



Orleans County Historical Association

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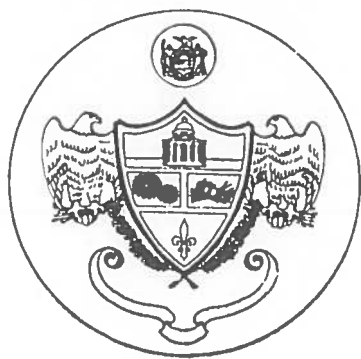
SUBJECTS

*** Prisoner of War, WW II
induction, training
gunnery school
Air Force
pursuit armament / heavy bombardment
transport ship: the Queen Mary
369 Squadron of the 306 Bomb Group
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wiast gunner / ball turret
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NAMES

George Thomas Owen, father
Cora Rock Owen, mother
George R. Owen, brother
Kenneth R. Owen, brother
Purla Bates Owen, wife
Charlotte O. (James) Crowley, daughter
Paul (Mary Walker) Owen, son

Abex Corporation, employment



Orleans County Historical Association

INTERVIEW

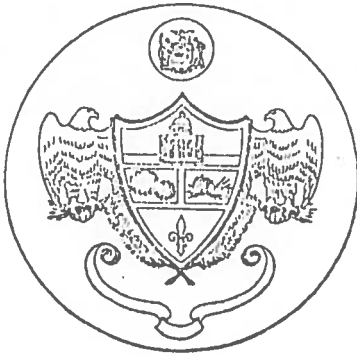
Charles R. Owen
Telegraph Road
Medina, New York

Charles R. Owen was born June 9, 1922.

The interview was conducted by Mr. Arden McAllister, Medina.

O Owen
Mc McAllister





Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to collect information about the historical development of Orleans County by means of tape-recorded conversations with people whose experiences reflect the county's growth.

These tapes and transcriptions will be preserved as educational resources and possible publication (all or in part).

I hereby release this tape and transcription to the Orleans County Historical Association.

Charles R. Owen

Signed

11/23/79

Date

Understood and agreed to:

Orden R. McAllister

INTERVIEWER

11/23/79

Date

For the ORLEANS COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, Arden McAllister of Medina, New York,
is interviewing CHARLES RUSSELL OWEN, 10923 Telegraph Road,
West Center Street Extension, Medina, New York, November 23,
1979.

- O I was born in Lockport, New York on June 9, 1922.
My dad's name was George Thomas Owen and my mother's
name was Cora Rock Owen.
- Mc You moved to Medina when you were young ?
- O About 14 months old, I believe.
- Mc What does your father do ?
- O He worked on the New York Central Railroad.
I have one brother two years older than I am, George R.
and a brother two years younger, Kenneth R. Kenneth lives
at the homestead and George lives at Newfane at the present
time.
We live - - - it's about three and a half miles west of
Medina on 31, which is 31E now.
- Mc It's also the Telegraph Road.
- O They call it the Telegraph Road now. They didn't used to,
I don't believe.
- Mc You went through the schools in this area ?
- O Through fifth grade I went to a two room country school
in Shelby Basin. I started sixth grade in Medina and I
went there until my senior year and I left my senior year
to go into the service.
- Mc That would have been what year ?
- O I went into service; October of '42.
- Mc That would be early in your senior year. They didn't
give you the opportunity to finish the year ?
- O No.

- Mc Well, you were inducted into the Armed Forces while World War II was under way. Tell us a little bit about your leaving home.
- O Well, we went with an Induction Group to Albion. There was no bus service taking the boys to Albion and my dad took us down in his car. While he was in Albion, they picked him up for driving out of town with the Gas Rationing on ! But that was straightened out. Then we went by bus to Fort Niagara where we were classified. I was classified in the Air Force and went from there to Miami Beach, Florida for my Basic Training. And then from there, I went to Kendall Air Force Base in Panama City, Florida for Gunnery School. Then I became a Buck Sergeant, then and went from there to Buckley Air Force Base in Colorado for Pursuit Armament training. And from there to Lowrey Air Force Base for Heavy Bombardment training. When I graduated from there, I was left AT Atlantic City, New Jersey where my folks visited me for about two hours. And then we left there for England, by the way of Scotland, on the ship, The Queen Mary. I was assigned to a bomb group.
- Mc May I interrupt you ? On the Queen Mary; did anything particular happen there ? Could you tell us about your housing situation there ?
- O Well, the ship was completely loaded with military personnel. And I was on - - - I believe they call it the first deck on the water. It was where the swimming pools - - - one of the swimming pools used to be. And, they had converted the locker rooms into bunks and that is where we stayed. And, on the way over, we had two submarine alerts. Of course the Queen Mary was at speed to outrun the submarines.
- Mc I suppose you had some kind of - - - you were in a - - what do they call it - - - a convoy ?
- O No. The Queen Mary was all by itself. No escort; no anything because nothing else could keep up with her.

