

Chambers Brothers Tell Of Experiences While Prisoners Of Germans

Brothers Did Not Know of Each Other's Fate Until They Met After Liberation.

It is unusual for two brothers to have been German prisoners of war during the same period and for one not to even know that the other was overseas, but such was the case of Sgt. Ralph J. Chambers and Pvt. William M. Chambers, III, sons of William M. Chambers, of Hazelwood, who have been liberated and returned to the States. Their experiences give a picture of horror and suffering that brings the German prison camps very close home.

"Everything you read in the newspapers is only about 75 per cent as bad as the conditions in prison camps were, for in most cases they were too horrible to print," said Pvt. William Chambers as the interview with the brothers began, in preparation of what was to follow.

After their months of exposure and lack of food in camps, as they were getting ready to sail, the boys met in France. "Words can't express how we felt," they said as they told of seeing each other for the first time. "I had never known my brother was in Europe much less had been a prisoner of war."

The boys seem to have a kind of understanding that Sgt. Ralph Chambers tell his story first as he was a prisoner sixteen months and Pvt. William over eight months. They feel that the veteran prisoner of a longer term should have the first chance at telling his story.

"Sometimes I thought I would get out, but a lot of times I had

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Rocky Branch Cemetery To Have Clean Up Drive

Beginning on Saturday, August 4, there will be a clean up campaign conducted in the Rocky Branch cemetery, it has been announced by Derry Norman. For four successive Saturday afternoons the work will be continued. Persons who have members of their families and friends buried there are asked to come to the cemetery on the Saturday afternoons designated and assist with the work.

he reported that they received something each week from the Red Cross, but the Germans in time gave them less and less, but kept the things piled outside the camp they later discovered.

On the long march from February to May they lived on the land, as they went, and they made from 20 to 25 miles a day. It was bitter struggle to keep going when you had so little food, but the Hitler youths would urge them on by methods which he hated to recall. Sgt. Chambers is entitled to wear the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Purple Heart, air medal, three oak leaf clusters, the European Theater and American Theater ribbon, and Presidential citation with two clusters.

"Now you let my brother tell you his story, for I was a non-commissioned officer and I did not have to work, so while I was in camp longer than he was he had in some ways a much tougher time than I did," said Sgt. Chambers as he turned the interview over to his brother.

Pvt. William Chambers entered the service in July, 1943, at Fort Dix, N. J., and was sent to Camp Grant, Ill., for his basic training and in February, 1944 was sent overseas. He was attached to the 45th Infantry Division as a medical aid. He saw service at Cassino, Anzio Beachhead, Battle of Rome, Invasion of Southern France.

He was taken a prisoner during the invasion of France and was caught in retreat as the American forces were driven back by the Germans. His group of prisoners had their shoes taken away from them and were stripped of their clothes and all personal possessions and started on a 300-mile march to a German camp, barefooted, without clothes and hungry they marched to Mulhousen, Germany.

Here he, with 26 others were herded into a box car and rode four and one-half days without food or drink to Limberg. Here they were registered as German POWs, and loaded on a box car again and sent to Mooseberg, their permanent camp, and for eight and one half months he lived the life of a German prisoner.

As a buck private it was his lot to be put to hard labor. His day

started at four o'clock in the morning and ended at 10 at night, working constantly with no food other than weak soup. If you stopped to rest, there was a guard who was ready to punish you.

His group were assigned to repairing the railroads, and according to Pvt. Chambers it was a job that had to be done over and over again, for the AAF was busy over Germany during that period. Day in and day out the American bombs fell on the railroad tracks tearing them to pieces and the prisoners repaired them again for travel.

The political prisoners were the most pitiful in the lot, according to Pvt. Chambers. They had been prisoners so much longer, and all hope had left them. He said they worked automatically, but they were mentally off, and had only a vacant stare, with no light in their eyes.

"It would be hard to make anyone understand the cruelty of the Germans. I have seen over 300 bodies of political prisoners buried together in a bomb crater without ceremony," he said.

"Everyone cherished hope of getting home—I mean the American boys, but in their hearts they knew they had little chance," he said.

Pvt. Chambers was liberated on April 29, this spring when the 13th armored Infantry of the 3rd U. S.

Army recaptured his group. It was nerve wracking according to his reports. They were in a German town, and the Americans wanted to be sure that it had completely surrendered so they shelled the place for nine hours. There were 500 American prisoners and 162 British prisoners in the camp. They were so afraid that some of them might get killed right on the eve of liberation, but not a soul received a scratch, when the shells stopped flying and the Americans marched in and took over.

