

Liberation – April 30, 1945

Then came the news over the camp PA system: The Russians were here. There were 9,000 airmen (7,588 American and 1,351 British and Canadian) imprisoned there. They were Free! That was followed by news from a German broadcast that Hitler was dead!

Many of the now ex-POWs, went into the town of Barth, many looking for food and supplies but most just enjoying the freedom to move about.

On May 1 a first contact was made with advanced Russian troops. The Russians encountered in Barth looked pretty rough. A large Russian tank rolled down the main street. The Russians were equipped with U.S. lend lease equipment. Convoys of G.I. trucks rolled in. They were passing out vodka and cigars and the Americans were giving them cigarettes. At one point, one of the POWs met a Russian and pointed to the American machine gun the Russian was carrying. "Amerikanish, Amerikanish," he said. The Russian said, "Da, Da," and with that cleared away some bystanders and emptied the machine gun into a row of houses. The ex-POW was stunned. Someone surely was killed, but it was clear the Russian, who couldn't care less, was through talking, and was going to shoot anyone coming out of the houses.



The Russians, upon hearing that the camp was short on beef, herded some dairy cattle into the camp. The ensuing scene was chaotic with half-starved Kriegies trying to catch, butcher, and milk these cows all at the same time.

Sadly, a Kriegie, venturing outside the camp, was blown up by a land mine. There were also fights breaking out between Americans and the Russian troops. There were some 10 known American dead just after liberation and orders were finally issued for the Kriegies to stay in camp.

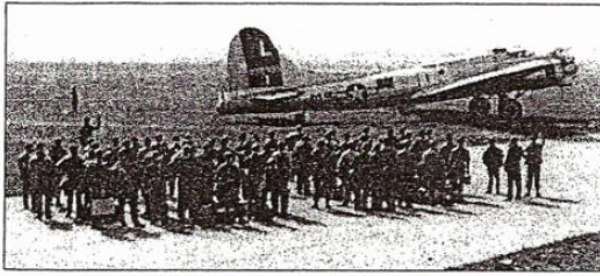
The Russians were an unpredictable lot with little regard for life. They were bent on revenge and were as hard as they could be on any Germans they encountered. Atrocities were commonplace.

Although the actual liberation was performed by the Russians, no effort was made by them to evacuate the POWs from the area. The Russians were part of General Zhukov's army, and they had orders to send American POWs to Odessa. They would then be sent home, supposedly, through Moscow. Colonel Zemke, the senior American officer, refused to follow the Russians' orders and was negotiating for additional time so the Eight Air Force could evacuate the camp. Art heard that the Russians had given Zempke ten days.

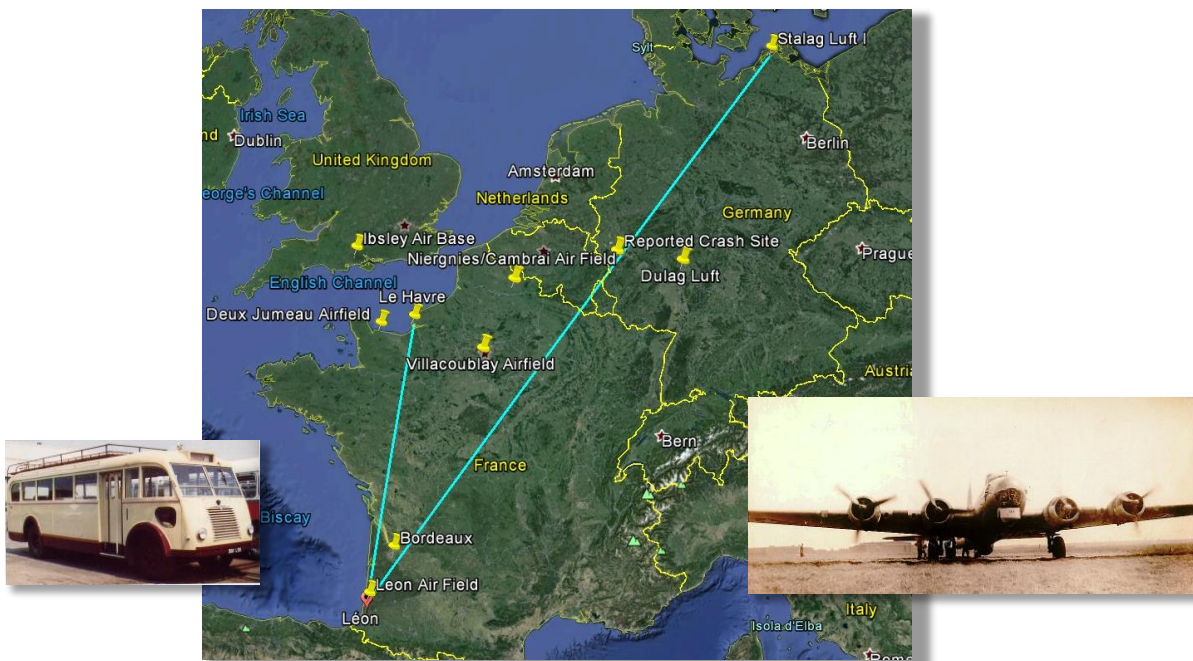
On May 6, 1945 Colonel Byerly, the former SAO, left Stalag Luft 1 with 2 officers of a British airborne division and flew to England the next day. After reporting to 8th Air Force headquarters on the conditions at the camp, arrangements were made to evacuate the liberated POWs by air.

