

Diary of Allen Dahl Young
Prisoner of War Stalag Luft I Barth, Germany
18 November 1944 - 18 May 1945

Shot down near Saarlautern
1330 hours Nov. 18, 1944

Horror Story



On the way out from a fighter sweep near Munich, Germany I was hit directly in the belly of my ship by heavy flak. I was flying at 15,000'. I lost my oil and coolant but worst of all I had lost my elevator controls. I made my first attempt at getting out at about 13,000 feet. I believe, at that time, that I was traveling at an indicated 300 mph. The air stream was so strong that it threw me straight back upon the radio section. I couldn't pull myself free and it seemed an eternity before I was finally thrown free of the plane. That is the last I remember until I came to find myself practically on the ground. Whether I pulled my ripchord or my chute was torn open on the radio, I'll never know. I probably unconsciously pulled it after leaving the ship. I later had a large bruise on my left shoulder and neck and some very sore ribs on my right side.

For the first 3 or 4 days I could hardly move my left leg or my head. To feed me in the mornings the Jerrys [= the Germans] would have to come in and lift me out of bed. Evidently the chute had been opened at an extremely high speed. I can hardly see how I got out of it all without hitting the tail of my plane or without breaking my neck or back when the chute opened. After hitting the ground (like a ton of lead) I got out of the chute as fast as I could and hid in the water and mud of a trench that I had barely missed landing in. I couldn't run so I hid in a hedgerow a few yards away. I layed there for about two seconds before a shot whistled through the hedge. Whoever had fired shouted "stand up." I stayed where I was, hoping that I had not been seen. Another shot and this time it was much doser: I figured then that they knew where I was so I started to stand up. I guess I waited too long for he shot again, missing my head by inches. I hit the ground with a bang. He shouted again so I stood up in a hurry. There was as I remember now, about six soldiers and a mess of young kids out there and they had me pretty well surrounded. It seemed as though the world had come to an end for me.

Here I was, a P.O.W. and unable to help myself. They searched me and took everything I had-which wasn't much-a lighter, watch, and knife. A German officer then arrived and took charge. He spoke a little English and asked me if I was hurt and the old routine of what was I flying, where I had been and where I was going. (They already had parts of my plane) I gave him my N-R-S [Name - Rank - Serial Number]. I was taken to a small village where I seemed to be regarded more as a curiosity with the civilians rather than an enemy. Just at the edge of town T-bolts were dive-bombing and strafing. I was taken into a cellar for shelter. I was then taken to Saarlautern to another Hdq. The 3rd Hdq. was in a church as was the 5th. The 4th was in a private home. Usually the army took over one part of the house and the owner would live in the other.

I was first interrogated by a non-com who told me he had worked as a butler in the Hearst Mansion in Calif. All in all I was taken to eight different Hdq. My last for the day was at

Saarbrücken. There I was given the good food they had been promising me - Black Bread and Black Coffee (I couldn't eat it). I was given a straw bunk and got a few hours sleep. I stayed here in solitary confinement for three days. I couldn't stomach the food but was sure getting hungry.

While I was here I learned that a pilot named Van Zandt [Robert Van Zandt, crashed 17th Nov. 1944, near Lisdorf] had been shot down near where I was and was in the cell next to me. He told me later that he thought I was a Frenchman.

We were both loaded on the train one morning and started out for Frankfurt. We had a wonderful chance for escape at the station but Van didn't have his dogtags and I was pretty well bunged up. I could hardly move. The trip took us about 16 hrs. during which Van & I got more or less acquainted - as much as we could without giving out information. We did, however, speak of escape. At one time during the trip we were threatened by P-51's strafing but flak drove them away. The civilians went crazy trying to get away from trains during such alerts.

From the time I was captured to the time I got on the train, I witnessed hundreds of families with their push carts and evacuating their homes with what belongings they could carry . It was a pitiful sight. We arrived at Frankfurt at about 1800 hours. And was marched thru the middle of town. It was really in shambles. We then took a trolley to our first camp, Oberursel.

We were stripped and searched and then assigned to our room. I was interrogated that evening and asked to fill out a Red Cross form. I filled in my name, rank and serial number. I crossed all the other lines out on the rest of the paper. It made the interrogator quite mad and he told me I wouldn't leave there until he got all the information on me. I was then taken to my room. It was a dinky, little hole in the wall and the bed was bare wooden slats. The room had an electric heater but I didn't get any heat for 3 days. I had to keep moving to keep warm. The food was terrible. Breakfast was two slices of black bread with warm barley water. Lunch consisted of a "weed" soup. It was sickening to smell let alone eat. It looked like grass, leaves, cabbage & sugar beets all boiled together. I had to eat it however just to get something hot in my stomach. Dinner was the same as breakfast.

I was in solitary for 8 days and was then called in für more questioning. This time he told me where I was from etc. I was sent back to my cell and was there for 3 more days. It sure was a relief to get out of this place. I thought I recognized my friend Muller there while I was going down the hall. I think he recognized me too. He was shot down a couple months before I was. The 3rd of Dec. a bunch of us were sent to Wetzlar (Dulag Luft).

We were issued a 'Joy Box" and clothed. This was stuff sent in by the Red Cross. We were given a shower and some hot food. We felt like new men. The Jerry doesn't give you anything but misery and a pain in the neck. I was here at Dulag for a week. We had a few air raids while we were there. Giessen, which was just over the hill was plastered by the R. A. F. It burned for 8 days & was still burning when left there. For our trip to Stalag #1 we were issued 1/2 a Red Cross parcel and a 1/10 of a loaf of bread per day. We got along fairly well although I have as yet to fill the hole in my stomach. It took us five days to go little more than 300 mi. I was quite cold because the civilians had knocked the windows out of our train. There was ten in a compartment made for six. It was quite cramped.

[Young later recalled: "One of the most harrowing experiences I have ever had was on our way to Stalag Luft I at Barth. The train went through the marshaling yards of Berlin during the night. The British night bombers really plastered us. The remaining windows of the train were blown out. The train was rocked back and forth by the bombing, but miraculously we made it through. When we were on the ground I sure got a different picture of what we had on our minds about

Germany. The trains were just full of people trying to get away from the area they were in, and I know the Ninth Air Force was bombing and strafing the railroads all the way through but they just seemed to be able to keep them going.

While on the train Van and I must have looked quite pitiful. A little elderly lady who was sitting close by must have had some feeling for our plight. She shared an apple with us. I'm sure she didn't own much more herself. I will never forget her kindness. It greatly softened my heart toward the German people in general but I guess we could have killed the guards if we'd had the chance."]

After arriving at Stalag Luft I we were given a shower and delousing and assigned to our compound and barracks. We sleep 3 deep with 24 men to a room. Not like home hut sardines get along so I guess we can. We have our own cook and K.P.'s etc. Co\ Gabreski is our C.O. of our compound. I met old Buddies-Lt. [Theodore R.] Staggers, [William] Moore, [John E.] Benbow and Capt. [Raymond] Mitchell. Major [John] Reynolds was killed by civilians down at Munich. I also met a fellow from Salt Lake.

After this "Horror Story" Young's diary continues on a day to day basis till the 17th May 1945