

Putnam County man recounts 4 escapes from POW camps during World War II

By Jill Thomas
Herald-Citizen Staff

COOKEVILLE -- When **Bud Maddux** talks about his World War II experiences, there's an almost irresistible temptation to respond admiringly, "That sounds like a movie."



But he doesn't smile when he tells his stories and later he admits there are other stories that he has no intention of telling and if there's a movie involved it's more like "Saving Private Ryan" than "The Great Escape."

Bud's given name is **Jim Smith Maddux**. He was born in 1922 in Buffalo Valley and has spent most of his life in Putnam County. Because of his middle name more than once his last name has been lost and he's been officially listed as "Jim Smith."

He was drafted in 1943 and at the end of his Army basic training a paratrooper came over and asked Maddux if he'd like to join the Parachute Infantry.

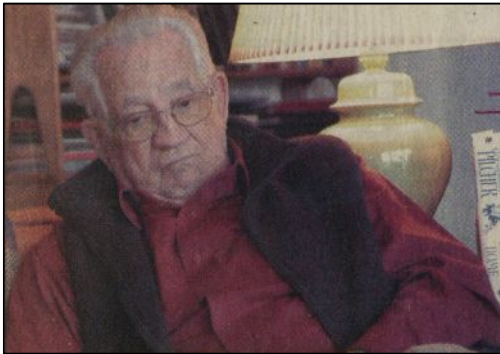
"I liked their uniforms and I liked the way the officers and men worked together. So I joined."

That training was so rigorous that Maddux felt it saved his life during the time he later spent in a prisoner-of-war camp in Czechoslovakia.

"In training we never walked anywhere -- we always ran. By the end of that training, I was one big muscle," he said.

When Maddux joined the paratroopers he weighed about 125 lbs. When he finished training he weighed about 160. After eight months in a POW camp digging coal in a mine in Czechoslovakia and living primarily on potatoes and bread, he came out weighing 125 again. Many of the other soldiers had lost so much weight they were emaciated, Maddux said.

On D-Day Maddux and his war buddies were flown 25 miles behind enemy lines and dropped into Germany with instructions to take a certain bridge and hold it for the American troops heading that way.



"We jumped at eight minutes after 2 a.m. Besides the parachute, I was carrying four lbs of soft TNT to blow up the bridge, a tripod for the machine gunner to use to keep the Germans off the bridge, my own rifle and ammunition.

"When I landed I never saw the boy who had the machine gun, never saw the bridge, never saw anyone from the original squad. We were scattered all over. No one was dropped where they should have been. I don't even know whether the plane made it back to England, it was being shot at after it dropped us," he said.

Maddux was captured and taken to the German command post.

There he was interrogated by an officer using excellent English kept asking questions about troop movements. Maddux answered with his name, rank and serial number. And then finally just kept saying, "I don't know."

Eventually Maddux learned that his interrogator had also been trained at Fort Benning in Georgia before he came back and joined the German Army.

"I think it was because of that that he finally let me go. At the end of the interrogation he gave me a cigarette. He didn't exactly wish me well, but he was clearly satisfied that I really didn't know anything."

Meanwhile, Bud's Mom heard the bad news that her son was missing in action. An Army Officer told her he was lost after the drop and then later let her know that he was alive but in a POW camp.

The Allied soldiers were put in Stalag 4B near Muleberg, Germany. After a month or so about 100 men were put on a train and taken for one ride after another.

"The first three months of POW days were the most miserable," Maddux said. "We were always on the move. We were mainly marching or riding a train. Or they put us in the boxcar and put the boxcar on the tracks with hopes that it would be shelled by Americans. For the first three months we had little food. For the first 14 days we had no solid food at all.

"One time we were just parked on the tracks when an elderly man and woman came to us with milk cans full of fresh milk. They gave each man a half-cup or so. It was wonderful."

Then one time the men were loaded on the boxcars and the train kept rolling all day and all night.

"They unloaded us out in the country. There were no buildings or anything. We marched for about an hour and came to a small camp in what we later learned was Czechoslovakia, near Pilsen. We didn't know where that was.

"We worked in a coal mine. It was a solid vein so we just loaded the coal carts. To get to the mine we had to take two separate elevators down and then walk seven miles (round trip) from the mouth to where we were digging."

For eight months the men dug the coal -- working long days, coming home to a small boiled potato and piece of bread.

"They made round loaves of bread which they made us divide into odd-numbered portions: 3, 5, or 7 pieces. They never allowed us to divide it into even numbered portions. We figured after a while this was just an odd numbering system that the German's had. We got to thinking they didn't know how to count any other way."