Evacuation – Operation Revival – May 13, 1945

On May 13, 1945 forty-one B-17G's were sent from Bassingbourn in the UK to a runway near Barth in order to evacuate part of the prisoners. From Barth they immediately flew west 960 miles to Leon airport near Bordeaux in France, where the ex-POWs were loaded on buses for a 100 mile ride to Camp Lucky Strike at Le Havre, France. This operation was repeated on May 14 and completed on May 15.



Vor dem Einstieg in eine B-17, Barth am 14.5.19455



Camp Lucky Strike, Saint-Sylvain, France – May 18, 1945

The transition camps were all named for cigarettes – Old Gold, Twenty Grand, Philip Morris, Taryton, Chesterfield, Pall Mall and, of course, Lucky Strike. Strange? Not really.



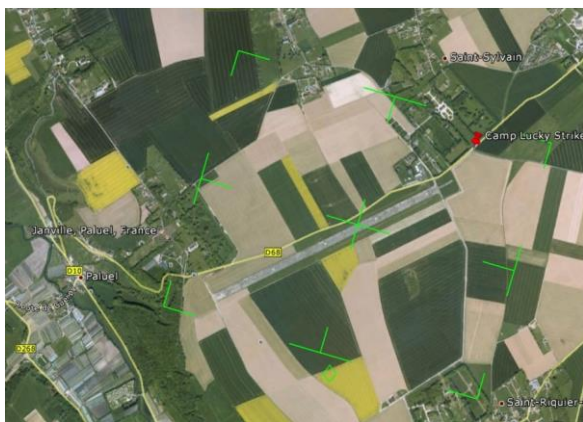
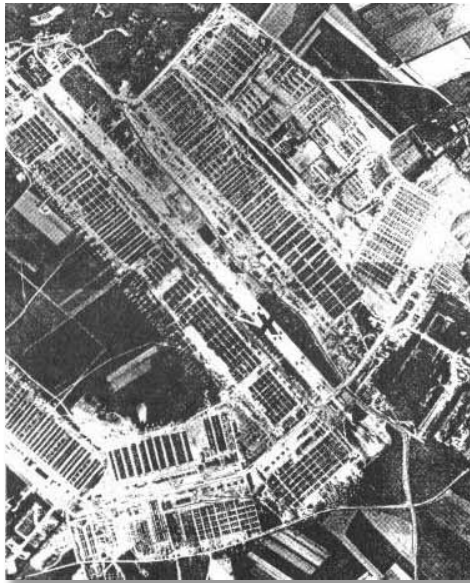
The staging-area camps were named after various brands of American cigarettes; the assembly area camps were named after American cities. The names of cigarettes and cities were chosen for two reasons: First, and primarily, for security. Referring to the camps without an indication of their geographical location went a long way to ensuring that the enemy would not know precisely where they were. Anybody eavesdropping or listening to radio traffic would think that cigarettes were being discussed or the camp was stateside, especially regarding the city camps. Secondly, there was a subtle psychological reason, the premise being that troops heading into battle wouldn't mind staying at a place where cigarettes must be plentiful and troops about to depart for combat would be somehow comforted in places with familiar names of cities back home (Camp Atlanta, Camp Baltimore, Camp New York, and Camp Pittsburgh, among others). (I doubt if the GIs heading into Europe were taken in by any of that cigarette and city mumbo-jumbo!) By war's end, however, all of the cigarette and city camps were devoted to departees. Many processed liberated American POWs.

The American tobacco companies provided a constant supply of cigarettes to the interned POWs. Red Cross parcels and packages from home always contained cigarettes and they became a staple and “currency” for the krieges who traded with each other and with their German captors. It was a marketing “Home Run” of an inexpensive addictive substance to naive nation under incredible stress.