Mc Boy, that seemed to be a little risky, didn't it ?

O Well, of course, that was the early part of the war and that was the only way she crossed; just by herself.

Mc Let's get the time right here now. You landed at a place in Scotland ?

O Right. Near Blackpool, Scotland. Then we had to be unloaded in smaller ships because the Queen Mary couldn't get in to dock.

Mc When would this be ?

O This would have been June 10th or 11th of 1943.

Mc Then when you landed in Scotland, what then ?

O Then we were divided up into where ever you were supposed to go. I went from there to the 92nd Bomb Group, not too far from Cambridge. That was an experimental group where we had Four Engine Fighters that were converted from B17s. But they didn't prove successful so that group, our Squadron, then was broken up and I was transferred from there to the 306th Bomb Group.

Mc Did you have a special assignment there with that 92nd ?

O It was going to be just as a Gunner; because that was all that was on these ships was guns, no bombs. Just a pilot and his crew and the gunners; that was all that was on there.

Mc You met a famous movie star at that place ?

O Well, between the 92nd and going down to the 306th, I helped make a Training Film with Clark Gable, who was in the Special Service Group. Ending by making a Training Film to send back here to the States.

Mc You had met him before ?

O Yes, he was in the Gunnery School at Panama City, Florida, in the same class I was until he left that and went back to California.

Mc Okay. So then at the 306th Bomb Group; where was that ?

O That was near Eagleshire, England.

I was assigned to the 369th Squadron of the 306th Bomb

Group. After a few days we started to fly missions again as there was a delay. We went to Kassel on the 28th of June and bombed a Ballbearing Works. Our plane was shot up so bad on that mission that it was junk as we got back.

Mc May I interrupt you again, Charlie ? What was your particular assignment on this B17 crew ?

O I was Armament Chief, which training I took here in the States, and Assistant Radio Operator. In turn on the combat mission, I could fly either the Ball Turret or the Waist Gunner.

Mc What is the Ball Turret ?

O Ball Turret is the turret shaped like a ball that hangs below the skin of the B17. The gunner is inside. Gets in this from the inside of the ship and he is completely isolated from the rest of the crew while he is in there. He has two fifty calibre machine guns to try to ward off any enemy aircraft from below that couldn't be seen by any other member of the crew.

Mc On this first mission over Kassel, Germany on July 28, 1943, what was the name of your plane ?

O "Gessele the Second" was the name of our regular ship.

Mc How large a crew was on those B17s ?

O Ten man crew.

Mc Ten men.

O Pilot, Co-pilot, Bombadier, Navigator, Engineer, Radio Operator, Ball Turret, two Waist Gunners, and a Tail Gunner.

Mc And you had a nickname ?

O PeeWee, they called me.

Mc PeeWee Owen ! Now this first mission over Germany; once again, what was your target ?

O It was a Ballbearing Works at Kassel. And at that time that was the deepest penetration into Germany.

Mc That was your first mission ? Did you get back safely ?

O Yes. There was no one injured except that the ship was pretty well shot up. We estimated that there were about 1500 holes in the ship.

Mc In the Second World War, in these bombers, What was it that hit the ship ?

O It was Flak and Fighters.

Mc Flak. What's Flak ?

O That's anti-aircraft fire from the ground. If you got hit by that and crippled by that, then the fighters moved in and tried to finish you off. Because if you were in a crippled ship, you couldn't keep in formation and you were left hopeless.

Mc What did Flak look like from the air ?

O Well they would look like a black wall in front of you. They would have a German fighter out of my range because we had no fighter escort at that early part of the war. They would radio down to the ground our altitude and speed. And they would set their anti-aircraft shells to go off at the altitude we were flying. So you, when you are on a bomb run, you had to fly right through it. You couldn't divert your course any.

Mc Then the next day after your first mission ?

O The next day, July 29, 1943, Our mission was to Submarine Pens at Kiel, Denmark. They briefed us that morning that we would run into between 250 and 300 German fighters that would be in the path we were taking. We were going in with 17 bombers and it was what we call a diversion raid, 'Cause the rest of the Air Force was going towards Hamburg. And, we were to draw the fighters so they would have an easier trip.

Mc That must have been pretty rough, over that target ?

O It was. We all made it to the target, but we had been hit by flak. We were flying at 30,000 feet. Of 17 of the four engined planes we had two engines on fire: number one and number two. We dropped our bombs and we thought maybe we could go to Sweden. We started out over the

Baltic Sea towards Sweden. But as we got part way out, we knew we couldn't make it. So we turned around and headed back towards Denmark. When we just got over the land, the pilot ordered us to bail out and we knew the ship was gone. *

Mc Did any of the men get hit prior to this point ?

