

PRISONER – STALAG LUFT III - ESCAPE

Written by Robert Slane

(Note: This true story is a continuation of the “REVIEW of EVENTS” previously published under the title “SCHWEINFURT” by Robert M. Slane. That article is included in the “Stories” section of the 91st Bomb Group Web Site.)

After crash-landing my B-17 aircraft adjacent to the small village in France, I was captured at the aircraft by two men dressed in civilian clothing . I was searched before being placed in the front seat of the Ford car the men had driven on to the field and parked near my downed aircraft.

In the back seat of this vehicle was another prisoner, handcuffed with both feet loosely tied. He, the prisoner, had a broad face with wild blond hair. He appeared to be of Slavic or Polish nationality and he cringed when my German captor threatened him with what appeared to be a hard rubber hose.

It was only a short drive off the field where I crash-landed to the outskirts of the village. We, the prisoners, were taken out of the car and walked up a dirt floor corridor between a house and a row of walled prison cells. The first cell door was opened and the other prisoner was shoved into a dark looking hole. I was taken further up the corridor and placed in a similar cell. When the door was closed the cell was pitch black. The only source of light was a “peephole” in the door. The cell had a sort of bench-bed about two feet off the ground. The walls were stone and concrete but the floor appeared to be hardened dirt or adobe.

I had been in the cell for about half an hour when the cell door was opened and I was led outside into the corridor. Two Germans, in military uniform, were waiting to question me. The questioning started with an inquiry as to whether I was hungry. I said “yes” although I had no thought of food but felt I should eat if food was offered in order to keep up my strength. The next questions were related to members of my crew, “how many were aboard the aircraft” and was I “concerned about their safety since some might be injured and need medical assistance”? I was unresponsive to any of these questions as I repeatedly showed them my dog -tags and again stated “name , rank and serial number”. Finally, they did get my attention when they pointed out that one member of my crew had been killed. I requested them to let me see and identify the crew member. With that request denied, I was returned to my cell. There was no further mention of food.

For the next several hours I sat on the bench ,leaning on the wall with my feet also resting on the bench. My mind was racing , going over, and over, and over, the events of the past few hours. I wondered what had happened to Glen Foster. It couldn't have been his body the Germans discovered behind the bulkhead or was it possible he had made it back to where the tail gunner, Sgt Smith, was reported to be unconscious? “What happened to the flare gun”? “Why didn't I carry matches so I could have destroyed the aircraft”? “Why, once I was out of the aircraft and hidden in a thicket, did I go back”? I knew the answer was because I had to, it was my duty, my responsibility as the crew commander. “If I had been able to destroy the aircraft, would the Germans have been able to identify the body found behind the bulkhead”? Maybe it was best that I was unable to destroy the aircraft for just that reason. “What happened to Bill Runner, the bombardier, who was waving from the ground as I came in over the field just before crash-landing”? “Did the rest of the crew make it safely to the ground”? These were the types of thoughts that plagued me during those first hours of captivity.

My eyes gradually adjusted to the darkness of the cell and I found a wooden bucket in a corner near the door. I removed the lid and the stench was suffocating. It was obvious this bucket had not been emptied for a long time. I returned to the bench using the fur collar of my flight jacket as a breathing mask until the smell receded.

I had been in the cell for four or five hours when I heard voices and my cell door opened. A German guard, lantern in hand, entered and with him was a young man dressed as though he were a motorcyclist. He had on a black leather jacket, leather pants and boots. He was about my size - 5 foot, 7 or 8 inches tall. He was dark complexioned and spoke with what sounded to me like a French accent. He spoke some English and when, without warning or apparent cause, he suddenly drew his pistol, I thought he might be an agent in the French Underground and was perhaps going to liberate me. That thought was short-lived as he suddenly grabbed my flying helmet and jerked it off my head. He then demanded that I give him my watch. I did so, but when he demanded my pilot wings I told him "no" and after two attempts to take them from me, with me resisting by covering the wings with my arms, he suddenly turned to the German guard, muttered something and left. The guard then departed and I was left to return to my own thoughts until morning.

With daylight the next morning, I had a better view of my surroundings and more light was coming through the hole in the door. Just above my head, where I had been sitting all night, was a great circular web containing a spider with a body the size of a quarter. I shuddered with the thought that it might have been crawling on me. I managed to relocate my position on the bench away from the immediate vicinity of the spider and spent the next hour or so trying to figure the best way to get rid of this new menace. Since I didn't have access to any weapon to kill it, I decided to let well enough alone with the hope that I could eventually get a guard to assist me in cleaning out the toilet and taking care of the spider.

About three hours after daybreak, I heard the cell door open and I was again taken out of the cell. I was escorted to a large room in the house. This room was filled with men of all ages. They were all seated in various locations around the room. Some of the men were armed with rifles, others had sticks that could be used as weapons. They appeared to be ordinary workers and for the most part, were dark haired, dark complexioned. None spoke as I was put on display by the Germans. They just appeared to be curious. I assumed they were part of the local search force that the Germans were using to track down allied airmen.

From that room I was taken to what appeared to be a kitchen. I was allowed to sit at one of the tables and was served a bowl of what looked like potato soup and a chunk of very hard, stale bread. The old woman who served me would not look directly at me and she was unresponsive to any conversation attempted by the German guards.

I didn't like the smell of the soup and I was only able to gag down one spoon full. The potatoes used in the soup had to be rotten. While I was trying to chew on the bread the old woman poured herself a bowl of the same soup and standing in front of the stove she took a spoon full of the soup. She tried to swallow but instead gagged and vomited the soup back into the bowl. She looked around the room, the guard had his back to her. Seeing that she was not being observed by the guard she took her bowl and dumped the contents back into the pot on the stove. She then turned toward me and looked me straight in the eye. There was a look of defiance on her face replacing the previous look of total indifference. We were two people who shared a secret. Her hate for the Germans was obviously deep rooted.

After leaving the kitchen I again requested that I be allowed to see the body of my crew member. There was no response to this request, but I was told that the airman was named "Schmidt" and that he had

been shot in the chest and the wounds were massive. I was returned to my cell with little accomplished except for the information about Sgt. Claud Smith.

It was sometime in the afternoon that my cell door was again opened and I was taken out into the corridor. This time I was facing a Luftwaffe Officer. He was wearing eagle wings surrounded by a wreath. I assumed that he was a pilot and perhaps one of the pilots who helped down our aircraft. He had an English speaking soldier with him. His only question was regarding my age. He seemed amused when I refused to answer his question and when I responded by pointing to the information on my dog tags. He had me take my sheep lined jacket off and he then felt the material of my shirt. The shirt was a thin summer khaki long sleeve. He may have intended to take the jacket, but did not when he realized the shirt would not provide much protection against the cold. The jacket was returned to me. After a brief conversation with the interpreter the German officer spoke directly to me in German. I didn't understand his conversation and his interpreter provided no help. After a short conversation in German with the guard the Luftwaffe officer departed and it was back to the prison cell for me.

I dozed for a brief time and when awakened was relieved to see that the spider had climbed to a new and higher position in the web. I wondered if perhaps it could sense my desire to rid the cell of its presence. I didn't relish the thought that I might have to spend another night with the spider present in the cell.

Late in the afternoon I heard increased activity in the corridor and the sound of marching foot steps. My cell door opened and a guard led me down the corridor. Outside the building was a line of about ten or twelve soldiers. They were all armed. My immediate thought was that this was a "Firing Squad". The guard had me go over to the corner of a building and I was shocked to see Joe Johnson, the co-pilot, and the engineer, top-turret gunner, Sherman Sly coming around the building. I felt a surge of relief when it appeared that they were uninjured. The three of us were directed to climb aboard a truck. The truck bed was covered with a canvas top and had seats along the sides and also had benches facing the rear of the truck. Four guards boarded the truck, one on either side bench and two sat on a bench in front of the tail-gate facing forward. Johnson sat next to me and we were both facing the rear of the truck.

We had no way of knowing where we were going or what was in store for us and admittedly there remained some fear that we were going to face a firing squad. It was nightfall before we made our next stop and when three more members of my crew were placed aboard the truck I had mixed feelings of joy and despair. Vic Kuhlman, the radio operator, was badly injured. He had made a successful bailout, but during descent had become tangled in the shroud lines. He struck the ground shoulder first and was in severe pain. He had received no treatment since capture. We managed to place him on one of the side-benches in the truck. Lou Brown, the ball-turret gunner and Robert Solomon, waist-gunner were picked up with Vic Kuhlman. Still unaccounted for was Charles Groth -waist gunner, the navigator, Glen Foster and Bill Runner, the bombardier. I had to assume that the body found in the aircraft was the tail-gunner, Claud Smith.

As we traveled I attempted to read the road signs but only the cities of Metz and Nancy were familiar to me. We passed through many small villages and the thought continuously crossed my mind that we should try to escape. All of our "escape" training programs emphasized that if at all possible, "try to escape from your captors prior to being placed in a permanent POW prison,"- "opportunity for successful escape would best be accomplished while being transported from one area to another." It appeared to me that positioning the two guards on a bench attached to the tail gate and facing us was almost inviting someone to leap up and push them over the back of the tail-gate.

I still had on heavy flying boots over my shoes. I would need to remove them before making any decision to attempt to leap out the rear of the truck. I slowly unzipped one boot, but when I attempted to take the boot off, the guard sitting nearest me on the side bench spoke to me and pointed his gun at my chest. Needless to say I didn't attempt to unzip the other boot. Even if I had been able to remove the boots I knew that there would be considerable risk in any attempt to rush the guards, but every time the truck slowed the thought crossed my mind that I could knock the guard facing us overboard, leap over the tailgate and disappear in the darkness.

Realistically, I knew that any escape attempt would be foolhardy unless every crew member had knowledge of and could react in a coordinated escape plan. Also, we had one member badly injured and his safety had to be considered. Still, with the thought of being a prisoner and facing an unknown future, I was fighting an inward battle with my emotions as I contemplated a situation that seemed hopeless.

