

I was captured in Breda, Holland on October 29, 1944. I was held in captivity in Luchenwilde, Stelzing IIIA. I lasted on April 22, 1945. By the Russian troops.



Christopher Gannon / Argus Leader
Harvey Texley of Brookings was a prisoner of war during World War II in Germany.

Memories don't fade for POW

Sharing WWII story helps relieve trauma

By PETER HARRIMAN
Argus Leader Staff

Harvey Texley was shelled by German artillery before he was captured and by Allied artillery after he was a German prisoner of war.

Almost 55 years have passed since then, but those memories have not faded.

"Every morning you feel those artillery shells land all around you," he said.

"Every morning and every night. It helps to tell people about it."

Texley, of Brookings, like

the rest of the country, has followed the story of the three U.S. soldiers captured Wednesday by the Yugoslav army.

Unlike most people watching, though, Texley has some idea what they are going through. He was a POW for six months during World War II.

"They've just got to live through it now," he said, "and hope for the best."

And if those soldiers eventually make it home, says Teri L. Elliott, they would do well to follow Texley's example and talk about their experiences.

Elliott is a clinical psychologist in the Disaster

Mental Health Institute at the University of South Dakota. She studies the emerging field of ethnopolitical warfare, specifically in the Balkans, the region where the U.S. soldiers were captured and where she spent about four months last year.

She said the key to recovering from trauma such as being taken prisoner is "being able to talk about it, acknowledge that it happened and integrate it into their personality so it is a part of them and not their entire being."

"They don't want to talk German POW / See 4A

German POW: Wanted to die

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of themselves as solely disaster victims but as survivors who experienced this event."

She said POWs "may have had to do things or experience things they feel guilty about. They need a place to talk about this without being judged."

If the soldiers received any training in dealing with capture, "the training will hopefully kick in right away," Elliott said.

Texley did not get survival training, as present-day soldiers get. He arrived in Europe on Omaha Beach a couple of days after the Normandy Invasion. "That movie," he said, referring to "Saving Private Ryan," "everybody should see that show. That's just the way I landed."

Under fire

After fighting in France and Belgium, Texley was in the advance guard of an anti-tank company that came under German artillery and machine-gun fire.

"When that machine gun opened up and sprayed our truck, you could hear the air rushing out of the tires," he remembered.

Texley and two companions crawled through a beet field trying to work around the machine gun. A German patrol nearly stumbled over them. They cleared the gun but found themselves in a woods full of Germans, and they were captured.

"The Germans were evacuating," he said. "They lined us up against a wall, and some high German officer pulled a pistol."

When the men refused to give more than name, rank and serial

'The only thing, we just hoped we could die.'

- Harvey Texley German POW

But Americans shelled the retreating Germans just then and sent captors and prisoners scrambling.

A kind of fatalism set in.

"The only thing, we just hoped we could die," Texley recalled. The prisoners walked upright through the American barrage while German guards crouched in safety and called them fools.

Taken to Auschwitz

Later Texley's POW group was taken to Auschwitz, where it showered in the rooms where Jewish prisoners were gassed.

"We could see the jets in the walls," he said.

German soldiers before the Battle of the Bulge took the Americans' uniforms and tried to pump them for popular culture information, like the names of Major League baseball players, so they could infiltrate the ranks of the advancing Allies.

Outside another prison camp, Texley watched Jewish prisoners on a road gang. A man pushing a wheel barrow stumbled, "and a guard came up and shot him in the head."

Texley and other soldiers above the rank of private first class subsisted on a piece of bread and a half a cup of soup a day.

"They just barely kept us alive," he said

soldier was an enemy. An elderly guard nicknamed Pops "had no anger at him at all. He was a nice guy," Texley said.

After six months, Texley was liberated by the Russian Army. The prisoners were taken to an air base, where Texley recalls feeding mess hall leftovers to Serb refugees, the ethnic forebearers of the troops who captured the U.S. soldiers this week.

Didn't talk to anyone

After his discharge, Texley returned to South Dakota, "and for 20 years I didn't talk anything about the war to anybody."

A son-in-law's interest in his old discharge papers primed a pump long dry.

Now, Texley belongs to a former POW group of about 40 World War II vets that meets monthly in Sioux Falls.

"We all talk about our battles," he says. "Our wives say they've never heard so many war stories."

G.I bill helps

After a long career in agricultural support industries, Texley did something many of his fellow veterans did decades before. He took advantage of the G.I. Bill to go to college, and in 1982 he graduated from South Dakota State University.

He's retired now, growing roses and attending military unit reunions, a classic example, it would seem, of Elliott's description of a survivor, not a victim.

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