

One Enemy Was Conquered

By Damon C. Perry (2022_v54)

Sworn to protect secrets about prison breaks, Dalton divulged only that he got as far as the North Sea before being recaptured and locked in solitary confinement for three months. Eventually freedom came when he was handed a loaded pistol as prison guards abandoned their posts and vanished. [1]

Retired United States Army Lieutenant Colonel, Dalton Young Medlen said, "I joined the National Guard when I was, well [long thoughtful pause] before I was 18 really, and then the National Guard was mobilized on November 25, 1940." [1]

Through "newspapers, articles, commentators and radio," Dalton scrutinized events overseas, explaining, "I don't remember when I read Mein Kampf [written by German Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler (1925)], I really don't, but we became thoroughly concerned... when Hitler invaded Poland and started over-running the small countries in Europe." He felt war was coming, but "... didn't expect it to come exactly from Pearl Harbor. I thought that maybe it would just be from the Germans. I hadn't thought of Japan being in it. They just became an enemy, that's all I can say. Just one enemy that had to be conquered." [1]

Asked if the United States was ready for war, Dalton said, "Shoot no! We weren't prepared... had no equipment and not enough people in the service. We literally trained with broom sticks. In North Africa, even after we went overseas, we had 37 mm anti-tank guns, and when we'd fire on a German tank, they'd bounce off the tank like peas off a duck's back." [1]

Dalton served in the United States Fifth Army 36th Infantry Division. After several maneuvers stateside, including a mock amphibious assault of Martha's Vineyard, the 36th arrived in French North Africa in April-1943 for a planned invasion of Italy at Sicily. However, General Patton used his more experienced Seventh Army instead. [2] Fifth Army commanding generals Clark (whom Dalton disapproved of) and Walker, planned a surprise invasion at Salerno. Meanwhile, US Navy Vice Admiral Hewitt insisted that surprise was impossible. Unfortunately, the admiral was overruled by the generals. Consequently, there was no preliminary naval bombardment of the 275 targets he had identified. As a result, the 36th faced a tough landing. [3]

In his personal journal, Dalton wrote, 9-September-1943, "We landed on a beach at Paestum, Italy. There was plenty of fighting. I was wounded about 1330 and captured about 1400." [4]

Dalton was strapped to the back of a German tank as it battled through Eboli, Avellino, and Naples. Barely avoiding an Allied airborne landing, the German tank unit arrived at the towers of Radio Rome where Dalton wrote, "We had a grandstand seat to the bombing of an airfield." [4] Here, a crude leg splint made out of twisted olive branches was made for Dalton. Using just a stick for balance, he hobbled around for the next two months until his leg healed. [1]

By train, Dalton arrived at a prisoner-of-war (POW) compound in Moosburg, Germany on 20-September-1943. The next day at Stalag III-A in Luckenwalde, Germany, he was locked up in a four-foot by eight-foot concrete cell with one very small window near the eight-foot ceiling. [4]

Dalton wrote, 2-October-1943, "My wedding anniversary and my darling daughter's birthday was spent in a cell thinking of home and the many happy hours I had spent with my family." 3-October-1943, "Was released from the cell and put in a compound. Had a cigarette." [4]

After days of revealing only his name, rank, and serial number, Dalton arrived at Oflag 64, in Szubin, Poland, on 7-October-1943. [4] It was perhaps the only POW camp set up exclusively for US Army officers. [5] Inmates were not required to perform labor for the enemy, they instead spent their time teaching, learning, and practicing various trades. Dalton mended clothing, alongside a shoe maker, in a little shop within the compound. Until a guard was posted, he secretly made knapsacks and other items that could be used in an escape. [1]

Prison life was physically detrimental. Dalton never received any medical or dental attention from the Germans. He was given straw to make a mattress, two blankets, and a bunk. POWs were sustained on a diet of 900 calories a day, consisting of soup and a piece of bread. [1]

Holidays were lonely and mentally arduous times. Dalton wrote, "We are all a lonesome group of officers..." Nights were particularly difficult, "I lay there until about 3 o'clock thinking of my darling wife and mother and the most precious children in the world [...] these things and thoughts are the only things that keep a man wanting to live when he is in a position such as this." [4]

Despite his tribulations (freezing temperatures, constantly being cold, and separation from loved ones), Dalton was uplifted in December-1943 by church services, fellowship with his comrades and contemplative reverence. He wrote, "... my barracks had a community singing, along with some mighty good harmonizing from some of the boys." He articulated that, "We don't have to worry with packages or gifts." Remarkably, he concluded, "This is the most wonderful Christmas from a spiritual point of view ... we have based all our Christmas spirit this year on the real principal [*sic*] of a true worshipful Christmas." [4]

The next Christmas he wrote, "Our camp is much larger than it was this time last year. Of course there is not that close unity of thought and worship with a strength of over 1,000 as there was with about 500. Personally I spent a long time last night sitting by the stove with a Christmas card (received about three weeks ago) and my Bible. The three people on the card [his wife and two daughters] being the most dearest [*sic*] people on earth to me. No one but myself knows the longing and the aching that was in my heart." [4]

Germany was progressively losing the war. On 21-January-1945, Hitler ordered division level commanders and above to notify him of all planned movements, "... so the Fuehrer can cancel the movement if necessary." [6] Meanwhile, Oflag 64 was evacuated as some 1,000 POWs were forced on a seven day march. Along the way, Dalton slept once in a box car, but mostly in barns with up to 50 men. [4] He wrote:

26-January-1945, "... Coffee and soup pm. A frozen Russian died in my barn."

28-January-1945, "... hard march in blizzard. Froze my feet. Slept in Catholic Church in isle [*sic*] in front of altar." Sadly, hundreds of his fellow POWs fell sick and were left behind during the 119 km march.

29-January-1945, at Oflag II D, "... Warm room and bed. . . feel as though I could make it a little farther on my feet – soup am, pork and sauerkraut pm."

Dalton was deloused and locked up at Stalag III-A on 10-February-1945. [4] On 22-April-1945, as Russia attacked Berlin, Hitler conducted his final military conference insisting that "... he will remain in the bunker and take his own life at the last moment." [6] That morning, Dalton was surprised when the guard previously assigned to watch his tailor shop at Oflag 64 reemerged.

He explained, "They put a guard in the shop to watch what we made. This old boy just took a hell of a liking to us, because we gave him a cigarette every once in a while and things like that. He would always point to his pistol and say, 'When the Russians come, I'll give you my pistol.' He knew that they were going to lose the war. He had the feeling even before 1943. One morning, that German came to me at 4:00 AM and shook me and handed me his pistol, fully loaded!" As Stalag III-A was orderly evacuated, Dalton stole a jeep and drove off to fight alongside the "trigger happy" Russians until joining American forces on 7-May-1945. [1]

At age 17, Dalton joined the National Guard. At age 25, he became "thoroughly concerned" about Hitler as a threat to America. At age 31, he first stepped foot on the European continent. He trekked over 4,500 km from the Battle at Salerno, to incarceration at Oflag 64, to a failed escape towards the North Sea. At age 32, Dalton's combat mission ended in Berlin; where on VE-Day – one enemy was conquered.

Dalton Young Medlen Timeline

June-1912. Born, Bonham, Texas.

October-1932. Married, Juanita Delta McDonald (Born, May-1912, Blue Ridge, Texas)

September-1943 through May-1945. Writes journal. [4]

June-1982. Interviewed by Damon C. Perry (his grandson). [1]

November-1989. Buried Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Covina, California.

December-2022. The story "One Enemy Was Conquered" is published within the paperback edition of the "2022 PVLD Anthology: Stories That Bond Us" (Palos Verdes Library District call number 813 2022).

End Notes

[1] Damon C. Perry, "Dalton Young Medlen Tape-Recorded-Audio-Interviews" (May-1982) unpublished.

[2] Wikipedia, "36th Infantry Division (United States)" (19-September-2022, at 03:22 [UTC]) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/36th_Infantry_Division_\(United_States\)#Pre-2_February_1942_square_organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/36th_Infantry_Division_(United_States)#Pre-2_February_1942_square_organization).

[3] Naval History and Heritage Command, "The U.S. Navy and the Landings at Salerno, Italy 3–17 September 1943" (10-May-2019 11:49:06 [EDT]) <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1943/salerno-landings/landings-at-salerno-italy.html>.

[4] Dalton Young Medlen, "The WWII POW Journal of Dalton Young Medlen" (1943-1945) handwritten and unpublished.

[5] Oflag 64, "A Brief History of Oflag 64" (25-October-2022) <http://www.oflag64.us/history.html>.

[6] Bill Stone, "Stone and Stone Second World War Books" *War Diary for Sunday 21-January-1945 and Sunday 22-April-1945* (3-Nov-2022) <http://books.stonebooks.com/wardiary/19450121>.