

G-I Reported Dead Home From Nazi War Prison Camp

JUN 19 1945

Reported dead in an official telegram dated August 30, 1944, Pfc. William Daggett, wearing service bars indicating participation in major engagements in the African, Sicilian and European theatres of operation, is very much alive. He is spending a 69 day respite with his mother, Mrs. Betty Malloy, and his uncle, Charles Daggett, 511 Sioux Street.

At the termination of his furlough he will report at Atlantic City, where he will either be re-assigned or arrangements made for his honorable discharge.

That "Billy" was believed to have been killed in action was evidenced by the fact that his mother received a Purple Heart, appropriately engraved, and one of the major insurance companies met the obligation of a policy. Instead of being listed among those who made the supreme sacrifice, he was taken prisoner by the Germans, and following the receipt of this information on November 2 of last year, the government asked his mother to return the engraved Purple Heart, and the insurance company asked for the return the money paid on his insurance policy. Both requests were filled.

That "Billy" is alive, kicking and able to talk things over, is because as he put it: "I played dead."

He was a member of a "walking-talkie unit" that was scouting a certain sector searching for advancing enemy tanks, when they walked to within a few feet of a German regiment hidden behind a French hedgerow. Overwhelmingly outnumbered, the Germans sensing their presence, opened fire, and at the first blast, he said: "I dropped to the ground and played dead. By the time I thought I was dead long enough and the Germans had left



PFC. WILLIAM DAGGETT
... glad report of his death
was not true

the scene, I opened my eyes. I opened them too soon. There was a German soldier standing over me and when I stirred I heard, 'Kum, kum.' I was a prisoner of war."

That was during the latter part of August, the place of his capture being a small town called Percy. He was taken to Rheims, thence to Luxembourg, later to Stalag B-12, and finally to Stalag 7-B, a prison camp located about 35 miles from the Swiss border and one of the kind that the Germans wanted to talk about.

One of the camp officers, he said, spoke excellent English. He called about 125 American prisoners together and told them: "Act like soldiers and you will be treated as soldiers." There were no hardships at the American camp. Other nationalities included in the prisoners of war were segregated from the Americans.

Asked about his daily menu, he said: "Breakfast, nothing; dinner, soup, 'all clear.' Occasionally it was cloudy and on occasions it contained something that resembled vegetables. Supper, coffee. We got a loaf of bread every five days."

He stated that the German guards were always in the market for American cigarettes, and they would readily trade a loaf of bread for a pack of "fags."

The American prisoners, he said, were put to work filling bomb craters and scraping mortar from bricks that one time were part of buildings. The Germans, he pointed out, used the bricks to erect buildings and factories as fast as they were bombed, but their efforts were fruitless. The raids were frequent and the gunners called their shots. Most of the time he spent at this task while at Augsburg.

Their bunks, he said, were filled with straw and the Red Cross furnished each American prisoner with four blankets. On one of the missions of the air corps, their camp was bombed, and they were moved to a school house and enjoyed steam heat.

It was while they were being marched by German guards that one of the U. S. units caught up with them and the guards were anxious to surrender. He stated that on the same day about 10,000 Nazi soldiers, who were hiding in a wooded section, threw down their arms and surrendered to the Americans.

After their liberation his group returned to Augsburg, some of them scouting for souvenirs, others looking for real food or drink. They were subsequently taken to Rheims by plane, thence to Le Havre by train, and then they started their journey to the United States.

"Billy" was inducted on February 3, 1942, received his preliminary training at Camp Wheeler, Ga., and Fort Bragg, S. C., and was sent overseas on October 15, 1942.

He participated in the African invasion on November 8, of the same year, his unit landing at French Morocco. He took part in the Tunisian campaign, the Battle of Bizerte, and at Maknassy he was awarded a Presidential citation for outstanding service. Following the African mop-up he joined the forces in Sicily, and in November, 1943, he, with a group of others who had been under fire, were sent to England to prepare U. S. forces for the Normandy invasion.

On June 23, during the scrap at Cherbourg, he was smacked with a piece of shrapnel, suffered a slight shoulder wound, and was sent to England where X-rays were taken to determine whether or not his shoulder was broken. Following several days of hospitalization, he rejoined his outfit, and was in on the fight at St. Lo.

He participated in two major engagements in Africa, one in Sicily and two in France. He wears the Presidential citation, combat infantry badge, and the ribbons and stars indicating the theatres of operations and the number of major engagements. He is in good health, and endowed with a sense of humor. He recalls many incidents that caused good laughs among the American prisoners.

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