

OFLAG 64 KRIEGIES RE-INVAD E EUROPE...WARSAW, SZUBIN, VIENNA, PARIS,
COPENHAGEN MAY NOT RECOVER!

"It was the best of times. It was positively the best of times!" It was SENSATIONAL...FANTASTIC...BEAUTIFUL...UNBELIEVABLE...UNFORGETTABLE. In short, the "Return-to-Szubin" Reunion was all the super superlatives ever spoken! The consensus: It could never be duplicated!

There are many reasons for the delay in publishing this edition of the ITEM. Please forgive the belated reporting job. I hope the material herein will make up for my tardiness.

Your correspondent, and his reunion co-chairmen, John Slack and Charley Eberle, want to express our gratitude to all who joined us on the greatest trip since the Lewis and Clark Expedition! Believing you are anxious to learn who the lucky kriegies and wives are, here's a list of the finest, homogeneous group ever assembled: Jim and Peggy Bancker, Frank and Tracy Diggs, Dan and Millie Lewandowski, Don and Cassie Waful, Charley and Emma Eberle, Brooks and Mae Kleber, Ed and Eleanor Batte, Ray and Eleanor Klinkenberg, Wright and Ellen Bryah, Lew and Janet Lowe, Gardner and Gert Simes, Joe and Sylvia Friedman, Bob and Gladys Thompson, Col and Mrs. Schaefer, Larry and Ash Phelan, Roy and Helen Chappell, Frank and Kay Maxwell, John and Mary Slack, Roy and Leilabeth Ihrle, Pete and Jane Graffagnino, Jim and Anne Fraser, Mae Goodlett, Erna Berzins, Amon Carter, Jack Rathbone, Irv Yarock, Len Vaden, Carl Hunsinger, Len Feldman, Ed Moschel, Tony Lumpkin, Bill Bingham, Emmet Shaughnessy.

Additionally, we were privileged to have with us for part of the tour the following three "honorary" kriegies: Wanda Rudzinski, Henry Soderberg, and Lou Romero. You all remember Henry, of course,.. but who are Wanda and Lou? Mrs. Rudzinski is a travel agent from Mineola, Long Island, commissioned by SAS to set up the complicated Polish segment of the schedule. Wanda is really quite a gal! Lou Romero is the Eastern District Sales Manager of SAS who had the task of supervising our fabulous journey. And what a great guy!

You'll meet Wanda and Lou (and, we hope also, Henry) at our next reunion.

Speaking of our next reunion: The entire male contingent held a short business meeting at our hotel in Elsinore, Denmark to decide on the site for our 1972 reunion. Fort Worth, New York and Washington were the final three cities selected. A vote was taken and the majority favored Washington. So... set your sights on the nation's capital for either the second or third week-end in October 1972 (we will announce the actual dates in our next ITEM). Frank Diggs is the temporary chairman. Incidentally, did you see the excellent article by Frank titled "An American Revisits Poland" in the June 28th issue of U. S. News and World Report?

There are so many highlights to report that it's difficult to know where to begin. One important item which stands out: Everything went according to plan! Planes took off and landed on time; our private motor coaches in each country we visited were clean, new, roomy; and all the drivers and guides were sensational! The hotels were just right, including the service; the restaurants were the best. In other words: a perfect trip!

The Reunion Committee felt you'd like to have the reactions from kriegies who made the trip, so we're attaching some personal comments with this ITEM. Most of them were written as our "747" was heading home for JFK Airport.

The weather was fantastic..every day! Poland, for example was going through a heat wave while we were there, with the temperatures going over 85; and it was sunny every day with one exception - a Sunday in Paris.

The mention of Paris brings to mind these interesting remembrances: Jim Fraser's charming wife, Anne, arranged, through the committee, to surprise Jim on his birthday on May 15th by having the maitre d'hotel instruct

the bakery chef to make a cake. It was just an ordinary cake...the extraordinary part of the story was the price of Jim's birthday cake: \$40.00!

Colonel Schaeffer had two suits pressed at the same Paris hotel. Cost: \$10.00. And John Slack paid the equivalent of \$2.50 to have two shirts ironed. Paris is a beautiful, historical city but tres, tres expensive.

Billy Bingham left his camera with all his film in a Parisian taxi, of which there are 55,000. With the help of our hotel's concierge, however, Billy's lost equipment was found within 24 hours!

