

POST OFLAG 64 ITEM

SPRING 2003

Minneapolis 2003

Bret and Lisa Job formally invited all of us to Minneapolis for the reunion in 2003. We are to meet the members of the WWII Historical Roundtable in Minneapolis and attend their meetings while we are there. Further details will follow as they become available.

PITTSBURGH 2004

Jerry Alexis and his brother, Roger, invited us to come to Pittsburgh for our reunion in 2004. The vote to take them up on the arrangement was favorable. Further details will follow.

PUBLICATIONS

POSTAGE FUND DONORS
Spring 2003 to Winter 2003

The Waters Story \$19.50
My Tour of Russia \$ 5.00
The Men of Oflag 64 \$ 20.00
The Oflag 64 Directory \$ 3.00
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MAIL CALL

Irv Yarock is still answering your letters.

We start this section off on a sad note.

Linda Slack writing for herself and her sister **Margie** informed us of the passing of **John Slack**. For many years John was the glue that held our group together as the publisher of the Post Of lag 64 ITEM. He was the editor, publisher, and everything else involved. Wasn't it great that he was able to attend our reunion in Columbus. Despite his infirmity his strong handclasp and his reluctance to let go were proof that he knew he was with old-time friends who appreciated what he did for us and loved him. Linda also sent along a donation for the Postage Fund and indicated that she would like to continue her association with us. Many thanks. Linda's address is Linda C. Slack, 54 Saddle Court, Sinking Spring, PA 19608-phone 610-777-7259.

On a lighter note, how many of you dreamed of cutting all ties and "taking off" but never got around to doing it. **Charlie and Bev Turnbo**, who was with us in Columbus, sold their home, their motor cycle, and their car and bought a 40 foot mobile home and are touring across America visiting family and friends, so don't be surprised if they drop in. Charlie is Col Yardley's nephew and can be reached by cell phone at 720-320-2178 or 720-480-2155 or eventually at P.O. Box 1335, Evergreen, CO 80437.

Rosa DiFrancesco Lee wrote representing the **DiFrancesco** family. They thoroughly enjoyed their time in Columbus, kudos to the Warthen Family. She's looking forward to Minneapolis. The picture of John Slack and Margie in this issue was one taken by Rosa.

Pat Waters, Mt. Pleasant, SC-wrote to Bill Warthen thanking him for his run down on the Columbus reunion. For those of you who didn't know the reason for his "last minute" cancellation, he was hospitalized. He's now back in shape and looking forward to Minneapolis. Thanks for the donation to the Postage Fund.

Jane Graffagnino, Hamilton, GA-comes from my (IY) neck of the woods. Her home town is Leominster, MA which is about 30 miles from my home town, Worcester, MA. Thanks for the donation to the P.F.

Tom Johnson, Lake Geneva, WI - sends his regards along with a donation the Postage Fund. Thanks.

Marge & Jerry Alexis, Pittsburh, PA - have been doing a lot of travelling including their time with us in Columbus. I (IY) stop to think that if I took off for any length of time the several organizations that I'm treasurer for would think I absconded with their money. All together their money would probably get me to Providence, RI (about 35 miles away).

"Higgie" Higginbotham, Fallon, NV -Sends his best wishes and a picture of him with his latest violin. Higgie is a master craftsman and turns out some beautiful instruments.

Betty Wright, Winfield, LA - writes to tell us that her husband has passed away. They were with us at the Newport, RI reunion. She enjoys the ITEM and sent a contribution for the Postage Fund. Thanks. She's moved and her new address is Mrs. Hiram Wright, 300 Arkansas Street, Winfield, LA 71483.

Bill Cory, Louisville, KY - there is a letter from him elsewhere in this ITEM. Yes, he says he still takes cold showers. I (IY) don't recall whether he took advantage of the occasional hot one we had when the boiler was functioning and when we had fuel. Joe Ainsworth and I ran the showers for quite a while. In order to try to keep up with the 15 minute per group schedule, we had to push the boiler to the limit. If we guessed wrong and the water "peaked" before the first shower, a runner from the infirmary would come down to tell us that the hot water had backed up through the system and the toilets were flushing with boiling water. Bill has become one of our major contributors to the plaques and the postage fund. Thanks.

MAIL CALL

Marvin Chevalier, Coralville, IA - Marvin was with us in Columbus, in fact, 11 (Y) sat at his table on the Saturday night-dinner. He sneaked out a little early and would not have been missed except that his name was the first one drawn for a door prize. Mary and Denise have been busy travelling around the country visiting relatives and friends,

Clarence Meltesen, San Francisco, CA - writes that he is spending most of his time visiting family, children, grandchildren and his great grand daughter. He is about 60% through editing the third edition of his book "Road to Liberation". Like most us in our age he keeps a bevy of doctors busy.

Shirley Weintraub, New York, NY - she writes that she lost her husband in 1980 but still likes to keep in touch through the ITEM. Thanks for the donation to the postage fund.

Carmen Cavessa, Columbus, GA - who is the City Manager and was our speaker at the Saturday night dinner sent a note to Bill Warthen thanking him and us for the wonderful fruit basket and the pecans. He says it was a pleasure meeting and spending some time with us.

LOOKING FOR -

Someone named **Lt. Bette** (no, not our Ed Batte) Anyone who knew him, please contact his son **T. Bugg**, 3805 Edwards Rd, Cincinnati, OH 45209

Anyone who knew **Bill Yates** and/or **Bill Makepeace**. They were both Oflag 64 but were late-comers. Both are deceased. Please contact **Dan Yates, 9923 Parkford, Dallas, TX 75233**.

Anyone know anything about **Lt. Robert Davis** Company C 106th Infantry. He was in Oflag 64 and started the march with us. Please contact **Robert O'Neill, 8276 E. Mohawk Ln., Scottsdale AZ 85255**.

Meredith Adams, Springfield, MO...Meredith Adams is a History Professor at Southwest Missouri State University at Springfield, Mo. She is writing a book about men that were American POWs in Germany and elsewhere and were sentenced to death by the restraining powers. She is including LTC Schaefer and Lt Schmitz in her book and discovered our group exists. She contacted me (Bob T.) and asked several questions. She then sent me copies of some of the chapters in her book and asked for comments. I then forwarded copies of what she sent to **Irv Yarock, Jack Rathbone, Clarence Meltesen** and **Herb Garris** and asked them to send their comments to the Professor. She said Texas A & M is interested in publishing the book.

Jack Rathbone responded and made the remark that he didn't know he was being held hostage,
" he just thought the Germans were being snotty"

If anybody is interested in contacting her and maybe adding something to her book she can be reached at

Meredith Adams
901 South National Avenue
Springfield, MO 65804-0089
Pho: 417/836-5511
Email: m1a604f@smsu.edu

Errol Johnson, New Haven, KY missed the last reunion because he was on a trip to Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England. After spending all that money on the trip he still had enough left over to send in a donation to the postage fund. Thanks, Errol.

Lyle Brock, Hillsboro Beach, FL writes that he thinks the trip to Hammelburg by some of our men will be a great trip. I think he is right! Thanks for the donation to the postage fund Lyle.

MAIL CALL

Jonel Hill, Pasadena, CA responded to our request about identifying people in the reunion photo by identifying himself. It was difficult to identify everybody in the photo because they all looked alike. Round red faces covered by a thatch of white hair. I think Bill Warthen finally identified everybody. Jonel also sent in a generous donation to the postage fund which is appreciated. Jonel also pointed out that the area code for his area is 626 not 676. This number was on the list of attendees that was prepared by Ellen Warthen and was passed out at the reunion. Please note the change.

Herb Garris, Pinehurst, NC write asking for anybody that has information on **Bill Yates** to contact his son via Herb in Pinehurst NC. We do not have an address on the son of Bill Yates, but will put it on the next item if we have it. Herb also furnished a name and address of a German POW that we will send to our History Prof in MO.

Clarence Meltesen, San Francisco, CA wrote to the History Prof in Mo and furnished her some information about the trial of Lt Scmitz and LTC Schafer.

Irving Yarock, Worcester, MA, sent in a newspaper clipping stating that the Arrow Trucking Co. of Tulsa had more accidents than 79 percent of all other trucking companies in the USA. They have 1,284 trucks running on the roads. **NOW, AREN'T YOU GLAD YOU KNOW THAT!**

Brad Bradford, Grove City, OH writes that an interesting book especially for anybody that was in North Africa is ... "An Army at Dawn" by Rick Atkinson. Brad also enclosed a donation to the postage fund. Thanks, Brad.

