BEHIND the barbed wire in Nazi Germany, as you read this, many prisoners of war are thinking deep thoughts that may have much to do with charting the future of the United States of America. They have little to do but think and hope and pray for V-E Day.

A prisoner thinks of what the United Nations should do with a defeated Reich, but he gives much thought, too, to how his own country should stand in its foreign policy after the war. But most of all he thinks of what is going on back home.

I know, for recently I came out of twenty months behind the barbed wire in the high-walled concentration camps of Fascist Italy and the Greater German Reich.

I am back today in this land of God-given freedom, white bread and clean air because, during all those long months of imprisonment, I never for a moment ceased to fight for the most precious thing in this world—personal liberty.

I was the first American correspondent ever to ride to war with Great Britain's fleet in the eastern Mediterranean.

One hundred and twenty-five thousand miles of travel aboard His Majesty's warships since 1940, witnessing nearly every naval engagement with the Italians, finally brought me my third sinking on September 14, 1942, and capture by an Italian landing craft four miles off Tobruk, Libya.

That started the toughest twenty months of my life—long, monotonous, seemingly hopeless days in which I often fought a battle to keep my stomach from merging with my spine.

Picking me up from the sea after Axis coastal batteries sank the British destroyer Sikh during a Commando raid on Tobruk, the Italian craft landed me on a quay where stood the German and Italian commandants.

Since I am first of all a newspaperman, my first demand was to interview Field Marshal General Erwin Rommel, whose Afrika Korps was then endangering Alexandria and Britain's great Egyptian bases. After three hours of verbal explosions, the Axis commandants countered with a proposal to release me if I would tell them the present dispositions of the British fleet.

My reply was: "Don't be silly!"

"Then," they fumed, "you are a prisoner of war."

Taken to Derna, I went without food or drink for thirty-six hours and then was given a bowl of putrid macaroni. Four days later I was flown to Bari in Italy.

Then began four months in a valley of death.

Behind barbed wire, I lived with lice-infested Indian soldiers whose emaciated bodies were hideously distorted by the swellings of malnutrition. In those four months, I never saw a bar of soap, or had a towel, or was given a pair of shoes. I wore only a torn, thin khaki uniform.

My unvarying food was a small plate of yellowish liquid which the Italians called "pumpkin soup" and a little roll of hardtack bread that fitted into the palm of my hand.

Colonel Stefano Orofalo, the commandant of the Bari camp, known as Campo P.G. No. 75, said all Allied ships had been sunk and no Red Cross food parcels were getting through. But I saw him eating from a Red Cross package and smoking American cigarettes.

Since I am a chain-smoker, the lack of cigarettes hit me hard. I made mine from olive leaves, cornstalk stubs and almost any debris I found in the camp grounds that would burn.

I refused to salute Italian officers on the ground that I could not show respect for people for whom I had none. I fought constantly for my release as a civilian, noncombatant war correspondent, but the Italians said I was a British naval officer and a combatant.

Through rain, cold, sleet and snow, I fought to bring (Continued on page 129)
The author of this article spent 20 months as a prisoner of war in Axis camps. When he was released, the Nazis were glad to get rid of him, because he had the annoying habit of speaking the truth to anybody who would listen. Here in his first magazine article are the facts they tried to suppress.

By Larry Allen
War Correspondent
news to the thousands of captives who passed through that camp. Although my fingers were so swollen by chilblains it was difficult to hold a pen, I made a news bulletin board from cardboard, translated Italian newspapers and communiqués and ran a full-fledged AP news service for the inmates.

After four months of fighting and testing, I was transferred to Campo F. G. No. 21 at Chieti. My news service went up in flames: into that great camp as fast as I could hear Italian radio broadcasts and translate Italian newspapers.

The Italians didn’t like the American magazines, especially the American headlines. Commandant Colonel Massi, a violent Fascist, sentenced me to seven days’ solitary confinement on bread and water.

I served forty-eight hours of that sentence, then decided to appeal to the commandant’s sense of honor. I wrote him a note saying, “I find it impossible to believe that I am being punished for writing the truth in a country which especially cherishes that characteristic.” I told him that I had called into his office and said that what he was about to do was not an indication of weakness on his part, but that I was free to return to the United States.

After the capitulation of Italy, I escaped from a train en route to Germany. I was recaptured thirty miles from the Swiss frontier and an Italian farmer betrayed me to the Germans.

