A Path Less Traveled: A B-17 Navigator in World War II Europe

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This guy took me on the train, and this was, I guess, as hairy as any experience I ever had in the underground because… [when] we rode the train… We were in a compartment for the night with four other people. One of these guys was a German officer. I was sitting right by a German officer… wear[ing] a ceremonial sword. This guy's sword was poking me in the side all the way.[1]

Far from the typical experience the American servicemen faced in the World War II (WWII), Second Lieutenant Marvin Edwards never thought he would find himself in such a harrowing scenario. Every day people fought in the war that devastated the European continent, leaving lasting memories and legacies. Seldom has the entirety of the world seen the human sacrifice by all the parties involved before or after WWII, and preserving the memory of the common soldier allows for the exploration of the human side of war and conflict. Generals and leaders made tactical decisions that have been and will continue to be debated by historians, but individual soldiers, marines, sailors, and air service members implemented these strategies dutifully, but with a cost. The testimonies of these men and women via oral histories are vital to understanding the costs and sacrifice in time of war. The oral history of Marvin Edwards provides a glimpse into the life of a B-17 navigator, an unintentional member of the underground resistance system in Europe, and a prisoner of war in WWII.

As the Allies planned and delayed and finally executed land invasions in the European theater, the United States searched for a highly effective yet low casualty method to counteract

[1] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, Interviewed by Ron Morello, University of North Texas Oral History Collection, Denton, TX, March 6, 1971.

the delays on mainland Europe. As many airmen soon found out, the Air Corps became the most dangerous U.S. military branch, as William O'Neill somberly noted that out of nearly 300,000 American battle deaths, air forces accounted for over 50,000. Despite the heavy losses, military and political leaders lobbied for an increased presence of air forces in Europe to begin to bring the conflict back to Germany.[2] Between 1939 and 1941, the number of aircraft in the U.S. Army Air Corps increased from 1,700 to 60,000. Fulfillment of the Allied air strategy required large quantities of airmen, mostly crew for bombers. Crews in B-17 bombers were accountable for effectively executing missions, and each crew member's specialty were vital elements to the mission's success. The navigator held one of the most important yet underrated jobs as an airman. So important, in fact, that the primary author of the 1940 Flight Training Manual for the Army and Navy, Captain Burr Leyson, argued that navigational devices such as the magnetic compass were the aeronautical instruments most studied by the Army Air Forces. Similarly, Edgar Whitcomb argued that navigators had some of the most difficult tasks in the plane, such as regularly making corrections for a variety of factors to prevent life-threatening errors for the crew. Throughout the course of the war, navigational technology evolved. At the onset, most U.S. military personnel used either compass and visual navigation in daylight or celestial navigation at night. As the conflict dragged on, radio navigation took hold, increasing the importance of navigators significantly due to the new, more effective technique.[3] Despite the

[2] O'Neill, *A Democracy at War,* pg. 301, 309.

[3] Burr Leyson, *Flight Training for the Army and Navy; a Manual for Pilots and Aircraftsmen Based on the Official Curricula of the Army Air Corps and Naval Air Service* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1940), pg. 146.; Edgar D. Whitcomb, *On Celestial Wings* (University Press of the Pacific, 2005), pg. 9.; William Rankin, "The Geography of Radionavigation and the Politics of Intangible Artifacts" *Technology and Culture,* vol. 55, no. 3, (2014), pg. 637-640.

little scholarly documentation of B-17 navigators experiences in the War, we can argue that navigators were crucial to functionality of any air mission.

Rarely did airmen in the United States Army Air Forces complete their 25-mission quota, especially bomber crews. Airmen faced numerous risks when participating in missions, especially the risk of being shot down. If crews suffered this fate, as many did, they faced a new challenge: avoiding capture. This did not always become a reality, but for some veterans, like Marvin, another route became available as resistance members in Nazi-occupied countries fought to rescue downed flyers.

From Rural Texas to Resistance Belgium

Born in the small Texas town of Forney, Texas, just east of Dallas, Marvin Becton Edwards always had a knack for science. The son of a pharmacist, he attended the North Texas Agricultural College in 1941—now University of Texas at Arlington—and studied chemical engineering to further study the sciences. "I started school in September of 1941, and in December '41 the war came."[4] He left the college to work in the North American Aviation Plant in Grand Prairie, Texas, in 1942 to contribute to the war effect.[5] His love of aviation and a desire to take action in the war led him to enlist in the Army Air Corps. Edwards elaborated, "School started again in September '42. I did not go back to school. I stayed on [at the aviation plant] until along about November, and then I enlisted in the Air Corps."[6]

[4] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 1.

[5] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 1.

[6] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 2

EDDINS, VELON EVERETT, Industrial Electrical Engineering, Fort Worth

EDWARDS, ALBERT JOE, Agriculture, Byers

EDWARDS, MARVIN BECTON, Chemical Engineering, Forney

EHLERS, VICTOR MARCUS, Pre-Law, Austin

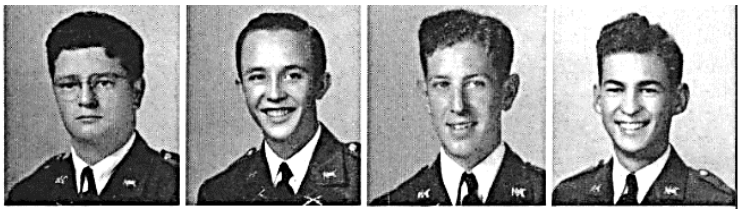

Figure 1: Marvin B. Edwards[7]

Edwards went through basic training and aviation school at the now-defunct Selman Army Airfield in Monroe, Louisiana. He trained to be a navigator in a B-17 bomber. In the early 1930's the Army Air Corps took great interest in developing a proper, effective long-range bomber to aid in coastal defense of the United States. By 1937, Boeing presented the U.S. Army the B-17, a twenty-ton aircraft with four 750-horsepower engines and five machine guns and a maximum payload of roughly 8,800 pounds. The Army lauded the bomber, and with the support of President Roosevelt, began ordering more of the aircraft by 1940.[8]

Navigators were an integral part of the B-17 crew. Navigators were often the cadets with the highest morale due to the position being of high preference of cadets in flight school. Navigators received some gunnery training in case a gunner on the aircraft became incapacitated. Nearly 500 hours' worth of rigorous course instruction befell navigators while in flight school. The relative youth of long rang bombers in the Army Air Force limited the number of qualified navigators to teach, so many instructors at navigational schools were recent

[7] North Texas Agricultural College. The Junior Aggie, Yearbook of North Texas Agricultural College, 1942, yearbook, 1942; Arlington, Texas, pg. 99; (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth379904/m1/103/: accessed April 15, 2018), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting University of Texas at Arlington Library.

