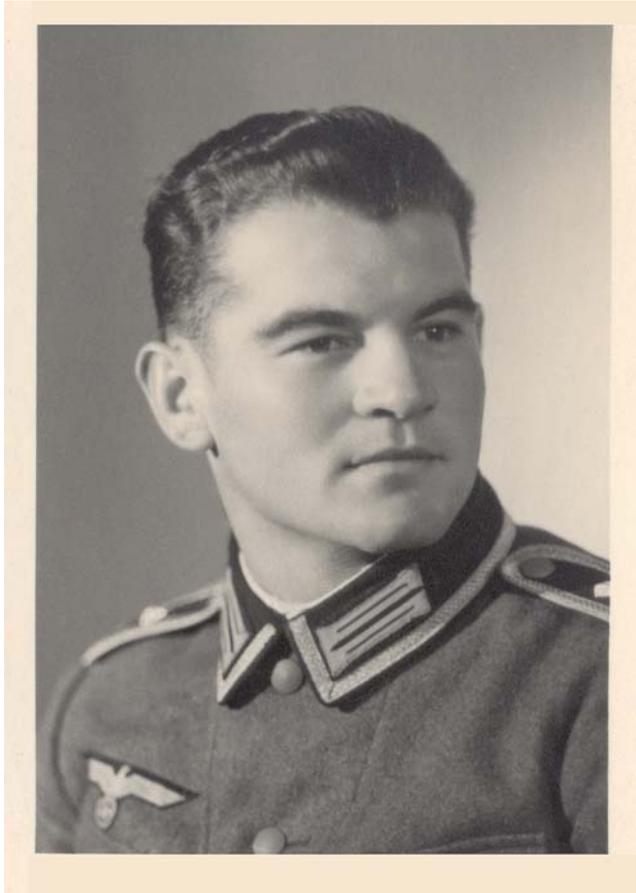


Hans Gut

A German Soldier's Journey



by Hans Gut

with Mark McAthey

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Preamble

by Mark McAthey

January 2005

The subject of this story is Hans Gut. I first met Hans at a football game in Edmonton during the summer of 2004. As we chatted during the game, I discovered that he had served in North Africa in World War II with Rommel's Afrika Korps. I had stumbled upon an amazing opportunity to talk first-hand with a man who had lived through an incredible part of history.

I called him a week or two after our first meeting and set up a time for us to talk about his past. He was kind enough to come over to my home. As we talked, I found Hans to be a very decent and honourable man. We started a friendship that I truly value.

Although somewhat reticent about discussing his past, during subsequent visits I was able to put together the following story of his journey through pre-war Germany, and his experiences during the occupation of Paris, and as part of Rommel's forces in North Africa.

It's a fascinating story.

Hans Gut



The Gut Children
Xaver (b.1913) and Vroni (b.1910) in back.
Hans, his little sister Maria (b.1920) and
brother Kasper (b.1915).

Hans Gut was born on the 1st of April, 1917 in Heissen, near the county of Allgaeu's capital, Kempten, in Bavaria. He was the third son (fourth child) of a prosperous dairyman who also made cheese and butter. The oldest child was sister Vroni, then Xaver and Kasper, followed by Hans and a younger sister Maria (pictured here). In 1928 the Guts added one more little girl, Zenta, to complete the Gut family with six children.

In April 1936, Hans had just finished his training to become a butcher in the town of Oberammergau, Germany when he was drafted into the Reichsarbeitsdienst or 'State's Workforce.' The Reichsarbeitsdienst was a disciplined organization, similar to the army and was originally formed to improve the infrastructure of local counties.

The town of Oberammergau was well known for putting on a passion play about Christ every ten years. The town made this pledge in 1633 when it was spared from the plague. The year 1934 marked the 300th year of the pledge. Hitler, using the opportunity for his political advantage, attended this particular play, during which time the town's population of 3,500 more than doubled.

Hans and his Workforce were based at Berka, in the province of Thuringen, for six months, after which each man was given the choice of where he'd like to serve in the regular army. Hans' older brother Xaver was already a member of the Signal Corps, so in October of 1936, Hans joined the Nachrichten Abteilung 27 (Signal Corps, Regiment 27) in the German Army (Wehrmacht) and was stationed in Munich, the capital of Bavaria, for one year.

