

May 25, 1945 Genesee News:

Prisoner of War 114 Days Leo Heppner Returns Home

“Leo Heppner is home,” were the words which spread about this community Wednesday. The returned soldier was met in Moscow Tuesday evening by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Heppner, and sister, Miss Violet Heppner, together with friends and other relatives.

The past year was an eventful one for the infantryman who entered the service March 28, 1944, left for Camp Hood, Texas for basic training, then drew an assignment to Camp Atterbury, Ind., for special infantry training. He was home on furlough during August of last year, and reported to Fort Meade, Md. His overseas address was received here October 1, and the last letter received from him before being taken prisoner was dated November 20, written in England. He left the United States with a division which became a replacement in the First Army, was in combat eleven days when the German army made its break-through into Belgium.

Dates became rather confused to the soldier, but some dates that he will always remember are the date of being taken captive, which was December 21, and the date of liberation, which was April 13, and Friday.

His division had moved into front-line position within a week after arriving in France, and had penetrated two miles of the Siefried Line. Two feet of snow covered the ground, and branches of the densely wooded area hung low with the weight of snow. Food was good and bunkers offered protection during the time they were not on the line. Then came the German break-through. Supplies and ammunition ceased to come through to Leo's battalion. Contact with regimental, brigade and division headquarters ceased on December 17, and during the four days following, unit commanders, knowing they were encircled tried to break back to their rear eschelons, but were unsuccessful. Ammunition had run low, units were disorganized, with men from three regiments intermingled. The platoon in which Leo was fighting, found itself with but two or three bazooka projectiles remaining, and there were but a very few mortar shells left. His weapon was an M-1, and the men had but a few cartridges left after four hard days of fighting with no supplies coming through. Then a German officer, with the customary two men appeared in the American lines under a white

flag, demanding the surrender of the command. The American officer, with no alternative, obeyed the surrender terms. Six hundred men, including Leo, were ordered to lay down their arms. This surrender took place near the village of Schoenberg, Germany on December 21.

All the men captured were stripped for action, trying to fight their way back to contact other American forces wherever they might be. They had no overcoats, no pack. They were ordered to start out immediately, and the first day of captivity ended at Prum. Their captors expected to place them on a train at Germalstein, but airmen of the allies had put rail lines and rolling stock out of commission. The hike continued in an easterly direction and then the men were marching in a northeasterly direction until they made a crossing of the Rhine at Colblenz. This city, headquarters of the Army of Occupation during World War I, was completely wrecked, and the bridge on which they crossed was not open to any travel except by foot. The Americans were then hiked to Limburg, east of Coblenz, and from there to Stalag 4B, near Mulberg, Germany, they traveled by train. Sixty-five Americans were crowded into each car after receiving a half loaf of black bread which weighed 1 kilogram, roughly two and one-fifth pounds. This was their rations for the trip. How long it took, Leo does not exactly know, but it was a long trip with numerous stops for track repairs. About every so often an allied plane would pick out the train and give it a strafing and then perhaps throw an artillery shell or a rocket against the locomotive. One day the prisoners noticed a German plane passing the length of the train and going hundreds of miles per hour. The men knew not what to expect until they saw two American fighter planes after the German. They were not permitted to view the results.

At the prison camp, Stalag 4-B Leo and his six-hundred fellow soldiers were briefly processed, and then separated, to be sent to various places to work. Leo drew the twon of Zeitz, Germany, 42 kilometers south of Leipzig, He arrived there Jan. 31, but later.....

PRISONER OF WAR 114 DAYS LEO HEPPER RETURNS HOME

(Continued from Page One)

.....was moved to a smaller town, where about 300 Americans were to become workers, and where they might be safer from bombing. Their quarters were in a monastery, and on the third floor. During air raids, occurring several times a night, the men

rushed to the basement to find shelter under the bell tower. Zeist was one of the much-bombed, places owing to it being a small rail center and the location of a fuel manufacturing plant. The work to which Leo and his fellow prisoners were assigned was that of preparing air raid shelters. Jack hammers were used to drill the rock, but quite often the air compressor or the motor would develop trouble, for some unknown reason. The men were expected to work eight hours a day. For this they were paid one mark and 25 pfenning. This was straight time, no overtime, and no double time for Sundays, Leo re-marked, and he hasn't forgotten that he was paid but once and still has 45 marks due him. The daily menu was seldom varied. When they arose in the morning each man was given a cup of ersatz coffee, a mixture that turned their drinking cups black. For noon there was no food, but at 5 o'clock the men partook of a bowl of soup made from kohl-rabi, cooked in a steam-heated kettle. There was no flavoring, but sometimes they "enjoyed" turnips in their soup. They received a small bit of margarine. Once a week they were supposed to receive two spoonsful of sugar.