Of course, the main highlight of the tour was returning to Oflag 64 at Szubin. It took a few minutes to become acclimated after we arrived. It seemed to be different, yet it seemed the same. The guard towers and the barbed wire are gone; the Little Theater, the Tin Store, the "Russian" barracks and all other wooden barracks are down. All other brick buildings still stand, but there have been some interior changes. For example, Room Two in The White House, has been partitioned to make three rooms. The one wooden structure remaining is the one opposite the White House entrance where the tailor shop and shoe repair shop were set up.

One of the chief attractions at our 1972 Reunion in Washington, D. C., will be the showing of hundreds of slides, pictures and motion picture film taken at Szubin.

Throughout Poland, the Associated Press correspondent, Nick Lolitos, (stationed in Warsaw) stayed with us. He sent back to the states many stories and pictures. The one photo which appeared in AP papers all over the country was the one of your committee (Slack, Eberle and Maxwell) just after presenting a plaque to the Director of the Delinquent Boys' School (which is what Oflag 64 is now). The plaque was engraved in New York by our own Sol Levy. He did a magnificent job. The engraving read as follows:

"Presented to the fine people of Szubin - to commemorate the
return of the American Prisoners of War
Szubin --May 1971"

Sol also engraved a second plaque for Henry Soderberg, which read:

"Presented to Henry Soderberg
Our World War II Benefactor
Our Friend
In gratitude from the Oflag 64
Kriegies - Copenhagen May '71"

We're particularly pleased to enclose a special supplement with this edition - two great columns written by prominent journalists and ex-Oflag 64 kriegies: Frank Diggs, Military Editor of U.S. News and World Report and Wright Bryan, Ex-Atlanta Journal and NBC War Correspondent. Our deepest thanks, Frank and Wright, for adding some class to both our newspaper and our reunion.

Among the many letters that ITEM has received since our return home was one by Jack Rathbone. We would like to quote part of his letter to illustrate what we mean when we say it was a perfect trip: "I'm still shaking my head in amazement at the way the group quickly developed into such a unit, with its own spirit. I don't know what I expected - I guess I came along ready to play it by ear; I'm sure I expected everybody to be congenial - but this became more than that - there was a feeling of a much greater bond than just congeniality. Then there was the definite feeling that SAS was putting out way above and beyond their normal duty to a tour...all this, plus that strange feeling at Oflag 64. Did you ever read Dickens' Christmas Carol and remember Scrooge's amazed and excited yet fearful feeling at seeing himself as a young man in the vision of the Christmas Past? Maybe that's akin' to my feelings." Well said, Jack. You hit the nail right on the head!

Roy Chappell brought along on the trip a POW book about Oflag 64 recently published, and written by Paul Marable who spent some time at Szubin. Roy is trying to get some more information for us about this new book.

We reported earlier in this edition about some prices in Paris. One of our favorite cities, Copenhagen, wasn't far behind Paris when it came to prices for new cars. Examples: Volkswagen Bug \$3500.00; Thunderbird, \$12,000.00; Cadillac, \$20,000.00! While many souvenirs were purchased in Denmark, we can report accurately that no car were bought.

A sight one day that half of the tour group will never forget (we traveled on land in two buses) was a debonaire concessionaire who walked up and down the aisle dispensing his wares of Polish brandy, Russian vodka, and a long Polish kielbasy -- all of which was consumed hastily in true kriegie style while we sang and laughed our way along a Danish highway. The concessionaire? None other than Amon Carter.

Another journalist who accompanied us during our journey through Poland was Peter White, of the National Geographic. Coincidentally, Pete was in Poland to do an article for his January 1972 issue, so he joined us for three or four days. Who knows? Maybe we'll even make the pages of National Geographic. We'll keep you advised.

A number of the kriegies departed from the scheduled tour to visit other cities and/or friends. Joe and Sylvia Friedman skipped Paris and went to Amsterdam, rejoining us before we left Paris for Copenhagen; Jack Rathbone hopped over to London to visit a British kriegie whom he knew in Oflag IX A/Z (Rotenburg); Em Shaughnessy sneaked off to Yugoslavia to try and find two Serbs he knew at Moosburg...and he found them! Jim and Anne Fraser left us at Paris and went to Rome when we took off for Copenhagen.

A small contingent of ex-Oflag 64 men (some with wives) came to our motel at JFK airport to wish the group Godspeed on May 8. Among them were: Jim Shoaf, Tom Miller, Tom Mitchell, Bill Rudel, Curly Curtis, Sol Levy, Dick Rossbach, Larry Brant, Charles O'Connor.

