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The American POW Experience in Nazi Germany

Daniel Sawey
University of Pennsylvania

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The American POW Experience in Nazi Germany

1942-45

Daniel Sawey, University of Pennsylvania, McNair Scholars SRI 2012

Entrance to Muhlberg's Stalag IV B, the largest German prison camp of the war. (Photo compliments of Pegasus Archive.)



SS head Heinrich Himmer inspects a prison camp, as prisoners observe behind the barbed wire. (Photo compliments of the National Archives.)

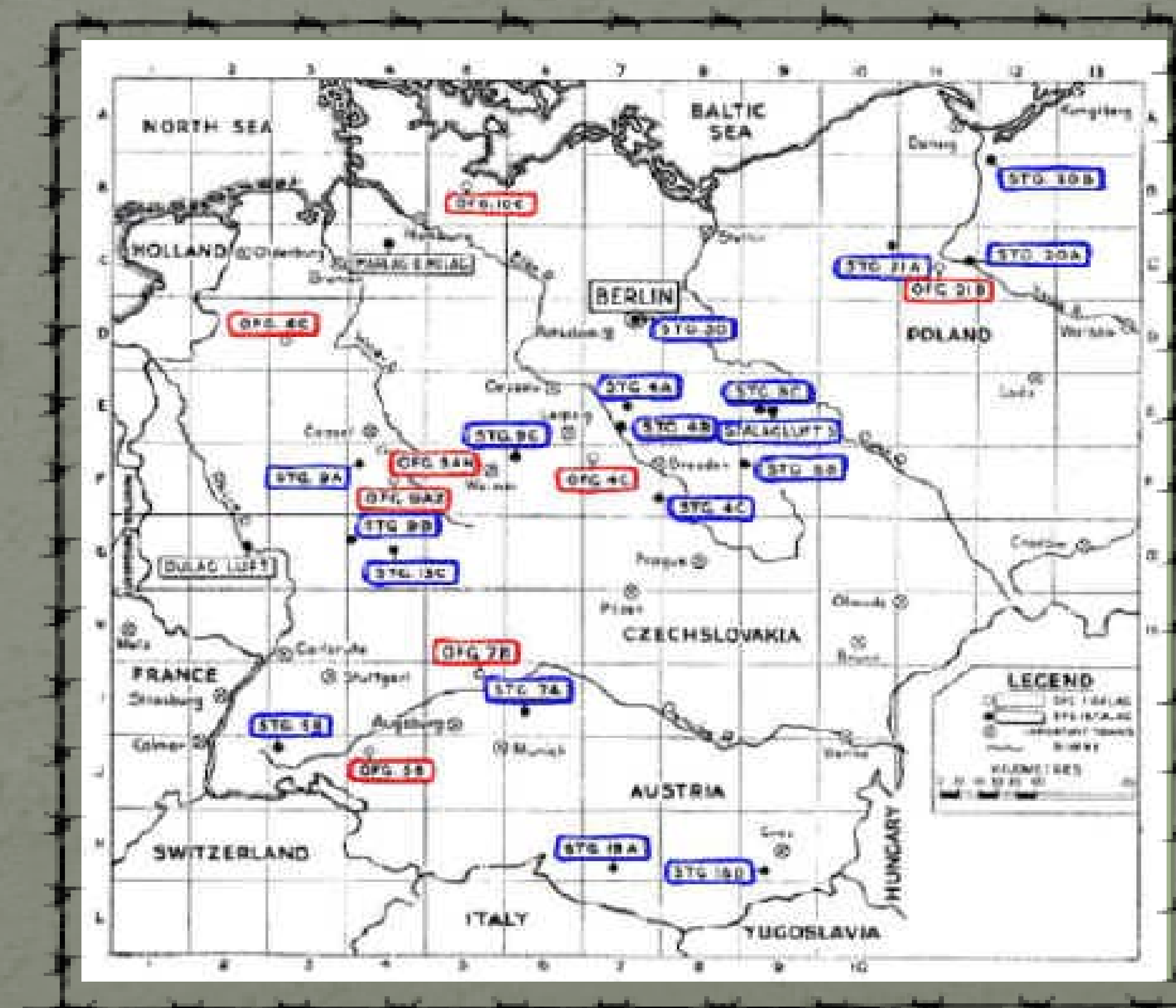
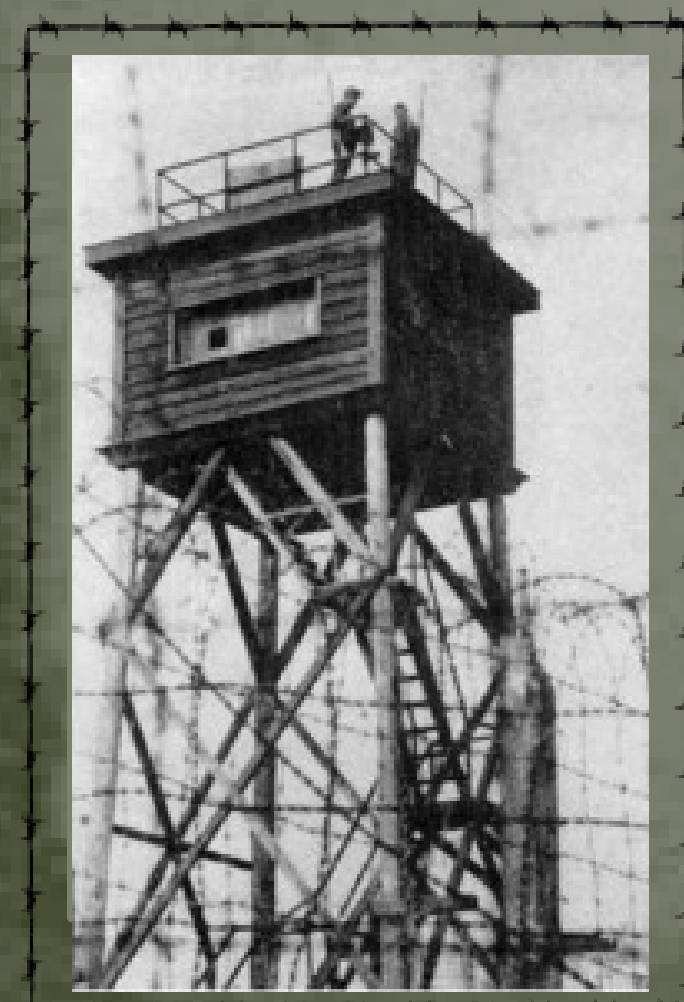


What Am I Doing?

- Were the experiences of American POWs in Nazi Germany fairly consistent for the duration of the war? Or were there certain developments that negatively affected their experience? What were these developments?
- There are many individual narratives, but little outside work exists that gives them scope.
- Can we say that we can develop a general idea of the experiences of these prisoners? Or were they so scattered, that experiences will vary according to the individual?

Facts and Figures

- 95,532 American servicemen were taken prisoner in Germany during the Second World War, a mixture of Airmen and Infantry.
- 23,554 American POWs were taken during the Battle of the Bulge, in December 1944.
- 54 total German prison camps were in operation over the course of the war, divided as follows: Stalags for infantry, Oflags for officers, and Luftstalags for airmen.



Locations of prison camps throughout Germany and surrounding area. Red denotes "Luftstalags", or camps for airmen. Blue denotes "Stalags, or camps for infantry. (Photo compliments of the Red Cross.)

Methodology

- Read narratives of both infantry and airmen from each year of the United States' involvement in the war, 1942-45.
- Visit the US Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, PA; use their collection of personal affections from prisoners, including diaries and letters
- Visit the National Archives in Washington, DC and peruse their vast collections of government materials related to the prisoners and their camps.
- Contact former prisoners and their families

