk to anybody. On the wall was a board with names grouped in tens. My crew was there all intact with Griffith and Henry marked dead. So now this crew was all accounted for. A Doctor examined me and told me that my back might be broken and that I would be sent to a hospital in Rotterdam the following day. I was then locked in a room with only a bed in it and told to stay in bed. I didn't need much urging as I was becoming very tired. Guess I was unwinding from the anxiety I had been under the past three days. Things looked very bleak about now. Maybe after my back was well I could escape and still get back home. I was awakened to eat some bread and soup, then back to sleep again.

The next morning I was rolled onto a stretcher and with two soldiers carrying me and an Unter-Officier leading we left the stockade. I never had a chance to talk to anyone while I was there. We walked and rested for about two hours, with many civilians staring as we went by. Those out of sight of the Germans would smile at me and hold up their hands with two fingers spread to form the "V" for Victory sign. I knew that I was on the right side of the war. We finally came to a large body of water and boarded a ferry-boat. The Unter-Officier ran all the civilians out of the deck house and we moved in. The Dutch people were staring through the windows at us which annoyed my captors, so they ordered them to turn around. All but one teen-age girl did so but she stayed there looking. One of the Germans ran outside and grabbing her shirt slapped her several times very hard. She turned around crying and he came back inside. They all had a big laugh over this.

After reaching the other side, we started walking again. We were now in a large city I took to be Rotterdam. The streets were crowded with people and many horse drawn wagons, also a few German Army trucks and cars. We passed a large building with camouflage nets running out over the street. Through the windows I could see many German uniforms and civilians working over drafting tables. The building covered an entire block and was four or five stories high. Many German cars and trucks were parked around it in the

street. We had walked a few blocks past this building when the air raid sirens started blowing. People and horses were running, but still we walked. Soon we could hear the planes and I could see they were B-26's, a two engine medium bomber. They were flying very low and soon the bombs started bursting behind us, each string getting progressively nearer. At this time my escort broke into a run and crossed the street toward some large bunkers that were air raid shelters. People were running in all directions and there seemed to be mass confusion and terror. I was dropped or dumped out of the stretcher and looking around I could see no German soldiers. The bombs were dropping almost upon us by now, and there was many people on the ground with me. I started crawling and reached a ditch full of human bodies. Now is the time to escape I thought, so I started crawling over and under people. Anything to get away from where the Germans dropped me. I continued to crawl even after the bombs stopped. Feeling very successful about my escape, I raised my head for a look around and looked directly up the barrel of a grease-gun in the hands of the Unter-Officier. He kicked me around until the stretcher bearers arrived with the stretcher and we continued on our journey. The large building behind us was evidently the target as it was demolished and burning. The Dutch civilians still held up their "V" for Victory signs to me even though only moments before Americans had bombed their city. They knew this was necessary for them to regain their freedom from the hated Germans, so held no ill feelings toward the "American Luftgangsters", as the Germans called us. This in English meant "Air Gangsters".

We arrived at a hospital later that afternoon. I was X-rayed by a Dutch doctor and a body cast was molded around me that reached from my neck to my hips and felt like it weighed a hundred pounds. They said I must wear this for a year without taking it off. No escape for a year, maybe the war will be over by then. I was placed in a ward with about twenty other bed patients, all American and British. Some were in terrible condition, the worst being the burn victims. Two died that first night. One American had lost both legs just above the knees. He was a Bombardier and had gone out the nose hatch with the bomb-bay doors open. He had struck one door sideways and neatly sliced off both legs. The below zero temperature at altitude had frozen the blood I guess, so he didn't bleed to death. I saw this same fellow in the main camp a few weeks later, before he was repatriated and said he would rather die than go home. The next morning a few of us that could get out of bed were wandering around the ward and I walked to an open window and looked out. We were on the third floor and could see German sentries stationed around the building. Somebody else joined me and we stood there looking out and visiting. One of the guards below started hollering at us and flapping his arms wildly. We laughed and I yelled "Shizenkoff", not knowing just what it meant but having a good idea. At this he un-slung his rifle and fired a shot at us. The bullet struck the wall beside the other guy's head and we ducked back. There was a lot of shouting going on down below, so I guessed I shouldn't have said that. It sure seemed to

have offended him. It meant just what I thought "shithead". We heard a lot of trampling in the hall so everybody got back into bed before the door burst open and about a dozen soldiers came running in. Seeing that we were all in bed, the one that had been so grossly offended started looking us over carefully. He kept looking at me and three or four others but couldn't make up his mind. After about ten minutes he finally gave up and they all left after closing the black-out shutters. This little episode didn't make me overly popular with my room-mates. I began to realize how serious some people took this war, and how brutal the Germans could be. I'm sure if I would have been identified, in a very few minutes I would have been shot or at the least beat to a pulp, just for trying to be smart aleck.

