

Missing In Action: The story of Private First Class Stuart B. Padnos

By Jonathan Padnos, 70 Years Later...

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When my father, Daniel Padnos, was 10 years old, he found a letter that his father, my grandfather, Stuart Padnos, wrote 17 years earlier on May 4th 1945, the day he was freed by the Russians from Nazi Prison Camp. [Picture of Letter's 1st page] Little Danny started reading the letter out loud until Stuart stopped him and said, "You have to remember I was writing this letter to my parents so I held back on some of the worst stuff so as not to shock them too much. We were packed into train cars like cattle. You could either sit or stand but once you took a position you had to stay there a long time because there was not room enough to get up or sit down. We were on the train for 8 days and nights, but actually 11 days because we waited for 3 days when we got there. There was no food, no bathroom. People got terribly sick. Some died right in the train car. Even though I was starved when we got there, I was so sick it was another week before I could really eat."

At some point he stopped reading, stood up out of his chair and started yelling and weeping in a high, scream-like voice, shaking both of his fists up and down. To quote my father, Daniel: "It was the most shocking display of emotion I had ever seen and probably ever seen since. Mom cried hysterically and begged him to stop. He left the room to lie down. I was in shock myself and did not move. Mom tried to console me but she was crying too hard."

For many years after that day, discussing the war was a taboo. Stuart probably suffered from PTSD, but that term only came to public awareness after Vietnam. At a later stage of my grandfather's life we were again able to talk about the War and ask many more questions.

This paper is my attempt at telling Stuart's WW2 story and it is based on that interview from 1962, another recorded interview that was conducted, again by my father, in 2002, when Stuart was 80 years old, and a third 1:1 interview that I had with Stuart, just a few months before he passed in 2012, at 90 years of age. I later conducted extensive internet research and came across books, videos and personal testimonials that were specific to the battle in which he got captured.

Let's watch a 2 minute video that will take us right into the Hurtgen Forest in the winter of 1944.
[<http://www.pbs.org/program/nazi-megaweapons/>]

Thank you PBS!

Let's take a look at a couple maps, just so we can understand the background and geography [present map 1: Allied Gains in Europe, June 6 D-Day – 15 December 1944, day before The Battle of The Bulge;

map 2: zoom in of map 1; map 3: Aachen and surrounding area; map 4: Hurtgen Forest, Roer River Dams, Kesternich]

Infantry combat is a brutal, personal thing, and the battle of the Hurtgen Forest saw some of the most intense close combat of World War II. The Hurtgen Forest was a beautiful place in peacetime, but in war it became the infantry soldier's worst nightmare. [Present 3 pictures of the Forest + back to map]

The American leadership grew overly optimistic for success during the pursuit of the German Army across France and Belgium. When the Americans approached Germany, commanders expected the pursuit to continue as it had so far. Confident of success, the First Army commander, Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges, permitted operations in the forest at a time when most thought that the war would be over in a matter of weeks or months. This was hardly the case, and by entering the difficult forest terrain, the Americans gave up the advantages in mobility and firepower that had helped get them to Germany in the first place.

The events in the Hurtgen Forest are important because they show what can happen when commanders and their staffs are slow to see an objective in the proper context. They also demonstrate the need for the operational commander to state in clear, unmistakable terms the intent, or vision, for conduct of an operation. It took the Americans weeks after they entered the forest to recognize that the significant operational objectives there were not road junctions and towns but rather the Roer River dams. These dams controlled the level of the major water obstacle standing between the First U.S. Army and the Rhine. The Americans could not safely cross the Roer unless they controlled the dams, but at first they sought only to sweep the forest of enemy soldiers and take several road junctions, key terrain, and towns. Some attacks along such lines were necessary, but the Americans operated in the forest for over two months before they launched an attack directly on the dams.

The terrain was some of the most difficult along the German frontier. It was certainly not the place for the Americans to put their tactical doctrine of combined arms into practice. Yet the repeated attacks in the forest did little more than cancel the effects of the air, armor, and artillery support that had been critical to success in Normandy, northern France, and Belgium. Had the First Army set out early on for the Roer dams, one might suppose that fighting in an area that prevented it from making good use of its superiority in air, armor, and artillery was worth the risk. Unfortunately, this was not the case. What began as a continuation of the pursuit across France ended as a battle for attrition deep in a forest filled with mud and mines.

It is not clear exactly when the Americans began to notice the importance of the Roer Dams. It is clear, however, that it was well after September. To reiterate, there were no operations orders or plans before December which list the Roer Dams as objectives of a ground attack. But by late November, it was apparent to most that the First Army must finally come to terms with the Roer Dams. The issue had come full circle—until November no one appears to have been concerned with the dams. Now, in late November and early December, everyone was. Aerial reconnaissance missions over the dams occurred as often as the weather permitted.

On December 8, 205 planes dropped 797 tons of bombs on the Urft, Schwammenauel, and Pualushof Dams. [Present dams on map]. Attacks scheduled for December 11, 13, and 14 either failed or were canceled because of bad weather.

