

AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMANY
Prepared by MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE WAR DEPARTMENT 1 November 1945

STALAG IXB
(Ground Force Privates Captured in the "Bulge")

LOCATION: Stalag 9B was situated in the outskirts of Bad Orb (50°1' N. - 9°22" E.) in the Hessen-Nassau region of Prussia. 51 kilometers northwest of Frankfurt-on-Main.

STRENGTH: On 17 Dec. 1944, 985 POWs, captured during the first 2 days of the German counter-offensive, were marched for 4 days from Belgium into Germany. During this march, they received food and water only once. The walking wounded received no attention except such first aid as American medical personnel in the column could give them. They reached Gerolstein and were packed into boxcars, 60 men to the car. The cars were so small that the men could not lie down. POWs entered the cars on 21 Dec. and did not get out until 26 Dec. En route, they were fed only once. Eight men seeking to escape jumped into a field and were killed by an exploding land mine. The German sergeant in charge, enraged that anyone had attempted escape, began shooting wildly. Although he knew that every car was densely packed with POWs, he fired a round through the door of a car, killing an American soldier. The day after Christmas, the men arrived at Bad Orb.

On January 25 the camp reached its peak with 4070 American enlisted men. The following day 1275 NCOs were transferred to Stalag 9A, Ziegenhain. On 28 Feb. 1000 privates left Stalag 12A, Limburg, for Bad Orb. They marched in a column which averaged 25 miles a day. On leaving, they were given half a loaf of bread and a small cheese for the five-day march. No medical supplies were available; men who collapsed were left behind under guard. POWs had no blankets and some had only a shirt and pair of trousers for clothing. Their arrival, plus that of other POWs, brought the camp strength to 3333 on 1 April 1945.

DESCRIPTION: From 290 to 500 POWs were jammed into barracks of the usual one-story wood and tarpaper types, divided into 2 sections with a washroom in the middle. Washroom facilities consisted of one cold water tap and one latrine hole emptying into an adjacent cesspool which had to be shoveled out every few days. Each half of the barracks contained a stove. Throughout the winter the fuel ration was 2 armloads of wood per stove per day, providing heat for only one hour a day. Bunks, when there were bunks, were triple-deckers arranged in groups of four. Three barracks were completely bare of bunks and two others had only half the number needed with the result that 1500 men were sleeping on the floors. POWs who were fortunate received one blanket each, yet at the camp's liberation some 30 POWs still lacked any covering whatsoever. To keep warm, men huddled together in groups of 3 and 4. All barracks were in a state of disrepair; roofs leaked; windows were broken; lighting was either unsatisfactory or lacking completely. Very few barracks had tables and chairs. Some bunks had mattresses and some barrack floors were covered with straw, which POWs used in lieu of toilet paper. The outdoor latrines had some 40 seats - a number totally insufficient for the needs of 4000 men. Every building was infested with bedbugs, fleas, lice and other vermin.

U.S. PERSONNEL: Pfc. J.C.F. Kasten was Man of Confidence, assisted by Pvt. Edmun Pfannenstiel who spoke German fluently. When Pfc. Kasten was sent out on a kommando working party, the barracks leaders suggested that Pvt. Pfannenstiel succeed him. Pvt. Pfannenstiel refused to take the post, however, until the barracks leaders had consulted POWs in their charge and gained their approval. Subsequently, he was an extremely able MOC. His assistant was PFC. Ben F. Dodge. Other important members of the staff were:

Capt. O.C. Buxton	Medical Corps	1 st Lt. J.P. Sutherland	Medical Corps
Capt. M.A. Eder	Dental Corps	1 st Lt. S.R. Neel	Chaplain
1 st Lt. E.J. Hurley	Chaplain		

GERMAN PERSONNEL: Noteworthy members of the German complement are listed below:

Oberst Sieber	Commandant	Oberstleutnant Wodarg	Deputy Commandant
Hauptmann Horn	Camp Officer	Hauptmann Kuhle	Lager Officer
Sonderfuhrer Bonnkirch	Welfare officer	Gefreiter Weiss	Interpreter
Pvt. Wolfgang Dathe	Mess Guard		

It was Hauptmann Kuhle who permitted American POWs to replace Russians in the camp kitchen and Pvt. Dathe who enabled them illegally to appropriate extra rations. Gefreiter Weiss, at great personal risk, informed the MOC as to the progress of the war and daily located the position of advancing American troops on maps which he smuggled in to the American POWs.

After a 23 March 1945 visit the Swiss Delegate reported, "In spite of the fact that it is difficult to obtain any kind of material to improve conditions, it is most strongly felt that the camp commander with his staff have no interest whatsoever

in the welfare of the prisoners of war. This is clearly shown by the fact that although he made many promises on our last visit, he has not even tried to ameliorate conditions and is apt to blame the Allies for these conditions due to their constant bombing."