O Yes. The Engineer, who flies Top Turret, had his head blown off. And the Navigator; we are not sure whether - - - we thought he left the ship, but he may have been killed before hand. He never was accounted for when we hit the ground. We were flying through heavy flak and there was one burst that came up through the bottom of the ship. I got hit in the left ankle, which in turn cut my electric flying suit off and I started to get real cold. When we had to bail out, we were flying at about 30,000 feet. And as soon as I cleared the ship, I pulled my rip cord, knowing that I would pass out with the lack of oxygen. And so I figured I dropped down 14 or 16,000 feet before I came to. When I came to, there was no sign of any aircraft in the sky at all.

Mc Were there other parachutists ? Some of your own crew ?

O I saw two or three chutes. That's all I saw in the air, as I was coming down. When I got near the ground, I saw this vehicle moving down this dirt road. It was hard to realize what it was until I got pretty near down. It was like a bus, a small bus with bicycles on the top. There were young German Marines in this bus and as they would come to a side road, they would stop and let several off on their bicycles and they would start following the chutes as they were drifting so they would be able to pick you up as soon as you hit the ground ! But as I came down, it was rough terrain, I swayed into the side of this embankment and in turn knocked myself out again. When I came to I was laying in a ditch. I could hear people talking in German and as I gradually opened my eyes, I saw a German

Owen 61/

1943



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GEORGE T OWEN

RFD 3 MEDINA NY

I REGRET TO INFORM YOU REPORT RECEIVED STATES YOUR SON SGT CHARLES ROWEN MISSING IN ACTION OVER KIEL GERMANY SINCE TWENTY NINE JULY IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION OF HIS STATUS ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED=

UNTIL THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S

226P

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

bayonet right across my face. There were some civilian farm women there trying to get the white nylon parachute; but the German Marines wouldn't give it to them. These young German Marines were anywhere from 17, 18 and 19 years of age and most of them could speak perfect English. As I found out later, a good share of them had been Exchange Students in England, France and the United States before the war. When Hitler called and ordered all of them back to Germany, they returned to Germany to become members of the so-called "Super Race".

Mc So they - - - they captured you right there, and what then ?

O Well, as this was in July of 1943, there was no Allied Forces on European soil; so they took us into the small farm.

Mc You said: "us". Did they pick up some of the members of your crew ?

O Yes; and they took us to this farm and this bus as it was coming back picking up the different German Marines and any Americans that they picked up; they in turn put us all on the bus and took us in this German Marine Base which was right on the coast, and put us in a dungeon, as I called it, as it was underground with just a little peek hole up near the roof. Each one was in a separate room. It was like a concrete vault. In the one corner it had a cement platform about three feet up off from the ground. It was probably three by six, with some straw on it. And, I thought it kind of funny that the cell's metal door had an opening along the bottom of it of about four inches. But as night came on I realized why it was built that way; because when the tide came in our room filled up with about a foot and a half or two of water !

Mc Well, when that started coming in, that must have been a surprise to you.

O It was !

Mc And did you know how far up it was going to come ?

O No, I had no idea how far up it was coming.

Mc You didn't know what to expect for a while, did you ?

O Whether I was going to be drowned in there or what !

Mc You were by yourself in the cell ?

O Right.

Mc Was this a very old - - - you said a dungeon - - - was it a very old building ?

O No, it was new. All modern concrete; solid steel doors. And you could see no one or talk to no one while you were in there.

Mc And how long were you at that place ?

O At that place, I was only there a couple of days. ~~Lease~~ ~~they, in turn, when~~ They took us from there by train to near Frankfurt where there was an Interrogation Camp. And while we were going, we passed through Hamburg. But when we got to the northern side of Hamburg, they took us off the train, made us march through the streets 'til we got through Hamburg, so the people could belittle us and throw stones at us and so on. Then they loaded us back on the train. When we got to the south side of Hamburg and took us to this Interrogation Camp; where they put us in solitary confinement, which I was in for 17 days. Then I had the greatest surprise of my life ! *
When they took me in to this office; it was a real large room and with one wall all covered with books and this big desk in front of it, and this German SS officer was setting at the desk. When I walked in he called me by name, and he asked me if I wanted a cigarette. I says: "no". And then he had a big chart on the wall of all the air bases in England, and he pointed to it. And he says: "that's where you took off from", giving the date that I was shot down. And in turn he went to a small shelf and picked off a small book or ledger, and in there I could see names. First, you know, there was my name, printed in a regular publication, and then there

was some numbers after my name. In turn he went and got another book off the wall and they had my life history from the day I was born, through school, through training, all my relations' names, when I went to England, until just a few days before I was shot down ! So they weren't after information, they were looking after verification 'cause all he did was stand there and look at my face, while he was asking me different questions.

Mc How do you think he ever got that kind of detailed information about you ?

O Well, not knowing at that time, but after I got back home, after the war, I found out that our next door neighbor, his wife was a member of the Nazi group here in the United States. Every town, I believe, in the United States had a group. One of the fellows that was in with us, from Kansas, they told him his wife gave birth to a baby girl after he was in England. A couple of days before he was shot down. They told him what she named it and how much it weighed !