We finally arrived at a railroad station. The guards formed a circle around us and we were herded into a waiting room. The civilians were ordered to vacate this area and we were alone with the guards. Vic Kuhlman was in pain and was shaking from shock and the chilly weather. We found a place for him to sit, but the chills persisted. There was a table in the center of the room containing a stack of blankets and I finally went over to the table, took a blanket and we wrapped it around Kuhlman. One of the guards rushed forward shouting as he pushed me backward. His tirade continued as I tried to explain that our friend needed help. Another guard finally came forward and talked to his comrade and calmed him down. When out of their hearing range, Kuhlman said in a very low voice, "He says you didn't ask permission". I realized then, for the first time, that Kuhlman could speak and understand German. He had been aware of their conversations since capture but was too frightened to let them know that he was raised in a German speaking household. Kuhlman told me that he could understand every word said in his presence by the Germans. This revelation was quite a surprise for all of us. I assured Victor that we would be careful not to compromise his secret. I requested him to listen carefully and let me know about any information he might hear with respect to our present location, proposed destination or anything else of significance with respect to our status.

We were under constant surveillance by the guards but were allowed to talk in low tones among ourselves. I asked Joe Johnson if he had been questioned about Sgt. Smith and he indicated that he had not. He mentioned that he and S/Sgt Sly had been fed earlier in the day and the soup was "delicious". He had eaten two bowls full of the potato soup. I made no mention of my own experience. Hopefully they had been served their soup from another source.

After about a two hour wait, we boarded a passenger train. The guards moved people out of their seats to make room for us and there was considerable grumbling by those who had to relinquish their seats as they tried to relocate. The other travelers appeared to be just ordinary citizens and for the most part appeared to be French citizens. It was difficult to fathom their thoughts with respect to our presence, but it was obvious that we were not the first prisoners they had encountered.

The lights were dim in the train and outside was total darkness. Kuhlman was in pain and every jolt of the train aggravated his shoulder injury. His low moans brought looks of sympathy from some of the surrounding passengers. One of the guards finally offered us a blanket. By folding the blanket we were able to place it under his shoulder and this action seemed to lessen the pain.

We were on the train the rest of the night and arrived at a prison out side Frankfort, Germany early in the morning. We were lined up in columns, counted, then marched into a prison compound. This was a "Dulag Luft," an interrogation center where we were finally told we would spend a period of time prior

to being sent to a “permanent” prisoner of war camp. The officer crew members were separated from the enlisted crew members and it was rumored that we would be sent to different “permanent” prison camps. We should have been aware of this, but I had forgotten that part of the lecture and I got a sick feeling watching my crew members marched off to “God knows where”. “Would I ever see them again”?

My name was called and I was placed with a group of officer prisoners. Joe Johnson and I were separated as he was called to join another group. We, my group of ten or so officers, were taken to a fairly large room. The room was not a cell but was just an ordinary room with a locked door. I knew none of the other airmen but in conversation discovered that most had been shot-down on the Schweinfurt mission (14 Oct.43). There were no chairs so most of us just slumped against the wall. Someone mentioned that we should keep our voices low, that probably the reason we were in a room without a guard was that in our discussion we would provide information of use to the enemy. There was some logic to that advice and the conversations became guarded.

For the first hour or so, the big topic was cigarettes. Who had a cigarette or tobacco? The heavy smokers were getting desperate. All of the smokers began a search through their clothing. Matches were at a premium as most of the cigarette lighters had been confiscated. One man had “roll your own” cigarette paper and others were using toilet paper to make cigarettes. Pockets were turned inside out to collect any tobacco that could be extracted from the lint. Anyone who lit a cigarette would share with others. For most of us this was the beginning of shared hardship that in some cases might be the difference between life and death. I was thankful that I didn’t smoke.

One by one the names of prisoners were called out and those departing did not return to this “holding” room. I was one of the last to be called and was taken down a corridor, out into the open and into another block of prison cells. This area was where prisoners were held in solitary confinement. The cell was small, maybe six by nine feet. A single low watt bulb was located in the center of the ceiling. High on the rear wall was a glassless, barred window. By standing on the cot, one could look out and view a sort of square court yard. The buildings surrounding this square, open area, all appeared to be prison cells with the same type of window as the cell I occupied. During my imprisonment in this cell I often saw faces peering out of these windows.

I had been in confinement for about three hours when I became aware of a guard looking at me through the small barred glass window in the door. This was standard procedure for the guards, to periodically look in each cell, day and night. Once a day each prisoner was escorted to a latrine in the building and permitted to use the facilities and wash up before return to confinement. I had eaten nothing except the stale piece of bread since capture and I did not take time to examine the contents of the small bowl of pea or bean soup served to me that first day of solitary confinement. I was very hungry and the soup was delicious. The bread served with the soup had some kind of spread that had little taste, but it was good.

The standard daily menu was a slice of bread in the morning with some type of hot drink that was a substitute for coffee. The mid-day food consisted of a cup of barley or pea soup and a slice of bread. Supper was another slice of bread with a spread of some unknown type of margarine or red jelly spread. It wasn’t exactly a diet of “bread and water” but it was close.

I found that by pushing the cot up to the rear wall I could look out the barred window and also listen in on the conversations of prisoners in adjacent cells. This method of communication must have been known to our captors but was evidently permitted. Perhaps this was one method used to gain information. The second day of imprisonment in the Dulag, I was at my window and listened to some

one named Rose tell a story of his bailout. He was in the nose of his aircraft attempting to put his chute on when the aircraft blew up. He was blown out of the exploding aircraft and right next to him was his parachute - floating in the air. Rose said he grabbed the chute snapped it on and pulled the ripcord.

I was still trying to visualize Rose's story when the prisoner he had been conversing with began to tell his experiences. He began by saying he had delayed opening his parachute in order to lessen the chance for capture. He said that after he was on the ground he waved to his pilot as the B-17 was flown at low altitude over his landing area. He then described how shortly after waving to his pilot a low flying German twin engine plane had fired at him. He was unhurt except for a shell fragment that went through his shoe and embedded under his big toe. I was stunned when I heard this conversation and I called out, "Runner, is that you"? Of course it was Bill Runner, our crew bombardier, and his response was immediate. He reported that he had been free for two days after bailout before seeking help from a man who appeared to be a French worker. He was taken to a house, given some food and then was turned over to the Germans. He had not escaped as I had hoped, but at least he was alive, unhurt and accounted for.

After two days of solitary I found that I was getting an increasing number of itchy lumps on various parts of my body. I didn't know whether it was "bed bugs" from the straw mattress on the cot or fleas of some type. I spent part of each day exercising with periodic push-ups and squats to keep my legs in shape. I removed my outer clothing from time to time to search for and kill fleas. I had difficulty sleeping as my mind kept reviewing the events that had suddenly changed my life and I tried to visualize the impact it would have on our families and loved ones back home. I wondered what my future would be like. I just couldn't seem to accept the fact that I was a prisoner and had no control over my own destiny. I made a firm resolve to provide only name, rank and serial number to anyone who might interrogate me. I prayed to God to give me strength and the perseverance to face any hardship that might befall me. I made a vow to myself that I would escape if the least opportunity presented itself.

On the fourth day of solitary I was taken to the office of my interrogator. A tall, distinguished-looking German Officer was standing at his desk as I entered the room. Seated at another desk in the room was a young woman. I assumed that she was the interrogator's secretary. I was invited to sit in a comfortable chair facing the interrogator's desk. At first there were no questions, as the Luftwaffe officer spoke in clear English, reviewing some of the facts he already had. He noted that I was flying an aircraft assigned to another Squadron and wondered, aloud, if perhaps the 401st Sq. suffered such a high loss rate on the previous mission to Anklam that the squadron could not fully support the Schweinfurt mission. I didn't know at the time what the loss rate was on the Anklam mission but I did know it was high and that was probably the reason my crew was assigned to fly an aircraft that was not only assigned to another squadron, but was at that time not considered a "combat ready" aircraft by the aircraft's crew chief.

Receiving no response from me regarding his probably very accurate assessment of the aircraft loss problem, he continued by telling me that I was a "little late" in arriving in England and that the majority of my provisional group arrived ahead of me. Again he was right. We had delayed two days at Bangor, Main for repairs from a hail storm encountered in route to Bangor from Grand Island, Nebraska. Standing behind his desk, he opened what appeared to be a large ledger or book. He then informed me that I was in pilot class 43A, graduating on the 4th of January. He appeared to run his finger down a column and then advised me that many of my classmates were already "guests of the Reich." He asked me if I remembered a classmate named Chester Lott. He informed me that I would be able to join Lott at a main prison camp as soon as I was released from the Dulag.

It was now time for some questions, but first he asked about my health and general treatment. For the first time I spoke and told him that my cell contained fleas or some type of bug and that I was afraid of infection from the bites. He stepped forward, had me raise my shirt above my abdomen and viewed the swellings on my chest. He then glanced at bites on my leg. He assured me that he would provide some relief, but that he needed my assistance on just one problem. He then went on to explain that there had been some recent changes of personnel in the 401st Sq. and that he didn't have the name of the new commander of the squadron. He went on to say that he knew that a Captain McPartlin had recently taken over as operations officer but all he needed was for me to verify the name of the newly assigned Squadron Commander. Once again I provided no response. The German officer then directed his secretary to call for a guard escort to return me back to my cell.

I was surprised to find that I was not taken to my previous cell but was taken to a cell that appeared to be located in the same building where the interrogation took place. Adjacent to the large barred cell where I was placed was a shower room. After a few minutes in this new cell, a guard appeared with soap and a large towel. Apparently my appeal for some relief from the fleas had been given some consideration. The guard indicated to me that I was to strip and he would collect my clothing for cleaning or delousing. I removed my wings, and insignia and entered the shower room carrying only my underwear and shoes. The shower was the first chance to clean up since being captured and the soap helped to relieve the itching and burning from the bites.

