

Mark Moore

Chaplain
106th Infantry Division (Artillery)



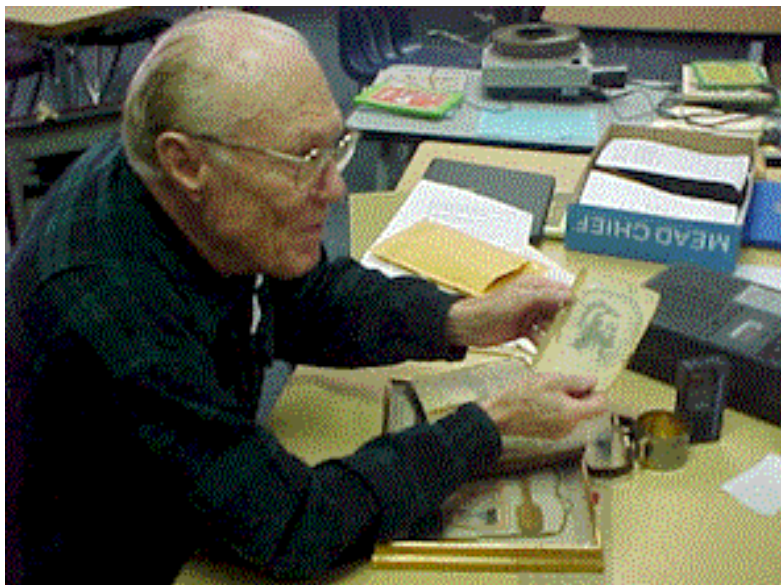
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Interviewed by: Kevin Duncan
Adult Secretary: Jon Bosch

MY LORD, MY COUNTRY

"Yes, America is the greatest country under the sun! She is great because she has honored God's Son. Other nations have a form of religion and know about Jesus but they have gone down because they have not known Jesus. I am not afraid of Nazism, Fascism, or Communism as long as we honor God and spread the full gospel of Jesus Christ His Son! As long as we keep true to Him we will live! When we fail Him, we will go down in despair!"

--From Mark Moore's book Prisoner of the Germans



My name is Mark Moore. I'm from Waco, Texas and was attending Baylor College studying Biblical Literature when America joined the war. After my training as a chaplain, I was one of two chaplains assigned to the 106th Division Artillery as a Lieutenant in June, 1944 in Camp Atterbury, Indiana. While most of the men were 17-18 years old, I was a 26-year old with more life experience.

After my unit shipped over to England on the U.S.S. Wakefield, I found myself in a chapel in Gloucester, England. I read a passage from the 66th Psalm — "Thou

hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." Could it have been that God was giving me a promise that He would bring me through as He had brought His servant through years before?

While I did not understand the true meaning of these Scriptures then, I later understood it to mean that I would be brought across the waters of the Atlantic, into the fire of bombs and battles. Those who "ride over our heads" were the Germans who were to overrun my unit in the Battle of the Bulge. And the wealthy place? This meant to me a return to America, back to my wife and the friends I had left behind.

I knew my mission was to minister to those men who were to need my guidance so much in the days to come.

As chaplains our duty was to address these needs of the soldiery: religion, morale and morals. In spite of the fact

that there was a shortage of rabbis, we were trained to minister to the needs of the men, whether Jew, Protestant or Catholic.



You see, our unit was one of those who landed just following the Normandy invasion. By December, 1944, the 106th was posted to a "rest area" of the front, along with the 99th and 28th divisions, in the Ardennes forest near the Belgian border. At this time, the German army made its last big push to force the Americans, Canadians and British back to the beaches — The Battle of the Bulge. Germans encircled our unit to the north and south along with many others, and this led to my capture and imprisonment as a prisoner of war. While it was expected that we could have only held out for a day or so, we instead held our ground for a week against battle-hardened elements of elite SS panzer (tank) divisions.

Even so, we were captured as we tried to move towards a breakout. I remember seeing about 600 men of our artillery division with their hands up. I moved to pour out a jerry-can full of gasoline onto the ground, rather than letting it fall into enemy hands. As I did so, I heard a voice speaking German, and even though I did not understand the words, I understood that he was trying to tell me, "Do that, and I'll shoot you!" I figured five or ten gallons of gasoline weren't worth my life, but I tossed the keys to my jeep into the snow in hopes that the enemy wouldn't be able to find them. Now that I was surrendering, I thought to myself; "Doubtless these men will need a chaplain in the prison camp, and it must be that God would have me go."