Munich is in the southern part of Germany, 80 km from the Austrian border, 50 km from Hans' hometown of Geltendorf. After one year, in October of 1937, the entire unit was transferred to Augsburg.

In the spring of 1938, their unit sent a select group of carpenters and tradesmen, who were released from regular duty, to Beuhl am Alpsee in the Bavarian Alps to build an Erholungsheim (mountain chalet); the chosen men were delighted. Those interested in the opportunity had been chosen after applying for posted



Hans and fellow soldiers with the horses used to bring supplies for the construction of the mountain chalet in 1938.

positions. Since Hans had some cooking experience, combined with his butcher ticket, he decided to apply as cook, and was accepted.

Often, while preparing meals, Hans would use the spice 'Maggi' to add some flavour to an often bland menu. In response, his comrades gave him the nickname "Maggi-Cook."

After finishing the building in the late fall of 1938, the men returned to Augsburg to their unit and back to regular duty. In October of 1938, Hans had originally been scheduled to be released from duty having served his two years of service, but Hitler and his advisors changed the length of service, and Hans remained with the Signal Corps until May of 1940. The unit was then ordered on to Paris, France for the occupation.



The Erholungsheim (mountain chalet) the men of Nachrichten Abteilung 27 built at Beuhl am Alpsee.

The unit travelled to France via Belgium. It was during a train stop, unloading supplies, that Hans discovered a new friend--an undernourished German Shepard he named Prince. Prince became Hans' faithful companion, staying close to him during their time in Paris.



At a train stop in Belgium (left), Corporal Gut supervises his men. It was during this stop that he met his new friend, Prince (above).



The German Army enters Paris, June 1940.

Hans marched into Paris with German occupation forces on June 11, 1940. The Nachrichten Abteilung 27 was the relief force directly behind the combat units. Their unit took over communications for the entire city.

In Paris, their unit was housed at the Mont Thabor Hotel, located at 4 Rue du Mont-Thabor; Hans' quarters were located on the third floor. After a time, Hans became friends with Gustav, the hotel manager. Gustav would

bring Hans a cup of black coffee and cognac first thing every morning, but Prince wouldn't allow Gustav in the room until Hans was ready to receive him.

Once, when a senior officer visited the unit, he banned Prince from the establishment. So Hans simply took Prince out to the retreat used by his unit periodically, which was about 100 kilometres north of Paris. Prince remained there for a week or two until the officer left, then was reunited with Hans in Paris.



Hans pouring wine with Gustav and Madame at the Mont Thabor Hotel.

Hans, now promoted to sergeant, was in charge of about 60 men in his signal unit. As the war progressed, the men were gradually transferred out to combat assignments and were replaced by women. Eventually, Hans had 60 women to contend with! One of the operators caught his eye; her name was Hertha Linke. Back in Germany, after the war, Hans and Hertha would be reunited. They would marry and spend the rest of their lives together.



Hertha, far left, beside Hans with friends at the retreat north of Paris. The Retreat (right).



After serving in Paris for two years, Hans was given the choice of volunteering for duty on the Eastern Front in Russia, or serving in North Africa; Hans chose the latter. And, so began his journey to join Rommel's forces in North Africa.

Hans returned to Wiesbaden, Germany, where a signal company was being assembled, to be assigned to the Afrika Korps. Once organized, the men boarded trains and began their trip through Czechoslovakia, then Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria before arriving at Athens, Greece.

From there, they boarded trucks which took them west to Patrai, Greece, on the Gulf of Corinth. From Patrai, the group was flown by Junkers-52 transport planes to Reggio de Calabria located on the toe of Italy's boot. In Reggio de Calabria, the unit received their equipment, helmets, weapons, radio gear and so on.

Next, they were taken by boat across the Strait of Messina to Sicily. Once again the men were loaded onto trains and taken to Palermo, where they remained for about four days. Hans recalled that while assembling there for shipping assignments to North Africa, he encountered his first taste of the war in the North African campaign. British bombers from the Royal Air Force (RAF) appeared overhead and bombed the base at Palermo. Hans and the others hid under tables until the bombing ceased, then went back to the business at hand, preparing to be shipped south across the Mediterranean.