After the shower I was returned to the adjacent cell, but discovered that my clothing had not been returned. Fortunately the temperature was not cold in the cell because I was now without my flying jacket, flight boots, trousers, shirt and socks. I sat on the cot in the cell, wearing only under clothing and shoes as I contemplating the turn of events and reviewed the one-sided discussion with the interrogator. It was very apparent that the German officer had gained, perhaps only recently, a great amount of knowledge concerning our mission. I suspected that he already knew the name of the squadron commander of the 401st Sq. Major Gillespie was the commander, but I had no idea how long he had been the commander. In fact, my crew was so new in the organization that we were acquainted with only a few members of the B-17 crew force.

It was several hours before I saw or heard another voice, and by this time it was apparent that I had made a big mistake by complaining about the vermin bites. I was now in a location that was completely isolated from the other prisoners and there were no windows to peer out side. I remembered the discussions by other prisoners while in the previous cell that the average stay at the Dulag was 7 days and supposedly, by that time, the Germans had either decided the prisoner had no information of value or the information obtained was sufficient to satisfy the interrogator. There were rumors that several prisoners were still in solitary confinement after several weeks and these prisoners were probably those who had been captured days or weeks after their aircraft had been shot down. Some had been hidden by "under-ground" operatives prior to capture by the Germans.

When the guard brought a cup of soup and bread late in the evening I asked for the return of my clothing. The guard shrugged and left without further acknowledgment of any kind. I remained in my underwear for the next two days, seeing no one but a guard to escort me to a latrine once a day and provide me with water and bread three times a day. I was no longer being served the daily cup of soup and I was becoming increasingly aware of being very hungry. The only advantage to the new cell location was that there were no apparent new flea or bed-bug bites.

It was the third day of confinement since the interrogation and I still had no clothing. Sometime in the morning I was lying on the cot, half-asleep, when the cell door suddenly opened and a guard handed

me a huge, heavy overcoat. He grinned and exclaimed “Rooski , Rooski,” several times as he motioned for me to put the coat on. This coat had belonged to a large man and when I put it on my hands were buried in the sleeves and the coat hung only inches above the floor. The guard continued to grin as he led me out of the cell and back to the interrogation room. The same German officer- interrogator met me at the door of his office and pointed to the chair in front of his desk. His glance at me was also one of amusement. I tried not to show my embarrassment but I was seated with nothing on but shorts, shoes and the overcoat. The guard had addressed the officer as Hauptmann, so I finally realized that the officer was a Captain. Although he had introduced himself at the beginning of the first interrogation, his name continued to elude me.

The interrogation began with a question as to whether or not I had been assisted in care for the flea bites. He had me open the overcoat and he gave a cursory glance at the condition of the swellings. After this brief examination I told him that I needed my clothing, flying boots and jacket returned. His response was that I had been provided an opportunity to tell him the name of the “new” 401st Bomb Squadron Commander and that my degree of cooperation would assist me in obtaining my clothing and insure that I would be sent to a an established prisoner of war camp where I would receive clothing , have comfortable living conditions, letters from home and freedom from solitary confinement. I once again stated that I would provide only my name, rank and serial number. This meeting was short. The German Officer informed me that in view of my lack of cooperation he could not predict when, if ever, I would be sent to the main prison camp. I was again escorted back to my cell.

Late that same afternoon the guard reappeared and informed me that I was to be transferred to another prison camp. I told him I would not go willingly unless I had adequate clothing. A second guard showed up and after a discussion left the area only to reappear with something rolled up into a ball. Both guards entered the cell and it was obvious from their actions that they would not hesitate to use force if necessary to remove me from the cell.

I was handed an old blue heated flying suit. These suits were shaped like winter long-johns; had a flap opening in the rear and a plug-in cord dangling at the waist. Designed to be worn under the flying clothing and plugged into an electric heat outlet in the aircraft, they were utilized primarily by the waist gunners and some lower ball turret gunners as protection from the freezing air encountered at high altitudes. I had no choice but to put on this oversized monstrosity. Outside the building a formation of prisoners was being assembled. The two escort guards left as soon as I got in line with other airmen scheduled for departure to a new prison location. The apparel worn by the prisoners was, for the most part, that which they were wearing when captured. I was the only one in sight with an open-flapped electric flying suit topped by an overcoat that once belonged to some Russian giant. Bill Runner was also in the formation and his reaction when he saw me was total disbelief followed by laughter. I joined him in laughter and in so doing lessened the inward humiliation I was fighting to control. I decided that I would just have to stop worrying about my appearance and concentrate on staying healthy and most important, alive.

After arrival at the rail station in Frankfort, we were marched through crowds of civilians to gain entrance to the main terminal. The guards were distributed along the slow moving line of prisoners and except for silent stares there was little reaction from the viewers. I felt particularly vulnerable with my strange attire and tried to keep my eyes focused on the line of prisoners ahead of me. I did note that the huge terminal was covered with a glass ceiling and I was surprised to see that, despite our bombing raid on the 4th of October, there was not a single broken pane of glass in this massive ceiling. This was a mystery to me as I was certain a rail terminal in Frankfort was the primary target on that date.

We boarded small railroad cars. There were no windows in the section utilized by the prisoners, but there was one small, iron-barred opening for ventilation on the outside wall. Two-man wooden, high-back bench seats, facing forward, were separated by a middle aisle. At the rear entrance was a small compartment that was utilized by the German guards. That compartment had a glass front view that permitted the guards to monitor prisoner activities. Across the aisle opposite the guard compartment was a small toilet-room. There was seating space for about forty prisoners. Bill Runner was seated just ahead of the guard compartment. I had hoped to get a seat with him, but by the time I boarded the adjacent seat was taken so I had to move forward to a seat in the middle of the boxcar. I wanted to hear the details of his capture, discuss our present situation and perhaps come up with some sort of escape plan.

It was relatively quiet in the rail car the first hour or so of travel. Each prisoner was facing an uncertain future; some were still recovering from injuries and others had not yet recovered from the shock of recent events. Death or severe injury to fellow crew members, survival of a parachute bailout or crash landing of an aircraft, capture and in some instances harsh treatment by the enemy and the recent period of solitary confinement had resulted in a sobering and deeply emotional response in all of us.

For the first time since capture we were offered food from Red Cross parcels and one of the guards distributing the food was friendly and very talkative. He announced that he had lived for many years in Chicago and he was interested in knowing if any prisoners were from Chicago. His friendly attitude and discussion with various prisoners produced a change in the mood of the majority of the prisoners and soon the prisoners were talking with the German guards and also relating their experiences with each other. Bill Runner, possessing an engaging and outgoing personality, entered the compartment where the guards were seated and was able to gain the information that we were being transported to a Prisoner of War camp at Sagan, Germany. The camp was an Allied Officer Prison primarily for air crew members and was located southeast of Berlin.

My own thoughts were centered on only one objective; to escape before arrival at the new prison camp. I was able to get Bill Runner's attention and he came forward to my location. I told him that I was considering leaping out of the rear entrance of the railcar during one of its frequent stops and that I would need his help. It was obvious that I could not wear the Russian overcoat during any escape attempt. The weather was fairly mild outside but I would need a jacket of some type to wear over the heated suit. Bill volunteered his A-2 flying jacket. The guards, two of them, were sitting relaxed in their compartment and were eating and at times talking with various prisoners who were permitted to stand in the opening of the compartment. Their pistols were holstered and their rifles stacked in a corner. There were glass windows in the compartment and anyone seated near that compartment could see outside and determine whether or not the train was stopping at a station or pulling into a siding to permit another train to pass. Since he was seated near the compartment, Bill had the advantage of being able to see the outside surroundings and could signal me to go to the rear of the railcar. The plan was for him to engage the guards in conversation and I would leave my seat, walk down the aisle, and shove Bill into the compartment and in the subsequent confusion exit the train through the rear opening. I pointed out to Bill that he would probably be at greater risk than I, but he felt he could explain to the guards that he was an innocent victim. Bill Runner indicated that he would risk his life to help me.

Well, anyway, that was the plan. I put on Bill's A-2 jacket and sat with my feet in the aisle. The overcoat was to be left behind. I could feel the adrenalin surging through my body as I sat there waiting for a signal from Runner. During this wait, two prisoners approached me. One was a navigator with his arm in a cast who had been seated with me and he was the spokesman for both men. He had overheard

part of the discussion I had with Bill Runner and he was very agitated. He expressed the fear that if I escaped I would be jeopardizing the lives of all of the rest of the prisoners. It was his opinion that in all likelihood the guards would shoot the remainder of the prisoners. My initial reaction to his remarks was one of anger. I told him that if he was satisfied to be a prisoner, then so be it, but that all of us had a responsibility to escape if and when the opportunity presented itself.

I had to acknowledge to myself that I had given no thought, other than putting Runner in a precarious position, to the impact an escape attempt would have on the other prisoners. In fact, I just assumed they all felt as I did, but perhaps without the same conviction. Some were like the navigator, recovering from wounds and would be unable to escape; others were so traumatized by their experiences that they were satisfied for the time being just to be alive and out of solitary confinement. Still, I felt that each person had to make an escape decision for themselves and I had difficulty in accepting any other viewpoint.

The complaining navigator exchanged his seat next to me with another prisoner and it was obvious from his demeanor and actions that he was continuing to voice his fears to anyone who would listen. Bill Runner was aware that there was a problem of some sort and once again came up the aisle where we could talk. I told him of the dissent by my former seatmate and after further discussion with him I decided to delay any attempt to escape. I didn't know whether or not that decision was based on the fearful attitude of a fellow prisoner or my own self doubts about my escape plan once it had been challenged. I really hadn't focused on the danger to Bill Runner who would probably face retaliatory action by the guards if he allowed me to push him into the compartment. Although I had little doubt that I could successfully exit the train, I had no plan other than to disappear in the night and attempt to distance myself from the immediate area; travel at night, hide during daylight hours and I knew that I would need to eventually find water, food and clothing. The "blue long johns" would also need replacement.