Ellen Warthen Atlanta GA, writes that she would like to be added to the mailing list. We will be pleased to do that Ellen. We were surprised to learn that you were not on the list. She also sends in a donation to the postage fund, Thanks Ellen

Don Waful, Syracuse, NY sent in some news on the production. "I'll be seeing you" This is the play about Don and Cassie that was on the stage in Philadelphia recently. There is more on this on another page of the item. Don also sends in a donation to the postage fund. Thanks, friend"

Joe Seringer, Cape Canaveral FL, Joe is spending the winter here and watched the shuttle Columbia take off. He then waited, hoping to see it land, but you know what happened.!

Paul Lampru, Jacksonville, FL complimented Bill Warthen and family for the excellent reunion they put on. Paul can join the rest of us in complimenting Bill and family for the reunion. Paul also sent in a donation to the postage fund for which we are grateful.

Notice!!

Pat Waters, Abe Baum and several men from the D-Day Museum at New Orleans are going on a trip to Europe around the first of March. Larry McBrayer who attended the reunion at Columbus and Bob Zawada of Task Force Baum and Phil Beron are the men from the museum. There are others going, but we do not know their names. A visit to Hammelburg is on the schedule, where they are to be met by Peter Domes, a LTC in the German Army, who will escort them on the trip from Aschaffenburg to Hammelburg. The Officers at the Infantry School at Hammelburg will escort the group through the camp.

Reunion 2003 information

Dates of reunion: Wednesday Sept 10th to Sunday Sept 14, 2003

Hotel for reunion: Holiday Inn Metrodome in downtown Minn and near the University of Minnesota

Room Rates: \$ 93.00 per night- inform them you are with Oflag 64

Transportation from Airport: \$ 12.00 per person- one way

Holiday Inn pho no: 1/800-448-3663

Proposed program:

Wednesday: Registration. Hospitality room will be open Wednesday evening

Thursday morning and early afternoon: This time is open to do what you please.

Thursday late afternoon and evening:: Tour Ft. Snelling in late afternoon..eat at Officers Club..attend World War II Roundtable discussion with the topic being Oflag 64.

Friday: Breakfast and business meeting in the morning.
Gangsters tour of St Paul in the afternoon

Saturday: Dinner at the hotel.. the rest of the day is open to do what you please.

Sunday: Breakfast and Memorial Service in the morning.

Other things to consider:

It was mentioned at Columbus that a "kids nite out" might be interesting to the generation following the Oflag 64 generation. Bret and Lisa are considering several options regarding this and contact the "kids" and see what they want to do.

Don Patton of the WWII Historical Roundtable mentioned a discussion of Hammelburg on Saturday morning at the Hotel. Bret will see if there is enough interest in this to pursue it further. We will keep you posted.

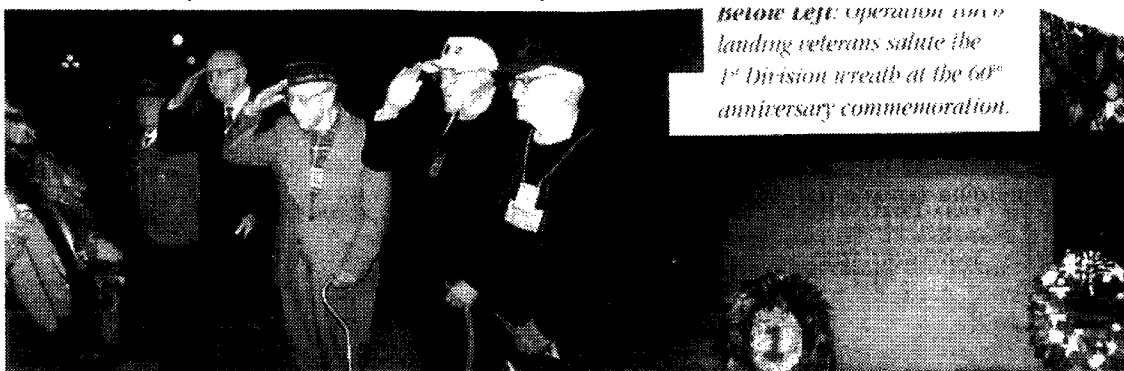
The University of Minnesota History Department asked if there would be any interest in some of our men attending a class and possibly being a guest speaker. Think about it and let Bret know.

The Mall of America is 20 minutes away and public transportation is available at the hotel. (Bus or taxi)

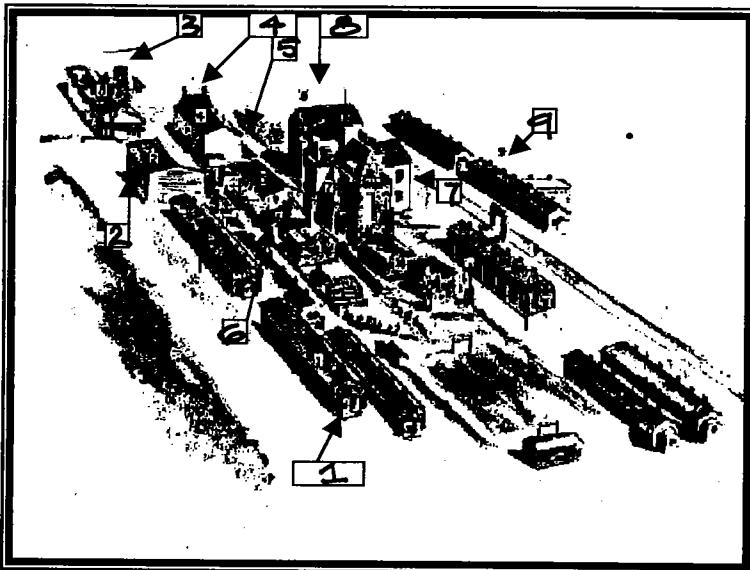
There are a lot of museums, theatres, plays, orchestra hall and others including a Mississippi River Tour
Bret will furnish more detailed information later.

This has nothing to do with the reunion, but it seemed like a good place to put it

It is George Juskalian, with friends, at the monument to the 1st Division at the landing spot for Operation Torch!
George is the man in the plaid shirt and the overseas cap.



Below left: Operation Torch landing veterans salute the 1st Division wreath at the 60th anniversary commemoration.



1. Barracks
2. British Orderlies
3. Linen and Utensil Store
4. Cobbler
5. Tin Store
6. Cookhouse and foodacco
7. Hospital
8. Library and Theatre
9. Administration building and cooler
10. Right: Senior Officers...Left: Showers

This is a drawing of Oflag 64 before it was Oflag 64. It was Oflag XXIB and was populated by British, etal

This story was sent by "Brad" Bradford. It appears to be part of a book by an Englishman. Brad doesn't remember the name of the book or the name of the author.

OFLAG XXIB, SCHUBIN

Schubin (Szubin) is a small market town in Poland lying about twenty miles south of Bromberg (Brydogoloz) and about one hundred and fifty miles due west of Warsaw. It is in the centre of a great undulating agricultural plain, which is almost entirely under the plough. From 1939 until 1945, it was in the newly created German province of Warthegau.

On the outskirts of the town about two miles from the railway station stood a large girls' school consisting of a main building, a chapel, a modern sanatorium, a small brick bungalow, a special bath house, a stable and quite extensive grounds. The grounds included a playing field and two large vegetable gardens with a greenhouse and potting sheds. Secondary schools were closed by the Germans in that part of Poland, which they annexed, and this particular school became a camp for prisoners of war in 1940. The main building, which was white, was of a good period and behind it stood the sanatorium also well built and well equipped. The grounds sloped up behind these buildings the playing field having been leveled and fringed with trees. A grove of chestnut trees surrounded the carriage way behind the main school building. To house the prisoners twelve brick barracks had been built in the grounds, six below the playing fields and six above on the steep part of the slope. Round them and also enclosing the main school

buildings were the usual barbed wire fences and sentry towers.

When the first Air Force prisoners arrived at the camp in September, 1942, from Warburg and Sagan they were pleasantly surprised by their surroundings. The trees and flowers around the sanatorium, the little bungalow which was to house the Senior British officer and his staff, the well kept vegetable gardens and the haphazard location of buildings which still suggested an estate rather than a prison camp, created a feeling almost of homeliness. Beyond the wire instead of a monotonous vista of pine trees, fields stretched away into the distance and all the business of farming could be watched every day.

The pleasantness of these surroundings was offset by the accommodations. The brick barracks were little more than barns with raftered roofs and no ceilings. There were no partitions, but at either end, in the centre of the floor, stood a brick or tiled stove. There were no other fixtures but each pair of prisoners was given a double-decked bed and a cupboard, and two benches and a table were provided for every twelve men. The prisoners arranged this furniture in such a way that small cubicles were formed along each side of the barrack, but a prisoner lying on a top bunk looked from one end of a barrack to another and conversation was carried on in a mass of cross-talk. Nevertheless, partly because of the discomfort but more because the camp offered so many opportunities for escape, morale was extremely high. Even though forced to change their barracks almost weekly carrying their belongings through the snow and

in spite of a severe winter, prisoners at Schubin were more consistently cheerful than in most camps.

