

Roy Burmeister

**gave the following speech May 30, 2005 at Ormond Beach.
He was a member of BTRY "B" 589 th 106th Div.
PW at Ziegenhein, Stalag 9A**

During the height of WWII, there were more than 16 Million service members on active duty. Nearly 75 percent of them were overseas at any given time. These veterans are dying at the rate of 1,000 a day. Only about 3million are still living. 14,000 died in captivity. The stories are dying with them. They sacrificed much to assure the freedom of Western Europe and the Pacific. The lessons learned from that effort helps assure that freedom continues flourish around the world, much as the soldiers of today are doing in the middle east.

Nearly 60 years after the end of WWII, the fate of more than 78,000 Americans who fought in that conflict remain unknown, MIA, missing in action. 8,100 in Korea and 1,800 in Viet Nam likewise remain unknown.

In WWII, one source estimates, 400,000 were killed and 670,000, wounded 125,000 became prisoners. The number held in the USSR (Russia) unaccounted for vary from 12 to 25 thousand.

We who were in the Armed Forces must give tribute to the civilians at home who grew the food, made the machines of war and supported the troops 100 percent. And the Merchant Marines, who braved the oceans to get it all to us.

A Prisoner of War Speaks

At age 18, I joined the newly forming [106th Infantry Division](#) at Fort Jackson, S.C.. I trained to be a forward observer for the artillery. I left the 106th when I was accepted for the Air Force, but, like so many that were reassigned to the ground forces where bodies were most needed, I was sent back to the 106th at [Camp Atterbury, Indiana](#). At that time many of the trained personnel had been sent overseas as replacements. So I, and the new replacements, reformed the 106th Division.

We then shipped October of '44 to England and in December on to France to take the place of the 2nd Div.. We were on the front line, in the Ardennes Forest, Germany, only a few days, when the Battle of the Bulge commenced in the early morning of Dec.16th. I, and the Lieutenant to whom I was assigned, were up with the infantry, which our unit, the 589th Field Artillery was to support. The 106th was stretched thin, protecting 26 miles of front aided by some Cavalry, when the Germans broke through, by passing the infantry and attacking the artillery. Being woefully ill equipped and overwhelmed by superior numbers, the 422nd and 423rd Regiments, after a valiant attempt to break out, were forced to surrender Dec.19th. I was then a Prisoner of War.

The experience began with a march to a railhead, but first a night in the mud on a hillside. We were crowded 60 or more into what we call 40 and 8 boxcars, nothing like the boxcars we know in the States. You can see one in Holly Hill at the City Hall grounds. Having had nothing to eat for a few days, the piece of black bread with a smear of molasses was gladly devoured, but without liquid became a torture. From the 20th till the 24th the train slowly moved to Bad Orb. We could not get out for natures calling. Those cars became unbearable. Along the way in a freight yard, the train with no markings to indicate that it was trans-porting war prisoners, was bombed by allied planes.

On reaching [Bad Orb](#), [Stalag 9B](#), Christmas Eve, we were interrogated. Name, rank and serial number did not suffice. We were held out in the snow and freezing cold to loosen tongues for information they already knew. After a short stay the officers and non-coms were separated from the privates and sent on to other camps. I was a corporal, and with other non-coms, again in boxcars and then on foot marched to [Ziegenhein](#), [Stalag 9A](#).

The unmarked camp was strafed by our own fighter planes. I was fortunate since I and the men I was with were not forced to work. Not so lucky were most of the prisoners. We lived in filth with bed bugs and lice, rations of less than 600 calories a day, in unheated buildings. I like all the others lost weight, more than For many, beatings were common. Too weak to continue on the march, which went on for many days, you were left where you fell at the wayside to freeze to death or shot.

Frozen feet, dysentery, and all the maladies common with living as we were forced to, were common. I, and two of my buddies, as did others, huddled together to keep from freezing. Clothing, especially boots and personal items were stolen. Imagine yourself, having lost your freedom, no longer able to defend against the atrocities of your captors.

Being forced to repair the bombed railroads or work in a factory, to build war material to be used against your own soldiers. I remained in Stalag 9A till liberated by General Patton's armored troops on Good Friday. On Holly Thursday the Germans tried to line us up for a march east to keep us from being freed by our advancing troops.

Captain Morgan, in charge of our group, had a plan, which ultimately saved us. A certain number of the men were told to feign fainting and sickness, the results of which far exceeded anyone's hopes. While half of the men "collapsed " the others "carried" them into the barracks where they were "treated". It worked, our liberators were advancing and our captors fled.

I won't try to relate the horrors others endured, except to say, picture the airmen shot out of their plane, landing, if they were fortunate enough to have their parachute open, into a crowd of angry civilians who had just experienced being bombed by these men. Or in Korea, being forced to tromp on your fallen buddies who you are trying to bury in the frozen ground. Let us not forget the Bataan Death March, Camps of O'Donnell, Cabanatuan and the infamous Hell Ships under the Japanese, or the bamboo cages of Viet Nam. It is too upsetting to tell in detail about all the outrages committed against Prisoners of War.

You can read about this in the many books written by the fortunate few who survived.

As for the Geneva Convention, our Country is one of the very few countries that honors it.

Thank you for giving me the honor of representing the many Prisoners of War and Missing in Action of all the wars past and present.

God Bless America

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