Bill Runner returned to his seat, wearing his A-2 jacket. That was the only signal to those watching that there had been a change in plans. The dissenting navigator approached me wanting to talk, however I was in no mood for discussion and I waved him away. I was frustrated and angry with myself. I felt I was probably giving up my only chance to escape and I wasn't certain just what part my own fear contributed to the decision to forfeit the escape attempt.

Several hours passed before I was able to shift my mind to other thoughts and finally, with my head resting on the bench back-rest, doze off to a fitful sleep as the train yawed back and forth making frequent stops in sidings to allow other train traffic to pass. The Russian overcoat served a useful purpose after all ; pillow, blanket and shock absorber.

It was late afternoon the following day before the train arrived at our final destination. We formed up in columns; joining other prisoners who were exiting their railcars. It was a short walking distance to the prison camp that was to be our new home. We entered an area called the "Outer Lager" for processing. Each prisoner was photographed and then handed a form to complete. The form had a Red Cross heading and according to our captors was required to be filled out in order for the Red Cross to verify our status. While others seemed to have no difficulty in completing the forms, I found that many of the questions were seeking information exceeding the "name, rank and serial number" response that had been our briefed guideline. I attempted to return the form with only basic information filled in. The form was returned to me with the warning that I would not be permitted to complete the processing until all of the information requested was supplied. The processing room emptied and I was the only prisoner remaining in the room. Finally, an English speaking man who claimed to be a Red Cross

representative approached and informed me that I should provide the required additional basic information as that information was necessary to insure that I was who I said I was. He pointed out that a home address was necessary. to insure proper notification by the Red Cross of my prisoner status. I remained skeptical, but finally provided some additional information that was not military related and the form was accepted.

The next step in processing was the issue of clothing -- G.I. winter trousers and shirt, winter long johns ,socks and a heavy G.I overcoat. For bedding, each prisoner was provided two blankets, a straw pillow with cover, a mattress cover and a bed sheet. We were told that we would be assigned “permanent” living quarters in one of the long , low, buildings located within the South Compound, but for the first night we would have temporary quarters where ever there was available space.

We, the new prisoners, were taken to the entrance gate of the South Compound, Stalag Luft III, and were met by prisoner members of the Camp Staff who were appointed to assist us in finding a place to eat and bed-down for the night. Processing and assignment to more permanent quarters would be made the following day after our first “Appel” or roll-call. This first night, I was assigned to a room occupied by six people - all strangers to me. I slept on a mat on the floor and shared their food. The conversations that first night were guarded since I wasn’t certain what should be discussed and the occupants had to insure that I wasn’t a spy. I discovered that each new prisoner had to be interrogated and “cleared” by designated members of the prisoner staff before information considered “confidential or secret” could be discussed. There were matters concerning prisoner activities that had to be protected and some activities were handled by a strictly “need to know” rule. Bill Runner and I had finally arrived at Stalag Luft III. It was the 28th of October, 1943.

The next morning all of the new prisoners were directed to stay in one group for the nine o’clock body count - our first “Appel.” The remainder of the prisoner force formed up by individual “Blocks”. After the count and as the prisoners were dispersing, I was suddenly grabbed from behind in a “bear-hug.” The culprit was my good friend and pilot training classmate, Chester Lott. Chester’s crew was shot down during the mission to Kiel, Germany on 13 June, 1943. He was the co-pilot and this was the crew’s first mission. Prior to reaching the target three engines failed for no apparent reason and as the aircraft became a straggler, enemy FW-190’s and ME-110’s began a relentless attack forcing the crew to bail-out. Chester and his pilot, Lt. Robert Jackson, were captured as soon as their parachutes hit the ground. My German interrogator at the Dulag was correct when he informed me that Lott was a prisoner at a “permanent” camp.

My second surprise of the morning came when Joe Johnson, my co-pilot, emerged from the crowd of prisoners waiting to greet the newcomers. He had only spent two days at the Dulag in Frankfort before being released for transport to Stalag Luft III. Now, the only crew members unaccounted for were Glen Foster, the navigator and Charles Groth, the right waist gunner.

To accommodate the large influx of new prisoners it was necessary for each housing barracks or “block” to create additional bed space. This was accomplished by making tiers of bunk beds. Joe Johnson and I were assigned to room 4,in Block 136. This was also Chester Lott’s room - shared with seven other prisoners. Our arrival increased room occupancy to ten. Joe had the lower bunk and I drew the upper one and neither of us complained. We were just grateful to finally be settled in a location where the occupants were considered friendly.

The first few days at Stalag Luft III were spent getting acquainted with those other prisoners assigned to Room 4, and receiving an indoctrination in the “Do’s and Don’ts” of prison life. The initial action by the American prison staff was to have an interrogator review the details of each new prisoner’s verbal

description of the events that led to his becoming a prisoner and to verify his status. By the time I arrived at Stalag Luft III there were prisoners from most of the American flying units in the European Theater and it was not too difficult to determine whether a new prisoner was the person he claimed to be. Chester Lott provided additional verification for me.

We were fortunate in that we were able to benefit from the experiences and subsequent disciplines initiated by senior officers - British and American prisoners. Each barracks or "Block" as we would call them, had an assigned senior officer, generally a Major or Lt. Col. The compound commander was a Colonel. In the South Compound the senior officer was Col. Charles Goodrich. He had been a prisoner since September of 1942 and had arrived at Stalag Luft III in March of 1943. Included on the Staff of the senior officer was an officer appointed to head the "X" activity. Members of this committee managed a myriad of activities devoted to obtaining information, planning escape activities and hiding surveillance equipment. Unless approved by the "X" committee, prisoners were not permitted to attempt to converse with or otherwise associate with any of the guards.

The discipline and leadership by the senior American officers was reflected in all phases of life as a prisoner in the South Compound. Food distribution was organized and each prisoner had a part to play in sharing what goods and services were available. In each room of the blocks the prisoners shared responsibility for clean-up and cooking. A roster was utilized to assign duties of this type.

There was very little reference to grade or rank in my assigned room and I felt that was the case with the majority of the company grade officers in the compound. There was however a certain undefined courteous regard provided to those prisoners who had been imprisoned for a year or more. These prisoners were generally housed in the single or double rooms in the blocks and the impact of long imprisonment was occasionally reflected in their demeanor.

After several days of indoctrination and after receiving security clearance by the camp internal interrogators, we, the new prisoners, were allowed to listen to the daily "evening news". The news was transported by special messenger to each "block". Guards were posted at the entrance to the block and when clearance was received the appointed messenger would give his report. It was amazing to be able to hear up to date news about the war effort. Only those specifically cleared by the chief of the "X" activity were to relay this information and although the source of the news was from "BBC" in England, any discussion of how or where the information was received was forbidden. This activity as well as many others was known to only a few and all of us not directly involved were advised to have no discussion about how the news was obtained.

During the first week of incarceration at Stalag Luft III, I began a daily walk program that involved many circuits on a path inside the perimeter of the Stalag. The path was adjacent to the two foot wooden warning rail that maintained a separation distance from the outer perimeter fence. We were warned that all we had to do to get shot by a tower guard was to step across the short wooden fence in the direction of the outer double row barbed wire fence. This warning was part of our new prisoner indoctrination program.

The second week of imprisonment I made known my desire to participate in any activity that would provide an escape avenue. I was advised to contact Alvin "Sammy" Vogtle, an American Spitfire pilot, shot down in January 1943. Vogtle occupied the single room at the entrance to block 136 and I was told he was a representative of the "X" activity and could provide me with advice with respect to any escape plans. When I visited Sammy, I explained that I would be a volunteer "digger" or helper in any tunnel activity and I expressed to him my desire to escape by any means possible. Sammy advised me that my help would be welcomed, but that even if I worked on a tunnel I would not be permitted to escape if

and when the tunnel was utilized as an escape vehicle. He went on to explain that it was the policy of the escape “committee” to utilize escape resources for only those specially designated persons who could speak German or a European language. Priority would also go to those who had been prisoners the longest. “As a relatively new prisoner with no foreign language capability, I was just not the type of candidate eligible for a tunnel escape”. Based on this information, I withdrew my commitment to assist in any tunnel work. I could understand why, with limited resources, the materials prepared for escape should be prioritized; however, I firmly believed that any one who participated in the risks of tunnel digging should not be denied the opportunity to escape after the “priority” people had departed through the tunnel. Needless to say, I was discouraged by the information just received, but there remained the option to seek approval of a plan not involving escape through an underground tunnel.

I felt it imperative to find someone who felt as I did .One who would be willing to take the time to work on a plan with me that might merit approval and support from the “Escape Committee”, or the “X activity”. I wasn’t certain of the procedures for approval but knew that any escape attempt would involve obtaining equipment that could cut through the mass of barbed wire in the two fences surrounding the compound. None of my seven roommates were ready to commit to participation in an escape attempt, but I had their assurances that if I ever came up with an approved plan, I would have their support in obtaining needed escape equipment.

As the weeks passed by - ever so slowly - life as a prisoner became fairly routine and the ever persistent thoughts of escape were tempered by a grudging acknowledgement that I wasn’t ready to attempt an escape without the moral and physical support of an accomplice.

The routine of prison life was interrupted by short periods of fear ,excitement, anticipation, despair or boredom. Daily physical activity was one way to combat the boredom and I resolved to try and stay as physically active as possible.

I helped Chester Lott plant tomato seeds in a small garden adjacent to our block. He had received the seeds in a letter from home. Thomas Decaro, a B-17 navigator, was the chief “tinsmith” in our room. He made most of the cooking pans and plates used by members of room - 4. He decided to make a set of “weights” for members of our room to use for exercise. I became his “first assistant”. The weights were made from Klim Cans (Powdered milk cans) all fastened together and then tightly rolled. A hickory broomstick, confiscated from the Cookhouse, served as our weight bar. Three of us in the room utilized the weights for twice daily exercise. Dale Perkins, a bombardier, was the third so-called “weight lifter”.

