

1945, May 25, 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 town of Zeitz, Germany, 42 kilometers south of Leipzig, He arrived there Jan. 31, but later.....

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.....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 move 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.

The Genesee News

GENESEE, LATAH COUNTY, IDAHO, FRIDAY, MAY 25, 1945

ESTABLISHED 1888

VOL. 57 NO. 9

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"BILL" WILSON DISCHARGED

"Discharged. Will be home soon," read a telegram received Wednesday afternoon by the Gerald Wilson family. The wife was from their son, Louis (Bill) Wilson, who was home from overseas on a 45-day furlough with a five-day extension. He reported to Fort Douglas May 17.

The young soldier, just past twenty years of age, was rounding out nearly five years of service in the tanks corps and cavalry reconnaissance when he received his discharge. He has seen action in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France and Germany. He was discharged under the point program recently announced, and by virtue of his long-time service in combat action.

BOB DEMERS WRITES LETTER TELLS OF MEETING PEDERSON

Bob Demers, with an anti-aircraft artillery unit in the Pacific Theatre and recently transferred to the Philippines, writes:

"Dear Mr. Pederson: "I just received a couple copies of The News, and I do enjoy them very much. I have no complaint as to getting the paper, despite our changes of APO numbers. The News, I must say, has followed me faithfully, for which I am indeed grateful. I also noted in the Feb. 9th issue that Art Jenkins was in the place I was. At that particular time I was no longer in New Guinea. We have been here since February and had two different APO numbers. It is now.....

"A very pleasant surprise confronted me while attending the Joe E. Brown show. I was seated exactly in front of one Dan Pederson and didn't even know it until he started talking to me!" By this time he has probably written you of our recent renewal of acquaintance. Naturally we had quite a confab about good old Genesee. He also mentioned that he hadn't received any copies of The News. I'll be down to see him tomorrow and will give him the copies I have received

GENERAL PETROLEUM BUYS 65 CONOCO PLANTS IN WEST

News of importance to local motorists was received here by John G. Meyer, who advised him of the purchase by General Petroleum Corporation, marketers of Mobilgas and Mobiloil, of 65 bulk marketing plants and other marketing facilities of Conoco Oil company located in eastern Washington and Oregon and northern and western Idaho and Arizona, just announced by A. H. DeFrist, vice president of General Petroleum. Purchase price was not revealed, but was understood to be in excess of \$1,500,000.00.

At the same time General Petroleum indicated that its policy will be to carry on an aggressive marketing activity in this area, and that it will utilize to the greatest extent possible the local Conoco distributing organization and facilities. Mr. Meyer, who has been agent for Conoco here, will now distribute Mobil products to gasoline stations, farms and industries previously served by him.

"This important transfer of properties reflects a new emphasis on the economics of gasoline distribution," said DeFrist. "It also indicates an expectation of great vigor in the post war competition in the oil business."

"General Petroleum, as a major primary producer and supplier on the Pacific Coast, has a naturally superior and transportation situation for its own gasoline in the area in which it will expand its marketing operations by the purchase of these Continental properties."

"On the other hand," DeFrist continued, "we understand Continental has been at a growing economic disadvantage in this area and is concentrating its marketing investment in territory where there is a fully integrated operator and a sound, original supplier. All of Continental Oil company's nine refineries lie east of the Rocky Mountains."

GEORGE MORSHECK HOME

SCHOOL YEAR IS COMPLETED HONOR STUDENTS ANNOUNCED

The 1944-45 school term at Genesee is completed. Supt. Kenneth Dean announces the following students who have stood high in their classes in high school: Highest honor—Beverly Anderson, Don Baumgartner, seniors; Lavonne Denow, junior; Marie Hoorn, Mary Jones, seniors, and Norma Searns, freshman.

Honors—Arlene Beavert, freshman; Yvonne Eikum, sophomore; George Pollett, junior; Gloria Jutte, freshman; Patricia Magee, senior; Patricia Nelson, sophomore; Shirley Ochs, freshman; Betty Olson, sophomore; Anita Schamhorst, junior, and Gladys Tafsen, junior.

