

He Is Back With Word Of Oflag 64

Iowa Officer Talks To Relatives of War Prisoners.

By Lillian McLaughlin.

They came from Montezuma, Ames, from widely scattered sections in Des Moines, persons of varying interests and means bound together by one word—Oflag 64.

Oflag 64 is a prisoner of war camp in Germany for American officers. A number of Iowans, mostly captured at Faid and Kasserine passes in Tunisia in February, 1942, may be there until the end of the European phase of the war.

But one Iowan there, Capt. Dale Burdick, a Shenandoah doctor, was sent home in September as an exchange prisoner aboard the Gripsholm.

Though he still is recuperating from the illness that permitted his release, Captain Burdick already is doing all he can to keep a promise he made to the Iowans in Oflag 64. He is seeing as many of their wives, parents and children as possible.

At a Home.

Usually he meets with them in the home of one relative, as was the case Thursday afternoon when nearly 20 relatives of American officers in Oflag 64 assembled at 2110 Thirty-seventh st.

They were called together by Mrs. Floyd Burgeson, wife of the Des Moines physician now at Oflag 64. The occasion was not one of gloom. The wives and mothers sat about waiting for Captain Burdick to arrive, exchanging bits of news from the letters they had received from Germany. They eagerly scanned the photographs Captain Burdick had sent ahead, delightedly found the face they were looking for, and passed it round to the others.

"See, this is my boy," said one mother. "He's smiling, too. You don't know what that means to me!"

Then Captain Burdick arrived, with his wife and young son, Bruce Francis. The children, Bruce, Mrs. Burgeson's little girl, Nancy, and young Joe Schneider from Ames, went out to play and the grownups became quiet, their

the grownups became quiet, their eyes all turned on the slender, pale young captain.

Informal.

Captain Burdick talked to them informally, just as if there were one or two in the room instead of 20. His hearers drank in every word.

He told them how, after the Iowans were taken prisoners, mostly over a two-week period, they were moved up into Italy, to southern Germany and then the officers to Oflag 64.

"The food is quite adequate," Captain Burdick reassured his audience. "There is no malnutrition in the camp. Some are in bad shape when they get there, but they fatten up."

Captain Burdick said the men depended almost entirely on the

Burdick—

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'WITH YOUR DAD'



"I was in the same camp with your dad," Capt. Dale Burdick of Shenandoah, Ia., told little Joe Schneider of Ames Thursday. Captain Burdick referred to Oflag 64, a prisoner of war camp in Germany, from which he was released as an exchange prisoner.

Burdick--

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Red Cross parcels they received weekly for food. Meats and anything which had to be cooked were pooled and prepared in the camp kitchen, he said. The rest of the box contents, and personal packages were kept by the man they were sent to.

"The food is monotonous—we try to vary the way it is prepared, but even then it gets tiresome. But it's enough. I wouldn't worry on that score." Captain Burdick believed clothing to be adequate also.

Foods to Send.

"Unless it is requested don't send clothing," he said. "Send food. Rice, powdered soups, prepared biscuit and cake mixes perhaps, and chocolate."

He told them of the garden the men had grown at the camp. "The tomatoes were coming out on the plants," recalled Captain Burdick, "but we hadn't eaten any when I left the camp."

"They finally ripened," filled in a young wife from Ames. "My last letter from Joe, said they had plenty of them."

Asked what food Germans provided, Captain Burdick replied, "Potatoes, that's about all we use of what they give us, also black bread—this is very heavy and sour, but toasted it isn't too bad."

Stoves.

The men filled powder cans with wood shavings to use as cook stoves for their individual attempts to prepare food, he said. "We called them smokeless heaters at first, then decided heatless smokers was more apt."

The double bunks, he said, had "soft pine boards for springs." The mattresses were gunny sacks filled with excelsior. "We are issued two blankets, not too good, by the Germans, the Red Cross issues us one, and then we throw our overcoats over us," said Cap-

tain Burdick. He spoke throughout the two hours in the present tense, as if he were still there.

At length, the anxious parents began putting in questions. Was the barracks heated well?

"Well, it's too chilly to sit without an overcoat. At night you either go to bed or exercise."

"Did the camp have good lighting?"

"Just fair."

"Were there any comfortable chairs?"

"No."

What did they do in the morning?

Counted.

"Well, first the Germans counted us. Then we got the hot water they gave us for breakfast, ate breakfast of coffee and biscuits from the Red Cross boxes. Then we did what we liked until noon, read, went to classes, took part in sports or plays.

What did they do in the afternoon?

"The same thing we did in the morning."

At first they were allowed to take walks but were asked to sign a statement that they would not do anything "derogatory to the German Reich."

"We decided the guard could interpret anything as 'derogatory to the Reich,'" said Burdick. "A man might smile at a girl, and if the guard thought it was 'derogatory to the German Reich,' he would be punished."

Recreation.

Captain Burdick praised the Y.M.C.A., which he said had done "a wonderful job," putting 3,000 volumes or more in the camp, 36 musical instruments for a band five portable phonographs and records.

After nearly two hours, the relatives begged Captain Burdick to sit down—but the questions went on, and the an-

swers. The Rev. Bart Kane asked about Stephen, his brother, a chaplain. Mrs. T. B. Aschim talked of her son Bob, a lieutenant.

Mr. and Mrs. L. W. Secor asked about their son, Dick. He had attempted to escape, they knew, and the attempt had failed. Could Captain Burdick tell them about this?

Secret.

He could not, said Captain Burdick. This was a military secret and they would have to wait until the end of the war for Dick to tell them. "But don't worry about Dick," he told the parents. "He'll be all right." Mrs. Carl Coffey of Montezuma and Mrs. Clyde Herring received personal information of their kin.

The group read copies of "The Oflag Item," prison camp newspaper Captain Burdick brought home, were pleased to find mention of some of their sons and husbands. Mrs. Burgeson served coffee and cake. The hours flew by.

Captain Burdick also met with relatives of Iowans in Council Bluffs when he was there recently, and hopes to meet others before he returns to active duty, he said.

Contacting the relatives, bringing them news of their men, has become a kind of private mission of the Shenandoah physician.

F. R.