

## **Humanity During War**

### **V- Stories from Other Areas**

#### **George Bailey:**

Bailey was a ball turret gunner on a B-17, whose plane was shot down on his thirty-third mission. As they were flying over Berlin, flak hit their bomber, and they flew towards the Russian line as they were unable to make it back to the Allied lines in the west. Bailey shot off a flare to alert the Russians that they were an Allied plane so that they would not be fired upon as they made their descent. When the plane finally hit the ground, it split in half, and Bailey's legs slid under the plane. At first, he began to panic as he thought that his legs got crushed under the plane. Luckily for him, he was able to feel his legs after a minute or so and was able to get himself out from under the wreckage after pushing off his top turret gunner, who was the only one that died in the crash.

The remaining crew was greeted by three Russian soldiers who chambered their PPSH-41s and aimed them at them. The men managed to convince the Russians that they were indeed Americans, which lowered the tension as the soldiers relaxed. A Russian interpreter later told Bailey and the crew that in a previous situation, Germans had taken old B-17s and landed in the Russian lines; when the Russians moved forward to help them, the Germans opened fire with the planes' turrets. This incident, according to the interpreter, was the reason for the aggressive reception, for they were wary of a German trick.

While the Russians took the crew to their field hospital to take care of the wounded, they told Bailey that the top turret gunner had broken all the bones in his body, most likely because he was thrown around the plane when they landed. The Americans spent several weeks at the hospital, getting to know the women and troops that were stationed there with them. Bailey recalled meeting a young Russian soldier who was bandaged extensively as he had gotten severely wounded in an earlier battle. Bailey asked the Russian if he would like to come with them to America when the war was over, to which he replied: "While I dislike

Stalin, I can not forsake my country for I must continue to serve her.” Bailey admired the young mans’ patriotism, noting that was an attitude all too rare even among Americans.

After spending time with the Russians at the field hospital, Bailey and his crew learned a hard lesson about hygiene on the frontlines. One day, as the crew was eating some black bread, they noticed a man leading a donkey that was pulling a cart with bloodied and used bandages away from the hospital. The crew did not think much of it until the man brought the same cart back, loaded with loaves of the black bread. The man in charge of the wagon put the bread in the same space that the bandages had occupied with no covering, much to the dismay of the airmen. After that revelation, the crew decided only to eat the inside of the bread and leave the crust alone.<sup>1</sup>

### **Herman Cranman:**

Cranman was a bombardier assigned to the 512<sup>th</sup> squadron of the 376<sup>th</sup> BG of the Fifteenth Air Force. He initially flew into Casablanca before being sent to Italy to begin his bombing missions. He began operating in May of 1944, doing raids in Northern Italy and much of the surrounding countries in Eastern Europe. On 1944-07-14, (the crews’ thirty-fourth mission), the crew was flying a mission to a target in Budapest, Hungary. The focus of the mission was the railroad marshaling yards on the outskirts of the city. Numerous problems plagued their flight towards the target; the most damaging was when one of the squadron’s planes turned back to base, forcing the remaining pilots to shore up the empty spot in the formation. The lead navigator missed the IP and had to make a sharp turn, breaking up the flight formation.

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<sup>1</sup> This story, as well as the others, is taken from George Bailey’s oral history transcript, August 21, 2006. Page numbers are not listed as access to the files themselves were halted due to Covid-19.

This opening was taken by the Germans, as they sent in three Me 109s to attack the bombers. One of the fighters strafed Cranman's plane, and the alarm sounded for the bail-out. Cranman had to wake up the nose gunner, who did not sleep the night before, and they jumped out of the nose wheel hatch door. Cranman managed to land near some trees when he heard the sounds of shouting heading his way. Leaving behind his parachute, he ran in the opposite direction and hid in a partially finished canal full of high grass. His watch and Colt .45 were left on the plane when Cranman jumped, so he had no way of knowing the time or defending himself. His escape kit had fallen out of his pocket when he landed in the trees, so he didn't have those supplies. He noted that the weather was sweltering that day, as it was about 11 o'clock when their plane was hit.