With the closing of school, members of the faculty have announced where they expect to be during the summer. Mrs. Covington and Miss McDaniels will attend school at Washington State. Mr. Chase expects to further his education at the Lewiston Normal. Miss Bekkedahl and Linquist plan to be at Ellensburg, Wash. Miss Weirich will be married June 9 to Cecil Nabelsiek at her home at Brookings, S. D. Mrs. Schaefer plans to be in Lewiston and Mrs. Hicks will visit a sister in California. Mr. Mutch, Mrs. Bartley, Mrs. Zemper, Mr. Tupper, Mr. Kalafas and Supt. Dean will be at Genesee for the summer.

HOLBEN HEARD FROM

Damon Holben, taken prisoner in Italy a year ago, has been heard from in a letter to his mother. The letter was written May 6 and was received here May 21. He wrote that he had eaten a real breakfast, and in his words: "It seemed like Christmas to have such a good breakfast." It is presumed that he is in France. He also wrote that he expected to be home sometime this summer.

DEADLINE FOR SCRAP PAYMENT

Supt. Kenneth F. Dean reminds holders of scrap metal receipts that such receipts must be presented for

TO OBSERVE MEMORIAL DAY

Stores and many other places of business in Genesee will be closed for Memorial Day, June 30.

American Legion members are to meet at the K. P. hall at 9 o'clock Wednesday morning, May 30, for an important business meeting and immediately following this they will go to the several cemeteries to decorate graves of deceased veterans of all wars. Members are requested to wear Legion caps and shirts.

SIX PUREBRED SHORTHORNS TO CALIF. FROM THIS AREA

Sam Lange and Carl Greif delivered six registered Shorthorn females and a bull from their farms to Spokane Monday, where Hal Williams of Pomonca, Calif, took delivery. Mr. Williams purchased 20 females and one bull, and is starting a purebred herd on his ranch near Los Angeles. He is a livestock feed manufacturer and runs 650 range cows. He has been so impressed with Shorthorns that he is founding a Shorthorn herd.

Mr. Williams, who inspected the Lange and Greif purebred herds, after visiting many other places in search of foundation stock, stated that Inland Empire Shorthorns rank very high in his estimation.

MCCROSKY BUY APARTMENTS

J. M. McCroskey, owner and operator of the McCroskey Farm Equipment business to Dick Zelmantz and Fred Bauscher, has purchased the Brownink Hall Apartments at Pacific and Poplar streets in Spokane, and took possession May 15. Mr. and Mrs. McCroskey plan to move to Spokane about June 1.

The apartments are of modern brick construction. There are seven 6-room apartments, four 4-room apartments, and a 3-room apartment, all of which rent in the upper brackets. These apartments were constructed eight years ago and are in a desirable location. Some of the people first to occupy the apartments are:

MEMORIAL DAY, MAY 30, 1945 DAY OF THOUGHT FOR MANY

Chaplain Roland B. Gittlesohn, with the 6th Marine Division on Iwo Jima, gave the following Memorial address on the island: Mrs. Edgar Carlson, whose brother, Cpl. Harold C. Glenn, was killed in action on Iwo Jima on February 26, received a copy of the address from a friend. It is herewith published:

"This is perhaps the grimmest, and surely the holiest task we have faced since D Day. Here before us lie the bodies of comrades and friends. Men who until yesterday or last week laughed with us, joked with us, trained with us. Men who were on the same ships with us, and went over the sides with us as we prepared to hit the beaches of this island. Men who fought with us and feared with us. Somewhere in this plot of ground there may lie the men who could have discovered the cure for cancer. Under one of these Christian crosses or beneath the Jewish Star of David there may rest now a man who was destined to be a great prophet—to find the way, perhaps, for all to live in plenty, with poverty and hardship for none. Now they lie here silently on this sacred soil, and we gather to consecrate this earth in their memory.

"It is not easy to do so. Some of us have buried our closest friends here. We saw these men killed before our very eyes. Any one of us might have died in their places. Indeed, some of us are alive and breathing at this very moment only because men who lie here beneath us had the courage and strength to give their lives for ours. To speak in memory of such men as these is not easy. Of them too can it be said with utter truth: 'The world will little note nor long remember what we say here. It can never forget what they did here.'"

"No, our poor power of speech can add nothing to what these men and the other dead of our Division who are not here have already done. All that we ever hope to do is to follow