

## German Prisoner



Sgt. Lewis E. (Ed) Baker

Missing in action since September 6, Staff Sergeant Lewis E. Baker, of Jewett, has been officially reported to be a prisoner in Germany, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. E. L. Baker of near Freeport, have been advised. He was a waist gunner on the Flying Fortress, "Silver Dancer No. 2", the first ship of that name having been lost.

Sgt. Baker was on his sixth raid when his ship was shot down. He had flown from Africa, helping scuttle ships enroute Germany there. His ship was one of the last to be shot down and it made a "beach landing". On his return trip to England, they captured an African burro as a mascot.

Baker graduated from Jewett High School and was inducted into the Army last October 10. He went overseas on July 5. Information as to his safety came through the Red Cross and the War Department.

Thankful for the word, with his parents, are his sister, Mrs. O. C. Hoovan, and brother, Adir E. Baker, of Jewett.

## Hear From Son, Prisoner of War In Germany

Mr. and Mrs. E. L. Baker, Route 2, Tippecanoe, have received two cards from their son, Tech. Sgt. Edwin Lewis Baker, who is a prisoner of war in Germany. Baker, a gunner on a Flying Fortress, was forced to make a parachute jump when his plane crashed after a raid over Stuttgart, Germany.

After being taken prisoner, he was hospitalized two weeks.

The cards received on Nov. 22nd and Jan. 3rd stated that under the circumstances he is getting along fine.

## Sgt. Baker Is Nazi Prisoner

Mr. and Mrs. E. L. Baker near Freeport, received a telegram through the International Red Cross, Washington, D. C. this morning that their son Sgt. Louis Edwin Baker, was previously reported missing on September 6, is a German prisoner instead.

Sgt. Baker, a former Dennison resident, was a waist gunner on the Flying Fortress Silver Dancer, had taken part in several raids in the Italian war theater and had been awarded the War Medal.

**My War,  
My Story  
By Lewis E Baker**

## Sgt. L. E. Baker Is Liberated

Mrs. J. B. Clantz, Dennison, received a V-mail letter this morning from her brother, Tech. Sgt. Lewis "Eddy" Baker, son of Mr. and Mrs. E. L. Baker, Route 1, Tippecanoe, stating that he had been released from Stalag 17-B prison camp in Germany, where he was taken September 6, 1943.

Sgt. Baker evidently thought his parents had been notified of his release according to the letter which read that other than the loss of a great amount of weight he was all right, and that he expected to be home soon. He was a gunner on a Flying Fortress.

Another sister, Mrs. Norman Caswell, and a brother, Virgil Baker, live in Dennison.

## Prisoner of Nazis Arrives Home

T/5 Lewis E. Baker, gunner on a B-17, and a prisoner of war in Germany since September 1943, arrived here Sunday and is with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. E. L. Baker, Tippecanoe. He is a former Dennison resident.

*L. Ed. Baker*

~And in the end, through the long ages of our quest for light,

it will be found that truth is mightier than the sword.

Douglas MacArthur

I was born on July 20, 1920 to Edwin L. Baker and Bessie B. Baker in Dennison, Ohio, the youngest of their six children. Most of my young life was spent in Dennison, attending school and just being a kid. When the stock market crashed in 1929 and the depression hit, the community began to change a lot, but I was too young to realize what was going on. The railroad laid-off a large number of men in the community, which in turn affected my dad's business, a small grocery and general merchandise store. My dad, or "Pop" as he was more affectionately known, watched his store sink into debt because of large credit bills charged to people who did not have any means to pay for them. In 1932, the bank foreclosed on the store because of excessive debt, and Pop had to move elsewhere to find work.



First, we packed up soup for the soup kitchen, as was the normal procedure for families before being given government relief, or W.P.A, the predecessor to modern Welfare. Our circumstances were difficult, especially when the electric company turned off our lights. My

married sister and one of my dad's brothers moved in with us because even with the little bit we had, it was still more that they had. In 1937, my parents moved us back to Jewett, where my dad lived before he moved to Dennison. Our family was poor, but since everyone else was too it

didn't matter. All of my siblings found work, and my dad did work as a tenant farmer. I attended Jewett High School, where I played Varsity basketball and graduated in 1939.

In the fall of 1939, I moved to Tippecanoe on a small farm my dad had purchased. By 1941, jobs were plentiful, and I found work as a truck driver. I was living a simple life, surrounded by friends and family and living close to the town I was born in. The war in Germany and Japan seemed far away from my home in rural Ohio. Reality took hold of me in October of 1942 when I was drafted into the armed services and sent to Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio. After taking some assessment and intelligence tests, I was assigned to the Army Air Force.