Once at the camp Maddux's mother's letters caught up with him. He was allowed to write her three letters in the following six months, but not allowed to tell her anything except he was alive and well.

The other "plus" for Maddux was that the man who ran the mining operations turned out to remind Maddux of his grandfather.

"He was a Czech and was interested in Americans and trying to learn English. His daughter was a teacher in the town. So the next time I received a letter from home I let her borrow it and sent it to her by way of her father.

"A few days later he brought it back with a note from her thanking me and wishing us well. After I read the note, my friend burned it so there'd be no evidence of the nice things his daughter wrote in support of the Americans," he said.

"It was a terrible life as a POW, but we had it better than any fighting soldier. I was young and single. I didn't have to worry about any family responsibilities except for knowing my parents would be concerned. It was hardest for those who had family to worry about.

There was one man who had been allowed to keep a photo of his wife and daughter and every so often he would get so discouraged about his situation that we were afraid he'd take his own life. When we saw that depression building up, we'd take turns starting a fight with him. We knew if we could get him mad enough to start swinging, he'd be okay. We took turns finding ways to get him out of his discouragement.

"After the war when we were being released in Miami, I met his wife. She was so proud that we had taken care of him. We took care of each other throughout the war," he said.

Probably because he was so young, Maddux felt it was his duty to try to escape. He succeeded in getting away from the camp four times, but was captured and brought back each time.

"Then the fifth time I tried, it was very near the end of the war and no one cared whether we escaped or not," he said.

The modus operandi for escaping from his captors was simple. He, and usually one or two others, simply didn't exit from the mine with the others but hid until everyone had cleared out.

"If I could do it again, I would never try to escape," the 83-year-old Maddux said this week.

"We didn't know where we were or where to go. We didn't know any German. It was kind of dumb when you think about it."

Each time Maddux escaped he was caught by young boys in whatever town they were passing through who recognized the POW clothes.

"These were 15 or 16 year old kids who were carrying weapons and just wanted a chance to shoot somebody. And sometimes they did," Maddux said.

But they never shot him and on the last escape attempt, made as the war was winding down, Maddux left with another prisoner who knew some German. The two traipsed across the fields.

"We were going we didn't know where. We finally saw a farmhouse and went up to buy some bread and milk. There in the kitchen sat two German soldiers!

"We later thought they were probably AWOL. We sat with them and had milk and a slice of bread. I had some American cigarettes and offered them to the Germans who accepted them. Then we got up and left. But it quite a ways before we felt safe enough that weren't going to shoot us in the back."

Later the two were spotted by some locals in a small town and taken by the mayor to a building that housed a number of other civilians, mainly women and children who were also hiding from the Nazis.

"The mayor got in touch with American forces and a driver came and picked them up and took them to an American Army camp.

There Maddux ran into Herbert Proffitt, a fellow Putnam Countian, serving in the signal corps. The two had about 15 minutes to catch up on things.

"We were glad to see each other, but mainly we wanted to be heading home," Maddux said.

At the camp the soldiers got new clothes, hot showers, and were "de-loused".

"Everybody had bugs," Maddux said.

The prisoners of war were flown to Le Havre and then put on a ship for New York.

"When I saw the "Lady in the Harbor" I simply flushed my mind of everything that had happened to me during the war," Maddux said.

He didn't start talking about it for years.

"I still don't talk about it much and I don't think about it. It doesn't bother me, but I've gotten it out of my mind," Maddux said.

"I wouldn't want to go through it again, but I wouldn't take anything for it either. Isn't that strange?"

Bud Maddux has many more stories: the one about how the camp doctor misdiagnosed a potentially dangerous ear infection. And the one about how a little string saved his life, but not the life of his crew, when he was preparing for a jump. Most of his stories show how he was protected throughout his time in the war.

Maddux gave credit for that protection to his mother and grandmother who he knew were praying for him day and night.

"But his grandmother was never afraid for him," said Maddux's wife of five years **Mary Ralph Maddux**.

"She always said, 'They won't hurt Buddy. He's too sweet.'"

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NOTES FROM BUD IN BUFFALO VALLEY: 12 July 1997

Jim Smith "Bud" Maddux was a paratrooper in WWII. He received his training in GA in special forces, then changed to paratroops.

He was in the Normandy invasion drop, not on the beach, but dropped near a main German camp where he was captured, then marched and rode in cattle cars until he reached coal mines where he had to dig coal. – 8 tons a day! He worked with an older Czechoslovakia man who received 2 slices of black bread smeared with lard (perhaps) daily. He would always give one to Bud.

Bud was given 1 potato a day, that was all his food except 1/5 of a loaf of every 3rd day. He had plenty of water, no soup, nothing else.

