

# Virginians at War

## SSGT Bill Hulcher

### Resource Packet

Contains: Glossary, Timeline, Images, Discussion Questions, Additional Resources

**Program Description:** Virginians at War: WWII - Lawrence "Bill" Hulcher features Virginian SSGT Bill Hulcher, a B-17 Waist Gunner and Togglier telling the story of his plane being shot down over Europe and his amazing struggle for survival. Hear about SSGT Hulcher's experience being shot down over Czechoslovakia, being marched through Europe under the brutal watch of the Germans, and eventually his liberation and return home to America.

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**Length:** 11:39

**Streaming link:** <https://vimeo.com/367059724>

#### Featured Speakers:

SSGT Lawrence William "Bill" Hulcher, Richmond



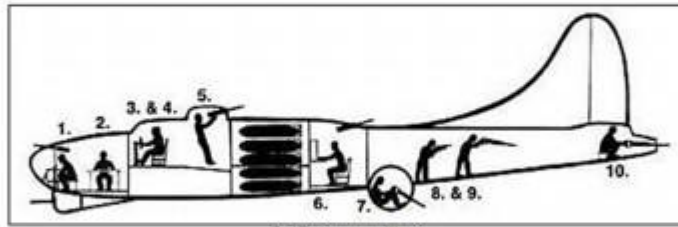
# GLOSSARY

## IMPORTANT TERMS

- **Ball turret gunner:** a soldier who mans a spherical mounted gun turret on the bottom of a plane
- **Luger:** Parabellum pistol; German-manufactured pistols used by the German Army during WWI and WWII; commonly taken as souvenirs by Allied troops
- **P 38:** Walter P.38; a 9mm German-manufactured pistol developed for the German Army at the beginning of WWII
- **POW:** Prisoner-of-War, anyone, although more often soldiers, who are captured and kept as enemy combatants by an opposing military
- **Silver Star Medal (SSM):** The third highest decoration in the United States' Armed Services given for valor in combat
- **Togglier:** Bombardier; a soldier who sits inside the nose cone of the plane and releases bombs; responsible for opening the bomb bay, arming the bombs, and flipping the toggle switch that released the bombs
- **Waist gunner:** a soldier who mans the machine guns mounted in the windows of a plane

# TIMELINE

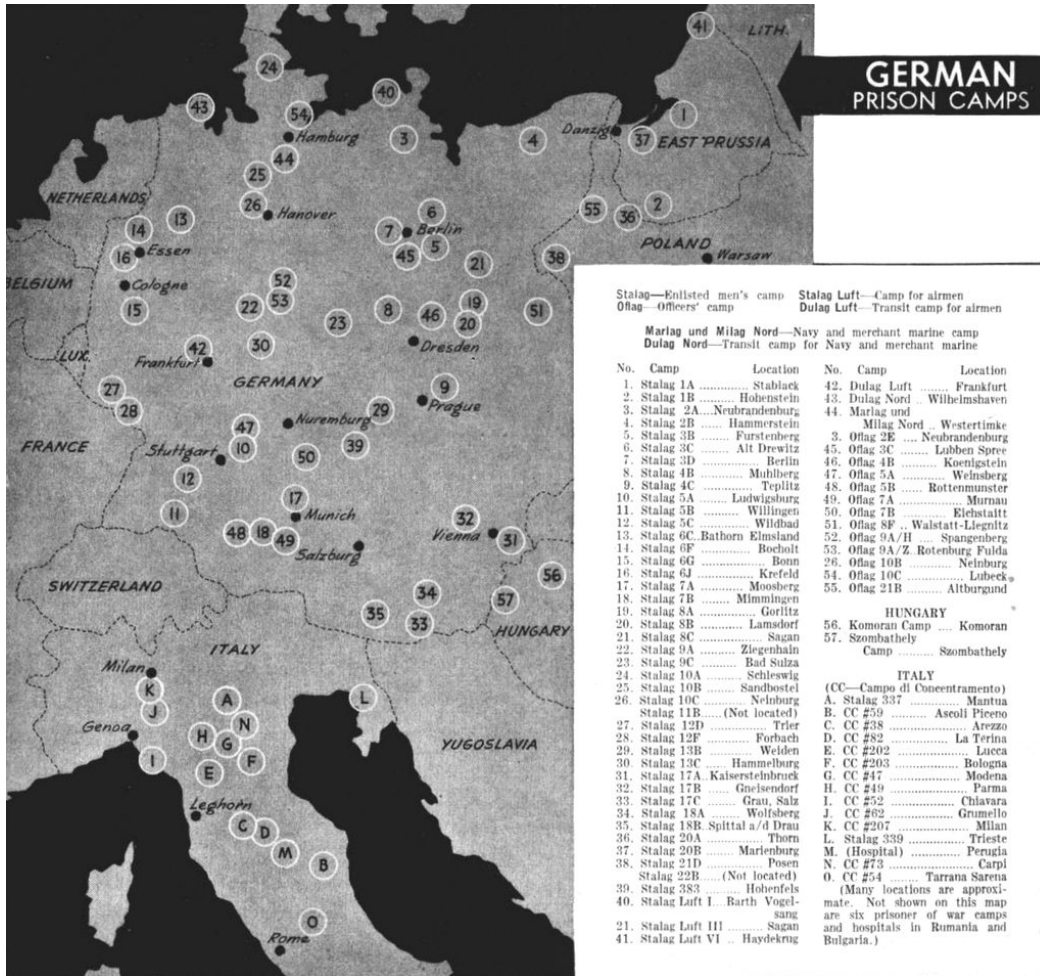
- **January 28, 1942-** Allied forces activate the VIII Bomber Command, the first operational element of the 8th Air Force, to coordinate and lead the air attack on Germany.
- **June 12, 1942-** In the first American mission against a European target, 12 U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) B-24 bomber planes attack the oil refineries at Ploesti, Romania.
- **July 1, 1942-** The first B-17 "Flying Fortress" arrives in Great Britain, earning its name from its heavy armament and ability to return from missions despite sustaining extensive damage.
- **August 17, 1942-** General Ira Eaker flies with the first B-17 Flying Fortress strike on occupied France.
- **April 1943-** American P-51 Mustang fighter planes fly their first mission over Europe.
- **August 1, 1943-** Allied bombers suffer heavy losses in an attack over a heavily fortified oil refinery at Ploetsi, Romania.
- **March 1944: The Bombing of Berlin-**The Allies bomb Berlin with 12,000 airmen, dropping thousands of tons of explosives.
- **August 1944-** Allied troops liberate Paris.
- **December 23, 1944-**After being initially hampered by bad weather, the 8th Air Force provides desperately needed air support to Allied troops engaged in the Battle of the Bulge. The bombers drop more tonnage than any other single day of the war, helping to turn the course of the battle.
- **March 7, 1945-** U.S. forces cross the Rhine River in Germany.
- **April 25, 1945-** The Luftwaffe shoots down five Allied bombers in a mission over Aussig, Czechoslovakia. These will be the last planes lost to the Luftwaffe.
- **May 8, 1945-** V-E Day — Europeans flock to the streets in celebration of the victory over the Nazis one day after the German Army surrendered to the Allied expeditionary force in Reims.