[8] "AAF Aircraft Of World War II" in *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol. VI: Men and Planes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), edited by W.F. Craven and J.L. Cate, pg. 202-205.

graduates. Some instructors improvised by inventing their own devices to train the men due to a lack of materials. Navigators were selected from a pool of men who scored high in arithmetic, as the Army valued this skill more than any other for its navigators. Navigation school was not easy, as one in five cadets failed before graduation, having to "demonstrate his ability to navigate by day within a course error of 11 degrees and a time error of 1 # minutes per hour of flight; he had to navigate during darkness by celestial means, over distances up to the full range of the training aircraft, to within fifteen miles of his objective."[9]

Edwards began his in-flight training on a B-17 bomber at several west Texas airfields, including bases in Pyote and Dalhart. The base in Dalhart housed 10,000 army personnel at one point, and trained B-17 crews starting in 1943.[10] Once Edwards completed his training, his trip to Europe began. "The ship was meant to carry some…, oh, perhaps 2,000 passengers and a crew of 1,000, maybe, and we had, I believe, 18,000 troops on there—all sorts of troops. And we were in a stateroom intended for two people, but usually we had sixteen or eighteen. We were really crammed in there."[11] Edwards and his crew arrived in England in the winter of 1943, before being assigned to the 95th bombardment group, 336th squadron stationed at Royal Air Force Base Horham, in the English county of Suffolk. The crew then spent two weeks training in preparation for their first combat mission. Marvin elaborated on the differences in training in England as compared to Texas:

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[9] Thomas H. Greer, "Individual Training of Flying Personnel" in *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol. VI: Men and Planes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), edited by W.F. Craven and J.L. Cate, pg. 584-588.

[10] Thomas E. Alexander, *The Wings of Change: The Army Air Force Experience in Texas During World War II* (Abilene, Texas: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2003), pg. 150-155, 180-187; One crew from the Dalhart base took part in an infamous mishap during the war when they accidentally bombed the small town of Boise City, Oklahoma, mistaking the cities' lights for one of their practice bombing fields.

[11] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 2.

There were an awful lot of airfields in a small section… the landing patterns for the airfield, I remember, we were in sight of five other American air bases when we circled the field to land. It was quite different from flying in West Texas where things were quite open.[12]

Figure 2: 336th Squadron Insignia in WWII[13]

The crew finished training in England in December 1943 and began preparing for their first combat mission. Due to the Army's 25-mission per crew policy, Edwards and his fellow crewmates were "anxious to get our twenty-five over…[because] casualties at the time among bomber crews were quite terrific."[14] Edwards described briefings for combat missions designed to discuss bombing patterns, which he mentioned "[went] all the way into Berlin… [but] before

[12] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 3.

[13] "Squadrons: The Squadrons the 95th." Squadrons | 95th Bomb Group, Horham. Accessed March 25, 2018. http://95thbg-horham.com/wordpress/about/squadrons-2/.

[14] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 3; William L. O'Neill, *A Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pg. 309.

you ever got off the ground they'd say, 'well, the weather's too bad in Berlin; we'll go to Hamburg instead or someplace close."[15] The location for American bombing raids depended largely on the short range of fighter escorts, because in the winter of 1943, U.S. long-range fighter planes, the P-51, had only just begun to be implemented. The crew flew their first combat mission in December 1943.[16]

The crew had several close calls during their first missions from nearly running out of fuel and having to land at the first runway they encountered in England to "one of the waist gunners was firin' away; and he slipped and fell while the machine gun was still shooting and shot part of the tail off our own plane."[17] The crew of the *Cuddle Cat* became quite acute to the perils of flying. Not all perils were related to German fighters and anti-aircraft weaponry, however. Edwards described a nerve-wracking experience while at base:

> We were only five miles from our own base, and the plane wasn't badly damaged, so they patched it up during the night. We wanted to go back… to our own field… so we went down to the plane and asked for clearance to land. The weather was too bad; the fog was too bad. There wasn't a plane in England flying that day, so we waited and… finally in the afternoon it let up a little. The weather people still didn't want us to go, but the pilot said, 'I'm going to go.' We took off in a complete pea soup going five miles. Well, as soon as we got off the ground we realized that we were not going to be able to see anything, so we called by radio to our airfield and told them to start shooting flares… eventually we saw some

[15] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 4.

[16] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 5.

[17] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 5.

> flares. We came down for our landing, and instead of being on the runway we were on the flight line where they had all the planes landed, and man, did people ever scatter! Anyway, it took us about thirty minutes to get that thing down.[18]

This harrowing experience illustrated the danger bomber crews faced daily, whether it be the Axis powers or the weather. The crew of the *Cuddle Cat* flew seven successful missions during December 1943 and January 1944.

On January 5, 1944, Edwards flew on his eighth, and unbeknownst to him and his crew, final mission. The upper echelon briefed him with various photographs of the target areas and the expected opposition, which Edwards "always took this with a grain of salt naturally."[19] After this, navigators "were given an extensive briefing to get our maps in order."[20] Once briefed, the crew assembled in formation. The crew flew as part of a 1,000-plane raid with orders to bomb the industrial German town of Elberfeld, a suburb of the North Rhine-Westphalia city of Wuppertal.[21] Edwards' airplane participated as the spare ship in this bombing raid, which he explained: "The theory of these [spare ships] was that they would interlock and have over-lapping zones of fire that a fighter could not penetrate."[22] He later joked that this theory "didn't work out all that well in practice" because in his experience, the overlapping fire zones rarely worked.[23] The crew volunteered to partake in this mission, and Marvin explained the rationale:

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[18] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 6.

[19] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 10.

[20] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 10.

[21] "Wuppertal, Germany", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* online, last modified April 19, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/place/Wuppertal#ref55519

[22] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 8.

[23] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 8.

> First and most important, after we got credit for twenty-five missions, we could come back home…we were all anxious to get home. And the second reason was that nearly half of our time and work for the mission was over…in trying to get these large groups of planes together, [the pilots] had to really force their planes.[24]

The mission got off to a rocky start. Edwards noted with a chuckle, "Well, the first indication that something was wrong: the appearance of a large city straight ahead of us (chuckle)."[25] Soon Marvin identified the mystery city as Düsseldorf. The lead navigator for the bomb group had miscalculated; Marvin noted "the course that we had planned…called for us to come in well south of any large cities in the Ruhr."[26] This proved to be a costly mistake for Marvin and the crew as flak originating from the city's antiaircraft defenses struck their second engine. Edwards likened the experience to "driving in a Volkswagen convertible and an East Texas Motor Freight comes by it and whoops you over a little bit."[27] Shortly thereafter, eight German fighter planes emerged with the intent to take down the damaged aircraft. Within minutes, all the gunners on the B-17 were wounded or preparing for the inevitable jump, thus leaving the plane without its defenses. After three passes, American P-57 fighters appeared, but by then the damage was extensive. With two engines heavily damaged and on fire, the crew had no choice but to "salvo the bombs" and jump.[28] Edwards elaborated on the "salvo" process,

[24] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 13.
[25] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 15.
[26] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 15.
[27] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 18.
[28] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 18.

"there's a red button that drops everything at once. Normally, you'd string them out or drop the big ones… but with the salvo the red button it's 'whst.' Everything goes."[29]

Marvin explained his fear of jumping, "I hadn't jumped at all and I just sort of froze there at the door. Well, the bombardier was behind me, and he wasn't in a hurry either. Finally, the co-pilot came down, and I guess you could say he kicked us out."[30] Once out of the airplane, Marvin wasted no time in trying to reach the ground safely. He recalled with a bit of a chuckle, "I pulled that ripcord so hard that I pulled the wire all the way off of the parachute and carried it all the way down to the ground. And in talking to a lot of other people who jumped since, it was one of the few times anybody has ever pulled the wire all the way off."[31] Marvin landed alone three hundred yards from a snowcapped village in what he thought was Germany. Once the adrenaline settled, the bleakness of his situation began to set in.