“There can be no questions of the value of our present operations . . . our problem is to continue our attacks as long as the results achieved are so much in our favor, while at the same time preparing for a full-out, heavy offensive when weather conditions become favorable,” wrote General Eisenhower to Gen. George C. Marshall on December 5. Eisenhower noted that the Germans had “the capability . . . of producing a sudden rush of water by blowing the dams near Schmidt. Bradley has about come to the conclusion that we must take that area by a very difficult attack from the west and southwest”.

The outcome of the air attacks reinforced General Hodges’s, commander of the First US Army, opinion that his belated decision to order a ground attack against the Schwammenauel and Urft Dams was correct. Already on December 7 General Gerow, the V Corp commander, had issued a Field Order, directing that an attack on the dams begin not later than December 13. This order was in accordance with earlier instructions from Hodges. The V Corps would envelop the dams with a simultaneous attack by the 78th Infantry Division (Stuart’s division, and part of the corps as of December 7) and the 2d Infantry Division.

The day before the attack (12 December), General Hodges told the commander of the new 78th Division, Maj. Gen. E. P. Parker (remember that name), that the division had “nothing to be nervous about” as it entered combat, “that it had been proven time and time again, that our training methods in the United States were not only correct but completely adequate to defeat the Boche, and that he had the utmost confidence that the 78th would tomorrow begin its battle history with a fine showing”

The 78th Division paid a high price in men killed, wounded, and missing during its indoctrination to combat, but it learned its lessons very well indeed.

Wednesday, 13 December, dawned very cold with a dense fog when the 310th Infantry’s (Col. Earl M. Miner) 3d Battalion began its attack across the rolling, snow-covered farmland to take Rollesbroich. About 5 A.M., the squad and platoon leaders ordered the men to leave their foxholes and begin an exhausting climb up the 200-foot-high hill marking the LD.

Another unit in action that day was the 1st Battalion, 309th Infantry. Assisted by the 3d Battalion, it took Simmerath, which looked like “a jumbled mess, buildings leaning crazily as if after a hurricane.” Automatic weapons fire from concrete bunkers meanwhile delayed the attack of the 3d Battalion, 309th Infantry, on Bickerath, and the regiment’s 2nd Battalion ran into serious trouble at Kesternich, which became the 78th Division’s own small piece of hell. Capture of Kesternich would give the division complete control of the southern approaches to Schmidt, and once and for all, give the Americans free use of the Simmerath Duren Road.

The commander of the 2d Battalion, 309th Infantry, Lt. Col. Wilson L. Burley, Jr., designated Company E to make the main effort. Company F would protect its flank; Company G would support.

The Germans knew full well the importance of Kesternich to the Americans.

The Battle of Kesternich, 14-16 December

Lt. Col. Byron W. Ladd's 2nd Battalion, 310th Infantry, received orders late on December 13 to assist the 2d Battalion, 309th Infantry, at Kesternich. Ladd's inexperienced battalion (Stuart's battalion) had received word only that a battalion of the 309th needed help. He received no details about enemy dispositions or defenses. Kesternich would have been a tough place to take even for an experienced unit—it was impossible for a new outfit.

Ladd's battalion failed to conduct proper reconnaissance. A concrete troop shelter that covered the western approaches to Kesternich remained undiscovered, as did the extent of a system of trenches protected by automatic weapons and snipers.

The attack began about 6:00 A.M. Automatic weapons fire from the troop shelter hit the Company E and F riflemen soon after they had left Simmerath. Because of reports that a platoon's worth of troops from the 2nd Battalion, 309th, were in Kesternich, division would not give permission to fire artillery into the town ahead of the 2nd Battalion, 310th. While trying to escape the fire, Company F riflemen touched off antipersonnel mines buried throughout the area. The reserve, Company G (Stuart's Company), was so close behind the attacking companies that it suffered several casualties from the same fire that hit Company F. Thus Colonel Ladd was unable to use Company G to properly assist the remainder of the battalion.

Company commanders estimated the casualties in the 2nd Battalion 310th Infantry, at 25 percent. This attack stalled just outside Kesternich. The Americans used the darkness as cover to evacuate the wounded and dead and for resupply.

Lt. Colonel Burley, the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 309th Infantry went into Kesternich to assess the situation for himself. His body was later found in the town. The executive officer also disappeared and was presumed dead, though his body was never recovered. The commander of the Company H, Capt. Douglas P. Frazier, took command.

The commander of Company E and the commander of the 774th Tank Battalion were arguing about the issue when a shell hit and wounded several men.

That night, patrols maintained contact between the separated elements of the 2d Battalion, 309th Infantry, and 2d Battalion, 310th Infantry. Companies F and G of the 309th were north of town. Companies E, F, and G of the 310th were along the road leading from Simmerath. The patrols would silently leave their foxholes and enter the no-man's-land around Kesternich. These night patrols resembled hunting—or to use a more accurate description, stalking an enemy. Some patrols disappeared without a trace; others brought back prisoners, who were useful sources of combat intelligence.