From a point of view of escape the camp was almost ideal. It had not been designed for any military purpose and not only were many of the buildings so placed that they created blind spots which were hidden completely from the guards in the sentry towers but the many large trees and steep banks also provided excellent cover. The compound was small, many of the barracks being only seventy feet from the perimeter fence—a much shorter distance than in most Air Force camps and the soil was well drained so that tunnels could be built at any level.

Almost as important as the topography was the fact that the camp was guarded and administered by the German Army. Some German Army camps were controlled efficiently, but before the arrival of Air Force prisoners, the Schubin camp had housed French Army prisoners and discipline had become lax.

The German Security Officer could not have been less suitable. Formerly a Professor of English at a German university he was an attractive character with a large red face and deep husky voice. He treated the whole business of war as an absurd episode in which the one thing that mattered was to preserve a sense of humour. Obviously he was lazy and it was easy to picture him in better times seated in an armchair wreathed in pipe-smoke having long and rather irrelevant discussions with his pupils. He was one of the few German officers among prison camp staffs who was not afraid of his superiors and towards the prisoners was always mildly apologetic.

Some of his colleagues were of very different type. A renegade Czech named Simms, a Captain, performed the duties of Camp Adjutant and was assisted by a fat little Lieutenant who had been a grocer before the war. Simms was irascible, anti-British and vindictive; the grocer was noisy and totally incompetent. Had Simms thought a little less of inflicting discomfort on the prisoners and little more of his duties the story of Schubin might have been different. As it was he added spice to every attempt to defeat the enemy.

The German Air Force guards who escorted the prisoners to the camp attempted to warn those responsible for security of the capacity of the captives for contriving means of escape. Jealousy between the Services was such that they were not allowed to enter the camp, but eventually Glemnitz the chief "ferret" at Sagan managed to talk his way in and did his best. His efforts caused great offence, however, and he was ordered to leave immediately. As he passed out through the gates he had to pass the prisoners who were waiting to go in and he told some of them what had happened. He made a bet that there would be a mass escape within a month and said that it would serve the Army right. It was no fault of his that he did not win his money.

But more important than either topography or the character of the Germans was the fact that the camp was in Poland. The courage of the Poles in this last war has become proverbial but it was nowhere shown more plainly than in their attitude towards prisoners of war. The Germans were ruthless and any Pole caught helping prisoners was shot. Nevertheless of the dozens of Poles with whom the prisoners at Schubin came into contact only one proved unreliable. All the others, including many women, helped in every way they could.

Almost every day Polish workmen entered the camp to light stoves, repair buildings, or do some other work and through them contact was established not only with the Polish Underground Movement, but with many individual families in the neighborhood who were prepared to take great risks to assist prisoners to escape. It is not surprising therefore that to veteran escapers the camp seemed a paradise or that many others who previously had not thought seriously of escape should feel that the chances were so good that they must make an attempt.

During the first few weeks, conditions for escape were unbelievably good, but unfortunately the prisoners, half of whom had come from the army camp at Warburg and half from Sagan, failed to establish a proper organization, and one attempt after another miscarried.

The first successes were achieved by the orderlies, a hundred of whom had accompanied the officers when they were transferred to this camp. Eighty-five of these were Army N.C.O.s and other ranks from Warburg, and fifteen were Air Force N.C.O.s from Sagan who had volunteered for this work in the hope of being able to escape. All the orderlies were housed in the stable, which had been converted into a barracks. Small parties were allowed outside the camp accompanied by guards to take swill to the pigsties, or collect fuel, and larger parties, more heavily guarded, went into the town of Schubin once or twice a week to fetch bread and Red Cross parcels from the railway station. In late October, 1942, a British Army corporal slipped away while on a visit to the piggery and rode off on a bicycle; unfortunately he was recaptured shortly afterwards as he rode through the town of Schubin. A few days later a Warrant Officer of the R.A.F. broke away from a party, which was collecting bread from the railway, but he, too, was recaptured within a few minutes.

In November, a further party of approximately one hundred officers which included Wing Commander Day and Lieutenant Commander Buckley, was transferred from Sagan. Their arrival brought about a great change. Day took charge of the camp as Senior British Officer and Buckley at once established an Escape Organization on the model of the one he had built up at Sagan. A new Escape Committee was formed which decided that as many escape attempts as possible should be made at once before all the opportunities due to German laxity should vanish. Owing to the size of the camp, tunnels offered the best opportunity, and three were begun at once. Working at great speed it was possible to construct a tunnel, which would reach beyond the fence within a few days. It was worth taking risks with security therefore, in the hope of completing the job in between routine searches. As it turned out, although one tunnel reached some feet beyond the wire, all three were discovered.

The "blitz" having failed the policy was changed with the approach of winter. Long-term tunnels were planned, to be dug with the maximum security, for use in the spring. The entrances of two of these tunnels

were at the western end of the camp, one in a latrine and the other in a barrack. The third was in a latrine in the centre of the camp, the tunnel running northwards up the slope. Later a fourth tunnel from the centre of the camp running south was also started. The utmost care was taken to conceal entrances and no risks whatever were allowed in the disposal of the excavated earth so that progress was slow.

Sergeant Wareing

Meanwhile there were a number of individual attempts. On 16 December, 1942. Sergeant P. T. Wareing, D.C.M., R.A.F., left the camp as a member of a party of orderlies engaged in collecting bread from the railway. The bread arrived at a railway siding at Schubin, in a closed wagon. The orderlies were taken to the station in a lorry, which was backed up to it. The bread then was loaded on to the lorry, and during this operation one of the other members of the working party dropped a loaf on the line. Wareing went to pick it up, squeezed between the lorry and the wagon, got underneath the latter and ran across two sets of lines and two platforms. The German driver of the lorry had left the wagon with Wareing, but he got back into the cab of the lorry and started the engine, the other guards were in the wagon and could not see him. The time was about 5.30 p.m. and it was almost dark. Wareing's clothing consisted of faded and dirty Army officer's trousers, a R.A.F. tunic which he had altered to look like a civilian jacket, and a cloth cap. He was *in* possession of a certain amount of food, maps and a compass.

From the railway station he ran southeast across marshy country past the village of Blumenthal into the woods. Then he turned northeast and after passing another prisoner of war camp skirted the northeast side of Netzwalde and joined the main road to Bromberg, which he reached after losing his way the following afternoon.

In Bromberg, he stole an old bicycle standing at the curb in one of the main streets then cycled along the Danzig road, heading toward Graudenz. The bicycle was not very serviceable, and he walked and cycled alternately. There were signposts all the way and a moon in the early part of the night. Just north of

Grippe he turned off the Danzig road and crossed the Vistula, by what appeared to be a temporary wooden bridge. There were German traffic policemen and machine-gun posts at both ends of the bridge, and sentries at intervals of about one hundred yards. The bridge was about half a mile long. He passed these defences without incident and reached Graudenz about 8 a.m. on 18 December.

In the camp he had learned that British soldiers had boarded ships for Sweden at Graudenz, but although he walked north along the river for a considerable distance he saw only river steamers and barges, and no facilities for larger boats. Returning to Graudenz he cycled up to the railway station, which he entered by a porters entrance at about 11 a.m. He was unable to see any notices indicating that passenger trains left that station for Danzig nor any goods trains which appeared to be going there. However, he did not risk examining the goods trains too closely and did not go into the main booking-hall. On leaving the station he saw a German leave a new bicycle against the wall so he took this, leaving his old one in its place, then cycled back through Graudenz and re-crossed the bridge over the Vistula. One of the guards stopped two Germans in uniform and turned one back, and while he was doing this Wareing rode round the group and crossed the bridge without being challenged.

He rested under a bridge just northwest of Michelau and had some food. He set off again about 2 p.m., rejoined the main road to Danzig and cycled through Neunburg and Mewe. At one stage he found a large can of milk standing by the roadside and helped himself. Reaching Mewe about dusk he was in a very exhausted condition, and slept in a haystack north of the town from about 5 p.m. until 3 a.m. on 19 December, when he set off, continuing along the main road. He talked to a British soldier who was working with German civilians on the road and obtained from him the information that the docks were in the centre of Danzig. He passed through Proust and entered Danzig at Peterehagen. He walked about for several hours searching for the docks, and with difficulty, got into the harbour. He followed a smallish inlet for some time, but saw no large ships, and finding that he could not get any further turned back. On return to Danzig,

he met a Pole, who promised to show him the docks, but merely took him back to where he had been.

In the evening he left Danzig on the east side and walked along a road parallel to the river, which he hoped to cross. There were no free ferries, however, and he had no money, having forgotten to place this in his pocket before leaving the camp. He slept in an unfurnished house from about 9 p.m. until 3 o'clock next morning. During this time a man, probably from a neighbouring farm, entered the house flashing a torch, but Wareing left by one door as he entered another, and was not seen.