Bud thinks his rigorous training in GA was what saved his life.

The Czechoslovakia was a larger man, older who had a daughter who taught English in the coal mine community.

One day Bud was reading a letter from his mother, Mrs. Molly, and the Czechoslovakia wanted to take it home for his daughter to read. She sent him a note back but he couldn't keep it. The Czechoslovakia perhaps thought it might be found and they would be accused of collaborating.

Bud wishes he had the Czechoslovakia's address. The Czechoslovakia lost lots of weight while they dug coal.

Bud says he shouldn't have tried to escape because he couldn't speak French, German, ect. and he just had to hope someone would help him. He says he should have stayed with the Germans instead.

Bud says the paratroop drop was a suicide drop to divert the German's attention from the landing of our forces at Normandy.

Bud's GA training: 150 push-ups before breakfast, after breakfast till noon, 5 marches with heavy packs, and longer marches, sometimes 25 miles.

NEWS RECEIVED CONCERNING PVT. JAMES SMITH MADDUX

Pvt. James S. Maddux, son of Mr. and Mrs. C. L. Maddux, formerly of Buffalo Valley, but now of Oak Ridge, was released from a German prison and returned to military control, according to a message received from the War Dept. on May 31. Mr. and Mrs. Maddux are in receipt of another telegram dated June 5 stating that their son was being returned to the states and would be able to communicate with them in the near future.

Pvt. Maddux was serving with a Paratroop Division, participating in the Invasion of France, June 6, 1944, and was taken prisoner on June 10, and during his interment was in Czechoslovakia. The last news from him prior to his release was written January 3, 1945.

Putnam County Herald, TN: June 7, 1945.

Jim "Bud" Maddux Obt.

COOKEVILLE -- Funeral services for Jim (Bud) Maddux, 84, of Cookeville will be held Tuesday, June 12, at 11 a.m. at the Cookeville chapel of Hooper-Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home. Cookeville Masonic Lodge #266 F&AM will conduct a Masonic memorial service today, Monday, June 11, at 8 p.m. at the funeral home. Burial with military honors will be in Maddux Cemetery in Buffalo Valley.



Family will receive friends today, Monday, June 11, from 5-8 p.m. and Tuesday, June 12, from 10 a.m. until time of services at the funeral home.

Mr. Maddux died Sunday, June 10, 2007, at his residence.

He was born Dec. 21, 1922, in Buffalo Valley to the late Clarence Josiah and Mollie Foster Smith Maddux.

He was an Army veteran of World War II and a member of the 82nd Airborne, serving in the European Theatre of Operations as a paratrooper. Prior to the Normandy Invasion, his unit parachuted into France. He was a prisoner of war for over 11 months after being captured by the Germans in France, despite five attempts to escape. He neither bragged nor complained about his service. He later became very active in POW affairs and was a founding member of the EX-POW, Chapter 1, in Dearborn, Mich.

After returning from the war, he married and worked hard to raise his family. He was a retired long haul truck driver with Commercial Carriers, which enabled him to travel throughout the country, delivering products to 48 states. He was also a member of Teamster's Local Union 299 in Detroit, Mich.

He was awarded the American Theatre Ribbon, European-African-Middle Eastern Ribbon with a Bronze Star, Good Conduct Medal, Purple Heart and Distinguished Unit Badge. He was a member of American Legion Post 409 in Allen Park, Mich., and American Legion Post 46 in Cookeville. He was also a lifetime member of Lincoln Park Masonic Lodge #539 in Lincoln Park, Mich., and a member of Christ Community Church.

Mr. Maddux will be remembered as a man with strong opinions who was a good husband, father, grandfather and friend. He will be missed by many, remembered fondly and thought of often.

His family includes his wife, Mary Ralph Jared Maddux, (whom he married June 16, 2000, in Cookeville); his daughter, Susan Jones of Cookeville; two stepsons and stepdaughters-in-law, Ralph Grady and Kathy Maddux of Chattanooga and Freddie and Susan Maddux of Cookeville; two brothers, C.J. Maddux of Andersonville and Bill Maddux of Oak Ridge; three grandchildren, Patricia Ann Maddux, Mollie Jones and Erin Sims and husband, Margues; two step-grandchildren, Rachel and Sarah Maddux; and several nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews.

In addition to his parents, Mr. Maddux was preceded in death by his first wife, Essie Nell Kirby Maddux; his son, Daniel Josiah Maddux; and his sister, Frances Johnson.

Pallbearers will be members of Veteran's Honor Guard.

Memorial donations may be made to Lazarus House Hospice.

Rev. Ed Malone will officiate the services.

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