

ROUTES OF MARCH FROM OFLAG 64 - 1945

General

I received several memoirs that bridged some gaps. What follows is a survey of my collection and the memoirs to set the numbers and the routes over which the kriegies of Oflag 64 were dispersed in Poland on their way to liberation. I have no problem using numbers several of us agree to and I have made some educated guesses where necessary to tighten the fit. Official reports use the recollections of participants as do historians and ghost writers. Here then I use available numbers and also try to correct one or two published errors.

The most usefull number for this report is a strength report for 20 January 1945. Oflag 64 held over 1400 officers. Haynes reports 1459 officers, two warrant officers and 136 enlisted men. This is the basis for the men who started the march which ended at Hammelburg, Odessa and other places where we returned to US Army control.

Escapees, Drop Offs and Hitchhikers

Before we left on 21 January there was an agreement that the sick and wounded, officially 86, would be left at Szubin under the command of Colonel Drury. In addition, I assume that about 50 were authorized to follow an approved escape plan and a few more hid out from the last appell and so were not in the column when we left for Exin (Kcynia).

At Exin on 22 January we had a sick group of about 25 to be left behind and there was a sizeable number who escaped overnight or evaded in the barns. This may have totaled 100.

On the 22d as we marched through Wirnitz (Smogulec) area I am sure about 50 disappeared into houses and barns. On the following morning after our short liberation in Echfeld (Ostek n. Notec) another 50 might have hidden in the barns and houses on into Charlottenburg (Wyrzysk). On the 24th, the opportunity lasted into Lobsens (Lobzenica) where we commingled with other POW columns in the square before we went off to our assigned barns. Here is where the Guard Company returned to control and on the following morning the Latvian SS fired into the hay barns forcing most if not all of the hidiers to come out. By this time another 50 could have escaped.

Routes to Odessa

It follows then that the sick, the escapees and some of the drop offs are groups that were liberated by the Russians and eventually evacuated to Odessa, USSR and returned to US Army control by General Deane's Mission. Since any numbers

in Poland his expected number of 350 and actual number of 3000 includes many enlisted men from the Stalags in East Prussia and Poland.

The Oflag 64 officers thus liberated were concentrated at Wegheim, vicinity of Exin; at Rembertow, a suburb of Warsaw; at Lublin and ultimately at Odessa. Our mission was not allowed to assume control in Poland and in theory the Polish underground (now above ground) and the Russian refugee control network seems to have been adapted to assist US personnel on the way to Lublin. What this seems to have mean't is that Colonel Drury had a real problem getting the sick properly evacuated from Szubin. Similar difficulties faced all other escapees and the 30 sick reported in a Russian hospital at Wegheim, when Gruening, Colley and Dimmling made it to the Mission in Moscow.

Toland reports a column strength of 940 one week after departure. This would have put the column at Zippnow or Oflag IID, and it seems to be a reasonable figure. However, Haynes reports 805 arrived and 740 departed Oflag IID. This drop off included a doctor to take care of the sick and were eventually liberated by the Russian Army on the 5th of February.

The group moved by various modes of transportation and in smaller groups going by way of Zippnow, Jastrow and/or Bromberg (Bydgoszcz), and then by rail to Warsaw or air to Lublin. There is no record of marching, but some hitchhiking and one way or another everybody seems to have arrived in Lublin and eventually moved on in the usual box cars. Haynes left Lublin on 22 February and arrived at Odessa on 27 February. Sage writes of the trip as going from Lublin through Lwow, Zhitomir, Vinnitsa to Odessa on the 28th. The US Military Mission team from Poltava Air Base took charge at this point.

Officially, Colonel Drury's group of 86 augmented by at least 186 escapees from the Exin area and some of the Oflag IID group were concentrated at Rembertow and evacuated from there to Odessa on 22 February. Sage, Haynes and others made their way to Lublin and nearby villages where Sage contacted them. I would suppose a minimum of 400 officers cleared from Rembertow and Lublin were embarked in Odessa on the Moreton Bay (British) for onward movement to Egypt and Italy on 7 March 1945.