We experienced one disappointment at Szubin. The authorities would not let us into the Little Chapel, which still stands behind the house where the German Kommandant lived. They claimed they didn't have the key. Every other building was open to us.

Well, that's about it for this issue. There are many more anecdotes we might report on, but this ITEM has to be mailed and quick (some of our subscribers are complaining)!

If you have any questions about the trip, let us know and we'll get off answers pronto.

Don't forget...Washington, D. C. in '72! PLAN NOW. We want to see YOU there.

Frank Maxwell
Guest Editor

John F. Slack
Editor

FROM: WRIGHT BRYAN
Ex-Atlanta Journal and NBC War Correspondent

"Why revisit the scene of such an unpleasant experience?" asked many a friend when we talked of plans for the Oflag 64 Kriegies' trip to Poland.

The friends knew about college and high school class reunions, family reunions, veterans' reunions, Elks' reunions, almost every kind of reunion except a P.W.W. reunion at the site of imprisonment -- this seemed to them macabre or, to say the least, odd.

Their thinking omitted two strong elements:

1. The lasting bond among men who have shared a difficult and dangerous experience.
2. The innate human curiosity which draws anyone back toward the scene of a critical episode in his life.

I told friends of how the Oflag 64 Kriegies had held reunions in this country which I was unable to attend, and how they had arranged a package tour to satisfy the itch to see how Szubin looks today and to include visits to several European cities, including rebuilt Warsaw to which few Americans go.

Heads wagged at this explanation; but my wife, Ellen, and I were eager to go. As it turned out, the realization exceeded our best hopes. The trip was one of the memorable experiences of our lives which already had included a generous amount of travel.

In the first place, the group (about 30 Kriegies and enough wives, relatives, and friends to total just over 50) was completely congenial. Over the gap of 26 years friendships and old stories were warmer than ever, augmented by the pleasure of meeting wives whose charm was no surprise but a great joy.

In the second place, travel arrangements were superb, thanks to our committee (John Slack, Frank Maxwell, and Charlie Eberle), to Louis Romero and other officials of Scandinavian Airlines System, and to Mrs. Wanda Rudzinski of the Dana Travel Agency, who knows all the angles in Poland and shepherded us through that Iron Curtain country.

High spot, of course, was the few hours in Szubin around which the entire journey was planned. As our bus approached Szubin, Kriegies who had marched out in January, 1945 began to sight landmarks they remembered. When we stopped at the gate of the school which had been our camp, everyone drew a long breath and headed toward spots they remembered best.

Temporary barracks, high fences, barbed wire, and look-out towers were gone; but permanent buildings which formed the nucleus of Oflag 64 (the White House, the hospital, the small chapel, the German commandant's house) looked just as they had, except that springtime green instead of winter snow surrounded them. Most of us located quickly and showed our wives the very places we were once quartered.

This was the most moving of many experiences, but others were numerous:

- Our committee's placing a wreath on the monument erected by the Poles at the main gate to commemorate their resistance to the Germans and the wartime use of these grounds, including an inscription honoring Americans who had been there.
- A civic luncheon with Polish dignitaries and wartime heroes in the nearby city of Bydgoszcz (the Germans called it Bromberg).
- Searching for mushrooms in the Polish countryside. (Get someone who was present to explain that.)
- The gala dinner, elegantly served, in a palace near Warsaw.
- Reunions with European friends. Several Kriegies visited Polish people who had assisted them. One Kriegie took a side trip to Yugoslavia, another to England, to see wartime friends. Ellen and I were entertained in two French homes of people I met the day Paris was liberated.
- Lunch on a mountainside in the Vienna woods overlooking the city and the Danube.
- Sightseeing in Warsaw, Vienna, Paris, and Copenhagen.
- The farewell dinner given us by Scandinavian Airlines in Elsinore, Denmark.

On that last evening together all present resolved to attend the next Oflag 64 reunion in Washington in 1972.

by: Frank Diggs
 Editor of the Oflag Item, 1943-45

Talk to anyone who made the great Szubin Safari of 1971 and you'll find that he had the time of his life. For widely different reasons, everyone enjoyed it.

You wouldn't believe what it's like to return to Oflag 64, first of all, after 26 years. I think it was primarily the contrast between the day we marched out through the barbed wire gate during a snow blizzard with the Russian artillery sounding in the background, and the beautiful Spring day in which we drove back, in great comfort, to the same camp - now a boy's school with a sort of campus atmosphere. The White House was still there, unchanged on the outside. So was the hospital, the chapel, many of the barracks, but without the barbed wire. Seeing the place again with your wife and fellow-alumni was downright nostalgic.