After some time, a couple approached, and started collecting some kind of wild plant that forced Cranman to crawl away from his hiding spot to avoid detection. He continued to watch them for some time, noting how they found his flying clothes, but they stuffed them away and continued about their business. Eventually, he got away from the area and began trekking through the countryside. He got to the outskirts of a village and went to a tree that had green apples, and it did not take him long to eat them. He noticed an older man and his son that were sitting near the tree, and he talked to them briefly, asking for directions to get to Budapest. The men gave him the directions and started to follow him once he started walking in that direction. Once he got within earshot of the village, the older man started shouting that they had an American airman. Herman attempted to run away, but the villagers shortly managed to capture him and take him to the Germans.

During his interrogation, Herman noted how the officer in charge threatened to shoot him as a cruel joke to see his reaction, and they beat him up substantially. As the interrogations went on, a woman at the house continually made sure that he had plenty of water to drink. He was then taken to a jail where he was reunited with his crew, except for the tail gunner who died when the plane crashed. The next morning the crewmen were chained together and marched through the streets to the local train station.

They were cursed and yelled at by the Romanian villagers along the way. From the train, the Americans were taken to a larger jail where the eight men were divided into two different cells and stayed in there for nearly eight days. Herman was the first to be interrogated, and then he was thrown into solitary for not giving the Germans any information on the Air Force. While he was in solitary, he met an English prisoner stuck in the cell as well, and they became acquainted with keep their minds occupied from the silence of the lonely cell. Herman was then sent to Stalag Luft III, where he spent the next ten months of the war.

### **Archie MacIntyre:**

MacIntyre's plane was hit by flak during a mission to Munich on 1944-07-11. The flak ruptured the planes' control systems and caused a fire to break out in one of the engines. The pilot took the bomber out of formation, and they continually lost altitude. They reluctantly had to steer themselves towards Switzerland, where two Fw 190s flew alongside them to make sure they landed. The plane crashed in a cow pasture, and the crew attempted to run towards the tree line, but four German soldiers quickly came and rounded them up. After several minutes of frantic yelling, the guards began to take the Airmen's flying equipment, which took them a few moments as they tried to pull them off instead of using the zippers. Then, the airmen were taken to a building under guard and a Swiss Officer came and told them that they had violated Swiss neutrality, and they would be held there for the duration of the war. They then gave MacIntyre and his crew Red Cross forms that had sections for them to fill out their military information. This quickly resulted in the pilot getting in an argument with the Swiss officer, for he refused to fill out the sections. Sometime later, the American Consul came and told the airmen that they were to stay in the country to make sure that relations with the Swiss did not deteriorate. Naturally, this was jarring to the men as they were hoping for the government to get them out of custody.

The following day they were housed in a small motel for two weeks, where they had little to no furnishings, and they could go outside but not beyond 100 feet from the building. Swiss guards patrolled the streets surrounding the motel, which made it impossible for the prisoners to attempt to leave the building, and they sat around eating bread and the occasional bowl of soup. After two weeks had passed, the prisoners moved to a place called “Welyln,” which was up far in the mountains via the rail system. They stayed at this village for much of the winter, and the Americans began to grow irritable. The airmen constantly clashed with each other and the Swiss troops and civilians. The two groups eventually agreed that the Americans needed some occupational or educational programs to keep them busy and release their pent up energy.

MacIntyre taught some classes and helped play medic for his fellow airmen, as several got hurt trying to learn how to ski. MacIntyre was willing to teach the lessons and keep busy because staying in Switzerland with hardly any distractions was driving him crazy. During his time at the hotel, he saw two men attempt to commit suicide by jumping out of the hotel’s top window. One of the men survived the fall, but he died of his wounds as the Swiss troops did not let Archie or any other airmen go and help tend to his injuries.<sup>2</sup> He also noted that several others died from their battle/crash-landing wounds because the Swiss did not care for them properly.

He spent some of his class time talking with other detainees on how best to escape the German sector. After several weeks, the Swiss began to suspect MacIntyre and began to search through his things periodically. The American consul did nothing for the men stuck in Switzerland; they told them they were on their own and had to deal with their problems.<sup>3</sup> MacIntyre and his friend Hatley took a trip on the rail system sometime after the start of the battle of the Bulge occurred. This trip was to get an idea of the

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<sup>2</sup> Page twenty-seven of Archie MacIntyre’s oral history transcript, June 12, 2002. Archie recalls his first several weeks in Switzerland in this section.