Routes to Stalag IIIA - Luckenwalde

I have notes in my diary of drop offs from the main (Col Goode) column as follows:

25-26 January 1945	Flatow (87 Off, 4EM)	91
26 January	Jastrow	130
5-6 February 1945	Zeitlitz	178

This is a total of 409 who were put on German trains, often fully exposed to the winter weather for days and were literally shunted towards Luckenwalde, south of Berlin, by

zigzag routes. All of these groups were agreed march casualties by the German commandant (Oberst Schneider) and the US Army SAO (Colonel Goode). My notes indicate that 60 were also left at Oflag IID with no German commitment to onward rail movement apparently.

Luckenwalde was eventually liberated by the Russian Army as it encircled Berlin. The problem of getting allied prisoners of war recovered was a sticky diplomatic problem by all reports. Meanwhile, Alloway and probably others slipped the wire evading the Russian guards. Norm liberated a bicycle for movement to the Elbe and contact with US troops.

Officially, 461 officers and 43 enlisted orderlies from Szubin were logged into Stalag IIIA. Some of this variance can be explained by Thompson's diary where he noted on the 12th of February at Swinemunde (Swinousjscie) that 21 men were left behind and again on the 14th at Stolpe that 100 men were left behind. Undoubtedly these groups were evacuated to Luckenwalde. Senior officers in charge of these groups were Lt Col Herte and Lt Col Jones, seniors for the Zeitlitz and Swinemunde-Stolpe groups are not recorded. The groups endured 6-10 days of travel with little food and less water, facts that have never been fully recognized.

The Route to Parchim - Hammelburg

As we know, the Goode column was on the road for 48 days and marched 567 kilometers. We reached Siggelkow-Niendorf area on 28 February and rested there until 5 March. A two kilometer march put us in Parchim, marshalling yards, at 0600 for departure at 1000. We were in the Magdeburg area that night during an air raid and then on to Weimar by afternoon of the 7th. We reached Bad Kissingen at noon of the 8th and to Hammelburg by 1900, sleeping overnight in the box cars to officially arrive 9 March 1945, with a strength of 423 officers and 67 enlisted men, at Stalag XIIIB, Hammelburg, Germany.

Baron claims that 1200 men reached Parchim with 400 to Hammelburg, 400 to an oflag east of Berlin and 400 marching to Hammelburg. 200 never reached Parchim. Sage writes essentially the same thing except that the last 400 marched to Moosburg. I regard the groupings of 400 as a convenient, simplification. Some destinations are in error along with mode of travel and the vague mention of some missing. There may have been some marches not included in this report that involved personnel from Oflag 64. I have no information of the recovery of the bulk of the POW at Luckenwalde other than some of them were at Camp Lucky Strike when I was there.

Hammelburg and the Raid

Baron writes that Hammelburg filled with about 1500 US Army officers, prisoners of war in January 1945 (Toland uses 800) with the majority from the 28th and 106th Infantry Divisions.

The camp already contained the Yugoslav Army officers, prisoners of war. With the arrival of the contingent from Oflag 64 in March, Colonel Goode became the SAO. There was the usual processing and a limited issue of red cross parcels to supplement the "green hornet" and "purple passion" soups.

At 1015 on 27 March we were told that we would march at 0530 Wednesday, the next day. Lists were prepared of those fit to march. Substantial meals were prepared with red cross supplementation. German issue of bread ($\frac{1}{4}$ loaf), jam, sugar and margarine was made at about 1500. This coincided with our hearing active firing towards Hammelburg and the ridge west of camp. Task Force Baum broke through the wire about 1800 hours, the SAO had been in charge for about two hours and it was at this time that Col Waters was shot while on a parliamentary mission under a white flag.

We moved outside the wire and assembled jubilantly to be briefed on the next phase. The task force was not organized to evacuate 1500 POW (Baron uses this figure at liberation, Toland uses 1291). Disposition was roughly in three groups. The first group rode with the task force and consisted primarily of armor force officers who could help on the return movement. The second group consisted of groups of 3-4 who would try to evade capture to reach US Army lines 30 miles due west. The third group returned to the camp.