Dale Perkins had an extraordinary experience the day his aircraft was downed. The pilot of his B-17 directed him to place the arming pins back in the bombs in anticipation of a possible crash landing. The crash landing took place while Dale was still in the bomb bay holding a hand full of arming pins. He survived the crash landing without injury.

Robert Webster, the copilot on Tom Decaro’s crew, was also assigned to room 4, Block 136. He and Tom Decaro were the only survivors of their combat crew. Webster was captured on land near the coastal docks at Kiel, Germany.. Decaro was picked up in the North Sea by a German patrol boat. To their knowledge they were the only survivors of their 10 man B-17 crew. It is interesting to note that the five crew members representing three different aircraft were all on the same mission to bomb the docks at Kiel, Germany on 13 June, 1943.

Two other prisoners assigned to room-4, Block 136 were also B-17 crew members on the same aircraft. Lawrence Connors ,navigator, and Edward Goulz, bombardier, were shot down by enemy FW190’s and flak. They had been prisoners since 25 July 1943. Larry Connors was accepted as sort of the room-4

“boss”. He was 30 years old , a mature and serious man with a deeply religious outlook on life. A small Irishman with a great sense of honor and a great sense of humor.

Shot down on the 12 of August 1943 ,Walter Ferguson, was the 8th prisoner assigned to Room-4, Block 136, prior to my arrival with the group of new prisoners that included Joe Johnson and Bill Runner. Walter was a “book-worm” and he spent hours reading and studying the game of Chess. He was nicknamed the “Birdman” for some undisclosed reason.

The individual barracks (Blocks) were single story prefabricated wooden structures.. The interiors had never been finished and the wooden building studs were still exposed on the inside walls. There were rooms on either side of a middle corridor. Each building had an indoor latrine, a washroom with several basins and a small communal kitchen with a cook stove. The indoor latrine was only for use at night after the doors at both ends of the barracks were closed and barred shut from the outside. Latrine buildings called the “Abort” were used by the prison population during the day. Small rooms at either end of the building were built to house one or two prisoners. One of the occupants was generally a senior officer considered to be the “block commander”, sometimes jokingly referred to as the “Fuhrer”. Each room contained a large window and all of the windows had functional shutters. Each barracks had about thirteen rooms including the smaller two man rooms.

It was within the confines of one of these rooms that a prisoner would spend a major part of his day, each and every day. The need for tolerance, understanding and a good sense of humor was essential to peaceful co-existence. We all knew that and with the “fatherly guidance” exercised by Larry Connors there were very few misunderstandings in Room-4, Block 136, South Compound.

With the colder months of winter approaching it was evident that we needed to try and “winterize” our room area with what ever was available. There was a small “pot-bellied” stove in each room; however the charcoal bricks issued by the Germans were not sufficient to keep the rooms warm. Each room had a daily scheduled time to utilize the cook stove located in the “community” kitchen and we elected to use our limited supply of charcoal for cooking purposes. A newspaper or paper of any sort was never discarded. I managed to sew newspapers between my two blankets and we were all grateful to the Red Cross for providing basic needs that included items like needles and thread. We used newspaper for filling cracks in the inside walls of the barracks. Many of those prisoners fortunate enough to arrive in prison with their flying jackets were able to sew layers of paper inside the lining of the jackets. Newspapers were a prized commodity.

Within the South Compound a band and choral group was organized. Bill Runner was an accomplished trumpet player and joined in when ever possible. The YMCA had provided musical instruments in sufficient quantity to make formation of the band possible. Christmas 1943 arrived, and we were rewarded with additional Christmas food parcels. It was a relatively festive time for some and John Moss, a B-17 pilot from Des Moines, New Mexico, invited me to his room for a taste of raisin home brew. In the course of our conversation, John made the statement that we would “probably be doing this same celebration in Stalag Luft III in 1944”. I couldn’t accept even the thought of being a prisoner for another year. We made a \$50.00 bet, witnessed by other brew tasters in room 3, the room adjacent to ours.

Christmas festivities were to cease early in block 136. On the night of 27th December we heard the air raid signals and all electricity to the barracks was shut off. Larry Connors was in one of the end rooms playing bridge with a foursome. Suddenly we were all startled by two loud gunshots. The sound was deafening and we thought the shots were made in our room. There were shouts in the corridor and when we opened the door to the corridor someone was rushing down the corridor path with a flaming

news paper torch. The torch was quickly extinguished when someone shouted that the light could cause further gunfire. The shots had been fired into the end room where the card playing had been continued by candle light after the electricity had been turned off. Lt. Col. John Stevenson had been shot in both legs with the bone shattered in one leg. There was confusion and delay before the Germans arrived at the scene and transported Stevenson to a hospital. There was little sleep in Block 136 the remainder of the night.

Escape activity was a continuing occupation for many of the prisoners; however most of the work involved tunnel preparation. Except for an awareness that such activity was taking place, those of us not directly involved had no knowledge when or where the underground work was being accomplished. It was rumored that the Germans were aware of specific areas where tunnel activity was taking place but would wait until the tunnel work had progressed to near completion before suddenly arriving with a tunnel destruct team. The purpose for delay in destroying the tunnel was to further demoralize the prisoners who had spent months in preparing a tunnel for escape only to have their work destroyed in a less than an hour. No one had escaped by tunnel in the South Compound since it was opened for occupation in September of 1943.

We were awakened one morning by a flurry of activity in the room adjacent to ours (room 3). It seems that John Lewis, an occupant of room 3, had participated in an escape. John, a P39 pilot, was shot down in March of 1943 by an enemy Me-109 pilot. He was captured by “unfriendly” Arabs in North Africa. John and another prisoner had spent months making a hinged ladder. This ladder had been hidden in the attic in our Block (136) and had been placed in a position where it appeared to be part of the roof structure. On the night of the escape we had a severe thunderstorm and there had been a power outage. John and his friend were dressed in black clothing as they made a run to the perimeter fences. The hinged ladder served its purpose - the first section reached the top of the inside fence and the hinged portion went over the top covering the space between the two fences. John’s friend made it across the double fence, he dropped down over the outside fence and disappeared in the adjacent wooded forest. John was not so fortunate. As he attempted to cross over the top of the two fences, the ladder broke and John fell into the mass of barbed wire between the two fences. Discovered by the guards, John was forced to remain in the location between the two fences until daybreak. When the power was restored after the heavy downpour, the tower guards on either side of his location kept their searchlights focused on him. Since the ladder pieces had also fallen into the area where he was trapped, John had visible evidence that the ladder had been previously cut by a saw and only a small section was left uncut. The cut area had been filled in with some sort of putty. It was obvious that the ladder had been discovered earlier by the German “Ferrets” and left in place to foil any attempt to escape. What the Germans didn’t count on was one escapee making it over the fences before the ladder collapsed. John was extricated from the fence area at daybreak with many cuts and bruises. He was then escorted to the “cooler” where he served time in solitary confinement His companion was free for several days before capture at a border crossing.

One other prisoner succeeded in escape from the South Compound prior to March of 1943. I never knew the details except that he was somehow able to exit the compound by hiding in an area under the horse drawn vehicle used to siphon waste materials from the latrines. These vehicles were referred to as the “Honey Wagons”. This prisoner was also captured and returned to prisoner status.

On the 26th of March, 1944 we awakened to the news that there had been a mass breakout of British prisoners from the adjacent North Compound. Eighty eight (88) prisoners were reported as having escaped and the news generated excitement and joy throughout the prison population. With this news there was also a change in the mood and demeanor of our captors. For the next three days after the

escape we were subjected to sudden , no-notice, Appells or prisoner body counts. Prisoners were forced out of their barracks while the Germans conducted numerous searches in each block. The “Ferrets” crawled under the floors probing the ground with long screw drivers. The attics all received special attention and the walls in every room were checked in an effort to find hidden items that might be used in an escape attempt. On the second day of the no -notice prisoner counts each block commander in the South Compound passed the word that we, the prisoners, were to disrupt the count with slow movement to the parade ground. After straggling into the parade ground, we all meandered around, shifting position in the columns thus making an accurate count impossible. The German officer conducting the count finally gave up and departed the parade grounds. A second count was initiated a short time later with the same results. The conversation between the German Commandant and Col. Goodrich, our senior officer ,was not discernable; however some members of our block heard the words “We will be back”.

It was later in the afternoon that we witnessed several vehicles, carrying weapons, pass through the gates and proceed on to the parade ground. Ground-mounted machine guns were placed at four locations surrounding the area where the prisoner count was to be conducted. Each gun was manned by two soldiers. As this action was taking place on the ground ,we noticed that every guard tower was being reinforced with an additional occupant and the weather cover that normally protected their machine guns had been removed. Each guard in the tower was also equipped with a rifle. All weapons were pointed in our direction. It was a chilling, sobering experience. We received the word from Col. Goodrich that the “passive resistance” was over. The directive did not require repeating; the German commandant had clearly made his point. The prisoner count and subsequent prisoner counts were conducted in an orderly manner.

It wasn't until the first week in April,1944, that we were informed that the majority of the escapees from the North compound had been captured and that 50 men had been murdered on orders from the German High Command. Many of those prisoners shot were captured early in the war and had been prisoners for several years. This unpredictably action by the Germans was devastating news to the prisoner population and there was no easy way to overcome the profound effect the deaths of these men had on their close friends and the entire prison population.