Lucky Strike was opened in December 1944 and closed in February 1946. From 1 June 1945, the camp stood under the management of the 89th Division until this division was deactivated and returned to the United States in early December 1945. The camp, where the 89th Infantry Division managed the

reception of troops, was a veritable American city for 18 months. Life was therefore rhythmical with this enormous hub of military personnel, short stopover for some, several months for others. One could find, like in any American city, a hospital, church, movie theater, post office, police station, barber shop, and a supermarket. There were also concerts and shows with famous celebrities (Bob Hope and Mickey Rooney, among others).

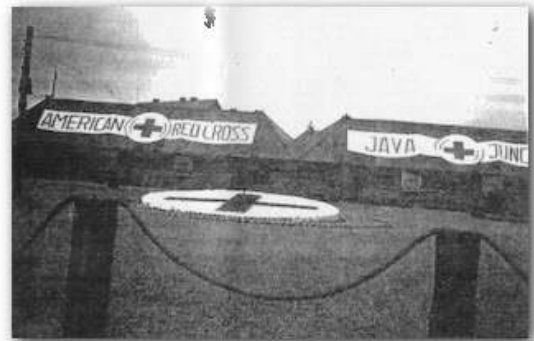
The only part of Camp Lucky Strike visible today is the original air strip. Everything else has been converted back to farmland.



The city was divided into four sections: A, B, C, and D. Each section was made up of 2,900 tents under which were housed 14,500 men (at times, more than 100,000 U.S. soldiers stayed there). These virtual neighborhoods even had public parks, and in certain places, statues of pretty women.



The Red Cross also had offices in the neighborhoods: nurses and girls who would serve hot coffee, cake, and newspapers day and night. A little further down were the bars: one for officers; another for NCOs and soldiers. One could drink everything they used to in pre-war France: the best liqueurs, good champagne, cognacs, and water of life (aqua vita), as well as Coca-Cola, whiskey, gin, and American beer. The bars were only open from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m., which was not enough time to satisfy the customers. Each sector also had its own auditorium, which served as a theater, cinema, and chapel all-in-one.



One of the nurses at the camp hospital reflected on the sheer volume of soldiers arriving at Lucky Strike.

Josephine Bovill, 77th Field Hospital, Camp Lucky Strike: - "When American prisoners of war (POWs) started to stream out of Germany, the several camps situated on the Normandy coast near Le Havre, and which had originally been used as staging areas, were now used to take care of the American prisoners of war until they could be sent home.... Large trucks would arrive at the camp regularly, full of jubilant GIs dressed in all sorts of motley clothes, half-'Jerry' (German) and half-American. We took those soldiers who were ill to the hospital. There were many emaciated soldiers who had been caught

in the Battle of the Bulge the previous December. The Germans did not know what to do with them as they were in full retreat after January 1945, so they marched them back and forth from place to place, and fed them very little as there was little food to be had. Prisoners captured earlier were better off, but all of ours were sad to see. However, their spirits improved once they arrived at Lucky Strike, since they knew they would soon be going home."

The Point System

At the core of the U.S. Army Demobilization Plan was the so-called 'Point System.' Points were awarded for years of service overseas, medals and other commendations received, campaign battle stars earned, as well as other factors. The magic point total for being sent home was 85. Many men had more points, and those that had the most were slated to be sent home first. Following is a pretty typical point-system computation table (though probably incomplete):

Number of months in the armed forces	1 point per month
Number of months overseas	1 point per month
Number of children	12 points per child
Number of battle stars earned by unit	5 points per star
Purple Heart winner	5 points per award
Soldier's Medal winner	5 points per award
Bronze Star winner	5 points per award
Presidential Unit Citation winner	5 points per award

GI were constantly badgering company clerks to get errors corrected and adjustments made to their point totals, which were recorded on their "Adjusted Service Rating Cards." Those men with the magic number of 85 points, or more, were to return to the United States, while those with fewer points were transferred out to make room for high point men from other organizations. Those with 80 to 84 points were sent to other units in the ETO and some of those with even fewer points were sent home on furlough and then went on to retraining for duty in the Pacific. The latter were perhaps the most fortunate of all, since the war in the Pacific soon ended and many of them were discharged before the higher-point men in the ETO got home.

Lt. James W. Harrison, Jr. was one of the winners! With 42 months of service since enlistment, 14 months overseas and 6 months in combat his total was 86.

While records are sparse, Lt. Harrison should have been one of the first Recovered Allied Military Personnel (RAMPS) to leave for the United States some 10 to 12 days after arrival at Lucky Strike around May 18. With typically two weeks of decompressing at the transition camp for hospitalization, medical and dental treatment, counseling, re-equipping and getting re-accustomed to decent food, drink and sleep, RAMPS would head for Le Havre docks to embark on one of many liberty ships crossing the Atlantic in early June.