B-17 crew positions

1. Bombardier	6. Radio Operator/Gunner
2. Navigator	7. Ball Turret Gunner
3. Pilot	8. Right Waist Gunner
4. Co-Pilot	9. Left Waist Gunner
5. Top Turret Gunner/Engineer	10. Tail Gunner

(U.S. Army)



Map of German POW camps; SGT Hulcher was liberated in a camp near the border of Germany and Poland

(U.S. Navy)



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hus- Hicks,	<b>Army Missing</b> <b>Richmonders</b> HUTCHISON, William C., Pvt., son of Mrs. Lucy Hutchison, Route 12, in Europe.	DAY, band of Island.
hus- linson,	<b>HULCHER, Lawrence W.</b> , Sgt., brother of Mrs. Gertrude H. Mif- fleton, 3316 Floyd Ave., in Europe.	DON husband Fort B
son of Pfc.,	<b>European Regions</b> BECKNER, Grover A., Pfc., brother of Mrs. Mary E. E. Woods, Pearisburg.	HARI son of Tazewe
opkins,	BLACK, Gerald W., 1st Lt., son of Paul S. Black, Luray.	MAR husband chese,
t., son gspur.	BLANKENSHIP, Walter R., Pfc., son of Mrs. Naomi Blanken- ship, Harrisonburg.	MAR band of Exmore
son of ville.	BOND, James W., Sgt., son of Mrs. Carrie F. Bond, Coeburn.	McCO Sgt., s
, Cpl., hnson,	HONAKER, Efner K., Pfc., son of Mrs. Bessie Honaker, Honaker.	Lefever McDA son of
son of n,	JAMES, Joe W., Pfc., brother of Mrs. Bessie James, Bondtown.	Martins

Newspaper list of missing servicemen, including Bill Hulcher,  
April 19, 1945

(Richmond Times Dispatch)





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were some of the major difficulties for POWs in the Second World War?
2. In telling his story, what were major aspects of Sergeant Hulcher's experience that seemed to stick with him most?
3. In WW2, many POW camps were liberated by any number of different armies, be they American, British, or even Soviet. Which army liberated Hulcher and his fellow prisoners? Would it have been different if it were anyone else?
4. Did the danger to troops end after the war ended? What are examples of how battlefields and combat situations remain dangerous even after an enemy has left?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about the experiences of Virginians in World War II, view *Virginians at War: WWII Home Front* and other films at [vawarmemorial.org](http://vawarmemorial.org). Looking to do more research? Check out the links below.

- Article from the Air force Museum talking about how pilots evaded enemy capture. [Link](#)
- National WWII museum look at the camps of American soldiers waiting to return to the US. [Link](#)
- Interview with American togglier. [Link](#)
- Simple overview of the crew and mission of the B-17 bomber- [Link](#)