The Germans marched us many miles towards a rail junction that would lead us to the prison camp at **Bad Ord. I was gripped by hunger during one of the halts during the march. We were packed in unsanitary conditions on tiny train boxcars and shipped to the prison camp in Limburg, Germany. British bombers bombed us, but it was by God's hand that we were saved from a direct hit. The only men among us that were killed were those who tried to use this opportunity to escape.**

After we arrived at Bad Ord, our imprisonment stretched from days to weeks. The Germans kept us on a 700 calorie per day diet. Our diet was supplemented by precious Red Cross boxes full of treasured foods like salmon, oleo and jelly shipped through Switzerland courtesy of the Red Cross and the U.S. government. Sharing these boxes and our regular ration was a careful process of division and selection. The man who would divide the food would be the last to choose, and we took turns dividing these meager provisions in this way. It was in this camp that a number of Serbian prisoners showed us how to make stoves we called "Smokey Joes". Heat was nearly as dear as food to us, and just after someone had entered our barracks all the others would call out for him to close the door quickly.



Despite the pitiful conditions of the camp, the other chaplains and I continued to help the men's morale and spiritual condition by holding services. There were Sunday Worships, Evening Devotions, Morning Devotions, and Bible Study. Many men would attend these services, but others would sit and talk or play cards during our prayer sessions.

While we were certain that we would be freed soon, the weeks passed into months. We thought that 100 days would bring us freedom but it was more than 5 months until the first possibility of liberation arrived. An American armored (tank) unit had broken 40 miles behind enemy lines and moved to liberate us from our captors. After shelling and smashing the German resistance in the vicinity, they arrived at our camp. Our commanding officer brought out an American flag that had been hidden and saved in anticipation of liberation. Disappointingly, the tank unit had only expected 250 men, but there were more than 1500 officers at our camp. Many of us were left behind because of the danger of marching back through the German lines without arms, food or medical attention.

The next day, the German guards who had fled the oncoming troops returned and told

us that we were to move out ahead of the advancing Allied forces. The Germans had recaptured us and forced us to march for 36 more days. During this march we were again struck by bombers, this time American B-17s and B-24s. They were attacking an ammunition plant nearby, but some of the bombs struck us as we were on the march. Many men were killed. Even though I was afraid, I moved to help those who were wounded. The colonel asked me to be in charge of helping the wounded and identifying the dead. There were four other chaplains, three medics and about six others who worked with me for three hours administering first aid to about 40 wounded men. As I began securing dog-tags from the bodies of the dead I came to one and read the name, Roland A. Koskamp. I quickly dropped the tag and reached for his shirt collar. There was his cross. I prayed a prayer for his wife and little daughter. The thought came to me, "This could have been Chaplain Moore just as it was Chaplain Koskamp."

When those of us who had been bombed reached the rest of the prisoners who had been recaptured, they were eager to know who had been killed. I read the list of names to them time and time again. They wanted a service in thanksgiving because God had spared so many of us. It is up to us to trust Him and leave ourselves as well as our loved ones in His hands.

After this march, we found ourselves in contact with members of the American 86th Division. Nazi Germany was drawing its last breath, and our German guards threw down their guns and surrendered to our liberating G.I.s. I think that they were happy to be prisoners of the Americans rather than the Russians. It just so happened that my brother, J.E. Moore, was serving with the 86th. One of the men in that unit wanted to reunite us as a surprise.

When I finally met up with my brother, we embraced and he stuttered with emotion, "Let me look at you!" I didn't think that I looked that bad, especially considering that I had been eating better than usual in the last month's march. But I had dropped from 160 lbs. before my capture to a lean 105. J. E. drew a bath for me, and I assumed that he wanted us to be together. Instead he began to leave the room.

"What's wrong J.E.?" I asked.

And he said, "Mark, you stink!"

I realized that the hot water had loosened all the grime of those six months of imprisonment.

After this, I returned by plane and boat first to Trinidad, then to New York. Upon seeing the Statue of Liberty we set up an altar and sang "America", said the Pledge of Allegiance, and then sang "God Bless America". We were thrilled to be home, back

with our families.

(Author's Note: After the war, Mr. Moore continued to do the work of God as the President of Trevecca Nazarene University in Tennessee. He worked to found a university in Kenya, built by donated funds he raised. Thanks to Mr. Moore for his help, inspiring words and kind spirit. This passage has been freely adapted from his memoirs, Prisoner of the Germans, Chaplain Mark R. Moore, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, MO, 1945. Let us not forget our veterans' sacrifices--without them it would not be possible to live as we do today).



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