I was sent to Jefferson Barracks in Missouri for six weeks of basic training and then stationed at Lowie Field in Denver, Colorado for Armour Training. In Colorado, I was trained to clean and assemble plane machinery. While there, I volunteered to go to Aerial Gunnery School in Las Vegas, which included an increase in rank and an increase in wages. After six weeks of ground-to-ground and air-to-air training, I graduated and received my wings with the rank of Staff Sergeant. Had I not volunteered, I probably would have spent my wartime cleaning machinery and repairing guns. As a Staff Sergeant, I received \$212 a month for compensation.

In February of 1943, I was sent to Salt Lake City, and then to Boise, Idaho to meet my crew and train with them. I was assigned to be a Waist Gunner on Lieutenant Cunningham's crew, which consisted of four officers and six enlisted men on a B-17 Bomber. Since it was the first time any of us had flown a B-17, we ran a large number of test flights and practice

procedures. We were sent to Casper, Wyoming for more flights as a crew and for further training, including training for night flights.



In May, after eight months away from home, I was allowed a three-day home leave before transferring overseas. As soon as we reported back to Kernel, Nebraska, we flew to Syracuse, New York before going to Bangor, Maine. The pilot lived in New York, not far from Syracuse, and the officers had told him he would be allowed to land in New York only if the weather was bad. Lt. Cunningham decided the weather was bad enough to stay for four days, long enough to visit his family. The rest of us hung out in downtown Syracuse, and we enjoyed staying out late. There were quite a few cadets in Syracuse, but the MP's wouldn't question anyone with the rank of Staff Sergeant like they would the cadets. After our break in New York, we flew to Maine.



Cunningham's Crew aka The Silver Dollar. I'm the 2<sup>nd</sup> from left on bottom row. This photo was taken at our Air Base in England. One man went AWOL prior to our last mission, the rest were captured except Lt. Cunningham (with dog) he eluded the Nazi's via the French Underground.

By the first of June, we finally flew overseas to England by way of Newfoundland and Scotland. Each member of the crew was sent to train on his specialty, and being a Waist Gunner, I was sent to "the wash" for advanced Gunnery Training against the Germans.

During the first part of July, our crew and our plane "The Silver Dollar" were assigned to the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group in the 562<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, eighth Air Force. In a briefing, a Lieutenant Colonel was straightforward with us about what to expect during flight. He said the flak, (90 mm shells shot up at the planes from the ground), would be extremely heavy, but the enemy fighters would be even worse since they could attack from all angles. He told us how many crews were downed on their first raid and the average number of raids before being downed was five.



Our first mission, on July 29, 1943, was actually the sixth mission of the 388<sup>th</sup>. We flew over France; there was a lot of flak and it was too far for the fighters to escort us all the way. The Germans wouldn't attack as long as we had the P-47 escorts, but because of limited fuel capacity, they could not go as deep into enemy territory as the Bombers. During that first mission, we lost one plane when it collided with another plane, but I thought I was invincible. Our second mission was to Bonn, Germany on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1943. The Silver

Dollar had to turn back because we had a broken oxygen line, which was essential to our flying.

Our third flight, on August 17<sup>th</sup>, was quite different than our first two flights. We were



called out at three A.M. and instructed to take just a change of clothes. We could not imagine where we were going, and we knew that a B-17 could not hold enough fuel to reach Russia. During the preflight, all they told us was to taxi to the end of the runway and take off. We

took formation over the English Channel and were only permitted to abort the mission if we lost an engine. After we were in the air, the pilot told us we were going to Regensburg, Germany, just south of Berlin, the deepest the Eighth Air Force had ever been. As soon as we hit the target, we would travel south to Africa, a longer trip than any B-17 had ever made. We were in the air for eleven hours and on alert at all times. We met German fighters midway after our P-47 escort had to go back to England. There were Dog fights all the way, and we lost our right wing plane. The tail gunner got credit for a Focke-Wulf.

We hit the target and did some serious damage. After hitting the target, we turned south over the Alps. There were no fighters because the Germans expected us to go back to England.

Over the Mediterranean Sea, we went down low and broke formation to save fuel. The planes on our right started shooting. We could not see any enemy planes, so we couldn't understand why, but the co-pilot reported we were low on fuel and needed to throw all unnecessary baggage and loose items overboard. We threw machine guns, walkways, and other loose things out into the sea, keeping only our water.

We lost eight planes in the Mediterranean Sea, but no men were lost because they were rescued by PB4 seaplanes that met up with us. We landed in Africa with nearly empty planes. One plane even lost a vertical stabilizer because it was hit by another plane during landing. After

having spent eleven hours in the air, I stretched out under one of the wings and fell asleep, in spite of the African heat. We spent a few days in North Africa, and some of the men and I traveled to Constantine, where we had lunch and watched an area funeral.