About 1:00 A.M. on the 15th, the executive officer of the 309th Infantry, Lt. Col. Creighton E. Likes, took control of the two battalions. He would direct a coordinated tank, artillery, infantry attack, scheduled to begin at dawn.

Some ten minutes of artillery fire hammered the rubble of Kesternich. The Americans neutralized the troop shelter, and some medium tanks and elements of Company E, 310th, reportedly entered Kesternich before noon. Company F swept along the southern fringe of the town and secured its objective, as well. Despite the artillery and the rather well executed tank-infantry attack, the Germans still forced the Americans to fight house to house. The reserve, Company B, meanwhile assaulted the troop shelter.

Problems arose, however, as soon as the process of consolidating the objective began. Every step along the single main road running the length of Kesternich caused problems with command and control of the separated squads and platoons. Soldiers returned to the rear with prisoners and were therefore unavailable for the preparations to defend the town. Other men acted on their own and took shelter in the houses that still stood. This caused disorganization because the squad and platoon leaders no longer knew where their troops were. German artillery fire continued, and the troops were tired from fighting their way through the snow as well as the enemy fire. Losses among junior leaders had been high as well.

Colonel Ladd and his S-2 went to the town about 2:00 P.M., but they left the artillery observers behind. Ladd met with Colonel Likes, who instructed him to begin defensive preparations immediately. The radios were not working, and Likes then left Kesternich to report to the commander of the 309th at the regimental Command Post. Likes returned to Kesternich a few hours later.

About 4:00 P.M., just after the battalion communications section finished laying wire to Ladd's CP, German artillery fire began to fall with renewed intensity. At the time, Ladd was meeting with his company commanders. Then, a breathless messenger arrived and reported a counterattack. Ladd told the commanders to hold the town "at all costs."

The phone lines were out almost immediately, but the artillery observers were not in position to call for fire support anyway. Ladd told his S-2 to get back to Colonel Likes and get tank support. But darkness was approaching and by the time the observers had word of the events in Kesternich, it was too dark for them to see, and they had made no plans for prearranged defensive fires.

The S-3 (Operations Officer) of the 2d Battalion, 310th reported that Company E withdrew into the houses and that Company F temporarily stopped the counterattack in its sector. This gave the company enough time to organize a line in the western part of the town. Fifty-six of the estimated 70 men in this group remained alive and surrendered on the 16th.

Company G, meanwhile, became scattered as its men tried to plug gaps throughout the town. The Germans fired an estimated 800 rounds of artillery and mortar fire on the 2d Battalion, 310th. Ladd led several men from Company G in a futile stand near the battalion CP. The Germans took most of this group prisoner.

To this day, no one is really sure what happened in Kesternich during the night of 15-16 December. Isolated fighting continued throughout the night. Captain Frazier, the commander of the 2d Battalion, 309th, accompanied a patrol from his battalion that reached the edge of Kesternich. Though Frazier believed there were still some Americans holding out, the patrol heard only German voices in the town. Another patrol actually entered a house, which they found full of Germans. The GIs used grenades to cover their hasty withdrawal.

On the afternoon of the 16th the 3d Battalion, 309th, together with the remainder of the 2d Battalion, 310th (a makeshift force of clerks, cooks, and heavy weapons men), managed to reenter the western part of Kesternich. The S-3 of the 2d Battalion, 310th, said later that "very few men from the battalion were found in any of the houses, none of them were alive."

When Colonel Ondrick, the commander of the 39th, decided there were no survivors, he withdrew the attackers. Later estimates of losses in the 2d Battalion, 310th Infantry, were 6 officers and 63 enlisted men killed; 5 officers and nearly 100 enlisted men wounded; and nearly 300 officers and men missing. Some 75 men sustained nonbattle injuries, mostly trench foot. The authorized strength of the battalion, less attachments, was 871.

Kesternich would remain in German hands for weeks. In three days the 78th Division lost nearly a thousand men and failed to clear the Monschau Corridor. The division was unable to meet General Parker's directive the "ground once gained will not be given up."



Stuart was one of 300 MIA. Let's go back a couple years and understand how did Stuart find himself in this mess in the first place? I've always knew Stuarts side of the story, but it all made much more sense after I learned the actual historical facts and chain of events that I've just described.

We asked Stuart to explain how did he all of a sudden turn from a Junior in University of Michigan to a soldier? [Picture U of M fraternity]

"When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, we were suddenly at war. You have to understand the difference of that war and subsequent wars. It's like our house was on fire and you weren't just gonna let the professional fire fighters fight it, if you could get a hose and put some water on the fire you would do it, and that's what we would do.

Almost to a man, we voluntarily enlisted to the enlisted reserve which would allow us to finish college and directly from there go to officer's training school and then into combat.

