



MY MILITARY CAREER

(SOME REMEMBRANCES OF SERVICE IN WORLD WAR II)

by William J. Newman

As recalled in September 1994



MY POLISH SLAVE LABOR CAMP

At war's end I was a corporal. But wars always end with complications for the military. In the industrialized Ruhr there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of large and small manufacturing companies. Because of German labor shortages the Nazis impressed able-bodied men and women from the conquered countries to work in the factories.

These laborers were placed in camps surrounded by barbed-wire fences. They were treated like prisoners, guarded at all times, marched to and from the factories and supplied with a modest amount of food to keep up their strength for the benefit of the war effort.

When Germany surrendered we imprisoned the soldier guards of these camps. The laborers had no supervision. They started to roam the countryside. At best they were harassing the German civilians, at worst stealing and raping and killing innocents.

The U. S. divisions that had won the Ruhr battle became baby-sitters for these camps. As a 20 year old corporal with no management experience I was put in charge of a Polish camp of about 350 men, women and children. I was given 6 Artillery privates to keep this camp under control. My instructions were to keep the Poles in and the Germans out of the camp.

The camp was in a semi-wooded area, approximately 100 yards wide by 100 yards deep. We were dropped off to do our duty until further notice. Food for us and the Poles was delivered once a day and that was the extent of our support.

You don't have to be a math genius to see I had a problem. You cannot put a man on effective guard duty on any more than 2 hours of duty and 4 off. Its always best to have 2 men on a post in case trouble erupts. My first executive decision. I would station my men at the one entrance to the camp. 6 men would be able to give 24 hour coverage at the gate.

My second executive decision was that we would not patrol the inside of the camp. We did not have enough manpower to guard the gate and patrol. Also it was apparent that the Poles had established their own police force within the camp. All we would do is get in the middle of their arguments and wind up having to shoot some of them or get beat up or worse by them.

My decisions worked perfectly. The first day one of my guards said some of the Polish men were climbing trees and going over the fence at the back of the camp. I told him not to see anything or anyone except those trying to get in or out the main entrance.

Within a week or 10 days the 95th was pulled off duty and preparing to go back to the U. S. During my career as camp manager we had no reports of any problems within the camp. What happened outside? Who knows. We did the best we could.