An air-raid warning sounded shortly afternoon on Easter Sunday, 9 April,1944. Some prisoners were just returning from a church service. The murder of the British prisoners was still the main topic of discussion. I had been walking the perimeter circuit when the siren sounded and I scurried to return to block 136. The German guards wanted us inside a building anytime there was indication that there was an air attack in the vicinity. I had just entered the building and was in the corridor when someone shouted “look out for a Goon with a gun”. The warning was in reference to a perimeter guard. This guard had his rifle resting on the outside perimeter fence and was aiming at a target within the compound. I darted into our wash room and looked out the window. There he was, calmly sighting his rifle at some object within the compound. I dropped out of sight fearing he might turn his sights on me and raced to the front entrance of our block where I might be able to see where he was aiming. When I arrived at the entrance to our building, I looked in the direction where it appeared he was aiming and saw a man leaning against the door jamb of the cook-house. I heard the shot and I watched in shock as the man in the doorway suddenly grabbed his throat, stumbled forward out of the doorway, took two steps and fell, face downward. I had just witnessed a cold blooded murder. Part of the horror of this murder is that no one could go forward to provide assistance.

When the “all-clear” sounded I was one of the first to reach the body of the dead soldier. I didn't know his name but I recognized him as one of the enlisted prisoners who volunteered to work in the

“communal” kitchen. His name was Corporal C.C. Miles and he was an infantry soldier. Cpl Miles was captured by Arabs and turned over to the Germans in February, 1943. He was buried in the POW cemetery at Sagan,, Germany. I will never forget him and I will never forget the way he died.

I received my first letters from home on the 19 of April, 1944. It was one of the best days of my prison life. Joe Johnson and Bill Runner had been receiving mail since the latter part of February so I knew my mother had been in contact with their families. Six months was a long time to wait for direct word from home but arrival of six letters at one time erased all the negatives of the past. I had been mailing four postcards and three letters monthly to loved ones at home since arrival at Stalag Luft III. At long last I was receiving mail - it was a day to celebrate.

Up to this date, physical adjustment to living conditions as a prisoner had not been too difficult. I had enlisted at age 18 as a private and maintained enlisted status while in pilot training. During the months both before and during most of my time in flight training, I lived in an open bay in the barracks where there was little privacy. I had been preconditioned to some degree to communal living . During the day light hours I tried to keep as active as possible. Located near block-137 was a set of wooden parallel bars. My daily circuits around the perimeter included a stop to do a short workout on the bars. Between workouts with the weights, the parallel bars and the walking, I was in relatively good shape. The major physical discomfort was a constant, gnawing hunger. All of us had lost weight but generally speaking the occupants of our barracks (136) were in relatively good health.

Mental adjustment to prison life was an entirely different matter for me. Sometimes, in the mornings just as I was awakening, I would not let my mind accept the fact that I was a prisoner. I would keep my eyes closed and conjure visions of distant places hopeful that when I opened my eyes I would be home or anyplace other than in a prison. I battled with recurring thoughts of what might have been, “if we had not been captured by the enemy”. I relived the events that occurred on the day my crew was lost to enemy action. “If I had ordered crew bailout earlier would Sgt. Smith be alive today”? “If I had immediately descended to the “deck” after loss of two engines would we have had a better chance to return to England”? But, most of all, I thought of and dreamed of escape - I just had to find a way to escape.

In the days before the North or South Compounds were built, the majority of the Allied flying officers captured and in German prisons were flying for Great Britain. These officers were from many nationalities and some had been prisoners since 1939. I was fascinated by the story about two Czech. pilots who escaped from the East Compound. The escape from the prison compound was successful and they made their way to the airfield located near the city of Sagan. They were also successful in somehow gaining access to a German aircraft and starting the aircraft engine. The problem they encountered was an inadvertent retraction of the landing gear while taxing out for takeoff. This story fueled my “daydreams” of escape and a good deal of my time was spent conjuring up all sorts of “Mr. Middy” situations where a fantastic and heroic escape was accomplished.

We were aware of a pending allied invasion for several months before it occurred but it had little meaning for us until it actually took place on 6 June,1944. News of the invasion was, for most prisoners, the greatest morale booster since being incarcerated. A map room in one of the blocks was utilized to post the latest available information on the two fronts - the Russian eastern front and the new western front in Normandy. These maps and supporting data reflected only that information that was made available to us by our captors. We continued to receive secret briefings based on information received through the prisoner “X” Activity. Protecting the source of this information required the vigilance of all prisoners.

A new prison compound adjacent to our compound was opened in the late spring of 1944. Separation between the North and South Compounds and the newly opened West Compound was a road way that extended from a gate opening between two guard towers on the south and continuing on to the German occupied "Vorlager" located north of the West and North Compounds.

The summer months of 1944 were slowly passing and during these months the prison population was rapidly increasing. The majority of the prisoners (self-named "kriegies") participated in one or more of the sport activities sponsored by individual barracks. A "kriegie" built theater was nearing completion and Bill Runner was a member of a band called the "Luftbandsters". I worked on a sketch book that depicted scenes from our room and the outside gun towers that were referred to as "Goon boxes". Decaro, Perkins and I continued our weight lifting program despite the fact that we had lost all visible body fat. The main topic of discussion centered around progress of the invasion and we were all hopeful the war would be over before the winter months arrived.

It's the 5th of August, 1944 - my 21st birthday. August marked my tenth month as a prisoner of war. We had just received word that for the immediate future the weekly issue of Red Cross food packages would be reduced by 50%. Instead of a parcel per man each week, the issue would be one parcel for two men each week. It wouldn't be long before the effects of the food reduction would become very apparent. Although our captors provided bread and some vegetables to prepare a soup in the communal kitchen, food from the Red Cross parcels was our main means of sustenance.

It was late August when I finally found a man who would be willing to take the risks involved in a direct escape route through the perimeter fences. Glenn Oster, resided in room- 3, the room adjacent to room-4 in our same barracks. During an "appell" Glenn was standing in front of me and had heard my comment that "I've got to get the hell out of this place". After the prison count he turned to me and said "you have got yourself a partner". Glenn's crew was downed on the 10th of October 1943, and he arrived at Sagan about the time I did. He was free for two days before capture in Holland. He said that he had been aware for some time that I was looking for an escape partner and he finally made the decision that he had, "enough of life as a Prisoner".

I wasted no time after Oster made his commitment to accompany me in an escape attempt. The first step was to outline the basic plan and then seek a meeting with Lt/Col. Clark, the chief of the mysterious "X" committee. Colonel Clark was one of the most prominent prisoners in the compound and the first American fighter pilot to be captured and imprisoned by the Germans. He was flying a British Spitfire when he was forced to bail out near the coast of France. A prisoner since July, 1942, he had been held with British prisoners in both the East and North compounds. He had gained superior knowledge and first hand experience in matters pertaining to covert activities while living with the British prisoners. He had the admiration and respect of the entire prisoner population of the South Compound.

I explained our plan to Lt/Col. Clark. It was a direct "crawl to the perimeter fence mid- way between two guard towers." The location for entry would be just to the west of block 137. Criteria included a severe thunderstorm at night - preferably after midnight and hopefully during one of the frequent power outages that often occurs during a thunderstorm. We would dress in black and have blackened faces. We would be requesting assistance with wire cutters, maps and any other items that the "X" committee might suggest.

Colonel Clark listened patiently. He was generally receptive to our need for assistance, but he had serious doubts about our chance for success and he indicated the senior Camp Commander would in all probability not approve the plan.

I was again the spokesman when we visited the Compound Commander - an experienced, highly respected senior officer. Colonel Goodrich was brief and very frank in his total disapproval of my plan. He pointed out that since the escape in the North Compound, the German Commandant, Colonel von Lindeiner, had informed the senior Allied officer in each compound that any prisoner who escaped could no longer be guaranteed return to a P.O.W. camp, that escapees could be considered saboteurs or criminals and would be shot or sent to a concentration camp. He also reminded us that any prisoner found in the 20 foot area (no man's land) between the short wooden guard rail and the perimeter fence - even though still confined within the prison compound - would probably be "shot on sight". He evaluated my straight "crawl to the wire plan" as suicidal. He emphasized that resources to support escape activities were limited and should be reserved for those individuals who speak fluent German and perhaps a second European language; qualified escapees could then be supplied with forged documents and credentials that would provide a fair opportunity, once out of the compound, to make it back to a neutral country.

Although somewhat chastised and disheartened by the interview and the decision of the senior commander, I was still resolved to continue planning for escape. Lt/Col. Clark recommended further delay of any escape attempt, but encouraged us to continue study of maps of the local area, the airfield near the prison complex and increased study of the German language, concentrating on road signs and common terminology. Most important was a program to learn the German "start-engine" sequence for several types of German aircraft.

True to his word, Colonel Clark's "X" Committee provided an unbelievable amount of data regarding German aircraft. In the adjoining North compound were English pilots who had flown the Me-109, Hinkle-111 and several other German aircraft types. Glenn Oster and I continued to study this information, having given up the original idea of trying to escape in a heavy rainstorm at night. We thought we would have a better chance for survival if we planned for an escape during a heavy snow storm.

The conversation with our senior camp commander had left us with additional doubts about our (or my) original "crawl to the wire" plan. Escape plans were generally limited to "over the wire", "through the wire" or "under the wire". Other more sophisticated plans such as impersonation or riding out in a vehicle would - with some logic - simply not be supported by the "X" activity unless our knowledge of the German language was vastly improved.

Since March, when the British tunneled out of the North compound, there had been no escape attempted from either the North or South compounds. Tunnel activity continued; however there had been no change in the policy that limited the escape route to those who were fluent in German or a European language. As previously mentioned, for those who lacked the credentials to qualify for tunnel escape the alternatives for escape were generally limited to "over , under or through" the perimeter fences. Our plan was still "through the perimeter fence" and in planning it was essential that we consider the security forces to be encountered. The outer perimeter of all compounds was enclosed by ten foot high, double row barriers of barbed wire fencing. Spacing was eight feet between the two parallel fences. Rolls of barbed wire were placed in the space between the two fences. High guard towers with mounted light machine guns and search lights were spaced at intervals around the entire perimeter of each prison compound. The tower guards were further equipped with a high powered rifle as well as binoculars. The outer perimeter security was further reinforced by walking armed guards patrolling the area outside the compounds. At night all prisoner barracks (Blocks) were locked by placement of cross bars on the outside entrance doors on both end of the barracks. Armed guards, one or two with trained German Shepherds, patrolled all areas within the compound grounds. These special

patrols were brought into the compound after “lock-up” at night and, with guard relief changes, remained until morning. Barracks doors were barred starting about 9PM and prisoners were forbidden to be outside their “Blocks” after closure. At least one bed-check, prisoner count, was conducted nightly.