The situation deteriorated and it was chaotic in Michigan because the Michigan Daily would come out with lists of enlisted reserves to be called up the next day and enlisted reserves to remain in school. It developed a climate that it was almost impossible to study. You'd sit at your desk studying and someone would come along saying "we're all gonna be gone in a month or two anyway, we'll never finish the semester" (which incidentally we didn't). It was a totally, just chaotic situation.

The enlisted reserves were called to active duty. We were sent from Ann Arbor, to Camp Grant, IL. July 43'. The ironic thing about that is that is where my father reported for duty in 1918 for WWI...

Grant was just a collection point. We immediately got on trains. You'd think that the whole war depended upon the secrecy of where we were going. We wound up in an Air Force base in Biloxi, Mississippi, right on the Gulf of Mexico."

So basic training was down in Biloxi? "I never had basic training! Biloxi was a classification station. You were entered in Flights, roughly 200 men to a Flight and you were put in a barracks and you started taking a battery of tests. After a period of time I wound up being the only one in a 200 man barracks. I couldn't get laundry or legal pass off base. It was hard to convince ppl that I was marching in formation as I walked down the street all by myself, so I had to sneak in with other people just to eat. All the other 199 were shipped out. I had absolutely nothing to do. Weather wise it was boiling hot during day and very cold at night. You would perspire, and your uniform would be soaking wet. So I volunteered to work for the Quartermaster in the area. Go in everyday, throw my uniform into the salvage bin and get 2 new ones, which was very easy to do since at that point the uniform had no insignia... that was my morning routine. At the afternoon I volunteered to work at the classification center, only for one reason, to get a hold of my record and find out what the hell is going on?? Why am I sitting there? Meanwhile, I call home; my mother is going out of her mind because the FBI has been going around town asking questions about me. Off course with her version "I must have gotten into some deep trouble...". I was classified to go to the air core intelligence school in Poughkeepsie, NY and they were just waiting for an opening and I just sat there for 6 months. I was working one afternoon at the classification center, running an IBM key punch machine, punching the IBM cards. An officer came back, slapped me on the back and said "how's it going soldier?" and I replied "not worth a good god damn. If I had any brains in my head I'd stay in Ann Arbor and probably finished getting my degree". "You're not wasting your time soldier, you got a job to do" and I said "sir, I got no job to do here. I am volunteering; I can get up and walk out of here any time I feel like it, and you know, right now I feel like it". So I gathered up my stuff, turned it in and walked out the door. AND THAT NIGHT, I came back to the barracks, and the First Sergeant is sitting on my bunk, which has been stripped, and there's my barracks bag all packed. And he wanted to know where I've been, (which truthfully was in town, illegally), and he said, "well, doesn't make any difference, you're shipping out of here right now) and I went out of there as a party of one, to Tuscaloosa, AL. The University of Alabama. I wound up being in the Army Specialized Training Program, which was sending kids back to college to become Engineers. This was something that you were supposed to apply for. Something you were supposed to take a test to get into. I never applied. I never took a test. They just got rid of me because what they found out was, I was occupying this whole big building, in an overcrowded camp all by myself. So, they wanted no further part of me.

I was at Tuscaloosa just 3 or 4 days and then I was sent to Boston University to become an Engineer. I was there for 1.5 semesters. [Picture of Stuart meeting Barbara in Boston]

I wound up at Camp Pickett VG, just outside of Richmond, not too far from DC. 78th Division headquarters. Commanding officer was General Sparky Parker, who decided that Camp Pickett was going to be a garden spot. So instead of what little time we had there to do some basic training, we

would be marched out to the country to cut sod to plant at camp Pickett. He then issued orders as to what hours this sod would be watered so that it would grow. And I have been on the watering squad standing out in the pouring rain with a rain coat and a helmet liner and a hose in my hand, watering the grass. I mean, this is just, how much brain power is exhibited in many of these areas.

After a very short period of time we were sent home for furlough, before being shipped overseas. I reported back to Camp Kilmer, NJ.

I fired a rifle a few times. I'm left handed. Now, if you fire an M1 and you're left handed, you get the ejected hot round in the right eye. Perfect shot every time! I told my friends, who are deer hunters and what not that in my conditions I'm willing to bet them any amount of money that using a scope, using a harness, prone position, standing position, anything they want; in my condition they can't hit the target. My conditions are simply this: I'm gonna watch your finger, as I see it start to tighten on the trigger, I'm gonna warn you, just as hard as I can in the eye with my fist. Now, you know I'm gonna do it, and I guarantee you I'm gonna do it. Go ahead and fire. Nobody takes me up on the bet.

So how did I become a rifleman? The range officer pulled out his pistol, put 5 shots in the bull's-eye, and pinned the medal on me. I also became a bazooka man. You get to fire 2 rounds with a bazooka. Ok. A bazooka is like a piece of stovepipe. Sheet metal. Very thin. You're gonna fire this thing that will pierce and destroy a tank and the round is gonna go zinging right past your ear. I mean, if this doesn't make you a little tense, you're unusual. So I fired two rounds. The first one skidded along the ground and the second one could have killed a Robin if one had been flying by. That's it, you've got your two rounds you're now a qualified bazooka man. And I carried a bazooka in combat. I was a mortar man and a bazooka man. I had both.