Our fourth mission was on the way back to England from Africa, where we bombed Southern France. It was a simpler flight because there were no fighters or flak. While over France, we lost one engine and could not feather it, or rather, stop it, so the propeller wind milled all the way back to England. Luckily, it did not fall off, but we lost another engine over the Atlantic Ocean that we were able to feather. We were "on the deck" off the coast of France and were concerned that we would have to bail out of the plane. We did reach England safely, and we landed at the British Air Force Airport. At the Airport, the Commander of the Base Royalty welcomed us, and we had dinner at the officer's club.

The British were able to fix our plane, and we returned to our base only one day late. We were then given a three day leave to London. Back at the base, Tech Sgt. Land of our crew told the men he would not be back because he had had enough. The pilot was not happy about this, and he asked the Waist Gunner to take over the Top Turret position, which had been Land's assignment. Sgt. Brokort did not want the job, so I asked if that meant another stripe. The pilot said it did, and since I had some experience in the Top Turret I was given the job.

Our fifth mission was to Brussels, but we had to abort before arrival when the first gunner passed out for lack of oxygen. Our sixth mission was to Melan, and nineteen planes bombed with very little flak and very few fighters. We had fighter protection the whole way in and out, so it was a short flight.

On September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1943, we took off on what began as a normal flight over Germany, our seventh mission. We hit the target at about noon (a VDK ball bearing plant in Stuttgart) and

dealt with usual flak, without too many fighters challenging us on the way home. Over France, the pilot told us to look outside the plane, and I looked out to see somewhere between 150 and 200 B-17's in all directions. Cunningham informed us that we were only six minutes from a P-47 escort, so I assumed it would be a normal end to a normal flight. Suddenly, the bombardiers called out that fighters were coming in from the front, 12:00 O'clock high. Plane after plane,



both Focke-Wulfs and 109 Messerschmitts, swept by us shooting the whole time, and we returned fire.

I watched one plane crash down ahead of us and another one go down to the left of us. The co-pilot yelled to the crew that we had to bail because we had been hit. I quickly looked over to the pilot, and he pulled his hands back from the controls to show me he had no control of the plane. I rushed to pick up my parachute, hook it on, and then ran back through the bomb bay to the radio room, where the radioman was still firing. I pulled the Ball Turret Gunner out and then went through the waist door after the rest of the crew. It was all over in just a few moments.

I leapt from the plane and opened my parachute. I looked up to watch as it opened above me and noticed a few holes in the nylon fabric, which I assumed were there because it had been shot through before I strapped it on.



The parachute was a chest pack, which was much smaller than a backpack, so I had to hold my trust in something much smaller than myself. There was no sensation of falling until I hit the clouds, then I actually realized how fast I was descending. My whole life flashed before me as I neared the ground. I had never prayed to God before, but I prayed right then as I watched the



French countryside coming much closer. I worried, thinking about what would happen to me, knowing that France was occupied by the Germans.

As I was traveling too fast and landed too hard, I heard my right foot crack upon landing on the ground in a French vineyard. I struggled to stand up, but the shooting pain in my ankle was just too much. Eventually I managed to rise to my feet long enough to pull the chute off my chest. I sat down between the vines as my foot began to swell. Luckily I had flight boots on, so the ankle could continue to swell and I would still be able keep them on. A Frenchman ran out to me, motioning for me to come into his house. It hurt too much to walk, so I tried crawling for a distance, but I could not make it. I knew that if the man was caught helping me, he would be shot, so I motioned for him to leave. I slept in the vineyard that night.

The next morning, the Frenchman returned with some bread and wine for me. I had seen no other American in that area the whole time I laid there, but at noon, I saw a German guard across the field with his gun drawn. I tried to hide, but he immediately ordered me to come out of the vines, his gun aimed toward me. I studied awhile, wondering what I should do, but I decided I should go with him, my hands in the air. I crawled out, and he motioned for me to stand. I stumbled up, and he got behind me and ordered the direction to go.

I heard trucks moving about a half mile away, and I stumbled and moved the best I could to get to the road with the bayonet to my rear the whole time. When we reached the road, he waved the first truck down and we got on. As we went down the road, we passed four crashed B-17's and two Focke-Wulfs. The Germans swore as we passed each one. I knew it had been a hard fight, but until then, I didn't realize how hard.

We came to a small town and went to a jail where I met up with the co-pilot, navigator, and four other members of my crew, plus about fifteen to twenty other American soldiers. On

September 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup>, we were taken from the small jail to the train station. We did not know what to expect, as we could not understand the guards.

At the train station, the French smiled at us because they knew we were Americans, but they had to be careful. The guards would move them on as we passed. They had one guard for every two American airmen. We boarded a passenger train full of American prisoners with a German guard at each door. We were not allowed to lower the windows, so it became very hot very quickly. As we rode, we passed through many small towns and several large cities. We could tell when we had reached Germany by the people in the station. At one stop, we were



ordered off, and met up with more troops. As we walked through the station, people would scream at us and call us American Gangsters because they knew we were the people that had been bombing

them. We had to walk several miles from the station. My foot still really bothered me, but I made up my mind to go because I had no idea what they would do to me if I didn't.