Hans at work on the roof of the Hotel Maurice. This hotel was the official residence of the Kommandant of Paris.



Junkers-52 transport planes



Hans' unit landed in La Goulette, on the northern tip of Tunisia. During debarkation, they were once again bombed by the RAF. When the bombers were gone, the unit travelled to the German depot in Tunis where they reassembled for their final journey to the front and set out by train along the coast of North Africa.

The train, loaded with German and Italian troops, was slowly making its way eastward, when suddenly the Italians began jumping off the train and heading into the ditches along the tracks. As they looked to the sky, the inexperienced German troops discovered why. Two RAF Spitfire fighters were beginning a strafing run on their train. Fortunately, the attack didn't last long and no one was hurt. There was little damage done, so they continued on their way. Hans would later recall that "if you had the Italians with you, you'd know what to do."

Hans also commented that as far as camaraderie was concerned, the Italians he served with were top-notch; sometimes more so than his fellow countrymen. For example, if Rommel gave orders to his transports not to stop, they didn't; not even for their own men. But, the Italians could always be counted on to give you a hand.

After Hans and his unit were off-loaded at Sollum, Egypt, just west of the Halfaya Pass (south east of Tobruk), they wound up sitting around for three or four days in tents awaiting assignments to particular field units. Eventually, Hans was assigned to the 190 Nachrichten-Komp/ABT.190, or the 90th Light Company.

It was late October of 1942 and, by this time, Rommel's forces were already retreating westward towards Tunisia after the second and final Battle for El Alamein against the British 8th Army. Hans and his Funkwagen unit (four men, including Hans who was in command) were busy during the retreat stringing and retrieving communication lines

between various companies in the field. During one such occasion, Hans was hit in the back on his brotbeutel (bread bag) by heavy machine gun fire. Fortunately, the bullet had travelled just beyond its effective range, and had little effect. On a couple of occasions, Hans was sent out on reconnaissance missions in a Panzer Mk. III, acting as radio operator.

He recalled seeing only one town during his missions along the coast. This was at Mareth, also known as the Mareth Line in the military jargon of the time, the site of an intense bombardment by the British 8th Army.

The German forces were eventually pushed back to the northern tip of Tunisia. The Americans were on the northwest flank, the free French along the western flank, and the British were moving up on their southern flank.