In the morning, he cycled east for about six or seven miles, but was unable to reach the sea. He returned to Danzig at about 7.30 a.m., and succeeded in getting into part of the harbour. A policeman approached and he made a detour, eventually getting close to the ships. He saw three or four flying Swedish flags and two flying the Blue Peter. In order to avoid the sentries posted on the quay beside the ships he hid himself and the bicycle in stacks of timber beside some railway lines. From this hiding place he watched the boats for about an hour during which time one sailed.

Just as the guards were being changed, Wareing left his hiding place, and when the guards who were relieved passed he walked in the direction of the ships. He walked slowly to the last ship, which was loading coal. As he approached, the guard on the gangway turned and strolled away, -whereupon Wareing walked up the gangway and got into the main forward hold into which coal was being loaded. He entered by way of the hatch, which was not then being used and climbed down the side of the hold, dropping on to the coal. Going right forward and hiding against the side, he moved later on to the back. He entered the hold at about 9.30 a.m. and remained there all day. When the hold was about three-quarters full about a dozen Russians and two or three Germans entered to trim the coal. The escaper hid behind a pillar and was seen by several of the Russians, so he addressed one of them, saying "Angliski pilot." This man told his companion, and none of them said anything. By this time it was dark and the Russians were working by flood-light. Between 10 and 11 p.m.

the Russians were taken away and Wareing forced a trap door into the trimming bunker. There was no one there and he dug a hole in the coal at the side of the ship and concealed himself.

The Germans searched the ship next morning, and one entered the trimming bunker flashing a torch, but Wareing was not discovered. The boat sailed at about 9 o'clock on 21 December. Wareing remained in hiding for three and half days altogether, spending each night beside a boiler. He left his hiding place in the early hours of the morning of 23 December and was seen by one of the crew. He was told that the ship would reach Halmstad about 2 p.m. On arrival there he was handed over to the Swedish police, and was taken to the British Legation at Stockholm a few days later. Shortly afterwards he was repatriated to the United Kingdom.

* * * * *

Two officers exchanged identities with orderlies and made an unsuccessful attempt to get away from a party which was fetching coal, but the orderlies were so well known to the Germans that this became impossible. To walk through the gate in disguise was equally difficult, first because the uniform of the German army was green and almost impossible to counterfeit, secondly because the area around the gate for some forty yards was out of bounds to all prisoners. The only way to surmount these difficulties appeared to be by boarding some form of transport.

The first attempt of this description was made in December, 1942. A film van with a canvas hood had arrived in the camp and stood empty outside the door of the main school building for some hours. The doors were locked and Germans were always sufficiently near to make tampering with the van difficult. In despair of finding a safer way an officer decided to climb on to the van and lie on the hood hoping to be driven out unobserved. The guard and the driver had their attention diverted for a moment and the prisoner climbed up. The lorry was tall and the hood sagged just enough to prevent him being seen by those standing at the side of the vehicle; those standing a yard or two away could see him easily. He lay still

hoping for the best. It was dark when the film show was over and the driver and guards packed the van, climbed in and drove down to the gate, which was brightly lit by an arc lamp high over the centre. To the prisoners who were watching the man on the roof was in full view, but although the guards at the gate looked inside and underneath the lorry most carefully not one of them thought of looking on the roof. The lorry drove off into the night, and shortly afterwards the escaper slid down to freedom. He was caught the following evening on Bromberg aerodrome attempting to steal an aircraft.

The second escape through the gate needed more careful planning. Officer prisoners were provided with sheets and the sheets were washed in the local town. A laundry van came right into the camp every week and the laundry was loaded from a shed. The officer in charge of the laundry planned to have himself concealed and driven out in the van. Several times preparations were made, but it was impossible to put the plan into effect either because of the failure of the guard to take long enough over his cup of tea or some other accident. Eventually, however, the prisoner succeeded in getting into the lorry unobserved, was covered with laundry and driven out of the camp. He too was caught soon afterwards hovering around an aerodrome. The third escape through the gate was timed to coincide with the tunnel, which was successful. A Polish Flight Lieutenant who had been the main liaison between the prisoners and the Poles outside had arranged hiding places for himself and a friend and wanted twenty-four hours' start before the mass escape occurred. Accordingly he entered into an arrangement with the Polish driver of one of the tanks used for emptying the cesspools. These tanks were long and tubular, sealed by round bulkheads on top, and looked rather like small petrol wagons. Without hesitation the driver agreed to enlarge the bulkhead sufficiently to allow a man to climb into it, to clean the tank and to drive two men out in it. In order to make success certain he brought the tank into the camp, and having parked it in a place out of sight of any German guards, carried out a dress rehearsal.

The prisoners intending to escape climbed into the tank and sat on a small stool. They found that there

was just room for them but discovered that although the tank had been cleaned carefully the fumes were overpowering. However this difficulty was overcome by the construction of special gauze masks which were treated with strong disinfectant.

On 3 March, 1943, two days before the tunnel was due to be used, the tank was deliberately left overnight in the camp. The next day a second similar tank was driven in and after doing its rounds of the cesspools was substituted for the one which had been left. Meanwhile the two escapers had climbed into this and were driven through the gates and out to their pre-arranged rendezvous. The next day the tunnel was used and the Germans naturally assumed that the two officers concerned had gone out with the others. Their true method of escape was never discovered. However, like those who had escaped through the tunnel, they were recaptured eventually.

* * * * *

Meanwhile progress was being made with tunnels and although more than one was discovered when the thaw set in unexpectedly early in January two new ones went *quickly* ahead. One of these was successful. At the eastern end of the camp the latrine was the closest building to the fence. The building was divided into two by a brick wall. Below the floor of one half was a sump and below the other a great pit. The dividing wall was carried down between them. A hole was knocked into the dividing wall large enough to allow a man's shoulders to slip through and a brick panel was made to fit it. Through this hole, at one side of the sump, a large chamber of approximately 500 cubic feet was excavated, the earth being thrown through the hole in the wall into the cesspool. From that chamber the tunnel itself was dug.

The tunnel was intended to come out in the corner of a shallow potato ditch, which began five yards beyond the fence and led directly away from it. The distance from the chamber to the proposed exit was about one hundred and thirty feet. Work in the tunnel was started in the beginning of January, 1943. Twenty-four officers and four N.C.O.s worked in three shifts. The first digging, the second dispersing the earth, the third

going in after the earth had been removed and shoring the tunnel with boards taken from beds and tidying-up generally. The earth was disposed of mostly in the cesspool which was so full of semi-liquid refuse that it could absorb a great quantity. Complaints were received from the driver of the tank, a Pole, that after pumping out the refuse his tank was half-filled with sand, but this never reached German ears. The rest of the earth was disposed of in the open. When there was fresh snow this was difficult and the earth had sometimes to be sprinkled openly on the paths as though to make them less slippery. After the thaw, with the playing-field a quagmire and the vegetable gardens ready to be dug, dispersal was a relatively simple matter. Prisoners were not locked in their barracks until 7 p.m. and as in January and February it was dark from 5.30 p.m. onwards almost anything could be done with safety. During that period the only guards in the camp were two ancient infantrymen who wandered slowly and harmlessly around the compound and were easily trailed. There were too many trees, buildings and banks to make searchlights any real danger. At one time the Germans became a little apprehensive that something might be going on and threatened to lock the prisoners in their barracks at 5 p.m. daily, but this was resisted successfully on health grounds.

Every evening, groups of prisoners could dimly be seen walking up and down the dark side of the football field or digging methodically in the gardens. At given signals kitbags full of earth were carried out and dumped in front of them to be trampled or dug into the ground. To avoid the ground microphones the tunnel had to go deep but it was soon learned that these microphones were far too sensitive and that the noise of prisoners walking around the perimeter of the camp or skating on the flooded football field made it impossible for other sounds to be detected clearly. By the end of February the tunnel passed under the fence at a depth of fifteen feet and from that point it rose steeply in the five yards, between the fence and the potato ditch. It was shored with boarding throughout and was about two feet and a half square. There was just room for a man dressed in a greatcoat and pushing a small pack in front of him to get through.

By 3 March, 1943, the tunnel was ready for use and all those who had taken part in the digging and four others chosen by the Escape Committee made their preparations. They were better equipped than Air Force prisoners had ever been before. Owing to the help of the Poles a great deal of information and material had been acquired. Civilian workers' passes, clothes, maps and plans of the locality, all were available and all those who intended to travel by train had proper identity cards, in most cases bearing their own photographs. The taking of these photographs had been arranged by a Polish girl, a friend of a Polish officer serving in the Royal Air Force, who sent a camera into the camp by one of the many Polish workers and then had the films developed and printed outside. Food had been saved through the winter and all had as much as they felt they could or need carry.