> I realized for the first time I sprained my ankle when I hit the ground. My leg was bleeding from several small cuts caused by [shrapnel]… the shock wore off; I began to realize how intensely cold it was there. We were wearing the real light blue RAF electrically heated flight suits… we were in the snow in house shoes, is what it amounts to.[32]

The extreme cold of Belgium in January forced Marvin to search for shelter. Marvin set off following his compass with minimal possessions and no firearm; "my compass showed that the woods that I was in ran east to west. Since England was to the west, I headed west."[33] Marvin

[29] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 19.

[30] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 30.

[31] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 31.

[32] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 34.

[33] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 35.

knew reaching the coast and finding a way to England provided his best chance for survival. After several hours trekking through freezing conditions, Marvin decided to turn himself in when he found a little village. "I just decided I would bring things to a head—give up if there was anyplace to give up."[34] Marvin then knocked door to door to find a local authority to turn him over to the Germans. After knocking on the third door, Edwards found himself face-to-face with an elderly Belgian woman who beckoned him inside; this marked the beginning of a clandestine adventure for Edwards. The house was full of welcoming villagers who kissed Marvin on the cheeks and began to give him supplies for the long trip to England. After his welcoming, a young Belgian by the name of Henri took Marvin to his home, where he began to scour the village for clothes for Marvin to wear. Henri would be Marvin's introduction to the Belgian resistance to Nazi occupation.

Emil, a friend of Henri, transferred Edwards from the village to a hut in the woods. At the hut, Edwards was reunited with two gunners from his crew, John Campbell and Louis Rabinowitz. Emil then took the men to the small city of Hastière-Lavaux. Here, during his movement Marvin began to notice how the underground worked:

> They took us one at a time…you go from these places always at night, and usually the person that is conducting you will walk, say half a mile in front of you. If he goes in a house, you go in the same house. You don't ever go in together with them. I don't remember whether it was this trip or another one, but I remember they provided me with a bicycle. And we had several miles to cover…I was to follow [a guy with a white package]. If he turned in a place, I was to go on with

[34] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 38.

him…I never saw the guy again but he got me to the right place. We did a lot of that sort of stuff.[35]

Having direct access to the Belgian underground gave Marvin firsthand connections to the backbone of the resistance, the individuals coordinating it. Marvin became close to several of these "real fine people."[36] He spoke of their patriotism and their dedications to restoring Belgian freedom and independence. Marvin described the population that made up the underground:

The backbone of this resistance was the Catholic priests, sisters, [and] the World War I veterans. Hell, if I had been a German, I could have picked out the underground people. In the first place they were grey-haired; they were World War I veterans; they wore their World War I decorations. Or they were Catholic priests. If you had gone around and gathered up everybody who was wearing these ribbons on their civilian clothes, you'd have the brains of the thing.[37]

These elderly Belgians lead the resistance by using their past experience to plan and orchestrate the agenda for countering the German presence, but "it was their children who were largely helping them" on the ground, Marvin elaborated.[38] Young Belgians such as Henri or Emil were also involved in the resistance to avoid being sent to work camps. Historian Edward Homze analyzed the labor policies implemented by the Nazi regimes, and noted that in Belgium "men between eighteen and fifty and unmarried women between twenty-one and thirty-five" were required to work even away from their residences. The military government in occupied Belgium issued labor laws through a series of ordinances; all workers had to work a "minimum of forty-

[35] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 44-45.

[36] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 45.

[37] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 45.

[38] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 46.

eight work hours per week" and had to carry "German-style work books", which the Germans used to as a census of foreign laborers.[39] Marvin found himself in an escape chain the Belgian resistance had set up to both return downed airmen and provide information to the Allies in England.[40]

Marvin's travels across the country of Belgium often involved him staying in the homes of elderly Belgian women to avoid raising suspicion with the local German authorities. The first home Marvin stayed in was the home of Madame Gozee of Hastière-Lavaux. She was around seventy when Marvin met her, and she spoke no English but held a deep-rooted hatred for the Germans. Marvin explained "she said that in her lifetime the Germans had come three times: 1870, 1914, and in 1940."[41] Although welcoming, the first night Marvin experienced his first vetting by the resistance. He recounted, "well this first night a priest came, and he took our names, home addresses and our units supposedly to let the folks at home know. But we come to find out later that what he done was checking us out…to make sure we really were Americans, not Germans. So, they cleared us all right."[42] The Belgian agents went through various vetting procedures to clear airmen, and took their personal items to keep them from being compromised if they were searched.[43] The underground agents were not without humor, though, as Marvin explained that the American slang word "yeah" upset the Belgians as it

[39] Pieter Lagrou, "Belgium" in *Resistance in Western Europe* ed. Bob Moore (Oxford: Berg, 2000), pg. 33; Edward L. Homze, *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pg. 183.

[40] Herman Bodson, *Agent for the Resistance: A Belgian Saboteur in World War II* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), pg. 89-90.

[41] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 46.

[42] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 46-47.

[43] Bodson, *Agent of the Resistance*, pg. 91-100.

sounded eerily close to the German word "ja." They would joke with Marvin, asking, "You're sure you're American?"[44]

After staying with Madame Gozee, Edwards met Jean de la Gosse, an active member of the militant arm of the Belgian resistance. De la Gosse attended the Royal Military Academy, Belgian's equivalent of the U.S. West Point, at the outbreak of the war. He was a gifted leader and tactician despite being in his very early twenties. Jean set out to get the downed airmen back to England, which required traveling to the larger cities in Belgium, such as Namur and Brussels.

Figure 3: Map of Belgium[45]

Larger cities meant the missions became riskier and put the lives of all parties in danger. Marvin confirmed that "the penalty for being caught helping the downed fliers [was] death."[46] The first stop for Marvin was the town of Namur, on the Meuse River. It was here Jean instructed

[44] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 48.

[45] "The World Factbook: BELGIUM," Central Intelligence Agency, April 02, 2018, accessed April 16, 2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/be.html.

[46] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 50.

him he "was going to stay with the Mademoiselle," another member of the resistance in Brussels, but first took Marvin to a temporary stop, a pub straight across the street from the jail in Namur.[47] German guards ran the jail and these were the first Germans Marvin had seen since he jumped from his plane. Luckily, he did not spend a lot of time near those guards. Marvin's next order was to reach the Mademoiselle via streetcar. It was here he encountered his first close call while in Belgium.

> They gave me some change and sent me out on the streetcar and told me to get off when another guy did. We sat in separate parts of it. So they gave me a bunch of this aluminum Belgian money, you know. I didn't know one from the other. The conductor came by, and I gave him what I thought I was supposed to—three or four coins—and it was wrong, and he jabbered at me for awhile. So finally, I put my hand in my pocket and held out everything I had, and he took what he wanted. He was bound to know something was wrong because I didn't know French. The guy up front didn't say anything, and I didn't either.[48]

Marvin evaded capture in this instance by having normal Belgians turn a blind eye to a potentially catastrophic mishap. Edwards finally reached the Mademoiselle who he described as "a hard-looking character [who] worked somewhere in town all day."[49] This left Marvin alone, with only a book on Canadian forestry to entertain him for the ten days he stayed with the Mademoiselle in Brussels.

[47] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 50.

[48] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 52.

[49] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 53.

Towards the end of January 1944, a man came to escort Marvin to Brussels, the last stop before reaching Antwerp and the coast. The man took Marvin by train where he ended up in the same compartment as a German officer for the approximately ninety-mile trek from Namur to Brussels. Marvin recalled this as being the hairiest experience he ever had while being aided by the resistance, saying "I couldn't speak a word of German and, of course, no French; and I just didn't have any business there."[50] Luckily, the man who was escorting Marvin saw the dire situation and acted. "He made a good conversation, laughing and joking and all, you know. Every so often he'd whisper to me, 'Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.'" Due to the quick wit of a Belgian resistance member, both men safely reached Brussels, and Marvin met Madame Dufois—his last host—the wife of a French officer who was a prisoner of war at the time of Marvin's arrival. Their son lived with them, and Marvin described him as "[a] very sickly boy…[an] intellectual type, awfully friendly."[51] While in Brussels with the Dufois family, members of the resistance visited Marvin frequently.

> I know one guy came to see me, and he sketched out for me the plan for the antiaircraft defense for the German fighter headquarters for this part of the country to take back to England, you know. I said "Yeah, yeah." But I got to thinking… that if I was captured, I had a lot of stuff on me that was bad, for example, this picture of Henri and his wife… that's their death warrant, and this diagram of the German's antiaircraft defenses was my death warrant. So I just got rid of a bunch of it, just burned it in the fireplace.[52]

[50] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 54-55.

[51] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 55-56.

[52] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 56-57.

Marvin's experience is a prime example of why certain information never left Nazi-occupied territories. Often a downed airman would dump any evidence that could otherwise incriminate them as spies, because if they were captured by the Germans, they were going to end up as prisoners anyway. The Belgians who assisted downed flyers in their efforts to reach Allied lands faced, most likely, either imprisonment in concentration camps or death.[53] The Dufois', and all other families who aided Marvin, understood the risks yet defied the German occupiers through their generosity to a strange U.S. airman. This generosity was not without risk, though. The son of Madame Dufois became concerned that Marvin had nothing to read three days into their stay with them and offered to go and fetch a book of Shakespeare for Edwards. Despite Marvin's initial declinations, the boy left anyway to find a book. Edwards never saw the boy return. "So he took off, and we had supper, and after supper we were still sitting at the table there waiting for the boy to come back. The door opened a little bit, and then it just busted all at once. And the Germans came from everywhere, uniformed Germans. There was about ten of them."[54] Madame Dufois was taken away immediately. The *Geheim feldpolizei* (GFP) apprehended Edwards and transferred him to a local police station.

A Prisoner of War

The German military government in Belgium implemented a police service, the GFP, to conduct police services and intelligence throughout the country. The GFP had the ability to subdue and interrogate any suspects before bringing them to a military tribunal.[55] Edwards

[53] Lagrou, *Resistance in Western Europe*, 33.

[54] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 58.

[55] For further information about the *Geheim feldpolizei* , see Guy Beaujouan, Anne-Marie Bourgoin, Pierre Cézard, Marie-Thérèse Chabord, Elisabeth Dunan, Jean-Daniel Pariset, and Christian Wilsdorf, *La France et la Belgique sous l'occupation*

became wary of the situation, as it betrayed his expectation of being apprehended: "It seemed like they were treating you like a civilian, not a military, prisoner. They didn't ask your rank, your serial number, your unit, or anything like that. This was not too good."[56]

While at the police station, Edwards learned the charge against him: "spionaje verdacht." "It didn't take much imagination to know what spionaje meant… verdacht apparently means 'suspected.' So the charge was 'suspected espionage.'"[57] After hearing his indictment, the German police led Edwards to an interrogation room. Here, a German military typist and "a guy in civilian clothes" began to question Edwards.

> They had no interest in the military part of it because there wasn't anything that I could tell them. I was just a second lieutenant who had been shot down thirty days ago… They wanted to know…real interested in how I got to the place where they found, and who these people were. And I didn't know any of that stuff. I didn't speak the language, and I didn't know anything about the…a guy just took me there.[58]

Edwards' honesty did not please his German captors. They demanded he do better than "I don't know," but did not resort to any physical or mental violence to get answers out of the downed airman. After repeated pestering from the German officials, Edwards' gave in; "I made up this wild cock-and-bull story…I mean, you know, there was no resemblance to the facts. And he said,

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Allemande: 1940-1944; les fonds allemands conserve´s au Centre historique des Archives nationales ; Inventaire de la sous-se´rie AJ 40 (Paris: Centre Historique des Archives nationales, 2002), 10, 13-15; Adrein Verdebout, "La prison de Saint-Gilles sous l'occupation (1940-1944): Politiques répressives et structures de detention" (M.A. Thesis, Université libre de Bruxelles, 2009), pg. 31.

[56] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 60.

[57] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 60.

[58] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 62-63.

'Okay.'"[59] This fabrication, however, brought about unforeseen consequences, as later the interrogator produced a typed transcription of Edwards' conversation and forced Edwards to sign, asserting its validity. Marvin would have to remember the details of his false story to repeat it whenever asked by the German authorities. After signing the document, they took Edwards to his cell in the Saint-Gilles prison in Brussels.[60] The cell's dimensions were "three steps by six steps" and it contained a faucet, sink, bucket for excrement, a straw mattress, and a tiny window.[61] Edwards took particular interest in the door, a "great big, old, thick door…had a little peephole in it."[62] The door's peephole could be altered so the occupant could view the rest of the prison. Through this method, Edwards located his cell to either number 399 or 499. Marvin described his first night in Saint-Gilles as his worst.

> The worst part of it was that I couldn't remember what I'd told the interrogator. They have a little piece of wood on the wall there that looked like a soap rack of some sort, and I could lift this up, and I could make marks on the wall with one of these aluminum Belgian coins… to try to shorthand my story. For example, if there was a house here, a two-story house—mother, daddy, and two children—I'd make two big marks and two little ones... I tried to memorize [the shorthand] because I was sure that we'd go over the story again.[63]

[59] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 64.

[60] For an excellent piece on Saint-Gilles, see Adrien Verdebout, " La prison de Saint-Gilles sous l'occupation (1940-1944): Politiques répressives et structures de detention," 2009.

[61] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 65.

[62] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 65.

[63] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 66-67.

After an arduous night, the morning brought Marvin some humor. A "short, very fat" officer "with a dueling scar" and a "retinue of guards" barged into his cell, demanding to see Edwards' uniform.[64] Naturally, Edwards presented his dog tags, as the Belgian resistance members had long discarded the rest of his flight suit. The officer rebuked, "That's not a uniform. They fly over in airplane, and they dump these out by the barrels, the dog tags."[65] Edwards then presented him the only other issued piece of clothing he owned, his English socks. Edwards admitted with a chuckle, "Anyway, he wasn't real impressed with any uniform and I wasn't either."[66]

In the following days, the true interrogation began. The Germans enlisted a man named Steimel, an English professor at the University of Cologne, to interrogate Edwards. Though claiming to be part of the *Luftwaffe*, Edwards never saw him in uniform. Marvin recounted the story he wrote on the walls in Saint-Gilles to Steimel in what seemed a routine interrogation. Steimel startled Edwards by the amount of prior knowledge he held. "He knew an awful lot about our organization. He knew the names of my other crew members and something of where they were from, and this always takes the wind out of your sails."[67] Steimel focused on Edwards' flight crew yet took keen interest in Marvin's involvement in the Belgian underground. The Nazis demanded information or threatened to turn Edwards over to the "civilian courts" where there "was certainly never any implication that you would come out innocent" and face a firing squad.[68] The judicial system in Nazi-occupied Belgium was under the jurisdiction of the

[64] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 67.
[65] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 67.
[66] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 67.
[67] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 69.
[68] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 70.