The following morning those of us that could walk were driven to a train station. We traveled by train to Dulag at Frankfurt, the main interrogation prison in Germany. We were all locked in solitary cells and awaited our turn. Our S-2 had briefed us about this place, and said that the less we told the Germans, the sooner we would leave here for a permanent prison. On our way from the train station to the prison, we passed a large compound full of pregnant woman. This was one of the Nazi Party baby factories. True German females were mated with some of the elite SS Troopers, and were breeding the "Super Race". Too bad the war had to end this noble experiment.

While on the train we knew when we entered Germany. At each station along the way the train would stop. Our guards would surround the car we were in, not to keep us in, but to keep the mob out. There were many ropes in evidence and I'm sure they were eager to use them. Quite a contrast from the "V" for Victory signs of the Dutch people.

Here in Dulag the first morning, I was served breakfast consisting of ersatz foods. Ersatz meaning substitute or imitation. The coffee was made of barley, the bread from sawdust and the jam was something dyed red and sweet.

Following breakfast a small dapper looking civilian entered my cell, introducing himself as from Switzerland and representing the International Red Cross. He said he must ask me a few questions so he could notify my family that I was still alive and okay. Back in England we had been briefed on what would happen if shot down and captured. They had the procedure of this camp down exactly as it happened. There were a few English permanent personnel here, and actually were defectors working for the Germans. We had been told of them and also this little weasel with his few questions. To every question he asked, I replied with my name, rank and serial number. According to the Geneva Convention that was draw up after World War I regarding the care and treatment of prisoners of war, agreed to and signed by all European and U.S. countries. This was all that I was required to tell them. After a while he became angry and threw the pencil and form at me saying that I could look it over and answer what questions that I wanted to, and he would pick it up later, as he was too busy to argue with a stupid Luftgangster. His form consisted of about six long pages, and

covered my entire life from birth to the present. He had filled in the name, rank and serial number, so I just layed aside.

My lunch was a soup of de-hydrated vegetables with bugs and worms floating on top which I promptly poured down the drain. I almost lost my breakfast just thinking of eating it.

My little Swiss friend returned that afternoon, but this time dressed in a German uniform. Seeing that I hadn't answered any questions he tore the form up and said that my family would not know that I was alive and well. Pointing at a series of numbers on my blanket, he asked if that was the same number I had in Sing Sing Prison before I was freed to bomb and kill German women and children. This was so ridiculous that I had to laugh in his face. He then started shouting in German and slapped me saying that I would stay there until I would co-operate.

Supper was served, two boiled potatoes and some barley soup that tasted good and some more ersatz coffee. I was still very hungry even after all of my supper so amused myself by thinking of what I would eat when I got home. This pastime would be used on numerous occasions before I would get home.

About 2 o'clock in the morning I was awakened and hustled into another building, and taken to an office heavily decorated with Hitler pictures, swastikas and other Nazi junk. I was stood in front of an SS Officer seated at a desk. He started by telling me that because I was so un-cooperative he might have to shoot me as a spy. I was captured out of uniform, wearing a civilian coat and no identification papers. I reminded him of my dog tags but he said they were easily faked. Now if I would tell him where I had landed, what I had done with my flight clothes, and who were the people who had helped me, he would verify that I was an American flyer and I would be free to go to a prisoner of war camp. I'll admit that he had me thinking and his threat did kind of shake me. Instead of frightening me though, I guess it made me angry. Angry at myself for being so stupid for getting captured and angry at fate for hurting my back. I decided to call his bluff and see what would happen. The way I was feeling I would almost welcome a bullet to put me out of my misery. I started to repeat my name, etc., but he leaped to his feet and whacked me alongside the head, knocking me down. I was very clumsy in my cast so couldn't take any defensive action. He kicked me once but realizing that he looked silly kicking the cast, he settled for a punch in the face, and stormed out of the office. Two soldiers jerked me to my feet and dragged me back to my cell.

About day light they came for me again. This is it I thought, shot at dawn. As we left the building I seen a group of prisoners in line and told to join them. I asked what was going on and was told that we would be issued a loaf of bread for the trip to Stalag Luft III. I soon spotted Bill Roberts and Earl Horr. Quickly joining them I found out about the rest of the crew. Jones was in a hospital in Holland, probably the same one I had been in, Griff and Pat Henry were dead and the other four gunners had left for a POW camp yesterday. They had been here for three days and under went about the same interrogation ordeal that I had. They were all