The escape was planned for the night of 5 March, 1943. As the barracks were locked at 7 o'clock it was necessary for all the thirty-two prisoners who were going to escape to be under the latrine before that hour. Sixteen were to lie head to toe in the tunnel itself the other sixteen to wait in the chamber which was just large enough to hold them. The prisoners went down in ones and twos and by 6.30 p.m. the last man in the draw had been pushed through the small brick trap door and squeezed into the chamber. The brick panel was then replaced the latrine seat put back and the latrine deserted. About three feet of earth remained to be dug out in order to reach the surface and space for this earth had been left on the floor of the tunnel itself.

Due to excellent survey work the tunnel came out exactly where it was intended and the first two men left at 10 p.m. Some difficulty was experienced by those who followed because as each man went out he kicked back a certain amount of earth and the tunnel began to narrow just at the point where it curved upwards. More than one prisoner was stuck temporarily with his head only two or three feet from the fresh air and had to dig himself clear, passing the earth back to the man behind him. One rather fat officer took forty minutes to clear himself and was so exhausted afterwards that he failed to get far.

As each man put his head above the ground he was able to see the guard patrolling the brilliantly lit fence only five yards away. It seemed impossible that he would not see or hear something. However, after watching him for a few seconds, each escaper became assured that the bright lights made all else inky black and that the guard's attention, such as it was, was concentrated on the inside of the camp. To each the noise which he made as he got out of the tunnel and crawled along the ditch seemed deafening, but only once did the guard stop and peer in the direction of the tunnel exit. If he had heard a noise he did not take the trouble to walk a few paces necessary to discover what it was.

By midnight the last of the escapers had crawled away and the tunnel lay empty and open. Three changes of guard took place but even with the coming of daylight no one noticed anything although the tracks of the men who had crawled across the stubble in the neighbouring field were visible. There was great excitement in the camp and to one Wing Commander the temptation of an open tunnel, even though it meant emerging a few feet from a German in broad daylight, was too good to be missed. Parade was not until 8 o'clock and a little before 7 he and three other officers wandered down to the latrine. The trap was removed and the Wing Commander lowered into the chamber and a few moments later early risers saw first a head and then a body emerge from the ground just outside the wire. The guard still walked his beat and did not look round. The Wing Commander stood up looking very much like a Polish workman, brushed the sand from his clothes and strolled away to temporary freedom.

In the camp itself pandemonium soon broke loose. The testy little Czech Simms took the parade and at first when he realised that so many prisoners were missing he thought that the British were playing a joke. Then the guard patrolling outside the fence discovered the tunnel mouth. No German dared go down the tunnel and a Russian prisoner with a rope round his waist was sent in head first, in due course arriving under the latrine seat. At 11 o'clock that morning bus loads of special S.S. troops began to arrive outside the camp. As the Commandant had

placed special patrols on the road to search all persons and vehicles going past, some confusion followed. The camp guards made a gallant attempt to board and search the buses but were soon retreating in disorder. After some hours of talk, parades and inspections of the tunnel exit, the S.S. formed up outside the gate and marched slowly into the camp in single file. The prisoners were delighted and lined the route cheering.

The S.S. turned them out of their barracks and made some attempt at a personal search. As they appeared not to know what they expected to find this proved abortive. In one barrack there was a barrel of beer in the passage and many of the S.S. troops asked how much it cost per glass and were charged fifty pfennings. German money, of course, was illegal for prisoners and most valuable. Later one of the officers of the S.S. used the barrel as a seat not knowing that in a false bottom beneath the beer were most of the papers and maps of the forging and map departments. A good deal of chocolate and other items were sold for high prices. Several hours were then spent by the prisoners on the football field, while their barracks were searched but as far as is known nothing was either found or taken away.

Of the thirty-three escapers none reached England. Lieutenant Commander Buckley, the first and perhaps the greatest organiser of escape in Air Force camps in Germany, reached Denmark with a prisoner who was a Dane serving in the R.A.F., but it is believed that they were drowned whilst attempting to cross to Sweden in a canoe. Of the others, two reached the Ruhr, a third got to Hanover and a fourth was caught near Innsbruck, all having travelled by train. Two Polish officers reached Warsaw and spent some weeks there in hiding before being caught by the Gestapo. They were threatened with death but were eventually sent to Sagan.

Although the final result was disappointing the escape had several satisfactory features. Three of the prisoners who travelled by train passed five examinations with their forged papers and a fourth, seven. In several cases the examiners were members of the Gestapo and experts in the matter of identity

cards. Even better was the general disturbance in the German High Command. Mass escape was always a question for the High Command and on this occasion, according to the Germans themselves, three hundred thousand troops and police covering the whole of the province of Warthegau and all frontier areas were turned out for the search. More than one prisoner had the satisfaction of seeing lines of the German Home Guard combing the fields sixty or seventy miles away from Schubin as he passed them comfortably in a train. In all frontier zones the Railway Police were doubled and special patrols were placed on all main roads and bridges. The Home Guard in Warthegau was on full-time duty for a week during a period when they were badly needed in the fields.

Meanwhile the Gestapo had taken over the administration of the camp. The Commandant was superseded by the head of the local Criminal Police every member of the German administration was interrogated and all the officers were court martialled. Some prisoners returning from their escape had the satisfying experience of seeing the officers who had been bullying them for so many months standing rigidly at attention in front of their new civilian chief and being dressed down like schoolboys. The results of the court martial are not known but the Commandant was replaced within a fortnight and when the prisoners left Schubin about a month later, the other officers were awaiting sentence.

The reign of the Gestapo lasted a month, after which camp life returned to normal. A second tunnel was at once completed. It was one hundred and ten feet long and sixty feet beyond the perimeter fence. All preparations were made for an even larger mass escape and then, for the only time in over three months, the security system broke down. On 26 March the last load of sand had to be disposed of and one of the tunnel leaders was throwing it out of a window on to a bank behind his barrack when he saw a German sentry outside the fence watching him; a watcher had failed to give warning. The Germans who had already made several searches stopped at nothing and eventually discovered the entrance, and Russians were ordered to fill in the tunnel. However two prisoners were not defeated. They managed to

crawl into the tunnel, just before the Russians broke into it with their spades. One or two prisoners who were watching saw a Russian suddenly stop digging and a broad smile break over his face. A moment later he continued and exposed the tunnel but by then the two British prisoners had passed along it and were beyond the fence. The Germans put guards on the tunnel and a triple cordon of sentries round that side of the camp that night. The two prisoners broke out and by crawling flat on their stomachs covered about a hundred yards in two hours, but they were picked up by the triple cordon of which they had not been aware.

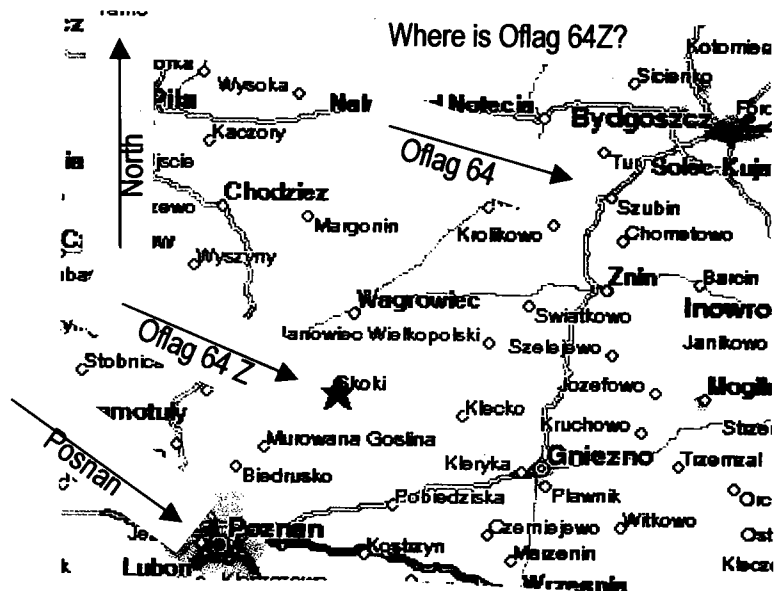
Even then the game was not finished. It was known that the camp was soon to be evacuated and the mere fact that two men had emerged from the tunnel gave an opportunity to others to pretend that they had escaped in the hope that they could hide until the camp was deserted. Four "ghosts" joined four who had been living underground since the first tunnel and as no other tunnels were available they led a hectic life during the next five weeks, sleeping underneath beds at night and finally taking up their quarters in the attic of the sanatorium. During this time the camp was being evacuated in batches of two hundred and it looked as if their plan would succeed. By sheer bad luck, the day before the final batch was due to leave the camp, a chimney sweep arrived to clean the sanatorium chimneys and found them in the attic. He was a Pole and was bribed heavily to say nothing but many of his compatriots had been shot after the previous escape and not unnaturally he was afraid. He reported the "ghosts" to the police in the village who in turn informed the camp authorities, they were found just in time to be sent to Sagan.