It was warm when we reached Dalh Loft. We sat down in the yard and heard an American yelling "Smoke your cigarettes!" We learned this was because the Germans would take them off of you. A German captain came up to me and wanted to see my foot, which by this time was badly swollen. He ordered another wounded prisoner and me to go with a guard. This was the last time I would ever see my officers, although I would see my other Sergeant later.

The two of us were taken to a very nice building, which was being used as a hospital. I was taken in and assigned a room, where I could take a good shower or bath. I later learned that at that same time, the other men were taken into the prison and really worked over to get any

information. Higher-ranking officers were treated even more severely because they knew more than the enlisted men.

There were two British non-commissioned officers who acted as orderlies in the hospital and brought me my food tray for the day. The third day I was there, a guard came to my door, took me to another room, and ordered me to sit down. I probably sat there for an hour by myself, in a windowless room. A captain came in, and I stood and saluted him. He returned the salute and we sat at a table across from each other. He asked me my name, where I had come from, and many other questions. All I would tell him was my name, rank, and serial number as we had been instructed.

He then put before me a list of the crew of the airplane. He told me that they had everyone but Lieutenant Cunningham and Sergeant Land, but Sergeant Land had not been with us that day because he had already gone AWOL. The German Captain threatened not to fix my foot to try to get more information, but I still refused. He would blow smoke in my face and leave his cigarettes in front of me to try to get me to talk more, but the smoke didn't entice me since I didn't smoke.

Finally, he left the room, and after sitting for about fifteen minutes, one of the English Corporals came and took me to the main part of the hospital. The English Corporal was the first person I had met since my capture that I could actually talk to. Soon after that, I got a very good meal. The next day, they took several of us out and they took x-rays of my foot. A few days later they told me that my foot was not broken and I had just badly twisted it, fifty-seven years later, it still bothers me.

The hospital was pleasant, and I played bridge with the two British Corporals who were much better at the game than I. About ten days later, the Germans decided I was able to move

around well enough to be moved to a regular prison camp. I was in a group of about forty enlisted men who were transported back to the train station. We went to Munich to Stalag 7-A, which had less than desirable conditions and housed men of many nationalities including French, English, Russian, and Australian. We slept on the floor or wherever we could find a space. While there, I ran into a few other men from my crew. The French and English controlled the camp because some of them had been there three or four years. The only things we received there were a blanket and a pair of shoes.

In early October 1943, they moved me along with 1500 other American prisoners to a new camp. We put all of our supplies in our blankets and set off on foot to the train station. However, this time we did not go to the train station, but to the train yards where we were put on freight cars known as "40 or 8", which meant they carried forty men or eight horses. The boxcars were not even the size of a typical American freight car, but were actually about the size of a caboose. They managed to cram about sixty men into each car and to lie down was nearly impossible. We didn't know exactly how many cars there were, but considering there were 1500 of us, there must have been around 25 cars.



After filling the cars, the German guards shut and bolted the doors. We had to use one corner of the train for a bathroom, which made even less room to stand or lie. The train progressed slowly down the track, jerking the whole time. They let us outside



twice a day with guards surrounding us with guns drawn in case anyone tried to run.

We rode on the cars for seven or eight days with very little food or rest. When we reached the town of Krems, Austria, we were completely broken. We were taken off the train and were marched during the night through the town of Krems. The guards told us we were going to a different prisoner of war camp. When we arrived, we were taken into a shelter where we put all of our supplies into a basket to be fumigated. The guards then took us, only a few at a time, to have our heads shaved and be sprayed for lice. Then we took a shower, which was extremely refreshing, and we began to think they were taking us to a good camp.

We waited in anticipation of what was to come, and after about three hours, they began calling our names and numbers and giving us our clothes back. We were then marched off in groups of 150 to our new home. Since we had not gotten a good night's sleep in more than a week, we went immediately into our barracks at Stalag17-B; we found our beds and went to sleep at once. It was no more than three hours before men began to wake and yell because the bunks were full of fleas. We had to take our bunks apart and run fire across the wood to kill the fleas.

The next day, we received soup and rutabagas (a large turnip), which was the first hot food we had eaten in weeks. We were so hungry that it didn't really bother us that the soup had worms in it. A few days later, we received a Red Cross parcel, one for every two men, even though there was supposed to be one per man per week. The parcel was good, it contained a can of spam, a can of corned beef, a can of crackers, 2 oz. of



instant coffee, a can of skimmed milk, a half pound of cheese, two packs of cigarettes, a box of raisins or prunes, and a chocolate bar called a "square D". If I received a pack of cigarettes a week, I could eat pretty well by trading the cigarettes to the Germans for food. Unfortunately, it was hard to trade for food all the time because we usually had to divide the parcel between two and six other men.