Mc Didn't he know that before ?

O He didn't know that himself until then.

Mc Well, I'll be darned ! Isn't that something ? So there was some evidence there were some Nazi sympathizers in Medina.

O That's right. In fact after I got home, my mother told me - - - my dad and mother belonged to the Veterans of Foreign Wars. They was standing - - - the Ladies Auxiliary was standing in front of the meeting hall this one evening; as their meeting got over first. And this State Trooper walked up to them, knowing who they were, pointed up to some lights up over Main Street in Medina, and told them that that was a Nazi meeting going on right now. One of the women says: "Well, why don't you break it up and arrest them ?" He said: "Well, we are not interested in the local people right here.. We are interested on getting information on higher ups." Which I found out was in

New Jersey where their information all went to.

Mc That must have been quite a shock to you that they knew so much about you ?

O It was hard to believe but I saw it with my own eyes and knew it.

Mc Let's establish the dates that you were at this Interrogation Center. Do you remember that ?

O We were put in solitary the last part of July and kept there until August 11th. Then they were going to move us from there to Stalag 7A, which was near Munich. And on August 12th on our movements, I tried to escape. But then we got to Stalag 7A.

Mc What happened on your escape there ?

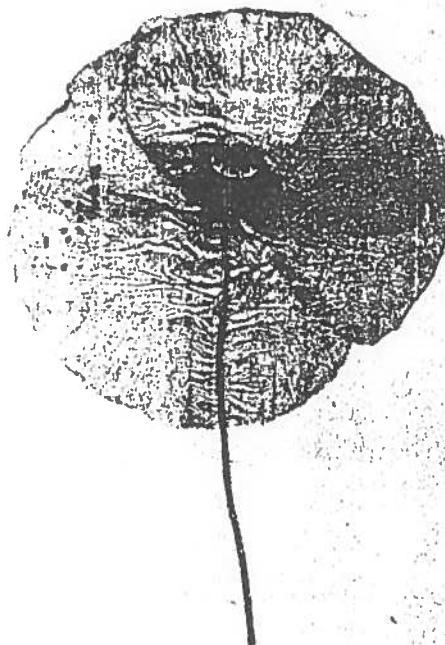
O Well, we tried. A few of us tried to escape from the train but it was too well guarded.

Mc They didn't punish you for that ?

O No. The 13th, we got to Stalag 7A and we were there until October 12th, as it was a small camp and they had moved in a group of Italian prisoners. When Italy surrendered, the Germans took them prisoner and so in turn they moved us from there on October 12th to Stalag 17 which is in Krems, Austria, about 45 miles west of Vienna. On October 13th, that was a three day trip, tried another escape which was also fruitless. October 14th we were the first Americans to arrive at Stalag 17. November 1st, the American soldiers were captured. These three that had tried to escape from Stalag 7A. So they (the Germans) had the true count at Stalag 17. They knew someone had to be in there in the place of this German American. So November 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, they gave us mass punishment by taking us outside and taking the clothes away from us. As this was near the Alps, there was snow on the ground. But during those three days no one broke to give the Germans the satisfaction of finding the three Russians. And, we hid them good

Owen

10 1/2



PRISON POPPY

Growing alongside a prison fence, You are a symbol of better days,
you proudly hold your head. that all of us once know.
In the brightness of your petals, Carefree days with nature spent,
a better life can be led. beneath a sky of blue.

Hike through the country through the woods, Though you grow within a prison,
picnics by the shore. yours is a life so free.
You are a reminder of all these things, and you help to cheer a prisoners life
that I am longing for. in this land across the sea.

I picked you to put between these pages,
your petals are fading fast,
but in my memory you will ever linger,
as I saw you growing last.

By - Charles Owen

enough so they weren't detected ! Then we led a surviving life until we found out about the Invasion which was nearly a year after I was captured.

Mc You are talking about the Invasion in Normandy ?

O Yes. As I had been a prisoner for 11 months before the Invasion. Then the next most important thing that happened, I guess, was on December 2nd of '44, which we found out later was the Battle of the Bulge. The Germans figured they were going to win the war then, during the Battle of the Bulge. So they fired into our barracks, killing some of those boys while sleeping, and refusing to give First Aid to those who were wounded. Then on March 17th, 1945, they finally discovered the Russians who were living in the camp. One Russian was an officer and he gave me his wrist watch before the Germans took him away and shot him.

Mc Well these Russians; were they able to mingle or were they hiding under something ?

O Well in - - - in each compound was a big large latrine. Open pit latrine that had like a large cistern probably 50 feet long and 15 feet wide. They were lowered down in that cistern or pit when there was going to be any search or anything. That's where they stayed while the Germans were searching the compound. Of course, with the odor of the latrine, the dogs couldn't pick up their scent.

Mc So they were able to hide out there about six months, weren't they ?

O Right.

Mc What was the camp at Stalag 17 like ?