<sup>3</sup> Page twenty-nine of Archie MacIntyre’s oral history transcript.

setup of the train system, and the amount of security the Swiss had at the stations. They were caught riding past their designated stop and Swiss guards forcibly sent them back to their camp. MacIntyre decided to keep a low profile after that, to make sure he didn't get into more trouble and get sent to a higher security prison. The American detainees were eventually allowed by the guards to put on a Christmas show, and MacIntyre planned an escape during the show. He and Hatley went around the village to get civilian outfits for the "program." The local barber had an outfit for Hatley, but he only had a woman's ski outfit for MacIntyre. He agreed to take the clothes, and the barber provided him a wig, shaved his face, and did his eyebrows for good measure.<sup>4</sup> By this time, the American consul decided to help the American detainees,<sup>7</sup> and they provided MacIntyre and Hatley with train tickets to Bern. Once MacIntyre got dressed, he and Hatley headed towards the train station. The guards barely looked over their tickets and simply ushered them on; they then made for the back compartment of the train to avoid as many people as possible. MacIntyre remarked in his interview how he wanted to relieve himself so badly, but he didn't know how to use the restroom with the tracksuit. Once he was back to his seat, he took out a knitting kit he had borrowed to look the part of a female passenger.

Their trip became more stressful when a group of Swiss guards boarded the train at the following stop, and two of them sat across from the airmen. The Swiss paid them no mind, as they were deep in conversation, and the duo made it safely to Bern. Once at Bern, they made their way to the American legation where they spent the night. The employees laughed when Archie described how he and Hatley made their escape from the camp by getting the disguises. The next morning, the two airmen got train tickets to Zurich, where they received help from the Free French. After an uneventful train ride, they met with the French agents and evaded to the French sector of Switzerland.

**Wilhelm C. van Schaardenburgh:**

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<sup>4</sup> Pages Thirty-one and Thirty-two of Archie's transcript. This section deals with his attempt to escape the German sector of Switzerland.

Wilhelm was a Dutch citizen born on 137-10-21, in the city of Rotterdam. The Germans bombed the city on 1940-05-14, which resulted in the deaths of 750 people. Wilhelm and his mother survived the bombing, but they lost their house and decided to flee the city and stay in one of the suburbs.<sup>5</sup> They remained in this village for the remainder of the war, where his father mediated between the Germans and the local authorities to sort out problems.<sup>6</sup> While he did his official work helping out around the village, Wilhelm also said his father actively aided Allied airmen that happened to crash in the surrounding area. At one point, his father attempted to help a lone airman that survived a crash, but the German forces captured him and sent the airman to a prison camp. Wilhelm spent much of his time in the village watching the massive air armadas as they would pass over to conduct missions in Germany and England.

By 1944, it was becoming difficult for Wilhelm and his family to get food, as the war had put pressure on the farmers of the village. Several crops were flooded, therefore limiting the amount of food the villagers were able to receive.<sup>7</sup> Wilhelm and his parents managed to survive that winter off of their food stocks, although he did say that they became very skinny during this period. Near the end of the winter, they had the top floor of their house confiscated by the Germans, and they had an officer live with them for the next several months. Wilhelm remembered that the officer was a good man to the family, as he often brought them an extra can or two of food whenever he collected his food supply. Wilhelm's father often showed the officer maps of the Allied advance to show that the war was nearing its end. Wilhelm remembered the officer's response, "Then I can see my family again."<sup>8</sup> In April and May of 1945, Allied planes began to deliver food drops into Western Holland, with the approval of the German

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<sup>5</sup> Wilhelm recalls the devastation of Rotterdam as they made their way to the suburbs.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm's father was not in the Dutch army when the Germans invaded as he was too old to be drafted at the time, which allowed him to stay with his family during the occupation.

<sup>7</sup> Wilhelm does not specify the exact reason for the flooding of the crops, whether it was due to dikes breaking or damage from nearby bombings. Page two of Wilhelm's oral history transcript, May 23, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Page two of the oral history transcript.

forces stationed there. The villagers celebrated the food drops, as everyone had begun to despair about the lack of food in the region. These drops helped Wilhelm and his family stay fed until the war ended on the eighth of May.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The food drops that Wilhelm refers to operations Chowhound and Manna, performed by the United States and British, respectively. Chowhound was conducted from May first to the eighth, and helped to drop 11,000 tons to the impoverished people in the region.



