

ROUTE AND HISTORICAL REFERENCE

Billie's Journey

A printable chronology, route, and reference sheet for the real wartime account behind *A Very Present Help*.



CRAIG A. HART

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From capture to homecoming

Stop	When	What happened
Lorraine	Sep. 20, 1944	Captured during an attempt to take a village on a hill.
Rail transport	Sep. 1944	Three days and four nights in a crowded boxcar with almost no food or water.
Limburg	Autumn 1944	Transit camp, forced work, hunger, preaching, and air raids.
Moosburg	Winter 1944	Stalag VII-A as the parcel and transport systems deteriorated.
Munich	Jan.-Apr. 1945	Farm work detail, severe hunger, and the war's final collapse.
Reims	Spring 1945	Westward movement and Allied processing after liberation.
Le Havre	July 1945	Embarkation aboard the Marine Dragon.
New York	Homecoming	Arrival beneath a great WELCOME HOME sign.

The thread that survived

Billie's service record was among the cohort devastated by the 1973 National Personnel Records Center fire. The family account - capture, boxcar, Psalm 46, camps, farm labor, the deer, the lost Bible, and homecoming - became the factual spine of the novel.

Quick reference

People and institutions

- Billie S. Hoof - Craig A. Hart's grandfather and the real Army private whose account inspired the novel.
- David Hart - a fictional composite and 'wish' who investigates the surviving clues.
- National Personnel Records Center - repository where the 1973 fire destroyed millions of service records.
- International Committee of the Red Cross - coordinated parcels that depended on a failing rail network.
- Graves Registration - Army service responsible for recovering and identifying the dead.

Places

- Lorraine - the costly campaign landscape where Billie was captured.
- Limburg an der Lahn - rail junction and location of the Stalag XII-A transit camp.
- Moosburg - Bavarian town containing Stalag VII-A, Germany's largest POW camp.
- Munich - location of Billie's farm work detail and the modern excavation plot.
- Reims and Le Havre - stages in the westward processing and repatriation route.

Use the route

- 01 Choose one stop. What was happening in the wider war at that moment?
- 02 Mark where family account ends and documented historical context begins.
- 03 Compare the real route with the novel's compressed geography.
- 04 Identify one location where the modern landscape conceals or reveals the past.
- 05 Ask what WELCOME HOME means after ten months of captivity - and after decades of incomplete memory.

Explore the interactive companion

Visit craigahart.com/book-clubs for the selectable journey, Fact or Fiction file, Discussion Room, historical field notes, and additional resources.