Leo was a prisoner for 114 days, and in that time he was given three Red Cross packages. Owing to the difficulties in transportation, confusion and delay, a package was always divided between two men. As a rule the Red Cross boxes contained the following: A small tin of butter or margarine, 5 to 9 packages of cigarettes, a small can of jam or jelly, soap, a can of meat, such as corned beef or spam; powdered milk, cocoa powder, small can of cheese, a box of K ration crackers, some instant coffee, and a number of vitamin pills. On the combined diet Leo lost 40 pounds in weight. He has regained that weight, but has not forgotten how good those frozen apples were that he and the other fellows picked from trees on the hike from Schoenberg to Limburg.

Rumors were heard every time a person turned his head. Rumors sometimes placed the American army driven back to Paris. Then the rumors would tell of a successful counterattack with some gains. The story next might be about the Americans fighting along the Rhine and across the big river. Additional news might be discouraging, but when Leo and the fellows near Zeitz heard American artillery, then 50-calibre machine fire, and then 30-calibre fire, they framed their own rumors, and one day, from their third-story quarters they saw what they took to be an American convoy of tanks, trucks and other equipment. They were so certain that three Americans were helped through a basement window, and

they managed to contact the convoy. Within a half hour five American tanks came roaring into the small town near Zeitz where they were held. The prison guards knew that resistance was futile, and they merely watched Leo and the other men rush out to meet their liberators. From every tank and every vehicle that enter the village came candy and food, and cigarettes. The men liberated seemed no happier than their liberators. Backs were pounded, hands were shaken and every salutation known was in use. Friday, April 13, was a happy day. Leo happened to remember that a souvenir would not be out of order, so he, like others, requested their prison guards to "come across" with the swastika-adorned belts. The guards offered but feeble resistance. Some were almost helpful.

For five days after being liberated Leo and his fellow soldiers "lived off the land" so to speak, but they were not accustomed to full meals, and their eating brought on discomfort. They were moved about three kilometers from the prison to remain for five days, and then were taken aboard C-47 transport planes to be flown to France and there receive inspection, new clothing, and best of all a real bath.

On April 26 he wrote a letter to his parents and sister, which was received here May 12. This was the first word of his liberation. A number of men repatriated were taken by truck from a camp near Paris to a port and from there went by boat to England where a large number of wounded men were taken on board for the trip back to the United States.

Living conditions at Stalag 4-B were pretty bad. Water for a large camp came from one well. There was but little food, no medical care, and sleeping accommodations were next to none at all. Conditions at the place where they were held near Zeitz were much better, but the food was barely enough to keep one alive. The men had left the battle front without over-coats, blankets or extra clothing. To their rescue came the Red Cross with a supply of Russian overcoats and shoes for the boys who were next to being barefooted. Leo said he was fortunate. His shoes withstood the long hike and the trips to and from work. He was not ill, except for a cold during his captivity. He suffered quite a bit from frozen feet, sustained during the early days of the hike from Schoenburg to Coblenz. Everything which happened to him from the time of being taken prisoner to the day of liberation seems like a bad dream. It's all over now. He will have 60 days at home and then report to Santa

Barbara, Calif, for reassignment. The reunion of the family has been pleasant beyond words, and no time has been lost in notifying Leo's brother, who is stationed somewhere in the Pacific.

Leo wears the Expert Infantryman's Combat Badge, ribbons for the American Hemisphere Theatre and European Theatre of Operations, with one star each, and the Good Conduct ribbon. Don't be surprised either by the new shoulder patch regulation, which authorizes the branch of the service on one shoulder and the unit patch on the other.

1179

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)

SERIAL NUMBER 52	1. NAME (Print) Harold Leo Donald Dewain Heppner		ORDER NUMBER 11179
T	(First)	(Middle)	(Last)
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) Genesee Teton Idaho			
(Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)			
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]			
3. MAILING ADDRESS Same			
[Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same]			
4. TELEPHONE	5. AGE IN YEARS 20	6. PLACE OF BIRTH Wilmot	
(Exchange)	(Number)	(Town or county)	
	DATE OF BIRTH May 13 1921	South Dakota	
	(Mo) (Day) (Yr.)	(State or country)	
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Paul Heppner			
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS Student at U of I			
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Moscow Teton Ida			
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)			
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.			
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 1-1-42)	(over)	☆ GPO 16-21630-2	Leo Donald Dewain Heppner (Registrant's signature)