Colored truck drivers drove the liberated men to a town some distance away, going down crooked roads at 55 miles an hour. Later the men saw a 65-pound pig in a pasture, they killed and cooked the porker and ate until they were sick. After recovering, they ate some more.

"We were worried about what the reaction of the Americans back home towards a prisoner of war, but we soon learned there was nothing to fear, as we were treated like heroes. The army certainly has given us the very best of medical attention and food," Pvt. Chambers remarked.

Pvt. Chambers was then flown to Camp Lucky Strike in France. He says that favorite American cigarettes have been used to name the American camps in Europe.

Then the two brothers had their dramatic meeting. Sgt. Ralph Chambers left three days ahead of Pvt. Chambers, but his liberty ship got in combat and was struck by an aircraft and a tanker in a fog, and delayed en route 6 days, so he got home five days ahead of him, and the meeting in America was another happy event in their lives.

The only souvenir that Pvt. Chambers brought back with him from a German prison camp is a book. He prizes it above all his possessions. It meant a great deal to him in camp, where he found the volume among the meager collection of books in the camp library. It is a story about the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Pvt. Chambers, who is entitled to wear the Purple Heart, was wounded twice in Italy. He is also entitled to wear the European theater ribbon and the good conduct medal.

Like all overseas veterans the Chambers brothers feel that there is no country in the world like America, and no people on the face of the earth so kind, so generous, and fair as the Americans. They want to live the rest of their days in this country. Sgt. Chambers plans when he is discharged to live in New Jersey, but Pvt. Chambers wants to live right here in Haywood county.

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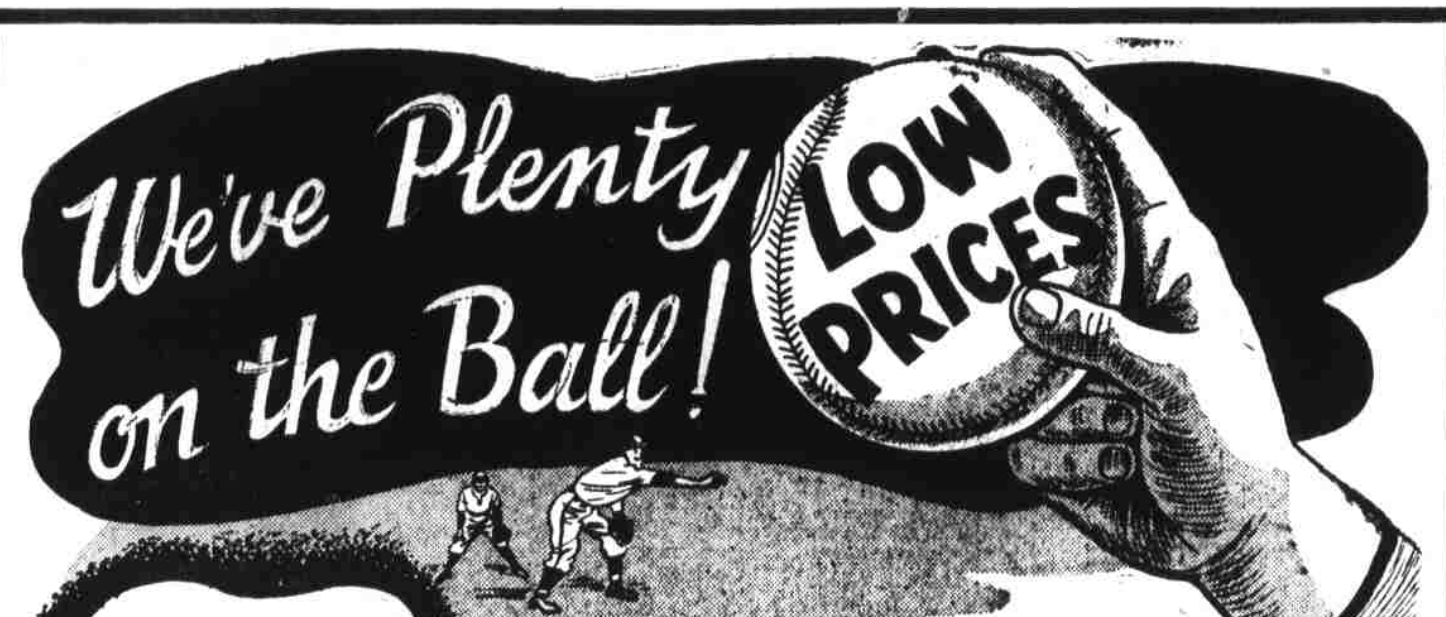
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