TREATMENT: In a report describing Stalags 9A, 9C, and 9B, which he visited 13 March 1945, the Representative of the International Red Cross stated, "The situation may be considered very serious. The personal impression which one gets from an inspection tour of these camps cannot be described. One discovers distress and famine in their most terrible forms. Most of the prisoners who have come here from the territories of the East, and those who still continue to come, are nothing but skin and bones. Very many of them are suffering from acute diarrhea with bloody phlegm due to their complete exhaustion. Pneumonia, dorsal and bronchial cases are very common.

The prisoners who have been in camp for a long time are often also so thin that those whom one had known previously can hardly be recognized.

These prisoners, in rags, covered with filth and infested with vermin, live crowded together in barracks, when they do not lie under tents, squeezed together on the ground on a thin pallet of dirty straw or 2 or 3 per cot, or on benches and tables. Some of them are scarcely able to get up, or else they fall in a swoon as they did when they tried to get up when the Representative was passing through. They do not move, even at mealtime, when they are presented with their inadequate German rations (for example 9B has been completely without salt for weeks).

FOOD: When the Americans arrived, the kitchen was in charge of Russian POWs under the lax supervision of German guards. Sanitary conditions in the kitchen were foul and the soup prepared was practically inedible. When the MOC was permitted to substitute American POWs for the Russian help, there resulted a considerable improvement in the preparation of the meager prison fare. The 8 bushels of potatoes which German Pvt. Dathe enabled the Americans to steal was most necessary since the German ration was terribly slight. It consisted of 300 grams of bread, 550 grams of potatoes, 30 grams of horse meat, ½ litre of tea and ½ litre of soup made from putrid greens. The greens made the men sick, and the MOC intervened to have the allotment of greens changed to oatmeal. Later, even this small ration was cut so that at the end of their stay POWs were receiving only 210 grams of bread and 290 grams of potatoes per day. The MOC was convinced that a larger ration was available and attributes its non-distribution to Oberst Sieber, the commandant. The full ration listed above was the minimum German civilian ration minus fresh vegetables, eggs and whole milk. No German soldier was so ill fed.

A thousand men lacked eating utensils of any kind – either spoons, forks or bowls. They ate out of their helmets or old tin cans or pails – anything on which they could put their hands.

Only one shipment of Red Cross food parcels reached camp, 2300 parcels on 10 March 1945. Failure of another shipment to arrive from Geneva was attributed to the chaotic transportation conditions within Germany.

The German rations had a paper value of 1400 calories. Actually, the caloric content was even further lowered by the waste in using products of inferior quality. Since a completely inactive man needs at least 1700 calories to live, it is apparent that POWs were slowly starving to death.

HEALTH: In the month between 28 Feb. and 1 April, 32 Americans died of malnutrition and pneumonia. Medical attention was in the care of the 2 American medical officers and 10 American medical orderlies. On 23 March the infirmary held 72 patients, 22 of whom were pneumonia cases. The others suffered from malnutrition and dysentery. Influenza, gripe, and bronchitis were common throughout the camp. No medical parcels were received from the Red Cross and the extreme scarcity of medicines furnished by the Germans contributed to deaths of POWs who otherwise might have been saved. The MOC considered it fortunate in light of the exposure, starvation and lack of medical facilities, that more POWs did not die.

CLOTHING: Instead of issuing clothing, the Germans confiscated it from POWs. Upon being captured many men were forced to give up everything they were not wearing, such extra items as shoes, overshoes, blankets and gloves. Some had only shirts and trousers, no jackets. Others lacked shoes and bundled their feet in rags. At Limburg and elsewhere en route from the front, Germans took Americans' overcoats with the result that as late as the last week of March one-fifth of the POWs had none.

No clothing came from the Red Cross because of the transportation breakdown.

WORK: On 8 Feb. 350 of the physically fit POWs were sent to a work detachment in the Leipzig district. Other men at the camp were forced to carry out the stalag housekeeping chores. Until Pvt. Pfannenstiel became MOC, German guards had marched into the camp and taken the first men in sight for necessary camp details. This resulted in considerable inequity since they not infrequently took the same men time after time. The MOC arranged to take care of all details through men physically fit to work and subsequently furnished a daily work roster to the Germans.

PAY: In Dec. 1944 en route to Bad Orb, POWs were lined up at Waxweiler and forced to give up all money in their

possession. About \$10,000 was taken from the 985 men by the German lieutenant in charge and no receipts given.

Since the issue of "lagergeld" had been abolished, no money was paid to officer or NCOs. The amount due them was credited by the Germans to their account every month, to be settled at the war's end. Non-working privates received no pay.

MAIL: No incoming mail was received. The issue of letter-forms was irregular and haphazard, but each POWs was permitted to mail home a form postcard informing next -of -kin of his status.

MORALE: Morale fell rapidly under the brutalizing conditions and by March the majority of men were absolutely broken in spirit, crushed and apathetic. The Swiss delegate emphasized the fact that even American and British POWs asked for food like beggars.