The summer of “44” was gradually passing and there were few changes in prison living conditions except for the addition of new prisoners. Their arrival provided confirmation of war news and it appeared the German air capability was considerably less since our fighter escort range had improved.

I was receiving news from home, but the letters received were written between two and three months earlier. I received many letters from a beautiful little student nurse that I met during B-17 phase training in Boise, Idaho. Her name was Mary Lee Valentine and she captured my heart at first sight. After leaving phase training in Boise, I wrote her a letter from Pendleton, Oregon asking her to marry me. Strangely, in her next letter she never mentioned or acknowledged receiving a proposal that I had considered to be one of the most momentous decisions I had ever made. She was only 18 and happily engrossed in life and her training. Her lack of response was probably best for both of us. So many men had received “Dear John” letters that I didn’t dare to hope that she would still be single when or if I ever returned home. Like most prisoners I read and reread every letter received.

Joe Johnson’s wife had twin boys and Glenn Foster’s wife had a baby girl. My mother was attempting to make contact with the families of the other crew members and through her help I received a letter from S/Sgt Groth’s sister. Charles Groth was well and imprisoned in another camp for aircrew members. She reported he was also with Louis Brown. Glenn Foster’s wife was able to tell my mother that Glenn was interned in a neutral country. The people at home confirmed Sgt Claude Smith’s death. I finally, after almost a year, had an accounting of all of my crew members.

One day I was surprised to receive a food parcel from a family in England. On the 10 of October, 1943 I crash landed a B-17 in a farmers beet field in East Anglia. We were out of fuel and I made the landing on a fog shrouded afternoon. Two local families provided food and housing for my crew until arrival of transportation from our base unit, the 91st Bomb Group. Some how this family had received word that my crew did not return from the combat mission flown four days later to Schweinfurt, Germany and that I was a prisoner in Stalag Luft III. Receipt of this unexpected package created a remarkable and emotional day for me.

The summer months had passed and fall weather was about to give way to winter. The war news was encouraging and the driving urge to escape was lessened. I just couldn’t make myself believe that we would be forced to spend another Christmas as prisoners.

Late in November a major change in compound security took place. All of the guards had been removed from the guard towers located between the new West compound and the South and North compounds. This reduction was probably made to conserve manpower, but for me it opened up a new route to freedom. Removal of the guards meant that access - without detection - to the corridor road between prison compounds was now possible. After access to the corridor road was accomplished, the escape route in the corridor road would not present a direct visual line to the corner tower guards because their primary area of interest and responsibility would be in their respective compounds. The corridor road between the compounds was German territory. The north end of the road terminated in the German “Lager” and living quarters. The south end terminated at a gate between two guard towers. This gate was unmanned and was used as access for delivery of certain utility items. The waste disposal wagon (Honey-wagon) used this gate for access to the corridor road before entering the gate at the entrance to the South Compound. The long, covered coal shed in the south end of the corridor road was

empty as the supply of coal had been depleted.

Concurrent with removal of the guards from these towers, I prepared a new route of escape and briefed Lt/Col Clark and selected members of his committee on the changes. This plan was indorsed by the committee and I was told that Colonel Goodrich had been advised of the committee recommendation for approval and that he offered no objection to the plan. Col Goodrich still advised delay of any escape attempt in view of the favorable war news.

Motivated by the news that the escape plan had been approved, Glenn Oster and I spent hours re-studying the maps of the local area. We began collecting the additional clothing we would need for the cold weather. White hoods were needed as well as white cloth covers for our feet and hands. I gave Joe Johnson a \$50.00 IOU for his leather A-1 jacket. Other roommates provided oversized long-johns to be worn over our clothing. Two new additions to room 4 were particularly helpful, providing me with gloves and long-johns.. Horace Mockett, a B-17 pilot, was shot down in August , 1944, but was hospitalized with a flak wound in his knee. He didn't arrive in Stalag Luft III until the 29th of October, two months later. Andrew Poggi, a B-24 bombardier flying out of a base in Italy, went down on his last scheduled combat mission. He had been assigned to room 4 since mid June, 44. Total room-4 occupancy was 14 by the end of November, 1944.

The "Battle of the Bulge" in mid-December brought depressing news. The German media was loud in acclaiming a "great victory" for their forces. For me and most other prisoners it just meant further delay in our eventual release. However, during this period - just a few days before Christmas - as I was making the circuit around the perimeter, I noticed a change in the appearance of the gate area at the entrance to the corridor road located between the two guard towers. There was a double gate at this location and, probably as a matter of convenience to permit easier access, the inner gates had been left open and the barbed wire barricades normally placed between the two gates had been removed and repositioned alongside the open inner gates. Now, only one single strand fence prevented access from the corridor road to the outer perimeter road. A wooded forest area was located just across the outer perimeter road.

I contacted Oster and told him that I was going to seek final approval for an escape based on the weather conditions. I received assurance from Lt/Col. Clark that the escape was fully approved and that cutting materials would be provided just prior to our departure from a designated barracks near the corridor road fence. The route from this barracks would provide us maximum distance from the guard tower search lights during the first critical phase of the escape plan. All that was needed now was a good snow storm.

Christmas Eve was quieter than normal. Unlike Christmas of 1943 there was little celebrating. We had all hoped for a promised "double issue" of Christmas parcels, but there was a delay. I went by Moose Moss's room and gave him a \$50.00 IOU. I had lost the bet we made last Christmas. My good friend Chester Lott gave me his most prized possession - a small, penny sized compass. I couldn't have received a better gift. It snowed Christmas day and for a while I was sure it was going to be the "day". It stopped snowing by late afternoon so there was nothing to do but be patient. I wrote a letter to my mother and dad, sealed it and gave it to Chester Lott. He assured me that he would deliver it in person if I was unable to make it home. I just wanted them to know that I loved them, that I was aware of the risks, but that I was doing something that I just had to do.

THE ESCAPE

It was late in the afternoon on the 17 of January 1945. I was walking the perimeter when the snow first

began to fall. There was a light snow covering on the ground from a previous snowfall. I felt a surge of excitement and fear and my adrenalin level was surging to a new high. - the escape night had finally arrived !

The plan was simple -- cross the clearing from the barracks to the wooden warning rail; crawl under the guard rail and continue on to the double roll of fence at a location next to the shadow of one of the abandoned guard towers. Cut through the wire on the first fence; crawl into the area between the two fences and cut through the center barrier of barbed wire; cut the outside fence; crawl through the outer fence; splice the fence together so the openings are not obvious; cross the corridor road to a shallow ditch on the opposite of the road; crawl south along the corridor road for about 150 feet and carefully pass the guard at the main entrance to the South compound. With the heavy snow fall and cold weather the guard (if past practice is followed) will frequently take shelter in the one-man guard house and in so doing he will face the South compound --looking away from the corridor road.

Once past the main gate guard, slow down and continue crawling toward the gate at the end of the corridor that is located between the two compounds and their respective guard towers. Use the shadow of the empty coal shed where possible; stop all movement whenever the click of the search light is heard; start again when the light is switched off; pray that both guards in the towers are concentrating on things in their respective compounds; check for the location of the outside perimeter guard to insure that he has passed by the gate area before departing from the shadow area of the coal-shed; crawl the last critical 30 feet to the gate fence centered between the two towers; use the out of place "barbed-roll" barricades for partial coverage. While making the last two or three cuts in the remaining single fence (gate), pack snow around the wire cutters before each cut to soften the sound; go through the outer fence and crawl across the perimeter road and take cover in the road ditch; check for the perimeter guard; if clear, crawl about 150 feet to the forest, then --into the woods.

We were dressed by 8:00 pm--layers of white underwear over heavy clothing; white hoods over stocking caps; white socks covering shoes and white mittens plus two spares made from white socks. Food was limited to two "D" bars of chocolate. We had one general area map. We were briefed that small diversion activities would be initiated by members of the "X" committee to hold the attention of guards in the end towers adjacent to our escape route.

Several senior officers were in our scheduled departure barracks to assist where possible. Lt/Col. Clark was there providing last minute advice and checking our clothing. Lt/Col Melvin McNickle provided us with side cutters and the area map. I had a warm feeling toward these men as they were the ones who surfaced as leaders in an environment that placed heavy demands on those who served their fellow prisoners.

We departed through the north door of the barracks at about 8:15 p.m., equipped with three side-cutters, a large pair and a smaller set with attached long hickory handles, and an emergency hand-made cutter made from a pair of ice skates. It was snowing fairly heavy. Glenn Oster ,with wrists as thick as the average man's ankle, would do the cutting. I would pack snow over the cutters to subdue the sound.

Guards would be at each barracks at 9:00 p.m., so, it was imperative that we get through the first double row fence and if possible past the stationary guard at the main gate before 9 o'clock. We crawled on our bellies toward the warning fence; each time a tower search light came on we froze in position. Oster was leading the first time the tower light came on - this was the first test. Were the lights so bright, as we had been led to believe, that the guards would have difficulty in identification of objects during heavy snowfall? It seemed the first light was on us for a long time. I could almost feel the impact of a bullet, then the light direction shifted and finally was turned off. We

had passed the first test!