Then I was thrown into a cattle car and taken through Bremer Pass into Hinterland. There a German officer opened the door of the boxcar, dragged me by my hair out onto the tracks.

“Y ou American dog!” he shouted. “Why you come over here to fight in a war which does not concern you? You Americans want all the oil and gold in the world. You want all of Europe. That was too much for me. “You forget,” I reminded him, “that Germany declared war against the United States secondly, there isn’t anything in Europe we haven’t got. Personally, I haven’t seen anything worth having. And thirdly, American boys are our equals. They are the ones who have to preserve the right to live their lives the way they want to live them—and that’s something you’ve never known in your life.”

That brought me a swift kick, a change of trains and a four-day ride in a third-class ben case railway car to Altburgund, in the Palatinate, near the city of Posen. In Altburgund, formerly called Sowin, is Oflag 64, the largest American prisoner-of-war camp in Germany.

In Germany, my battle for liberty as a civilian, noncombatant newspaperman went on, but the Germans said I was a full-fledged prisoner of war.

“I think every American officer in that camp got down on his knees at night and said to himself, ‘What’s the Red Cross doing? Why aren’t they sending me food in private parcels, for that was what they were doing back home?!’”

There is little food in that camp. Most of the food we received in the Red Cross parcels was cow placenta, some of which was just black, sour and often moldy bread; a one-inch-thick slice of tough-skinned Tafelmargarin, which most of us used for shining our shoes; one ounce of spoiled, sandy apple marmalade, which few if any of us attempted to eat; one ounce of beef sugar, and a one-inch slice of tough-skinned Wurst.

In the British Navy down to lieutenant, my rank, since I was taken prisoner, had always been the one where you are protected by the British Navy down to lieutenant. When my release was finally ordered by the German High Command I emerged with a rank just above that of corporal.

Behind the barbed wire in Germany, you have plenty of time to think. Like the 700 American Army officers in the camp, I remember, my country, the people who were doing back home, the people I loved, and what to do with a defeated Germany.

I thought as I lay upon a hard, flat pallet of straw flung across the crude wooden bunk that formed my bed.

I thought as I shivered with intense cold, and chilblains filled my fingers with water, and frostbite ruined my toes.

“Flag-waving—and after that get a gentle brush of ‘Sorry, buddy, no jobs open.’”

Many an evening as I hugged the stove I would listen to Second Lieutenant Wright, of Fort Worth, Texas, sing, “If you get closer to the stove and add: ‘And what do we read in the German newspapers? Such news as a strike in a land­mark cotton mill, or a Nazi law to press closer to the stove and add: And the next thing, think Lieutenant Thomas Hughes, of Fort Worth, Texas, would sing in his powerful voice:

“You know, this worries me. Some people back home think we are going to lose the war. The other day we knew the Germans will fight as long as Hitler lives. This might go on for years unless we put into it everything we’ve got. I know, too, from my experience, that the Germans are bitter in their hatred of us and our Allies and appear determined to fight to the death. We have often talked with German officers and soldiers who told us they had no alternative except to fight until the end. We have never known that as many letters from home, the overwhelming majority of letters from home, was sometimes expressed that, ‘after all, the Germans are nice, white people.’ From my own experience and that of my fellow prisoners, it seems there is little white about the Nazis except the color of their skins.

In the concentration camps at Moosburg near Munich, I have seen German guards eating fresh vegetables and semi-brown bread while we captives received only slices from cow placenta, sour, spoiled, and required to eat sickening dehydrated soups or have nothing at all.

Under the Geneva Convention the Germans are required to provide clothing for captives. But in Oflag 64, although they had thousands of captured British and American uniforms, overcoats and recreational or educational facilities. On one occasion, Commandant Fritz Schnei­der held outside the camp gates a whole wagonload of theatrical and entertain­ment equipment sent by the Y. M. C. A. We finally got it after many protests by high-ranking blue-blooded American officers like the old Colonel Thomas D. Drake, of Clarks­burg, West Virginia, and Indianapolis, Indiana. Drake, as senior American pris­oner-of-war in Oflag 64, had a special audience with Hitler, who promised that the Ger­mans live up to the Geneva Convention.

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Officer prisoners were not required to work, but I have seen American enlisted men forced to hard labor from 4:45 a.m. to 9:15 p.m. on farms, highways, in ce­ment plants and on construction projects.

The thing that disdained most was to get a letter in the silly, stereotyped form of: “The flowers are blooming; I’m fine, and hope you are too.”

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