At any rate, from there we boarded ship, and went to Bournemouth England, which is a resort area as a matter of fact. [left NJ 14 Oct 44, arrived 26 Oct] And I wrote my brother [Picture of Seymour and Stuart], and told him not to worry about me, because this outfit that I was in, was so poorly equipped, so totally lack of training, that they would never ever think about putting us in a combat zone. That we were over there for police duty, and that would be it. I had no reason to lie to my brother. I might paint a pretty picture to my mother and father, but I was dead serious. I felt that there was just no possibility that they would be stupid enough to put an outfit this poor in a combat zone. One of the funny stories that happened many many years later, that gives you an idea of how "well" equipped we were; Mother and I took a cruise on a freighter, and the first day out, the purser said to me, the head waiter thinks he knows you. He pointed him out and I look at this big, heavy set, Hispanic gentleman with a real fancy curly mustache. Never saw him before in my life. "Well, he said to ask you a few questions. Where you at the Camp Kilmer in NJ?" I said, yeah, anyone who went to Europe was there, that was the port of embarkation. "Well, did you get in the boxing matches?" They had boxing matches where you had to tell your experience, mine was zero. But the prize, if you won your match, was a 2 day pass in NYC. Now, you're going overseas, you'd give your life for a two day pass in NYC. I get in the ring with a Golden Gloves fighter. I immediately got pummeled pretty good, BUT somebody recognized him and turned him in, and I won by default! Now I'm looking at this guy, where in the hell did he come from? Then he asked me, "Did you have trouble getting shoes?" I wear, in a dress shoe, today, a size 8, I used to wear a 7.5.

In a military boot, this is like a 6.5. 10s, 12s, 13s, 14s, they could give you a boatload of them. 6.5 they didn't have any. This guy was the permanent cadre, in charge of the shoe department at the camp. This is got to be 15 years later. He remembered me, because it was such a disgrace for him, not being able to do his job. I went into combat with officers Oxfords; In the winter time. I went into combat in the wintertime with a cotton shirt and an unlined field jacket. I never knew, till I got back to the states, after prison camp, that there was actually a liner, that was supposed to come with that field jacket. But that's what we had. I got frozen feet. The German's saved my feet when they put me in the hospital."

So what happened in England? "In England, nothing. We played football. That's why we were sure that this is not a serious division of the army.

And finally we went across to France [22 November 1944]. Landed in Le Harve, France. [Present map]. At this point we didn't have a round of ammunition. We went by truck. [78th division moved to Belgium on 27 November 1944 to Rotgen, Germany on 7 December 1944, to prepare for combat]. When we first got into combat we were in the hedgerow country. You can't imagine these hedgerows [Present picture]. They were so thick and so dense that a tank has trouble going through them. You can set your canteen cup on top of it, just set it there. That was our first experience with the buzz bombs. Going from Germany, over our heads, to England. The first unmanned rockets. And you'd see them going over; the flame shooting off the back end. You were told, as long as you can see flame, it isn't gonna land anywhere near you, so don't worry about it. if one flames out, watch out! If for some reason the engine fails on them, they come straight to the ground and blow up. It's a very deceptive sight. It looks like you could hold a cup up and catch the damn thing.

But we didn't run into a great deal of opposition until we got near Schwammenauel and the Schmidt Dams; on the Roer river [Present map]. The far side of the river was all low land. And you had to control those dams if you were gonna cross that river, otherwise the Germans could open the dams and they'd flood you out. We were in the "black forest" and when they say it's a black forest, they mean it. The trees are so dense that when you go on outpost at night, you tie a rope to your tent.

We were the first outfit in in the Battle of the Bulge [technically it was 1 day before the German attack and that battle]. We were told that all we were facing was the Volks army; that they had no mechanization, was all old men and young boys, most of their equipment was horse drawn; and that was going to be what we faced.

[in my 2012 interview, Stuart said "Our commanders didn't know what they were doing. I remember one time when there were MPs at certain posts, giving direction. Our Company Commander asked "where do you go to get to the front line?" MP: "Just where the hell do you think you are??"

"I remember the pill boxes; solid concrete. There was just no chance to penetrate them. In general, I don't ever remember us falling back. We were trying to capture this little town; we were able to capture a territory, and they'd take it back. Then we'd capture it again, and they would take it back again..." This is 1 for 1 the historical description of what happened in Kesternich, Stuart simply didn't know that was the specific battle in which he had fought].

"I remember this much, the first time you have to roll an American in a blanket, you go and through your guts out. You could see German's stacked up like firewood, it didn't bother you a bit. We were taking prisoners so fast, that we were marching prisoners back with one guy guarding them. The thought of being captured ourselves wouldn't occur to us. Now, when you're in combat I think everybody accepts the idea that more than likely you will be wounded, but it was gonna be in the shoulder, the fat of your leg, or some place that's a guaranteed pass to an interior hospital and probably back in the States.