Oster was at the perimeter fence and made the first cut as I was crawling in the area between the guard rail and the fence. The cut sounded exactly like a rifle shot. Oster had made the first mistake--cutting without waiting to pack snow over the cutter head. We both froze in position for a minute or so and Oster waited until I reached the fence. We agreed that there would be no further cuts without using the packed snow technique.

The large side cutters would not work after the first cut. They were dull and required too much additional leverage to be effective. The small lineman's pliers with the hickory handle attachments turned out to be the best tool. Three cuts and Oster was inside, between the two fences. I worked from outside the first fence, reaching in to pack snow over each wire cut. After entering the area between the two fences my job was to twist the severed wires back together to cover any obvious hole in the fence material. We kept a close watch on the guard at the main gate to the South compound since he was fairly close to the area where we were making the wire cuts. Oster made it through the second fence and on to the corridor road and he was crawling into the ditch alongside the road when the guard at the gate suddenly started down the fence line in our direction. I had just started exit from the outside fence and the guard would step on me if I remained still in that position. I scrambled back between the two fences, pulled the severed wires together and froze in a face down position. The guard passed my location, continued to the corner of the of the south camp compound, then reversed direction, walking back up the fence line to his main gate position. The guard had walked by me twice, within three feet, and he also failed to see Glenn who was lying in the shallow ditch opposite my location. Our plan had passed a second critical, but totally unplanned test. After the guard returned to his station at the main gate, I crawled back through the outer fence, spliced the wires together and joined Oster in the shallow ditch on the opposite side of the corridor road.

We were out of our compound, and thus far, on schedule. The next critical step was to crawl up the road toward the gate and when the guard sought shelter in the one-man gate house we would pass his location on the opposite side of the road. The snow fall was lessening when we reached the position where we would wait for clearance of a path that would take us past the guard at the main gate; however, this guard for some reason would not take shelter in his guard house. The weather was freezing cold, but the guard, unlike most, simply wasn't ready to use the shelter. We hoped he might take another long trip down the fence line but he maintained his position at the gate. To attempt to crawl past him while he remained stationed outside at the gate would be too risky since we would pass within ten feet of his location and the lights at the gate would make us fully visible if he should glance our way.

We waited and we waited, shivering in the snow, shifting positions, with ice beginning to form, making the outer underwear stiff and creaky. A ring of ice formed on the face of our hoods from our rapid breathing. Oster, who was a body length ahead of me, finally pushed back alongside me. We discussed losing time and the increased risk of getting caught in a guard change. We had finally decided to move up closer to the guard position when I detected a sound behind us on the roadway. Looking back I could see a group of guards coming up the road---we had been delayed too long! Oster was moving ahead of me, not having heard any thing. I grabbed his ankle--jerked on it--and pointed behind me. We both "scrunched" down as far as possible. Glenn Oster's body looked as big as a whale to me. My heart was pounding so hard that I was sure it could be heard; but we lay as still as possible - hardly daring to breathe.

The first three guards passed quietly. The next three were talking and laughing and again we were fortunate. One single guard was trailing behind the other six and he came by more slowly, but did not glance our way. I thought we were in the clear, but looking back, I saw a German shepherd coming up the road way. The dog, lagging about 30 feet behind its master, passed our positions; but suddenly stopped, turned and looked in our direction. It came back toward us and in a playful gesture spread its front feet in front of me and barked twice. The guard by this time was already at the gate talking to the gate guard and beginning to enter the compound. He whistled and the dog turned back, ran to the gate and entered the compound with his master. We couldn't believe our luck! I crawled up next to Glenn and as cold and scared as we were, we elbow-punched each other with joy.

However, our good luck was dampened by the reluctance of the guard to enter his shelter. He was continually turning, looking back into the West camp compound and taking short trips along the perimeter road, stopping just short of our position in the corridor. It had stopped snowing and the search lights seemed brighter than before. We continued to wait and wait, probably for another hour, and we began to fear that we would be caught in another guard change. Oster kept insisting that we needed to continue past the guard and take our chances that the guard would not hear us or glance in our direction. I felt it too risky--that we had to wait. Finally, after further delay, we both agreed that the guard was never going to enter the shelter. We would just have to attempt to crawl past him, within ten feet and in a lighted area. We had moved to perhaps fifteen feet of the gate-guard's position when the guard suddenly turned and entered the shelter. The shelter faced the entrance gate to the South compound and there was no visibility to the guard in our direction. It took us no more than three minutes to finally pass the main gate guard area and enter the shadows cast by the poles supporting the roof of the long, empty coal shed. It had taken us over two hours to cross an area that we had planned to cover in less than thirty minutes, but we had finally overcome the third major obstacle placed in our path.

The remainder of the route meant crawling ever closer to the guard towers and the search lights, so, we had to be extremely cautious; crawling when the search lights were off; remaining completely immobile when the lights clicked on. We were now close enough to the towers to see the bundled up figures of the tower guards and hear the clicks of the switches as the search lights were turned off and on. The hoped for heavy snowfall had ceased altogether. We would often lay still for as long as three or four minutes when a search light from one of the towers was on; however, as we had hoped, the primary beam of the lights was generally focused in areas within the compounds.

We finally, after what seemed an eternity, arrived at the south end of the coal shed. We were less than thirty feet from the two guard towers; twenty feet to go to reach the shadows produced by the barricades that had been removed from the area between the gates. The inner gates were still wide open. We had estimated that if we just had the outer gate to cut through, only two cuts would be required.

Another wait, this time for the outside perimeter guard to make his rounds. After this guard passed the towers we would have about ten minutes before he would pass by again.

The perimeter guard finally passed by the two towers; calling up greetings to the two tower guards. We started the last stretch to the gate, Glenn Oster one body length ahead of me. If a tower guard looked straight down next to his tower, we would be in his line of sight; any movement might be detected. Since it was bitter cold nearly all the guards had their overcoat collars turned up and some wore earmuffs; hopefully, these two would be in that category.

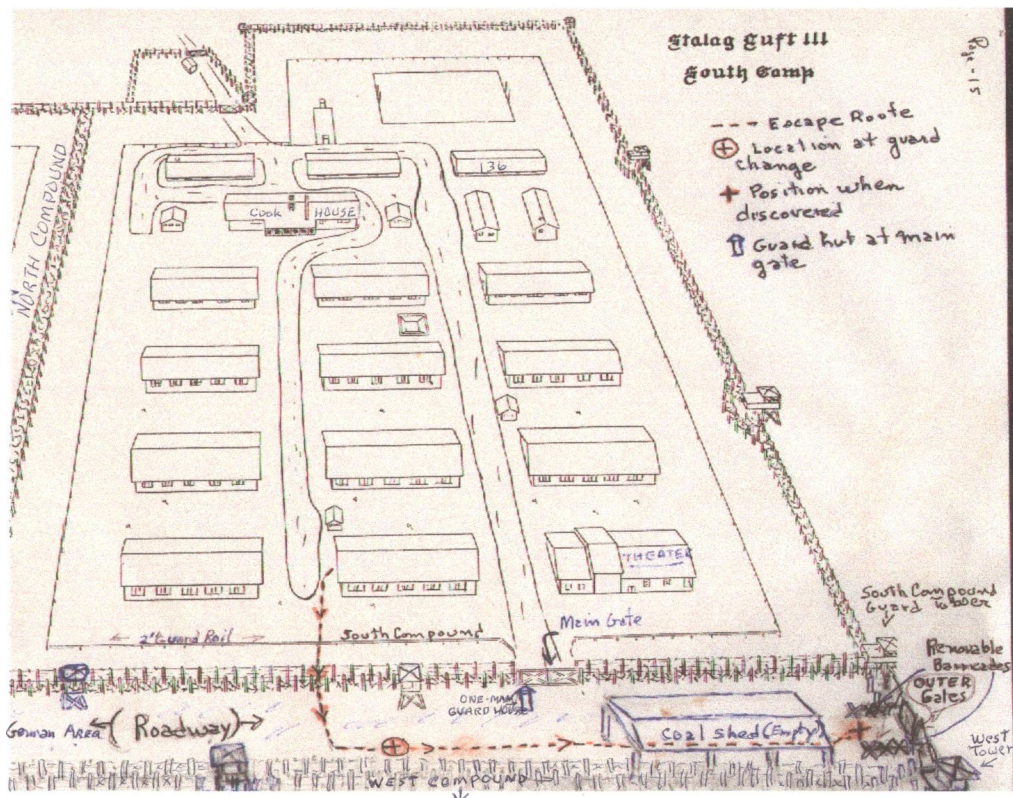
We were more than halfway between the coal shed and the fence; about eight feet to go and we would have shadow coverage beside the rolled up barricades. I suddenly became aware of a dog growling. I stopped, looked back, and saw a blur of animal leaping at my face. I put up my left arm and the dog grabbed it. The guard with the dog let out a scream of terror and was busy shouting while trying to get his gloves off so he could use his rifle. I managed to get to my feet with the dog hanging on my arm. I shook the dog off and raised my hands, asking the guards in loud German not to shoot. The dog continued to lunge at me, shredding the outside iced clothing. Glenn Oster was on his feet now. The guards in the towers had their search lights on us with their machine guns uncovered and ready. The fence--so close--was still a barrier to freedom. There was no place to go--to run to.

What turn of fate caused the guard to exit the South compound and enter the corridor? He was not prepared to find us. He had his rifle still strapped to his shoulder and his scream was one of surprised fright.

It was well after midnight when we were captured. We were stiff with cold and a sheet of ice covered our chests and legs. We needed five more minutes, maybe even less, and we would have been through the last barrier, across the perimeter road and into the forest-- then again --perhaps in that same period a tower guard might have sighted us and opened fire.

I was thankful. I had not dared--during all the planning-- to ask God to spare my life. I had just asked him to give me the courage to do what I had to do when the time came, regardless of the fear I might have. That prayer was answered.

NOTE: This true narrative is the 2nd Part of The "REVIEW of EVENTS" written by Robert M Slane . A 3rd and final Part is still to be written.



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