Throughout the day, we could go to anyplace in the camp. There were around 1,500 men when I first arrived, and by March of 1944, the number was up to 4,000. The barracks held 300 men in two parts with a washroom in the middle. The water would be on for about an hour in the morning and maybe two to three hours throughout the day, so we had to plan to wash up when the water was on. The latrine was outside and was used by four barracks, but since we were not allowed out of the barracks after dark, there was an early morning rush and a late evening rush to use it.

The guards watched the camp from towers that stood in each corner with spotlights and 20 foot high barbed wire fences between them. Each compound was fenced in with guards and dogs on patrol, so we were restricted into our areas.

About two weeks after we arrived in Stalag 17-B, I learned some of my crew members were there, so I looked them up and talked to them about our last raid. They all had about the same experience as mine, except they had not been wounded. Throughout the next year, I would see some of them occasionally.



The losses that day were the greatest the 388<sup>th</sup> encountered throughout the entire war. September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1943 forever became known as Black Monday. Our entire 362<sup>nd</sup> squadron had been shot down that day.

The camp was livable if there was enough food, so we learned to ration the parcels to carry us through the lean times. The Germans punctured the cans before we received them so we couldn't save the meat for escapes. Roll call was twice a day, and we all went out to the compound at the same time, standing in lines, four deep, to be counted. When the whole camp was checked, we were permitted to go back to the barracks. If a barrack did not check out, they would have a roll call. The rest of us would have to wait until they checked out before anyone could go back inside, which was really rough when it happened on a cold day.

Once, the YMCA sent musical instruments to us. A man in our barracks played the xylophone well and took the one that was sent. He slept in the bunk next to me and played often. Our guard heard him and told a German officer. We were surprised one day when the German Commander of the Camp made an inspection of the barracks and wanted to hear him play. He was playing, and the Kriege and Germans were enjoying his work too much to notice anything else in the barracks. Since they had arrived so quickly, the men had no warning to stop what they were doing, including the man who was heating water in the back corner. We were not permitted to heat water, but could do it by crossing two electric wires. Luckily, a G-16 got to him before the Germans could see what was happening.

It wasn't too long before men in our barracks began to come up short on food they were storing. It was kept very quiet, but one man in our barracks caught a GI stealing another GI's food in the middle of the night. We didn't know what we were supposed to do with a fellow GI caught stealing. We knew we could not turn him over to the Germans, so the men decided to have a trial with all the GI's in our barracks as the jury. He admitted to the thievery. We could have had him moved, but that would be unfair to the barracks we sent him to, so after a long discussion, we decided it was fair to keep him in our barracks without talking or having anything

to do with him as long as we were there. I only hoped and prayed that he would learn something from this, and I know he did.

Cards were a good pastime, but decks of cards were very scarce. The mail was also very slow, with two months or longer being the usual time for a delivery. My parents occasionally sent me parcels. They sent me long underwear in December, but I didn't receive them until July. The Red Cross and Salvation Army continued to supply us with things.



Basketball tournament in camp, that's me on the far left in dark uniform. This photo was found by my Grandson's teacher in 2005 on a trip to Austria. She purchased a book on Stalag XVII as a gift and this photo was in it. It must have been taken by a GI and smuggled out of camp when we were liberated.

We built a baseball field and a basketball court where we could play when the weather

was right. Some of the men put on a play at Christmas time. They also would put plays on at different times with men playing the women's parts, we really enjoyed it! We were able to attend a church in the camp ministered by Father Kane, and he did services for both Protestants and Catholics.

In the camp, we had men and boys from all walks of life, from cities to farms, from north to south and east to west. A good discussion could always be had about the Civil War, with a fellow from Connecticut taking the side of the North or the South and always winning the case. The Jerry's did allow us to have a Fourth of July celebration.



The Russians were in another part of the camp. The Germans did not like them, and since the Russians were not members of the Geneva Convention, they did not receive Red Cross Packages. It was not unusual to see a Russian funeral. When they would go by our compound we would stop and stand at attention to honor the dead as the funeral procession went by, this really angered the Germans.

In the winter of 1944, we had good times and some very hard times. When the Red Cross packages were regular, the times were mostly good, but when we got down to three or four men per parcel, times got a lot tougher. We would always perk up when we received news that the Russians were advancing or the Germans had stopped. We thought that the war would be over in six months or less.

One night we jumped out of bed to the sound of gunfire, a blowing siren, and the brightness of the shining lights in the compound. We heard lots of yelling and gunfire, and guards ran into the compound and into each of the barracks with guns drawn. We learned that two G.I.'s had tried to escape but had been shot. By the amount of gunfire, we assumed there were more than two men. It was a long night with the Germans yelling and screaming orders to everyone to be quiet and stay in bed and the constant barking of the dogs.



