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FIFTEEN CENTS

## On POW Day, Ben Thompson recalls his days in Stalag 7A

The recent observance of POW Day had special importance for Mr. Ben Thompson, 212 N. Jones Street, Marietta. He was a POW for a year during World War Two. Mr. Thompson, who is well-known in Marietta as a civic leader and postman, related the story of his internment in German Stalags to Marietta correspondent Hazel Baker. The story follows. —Ed.]



Ben Thompson

Hundreds of other Allied airmen from Britain, Canada, Australia and America were interned there until January 1945. When the Russians started moving toward Berlin, with our camp in their way, we found ourselves marched out, heading south.

I enlisted in the Air Force on October 10, 1942, at the age of 18. I was trained as a radio operator and aerial gunner and was assigned to duty as a crew member of a B-24 ("Liberator"), flying out of Italy with the 15th Air Force. Our bombing missions included northern Italy, Rumania, France and Germany.

It was on the last bombing raid, which was to have been Munich, Germany, on June 6th, 1944, that my plane was attacked by enemy fighters and lost an engine to their machine guns. The Liberators fell out of formation, turning back, but had lost so much altitude that we were exposed to the anti-aircraft batteries at Inasbruck, Austria, and our plane was badly damaged by them. We were literally shot out of the air.

We bailed out just before the plane blew up. I came down in a rural area near the city of Inasbruck and was immediately captured by German citizens. They turned me over to the military.

I was placed in a local jail cell for a while, until I was sent to an interrogation center at Frankfurt. After several days of isolation and questioning I was put on a train, under guard, and finally arrived at Stalag Luft 3 in Sagan, which is now a part of Poland. This was the same camp in which ex-Lancaster mayor Scott was imprisoned.

The weather was extremely cold in January of '45, with much snow and sleet. The hundreds of Allied airmen were forced to hike all night in the intense cold. At dawn we would be herded into barns and chicken coops, out of sight of Allied aircraft.

After three days and nights of this, we were placed in boxcars, like cattle, and driven to a prison camp near Moosburg, Germany: Stalag 7A. Moosburg is not far from Munich.

Stalag 7A held thousands, rather than hundreds, of prisoners. Life there was a constant struggle for food and shelter.

President Roosevelt died while I was interned in Stalag 7A, and we were all concerned about the war effort when we heard the news. But soon after, in April 1945, we suddenly saw American P5 fighter planes swooping over our camp. It was a lovely Sunday morning.

We had been hearing the sounds of heavy guns for several days, but weren't sure what was happening. Rumors circulated that we would be held as hostages so the Germans could get better terms of surrender.

Finally, like dinosaurs out

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Left to right: Nancy Herneisen, Albert Dettinger, Steve Englert, Paul Grater, Steve Bailey, and Claudia Good. Steve Englert and Paul Grater are holding the

certificate; Steve Bailey holds one of the stickers that were put on the ambulance doors after this photo was taken.

## Marietta ambulance wins state emergency certification; fund drive starts

The Marietta Ambulance is now state-certified.

Last Wednesday Paul Grater, director of Pennsylvania Emergency Health Services, presented Marietta Area Ambulance Association officials with a certificate and round stickers, which were immediately placed on the doors of the ambulance.

The certification means that the Marietta Ambulance and its personnel meet certain requirements in

terms of equipment, training, availability (all the time is the requirement), and recordkeeping / communications.

Marietta received the 16th certification in Lancaster Co. and the 144th out of 1079 services in Penna.

The current ambulance was delivered in 1978 at a cost of \$17,000. Of this amount, \$7100 remains to be paid.

The ambulance crew conducts fund raising campaigns on a regular basis to

meet expenses, and they are now in the middle of a membership drive. Mary Ann Spangler and Ruth Miller are chairing this drive. If you wish to join the Ambulance Association, and have not been contacted, you may obtain a membership at Farmers First Bank. Memberships cost \$7 for a family, \$5 for individuals.

The Marietta Ambulance, which was organized in 1963, will soon purchase a CHE radio, which will enable the ambulance crew

to talk with local hospitals while en route.

Current officers of the MAAA are: Albert Dettinger, president; Steve Englert, crew chief; Steve Bailey, assistant crew chief; and board members Bob Spangler, Arthur Haines, Pat Kenney, Jr., Mary Miller, Barry Eppley, and Hazel Baker.

The MYAA has ten qualified EMT's and five people trained in CPR, in addition to the Advanced First Aid members.

## Romayne Bridgett, native of Mount Joy, citizen of Paris, reflects on life as singer, mother

by Lorna Simmons Nolt

When you meet Romayne Bridgett face-to-face for the first time, you just know her singing voice is powerful and important and that every phrase she sings means exactly what she feels it should mean, with every nuance an interpretation of feeling she has taken a lifetime to explore and to

express.

Because that's the way she is: powerful, assertive, insightful, and intelligently able to interpret in song what she perceives with her whole self.

And her charisma—her stage presence—fills her living room just as surely as it does the stage.

Romayne Bridgett —

familiar face and voice of a myriad of Lancaster operas and musicals, Mount Joy native and probably one its biggest fans—has spent all of her years exploring herself and what she calls "the beautiful things of life." "I get up for a performance by reading great poetry and literature," she says, "listening

to and singing beautiful music, keeping what I call 'happy thoughts.'"

She is, to put it mildly, a positive person.

But she hasn't always been so sure of her goals or of herself. Singing, her great love and comfort and career, grew out of somewhat negative beginnings.

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