

War Era Story Project 2012

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I was 8 years old when my mother was killed in an auto accident, in 1933. My dad and seven children were without a wife and mother. My 13 year old sister tried to take care of us younger children, and then my grandmother came to take care of us. She could not do the job. Five of us younger kids went to the Belmont County Children's Home at Tacoma, Ohio. This was the best thing that ever happened to me at that time. All of we kids were placed out to different families. I was placed out to a 185-acre farm owned by Alvin and Becky Phillips. I stayed with the Phillipses for three years, and at age 19, after graduation from Centerville, I went into the U.S. Army Infantry, 104th Inf. Div. "Timberwolves."

I landed on Omaha Beach in France at the end of August in 1944. I, along with 8 or 10 others, was captured after a river crossing in Holland on Oct. 31, Halloween night. I was taken out of the combat area and interrogated. I told them nothing. The German said "that's okay." He shuffled thru some papers and told me the names of all of my men in the machine gun squad – that was a shock to me. From there, they put us on a train and took us away above Berlin on the Polish Border to a prison camp. This was bad, as we had body lice and no showers and just about starved to death.

Then the Russians were too close and the Germans moved us to the southeast of Berlin to another camp; that trip was bad cold, not many eats. The camp had the same conditions as the one we left. Finally we were liberated by the Russians. They told us to stay put and they would increase our potato rations. Our clique of six guys decided to leave the next morning early and headed for the Elbe River, as we knew that was where the Americans were.

We had quite a trip: walked a lot of miles, rode on some Russian Trucks. We stopped at a farm and saw a woman milking. We asked her if we could have some milk, she got a tin cup and gave all six of us a cup of milk. Man was that good.

Another time, we met some Russians butchering some beef. A man told us to wait and he went and got us two big cans of belly beef. He said that there was a park close by. We went to the park and ate that good food. While in the 2nd camp at Luckenwalde, Max Schmelling, a German Boxer, came in our barracks. I got his autograph and someone stole it out of my bag. Max fought Joe Louis; he won the first fight, but Louis won the second fight by knock-out in the first round. Max said that fight was crooked. Ha! Ha!

Finally, we were flown from Germany to France at Camp Lucky Strike. We got on a ship for 14 days and landed at New York. We all kissed the ground; I was so glad to see the Statue of Liberty and to be back in the good old USA. In my new life as a citizen, I held three or four small jobs until, at age 40, I went into the insurance business for 40 years, counting my part time and full time, as an independent agent in my home town of Barnesville, in southeastern Ohio, 30 miles west of the Ohio River at Wheeling W.VA.