* * * * *

During the evacuation one officer escaped in a packing case which he had made with wood from the top of a greenhouse. The packing case was so made that one side of it fastened on the inside. A great deal of heavy luggage was being taken each day from the barracks to the camp luggage store, and *this* particular packing case was filled with clogs and various items of equipment and sent to the store where it was searched and put behind the counter. At mid-day the escaper went into the store with a number of other

prisoners who were handing in their belongings and laid behind a pile of old palliasses. When the guards left the store to go for their mid-day meal he pulled away some boards, which divided the hut and got into the luggage store, afterwards replacing the boards. He found his special packing case, emptied the contents behind some other packing cases in a corner, and shut himself in it.

About two hours later this packing case was loaded on a lorry and although the escaper had intended to get out of it on the way to the railway station, he was unable to do so because heavy packages had been piled on top. The case was put down in the station yard and he tried the hinged side, which unfortunately sprung open and he could not close it again. However, he beckoned to a Russian prisoner of war and by sign language made him understand what was wanted, whereupon the Russian banged it shut. The escaper had seen that his position was in a shed and near the shed door. When he heard the lorry drive away he got out of the case and hid behind some luggage until dark. The shed door was locked and a guard was stationed outside. He decided to wait until daylight when he hoped that the guard would be removed, but he was unable to leave the shed until the next night when he opened the door with a skeleton key. He walked out of the railway yard at about 10 p.m. and made his way towards Bromberg aerodrome intending to steal an aircraft. Whilst hiding during the next day in a hole near the railway line he was caught by a German and taken to the aerodrome, eventually being returned to Schubin.



Col. Doyle R. Yardley, Home Was Never Like This, Edited by Charles Turnbo, Yardley Enterprises, P0 Box 1335, Evergreen, CO., 80437. Pb., 312 pp., \$25.00.

It is truly an honor to review this account and to share a great story, which involves a fellow prisoner friend of mine in WW II. It is a wonder that the book came about at all and it did with the discovery of Col. Yardley's diary found in one of the footlockers in his home in Texas. In about a years time, Nina Yardley and Charles Turnbo, brought the book to publication with a tremendous effort and for whom we are so pleased.

The diary begins in April 1942 and concludes in April 1945. with a short epilogue into 1946. It is easily read and certainly exciting. The introductory pages portray the author's qualifying at Fort Benning for the parachute wings and his earliest assignment to the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion. It then covers the harsh training his unit faced at home and then in England in preparation for the initial employment of America's Airborne Assaults in WW II, which took place in a departure from Lands End in England for a 12 hour flight for over 1500 miles south to liberate and destroy an airbase near Oran, Algeria. That drop was very successful. An interesting aside is that on that jump his battalion was accompanied by a then Major, now a LTG William Yarborough, who was Gen. Mark Clark's airborne advisor, and who lives near me in Pinehurst. He recalled and gave high praise to Col. Yardley, whom he well recalled as we spoke in a recent call on the phone. After about 17 days his unit made a second drop on another target near Gafsa, Algeria, which was well done. And shortly after Gen. Clark gave the 509th a third mission to follow their role in Sicily. It was to fly out of Sicily north well behind the enemy lines at about 20 miles east of Naples to Avallino, Italy. It too was successful and made the third combat jump and qualified the bronze stars on his parachute wings. It is a rare honor and a precious few of us left with even one star, much less three. Today, it s a distinctive honor to see a veteran and recognize it. Unfortunately, he was wounded by German machine gun fire and taken a prisoner of war in Sept. 1943.

The next few chapters relate the tortuous details of his movement by vehicles and train from the battlefield north through Italy and the Brenner Pass to Stalag XIII C in Hammelburg, Germany. And then later to the permanent camp Of lag 64 in Schubin, Poland arriving in Sept. 1943 as one of the earliest following the losses from North Africa and Sicily.

Next come the keen observations he made of the camp activities. It covers the way many took the prison life, the avocations readily available to relieve the boredom, the leadership and discipline maintained, and impressions of the German and America camp leaders. Notable was its initial Senior American Officer, Col.

Thomas D Drake, a Regimental Commander of the 34th Infantry Division in North Africa. He was badly wounded and later exchanged and sent home to America. His follower was Col. Paul R. Goode, A Regimental commander of the 29th Infantry Division taken in Normandy on Omaha Beach in June 1944. Both of these officers were held in the highest esteem and greatest respect, not only by us, as prisoners and his subordinates, but by the German camp authorities as well.

Near Dec. 1944, Col. Yardley was selected to lead the formation of another Oflag 64Z to accommodate the gradual fill to capacity of Oflag 64, following , Holland, The Bulge and early Rhine campaigns. Then. after our departure from Oflag 64, on 21 Jan. 1945, our respective escapes were planned and executed. His careful observations of the Soviet Army Forces under Marshal Zhukov, are well described, as they made their way onto Berlin. Our path crossed as we progressed across friendly Poland to Warsaw, Kiev and finally by train to Odessa, Russia on the Black Sea ,where in early Mar. we were repatriated by American officers from the Lend Lease Military Mission in Moscow. We sailed on the same ship, the H. M . S. Moreton Bay though Istanbul, Port Said and to Naples, Italy. There we parted company as he was sent home, and the reviewer managed to return back to Marseille, France and then to Dusseldorf, Germany to join my own unit again.

His next assignment stateside was to visit the South American Nations and our Mission with them and to explain, with his fluency in Spanish , the skills our airborne troops had learned in Europe and which the host members welcome.

The story ends with a tragic loss of the author and closed what may have well become a highly successful one. Our deep thanks to Nina and Charles for their research and diligence in bringing this story of an American Airborne Hero to fruition. It is highly recommended for purchase for a library item and fine reading.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Herbert L. Garris
Box 1693
Pinehurst, N. C. 28370

April 30, 2002

Dear Ms. Fauser,

We are remiss in not having written to you before now, but we did want you to know how much "I'll Be Seeing You" meant to us. What a beautiful, memorable evening you gave us! A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to travel back in personal yet collective time, the musical stirred our emotions--our laughter, our tears, and our love. As deeply held remembrances came forth for some, others received newfound understanding of the hardships that were endured during World War II.

The Wafuls have every reason to feel proud that you touched their lives, but the officers of Oflag 64 and their families are equally proud and honored by your devotion to telling their story as well. Although people daily recount their past through photos, films, letters, or anecdotes, few have the privilege, as did we, of seeing their memories and experiences brought back to life in as thorough and moving a tribute as you created in your musical. We know that it entailed a labor of love for you to relate this wartime romance in words and song, and we are grateful that you were so moved by Oflag 64 as to commemorate their courage, bravery, and fortitude in your musical. You celebrate the overwhelming power of love and the unbelievable strength of mankind in the face of adversity.

Please know that you have our heartfelt appreciation for the excellent inaugural presentation of "I'll Be Seeing You" at the Kimmel Center as well as the lovely reception which followed. It was truly a special evening indeed -- one that we will treasure always.

Our warmest thanks to you, Ms. Fauser.

Most sincerely,

John
Dein James
Marjie Suda



The photo above is of Don Waful and two actors in his play "I'LL BE SEEING YOU" This is the play about Don and Cassie that was presented in Philadelphia in Feb. of last year. The uniforms the actors have on are Don and Cassie's actual uniforms. That must have been an emotional moment for Don.

The letter to the left is from John Slack and his daughters and families.

MCARLYLE PRO



THESE ARE UNSOLICITED COMMENTS MADE BY THE AUDIENCE

"THIS IS THE AMERICAN LES MIZ."

"THE MUSIC IS STIRING..."

"FANTASTIC..."

"I HAD A WONDERFUL TIME, AND I'LL SEE IT AGAIN"

THE SHOW REALLY CAPTURED THE TIME AND EVENTS

THE SHOW TOOK ME BACK TO MY YOUTH..."

THE MUSIC IS WONDERFUL..."

I CRIED...ITS SUCH A WONDERFUL LOVE STORY..."

YOU REALLY LOVE THESE CHARACTERS..."

THE PERFORMANCES ARE MOVING..."

THANK YOU FOR TELLING THIS IMPORTANT STORY..."

A LITTLE COMPANY BUSINESS

OOPS!

In the issue of Winter 2002 we listed all the people that had contributed to the postage fund for the year 2002. We overlooked several names and are taking this opportunity to correct our oversight. The names that should have been included are:

Edward Rooney
Jim Bickers
Vernon Siebert

Ed Rinehart
John Creech
Don Graul

John Slack
Joe Barrett
Marcia Kanner

Herm Littman
Nita Gauntt

WOW!