At daybreak, we had a roll call in the compound and the two bodies of the unsuccessful escapees had been laid out on the ground. We tried to go to another section to be counted, but the Germans would have nothing to do with that idea. We stood at attention where the dead soldiers bodies laid, and the bodies

stayed there for two days so that we would not forget. These two G.I.'s and another Sergeant who died at another time were the only people we lost in the fifteen months we were at 17-B.

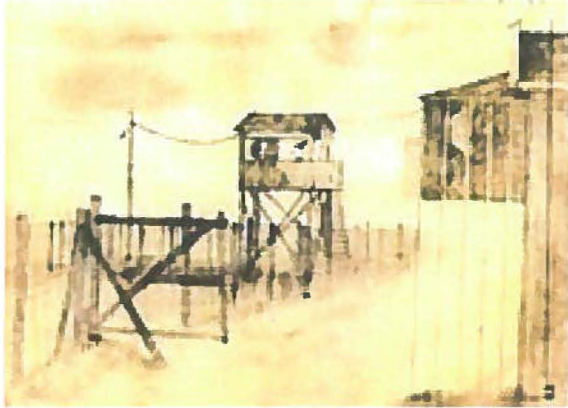
The English made air raids on the town of Krems at night. The bombs lit up our whole camp because we were very close to the town. When I looked out the windows at night, it was as bright as daylight. We were not allowed to go to the air raid trenches at night. In the daylight, we would go outside and watch the B-17's and B-24's fly over. They were bombing Vienna, Austria, which was about 50 miles away. We had seen German, American, and English planes go down in the distance.

The summer of 1944 was a quiet time because of the invasion in France. The Germans were gentler because the war was coming to an end with the Russians in the East and the Americans and Allies in the west. We were sure the war would be over by Christmas of 1944, but it was not. We kept up with the progress on a contraband radio and by a newspaper the Germans would give us.

The Russian front was more advanced in the newspaper than the English radio said. We credit this to the fact that the Germans had to tell their people as they had told the people coming in from the Eastern Countries to Germany and to tell the soldiers coming home what was going on. We celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas better in 1944 than we did in 1943. Although food was still a big concern, we didn't worry too much because we knew it was only a matter of time until we would be free.

In 1945, we were looking for the end. We would wonder who would reach us first, the Russians from the east or the Americans from the west. Then we heard about the Battle of the Bulge, which was very upsetting considering we thought it was all about over. We continued to see B-17's and B-24's at different times, so we knew we were still winning and we also knew the

Germans were easing up on us. On April 5, 1945 we got a new Jerry Captain who was kinder than the last commandant. We found out why the next day.



The next morning, we were instructed to be ready to evacuate. The whole day was a mad house with bonfires raging and trading with the Russians and other P.O.W.'s from other countries. It was rumored that the Russians were only thirty miles away. At night we could still see guns flashing in

the east. Because of my wounded ankles I was concerned I could not keep up with the group. Not knowing what to take, I packed all the food that I had saved, cigarettes to trade with, and soap, which turned out to be a great trading item.

We moved out on the morning of April 8, 1945, a barrack at a time, moving about a half-hour apart. Six to eight guards went with each group, and we moved in groups of 500, eight groups in all. The first night, we rested along the Danube. During roll call the next morning, there were thirty men missing. I talked to other G.I.'s and decided to stay with the group since we knew the war was almost over. We heard that the Russians had bombed Stalag 17-B.

We marched twenty to thirty kilometers a day with only one rest stop. Everyone had blisters on their feet because our shoes were not fitted very well. In the towns that we walked through, we saw very few people, no cars, and only a few trucks. The people we did see would smile at us, but we could tell they were having a hard time. We did see a few wagons pulled by horses, cows, or oxen. The nights were cold, and some nights we practically froze, but we continued to move despite our frozen hands and feet.

One day I traded a bar of soap to a farmer for a small basket of carrots. When we stopped that night, we cooked the carrots with a can of corned beef, which was quite a meal for about ten to twelve men. We passed through many small towns, figuring the Germans were trying to avoid the cities. We did pass through the city of Linz, a small war industry city, and there were many bomb craters.

One day, a P-38 flew overhead, but no German fighters went after them and no flak was shot at them. After about 200 miles of walking, we stopped in a woods area to stay. We could hear tanks and trucks on the other side, but no traffic was on the road on the side of the river we



were on. Either the Germans or the Americans had blown up all the bridges on the river. Finally, on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1945 a small convoy of American troops came by with a General. He wanted to know who we were because he had no records to show any American P.O.W.'s in this area, plus the other

countries' P.O.W.'s

He ordered a Colonel to go to work and get us out of there. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945 we received trucks with food, but we still had to divide them up to share with the French, English, Serbs, and Polish. The Colonel told us we would stay where we were, along the river Inns. The river was down a very steep hill from us, and there was a spring about three-fourths of the way down to the river where we could get water to drink and cook with. We didn't have very good pails to carry the water in, so during the climb back up the hill we lost half of the water we had gathered.