From then on, nothing could go wrong. It was a sort of a moveable bash, with congenial company, interesting places to see and a more-or-less continuous party. Using a fine sense of kriegy values, the amount of food and drink consumed was truly formidable.

There was a serious opportunity to look at life behind the iron curtain that few Americans get nowadays. The complete reconstruction of Warsaw in just 26 years was truly impressive. But the way that our brave and still-oppressed friends in Poland are living in some bygone century has to be seen to be believed.

Then there were the slightly more unbelievable experiences of a crowd of relaxed kriegies at large in Vienna, Paris and Copenhagen. It is not true, as charged, that Tony Lumpkin tried to push Bingham off the highest balcony at Schonbrun Palace outside Vienna, though Bingham may have deserved it after the incident of the hotel maid in Warsaw. Waful won the gold-plated Red Cross parcel for bashing his way through a seven-course dinner at a swanky Parisian restaurant. Wright Bryan turned out to have a fine after-banquet baritone in Copenhagen or somewhere. And Amon Carter, carrying a roll of ancient Polish sausage in a high-class casino in Denmark, set the natives back several notches.

The Committee - Maxwell, Slack, Eberle, - it must be admitted, did a very smooth job of keeping over 50 independent-minded kriegies and wives on schedule, well-fed and happy. Nobody missed any planes, buses, meals or drinks. Then there was a near-perfect record by the sub-committee on the weather, headed by Eberle except in Paris when he hit out.

But the biggest rewards for many kriegies were the opportunities to peel off and see old wartime friends and relations. Len Feldman, for instance, met a new relative at every stop. Doc Graffignino had a long reunion with some old Danish friends. Jack Rathbone buzzed up to England to see another chum. Eberle met his wartime benefactors in Warsaw. Emmett Shaugnessy just couldn't stay away from Yugoslavia and found two oje buddies.

Personally, my high point was a reunion in Paznan with the Polish family that had hidden me out for several weeks after I left "the" march - a kindness that I had been waiting 26 years to repay. It turned out to be a very heartwarming occasion. And so was the rest of the trip for all 30 of the old kriegies involved.

Ask anybody.

Brooks Kleber: "We are very happy we came on this 'sentimental journey,' combining the deep emotions of returning to the Oflag; the excitement of seeing exotic cities and countrysides; and, of course, the warmth of the friendship and fellowship which pervaded the entire two week period."

Bob Thompson: "As the years pass, and your memory dims, you begin to wonder if certain things really happened, or if you are only dreaming that they happened and you become curious about them. The return trip to Oflag 64 satisfied my curiosity about the place and I no longer have any desire to return to Poland's Szubin."

Gardner Simes: "A wonderful trip! The wives were grand, which resulted in a congeniality far beyond expectations. Gert and Erna both had a great time and the trip was good for Gert. Warsaw - a poignant experience; Szubin was sad and moving. The atmosphere hasn't changed in spite of no barbed wire. Vienna was beautiful; Paris - exotic and unusual -- a fun place. Denmark...a very nice place where we could very well live"

Jim Bancker: "Without a doubt, the trip was the best one I have ever taken. Revisiting Szubin was, of course, the highlight. And to see the 'White House' and four of the barracks still standing was thrilling for me and my wife. She now has seen in person what I have talked about so much."

Ray Klinkenburg: "The Oflag 64 tour can be described as fantastic, unbelievable, and for us, 'the trip of our lifetimes.' The people who planned the trip deserve a big thank-you. I always remember John Waters' remarks in Omaha, that the friends made during adversity are long-lasting. We think the group that made the tour was the greatest!"

Billy Bingham: "What an experience! I enjoyed every minute of it, and every person on the tour except 'Lumpkin', whom I was forced to room with. All of you who didn't go, by all means contact Wanda and let her arrange a tour for you to Szubin before it's too late."

Pete Graffagnino: "The entire trip was a great one with Poland the high-point. The opportunity to revisit Szubin in company of others who shared past experiences has been an unforgettable exercise in nostalgia."

Ed Moschel: "A great trip. An opportunity that comes once in a lifetime."

Charlie Eberle: "This was the most memorable two weeks in my wife's and my life."

Lew Lowe: "The return to Szubin fulfilled a desire which I never thought would happen...a truly satisfying experience."