By midnight the Germans resumed control of the camp, mounted local resistance to the movement of the task force, and marshalled patrols of farmers (Orts bataillons) to roust the escapers and evaders. Those of us captured or recaptured as the case may be were to find that the next stop would be Nurnberg.

March or Ride to Nurnberg

Toland writes that a first action by Commandant Goeckel was to notify the kriegies in camp that they would be marching out at once. At 0130 hours 28 March, 500 were on the way under 40 guards. He notes that on Easter Sunday they were half way (1 April 1945) and had been subjected to surveillance by allied aircraft, using panel signals to forestall strafing.

Meanwhile, the task force reconnoitered for a break through route and began to meet up with organized resistance. With an initial strength of 307, only 100 were combat ready. Wounded were left in a Red Cross marked building and when the final action with encircling forces was finished the able bodied broke into small groups to attempt evasion. It can be noted here that Vic Kanners and Bob Thompson who provided diary and memoir information for this report were with the task force in this last action.

My group was in a daytime hide to the north of the task force. Soon after 0900 the last firing was heard, and we knew the task force was defeated. We moved out under cover of darkness

and evaded farmer patrols on the roads by cross country movement. We again tried to hide for the day, but the next morning, 29 March we were bagged by a patrol that had flushed some task force men lower down the hill and came up searching. We walked under guard back to the lager by 2100 having been first concentrated in a barn. We were given a blanket and slept in the riding hall.

The next day we were marched into Hammelburg and loaded 45 to a box car for movement at dark. Our route took us through Bamberg at 0600, 31 March; Erlangen 1500; a stop at Furth for a wine issue to the guards; and arrival in Nurnberg, North East marshalling yards Easter morning. A short march through the bombed out town, past the Nazi Party Stadium took us to Langnasser Luftlager, a tent camp.

Toland writes of the arrival of the Hammelburg march group in Nurnberg on 5 April 1945. A calamitous coincidence placed the group on noon break in the vicinity of a munitions building and at the time our air force bombed the target employing 28 bombers. Casualties amounted to many wounded and 24 dead.

It was on 6 April that the 14th Armored Division liberated Hammelburg.

March or Ride to Moosburg

On the 3rd of April the Luftlager (Stalag XIIID) was evacuated just as we finished getting the tents pegged down and ditched. I wound up in a group to go by rail while the larger number were marshalled to march by road. Our announced destination in all cases was Moosburg to honor an agreement that allowed the International Red Cross to concentrate POW and parcel supplies in central locations. We regarded this phase as the beginning of the end and generally the Germans seemed to realize the same conclusion. It can be noted that at least one march group may have taken a wrong turn for at last report they were reported in Munich on liberation.

The rail movement of my group consisted of about eight box cars. I assume that about 350 officer and some enlisted men from the task force were in the rail movement and the remainder of the Luftlager group was about 450 to 500. I have no official numbers on this phase of our movements.

We were essentially leaderless at this time as to US senior officers. There was no rail movement until the morning of the 4th, at which time we went more or less North and then returned, for the route was bombed out. We then moved out again and enroute the following morning the train was strafed since the Germans had not bothered to mark the box cars PW. This was done quickly and before we left the area. We went through Munich at 1630 and arrived Moosburg at 1930, 5 April 1945.

Alex Bloom provided a precise log for the march group to Moosburg while Vic Kanner's narrative provides additional insights on this last phase of German control. The following is the log supplemented by my checking for spelling in the Rand McNally road maps for Europe. Alex had it right down to the umlauts which my typewriter can't reproduce.