WELFARE: The Protecting Power inspectors visited the camp on 24 Jan. and 23 March 1945, each time reporting the atrocious camp conditions and extracting promises from the commandant.

The International Red Cross representative wrote an extremely strong report decrying camp conditions as he saw them on 10 March 1945. That more Red Cross food and supplies did not reach camp must be attributed to the disruption of German transport.

For similar reasons, the YMCA was never able to visit the camp nor to supply recreational equipment.

RELIGION: Until 25 Jan., no room was available for either Catholic or Protestant services, although two chaplains were present in the camp. In Feb., however, the chaplains held regular services for both denominations and received the cooperation of German camp authorities.

When the MOC refused to single out Jews for segregation, a German Officer selected those American POWs who he thought were Jews and put them in a separate barracks. No other discrimination was made against them.

RECREATION: From the end of December to the middle January, POWs were allowed to leave the barracks only between 0630 and 1700 hours; the rest of the time they were locked in. Outdoor recreation was non-existent because of POWs' weakness. The British lazaret at Bad Soden sent over 32 books, the only volumes obtainable.

PROPOSED EVACUATION: Being informed of the rapid advance of the American forces, Pvt. Pfannenstiel began to prepare a camp organization to meet the contingencies of their arrival. Secretly, with the aid of the barrack leaders, he selected 500 of the most reliable men in the camp and made them military police, whose authority was to begin when the American troops arrived in the vicinity, at which time they were to maintain control and order within the camp. About the third week in March, the district commander ordered that 1500 of the men in Stalag 9B be marched eastward to another camp. When he received the order, subject protested that to march the men in their semi-starved condition was impossible. He realized that the Americans were close and wished to prevent the march by any means possible. The district commander met his protest by reducing the number demanded to 1000. Subject was told to choose the 1000 best fitted for the march. He then went to the German medical officer in charge of the camp and pointed out that there were a number of diphtheria and possibly typhus cases in the camp and that to march them off might spread an epidemic through the area covered by the march. He was successful in convincing the doctor who proceeded to slap a ten-day quarantine on the camp. By this means subject was able to prevent the movement of any of the American POWs until they were rescued by American forces.

LIBERATION: Subject was attending church services in the camp at 1415 hours on Easter Sunday, 1 April 1945, when he was called out of the church. He suspected at this time that the Americans might be closing in on the camp. Sent by the camp commander to Bad Orb, a hospital town, he was taken to the major in command of the town hospitals. The major proposed that subject take a white flag and proceed to meet the American troops and guarantee the surrender of the town. This proposal strongly accorded with the wishes of the townspeople. Subject felt that an American soldier wandering around alone behind German lines carrying a white flag might have some trouble so he refused to go unless he was accompanied by two unarmed German officers. The major named 2 officers and with them subject proceeded toward the edge of town. By this time an American unit, rumored to be one of great size and power, had occupied the hill overlooking the town. As subject's party reached the edge of the town, it was stopped by the German, Major Fulkmann, charged with the military defense of the town. Fulkmann denied having made any arrangement with the medical major for its surrender and refused to permit the party to proceed until he had consulted with the medical major.

At this time the German garrison opened up with small arms fire against the American position on the hill, and the Americans answered with machine guns. Subject's party was caught between the two fires. The German officer with him then walked down the street and told him to follow and keep cool. In the meantime the American firing, which had started high over his head, was getting lower and lower. Without much time to spare, the German officer and he managed to duck into an underground hospital. During the night the medical major and the major in command of the garrison met at the

hospital to consult on what to do. In the meantime the Americans began firing artillery shells into the town. They dropped one shell regularly every 15 minutes. The medical major persuaded the garrison major that resistance was hopeless and the latter agreed to withdraw his troops. The withdrawal took place during the night and the next morning Pvt. Pfannenstiel's party again went forward with their white flag to meet the Americans.

They made contact on the edge of the town with Capt. Langley, commander of an American reconnaissance group of 200 men that had run 60 miles ahead of the main body of the American forces, and hours ahead of its own ammunition supply. By the time that the group entered Bad Orb with its tank guns and anti-tank weapons pointing fiercely in all directions, there was not a single round of artillery ammunition available to be fired from any of the guns. Subject borrowed a car and returned with some of the American soldiers to Stalag 9B. There everything was in order, the German guard unit remained and the camp commander turned over the control of the camp to the Americans. At about noon, American units of the main body began to pass through the town, and when they learned of the pitiful condition of the American POWs at Stalag 9B, the units, as they passed through, emptied their PX stores and sent them up to the prisoners.

After several days, the American personnel at Stalag 9B were evacuated to Camp Lucky Strike near Le Havre.

"SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THIS REPORT CONSISTED OF INTERROGATIONS OF FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR MADE BY CPM BRANCH, MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, AND REPORTS OF THE PROTECTING POWER AND INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS RECEIVED BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT (Special War Problems Division)." Taken from the general introduction to camps.