O Well, there was three compounds, and there was double barbed wire fence around the outside where the guard towers were located. At night police dogs ran wild; loose in the fences. And then they had all the tin cans spread out inside the inside fence. Then about 30 feet inside of that was one strand of barbed wire.

In the daytime if you tried to cross that one strand of barbed wire, you were shot at. But at night they had these tin cans in case you tried while the spotlights were not right on that area. That would give a sound and you would be detected. Also at night they had German soldiers that would sneak around during the night and crawl underneath your barracks, as they were up on stilts, and try to listen. To find out if you were trying to dig tunnels. They would find out that we were digging tunnels but they wouldn't stop you until you were ready to break through on the outside and they would be waiting there with machine guns and shoot them down as they came out - - - trying to come out at the end of the tunnel. Because they figured that way the American hopes would be up and if they would wait and break them then, it would be a complete downfall. Where if you were stopped right at the beginning, you'd just say: "Well, we'll start again."

Mc They did try though ?

O Oh, yes. They tried - - - tried right to the very end.

Mc Did you ever get involved personally in that ?

O Oh, yeah ! Because what we would do; we'd fill our pockets with the dirt and then we would go to the latrine and drop the dirt down the latrine. So when the "honey wagons" came to suck the waste out of the latrine, the dirt would go out with it.

Mc What about your food ?

O Of the 19 months that I was in Stalag 17, we received four or five Red Cross parcels, in that length of time. The rest of the time they gave us soup once in a while made out of horse-heads. They used the rest of the meat of the horse for their own food. Then they would give us dehydrated cabbage soup. And you would find out, if you were to drain the water off the soup, you would find out that you had more little white worms than you had cabbage!

But they were cooked, so you ate them. And we had German black bread that they used to feed us. It was a loaf about a foot long and maybe four inches wide and an inch and a half or two inches thick. But the bottom half inch of it would be solid dough that never was cooked. And it was not known how old it was as it was stored in sawdust, and the sawdust was all over the bread to act as an insulation or a way of storing it.

Mc You must have lost some weight ?

O I weighed 159 pounds when I was shot down and when I was liberated I weighed 85 pounds. But most of the fellows never gave up, and so they made a go of it. Those that did just lay around and dream of home and things; they were the ones that got sick. Some of them just were shot trying to run towards the fence or something like that as they lost all sense of being.

Mc If anyone did get ill, was there any kind of medical aid at all ?

O No. No medical treatment until the early spring of '45; they brought in a few infantry officers. One of them was a priest and the other one was a doctor. But as I say, that was just a few weeks before the Germans moved us out of Stalag 17.

As the Russians were coming towards Vienna, you could hear the heavy guns firing at Vienna. And, the Germans there at Stalag 17 didn't want to surrender to the Russians ! So they put us on this forced march across Austria. They divided us up into four groups, 1000 in a group, as there were 4000 American Air Force prisoners in this camp. We left on April 8th from Krems. We went from April 8th, 1945 'til May 2nd.

Mc You had a little experience with the Hitler Youth on that march, didn't you ?

O Yes. One night as we was on this forced march, we come into this small town - - - oh, a population of a couple of thousand. In the center of this town was these three modern buildings; three of four story brick buildings and it was a Hitler Youth School or Camp. They put our group of 100 in the little city park which was encircled by a stone wall four or five feet high. That night we were guarded by Hitler Youth from age of six to maybe nine years of age. And, they all carried submachine guns. And, I believe that was the most terrifying night I ever spent while a prisoner, as I could picture myself as a six or seven year old boy guarding enemy men. In turn I was afraid as much as move my hand or foot figuring that they might shoot at us.

Mc Did any of them actually shoot ?

O No. No, we weren't disturbed at all. As I found out later, there also were some SS on the outside of the fence. 'Cause that morning one of the SS soldiers, which could speak perfect English, said to us that we were fine as long as we stayed - - - as long as we stayed in there. But if we had tried to get out, then they would have dealt with us. And the training they got, those Hitler Youths. On May 2nd, when we were liberated by the 13th Armored Division, Patton's Army, they picked up a Hitler Youth and brought him into the camp or the woods where we were living. And, as some of our boys were barefooted, there in the snow; this one Corporal ordered this Hitler Youth, which was maybe 15 or 16 years old, to take his shoes off and give them to one of the Americans. He refused, so the Corporal reached down with his knife and was going to cut the shoelaces on the shoes. As he did this the kid swung on him. The Corporal was going to "finish him off" and a Major come up and stopped him. He told him to take the Hitler Youth into Brownell where they had set up a stockade. A few minutes later the Corporal

came back with the shoes laying on the front seat of the jeep, and he told the Major that the soldier tried to escape. So we had the pair of shoes to give to one of the Americans.

Mc Well, on May 2nd, you made contact with Patton's Division?