Capture and Confinement

In His Own Words

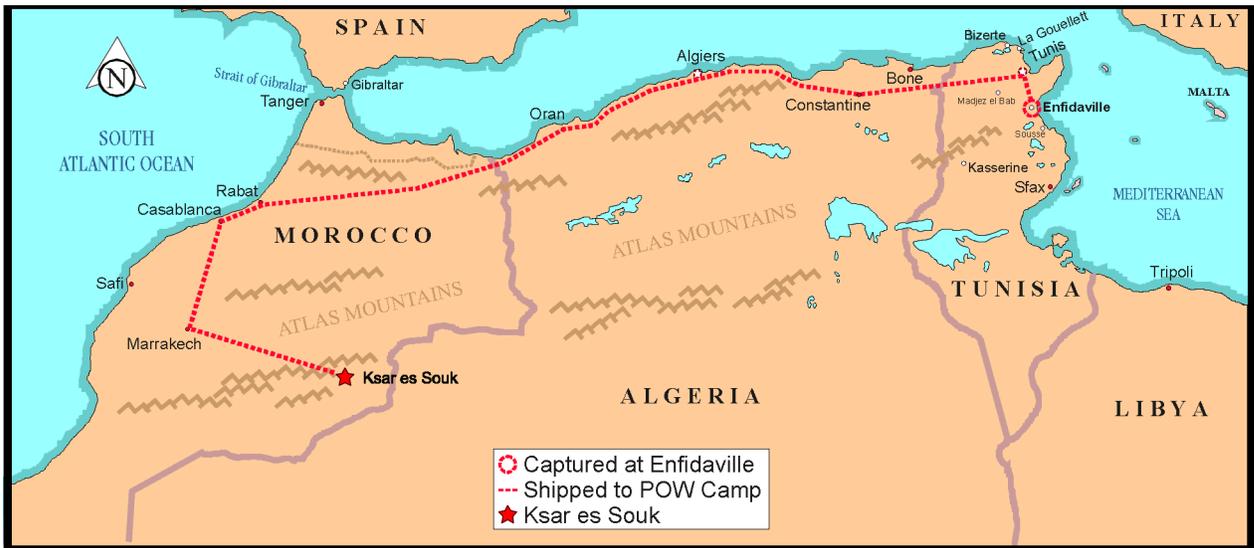
Hans Gut

After the German Afrika Korps ran out of breath and capitulated on May 13, 1943, the English Eighth Army captured me at Enfidaville, Tunisia. They had me and a couple of hundred fellow soldiers march about 27 km to Sousse, Tunisia. There we had the opportunity to cool off from the immense North African heat in the Mediterranean Sea.

On June 3rd we were transported in open trucks through the city of Tunis, which contained a mixed population of half French, half Italian. From one side of the street we had stones flying at us, cigarettes came from the other side. After a day or so we arrived at Souk el Harras in Algeria. Spread out on a hill

was an immense camp with about 1000 tents, each accomodating two to five men. An old English sergeant hit the tents every morning with his 'symbolic stick' and yelled, "Get up you stinkers!" (or something to that effect). For breakfast we were served nice English tea and biscuits--good but not very filling for our empty stomachs.

A bad thing about this camp was that the open latrine was very primitive. More than once the seat broke through and the poor fellow using it wound up in the not-so-sweet-smelling human waste. The fellow was then sent to the water tank truck for a thorough wash



down, which was a relief for all of us. Then, one day there was a terrible accident. The water tank on top of the hill broke loose, rolled down through the camp over many tents killing eight P.O.W.'s and injuring many more.

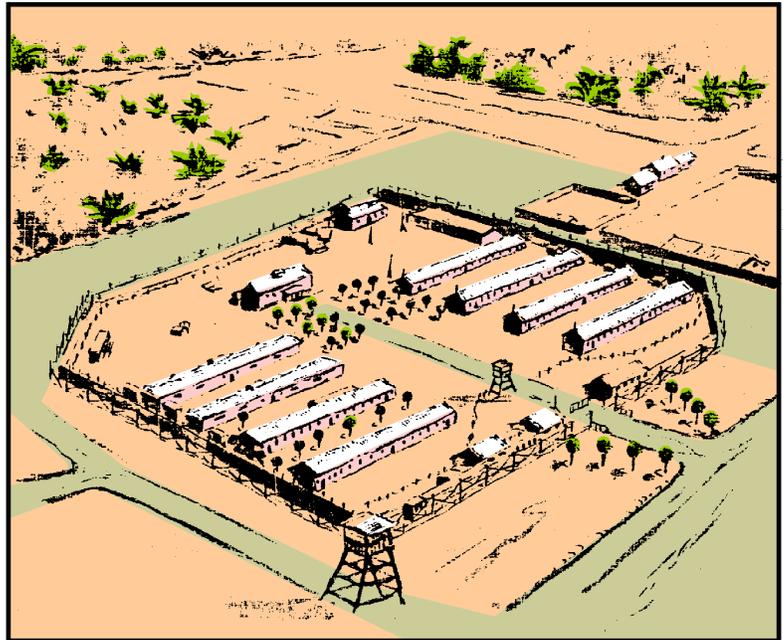
After a week or so at Souk el Harras, we walked to the railroad station at Constantine, Algeria and boarded box cars, 42 per car. From June 30 to July 5 we rode the train to Casablanca, Morocco, where we were deposited at the U.S. P.O.W. camp at Ber Rechid. Our British commander signed us over to the American soldiers. There we were properly identified and registered as prisoners of the U.S.A. The only personal item I was allowed to keep was my watch, probably because it did not tick and appeared to have no value. Even my diary was taken (it was given back to me on March 21st 1945 in Brady, Texas, minus a few pages). Every one was allowed to keep his spoon and eating pot. The food was good and plenty at this camp.

After a few days we were herded onto trucks, standing room only. The truck drivers were Moroccans, the commander was a Gaulist and the guards were Senegalese soldiers. There was confusion amongst us about the change of guardians. "C'est la vie!" say the French. It appeared that we were once again French prisoners.