Bill Warthen sent us a check for \$5,000, which represents the money left over at Columbus after all the bills have been paid.. He is certain that the numbers are correct, but if he later finds that an error has been made adjustments will be made. Joe Serringer has deposited the check in the bank at Wooster, OH, and suggests that we use half the money for the Minneapolis reunion and half of the money for the reunion at Pittsburgh. You may recall that is what we did with the money that Duanne Kennedy sent in from the reunion at Laughlin, NV

Not Company Business, but.....



2 mean men... You know the one in the hat! The other one is Bob O'Neill from Scottsdale, Arizona!
Photo taken at the reunion in Columbus, Oct, 2003.

WILLIAM R. CORY
12 WOODHILL ROAD
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY 40207-1146

December 12, 2002

Note about Bill Cory's cold showers! Irv told me (Bob T.) that Bill would come out of digging in the tunnel real dirty and they would throw cold water on him to clean him up so the Germans wouldn't know what he had been doing!

Mr. Bob Thompson
Mr. Irv Yarock
Tulsa, OK 74133, &
Worcester, MA 01604

Dear Bob & Irv:

To the two of you and all Ex-Oflag 64 PsOW who were captured in Tunisia (or elsewhere in N.Africa-earlier), or who knew Hill T. "Spud" Murphy.

I have made a grave error in saying that "Spud" Murphy committed suicide after the War. Say what you will, lapse of memory, or worse, total senility. I am totally wrong and know it. My apologies to Mrs. Hill if still with us, and to their children. "Spud" did die, but not by his own hand. It was not right after the War's end, but much later, and Having heard otherwise, I've kicked myself dozens of times for not looking him up down in Ala. when I travelled that way on business post-War years.

So much for old age - nevertheless, my apologies all around.

Aside from such a huge "boo-boo", it was nice of you to reprint my letter.

On another subject, have just read a Great War Book-AN ARMY AT DAWN, 1st of 3 vol trilogy, which gives an all-out detailed account of "our War in N.Africa". You are in at least two, or more, pages, Irv - something like pages 237/262. By Rick Atkinson, it mentions others we knew also-Drake/Waters/Alger/VanVliet, and some more of my Louisville 1st Armored buddies who escaped the fate of capture, and who live, or have lived here in my neighborhood. I highly recommend it for any and all..

Irv: Your "MAIL CALL" Items are priceless! And, for your information I do still take those cold showers each day, and even gotten my Son to do so - he's now 48! Also, on the subject of Hervey Robinson - he, and Bill Fabian (both of whom went down in the Tunnel Jan 20 with "Spud" Murphy and me) came to our 50th Reunion which I hosted here in Louisville in '93. You may have remembered my NZ Friend, George Brown here that year too - he and I became close friends in Rothenburg am Fulda before Szubin. He just died at 91½ this summer, and was the Father of my Godson of Richmond, NZ whom I saw once at age 6mos when I was Mil. Attache there in '46/'47

Re-reading my previous letter & seem to be a bit repetitive!

All the best this Season
to you both - Bill

copied for
mail

Great generation retells war stories

BY MICK WALSH *Staff Writer*

Go to a reunion and chances are the conversation will center around old friends, frat parties, ballgames and, dare we say it, our children.

The men of Oflag 64 talk about commandants, lentil soup and prison breaks. Oflag 64 isn't a new IBM product. The word comes from the German phrase *offizier lager*, which translates roughly into "a POW camp for officers."

The number represents just one of the many stalags set aside for U.S. captives by the Axis in Germany and Poland.

About four dozen survivors of the camp got together this past weekend to visit Fort Benning, where many trained before being shipped overseas, and to share remembrances of the 20 months they spent together from June, 1943 until January, 1945.

It's a time to tell stories," said Bill Warthen, a retired tobacco and peanuts farmer from Vidalia, who organized the reunion. Among them: the thwarted escape attempt.

For them, the news from Stalag Luft 3 wasn't what they wanted to hear. For they, too, had planned an escape from their German guards by digging a tunnel from inside one of their closely guarded barracks to an area on the other side of the barbed wire fence.

Months had been invested in the plan. Tunnelers sewed dirt from their excavation into the trousers of their fellow prisoners of war, mainly Army officers, all then in their early to mid-20s, most captured months earlier in North Africa. These men in turn deposited the dirt during their daily walks around the compound.

Slats from their bunk beds reinforced the roof of the tunnel. Forged documents and maps were made for the potential escapees. Civilian-like clothing was made. Classes were conducted in colloquial German. All the men needed was the go-ahead from their superiors.

Then came word that a similar plan by POWs inside the massive Stalag Luft 3 camp had ended in disaster.

Their tunnel surfaced too close to a German guard barracks. Only three men were able to escape. Upon Adolf Hitler's orders, 50 of the escape organizers were lined up and shot. Some of those actions were captured on film in the 1963 hit "The Great Escape," starring Steve McQueen and James Garner.

The Oflag 64 escape committee closed down the tunnel project immediately. It was March, 1944. The Oflag 64 survivors, most well into their 80s, came to Columbus to reminisce, and to salute those who either never made it back from World War II, or have died during the 57 years since the prison camp was closed in January, 1945.

Day trips took them to the Gardens at Callaway, Andersonville, Plains and Fort Benning, where many of them had trained before being shipped off to Africa, where on Valentine's Day, 1943, the German Afrika Korps inflicted what became the greatest land defeat on U.S. forces by a foreign power in history. More than 5,000 U.S. soldiers were either killed or wounded that day. One hundred and fifty captives would be led off to a 10-acre compound in Schubin, Poland.

By the time the Oflag was evacuated in January 1945, the roll call had

more than 10,000 shot-down American flying officers were held, or the several stalags for thousands of American enlisted men scattered throughout Germany and Poland.

The Oflag 64 group was an eclectic one. Most of them were young lieutenants or captains, but there were enough field-grade officers to maintain discipline. Average age: 27. Most were college-educated, many with advanced degrees. They included men who in civilian life had been doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors, journalists, artists, ranchers, musicians, and even a former commandant of a U.S. military school.

Two words come to mind when I think back to those days," said Warthen, "hunger and cold. There was never enough to eat and that winter in Poland was unbearable." Red Cross parcels were available periodically, he explained, sometimes to be shared by two or three men. "They were something to look forward to and a great supplement to our limited diet."

Coffee was brought into the barracks by the guards every morning... in buckets. A watery soup, two or three slices of black bread, and maybe one or two small potatoes represented the daily menu. As bad as the conditions were at the camp, which before the war had housed a boys' school, the resourceful Kriegies (German for prisoners) persevered. You didn't see it in "Hogan's Heroes" or any of the other romanticized tele-tributes to POWs, but the men of Oflag 64 refused to allow their intellects to waste

A theater group was established; so was a glee club and a jazz band, which used instruments given them by the Red Cross. An elaborate program of classes was set up by those men with academic backgrounds. They built themselves a greenhouse, a tailor shop and a shoe repair shop. The camp library had 7,000 books.

But in early 1945, with the Russian Army closing in on Poland, Hitler ordered the camp closed and the prisoners moved to a stalag 300 miles away in Hammelburg.

Keep in mind it's January and very cold," said Warthen. "We marched for 45 days in all. Many of us were ill with dysentery. We ate anything we could find to stay alive. ANYTHING. Others had frozen feet. But what's truly amazing is that not a single one of the Oflag 64 men died on that march. In fact, during the 20 months the camp was open, only one American prisoner died, and he from a heart attack. You can thank the leadership and the respect for discipline among those in the camp." Just before checking out of the Sheraton Four Points on Sunday, Warthen and his reunion committee made plans for next October's get together in Minneapolis.

And probably tell the same old stories.

**John F. Slack
Printer, WWII POW, 89**

John F. Slack, 89, a retired printer and decorated World War II prisoner of war, died of pneumonia Sunday at St. Joseph's Hospital in Reading.

Mr. Slack grew up in Asbury Park, N.J., and earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

During World War II he served in the Army. In 1943 he was captured by Germans troops in Tunisia and for 27 months was imprisoned in Szubin, Poland. He was liberated in Moosburg, Germany, in 1945. For sending information to the Allies from his prison camp at great personal risk, he was awarded the Bronze Star.

After his discharge he worked for National Publishing Co. in Philadelphia until establishing his own company in the city.

His daughter Marjorie said the company adapted to the needs of the business community, initially offering duplicating services and telephone-answering services. When offices began to have copy machines and voice mail, he offered printing and graphics services for business cards and letterheads.



Mr. Slack retired in 1996 after having heart surgery. The same year he gave up his editorship of the Item, a newsletter that his comrades had started in the prison camp and then continued after their release. His daughter said that the men kept in touch and learned about reunions through the newsletter.

Her father was intensely patriotic, she said: "He always had the American flag flying outside his home."

