

Captain (MC) Floyd Milton Burgeson
1908 – 1984

BACKGROUND AND MILITARY SERVICE



Dr. Burgeson was a lifelong resident of Des Moines and graduated from the State University of Iowa College of Medicine in Iowa City in 1934.

He served five years during World War II with the 168th Infantry, 34th Division, and was captured by the Germans on February 17, 1943. He was a prisoner of war until liberated by Russian forces on March 1, 1945. D. Burgeson was active in the National Guard after the war until he retired from the Guard in 1969 as a brigadier general.

ADDITIONAL MEDICAL SERVICE

Dr. Burgeson was a past president of the Poke County Medical Society, Chief of Staff at Iowa Lutheran Hospital in 1948 and Chief of Medical Staff at Broadlawns Medical Center from 1954 to 1956. He practiced private and industrial medicine for 30 years and in 1981, after 12 years as a physician at Veterans Administration Medical Center, he retired.

Sources: *The Des Moines Register* (Des Moines, Iowa) - Mon. Jan 16, 1984, Page 11

<http://www.newspapers.com/image/130770500>

MEDICAL SERVICES AT OFLAG 64

FIRST ANNIVERSARY EDITION

The Oflag 64 Item

No.13 Altburgund, Germany – November 1, 1944, Page 2

“18 Medical Officers Staff Well-equipped Gefangenen Hospital”

“On call for any emergency” isn’t an ersatz idiom but a reality for kriegies requiring treatment in the Oflag Infirmary.

With a staff of twelve doctors, two dental and three administrative officers, and one warrant officer, under the direction of Capt. Floyd Burgeson [arrival date 9 June 1943], the hospital is equipped to take care of any minor medical or surgical case and has beds for twenty-two patients.

For more serious ailments, provision is made for the transfer of the patients to the Altburgund hospital, where X-ray treatment and expert care are provided. These cases must however, be first presented to the German medical officer for approval.

Capt. Burgeson points out that most of his medical supplies, including dressing, instruments, medications and pajamas for bed patients, comes from the American and British Red Cross.

The hospital operates a kitchen of its own and the diet of patients is closely supervised, with proper foods provided as nearly as possible under present conditions. With regard to regular chow the Senior Medico states that for healthy men in camp the most beneficial foods available in the parcels are powdered milk, cheese, biscuits, margarine and meat, when parcels are available.

Anticipating an increase in business during the touch football season, and desiring to preserve the physical condition of gefangeners as well as may be, Capt. Burgeson prescribes to all the observance of the general rule of hygiene, plus the elimination of mental anxiety in regard to health.

It sounds easy – but just try it.

Source: Oflag 64 Remembered <http://www.oflag64.us>

The Oflag 64 Item

No. 15 Altburgund Germany – January 1, 1945, Page Four

“The Saga of John Kriegy”

Item Comprehensive Survey of Oflag 64 Shows that Average Kriegy Is 27, from N.Y., College-Trained, Food Conscious, Efficient & Making the Best of It

Item news-sleuths last month combed the Oflag from White House to outhouse, peering and prying into every twist and turn of kriegie operations to find what makes the camp tick. This is what they found.

Lieutenant John Average Kriegie of Oflag 64, sitting for his composite statistical portrait, reveals these facts about himself:

He is 27 years old. His home is in New York or Pennsylvania or Texas. He is half bachelor and half married (most men are like that). He attended college but, more likely than not, left without a degree.

His civilian occupation was that of student or salesman, clerk or businessman.

His favorite pastime, at which he is, through no fault of his own, in but poor practice, eating.

[Note: Many categories were listed, evaluated, and discussed in this survey, but the focus of this writing centers on POW health, medical facilities and staff.]

Health...

Lt. Average Kriegy's health is constantly being watched by a medical staff of which Capt. Floyd Burgeson is head. Capt. Robert Blatherwick is assistant medical officer and Capt. Eben Bergman administrative officer. Lt. Harry Abrahams is camp sanitator, and a staff of 13 orderlies under 1st Sergeant Butler do the kitchen and sanitation of the hospital.

When Lt. Kriegy required hospitalization, there are 22 beds available of which 12 to 15 are usually occupied. Facilities are adequate for handling general ailments and minor surgery. More serious surgical cases go to Wollstein, where Lt. James Godfrey is U.S. Medical representative and Polish surgeons are available.