We constructed shelters like lean-to's, figuring we would be there for a few days. Some built log cabins figuring they'd be there longer. We built a latrine by digging a hole and placing logs on top to sit on. We were on the wrong side of the Inns River. It was a dividing point; the Americans were on the west, and the Russians were on the east. We knew more Allied troops would be coming because the army knew we were there. By May 1<sup>st</sup>, everyday we began to anticipate trucks coming to get us, but we settled in and waited. We knew the war was over, but the army still had some resistance.

One day a Jeep with a Colonel came into the camp. He asked all the men that were able to walk to go with him to a small warehouse about twenty miles away where we could set up a mess hall and have a shelter. There would be a few trucks for the sick and those that could not walk. The next morning, we were on our way. We made it in by the late evening. We got hot food there and some G.I.'s asked us to assist in getting blankets and clothes. We also had running water to wash up.

We camped at the warehouse for a few days with the Army helping more each day as supplies caught up. We were told that the trucks would be in, and we would go to an airport to be flown to France. We made a short trip to a river where a bridge had been built to get to the airport, then a flight to France, and to Lucky Strike, which had been the first stop for the invasion troops and on to the Front. It would be our home for a few days. They limited our food, so we would not eat too much and become ill. We could not go to a BX. They paid us \$20.00 so we had some money, but it wasn't French money. We were then trucked to La'havre and then onto a Liberty ship.

Six days later, we landed in Boston, Massachusetts; we were one of the first groups to return. There were a few people at the landing, but the war in the Pacific was still going on.

We loaded on trucks to go to Camp Miles Standish. As a Tech Sergeant, I was the highest ranking officer on our truck, so I got to sit up front with the driver. When we reached the camp, I had the truck driver take us to a BX. We only had a small amount of money each, and since they wouldn't sell us candy on board the Liberty ship, everyone bought candy. It was about four cents a bar, so we all bought boxes of twenty-four. They sold us all we wanted. Most of the trucks had gone directly to the theater, but we were not late to the briefing, since we had been issued uniforms and supplies in France.

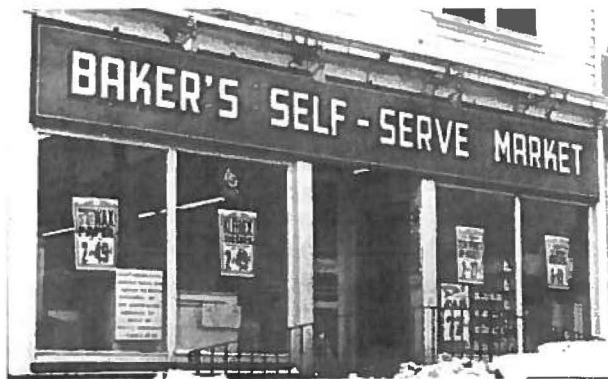
The next day, we went to a meeting where they asked for information about us, although not nearly as much as the Germans had. I filled out papers like I did when I went into the service saying what group I was in, when I was shot down, the camp I was in, and my rank. They asked if we were wounded, but didn't ask for much detail. They did not send us to the doctor unless someone asked to go. They noted that I had a broken foot, but there was no examination.

Next, I went to the Payroll Clerk. I knew I had a lot of money due me. He offered me \$50.00, and I asked for \$500.00. He could not give me that much. I went down to a Captain and asked for \$500. He would only give me \$100. I didn't know that I would only need enough money to get home.

The next day, I was on a train to Camp Atterbery, Indiana. It was then that I began to realize I was free and able to do as I wanted. Even though I was told where to go and when to be there, I knew that I was on my way home for awhile. I left Camp Atterbery for home the last part of June, 1945. It was a very happy reunion with my family, except for my mother. Her health had really gone downhill. I now realized how much she had suffered not knowing all of that time whether I was dead or alive. The Red Cross and the Army portrayed the prison camps to be rather nice with plenty of food. She was devastated to realize this was not the truth.

I had a hundred day leave through the summer. The war in Japan was ending while I was still at home, so I could begin to plan for my future. I had no plans to stay in the service.

I had a little money that I was able to save and plan with. At the end of my leave, I was sent to Texas. After two more months in the service, I was officially discharged in October, 1945 as a Master Sergeant with a 20% disability for my foot. I still did not have much of a physical and was given no mental exam.