We were hit at night by a Panzer unit. Tanks. If there is any one thing that would scare the hell out of an infantry soldier, it's a tank. I mean, they carry 50 caliber machine guns, and it literally just cuts people in half. And here you got this damn bazooka...

That night me and two other guys were on perimeter outpost with our mortars. We're guarding for anything coming from our direction. We got a lot of firing from the other direction; we don't know what to do, and finally someone got back and said "The outfit's been wiped out. Get the hell out of there!" So we went back from where we had come, hoping to link up with some other Americans, meanwhile we had been surpassed and ran into the Germans." [Present picture of Holland Evening Sentinel: Stuart MIA], Did you see these Panzer Tanks? "You better believe it." And you were running from them? "Yes. When we were finally captured, your first reaction is total shame. How could this happen to me? The next day when we went into interrogation, there's our Colonel, several Captains, and then you adjust your thinking saying, hell, if these guys are captured, they're trained, they're regular army, what have I gotta be ashamed of.

Of my company, as I understand it, out of 200 people, about 20-25% max, survived that night."

So you ran into these Germans and what happened exactly? "There was no place to go, we just gave up." You just put your hands up? "Yeah. And we're lucky they didn't shoot us. And probably if we'd been a bigger group they probably would have, but because there were only 3 of us they wanted to know where in the hell we came from." Did they speak English? "O yes!" Were they friendly, were they rough? "O no. In a combat zone, I don't care which side you want to talk to, soldiers are animals, and that's why I have always been totally critical of the criticism of some of the troops in Vietnam and Korea, using brutality. Everybody is brutal, I mean, it's kill or be killed. I mean, I wore glasses; German soldier grabbed my glasses, through 'em down on the ground and stomped on them. You know; no real reason in the world. When we were taking prisoners, you know, it's bitter cold out, we stripped 'em. And they did the same with us. Soldiers at the very front line are animals. You go ONE step behind the front line, and now you're in with the soldiers who have been in combat and out of combat, and they know that you didn't want to be there, they know that they didn't want to be there. If they got food, you got food, if they had cigarettes, you had cigarettes, I mean, there was no real animosity. Then you go one more step back, and now you've got the little bastard with the polished boots, and the swagger stick; and... watch out! And then you finally get to a prison camp and there you've got guys with one arm, one eye, one ear, walking like crutches, guarding you. These guys would take us out to work on the turnip farms, and that's why I told Mother when we got married: there was one thing that would never be served in this house, and that's a turnip.

Then they moved us to Bon. We were marching. The streets would be lined with people. For you the war is over, but if they saw anyone who looked particularly Jewish, they pulled him out of the line and beat the hell out of him. So when you meet German of that age and they tell you that they didn't know any of this was happening, you know, be polite and say you're a god damn liar, and turn around and walk away from them. Because it's just not true. They knew what was going on, and they approved of it. You know, you don't march some people away, your next door neighbors away, and never see them again, without wondering what vacation land they went to.

So from Bon we got into these little 40 foot trains, packed in so tight. At this point I not only had had the frozen feet, but I had a couple shrapnel wounds, I picked up along the way." Where did you get the shrapnel wounds? It's probably the reason that I was left on outpost, because I was slightly wounded in my foot and in my hand."

So you were taken on a train for 8 days without leaving that car? "Yes. No food. No water. You just stood there, you couldn't sit down; there wasn't room." Some people died on that train? [Stuart had No comment, and just continued as though that question had never been asked]. "So when we got to the destination, I can remember it was at night, we were closer to dead than alive. That's where I developed my intense love for the English. Because when we arrived they'd go through the guys and asked if we got a watch, we got a ring, we got a fountain pen, got anything we could trade and get us some food. And if anybody had anything and they gave it to them, you never saw the guy again. We were taken in by two South African's, who moved into one bunk, and gave us, a kid from Texas... you know, I don't remember a name of anyone in my whole company. I don't remember a name of anyone in prison camp. I don't remember this guy's name that I shared a bunk with. And that whole part of my memory is just...gone. I don't remember life in prison camp to any great extent, except that I know that occasionally we'd get a Red Cross parcel but you had to divide it between 8 people. We had a loaf of bread. It was like sawing wood, cutting this stuff and you'd have to cut it as close as possible to equal size pieces. We had homemade cards on top face down, and I'd get the last piece because I cut it. And each one would draw a number and that was the piece they got. Just a few crumbs of bread were a precious thing. In the Red Cross parcel there were cigarettes, and some guys were so addicted to smoking that they would smoke 'em, those of us who weren't, traded them for food. Cigarettes, all through that area, were the medium of exchange. And, of course, this was another thing with the English, there wasn't anything that was American that was worth a damn, except that when the parcel's came in, seemed somehow that the English got all the American cigarettes and the American got all the English cigarettes, which had a lesser trade value..."