For minor ailments not requiring hospitalization, Lt. Kriegie goes to sick call, where the average of 30 of his fellow kriegies appear each day. Most frequently occurring cases are those of the upper respiratory tract, skin ailments, minor cuts and bruises, with occasional cases of stomach trouble.

Capt. Burgeson emphasized to Lt. Kriegie that worry and depression cause a large percentage of the camp's ailments. He tells Lt. Kriegie to keep busy and practice personal hygiene and he is likely to stay well.

Capt. John Thornquist, dental officer, aided by W.O. Roger Cannon voluntary dental assistant, keeps an eye on J.A. Kriegie's teeth and treats the most urgent cases.

Source: Oflag 64 Remembered <http://www.oflag64.us>

SAFETY AND RESCUE CONCERNS

When Colonel Drake announced that Oflag 64 would be evacuated on Sunday, January 21, 1945, many questions emerged. Addressing these concerns in his book, *THE BIG BREAK*, Stephen Dando-Collins added these comments:

The camp's chief medical officer, Captain Floyd M. Burgeson from Des Moines, Iowa, asked Goode about the fate of men who were unable to march because of wounds or illness.

"The Germans have given permission for those who are wounded or too ill to march to remain behind at the hospital," Goode advised. The two dozen sick men at the Wollstein Lazarett would be permitted to remain where they were. The final decision

to who stayed at Oflag 64's hospital would be in the hands of the Germans.

Unfortunately, Dr. Burgeson's nemesis was Hauptmann Pongratz, M.D. a hard-core Nazi and with the influx of sick and wounded survivors of the Battle of the Bulge, hospital bed requirements expanded from 22 to over a hundred with men "packed into hospital rooms and corridors. Upper respiratory infections, which were widespread in German-run POW camps, proved the most common ailment. Battle wounds, stomach problems, skin conditions, and cuts and bruises filled out the remainder of the sick list."

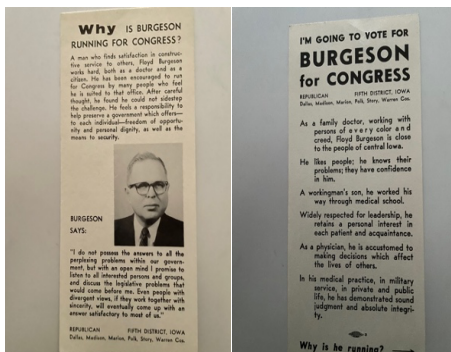
Dr. Pongratz was not popular with kriegies. On his word alone, the most seriously sick POWs had been transferred to Wollstein for treatment by Polish surgeons, and it had always been difficult to convince Pongratz of the severity of American cases." (pp. 87-88)

"Eventually, the numbers were sorted out with two dozen sick men in the hospital at Wollstein and ninety-one men in the Oflag 64 camp hospital. The men in the Schubin hospital included seventy-eight sick and injured American officers, tended by US MO Captain Robert Blatherwick. He was joined by Catholic Chaplain Father Stanly Brach from Newark, New Jersey, who volunteered to stay, and ten of the fourteen enlisted men who had been serving as hospital orderlies.

Before leaving, Colonel Goode put Colonel Fred W. Drury in charge of the hospital group. All stay-behinds had been told that they would have to wait at the camp until the Wehrmacht provided transportation for them. And all were hoping that German transportation failed to evacuate, which would mean that they would fall into Russian hands once the Russian army reached Schubin." (p. 98)

[Note: The Oflag 64 POW Database website states the following: *Dr. Floyd Burgeson, as Medical Director of Oflag 64, was assisted by the Russians and trucks to take his patients East from Oflag 64 in Poland to Odessa in 1945.]*

CONTINUED COMMUNITY SERVICE



After retirement, Dr. Burgeson became active politically, serving as president of the Des Moines School Board and a Republican candidate for the Fifth Congressional District in 1966.

He was a member of the First Lutheran Church and several community organizations, including the Masonic Lodge and the Des Moines Rotary Club.

TAPS

Funeral Services were held at the First Lutheran Church with burial in Masonic Cemetery.

Survivors include his wife, Helen; two daughters, Nancy Fournier and Mary Preacher; and other family members, including a sister and six grandchildren.

Source: *The Des Moines Register* (Des Moines, Iowa) - Mon. Jan 16, 1984, Page 11

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Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers