



1982

Herbert Lefor of Dickinson: Germany, World War II

Herbert Lefor

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PRISONER OF WAR

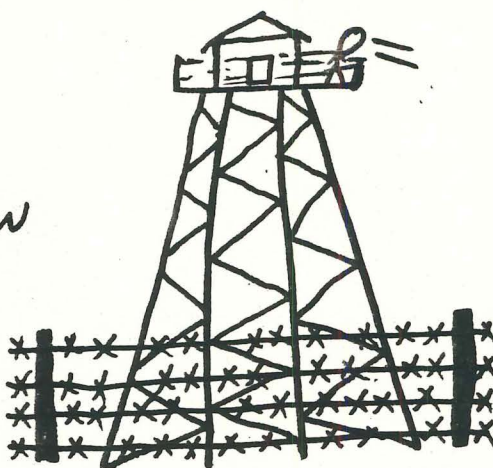
A TRUE STORY

BY: HERBERT A. LEFOR

DICKINSON, N. DAK.

AMERICAN PRISONER IN EUROPEAN
THEATER OF WAR
GERMAN PRISON CAMPS
WORLD WAR II 1941-1945

BOOKLET PREPARED IN
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EX-PRISONER OF WAR QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name: Herbert A. Lefor

Current Address: 875-3d Ave. W., Dickinson, N.D. 58601.

Address at time you went into service: 330 1st Ave. W., Dickinson, N.D.

Birthday: August 18, 1922

2. Family: (spouse and children) Rose V. Lefor (Wife)
Douglas F. Lefor, Son (Married)
Dale R. Lefor, Son (Married)

3. Work and educational experience prior to going into service?

High School Graduate in 1942, short work stint in the shipyards in Tacoma, Wash., then into the Military in October of 1942.

4. Dates and place of entry into service?

Enlistment November 10, 1942

5. Summary of events from time of entry into service and until just prior to capture or entering status as a POW?

After enlistment I was shipped to Hawaii for my basic training. After basic I was assigned to the 298th Infantry Division (Hawaiin National Guard) in the Service Company. I was typing clerk and file clerk for Colonel James D. O'Brien, Commander. About August of 1943 I applied for Air Force Pilot training and was shipped to Keesler Field, Mississippi & sent to Prep-school at Burlington, Vermont. Took ten hours of flight training and was ready to solo when all of us were washed out back into the infantry. In September of 1944 was shipped to European Theatre, landing at Glasgow, Scotland, then down to Portsmouth, England, on a ship over to Omaha Beach, France. From there on a red-ball truck up thru Belgium to Duren, Germany, where I was captured by the Germans.

6. Unit, Country, time, area, weather, etc., at time event occurred which resulted in POW status? 9th Infantry Division, Company E., December 12, 1944, time about 4 in the afternoon, in Marieawiler, a suburb of Duren, Germany. Weather was wintertime, cold, not snowing, we spearheaded and got cut off, eight of us took refuge in a shed where there was an old horse-drawn hearse in. Two wounded from small arms fire. Surrounded by German soldiers, were force to surrender. I could speak German so we were treated fairly. They stripped us of our ~~money, watches, rings, etc.~~ money, rings, watches, etc. & marched us to headquarters in Duren, where we were, interrogated.

7. Describe military or other events that resulted in your POW status?

The Germans launched their big offensive push, called the Battle of the Bulge at that time and we ~~were~~ were at the head of our spearhead.

8. Following your capture, describe what happened. How many men were involved? Where did you go? How did you go? What type of personnel (military or civilian) took control of you? After our capture, we were taken to German Military Headquarters where we were interrogated, the wounded were given very good medical care by German doctors, two wounded, six captured. We were taken by a guard heading East, stayed in a hay loft of a barn that night., next day marched East to Cologne where we got on a train to go South along the Rhine River To Coblenz where we got off & marched East again toward Limburg where there was a temporary camp where the assigned prisoners of war to other permanent camps. We were in the hands of the German Military all of the time. No civilians were involved.

9. Were you able to hide or escape? If so, tell what happened. Where did you hide? Food? Clothing? Water? Weather? Sleep? etc.

No chance for hiding or escaping.

10. How did your escape end? Returned to U.S. control? Discovered by enemy?

11. Could you describe in sequence the various places you were interrogated and the methods of questioning the enemy used?

Interrogated at Military Headquarters in Duren by a German Captain named Schuessler, he just wanted to know what our unit was. Very nice man, we just gave our rank, name and serial numbers. That was all of the interrogations we had.

12. Did you have a weapon on yourself when you were captured? Did it effect your treatment?

I had a Browning Automatic Rifle(BAR) on myself and the rest just Had MI rifles at the time we were captured, The German soldiers told us in German just to drop our weapons slowly & come out of the shed with our hands above our heads. The fact that I told them that I could speak german, made a great difference in our treatment.

13. Were you at any time considered a civilian or an enemy spy or a wrong nationality? If so, how did this effect your treatment?

Never considered anything but a soldier of the UNITED STATES ~~ARMY~~ ARMY.

14. When captured or escaping, what clothing or equipment were you wearing? What changes did the enemy make in your clothing?

When captured, we had on our winter coats, gloves, combat boots and a stocking cap on our heads under our Steel helmets. The enemy let us wear our helmets until we got out of the battle zone, then we discarded them & kept everything else until we got to our permanent camp. At permanent camp they issued us their own coats, similiar to our coats only marked on the ~~back~~ with a big white K G. (FOR KRIEGS-GEFANGEN) or war captured. We kept everything else.

15. What was your first food you received after your capture and what was your food from that date on?

Our first food was that evening in a german mess at Military Headquarters at Duren. Consisted of vegetable soup, a small piece of baked meat and a small potato. After that it was a liter of soup a day and a large slice of bread(very coarse, some said it had sawdust in it)~~for~~ this was the german ration. In our permanent camp how-ever, we received Red Cross parcels from Switzerland once a month. (THESE CONTAINED A CAN OF ~~SMX~~ SPAM, TWO PACKS OF CIGS, A CHOCLATED BAR, A CAN OF COFFEE & TIDBITS)

16. Did your nationality, religion, or race have a bearing on your treatment from the enemy?

The fact that I could speak German was a help in my treatement.

17. What was your impression of your captors? Were they arrogant, considerate, professional, troubled, confused, anxious, etc.?
They were very considerate, they tolerated the Americans, even liked them better than the British or French. They hated the Russians.

18. Were you alone or with others? How many? Same unit? Other units? Other services? Other nationalities, etc.?

There were eight of us of the same unit.

19. At time of your capture, did you have higher or lower ranking persons with you? Did the difference in rank effect you?

All of the same rank, no effect.

20. Following your capture, how did you feel about your family at home, and at what point or time did you feel they probably knew about your POW status? At temporary camp at Limburg we were permitted to write letters to our family and I beleived they would know within a month of my capture either by receiving my letter or by the Red Cross.

21. When did you receive your first letter, package or information that your family knew of your capture?

Never did receive anything.

22. In regards to your interrogation or questioning--was this conducted formally at a special camp or location? Did you have special or skilled interrogators? What did they want to know? How long were you there? Then where did you go?

Informal interrogation, at a field headquarters conducted by a field officer, not specially trained for questioning, they wanted to know what outfit we belonged to. we were only there about two hours then we were taken farther east back of the front lines.

23. How did you feel the war was going when you were captured?

We know the ~~Axis~~ Allies were advancing and that the war for Germany was near at end, we realized that they were making a last ditch offensive to try to break loose.

24. Did you think you would eventually get home?

I had doubts as to whether I would ever see home again.

25. Did you have an opportunity to observe the enemy in combat, training, camp, or moving from one place to another?

~~Yes~~ Yes , while we were being moved out of the war zone, we were on a high hill and observed the Allied fighter planes strafe and scatter the German field forces. We did not observe any allied ground forces take advantage of the scattering of the Germans, which would have seemed to be the natural thing for the Allies to do.

26. Did you suffer any injury at the time of your capture? What was done about your injury or illness following your capture?

I suffered none.

27. At your permanent camp or camps, would you describe your conditions. Food? Living area? Beds? Food ration? Health? Water? Weather? Number of men? Guards? Size and location of camps? Organization in camp by enemy and by U.S. forces?

Food was a liter of vegetable soup with a small amount of meat in it per day with a slice of heavy dark bread. ~~Our~~ Our living area was the regular barracks with triple bunks and mattresses made of corn husks, bed bugs all over the place & body lice prevelant. Health was good. Water plentiful, Weather, Typical winter conditions until towards spring of 1945. 600 men in our camp, all infantry, camp run by Germany Army (Wermacht), consisting of one officer(Warrant Office) in charge and eight ~~guards~~ guards. We had no officers in our camp(American). I was considered ranking man because I was the interpreter.

28. While in your permanent camp, did you know what was going on in the war? What did guards say about the ending of the war?

I knew what was going on because one of the prisoners had built a receiver into the headboard of his bunk and was receiving the British Broadcasts.

The commandant of the camp would converse with me. His words were, " I am ~~am~~ not a Nazi, I am 72 years old and was pushed into the regular army just to do jobs like this to relieve men for the front, I realize Germany is through in the war."

29. If you worked in camp or lived in work camps, please describe your daily transportation, work, food, punishment, etc.?

I did not work, but our men had a chance to work on road work for an equivalent of 20¢ per day in German Script money, they were taken out in small work details by one guard and transported by truck or walked, depending on the distance. * Men were anxious to get on work details as they got out of the compound. They would pool their money at the end of the month and I would bribe the commandant to get us a barrel of beer at the end of the month, this he did freely, he got us a 50 gallon barrel of beer once a ~~am~~ month and the men would gather in the compound and ~~sign~~ sign and ~~line~~ dance with each other. One man tried to escape during one of these parties, he was caught trying to go under the barbed wire. He was punished by being laughed at and jeered by the German Guards.

30. Was your camp or camps ever bombed or damaged by the enemy or friendly military action?

Our camp was bombed by some bombs that were meant to be dropped on some military barracks for the Germans about one mile west of our camp. We had Bomb shelters behind the barracks where we went for shelter.

31. Could you describe your roll call or counting procedure in camp?

Roll call would consist of all of the men from each barracks falling in rank in front of their barracks. I would have to count them and report to the commandant as to presence and accounting.

32. What type of guards did you have? Age? Rank? Weapons? Number? Service, etc.?

We had mostly older Regular Army Guards, each had a small arms rifle and side arm. About eight of them on duty at all times.

33. Could you describe your camp? Size? Fences? Guard towers? Latrine? Ration distribution? Hours? Lock-up? Heat? Recreation, etc.?

Camp was ~~next~~ about 1200 ft by 1200 ft, regular barracks like seen on HOGAN'S HEROES, Barbed wire fences very heavy on inside & another one about ten feet ~~farther~~ farther out (electrified). Four guard towers with powerful spot lights in each. Latrine with plenty of ventilation. ~~Ration~~ Ration distribution was about six every evening, Lock up was at nine, barracks were locked from the outside. Heat was two free standing coal burning stoves in each barracks. Recreation was baseball, volley ball, running, waling.

34. Could you describe the men close to you or the men you knew best? How did you get along with them?

The camp barber & camp cook were the closest to me, names cannot be remembered after so many years. I got along well with all of them as I was the interpreter & could communicate with the enemy for them & get them special favors.

35. Could you tell about epidemics or sickness in camp? What were the medical facilities? How were you medically treated in camp?

The only epidemic was body lice, every month the Germans would delouse our clothes and us. They gave us creosote to spread on our bunks to try to halt the march of bed bugs. We were treated medically fairly well. We were inoculated twice in six months.

36. Were any prisoners killed in camp or taken from camp and disappeared?

None.

37. Could you describe the ration or food distribution system? How much? Fresh, canned, stale, dried, etc.? Local foods, Red Cross parcels, parcels from home, trade with guards or civilians?

Our german ration was a liter of vegetable soup per day & a slice of heavy dark bread. Our Red Cross parcels contained a tin of meat(spam), a chocolate bar, a can of coffee, some heavy crackers, two packs of Chesterfield cigarettes. We received no parcels from home. The fresh ground coffee was used by me to barter with the commandant & guards for special favors and treatment. Cigarettes were used by the prisoners among themselves as barter or money. Poker games were played with cigarettes. When I went to Berlin to get medical supplies, I took along a guard & gave him two cigarettes, gave the conductor on the railroad one cigarette for my ride to Berlin, gave the waitress two small chunks of my chocolate bar for a meal & bottle of wine in the restaurant. With a carton of cigarettes I could have bought my freedom from the Germans.

38. Describe the type of work or responsibilities you were assigned within the camp from friendly or USA prisoners?

I was the interpreter for the entire camp & that was all of my duty.

39. What were some of the things that kept you going while in camp?
Your health? Age? Faith in U.S. Armed Forces? Religion? Family?
Aid from other prisoners?

Just the fact that the Allies were winning and that eventually we had a chance of being ~~xxxx~~ freed.

40. Did any prisoners become mentally sick or irrational in camp and were they removed?

Many of them were disgruntled because of the conditions, ~~but~~ but they were not removed. We just let them belly-ache. Many of them were chronic belly-achers.

41. Did you have any secret radios, newspapers or outside news sources in camp from which you received information? What information did the enemy give you?

One of our men had built a radio receiver into the headboard of his bunk, materials were bought from the guards with cigarettes & chocolate bars. Guards knew we had the receiver & told me they did not care only if we built transmitters would they interfere. Commandant gave me most of the news. Even asked me if I had any distant relative in Germany & If I wanted to go visit some of them.

42. Did you have any serious illness in camp?

NONE.

43. Did you have any riots in camp?

NONE.

44. How did you first know that war was coming to an end?

When the commandant came to me and said that the Russians were coming from the East on a fast pace push and that they would like us to pack up and leave the camp with the Guards and march westward towards the American lines on the Elbe river. They did not want to be captured by the Russians.

45. What were some of the tricks you played on guards?

Giving the one guard a hotfoot was a frequent thing. He was a jovial fellow and jolly. he would mingle with us & the prisoners gave him cigarettes from time to time. Also gave him some chocolate bars since they liked him. However they would pull pranks on him such as tie a string to the ~~xxxx~~ back of his belt & when he arrived at the Commandants office, he would be laughed at.

46. What about escape procedures and methods used by you or others that you have knowledge of or direct information about?

Prisoners conferred with me about tunneling out of the camp. I told them they could do what they wished but that this was March of 1945 and the war could not last more than a month & that if they would be caught, they would lose their freinly atmospheree with their guards. No one attempted to tunnel. Only one tried to escape & that was at one of our beer parties.

47. Were you ever bombed by friendly or enemy aircraft?

Once by Allied Bombers, were only bombed by error, since some of the bombs meant for a military camp one mile west of us erred and fell ~~xxxx~~ near us.

48. Describe any special train or ship trip you took while a prisoner?

A train from Limburg Germany to South of Berlin, (Three days & three nights in a boxcar) in the and of December 1944. Very cold, 40 prisoners to car all huddled up to keep warm. Latrine was a large paid at the door which was emptied once a day. Disentary was rampant. Prisoners were licking the frost off of the bolt heads on the wall of the boxcar to get some releif.

49. When were you close to death or felt all was not worth living and you probably would die or be killed?

Never that despondent.

50. Could you tell about any special religious observances by the enemy or special occurrence when they relaxed or tightened security rules?

We were taken prisoner of war on December 12, 1944, while at temporary camp at Limburg, Germany we were permitted to go to a Midnight Mass at a local Catholic Church, one guard went with us & left his rifle outside of the church & observed mass with us. Commandant encouraged us to have our own religious services right in camp every Sunday.

51. Would you describe in detail any particular holiday, if observed, by enemy or prisoners, such as, New Years or Christmas.

New Years Eve was celebrated with a barrel of beer. Lincolns birthday was observed by a visit to our camp by Max Schmelling, former world heavy weight boxer. He was an officer in the German Paratroops but had been injured & was visiting all of the American camps as he knew quite a few Americans himself, he said.

52. How did you feel about food in camp? How did enemy food agree with you? What was food? What were utensils? What did you make to eat with? Pots, pans, cups, plates?

We wished the Germans would give us more food, however we realized that they did not have the extra to give us. Our soup was prepared by our own cooks in a large soup kitchen in large soup vats. We each had a small pot & spoon to eat it with.

53. Were you aware of any other American or Allied POW camps in your area? Civilian camps?

No other camps in our area except an interrogation camp ~~west~~ West of us about 25 miles at Luckenwalde, which the Commandant told me about. He also told me that Belsen prison camp for the Jews was East of us.

54. In reference to your mind or yourself, how do you feel you held up in camp? Did you suffer periods of depression, crying, hysteria, headaches, loss of memory, etc.? How about the other men in camp? How do you feel you and others were able to live without nervous breakdowns?

Our minds were always clear. The only depression in camp was because of the lack of food & the parcels from Red Cross relieved that., No crying, hysteria or headaches or loss of memoray by anyone in our camp.

55. How do you feel other American POW's behaved or acted while in enemy hands? Please do not name an individual by name if you feel their behavior was not correct or up to the standards you set for yourself.

We had a chance to observe some of the other American Prisoners as they passed throught our camp when they were fleeing the Russian Advance x prior to our evacuation. These were prisoners from an Air Forse camp or "LUFT" camp farther east of our camp. The air force prisoners had favorable treatment. Since Herman Goerring gave the order to give the Air personnel favorable treatment to ensure better treatement for his German Air Force personal Prisoners of the Allies.

56. Towards the end of the war, what were first signs that the war was coming to an end in our favor?

The Commandant of our Camp called me in to his office and we discussed the war. He said that the war was winding up and that we would most likely abandon camp & go for the American Lines. He asked me if ~~we~~ we would rather be liberated by the Russians, If so, the guards and every German would take off and let the Russians liberate us. I opted for the marching to the American lines.

57. How did the enemy guards or administrative personnel treat you towards the end of the war or when it was apparent the enemy would lose the war?

They treated us a little better, hoping for favorable treatment at the end of the war.

58. Could you describe how your POW status ended?

We came marching towards a bridge at the Elbe River & stopped, The head guard then marched forward and an American officer & some guards came towards him & conferred with them. I was called to interpret. We explained we wanted to be taken across the bridge to the American Side. I asked the guards if they wanted to return or be taken prisoners by the Americans. They opted to be taken by the Americans rather ~~than~~ than go back and face the Russians. I asked the Americans to give them favorable treatment as they were good to us.

59. When or where did enemy guards leave? Did guards say or do anything at the end of the war?

See statement at # 58.

60. What did the American staff at the camp do at the end of the war?

See prior statements.

61. At the end of the war, where did you move? What was your food? Your health? Your morale?

See previous statements.

62. Could you describe some of the confusion that took place when you were liberated at the end of the war? Time, place, friendly or enemy forces involved, food, health, morale, POW discipline in camp, contact with U.S. military forces, etc.?

S EE PRVIOUS STATEMENTS.

63. After liberation or the war ending, what happened? Did you move as an individual or group, go by foot, train, bus? Where did you go, to another U.S. camp?

ALL OF US WHO WERE TAKEN ACCROSS THE BRIDGE ON THE ELBE RIVER AT MAGDABERG, WERE STRIPPED OF OUR CLOTHDNG, SHOWERED AND DELOUSED AND ISSUED CLEAN AMERICAN CLOSTERS. WE WERE ~~REXX~~ FED ALL OF THE CHICKEN DINNER WE WANTED. ABOUT A WEEK LATER WE WERE FLOWN IN C-10's FROM THERE TO NANCY FRANCE. FROM THERE WE WERE TRANSPORTED TO A CAMP CALLED ~~XXXXXX~~ "CAMP LUCKY STRIKE" JUST OUT OF CHERBOURG, FRANCE WHICH WAS A TENT CAMP SET UP FOR ALL EX-PRISONERS OF WAR. HERE WE WAITED FOR TRANSPORTATION BACK TO THE STATES. WHICH CAME ABOUT TWO WEEKS LATER, WE BOARDED THE "ILLE DE FRANCE" SHIP AND SAIDED BACK TO THE U.S.A.

64. What happened at your camp prior to returning to the States? Did U.S. military officials interrogate you, examine you physically, give you food, clothing, etc.?

We were given fast physicals, asked if we felt alright, (Since all of us felt elated at being liberated, we did not press too much or complain.)

65. How, when and where did you arrive back in the United States? Did you stay at some camp? Did you go home by train?

Docked at New Jersey, sent to a camp in N.J. & then sent home. Went home by train.

Later were given six weeks furlough in Hot Springs, Arkansas. We were billeted in the nicest Hotel in Hot Springs.

66. What things today remind you of prison life in your day to day living?

Nothing, except when someone asks me to reminisce.

67. Do you have any complaints about how you have been treated since your POW days?

YES: WE WERE FORGOTTEN BY OUR GOVERNMENT, STATES ETC., UNTIL THE IRANIAN'S HELD SOME ~~RE~~ AMERICANS PRISONERS. THESE PRISONERS WERE GIVEN MUCH PUBLICITY AND FAVORABLE TREATMENT. WE DID MUCH MORE AND WERE FORGOTTEN.

68. Do you have a picture of yourself prior to being a POW, preferably a picture in uniform? Do you have a picture of yourself following the war? Do you have a picture of yourself and your family recently taken, or taken within recent years? Any or all of these pictures would be appreciated. They will be returned to you after we have made copies of them.

HAVE NO PICTURES.

69. Do you have any copies of telegrams from the War Department or the U.S. Government regarding your becoming a POW? Or your release, or war time status as a POW? These or copies of these would be appreciated. If you wish them returned, they will be sent back to you.

NONE.

70. Do you have any letters or copies of letters you sent home or received from home during war or during period you were a POW? These or copies of these would be appreciated. They also will be returned if you so indicate in your reply.

NONE.

71. A few POW's were able to return to the U.S. or home with a few articles they may have made, been given or in some way secured in POW camp. Some of these could be: paper notes, camp regulations, clothing, cigarette lighter, insignia, hand made pans or pots, special cans used in camp, small tools, etc. If you have any of these, we would appreciate a picture of them. If you desire they could be sent with this report and we will take a picture of them and return them to you if you so desire.

NONE.

72. The above questions or suggestions are limited and you may write or explain many items not included; therefore, feel free to express yourself in any manner you desire.

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