Militärbefehlshaber, who rendered judgments in less serious cases, but serious crimes, such as espionage, went to military courts. Crimes committed against occupying troops and institutions were punishable by death, either in the court system of the occupied country or through a civil or military court in Germany.[69] Edwards found bravery and loyalty in the face of these threats. "As I said, I told him pretty much the same story that I'd told before. It was a made-up thing—no names, no places. I told them that I didn't know who these people were, and I didn't know who it was that too me to the place where I was captured. I said I didn't know anything about the activities of these people."[70]

After nearly a week of interrogation, the Nazis placed Edwards in solitary confinement. Typical German interrogations did not involve physical violence, but rather "privation and mental and psychological blackmail" to force prisoners to talk via solitary confinement or limiting food rations.[71] Edwards spent a month alone in a cell and discussed his fears of solitude. "The worst thing is that you'll disappear and never leave a trace of any sort. It's one thing, you know, to be killed in this battle or that battle, but it's another one to just, you know, just disappear into nothingness. I think this bothered me more than anything else."[72] Marvin rejoiced when his captors moved him into a general cell with other prisoners of war. Edwards found relief not only in company, but also in the ability to escape his mind. "The mind is such an enemy; you can imagine so many things when you're completely by yourself."[73]

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[69] Michel de Boüard, "La Répression Allemande en France de 1940 a 1944", *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, (1964), Vol. 14, issue 54, pg. 67-68.

[70] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 70.

[71] Dawn Trimble Bunyak, *Our Last Mission: A World War II Prisoner in Germany* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), pg. 82.

[72] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 79-80.

[73] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 80.

Edwards eventually found himself reunited with one of his crew members, the waist gunner named Campbell, whose capture brought a sense of dread upon Marvin since "Campbell was the youngest of the group and character-wise perhaps one of the weakest."[74] Edwards recalled that Campbell broke under the pressure of interrogation: "Campbell took them back to the village… and pointed out 'I was here and I was there. This guy helped me.'"[75] Due to Campbell's assistance, Henri was taken prisoner by the German authorities. The Germans brought Henri out to be identified by Edwards, who to his horror realized that "the boy still had on my blue RAF flying suit. He hadn't destroyed it."[76] The Germans did not recognize the uniform, and Edwards told his captors that Henri was not the correct man; the Germans later released Henri.

Clad in civilian garb, Edwards and several other prisoners marched out of Saint-Gilles for the last time and boarded a railcar bound for Frankfurt, Germany, in the spring of 1944. Edwards recalled the trip being long, but the passage became further complicated when American bombers destroyed the railway tracks ahead of them, forcing the train to return to Brussels on several occasions. When they finally reached Frankfurt, the town was a smoldering ruin of its former self. "The British had raided that night and that town was black. It had been raided so much that there was just almost nothing left. There were refugees still leaving the station, pitiful people with a bundle of clothes on their back maybe."[77] Edwards remembered the despondent citizens of Frankfurt pitting their frustrations and anger upon the newly arrived American prisoners. "These folks were really mad. They'd see a bunch of Americans, and they'd get after

[74] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 71.

[75] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 72.

[76] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 72.

[77] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 82.

them with walking canes, anything they could."[78] The German citizens took particular indignation with Edwards because of his civilian clothes. These citizen mobs were repulsed by the German guards, led by a disciplined sergeant who "was ordered to take six prisoners to Dulang Luft, and he was going to get six prisoners."[79] Despite the protection the fear of violent reprisals never left the Americans. This disturbing ordeal altered Marvin's perspective of the justification of warfare. "It's just a terrible thing. And emotionally, it's a terrible thing because in your country, you're a hero; you're a soldier defending your country. Over there, you were the worst kind of scum, and this was a different adjustment."[80]

The prisoners were transferred to the Dulag Luft, "the central interrogation center where all flyers were supposed to come" to be processed in the German prisoner of war system.[81] There were several satellite Dulag Luft's (*Durchgangslager der Luftwaffe*) operated by the Luftwaffe, with a central camp functioning as a transition camp before airmen were sent to internment camps.[82] Edwards passed through the Dulag in Frankfurt am Main, housed in the Frankfurt Botanical Gardens. By the time Edwards reached the Dulag Luft, nearly 2,000 prisoners a month were being processed through all the German Dulags. Next to a rail station, the Dulag Luft in Frankfurt was exposed to Allied air attacks. At the Dulag, the men became a *kriege* (prisoner) of the German Prisoner of War department. The department issued these men a

[78] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 82.

[79] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 83.

[80] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 83.

[81] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 84.

[82] Arthur A. Durand, *Stalag Luft III: The Secret Story* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), pg. 56-72. The original Dulag Luft was in Oberursel, near the Taunas Mountains in Central Germany, and then the Dulag shifted to Frankfurt am Main after Oberursel fell victim to an Allied bombing attack in September 1943. Durand provides an excellent examination of life in Dulag Oberursel, while Bunyak's analysis focuses primarily on Dulag Frankfurt am Main.

number and an identifying document.[83] Edwards remembered the interrogations lasting two weeks, depending on the individuals and the circumstances of their capture. Edwards "got through Dulag Luft very quickly "because the Germans only asked military questions."[84] After a couple of days, the prisoners were placed on rail cars bound for a Stalag Luft. During the transit, Edwards fell victim to another Allied bombing raid. An English prisoner explained that the bombers were British because of the method of targeting. Marvin remembered:

> A guy came over in a pathfinder plane, maybe a "Mosquito." He would come in low and drop a red pathfinder thing, and then they came along with a—I don't know—green or yellow or something and make a circle around it. Everybody tried to get in the circle. So you get out in the yard in one of these cars, and you know, you look for the red. And if you see the red, man, it's tough (chuckle).[85]

During the war, both the British and the Americans contained their bombing efforts as much as they could to military targets. Edwards stressed that the Americans "were still real careful about our military targets" but, as the war progressed, "it reached the point where they were not so careful."[86] Starting in 1943, the British and Americans divided up bombing raids into Germany on a day and night schedule, with the British taking the former and the Americans the latter.[87] Lucky for Edwards and his fellow prisoners, the British were off their marks the night the train was sighted.

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[83] Bunyak, *Our Last Mission*, pg. 80-82.

[84] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 85.

[85] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 86.

[86] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 85.

[87] O'Neill, *A Democracy at War,* pg. 180. This tandem bombing plan, Operation Pointblank coordinated by the aptly named Combined Bomber Offensive, came into existence after the Allied strategy conference in Casablanca in the beginning of 1943.