**After the war:**

I returned to Tippecanoe, Ohio. In November, I tried to purchase a small farm, but it fell through because I couldn't get a clear title. In February, 1946 I decided to purchase the Bendure General Store in Freeport. Two employees and I ran the store. I used the money I still had, and with the aid of a friend, Tom Barr, I was able to make it work. In 1947, I purchased the building, and my dad, who had been working in the store, joined me as a partner. Mary and I married in 1947. In 1955, we built our house on Route 800 where we moved and lived until 1999. My mother died in 1957 after a long illness. My dad "retired" in 1959, and Mary and I purchased his part of the business. He continued to work in the store until 1970, he passed away in 1972. We purchased two lots on the square of Freeport with the thought of building a new supermarket. In 1962, we built the store in Freeport. It was quite a store for our little town, and Mary and I really worked to make



it a success. It was a long and hard road, but it was well worth everything we put into it.

My son Dick (born 1949) went off to Ohio State in 1967, and Gary (born 1953) to Ohio University in 1971. Dick graduated from Ohio State with a degree in Chemical Engineering. Gary moved to Florida for awhile in 1973, and he returned in late 1973. At about this same time, our grocery supplier, Associated Grocers, told us the Kroger store in Newcomerstown was for sale. Gary, Mary and I purchased the store and opened it with Gary as the Manager in August 1974. After a slow first six months at the Newcomerstown store, business really began to turn around in the winter of 1975. Gary was learning how to be a good manager, and in 1979, we doubled the size of the store. In 1982, we purchased the Food Villa Store in Scio from the other owners, and finally in 1983, Mary and I sold the business to Gary and his wife Terrie and I retired.

I had been on the board of Associated Grocers for many years. I was also on the board of the East Central Ohio (ECO) Grocers' Association for twenty years, which was very educational. I was a member of the Freeport State Bank Board, and when the bank was sold to the Steubenville Bank, I served on their board until they sold to Bank One.

This is my life, the life of a survivor of the Great Depression, a survivor of seven WWII bombing raids, and a survivor of two German prison camps. I am pleased with the life I have lived and give this story as a testimony to all those who are willing to listen and learn.



# OHIO VETERANS HALL OF FAME

## CLASS OF 2009



LEWIS E. BAKER

Coshocton County  
World War II  
United States Army  
Air Corps  
Former Prisoner of War

Mr. Baker took adversity from being held captive by the Germans in World War II for 20 months and used it as a motivational tool to help his fellow veterans and Americans. After leaving the service he purchased a grocery store and grew that small business into four stores and also the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Associated Grocers. Lewis currently serves as the treasurer for the Ex-POW Wooster Chapter and has been an advocate for countless POW's and widows. His efforts have helped numerous veterans receive their benefits. He is a Past Commander and an active member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. At 89 years young he still performs Honor Guard duty for his fellow veterans and was the 2007 Veteran of the Year in Wooster. In addition to his veterans' affiliations he has served as a charter member of the Freeport Volunteer Fire Department, a member of Masonic Lodge for over 60 years, 10-year member of the school board, Past President of Lakeland Area Booster Club, and a member and Past President of the Lions Club. In 2004, Mr. Baker wrote a book on his World War II experiences, titled "My War." His passion for Veterans and his community is second to none.





You and your immediate family are cordially  
invited to attend  
an evening dinner/reception  
in honor of the

Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame  
Class of 2009

November 5, 2009  
6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Columbus Marriott Northwest  
5605 Blazer Parkway  
Dublin, Ohio 43017

Please RSVP  
By Friday, October 30, 2009

*Dress Business Attire*

*Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame  
Class of 2009*

*Please join Governor Ted Strickland  
as he honors the*

*Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame Inductees*

*with a public reception*

*Friday, November 6, 2009 at 2:00 p.m.*

*in the main lobby*

*Franklin County Veterans Memorial*

*300 West Broad Street*

*Columbus, Ohio 43215*

*Induction Ceremony will begin at 3:00 p.m.*

*in the*

*Auditorium*

# Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame Class of 2009

*Lewis E. Baker*

*Doris M. Powell\**

*Robert H. Brothers*

*Mary Reynolds Powell*

*Phyllis A. Fitzgerald*

*Albert J. Roese*

*John E. Jackson*

*Cyril L. Sedlacko*

*Donald J. Jakeway*

*Herbert W. Seelbach, Sr.*

*Theodore G. Jenkins*

*Phillip R. Shriver*

*Walter M. Lawson, Jr.\**

*Frank W. Pruitt*

*Jack A. Meyer*

*John W. Twohig\**

*Thomas N. Moe*

*Joseph H. Wells*

*George Peto, Jr.*

*Robert A. Woods*

*\*(deceased)*



I would like to thank David Dilly, Coshocton County Recorder and former Veteran Service Officer, who was kind enough to nominate me for this honor. Mr. Dilly was joined in this nomination by my son Gary Baker.

In addition to a dinner/reception on November 5th, there is a public reception November 6th. There will be a plaque honoring the Class of 2009 displayed in the State House.