The trucks, 30 in total, rolled toward the Atlas Mountains. At nightfall we arrived at an old fort with high walls, watchtowers and a big gate. We were marched toward the gate, single file, and were ordered to place our shoes in a line along the wall. Once inside the walls, we could lie on the sand and watch the stars. Unfortunately, there was no food or water. To everyone's surprise, as we marched out of the gate in the morning in single file, only in reverse order, our shoes were there, where we left them the evening before. Smart idea: "No shoes, no escape."

As we boarded the trucks we received a chunk of bread and a pint of water in our kochgeschirr (soup-pot). The following night we arrived at Ksar es Souk, a former garrison of the French Foreign Legion.

Eight barracks, an infirmary, a kitchen, an office building and a latrine made up the new habitat for the 1,500 of us. We were happy to move into brick buildings; until now our habitats had only been tents. But as the days went on, we found ourselves in a not very comfortable situation. We didn't



The Prisoner of War camp at Ksar es Souk

have tables or chairs; we lived and slept two feet apart on thatched mats on the floor. Our companions were lice as well as bed bugs and fleas. We were given loaves of bread for lunch, 2/5ths of a loaf each, with one of us having to split the loaves into equal pieces, without the luxury of a knife. After a week's trial, I had the honour of doing it for the ten of us in the room.

As Sergeants, we lived separate from the regulars. We also received 10 francs pay a month in comparison to 2 francs for the regulars. The only chance to spend the money was with the appearance of an Arab and his donkey which carried two sacks of dates on its back. My cash supplied me with a handful of dates; sometimes I was fortunate because I do have a large right hand. The poor boys received only four or five dates with their 2 francs.

Breakfast was a half soup-pot of coffee, which looked like nothing more than brown water. Then we waited for the bread ration, which came about 10 a.m. Dinner at night consisted of a full pot of soup, with about a spoon full of onions slices or five to seven peas in it.

The gossip around the camp was that Alois Shirmer, a fellow prisoner, once found only one pea in his soup. He told his roommates, "This one I do not need either!" He fished it out with his spoon and threw it out the window. After that, the lentil soup did not have any peas in it, but there were plenty of grains of sand, and bugs at the bottom of the pot.

One good thing at Ksar es Souk was the running water, even if it was only dripping, as we had the opportunity to wash ourselves. At the tent camps back in Morocco, those poor prisoners only received their soup-pot full of water each day for drinking and bathing.

The toilet was French style, a round hole which led down to the sewer. There was kind of a groove along the wall where we put a foot in order to collect the dripping water to flush the hole; because the dripping water did not run fast enough to flush the hole without our help.

To clean our backsides we used a 'special' tool. Each of us sifted through the sand in the camp for an oval, flat stone, the kind you throw in the water to make skipping jumps. With that stone we scraped our buttocks, then washed them both with our bare hands. That was a miserable life.

Somehow the International Red Cross found out about us poor suckers in Ksar es Souk. This resulted in a shipment of food which arrived in December 1943, along with a Red Cross representative. He supervised the distribution of the food and collected our home addresses. Each of us received five post cards, and we were allowed to send one home each month. We enjoyed our goodies over several weeks, some spread it out even longer.

As of January 1944, we began receiving mail from our relatives, as well as food parcels and writing materials. The Red Cross sent us many good books. We also were supplied with tables and chairs, but they could only be put up between the buildings, as there was no room in the barracks. We moved them around to spots in the shade, according to the time of day. Each day a different barracks had the use of them.

Tragic incidents happened once in a while. There was a kind of obscure line marked ten feet back from the 12 foot high stone wall surrounding the garrison. In our regiment there was an older P.O.W., who was a geologist who'd worked with Rommel's staff and had been responsible for finding water in the desert. Just a nice old fellow, not a soldier at all. While engrossed in reading a book, he wandered too close to the wall, and a guard in the watchtower shot him. The guards also had other games. Knowing that many prisoners were craving a smoke, they would throw ½ smoked cigarettes from their watchtowers, and when a desperate prisoner tried to retrieve it they shot at him, not aiming very close, but enough to scare the poor sucker.