After the Dulag Luft, Edwards found himself in Stalag Luft III in modern day Żagań, Poland (Sagan in German). Stalag Luft III earned international fame as the place where the "Great Escape" occurred. The camp design consisted of compounds, separated from one another by a wire fence. The Germans segregated the prisoners by nationalities, with "[the] central compound which was American and an east compound which was English."[88] The camp itself was surrounded by thick pine forests. Stalag Luft III housed Marvin from "late April in '44 until late January of '45."[89] Edwards found his time in Stalag Luft III mundane remembering, "as an officer, you don't work," and the daily routine involved "roll call in the morning."[90] The food in the camp consisted of Red Cross parcels and "potatoes and bread" from the Germans.[91] The prisoners received a loaf of bread a week. Several months into Edwards' imprisonment, "the parcels got thinner because the German railroad system was getting shot up."[92] Edwards recalled the parcels originating in Sweden and Switzerland, and he kept a list of the contents.

> You got a pound prunes, six ounces of jam, eight ounces of cheese, twelve C-ration biscuits, eight ounces of salmon, a pound of oleo, twelve ounces of meat and vegetables or can of corned beef, a can of spam, milled pate—that's a sort of goose liver paste of some sort—five packs of cigarettes, two chocolate bars, sixteen ounce can of powdered milk, and a bar of soap.[93]

[88] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 90.
[89] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 90.
[90] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 90.
[91] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 91.
[92] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 91.
[93] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 91-92.

According to Edwards, these parcels were designed to maintain body weight and distribution of these parcels should have occurred once a week. Edwards, however, lost more than twenty pounds while imprisoned, displaying the lack of adequate nutrition provided to prisoners. Even while incarcerated, American POWs maintained a system of discipline. Edwards recounted "the folks really respected their officers… the German commander would just tell an American senior officer what he wanted done… and this pretty well covered it."[94] The American officers, like Edwards, kept separate from the enlisted men, unlike their British counterparts. Several individuals left lasting impressions on Marvin, including a guard named Robert.

> The guy was from Hamburg. He was a big, tall, Nordic type. He lost his wife and mother and four children in an air raid up there. And, man, people were giving Robert a wide berth. He was always a pretty cold character, and after that happened, I mean, everybody tried to stay out of his range… Robert was awful quick with the trigger… [and] always had a submachine gun or machine pistol.[95]

The other guards appeared not to fit the normal, stereotypical mold of Nazi soldiers to Edwards. Some "spoke English pretty good" and were older, more "businessmen-type… not big Nazis" in Marvin's opinion.[96]

After the failed attempt on Hitler's life in July 1944, Edwards remembered that he "could feel the tension outside."[97] The prisoners were at a loss until information came through the radios in the camp. Edwards noticed a change in the behavior of the guards. "They were the

[94] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 93.
[95] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 96.
[96] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 96.
[97] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 96

same people, but there had been some changes. Oh, little things. For example, prior to that time at roll call, which was at the parade-type formation, and we used the western military salute. After this, it was the Heil Hitler. It would no longer be the other one. It was just this sort of 'Mickey Mouse' stuff."[98]

While at Stalag Luft III, Marvin initially felt ostracized from his counterparts. He found his experience "interesting…because [other POWs] had to make sure you were an American, too."[99] At first, the other prisoners avoided Marvin because none of them knew him before arriving at the camp. "The fellows that I had known in the States and in England had gone to other compounds," leaving no one to vouch for Edwards.[100] As time progressed at the camp, "enough people came into camp that had known me in the United States…guys that had been wounded…or other guys in the underground."[101]

Life in the camp organized around the activities the men used to keep themselves physically and mentally active. Softball and walking around the perimeter of the compound took center stage for physical activity, Edwards recalled. The prisoners even organized classes, subjects ranging from "French, German, algebra" to many others.[102] The prisoners were also allowed a library, of which Edwards took advantage. "I averaged one book a day. You know, I liked to read them," he recalled.[103] The soldiers also passed time by cooking. Edwards remembered, "We liked to cook with the stuff we got in the Red Cross parcels."[104] The Germans

[98] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 97.
[99] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 98.
[100] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 99.
[101] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 99.
[102] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 100.
[103] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 101.
[104] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 100.

limited the materials the men could cook with, but they found ways to improvise. "The Germans gave us a briquet of coal, one per man per day," so the men sought stumps from fallen trees for firewood.[105] Edwards explained that the Germans reluctantly gave the men two axes and shovels, only under the oath "that you won't use them to escape."[106] Though handy, this presented a problem as Edwards remembered with a chuckle, "the only trouble is that two is not many for that many people…but a room might have them for an hour out of the day. So we'd chop like crazy for an hour."[107] Once their privileges were up, the men resorted to using their bare hands to pull up the stumps.

Following the Allied invasion of mainland Europe in June 1944, food became scarce for captives. By the fall of 1944, the Nazi regime felt pressure from both fronts, as the Allies advanced from the west and the Soviet Union from the east. Located in the eastern half of Germany, the men of Stalag Luft III awaited a Soviet liberation. As the Russians advanced during December 1944, the prisoners expected the Germans to move them further into the heart of Germany. The men "were down to like a fourth of a parcel per man," and to make the situation worse, the men were not going by train.[108] Edwards recalled somberly, "This was going to be a march this time and we knew it."[109] The men began preparing in any way they could, some "that used to walk around the perimeter three times a day now [sic] did it ten times a day" while others "fashion[ed] packs and so forth."[110]

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[105] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 100.

[106] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 100.

[107] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 101.

[108] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 103.

[109] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 103.

[110] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 103-104.

By January 1945, Edwards could hear the action on the Eastern Front. "We could actually hear artillery fire from the Russian front. But we never saw any Russian airplanes, but frequently we could see American planes," Edwards stated.[111] During the bitterly cold night of January 27, 1945, the guards alerted the prisoners of Stalag Luft III to begin preparations for the march. At 10:30 p.m., Marvin's barracks "was one of the first out of the march, so we left camp around midnight."[112] Clothed in just wool overcoats and hats, the men set off for a destination unknown. "Oh, good God… there was snow all over the place, all over the place… it was extremely cold at the time."[113] The severity of the cold froze the possessions the men brought with them, even the food. Edwards brought a can of spam to eat on the march, and when he opened it "you tried to bite into it, and it would freeze to you, you know, freezed to the can… when it would come loose, it'd took the skin with you."[114] The cold was so severe that Marvin witnessed men who fell from exhaustion freeze to the ground. The prisoners supported each other throughout the march, and Edwards elaborated on how they assisted those who fell:

> Well, his buddies would try to get him and keep him on his feet—slap him, encourage him, and carry him—anything they could do. Some of us had these old wooden-bed-type-things, and we had made these into sleds and tried to carry them along with our possessions on them with ropes and all, home-made ropes out of strips of cloth. So, we loaded a guy on there, and after a while, he'd get to where he maybe could be helping you next.[115]

[111] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 104.
[112] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 105.
[113] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 105.
[114] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 106.
[115] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 106.