O The 13th Armored Division. We stayed there until May 4th when a detachment of the 7th Army came down the west side of the river. As that was an Infantry Division, they had trucks and equipment. They set up Field Kitchens, and the first thing they did was to bake 1,000 loaves of bread!!! As the four groups of us were back together again, they took these loaves of bread and broke them into four equal parts and gave each prisoner, or ex-prisoner, a quarter of a loaf of bread! That was the whitest looking angel-food cake you ever saw; it was the first white bread we had seen in 23 months!!

Mc That must have tasted real good!... When did you first see the Americans?

O Well, as we were up on the side of the mountains, on the opposite side of the river, there was a winding dirt road. It wound among the pine forest; and right across from where we were, the road came right to the edge of the river. We heard this rumbling noise and could see the dust from the dirt road rise up above the trees. As the vehicles came out of the clearing, they were American tanks with big American flags waving on the back of the first tank! Then they went into Brownell, which was about eight miles top of us, and put up a pontoon bridge and came across the river and back on our side. They liberated us, and took the German guards prisoners.

Mc Do you remember your thoughts at that particular moment?

O Well, they was too good to explain I guess. We never gave up hope, but it was drawn kind of thin. But then when we saw that, we all thanked God that we were still alive and we were able to know that we were going to be able to go home.

Mc It must have been a real thrill.

O It was! We stayed there in the woods 'til May the 5th when

Owen 15 1/2

the 7th Army brought enough trucks in to move us all, four thousand of us, into Brownell. They moved us into Braunau, Hitler's birthplace and kept us there to May the 7th. Then they moved us 30 miles to a fighter Air Force Base that Germany had. They flew in B-47s and landed enough of them on the ground in one flight to accomodate the whole four thousand Americans. On May the 6th, we flew to Nancy, France. There, they put us on a train to Epinal, France. While we were there, they issued us clothing. On May 8th, while we were there, they turned on all the fountains and things in town as we found the Germans had surrendered! On May the 10th they put us on a train and we traveled to Camp Lucky Strike, which was near LaHarve, France. We stayed there until June 1st.

While we were at Camp Lucky Strike, they started out feeding us all liquid foods, withopt any spices or seasoning to try to build us up so we would be able to stand the trip back to the United States by ship.

While I was there, I sat at the same table with General Eisenhower and he told us then he was going to get us back to the States even if he had to put us on double capacity on the ships; meaning that one group would have to be above deck while the other group would be below deck sleeping and eating. Which he did!

On June 1st, we left for the United States. The ship stopped in England on June 2nd, but just

(NEXT PAGE)

to change some crew as we weren't allowed to get off the ship or anything, and on the 3rd we left for the United States. We got to the United States at night but we could see the Statue of Liberty lit up as we came in. We stayed docked out into the bay overnight. The next morning the ferry boat sailed around us. There was all the civilians singing and waving to us, and we landed the next morning. I dare say, most of us kissed the "old earth" when we got on the ground ! Not realizing it, there was a Newsreel taken - - - movie films of us getting off the ship. After I got home I got a phone call from a girl here in Medina, Florence Woodard, who has passed away now; but she was going to nursing school and her and some of the other girls were at the theatre - - - at that time they used to show the Newsreels in between at the theatre - - - she saw me when I got off the ship and got on land.

Mc Isn't that something ! This ship that brought you back across the Atlantic, was that one of the ocean liners ?

O No. That was one of the small ships, or Liberty ships, or whatever you wanted to call them. And we hit a bad storm on the Atlantic and to top it off, a group of us got Ptomaine Poisoning from some bad chicken that they served us and so it was a rough voyage home !

Mc You were at double capacity too ?

O Double capacity, yes !

Mc Spent half of the time up on deck ?

O Right. We tied ourselves to whatever we could. As we would hit these big waves - - - then one minute the bow would be out of the water, and the next minute the stern would be out, and the propellers would be right out in mid-air. And then they'd chop; and go chop down in again and you thought the ship was going to break in two. But we made it !

Mc It was all worth it anyway; coming home ?

O Yes, it was. I got home on June 15th, on my dad's 65th birthday. I got in Medina on his birthday.

Mc How did you get from New York to Medina ?

O We got on a train at Trenton, New Jersey; another lad from Batavia, Jack Hollenbeck, as we were riding on this Pennsylvania train going towards New York. The first time either of us had been there, and we were discussing how we were going to get through to New York over to the Penn Central Station. In the seat behind us was an elderly gentleman who overheard us talking. He said: "Boys, where are you going ?" We told him - - - or I told him: "Medina, New York." He says: "You know, I was born and raised in Middleport." So he said: "I will take you boys to the Grand Central Station by the subway." And so he took us, went out of his way - - - took us to the subway, paid our fare and took us to Grand Central Station and right to the track that would take us into Rochester. And we called from Rochester, and Jack's father, who worked with the Veteran's Administration in the Batavia Hospital, come to Rochester and pick us up and brought us to Medina.

Mc Do you remember the name of the man from Middleport ?

O No. He never gave us his name. It was out of a clear blue sky. There he was. Somebody had to be looking over us.

