

# **Summary of Prisoner of War Experiences of Robert Venoy Reed**

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For ENGL 618: Research Methods in English  
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## **Introduction to the Series**

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography were prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English at Western Carolina University. The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship
  - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to a subject.
    - Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
  - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
    - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively.
  - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
    - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
  - Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is presented as submitted by the students. While these students take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are always possible. As these students learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires checking of sources and corroboration by authoritative sources.

It is hoped that the transcription and annotation of WCU Special Collections materials will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, and other patrons and users of WCU's Special Collections materials.

## **Introduction**

Robert Venoy Reed was born in Sylva, North Carolina on May 28, 1915. He graduated from Sylva High School in 1936 and worked as a sales clerk at the Sylva Pharmacy before joining the military in October of 1942. Reed trained as a medic for the army, and he continued his medical work while he was a prisoner of war in Germany. He was discharged from the army and returned to sylva. He and his wife resided in Sylva for the rest of their lives (Seperation Qualification Record).

This document reads as a personal account, and as it is in first person, it is likely that the author was Robert VenoyReed himself. World War II is remembered for the Holocaust, but there were also Prisoners of War (POWs) that were held in captivity for months and years. According to Arie J. Kochavi, German POWs were often mistreated, but the German army mainly held to the Geneva Convention when it came to POWs who were considered to be racially superior, including those from Europe and the United States (Intro). Reed's experiences as a POW are not singular, and his account of his time in Germany is a valuable addition to the history of World War II.

## **Editing Practices**

All typographical errors and misspellings have been retained in this translation. Relevant information has been footnoted, and where appropriate, a source has been given.

## Summary of Prisoner-of-War Experiences of Robert Venoy Reed

I was inducted into the service on October 1942 and went through the usual training , including surgical school technician training\* before being shipped overseas. I landed on Omaha Beach, France, on D-Day<sup>1</sup> Plus 10, June 16, 1944. On 26 June 1944 I was recommended for the Silver Star<sup>2</sup>. A part of the recommendation: "Without hesitation T/4<sup>3</sup> Reed crawled into an area which was under an intense concentration of enemy artillery and machine gun fire in order to evacuate two wounded men who were lying in an exposed position. — Four times he was forced to take cover from intense enemy fire."

This as a typical day in the life of a Medic and I only did what the other medics did in carrying out their duty.

From the time I landed At Omaha Beach until my capture I was on active duty for 7 months; the only relief was a few days when we pulled back for regrouping and replacements. That is a long time in combat with no rest relief. I worked as a Medic until shortly before my capture on Jan. 19. At Christmas I was a Medic with our outfit in Belgium, but went to Battalion aid station<sup>4</sup> shortly after that. I was captured with other battalion aide station personnel in Alsace.<sup>5</sup> I was working at the time. We could see Germans across the Rhine River.<sup>6</sup> Our troops had been moved to help relieve the situation at the Battle of the Bulge,<sup>7</sup> and only a remnant of the 79th Division was left. We had no back up force to save us from the Germans when they over ran our position. There was snow on the ground and I was working in my OD shirtsleeves when captured. I can't

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<sup>1</sup> D-Day, the successful allied invasion of France to battle Nazi Germany, was on June 6, 1944.

<sup>2</sup> The Silver Star Medal, given for gallantry in enemy combat, is the third highest award given by the US Military.

<sup>3</sup> An Army rank, T/4 indicates Technician 4<sup>th</sup> Grade, which was a non-commissioned officer position.

<sup>4</sup> A Battalion Aid Station was a medical support area within the support unit of the Army battalion.

<sup>5</sup> Alsace is a region in France that shares borders with both Switzerland and Germany.

<sup>6</sup> The Rhine River flows along the border between Alsace and Germany.

<sup>7</sup> The Battle of the Bulge was the last major German offensive campaign of World War II.

remember how I got a coat, but somebody gave me a fatigue jacket down on the river.

At Baden-Baden,<sup>1</sup> in the first prison camp, I was assigned to a German doctor. We walked through a large part of Germany because the Germans were retreating from allied troops. We got very little food and water. We slept in dirty barns and often had to stand up because there was no room to lie down. The Germans constantly cursed us and called us "dirty dogs" and said, "Why don't you clean up? Why don't you shave" and we didn't have anything to shave with. I can remember getting one Red Cross parcel which I shared with the German doctor.

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<sup>1</sup> Baden-Baden is a town in southwest Germany.