No matter how strong the men bonded together, inevitably the conditions pushed men past the brink. Out of the nearly 110 men in his barracks, Edwards recalled that only 10 men survived the entire march. "Some of the guys froze; one fellow I know was shot; one guy just flat went crazy."[116] The men marched the entirety of the 28th, and by the time they stopped in the village of Moskau in the dawn of the 29th, the march amounted to nearly eighty-nine kilometers. The prisoners rested in a paper factory where ovens and soup kept them warm for a day. On the January 31, 1945, Edwards and the survivors marched another eight kilometers to the town of Spremburg. Here, the long march ended.

On February 2, the men boarded "old French forty-and-eight cars from the First World War."[117] Designed for transportation of men or war materials in WWI, these boxcars gained their name because they could hold either forty men or eight horses.[118] Marvin described the conditions in the car: "the first thing they did was put two guards on each car. The guards stretched a rope across one end of the car, so that way they had a third of it to themselves…that left the other two-thirds of the car for the prisoners. And, in this area instead of forty men they put fifty, so this made it impossible to sit down or anything else."[119] Edwards recalled that the guards on the train were the same from Stalag Luft III. The guards were older men, often veterans of WWI, and Edwards recalled that the guards struggled just as much if not more than the prisoners on the march because they "couldn't throw away his gas mask, his rifle, or any

[116] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 107.

[117] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 111.

[118] "French "Forty and Eight" Railroad Car," National Museum of the US Air Force™, May 04, 2015, accessed April 16, 2018, http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/196342/french-forty-and-eight-railroad-car/.

[119] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 111.

other thing they had."[120] One event exemplified their exhaustion to Marvin. "They stopped at a station someplace, and German guards got off and got some coffee and doughnuts, and the train started up, you know, and we were hollering at the guards to come on. They were a little bit late. The train was going faster and faster, and the guy couldn't get back on. 'Hey, give me your rifle.' So, he gave us his rifle but still couldn't make it, so we pulled him on. (chuckled)"[121]

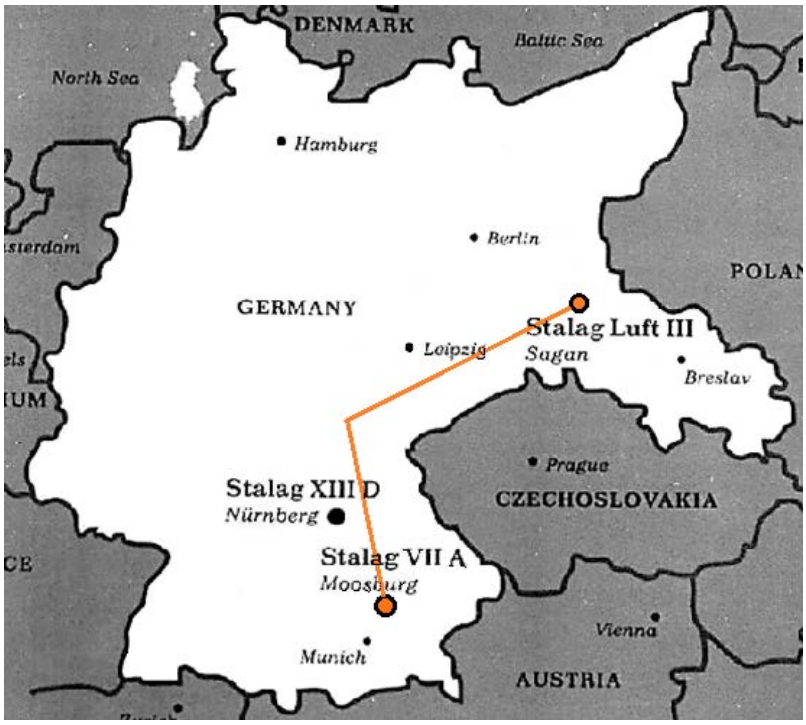

Figure 4: Map of certain POW Camps in Germany[122]

[120] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 112.

[121] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 112.

[122] "German POW Camps with 303rd BG(H) Prisoners," 303rd Bombardment Group (Heavy), accessed March 15, 2018, http://www.303rdbg.com/pow-camps.html.

The men spent nearly two days on the train before arriving in Nuremberg at their destination: Stalag 13-D. This camp was under the administration of the *Wehrmacht,* the national army of Nazi Germany, not the *Luftwaffe*.[123] Edwards felt uneasy at the camp, especially when the men were escorted for their first shower. The men had heard of the infamous showers in the concentration camps, and their spirits wavered when they saw the building in Stalag 13-D. Edwards recalled his worries: "We heard about [the gas chambers], and we were much distressed really at the way they built these damn shower buildings. Why would you build an airtight shower building with the doors that seal it? It just didn't look right. And this one was built the same way, and, you know, it looked overdone for a shower building."[124]

The prisoners experienced terrible accommodations while in Stalag 13-D. The Germans housed Edwards in "filthy" barracks.[125] The men found themselves confined, "twelve in a bed—that would be four across and three high… twenty-four to a kind of stall."[126] With no heating, the men resorted to lighting fires in their barracks and the smoke "kept everybody pretty miserable."[127] The food made the men sick, because "the meat had gotten ammonia on it. So this was pretty bad."[128] The Stalag also fell victim to Allied airstrikes on a daily basis. "The British came three nights, and the Americans came in the two intervening days. And they just blew the daylights out of that place," recalled Edwards.[129] The raids sporadically missed their targets and

[123] Manfred Messerschmidt, "The Wehrmacht and the Volksgemeinschaft", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Military History (Oct. 1983), pg. 719-725.

[124] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 114.

[125] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 114.

[126] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 115.

[127] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 115.

[128] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 116.

[129] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 116.

bombed the compound, destroying a barracks holding British POWs on one occasion. These raids leveled the city of Nuremburg, and Edwards remarked on the perplexing scenario these captured American flyers found themselves: "It was very flat and desolate, and this bothered our people. We didn't realize how badly we were tearing up these cities. You know, you looked at a photograph, and this was a ball bearing plant, and they had ball bearing in Focke-Wulfs. You don't see the human side of it."[130] Edwards felt remorse for taking part in the raids, citing the "statistics on some of the raids on German cities show there were more people killed in Hamburg…than there were in Hiroshima…so this was tough, and I was sorry I had to have a part of it."[131] Though remorseful, Edwards expressed that they "could not have done any different than this."[132] Life in Stalag 13-D worsened for those who had come to enjoy Stalag Luft III. Marvin recalled, "Nobody was interested in classes anymore… Nobody walked for exercise. You know, there wasn't enough food. Health was beginning to deteriorate."[133] Edwards struggled through respiratory ailments for his two month duration in Stalag 13-D.

As the Allied forces crossed the Rhine River and invaded the heartland of Nazi Germany, many of the prisoners, including Edwards, began preparations for escape rather than liberation. The prisoners feared that when the Allies came close to the camp, the Germans might "turn machine guns loose on the camp."[134] Marvin traded what little he had, small bits of chocolate for "trac[ing] a map" and an "escape compass."[135] He partnered with a fellow Texan, a man named

[130] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 117-118.

[131] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 121.

[132] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 121.

[133] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 119.

[134] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 122.

[135] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 123.

Berkovsky ("Berky" hereafter), and the two prepared to escape. Edwards thought he "learned enough French in my stay in Belgium" to "pass as a French laborer" and believed Berky knew enough of the Russian language to pass as a Russian soldier.[136] The men had to delay their escape attempt because, by April, the Germans began the evacuation of Stalag 13-D. The men marched toward the German town of Moosburg, and the Germans warned the POWs to "expect air raids, strafing, and so forth" and to run from the road to find cover.[137] Soon Berky and Marvin saw an opportunity.