Mc Sure ! Were you discharged right away ?

O No. I came home on a 66 day furlough and when we left there they gave us \$120.00 in cash, plus our train tickets. And when I was home they sent me \$3000.00 in back pay. After the 66 days I had to go back to Atlantic City, New Jersey, where, if married, you could take your wife with you. But I wasn't. And they put us in a hotel with a private room on the Boardwalk. We were there for six days for to straighten out our records and make out all

the back pay and all that. But I was one of the older prisoners; it took longer. So they said we are going to have to put you in some kind of outfit until we get everything straightened out. So they give us an opportunity of any branch in the Air Force that we wanted to go in to. So I signed up for the Air Squadron which was from Lake P Field in Dayton, Ohio. But I was never there. They had a small group of about 100 personnel and a few ships at Fort Dix, at a Transport Command Base. And then, I spent one week in Orlando, Florida and two weeks there. Then in October we went to Rome Air Force Base in Rome, New York and got our discharge and came home.

Mc Where were you on VJ Day ? When the war ended in Japan ?

O Well, let's see. I can't recall the day. I might have been home on my 66 day furlough.

Mc So you were right at home at the time ?

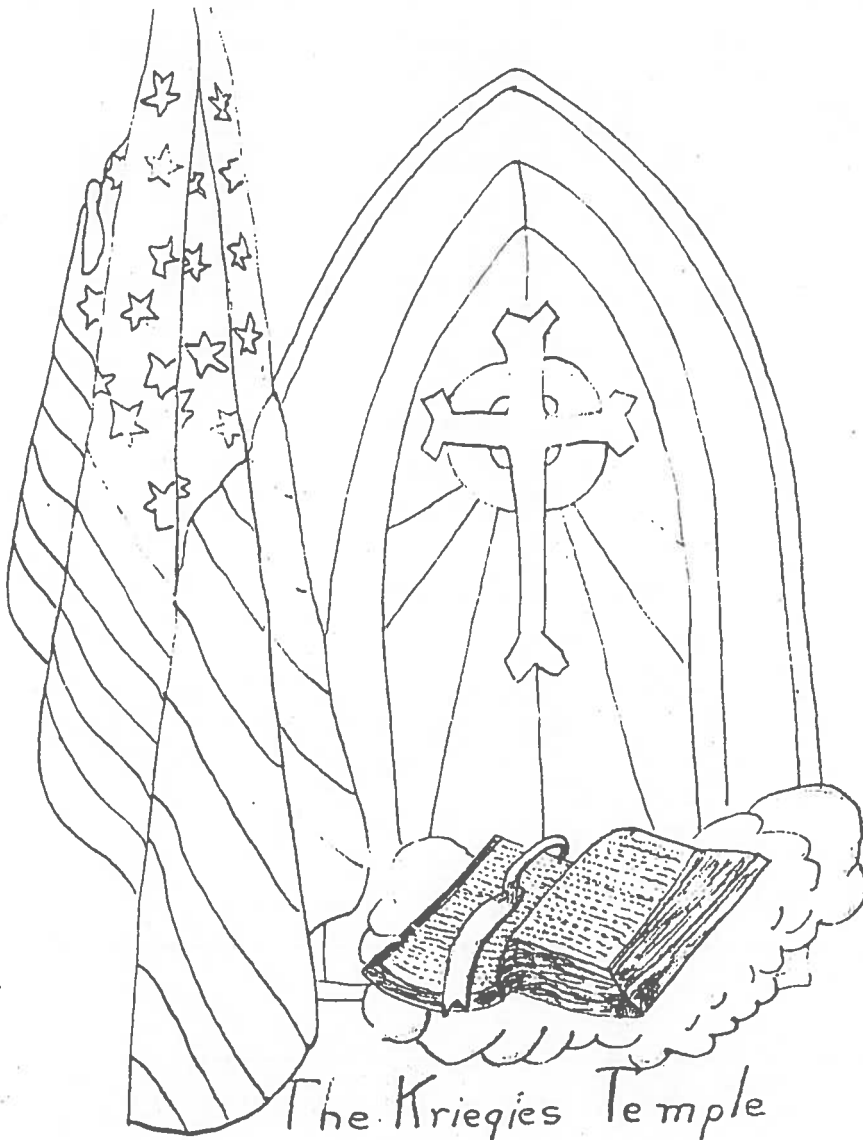
O At home when VJ Day took place.

Mc Well, Charles, are there any other reminiscences that you have of your Army days ?

O Well, there are two things that I over-looked that was kind of important. In prison camp we built a little Chapel out of crates and tin and cardboard. Then we built a little theatre and put on several plays; I played in the "Life With Father". And then I played the part of a Can-Can Girl in one of the plays. One of the other experiences, which wasn't quite as pleasant; when we was on a forced march, we come into this town where there was a Concentration Camp and they were moving some civilian prisoners which were, might as well say, nearly dead, down the street. And as they would stumble, they would pick them up and bash their heads against the side of the wagon and go on down the road as if nothing had happened. That's the main thing, I guess.