At Hammelburg,<sup>1</sup> General Patton<sup>2</sup> sent a company of tanks into our camp to liberate his son-in-law,<sup>3</sup> and we were liberated for a few hours, but by morning a Panzer division<sup>4</sup> firing point blank at our tanks. It was a beautiful sight to see the American flag being raised over the camp; we cried when the flag went up and we cried when the flag came down.<sup>5</sup>

Sanitary conditions were terrible. In Hammelburg when we were in cavalry barns we could hear water running, but we got little water to drink - that was part of the torture. Body lice was common as were diarrhea, frozen feet, pneumonia, etc. I lived in fear of getting sick myself, because no man could be evacuated to a hospital unless he had a fever of 105 degrees and then he was put through a delousing machine;<sup>6</sup> few lived through that. The hospitals were full of German troops who had been wounded. Naturally the Germans tried to take care of their own people and there was no room for us, the enemy. Guards were often feeble, old men, but they were bitter toward us – to them we were "filthy dogs".

The worst experience was when we were loaded into box cars at Nuremberg<sup>7</sup> and the train moved to Stuttgart.<sup>8</sup> The cars were not marked to identify us as POWs. The cars were so crowded that we could not lie down - we had to sit or crouch. There were no toilets and we had to sit in our own filth. No fresh air – and then the bombings - maybe by our own air force - we didn't know who was doing the bombing but we knew somebody was. We thought that we had been left to die. I don't know how long we stayed there but it seemed an eternity. Even among so

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<sup>1</sup> Hammelburg is a city in Germany and the location of two POW camps during WWII.

<sup>2</sup> General George Smith Patton, Jr (1885-1945) died after sustaining injuries from a car accident (Hirshson 678).

<sup>3</sup> General Patton's son-in-law, Lieutenant Colonel John Waters, was also held at the Hamelburg POW camp (Baum et al, 2).

<sup>4</sup> A panzer division was a German armored tank division.

<sup>5</sup> The failed rescue attempt was ordered by General Patton and was controversial before and after the mission (Baum et al, 2-4).

<sup>6</sup> Delousing machine may be a metaphor for the process that prisoners were put through to kill lice. For an account of the process, which included bathing and a chemical treatment, see Rynas and Scmaglewska, Chapter 3 - Delousing Day.

<sup>7</sup> Nuremberg is a city located near the center of Germany.

<sup>8</sup> Stuttgart is a city in Germany.

many men I felt so alone. I had not heard from my family and did not know if I would ever see them again. Finally the train moved to Moosburg<sup>1</sup> where we were liberated.<sup>2</sup>

I worked with the German doctor all the way. At Nuremburg we took care of the civilians first and then our men. Some of the German women slipped us cold eggs or potatoes in sympathy. Their medical supplies were practically nil - for example, we used crepe paper for bandages. After working non-stop for 72 hours I passed out, but the German doctor took care of me. I felt that he was a kind man who was just doing his job. He was with us when we were liberated at Moosburg.

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<sup>1</sup> Moosburg is a city in Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Reed was freed on April 29, 1945.

We were liberated by American and Russian troops. The rumor was that the Russians were paid \$400.00 for each American soldier liberated. Big Allied planes flew over that day, buzzing us in salute. It was a thrilling day.

As *soon* as possible I was flown to Inglestadt Air Base<sup>1</sup> and then to Rheims, France. Camp Lucky Strike<sup>2</sup> was frustrating; we had been processed, issued new clothes and then we could not leave the compound even to mail a letter. We were told to help police up the area, and we grumbled about this; The captain heard us and ordered us to his office. We told him that we thought the German POWs in the camp could police up the area. We did not know it at the time, but General Eisenhower<sup>3</sup> was due to arrive soon with a party of officers and congressmen. Being so recently liberated, we still showed signs of our imprisonment and the members of the party were anxious to talk to us. We told an admiral that we wanted to go to Paris but were restricted to quarters; he suggested that we talk to General Eisenhower about this, and he saw to it that we got a 5 f2z day leave to go to Paris and we rode the Red Ball Express<sup>4</sup> there and back. We later learned that we were detained at Camp Lucky Strike until we could be assigned to a Liberty ship.<sup>5</sup> I was the only medical staff on board; I had medical supplies, but no major medical emergency arose.

I had enough points for discharge when I got back to the US, but after leave and R&R, I was assigned to the psychiatric ward of all places at La Garde General Hospital.<sup>6</sup> I could not stand the work there and was transferred to a surgical ward. I was anxious to get home, but a doctor told me not to be in too big a hurry — that I was suffering from combat fatigue and i20 or 30 years it would be a lot worse. How true that was!

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<sup>1</sup> Inglestadt Air Base is an air base in Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Camp Lucky Strike was one of several camps named for cigarette brands, allowing for secrecy about the actual location of the camp. Camp Lucky Strike was located near Saint. Valery, France.

<sup>3</sup> General Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969), future president of the United States, was at this time the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.

<sup>4</sup> The Red Ball Express was a convoy of trucks that was used to supply allied troops in France.

<sup>5</sup> Liberty Ships were cargo ships that were mass produced by the United States during WWII.

<sup>6</sup> LaGarde General Hospital was located in New Orleans.

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