

A P.O.Ws. MEMORIES

Battle Order.

Briefing room preparations.

**The date 12/9/44 – the target FRANKFURT.
398 Lancasters detailed to bomb
the central station and rail lines – last major
attack of the war on Frankfurt.**

**This was our nineteenth operation: there was
a philosophy, often proved to be unreliable,
which said that on your first operation there
was a 1 in 20 possibility of being shot down
and after five operations that became a 1 in 5
chance, increasing to 1 in 2 chances after your
10th operation.**

**Seventeen aircraft lost that night – of the 124
aircrew shot down there were only 10
survivors and five came from our crew.**

**I've already described our being shot down,
and the eight days we spent trying to walk out
of Germany before being caught on the**

outskirts of Rastatt, north of the Rhine.

On the third day we were moved to a small village jail where we met up with three other P.O.s. and eventually moved to Dulag Luft the Luftwaffe's interrogation centre for airborne prisoners. We only spent two or three days there for Arnheim had taken place and there was an influx of prisoners. We were put aboard a train – a corridor train with six to each compartment and were each issued with a Red Cross Food Parcel: here we had met up with two other members of our crew, who had been told that we had been killed. Three were still missing and our concern was for our Rear Gunner who was a Jew, but when we arrived at our Prison Camp “Spag” was in the crowd waiting to greet the new entrants. We learned later that our Pilot and Mid—upper Gunner had been killed.

The train journey was over a few days, sometimes being laid up in sidings for hours at a time. Eventually we arrived at our camp. Stalag Luft VII (Bankau) which the Luftwaffe had somewhat

optimistically built in the middle of the Eastern Front in Silesia. The camp opened in June 1944 but was not yet finished when we arrived; indeed for the first few weeks we slept in small huts (kennels) sleeping six men. There was no electricity and only one water pump for over 800 men. At the end of July 36 POWs were transferred in from Stalag 383, bringing with them their secret radio, and news of the war's progress was distributed round the camp each night. Although the Germans knew the radio existed they were never able to find it.

The new camp was being built in an adjacent compound; the Germans realised that there were a number of POWs that were Army – almost certainly from Arnheim – and the Germans decided that they should work, so they were taken in to the new compound and made to help with the construction of the huts, not realising that their work was being sabotaged. The following day another group of men dressed in the Army uniforms took their place and continued the work in the new compound; at the end of the day when they were leaving to return to the kennel compound

they slammed the door of the hut on which they had been working and the roof fell in. No one worked after that!

Another ploy was to disrupt the morning and evening parades by filling in the blank files. This resulted in a count of more prisoners than were actually in the camp.

The new compound contained eight barrack blocks, each of fourteen rooms – 12 PoWs to a room, two tiered bunks, a table chairs and a stove. This was luxury. Two ablution blocks, a cookhouse and a large hall with a stage. It was surrounded by a double barbed wire fence sixteen feet high with armed guard towers on every side.