Owen

18½



The Kriegies Temple

There was no temple for our Lord.
When we're banished to this place
Of solid exile. Yet we saw
Within the barbs, His lonely face.

So we saved up The precious wood
of crates from home and scrapes of tin,
and built on sands of solitude
a house where God might enter in.

and we were weak with strange despair,
and hungry - for the blood was spilt,
yet preserved - now come and see
The Temple which belief has built.

by - Charles Owen

Mc What did they do when they killed them there ? With the bodies ?

O Just threw them in the wagon and kept on going.

Mc That must have been a sad sight to see.

Now, a little bit about your own family, your marriage and your children.

O While I was home on my convalescent furlough, another lad, George Grapes from Shelby, and Bob Fisher and myself went down to Olcott Beach. I met these several girls walking down the street which were also from the Medina area. But I only knew one of them and one of them turned out to become my wife.

Mc What is her name ?

O Purla Bates. We were married on June 28th, 1947. Since then we have two children; a daughter, Charlotte, and a son, Paul. And Charlotte has given us two grandsons; Patrick and Travis.

Mc Who is Charlotte married to ?

O Charlotte is married to Jim Crowley. They live in East Shelby. Paul lives on the Portage Road in Medina. He married Mary Walker, whose parents are both school-teachers here in Medina.

Mc Since those war years, where have you worked ?

O I held several small jobs. I started in a gas station when I first came home, but I only worked there a short period. And then I went to work for a trucking company and worked there for three years. Then I went from there to Abex Corporation where I have been there for 28 years now. Spent a brief time in a furniture place but it went bankrupt.

Mc Thank you very much, Charles, for this interview.

V-R
1-27-1981

He Knows How Hostages Feel



Charles R. Owen

Charles R. Owen of Telegraph Road, Medina, follows the story of the American hostages with more than passing interest. And he has opinions based on more than newspaper and television coverage.

Mr. Owen, a foreman at Abex Corp. here, active churchman, father, grandfather, and avid summertime camper, spent nearly two years (July 1943 to May 1945) in German prison camps during World War II, most of the time at the infamous Stalag 17 in Austria.

When news commentaries indicate that the present 52 ex-hostages will have emotional problems relating to their imprisonment and harassment in Iran, he knows all too well what it means.

"I still dream about it sometimes," says Owen, who remembers clearly the ordeal, 35 years after it occurred. Although he is emotionally normal, he has clear flashback memories.

"I remember when I first

came back home, I didn't drive a car for quite awhile. If someone had blown a horn, I didn't really know how I'd react," he explains.

His long ordeal began with a doomed squadron of U.S. B-17 bombers shot down over Kiel, with crewmembers bailing out at high altitude. Nursing cracked ribs and bruises, he was herded from one camp to another and to Stalag 17, where the Germans became a study in contrasts. Sometimes the captors were human and understanding and let the 4,000 men of the camp enjoy sports and theatrical programs. At other times, the men were herded nearly naked into the snow to stand for 24 hours while barracks were searched. At another time, machine guns raked the barracks, killing some of the captives.

And on a 250-mile forced march near the end of the war, the German guards turned sour, broke down emotionally and brutalized and killed some of the marchers only days before they regained freedom.

As one of Medina's three or four POW cases growing out of that war, Owen has just finished recording and giving his "oral history" to Mrs. Helen McAllister of the Historical Association.

As he watches the hostage story these days he has some firm convictions. He realizes it will take weeks, months or years for the freed captives to regain their emotional stability.

He knows how the current rash of special treatment feels. When he and his comrades were given a quarter loaf of fresh bread as their first food after freedom, he remembers, "It was like the most delicious angel food cake I had ever seen." (His weight had dropped from 159 to 85 pounds.)

He recalls how a ferry boat circled the incoming troop ship, loaded with ex-prisoners, and how those aboard sang and shouted cries of welcome. But, with tens of thousands of prisoners involved in the return of 1945, the same focus of attention was understandably not given, in comparison with the world-wide focus on the historic Iranian case.

Owen agrees wholeheartedly that civilian Americans seized in such hostage situations should be regarded as prisoners of war. "No war is declared but there is no other way to view it," he says.

And what happens if the Iranian crisis is repeated at some future time at another location?

"It is just my opinion, but some real decisive action has to be taken within a few days or weeks," he declares.

"We might have done something here before the Iranian situation became organized to the point where they were able to determine who was in charge and what course the situation would take. It is a disgrace that they had to be there so long."

He shares one feeling with the ex-hostages. When he saw the Statue of Liberty, he found it, "a beautiful sight!"

Owen



Charles R. Owen 1943

All's well

That

Ends Well



Mr. and Mrs. Charles Owen

1979

The original transcription was done by Luther P. Burroughs, Albion.
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