By the way, his name was Merrile, the guy from Texas. "It's in that letter?" It's in that letter a few times, actually. "I don't remember him, at all. And we slept head to toe in the same bunk."

Let's go to the happier part of the story. Could you tell when the war was turning around? "They had radios in the camp. I never knew where they were, but we had them. The German guards used to come in, and on the door they had a big map of Germany with pins in it, where the front line was. And the German guards would come in and study our map because there map wouldn't look anything like our map. Our guys were getting BBC reports. Where the radio was, I have NO idea.

[Present 5 pictures of word getting back to US that Stuart is alive and is a POW. 2 news articles; original post card, letter from Seymour mentioning Easter in order to hide Stuart being Jewish]

So finally it got to the point, spring arrived, you could go outside, and the American planes started...

Our POW camp was right between Berlin and Leipzig, on the far side of the Elbe river, beyond where the American advanced. And the perfect V formation, like an air show, of American bombers, would come directly over our camps. The lead plane would shoot out a flare, they'd take a sweeping left turn, and head for their run on Berlin." They knew you were there? "We know this: Before it got warm enough, we were allowed to go out and gather wood for the fires. But we knew that if you went out with a big group, American planes just seem to come out of nowhere and you'd get strafed. When things got real bad the Germans did NOT want to get captured by the Russians, they wanted to try and march us through to the American lines, but we knew there wasn't a prayer of doing that. If you got that many people moving on the roads, you could be waving POW flags till you're blew in the face; you would get strafed."

Where you guys strong enough to march? "After we were with the America troops, to give you an idea, they gave us sports equipment, we'd pass the football back and forth, and if it wasn't a good throw and you had to go forward and try to catch it, you'd fall on your face, most likely. I never had my cloths totally off during the entire time that I was a POW. There were no showers, it was so damn cold that when you relieved yourself you bared just as little as possible. First time you get into a shower and you start washing your legs, you get the horrible feeling that these aren't your legs you're washing, they're the guys next to you. You know what your legs look like, and these are not your legs". Do you have any idea how much you weighed? "Well, I know this, after I got home, after being with the United States Army for well over a month, and being fed 5 and 6 times a day, I just barely went over 100 lbs." So that means 80-90 lbs? "Yeah, probably, I mean, we were mighty gone figures. Little cup of watery soup and a piece of bread and a few half rotten potatoes. That was your meal; one meal a day." And the turnips you could steel from the farm. "And the turnips you could steel from the farms; If you went out on the turnip fields, they had tank core uniforms. We'd be given a pair of tank core overalls that closed tightly at the ankles and the arms. And you'd come waddling back into camp like a bag of potatoes, and these guards would frisk you; and here you are, one bag of lumps, and they would laugh." It's interesting that the guards didn't seem to care. "They had all been in combat, they were all wounded soldiers. The officers, were miserable little bastards."

Finally, The Russians came in, and the Germans took off. They didn't get far, cause the Russians captured them. And they had reasons to be fearful, because the Russian prisoners were treated even worse than we were. But, at that point, we were scared stiff. We'd listen to the Germans, the Russians shot everybody first, if anybody was still alive they'd ask a question. The Russians came in, they kicked the door open, they looked around, "Americanski!" They'd grab the guys and start dancing them around the room. Now, if you were an American, I have had Russian soldiers hand me their mess kit and have me eat their meal, and it wasn't a case where they could get in line and get another meal. That was their meal. They carted us out and they put us in what had been a German officer training school. That's

where this letter was written, and I remember saying in the letter, I believe, that it would make my dorms in the University of Michigan look like a slum. Tiled floors in the bathrooms...

The English, they locked in the stables. They set up a kitchen to feed us, and if we hadn't taken food to the guys in the stable, as far as the Russians where concerned, they could starve to death and they would care less. But if you were an American, they'd give you anything they had."

How did the whole ordeal end? "We are in this compound in East Germany, in the other side of the Elbe River, and it's fenced in except that there's huge holes blasted through the brick wall. Russian guards are at the guard. An American convoy of 4 or 5 trucks came through, and they had no business being there. The Americans were not supposed to go on the other side of the Elbe River. The officer in charge said to us something to the effect that "I wish I could take you with us, but the Russians are insisting that they want credit for all the exchanges. However, we're gonna drive very very slowly through town. My drivers are instructed to keep their eyes on the road, and whatever happens in the back of the truck is of no great concern of ours and a word to the wise should be sufficient." And with that, I never went back to the barracks. I had all sort of stuff I had accumulated, couple of pistols, and German stuff. The Hell with this. One of the guys at the back of the truck, they grabbed you like a bag of potatoes, throwing us on, they packed the truck full and off we went. Well now, we got to the Elbe River and we had to cross the bridge, and the Russians didn't want to let us cross the bridge. The officer pointed across the river, which isn't very wide, and it had a whole line of American tanks. So he crossed the river.

