

Sabrina Pearman

Dr. Agar

Comp II

Charles Anderson

A total of 95, 532 American airmen and ground troops endured the horrific conditions of German prisoner-of-war camps. One of these POWs was Charles Anderson, an airman in the 381st Bomb Group, 532 squadron with a rank of four stripes, or staff sergeant. While bombing Berlin, Anderson was knocked out of formation by a direct hit, and his aircraft caught fire. Forced to bail out at ~~2,600~~ ^{BY AIRCRAFT ON MAY 19, 1944 6000} feet, he landed in a wooded area, and immediately buried his parachute, as was the set procedure. Anderson hid in the trees and rested until dark. When night fell, he assumed it would be safe to move. He came to a road, looked both ways before crossing, and then proceeded across the road. He immediately heard a voice say, "Halt!" Anderson was captured by a German guard on May 19, 1944. When asked if he felt ashamed because he had been captured, Anderson replied, "No! No, I was 600 miles behind the line. I was happy to be alive."

Anderson was taken to Berlin, Germany where he was interrogated. He ^{Then he was sent WETZLER for INTERROGATION} was locked in a 6X8 foot cell in a basement where he was fed only bread and water two times a day for three days in order to break him down. Anderson was under constant supervision by the German guards. When it was time to be interrogated, he was brought up to an office where he was asked numerous questions about his mission. Anderson only told the enemy his name, rank, and serial number. The German interrogator told the guards, "Get him out of here before I kill him." Anderson recalls an English pilot that was left at the interrogation center so long, his teeth began to fall out due to poor nutrition. This broken-down pilot obtained a piece of glass and committed suicide.

After the interrogation process, Anderson was taken to a POW camp in Poland. The rooms contained 24 men, with 16 beds, and one blanket per person. Towards sundown, shutters were pulled over the windows, and the doors to the rooms were bolted shut. The bunks were made out of wood. The "springs" consisted of six 1X6 foot boards. Burlap bags filled with saw dust served as mattresses about an inch-and-a-half thick. The camp itself was surrounded by "blow sand," fences, and barbed wire. He was allowed to stay for a year or a year-and-half, and then on February 6, he was forced to walk for days across the country, northwest along the Baltic Sea. Anderson and fellow POWs marched 84 days for a total of 600 miles. During this time, he had to deal with starvation, inadequate clothing, poor sanitation, disease, and cruel treatment.

Anderson can remember exactly what he had to eat on a daily basis while at the camp. He recalls, "When I woke up, I got a cup of hot water. At 10:00 am, I got a piece of bread. Then at 12:00, I got dehydrated cabbage or green soup. In the evening, I got a few potatoes." Anderson said, "The green soup tasted and smelled so bad, that you had to hold your nose to eat it. It smelled like cat manure." Anderson also remembered a time when he was eating some soup and noticed something crunchy. He discovered it was "rat manure." He also told of the extremes the POWs were willing to go to in order to stay alive, especially on the march. POWs ate slop meant for animals, maggots, and "tripe," which is pickled cow's stomach. The Red Cross tried to aid the POWs with Red Cross food packages, but very few actually reached the prisoners. Anderson was lucky enough to get a few items from a Red Cross package once. He remembers getting "some high-protein crackers and spam." Anderson said, "I love spam to this day. I can eat a whole can!"

While a prisoner of war, Anderson's clothing was inadequate. He was immediately stripped of his uniform when he was captured. The Germans did give some of it back to him, but only the shell. The "heating units" had been removed. Anderson was then given a few articles of clothing. They consisted of "a pair of blue wool pants, a blue ^{Cotton} ~~wool~~ shirt with a ^{No} collar, and a pretty good pair of shoes." He can remember the Red Cross sending suitcases filled with items such as razors, toothbrushes, sweaters, blankets, and towels. Once again, very few POWs ever received these articles.

The sanitation at these camps was extremely poor. Anderson was only allowed one shower in the 350 days he was a POW. He tried to give himself sponge baths in an effort to keep clean. Their bathrooms were trenches, piles of straw, and holes in the ground. The POWs were forced to sleep in snow, mud, and barns. Disease ran rampant. The most common were pneumonia and dysentery. Anderson recalls the POWs that suffered from an episode of dysentery. On their long march, the prisoners-of-war were only allowed to stop and relieve themselves a couple of times a day. The ones with dysentery would eventually fill up their long johns throughout the day. At night when they stopped, they would try to wash the long johns out as best they could, and then immediately put them back on so no one would steal them.

The punishment and treatment by the German's was harsh. One of the punishments administered in the camps was solitary confinement or "coolers," which were little jail cells where the inhabitants were fed only bread and water. This punishment was often used for prisoners who neglected to join roll calls in the morning. At 8:00 in the morning, the POWs were ordered to line up "five abreast" until all prisoners were accounted for. If one prisoner was missing, the rest would stand there until he was found. They could end up standing for hours. Bayonets, other artillery, and dogs were also used as sources of

And Evening Just Before The Doors were Locked

punishment. Anderson can remember when a German colonel ordered his boys "to put their bayonets on." The guards then called their dogs, and the POWs were chased for three and a half kilometers in the hot July sun. Many prisoners were jabbed with bayonets and bitten by the dogs. If one of the POWs callapsed, he was hit on the back of the head and that was it. Anderson said, "You never showed no fear." He also said, "Never say nothing until you're spoken to, and look them straight in the eye. You'll have a better chance that way." Anderson recalls an incident when a German guard lined him and six other prisoners up against a wall. The guard came over to Anderson, "called me everything he could and stuck a Lugar right against my teeth." Anderson looked him in the eye and dared him to pull the trigger. The guard lowered the gun.

Even though times were tough, Anderson and fellow POWs found a way to entertain themselves and to keep informed about the events of the war. The prisoners confiscated tins, wires from the heating units in their uniforms, tubes, and mirrors in order to create a radio. The POWs obtained these items by trading American cigarettes for the parts they needed. The radio had to be hidden at all times, and was only listened to at night.

Anderson was finally liberated on May 4, 1945 by the English. While on their forced march, the POWs were put in a hay barn and then surrounded by artillery in the hopes that if the artillery was shot out, the prisoners-of-war would be also. After a three day duel, the English drove the Germans back and into the hands of the Russians. Anderson weighed 85 pounds when he was liberated and suffered long-term effects from his experience. Anderson said, "My nerves are always high." As a result, he often goes into seclusion. In addition, he has terrible dreams and sleeps little at night. Anderson can still remember every day of his POW experience. Charles Anderson is now living outside of Oral, South Dakota with his wife, Virginia, on a ranch.