Going to the dentist was another dilemma. One soldier, claiming to be a dentist, had been pulling teeth. He had only primitive tools, no narcotics, just his assurance that he would relieve the pain. He had a strong assistant with him to hold your head. I know how it felt; I had two wisdom teeth pulled. Everyone was wondering how long this kind of life would last.

Off to America

One day, out of the blue, there was a big commotion and noise outside the garrison. Three bell rings sounded (signalling a roll call) and out to the parade ground we went. A lieutenant from the United States Army informed us that we were going to America.

England, France and the United States, three of the allied forces, divided the 120,000 German prisoners into three groups. (I wonder who it was that, with a stroke of a pen, decided which group of 40,000 went to whom). The reason we'd wound up in Ksar es Souk in the first place was that the U.S. had been preparing for the invasion of Italy, and they had to get us out of the picture somehow.

The American Lieutenant wanted the same number of prisoners that had originally been deposited in Ksar es Souk in 1943. The selection was based on an alphabetical selection, starting with the letter 'A'. By the letter H, the number had been reached. Since my last name started with the letter G, I was lucky to go. In reality, some of the original prisoners had died, but many more had arrived from the campaign in Italy.

After my release in 1946, I found out that the remaining poor fellows in Ksar es Souk were offered a chance to join the French Foreign Legion, or to be sent to work camps in Morocco. A few I met after my release. Those who chose the Foreign Legion, were sent to Indo-China and were honourably discharged (with pensions) when the French left. Those left in Morocco had a terrible time, and many of them died.

We lucky ones made the return trip to Casablanca. There we were herded into boxcars, with standing room only. Germany was still occupying France at that time, so the Gaulist guards were not very friendly toward us. For food, we were given a chunk of dry salted cod, but they forgot to put water in our soup-pot. The five-day long trip to Oran, Algeria was not very comfortable. We had only a few stops to take on water and more salted fish. The toilet was nothing more than a corner of the box car. We had no fresh air except a small draft from the door, so we each rotated for space at the door.

Actually, we did not know where we were going until we arrived in Oran. The departure from the train was casual and we were (almost) treated like humans. The GI's received us with a mixed attitude. As they marched us to delouse, they ordered us to take off our clothes and throw them in a pile to the left and march into the shower. We were given a bar of soap, something which we had not seen in a long time, and enjoyed the sprinkling water running down our bodies.

Upon leaving the shower, a towel was handed to each of us, then we were directed to a clothing store to find clothes that sort of fit. Finding the right kind of shoes was also difficult, but the Americans gave us time to find the right ones.

Feeling good in our fresh, new clothes, we were led to the food distribution tent. We received "K" rations, which included three Phillip Morris cigarettes. It was my first smoke after a long time and after a few puffs, "bang" I hit the ground. I was undernourished and no longer used to nicotine.

The camp buzzed like a beehive, everybody was running here and there to get something: blankets, utilities and so on. For two nights, we slept in crowded tents. On the third day we underwent physical examinations and were registered once again. After that, we were given accommodations in large tents and received cooked food. One day in October, we were marched to the harbour and up the gangplank of a Liberty Ship which had a 9,000 ton capacity. I don't remember how many of us were on the boat, but there must have been at least 500 of us crammed into one hold. For food, we were given "K" rations and coffee, tea or juice.

The toilets were up on the deck, fixed on the left and right sides, and constructed of two by fours. In shifts of 250, we were sent up, and according to whichever direction the wind was blowing, we were directed either right or left. There was a tremendous supply of toilet paper, but the only problem was that the paper did not fall down to the sea, but blew upward, getting tangled in the masts and wires on the deck. It flew around like garlands at the time of Mardi Gras in New Orleans, except the colour was not as nice.

We had an hour or two to wash ourselves at pipes dispensing water in intermittent bursts. The first day we let the wind dry our faces and hands because we didn't know why we were called up to the deck and had no towels with us. There was a checkpoint set out, both to and down from the deck. One of the guards, who must have liked my face, always gave me a pack of peanuts or cookies on the way in. The life in the damp hold was monotonous and we were glad when the call came over the loudspeaker to go up to the deck. To urinate we had to bang on the steel door, then a guard led you to a cubicle for relief.