Then, the first thing they did was they stripped you of your cloths and de-loused you. And you need it. They put us in new uniforms. The next morning, these C47s, I think 25 guys to a plane. I was in charge of one plane. The planes would swoop down, come to a stop, 25 guys, they'd throw you on. It was like 25 bodies on a plane, they'd slam the door, I mean they never cut the propeller, they took right off and we went to Nancy, France. RAMP Camp 1 – Reclaimed Allied Military Personnel 1. And from there we went by hospital train to camp Lucky Strike on the French coast. All the camps had cigarette names. There was an air strip in the middle of the camp. They gave us occupation money and they were feeding us 6 times a day. Nobody said anything about how you take a few bites and you were full, since your stomach has shrunk down. Then they announced we were leaving the next day. Turn in your money and you will be given regular American money as soon as you get on board ship. Day later, the ship engine is out, it will be at least a week; passes will be issued to Paris. We said, fine, give us our money. It's in finance, can't get the money. So a few of us went to the Red Cross and pleaded our sad case. I think we each got 3 cartons of cigarettes and 5 bars of soap. "And these pilots on their way to London will drop you in Paris." And we arrived [Pictures of Paris], I had a couple of francs that I intended to save a souvenirs, and that was it. So the first thing we had to do was sell some cigarettes so that we could get a hotel. It turns out cigarettes were way better than money. I came back having bought perfume for everybody I could think of, a big alligator bag for my mother, a small alligator bag, which I still have, for Barbara, and money in my pocket, and having spent a week in Paris. We went back to Lucky Strike. Eisenhower came over and said that if we were willing to double load, we could get out immediately. We came back to Newport News, Virginia. As we came into the Harbor, the guys were out on the gun mounts, they were all over the ship, [Picture of US troops aboard ship coming into harbor] and the captain is screaming on the loud speaker: "Marines! This is a military vessel, get these men back on deck!" The whole ship is POWs; what

are they going to do to us that hasn't already been done? But when we got off, this I do remember, we were addressed by a general who said "I know what the menu is for tonight, and I could tell you, but I'm not going to cause you'll just call me a damn liar anyway, but you got remember, now you're back in the states, military discipline must be instilled, I'm asking you, if you're walking down a company street and an officer salutes you, be polite! Salute back! And furthermore, you have to wear proper uniform; at least your underwear!"

And then we went in, and this is a scary time, into a huge room, and the center of the room was a big square, with telephone operators sitting shoulder to shoulder, and the whole perimeter of the room had telephone booths. Priority like you can't believe. [first time gramps cries during this interview]. Getting the numbers, you weren't connected. I remember it was a weekend and I called home and nobody answered. The folks didn't have a telephone at the cottage. That was very emotional, cause as much as they don't know what happened to you, you don't know what happened to them either. I called Barbara...

Then I came home, went back to school, and as soon as I graduated, I got on the train, and went to Boston, got married! [Picture of Stuart and Barbara on wedding day] I think back of that, and 2 friends of Barbara's parents had offered me jobs, very good jobs in Boston, and I think back of what a little business we had, I had a hell of a lot of guts in dragging Mother back to Holland Michigan. Cause her parents weren't exactly thrilled with the idea; they weren't too sure that the Indians weren't still running around there."

[Picture, letter from White house]

[Picture of Stuart in his office]

I'd like to close with a quote from the Eulogy written by my Uncle Jeff:

My father, for most of his life was a profoundly happy person. This was sometimes not obvious, but I have come to see that even his legendary temper, not really in evidence for quite a few years, contributed to his overall contentment. He certainly did not suffer the kind of tension or anxiety that can result from holding back on your opinions or temper. He did not have that problem.

I think that three of the greatest sources of his happiness were these:

1. Appreciation; 2. Optimism; 3. Purpose

Jewish tradition has thankful prayers covering nearly every phase of life and, it seems, almost

every time of day. Stuart was not one to chant a barucha for every occasion, but I know appreciated his good fortune. I recall one time when he walked into my office and said, "I've got the world by the tail," except he did not say "tail". I remember saying something like "absolutely," but marveling to myself that this was AFTER his cancer surgery, and AFTER our mother died. But he still appreciated what he had.

Stuart was a classic member of what we often call "the greatest generation," the people who went off and won WW II and then came back and built up our country. They were not given much to introspection. They were doers. But here is what I think:

Having survived the horrendous POW experience in WWII, I think Stuart came back with at least 2 personal determinations--Not necessarily voiced, but deeply felt:

1. Not to put up with any "Baloney".
2. To demonstrate by how he lived his life that he was worthy of the redemption he experienced in being one of only a few who survived his unit's ordeal.

Stuart was essentially given an extra chance at life. Many of the people he went into combat with did not get that chance. He was determined to make the most of it, and I think we can all agree that he did. He certainly inspired me and others in our family. His greatest legacy will be if that inspiration can take root and flourish and continue to inspire others, both now and in the future. We will continue to tell your stories, Dad. We will do our best to live up to your example.

Thanks again for all you did for us.

[Picture of Stuart's sculptures]