Mr. Slack was a Phillies fan, a voracious reader, and an active member and head usher at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church.

His wife of 56 years, Mary, died in 1997. In addition to his daughter, he is survived by another daughter, Linda, and a grandson.

The funeral will be at noon today at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, 625 Montgomery Ave. Burial is in West Laurel Hill Cemetery, Bala Cynwyd.

Memorial donations may be made to Pan American Health Service Inc., Box 888, Keene, Texas, 76059-0888.

The Philadelphia Inquirer
December 21, 2002

John Slack has been a large part of the heart and soul of the Oflag 64 group for almost 60 years.

He always came to the reunions with a big smile on his face.

Rest in peace, good friend!!!!

This is Linda's Eulogy to her father, John (12/21/02)

To listen to the smooth, mellifluous strains of Nat King Cole is to connect with Dad's heart and soul. Perhaps the silver-toned melodies of Dad's favorite singer were all the more soothing to him because of what he had to endure in his lifetime. His indomitable courage, tenacious will to live, and deep faith carried him through almost nine decades. Even in Dad's last days, as the "purple dusk of twilight time" stole "across the meadows" of his heart, we replayed for him those beautiful refrains from the *Stardust* melody which had sustained him throughout the years.

Yes, Dad, as Nat King Cole would say, "Unforgettable, that's what you are. Unforgettable though near or far." Early on in your childhood, the strength to survive and the need to be frugal permeated your being. Not only were you part of an itinerant family where a stable home was sometimes elusive, but also a part of the Great Depression which spanned your teenage years. To this day, I can hear you admonishing Margie and me to be sure to turn off the lights when we leave the room in order to save on electricity. "Money doesn't grow on trees," you'd say.

Your P.O.W. ordeal tested you in ways you could never have imagined, and yet you persevered when so many others could not. Your independent spirit allowed you to seek alternative and unorthodox ways to maintain your health, to be involved in civic and political issues, even to be contrarian, if necessary, and to speak your mind. You were also fiercely patriotic, installing a flag pole on the front lawn and proudly flying the colors every day, long before the tragedy of 9/11 convinced others to do the same.

You made many friends, quietly extending a helping hand whenever needed. Even in your later years as a stroke took away your full ability to converse, that grin of yours that went from ear to ear and lit up your entire face made friends for you wherever you went. You remained optimistic and never let any obstacles stand in your way.

I think that Nat King Cole's song *Smile* would be your gift to us:

Smile though your heart is aching.
Smile even though it's breaking.
When there are clouds in the sky, you'll get by
If you smile through your fear and sorrow.
Smile and maybe tomorrow
You'll see the sun come shining through for you.

Light up your face with gladness.
Hide every trace of sadness.
Although a tear may be ever so near
That's the time you must keep on trying.
Smile, what's the use of crying?
You'll find that life is still worthwhile
If you just smile.

Dad, you did yourself, your family, and your country proud! One special lyric from Nat King Cole's song *Nature Boy* perhaps speaks most eloquently for you with just this simple verse: "The greatest thing you'll ever learn / Is just to love and be loved in return." We love you, Dad, and very proudly join together to salute you today!

It has been said that a father's love can run so deep and so quiet that only the heart can hear it. Such was the case with my father. Though his words were often few, he spoke to my heart and to other hearts as well through the dignity of his presence and the strength of his spirit.

His strength of spirit was to be challenged many times throughout his life, but never more so than when he entered the United States Army. He did so on April 16, 1941 as a 27-year-old, as a First Lieutenant, and as a newlywed of just four days. In August 1942, his orders took him overseas first to England and then to North Africa in support of the war effort. That was the beginning of a 35-month separation from his loved ones, 27 of which were spent as a prisoner of war, or as Dad was often heard to say facetiously, "as a guest of the Germans!"

The prison camp experience at Oflag 64 in Szubin, Poland was, to say the very least, a difficult and extremely dangerous one. For the men, it took not only their personal discipline and military training, but also their iron-clad wills and passion for freedom's ring in order to endure the hardships of daily life. For me, the *Possibility Thinker's Creed* by Robert Schuller best summarizes the depth of the survival instinct that must have sustained Dad and his fellow prisoners. The creed states, "When faced with a mountain, I will not quit! I will keep on striving until I climb over / find a pass through / tunnel underneath -- or, simply stay and turn that mountain into a gold mine -- with God's help!" The valiant men of Oflag 64 did all of these things!

Dad drew upon that strong discipline even after the war. Every morning without fail, he could be seen polishing his shoes, shining his belt buckle, and then doing his sit-ups before embarking upon his day. He instilled that discipline in us, too, encouraging iron-clad wills and positive thinking. In our household, the number one rule was that we could never, ever use the word "can't." When we were faced with an obstacle, Dad always encouraged us by saying "Keep your chin up" -- words that I must particularly heed today.

Dad's discipline and determination also empowered him to single-handedly preserve that indelible bond between the prisoners that had been forged through adversity. Dad dedicated his time and efforts from 1962 to 1995 to continue writing, editing, and printing *The Item*, the newsletter that was published at the camp. In effect, *The Item* was one of many diversions the men used to combat perhaps the even greater enemies of monotony and depression that were brought on by the constant confinement behind barbed wire. *The Item's* peacetime role not only enabled the men to stay in touch but also to reinforce those existing bonds. As his P.O.W. buddy Don Waful said, "John Slack was the Christmas tree upon which we all hung our ornaments." Yes, on more than one occasion, Dad has been credited with keeping his group in formation.

Paramount on Dad's "to-do" list was attending the P.O.W. reunions. These reunions took place every two years and evolved into yearly gatherings due to popular demand and the passing of time. The year 2000 reunion was to have been the last; however, no one was prepared to let go of their special extended family. Although I had attended several reunions through the years, my first being in 1964, my greatest privilege came in 1997 when Dad asked me to accompany him, one on one, to the Newport, Rhode Island reunion. A tradition had begun. In fact, on October 6th of this year, we returned from our memorable journey to Columbus, Georgia not knowing then that it would be Dad's last reunion.

But, Dad, I will be carrying on our tradition by attending next year's gathering in Minneapolis. I will take with me your spirit and will bring home your love -- a love that runs so deep and so quiet that only the heart can hear it -- a love reflected in your dearest of friends, my heroes.

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JAN 11 2002
Baton Rouge, LA.



**WRIGHT SR., JUDGE HIRAM
JAMES**

A resident of Winnfield, he died Wednesday, Jan. 9, 2002, in the Winn Parish Medical Center, Winnfield. He was 78 and a native of Jonesville. Visiting at Southern Funeral Home, Winnfield, from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday. Visiting at First United Methodist Church, Winnfield, from 9 a.m. until religious services at 11 a.m. Friday, with the Rev. Barry Hoekstra and Dr. Calvin Phelps officiating. Burial in Garden of Memories. He was a native of Jonesville, where he attended Block High School. He graduated from Baton Rouge High School in 1940 and attended LSU from 1940 to 1943, before being called to active duty with the U.S. Army during World War II. He graduated from Officers Candidate School and was sent to Europe as part of the D-Day invasion. Shortly after going ashore during the Normandy invasion on Utah Beach, he was captured by the Germans and remained a prisoner of war until January 1945. Following his discharge from the U.S. Army in 1946, he returned to LSU and received his law degree in 1948. He moved to Winnfield in 1948, where he practiced law until he was elected city judge in 1969. In 1973, he was appointed to fill the remaining term of the late Judge Harwell Allen of the 8th Judicial District and contin-

ued in that capacity until his retirement in 1985. He was a member of the Louisiana State and Winn Parish Bar associations, Winn Parish Rotary Club and VFW Post 3800. Judge Wright was also a member of the First Methodist Church, where he taught the First Methodist Men's Bible class for more than 30 years. He is preceded in death by his parents, Howard William Wright and Myra Rowena Randall Wright; a brother, Howard William Wright Jr.; a sister, Lucille Wright Carter; and a son, Hiram James Wright Jr. Survived by his wife, Elizabeth Poe Wright of Winnfield; a son and daughter-in-law, Earle Wesley and Kim Wright of Baton Rouge; two daughters, Katherine Ann King of Baton Rouge and Mary Elizabeth Vaughn and her husband Hines of Sandy, Utah; seven grandchildren, Sarah and Jessica Wright, Justin, Allison and Ryan King, Elizabeth and Hines Vaughn; two sisters, Myrtis Wright Thornton of Baton Rouge and Norma Wright Braden of Birmingham, Ala.; and a brother, Randall E. Wright of Baton Rouge. Pallbearers will be Hines Vaughn, Charles Bice, Greg Davies, Stanley Martin, Tom Harrell and Dickie Heard. Honorary pallbearers are the First Methodist Men's Bible class. Memorial donations may be made to the First Methodist Church, Winnfield.