

Honoring a Veteran for Memorial Day

Armand M. Sussman

1945

Finally home two months
after POW release



My beloved Uncle Armand served with the Army 8th Air Corps, as a navigator on WWII B-17 “Flying Fortress” bombing runs over Germany and Nazi-occupied European nations.

Captured

Three years before the war's end he and the rest of his crew mates had to parachute out of their flame-engulfed plane that was spiraling down, destroyed by anti-aircraft shelling. When he hit the ground he was surrounded and captured within minutes by local police, Nazi soldiers, and local townspeople, all wielding pitchforks, rifles, and hand guns.

POW Camp

His seized dog tags indicated that he was Jewish. He was sent to a special section of a concentration camp where Jewish military prisoners endured years of Gestapo interrogation and severe abuse that he rarely spoke about, and which I don't want to detail here.

Treatment

In the final 18 months of his captivity, he was sent to a German Luftwaffe- (air force) controlled prison camp. Conditions were better for him there, but shortly before the war's end, orders came directly from Hitler that the authorities in all POW camps were to shave the heads of all Jewish military prisoners so they could be readily identified when compulsory executions of them were scheduled to begin. All of Armand's fellow prisoners – of all religious beliefs and non-beliefs – bravely banded together and shaved their own heads and hid their dog tags to prevent ready identification, segregation and likely executions of their Jewish fellow airmen.

Letter from Armand

Tenth of May, 1945

Dear Folks,

Tenth of May, 1945

I am fine and very happy and feel that you are too. On April 30 we were left alone in charge of this camp — the Japs had taken off. On May Day the white flag which had taken the place of the 3rd Reich flag was in turn replaced by the Stars & Stripes, the Russian and the British flags — the Russians had liberated us. Since then the barbed wire fences have been leveled. Too much has taken place since then to start to talk about — this letter will go through the lines and get home before I do. How soon I'll be home is difficult to say, but the important thing is I will be home, in good health, probably within a month. The Russians are really swell and a sincere lot — just can't do enough for us. Already they presented an splendid Russian-U.S.O. show and filled a corral with cattle. The termination of the war rated less rejoicing than our liberation. The death of our President was and still is a deeply felt shock.

The other day Leonard Rappaport looked me up. Julie Sadovnik lives in the next room. Proszek from Catsaque, Dick Moon of Allen town, William French, 939 Hamilton St., William Verry and Ed Czupryk — all here and all in good health.

I'm a free man now and looking forward to a new life. There is plenty to talk about but I prefer to forget most of it. My plans for the future depend a lot on whether or not I remain in the service. I'd like to return to college. At any rate, my leave will be a long one and a happy one. I'm looking forward to finding all of you and everything in ship shape. Love and regards.

Armand "Mitt" Sussman

SENT FROM PRISON CAMP AFTER LIBERATION
THROUGH RUSSIAN, BRITISH & FINALLY
AMERICAN LINES.

Sent from Prison Camp after
Liberation through Russian, British and
finally American lines

About the Letter

Uncle Armand's letter was written on a scrap of very thin, flimsy paper (good paper was becoming increasingly scarce during the war). It was roughly handled on its homeward journey, then opened, unfolded and re-folded, hundreds of times while being read joyously by all of his many Jewish relatives and Christian Allentown friends alike. Thus they needed to tape together and amateurishly mount the torn fragments of his precious letter. The taped-up original is an historic, extremely rare "liberation day" example, now on permanent display along with his personal military artifacts, in a specialized WWII war museum for POWs in a New Orleans collection. (Btw, his playful nickname is derived - in the Jewish tradition, from his middle name of Morton.)

Text of Letter

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Letter continues

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Love and regards,
Armand "Mutt" Sussman

Armand died ten days before his 98th birthday