> So, we were going out on this afternoon, a real pretty day, and some American planes came in to strafe, and everybody started running. Well, Berky and I started running, and we were together, and we just kept going, you know. And finally, one of us hollered for the other one that this was far enough. We laid down there a little while, and we could hear the guards calling the other guys back to the road, and it looked like most of them went back. We got up and went farther on, and I'll be a son-of-a-gun if there wasn't a German upon the outside us there another ten yards. This old guy must have been fifty years old… and he had gotten farther out than we had, so we went back with him. (chuckled)[138]

Reluctantly, the men rejoined their column and began marching. Marvin elaborated on some of the tricks he learned while marching, including how to find food and how to carry as much food as possible with you. Edwards found that the Germans "weren't shooting people for stealing potatoes," so he and others began digging up potatoes at the farms where they quartered at

[136] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 123.

[137] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 124.

[138] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 125.

night.[139] He and Berky found an ingenious way to get their farm fix, "A lot of fellows didn't know that you could eat barley, and Berky and I were getting fat on it (chuckle)."[140]

After more than a week, the men marched their way into Stalag 7-A, a camp housing a wide assortment of POWs. Housed in tents in the largely overcrowded camp, Edwards recalled that "there were about 2,000 of us in this particular group in camp" and that the group only had "three water faucets" and no lavatories.[141] The Germans gave no food to the soldiers interred, with many of them relying on the food they were able to bring with them on their march. Edwards spent time in Stalag 7-A from mid-April to approximately April 30, 1945.

The event surrounding Edwards' liberation remained vivid in his memory. "The night before we had heard a lot of artillery fire" but in the morning he saw a "line of tanks coming over the hill."[142] These tanks were not what Edwards expected. "They weren't olive drab with the white star. They were real rusty looking."[143] The tanks remained around three miles from the camp, so Marvin left to jump in one of the long water lines. After about thirty minutes of waiting, "all of a sudden the guy up in the guard tower started firing into the line."[144] Edwards found refuge in "this little brick building that the faucet was on," remembering "there we were just jillions of guys in this brick building, and there we stayed until the firing stopped."[145] This killing left many of the POWs baffled, but Marvin had an explanation:

[139] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 129.
[140] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 129.
[141] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 129-130.
[142] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 131.
[143] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 131.
[144] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 131.
[145] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 131-132.

"There had been some trouble during the night. The SS came in and we heard…a good deal of firing during the night, small arms fire. And we heard that the SS had wanted to move selected ones of the prisoners down on into the redoubt area, and they did move just a handful of them. But the SS had wanted to move a lot more, and our old Luftwaffe and German army guards wanted to stay there and surrender the prisoners they had and, you know, get better treatment for themselves."[146]

Not long after the firing stopped, the Allied forces responded. "An American P-51 came in… [and] he lined up a couple of these guard towers, and opened with all his machine guns."[147] The tanks began approaching the camp, but were slowed as a German sniper in the church tower in Moosberg fired upon the advancing army. Marvin remembered that "one of the tanks hauled off and blew a great big hole through the thing" before eventually a soldier placed an American flag at the top of the steeple.[148] The first American flag Edwards had seen in over two years; he remarked that "we'd seen an awful lot of the swastika, and it really looked good."[149] Not long after, American soldiers arrived at the POW camp. Liberation did not come immediately with the American army. Marvin and his fellow POWs waited "a couple or three days" before receiving any food from their liberators.[150] When it finally came, liberation felt dreamlike to Marvin. "Well, we just couldn't hardly believe it. We were afraid something would go wrong and that we'd still, you know, go the other way."[151]

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[146] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 132-133.

[147] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 132.

[148] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 133.

[149] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 134.

[150] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 134.

[151] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 135.

When reminiscing on the entirety of his internment, Edwards felt most proud that he "didn't crack in solitary."[152] He remained steadfast and brave in the face of incredible odds. "I decided that if they were going to kill me, they were going to kill me, and they weren't going to be sentimental about it and trade me anything for any information I had," Edwards proudly recalled.[153] Like other POWs, his mind remained focused on "get[ting] back."[154]

Individual experiences in war have the power to connect with large groups of people through the ability to bring forward a human perspective. Similar to the way these stories humanize global conflicts, such as world wars, gathering biographical information of the individual being interviewed is crucial to humanizing them. In this effort, those who interviewed Marvin failed. Without proper questioning or prompting to allow Marvin to elaborate on his childhood memories and interests, his interview is clearly intended to give mainly wartime information. Like his childhood, the interviewer posed no questions about Edwards' postwar life. A second interview addressing these gaps in personal information is one remedy that was seemingly ignored. This lack of information served only as a detriment to the reach of Marvin's experience, as qualities that others may have connected with are lost to the past.

Historian Robert Citino discussed the evolution of military history in recent decades from a focus devoted to strategy and tactics to a broader, more general "new military history," encompassing the traditional military strategy scholars with war and society scholars, as well as in more recent times war and memory scholars. Citino stressed the importance of historical

[152] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 138.

[153] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 138.

[154] Marvin Edwards, OH 0067, pg. 140.

memory, saying "that the manner in which we choose to memorialize certain historical events—and to 'forget' others—is a highly significant indicator of contemporary values."[155] If historical memory is so important, especially to society, should it not then take an important place in historical research focusing on military events? Historians who combine both military strategy with cultural memory in their research allow for the examination of all perspectives of historical events. Establishing a base within the historical incident itself before drawing research from different avenues, including oral histories, creates the closest example to a full circle picture of this history, and the resulting memory, that any person who did not live through said event can experience. The importance of the war and its consequences vary within society, but oral histories allow for the examination of both aspects of war on an individual level, giving invaluable insight for the historical record.

It is difficult to overstate the complexity of World War II and the amount of sacrifice given by all persons involved. The enormity of the war affected millions, bringing individuals from all different facets of life together in shared experiences. The legacies of those impacted by the war cannot be forgotten. Oral histories, including Second Lieutenant Marvin Edwards', give a voice to individuals who experienced war, and thus the ability to contribute to the historical record. Oral histories allow for light to be shed not only on shared experiences between different people but also on the circumstances that are unique to each person's journey, and ultimately their lives help contribute to a collective memory of war.

As World War II becomes more distant, historians must remain vigilant to ensure that individual sacrifice, humility, strength, and valor during the war are not forgotten. As the

[155] Robert M. Citino, "Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction", *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007), pg. 1082.

populace becomes more de-sensitized to and disengaged from history through bland, generic textbooks, the stories of everyday people, thrust into a global conflict, open opportunities for new research, new curiosities, and new memories. Each individual perspective from those who lived through World War II aid in the establishment of a collective history. Without individual representation, the memory of war becomes one of bureaucratic limitations, intrigue and empirical data. While no certain facet of historical research is more vital than the other, disregarding the experiences of those who fought, suffered, sacrificed, and survived ignores the daily realities of war. Preserving and telling stories of World War II veterans, like Marvin Edwards, are essential to any effort put forth by historians or everyday citizens to rehumanize a dehumanized war.

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