Route of Road March
Nurnberg (Oflag 73) - Moosburg (Stalag VIIA)

<u>April</u> <u>1945</u>	<u>Alex</u> <u>Bloom</u>	<u>Rand McNally</u> <u>Europe</u>
1-3	Nurnberg	Nurnberg
4	Feucht Pfeifferhutte Poling	Feucht
5	Neumarkt	Neumarkt
6	Berching	
7	Beilengries	Beilngries
8	Sandersdorf	
9	Neustadt	Neustadt an der Donau
10	Nieder Rummelsdorf	
11-14	Rest	
15	Weiter-Gaden	
16	Holzhausen	
17	Obermunchen	
18-19	Rest	
20	Mooseberg	Moosburg

Vic mentions a night march and watching an air raid over Nurnberg and that two men were killed in a bombing. If this all ties together on the 5th of April the following coincided:

The rail group was being strafed at about 1000 hours by P51's while on break.

The Hammelburg march group was caught in the main bomber attack on Nurnberg and took severe casualties.

The march column was also caught in some part of the air attack and lost two men.

I can only speculate, maybe somebody will confirm all or part of the hypothesis.

Apparently, once the column cleared the Nurnberg area it was still subject to aerial surveillance, but the conditions for marching were near ideal. Vic talks of sampling British, Canadian, Belgian and French Red Cross parcels as well as the #10 American issue. After crossing the Danube at Neustadt there were a total of five rest days, a situation similar to the waiting at Parchim in March. The columns intermingled with British on the way. When they arrived at Stalag VIIA

I met some acquaintances from my days in Mantua as well as cubicle mates from Oflag 64.

Liberation occurred 29 April 1945 in the Third Army zone of operations by the 395th Infantry Regiment of the 99th Infantry Division at 1230 hours. Return to military control left us at the Stalag with the wire coming down and the fence posts making bonfires. Onward movement to Camp Lucky Strike was deferred to VE Day at which time some of us flew all the way others as far as Rheims and on by truck and I suppose some went all the way by truck.

And then, as recovered allied military personnel (RAMP) we were processed, eggnogged, debriefed and eventually sailed to New York on the John Ericsson.

Conclusions

This study is a serviceable framework for portraying the entire evacuation operation from Oflag 64 to liberation.

Contributions or research may fill in the gaps where estimated numbers are used.

Expansion can include details such as the varying means of issuing German and Red Cross rations.

Anecdotal material is probably available when needed, the problem is to solicit specifically for such topics as Luckenwalde or Wegheim.

Collation of material and editing for style will be needed and I assume done by one of us.

I am basically a technical writer and this is a wrap for my project. What follows, I shall be happy to help along.

19 January 1987

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SPREAD SHEET: OFLAG 64 MARCH ROUTES
January - May 1945

	(50) estimates	50 official or confirmed			
	Col Goode	Col Drury	Drop Offs	Hammelburg	Nurnberg
	Hammelburg	Odessa	Luckenwalde	Nurnberg	Moosburg
<u>Jan</u>					
20	1459				
21 sick		86 (50)			
21 march	1373				
22 escape		(100)			
23 escape		(100)			
25 sick			91*		
26			130*		
28 sick		60			
<u>Feb</u>					
6 sick			178*		
12 sick			(21)		
14 sick			(100)		
<u>Mar</u>					
9 march	423				
27				1291	
28 march				500	(500**)
30 rail				(791)	
<u>April</u>					
3 rail					(350*)
3 march					(400**)

Notes:

Sick, march, rail and escape categories are minuses to accepted lager strength reports. There is an approximation but no numerical balance.

Officially, Col Drury had 186 escapees at Warsaw.

* indicates movement number may include some enlisted men.

** indicates that movement experienced casualties enroute.

Sick includes march casualties and drop offs.

Escapers and evaders in period of 21-23 January only.

March and rail are categories by mode of travel point to point.

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Department of the Army (Military Intelligence) Unclassified.

SPECIAL REPORT ON CONDITIONS DURING THE FORCED MARCH
OF AMERICAN AND BRITISH PRISONERS OF WAR FROM THEIR FORMER
CAMPS TO STALAG IIIA, LUCKENWALDE.

LUCKENWALDE (one page)

OFLAG 64, 15 July 1944, 1 November 1945

Manuscripts and Memoirs (Alex Bloom, William P Haynes
III, Victor Kannars, Clarence R Meltesen, Robert Thompson)