For three weeks we sailed over the ocean in a zigzag manner. Our convoy consisted of about 50 vessels of different shapes and sizes. There were a few U-Boat alarms, but we only got excited when we were on deck during the alarms. We were returned to our hold without the guards counting us. Sometimes while on the deck, we watched prisoners being transferred to the hospital ship in a hanging basket dangling on a rope. When they catapulted the rope to our boat we had to go stern or aft to get out of the way. Observing such procedures was very interesting.

We finally arrived in Norfolk, Virginia, where we left our floating home. We heard a band playing "Rosamunde," and thought, what a nice gesture. As we walked along the quay, we noticed they were actually playing for the GI's leaving for Europe, not for us.

I don't remember how we arrived at the railroad station. We boarded Pullmans Wagons with two men to a four-man coupe. As we boarded, we were given hot chocolate and baked goods. There was even a water dispenser with ice water, something I had not experienced since my arrival in Africa in 1942.

It was a leisurely train ride from Norfolk to Cincinnati, Ohio. Then it was on to Springfield, Illinois through to Dallas, Texas--just to mention a few of the sites we saw. The train ride was very enjoyable with beautiful scenery, and St. Louis, Missouri by night, with all its gleaming lights, was truly a pleasure to see.

A screeching sound made us aware that we had arrived somewhere. It was the Marshaling Yard at Dallas. After a long wait, a column of trucks arrived and transported us to our new home near Brady. It was a camp with three separate enclosures. Each one had six barracks, a kitchen, a shower, a canteen, a pool hall and a sports field. Everything was new and clean. There was only one problem; nothing had been used before and had to be adjusted to function properly. The water boilers, furnaces and kitchens had to be set up and so on.

With all the experts amongst 1,000 of us in each of the three sections, along with the generosity of the camp Commandant who provided us with the necessary tools, everything started to work in no time.

The responsibility for the operation of the camp was given to us, which was good in building up our self esteem after the time of monotony we endured in Ksar es Souk. The rations for the P.O.W.'s was the same as the U.S. Army's, and many of us got sick by eating too much of the nourishing food at once. Eventually, nearly all of us recovered to normal health.

Somehow, surprisingly, we had more supplies than we needed. For example, we ordered what we thought was the proper amount needed for flour for our bakers to make bread. We also asked for sawdust to mark the lines on the soccer field, but it was not on the supply calendar. Against our better instincts, we used the over stock of flour for that purpose. To the Army's way of thinking, "If you need less of that, you need less of everything." They reduced the percentage of things we ordered on all our food supplies, so we went back to the old routine, with no more overstock reported.

When the war in Europe ended in May 1945, the attitude toward the prisoners changed. Up to then we'd been treated according to the Geneva Convention. Now we received different and less food, but it was still enough. Then began a kind of defamation, and we were all sort of classified as Nazis.

To curb our freedom, somebody came up with the idea of putting us to work. Up to the grade of First Sergeant, we were organized in work groups and transported to Casa Granada in Arizona. There we went through a denazification program, as well as a physical

and spiritual examination. It seemed that the physical was more to find out if there were any SS members among us, (identified by a tattooed number under the left arm) not to see what kind of work we were able to perform.

None of us were rejected and we were all classified as able to work. We were moved to Florence, Oregon, and then on May 27 to Filer, Idaho, to cultivate sugar beets. From there we were transferred to Rupert, Idaho, and a week later to just outside Nyssa, Oregon to work in sugar beet and onion fields. Then we were sent back to Nyssa again to harvest potatoes, onions and sugar beets.

The Nyssa camp consisted of about 150 spacious two-man tents and a huge mess hall with a modern kitchen. The food was plentiful and was prepared by our own cooks. On Sundays, for example, we had German style doughnuts, coffee with cream, and plenty of orange juice. For lunch we had a hot meal, a German custom, featuring beef or pork roast with plenty of vegetables. The only thing missing was a glass of German beer. In the evening we had plenty of good sandwiches. The guards liked our food as well, and snuck in to have a taste of it.

We enjoyed working in the fields. The farmers were friendly, and as a rule, they had to supply us with fresh water. Sandwiches from the camp were handed out by our guard who'd brought them out to us. Some of the farmers gave us extra sandwiches of ham or cheese.

We were praised by some of the farmers for our good work, and told they'd never had such nicely cultivated sugar beet fields. Once, we worked for a farmer who told the guard to tell us to work faster, then he neglected to refresh our water. To show the farmer that we could be mean too, when we were supposed to separate clumps of growth into single plants, we didn't always separate them properly, or we planted the plants two feet apart instead of one. Complaining to the guard didn't help the farmer either. The guard told him he was only responsible for returning to the camp the same number of prisoners he'd brought out to the field. This was only an isolated case.

We arranged our free time at the camp to our liking. The fence at the camp was five feet high, mounted on two by four posts with barbed wire strung between them. Some of the dogs from the neighbourhood realized there was food in the camp and came to beg for it at the tents. A few of the dogs decided to live with us. The guards did not mind when they came on the truck and went to work with us either.

Then one day, out of the blue, we had a new camp commander. He did not like the loose discipline at the camp and made new rules. He prohibited fraternization between the guards, the public and prisoners. Dogs within the camp were banned. During his inspection of our tents, he found cigarettes and wondered where they'd come from, since our camp store only sold loose tobacco and rolling papers. He also didn't like the amount of

newspaper and magazines that were lying around. He ordered the guards to search us as we returned from work and ordered more roll calls during the weekend. The guards did not like the new duties, and missed the goodies they'd received from our kitchen during the weekend. (I think the guards were reservists from the region and not used to regular army rules).

The new Commandant was a little fellow, without much of a personality, and he did not like us at all. The guards' attitudes changed and we lost our enthusiasm for work. As I remember, it was late in October when we once again got a new Commandant. It was rumoured that the local population of Nyssa may have caused this change by reporting the situation at the camp to higher authorities. Life became sort of normal again, and we kept on working 'til December, when the last sugar beet was trimmed and thrown on the farmer's truck. Then we broke down the camp and started another enjoyable train trip toward the south in December 1945.

The rumour was that we were going home via the Panama Canal, the Caribbean Sea, then out to the Atlantic Ocean and on to Hamburg, Germany. Somehow along the way we missed a connection and arrived at a camp at Stoneman, California. The camp was contained within an immense military base. We had to take care of the grounds, cleaning the kitchen, including pots and pans, the hospital, garages and what not. The only restriction was, "Do not enter the barracks of the GI's."

Our camp Commander was an older gentleman, 1st Lt. Oliver Wilson. I had the honour of meeting him because he had to sign a medical document in regard to an injury I had sustained shortly before we left Nyssa. I had to be treated in the infirmary of the stockade, and he wanted to be sure that the medic told him the truth that I was indeed healed. He was the only official that asked personal questions about my family and so on, rather than to ask what Nazi organization I belonged to.

Homeward Bound

In June of 1946, we were ordered to clean the camp and prepare for our departure. But to where? The rumour, Germany! "Really?" It was difficult to believe. We went on a train ride north: to Stockton, California, then Sacramento, through Reno, then on to Ogden, to Cheyenne, Wyoming, then Omaha, Nebraska, finally arriving in Chicago, Illinois.

We spent two days at the Marshalling Yard in Chicago. We observed a very poor looking district. The only thing that broke the tedium was the immense group of sparrows swirling around, making noise. A sudden rumbling was the sign that they'd connected a new engine to our cars, and slowly we wound through a mess of railroad tracks out of the city via Toledo, Ohio through Cleveland to New York.

There, we boarded the British troop vessel "Sea Devil" and snuck out of the harbour. As I waved good-bye to the Statue of Liberty, it occurred to me, that during the nearly two years I spent under her guardianship, the cost I had paid was my own liberty.

On July 7, we arrived in Le Havre, France, and from there we were transported to Bolbec, to be provided with our release papers.

After two weeks of uncertainty, (some of us were kept by French authorities), I was finally handed my release document and a 12" x 20" envelope with the contents a GI took from me in Casablanca in July 1943: the envelope contained a small amount of German money, Italian lira, and Tunisian francs along with some letters from relatives dating back to 1942.

The date I arrived home was August the 3rd, 1946. **"Quite a trip!"**