Carl Hunsinger: "A most moving worthwhile experience that I think should be brought to the attention of those who could not make it this time. Perhaps another group could make it another time. From the point of good fellowship and renewing old acquaintances, such an experience is invaluable."

Dan Lewandowski: "The trip was full of nostalgia for me...Szubin in retrospect was a rewarding experience...and I enjoyed traveling through Poland, the homeland of my grandparents, with a fine group of people."

Len Vaden: "The highlight of the trip had to be the visit to the Szubin camp. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to get a more congenial group of travel companions. Being together again after so many years was more important than any of the places we visited. I'm looking forward to the October 1972 Reunion in Washington."

Wright Bryan: "Just as a trip, the Oflag 64 expedition was one of the best planned and most enjoyable Ellen and I have ever made...but to be for two weeks in pleasant places with so many friends and to find them and their wives so congenial...this made the experience really memorable."

Colonel Schaefer: "A surprising, lifetime memory to pass on to descendants."

Tony Lumpkin: "An excellent trip. Besides the good service, food and hospitality, one of the real pleasures was the return to Szubin and see how little the camp has changed and to be able to see and be in the actual area where so many long days had been sweated out in the past."

Ed Batte: "This has been a memorable experience to renew friendships... living arrangements have been fabulous and many thanks to the committee for a wonderful job of planning."

Emmet Shaughnessy: "Monetarywise, memorywise, friendshipwise - the trip to Szubin was most rewarding. Whatever I can do to increase membership will be done."

Roy Chappell: "Our wonderful and unique trip helped many to re-evaluate their aims and establish new perspectives, since we all realized again quite clearly that we had each been spared to perform some function yet unfulfilled in God's plan. Our deepest gratitude and appreciation goes to 'the committee,' Lou Romero, Wanda and SAS."

Amon Carter: "A great experience with wonderful people! No language problems since we had two great linguists, Chappell and Lumpkin. Would not have missed it for anything."

Joe Friedman: "This trip was an education of how others live; and of life behind the iron curtain. It also presented the opportunity to cement old friendships and gave me two weeks of sheer pleasure including gourmet eating, beautiful scenery and graceful living."

John Slack: "The Special Editions of our POST OFLAG ITEM merely said 'A two-week tour, including a visit to the camp at Szubin.' It turned out to be two weeks of fun...emotional surprises...nostalgia...learning...anecdotes...renewed friendships."

Len Feldman: "Although I enjoyed the travel, it was a delight to learn, that after 26 years, there is still an unspoken camaraderie between most of us ex-kriegies -- something hard to define -- but it's definitely there and it has warmed my heart."

Irv Yarock: "A tremendously moving experience. A once in a lifetime chance to renew old friendships on a trip which was unique and the best I've ever had."

Don Waful: "My fifteen months in Oflag 64, in all its dimensions - emotionally, materially, spiritually, were of lasting significance in my life. To return to the scene and to share it with my wife, who shared it with me then, altho' remotely, has been a moving experience. And the camaraderie among us all is a personal treasure."

Lee Ihrrie: "This trip meant visiting places I probably would never visit otherwise. It has given me an opportunity to travel on a 747 and also to return to a land where horse drawn carts are commonplace. I've dined in a palace and eaten foods I wouldn't have dreamed of eating, with service I've never known previously. I've met happy people and seen wonderful places. Most important, I've renewed old friendships and made new friends as well. It gave my wife an opportunity to meet some kriegies and more fully understand us. (She also did a little shopping!) We've all learned to be a bit more tolerant of each other's eccentricities, which probably is one of the greatest things to remember."

Frank Maxwell: "For health reasons, I was skeptical about going. During the months of planning with two great guys - John Slack and Charlie Eberle - I decided to think positively about it. Well, my wonderful Kay and I did go...had a ball...in fact I felt better during those two weeks in Europe than I have for years! And what a tonic it was every day to witness (and be a part of) the happiness generated by the entire group. You should have been there!

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Those are all the Kriegie Komments turned in to Charlie. You'll note four names are missing: Frank Diggs, Jack Rathbone, Jim Fraser and Larry Phelan. Frank's column (attached) carried his feelings; Jack's were quoted earlier in this issue; Jim nor Larry were on the same flight home with the group - hence they were unaware of our request for a personal statement. Knowing you'd be pleased to read a few lines from Jim and Larry, we're inviting them now to please send us their observation for publication in our next issue.