



POST OFLAG 64 ITEM

SUMMER 2006

REUNION 2006 NEW ORLEANS, LA

The reunion for the fall of 2006 is still on for New Orleans, LA. Pat Waters has spent considerable time in New Orleans making arrangements and especially spent time with the DDAY Museum people. The DDAY Museum is now known as the World War Two Museum. The name was changed by an act of Congress. Pat is making arrangements with the hotel for meals, etc and with the DDay Museum for activities. He is also looking into some side trips and will let everybody know a little later.

REUNION 2007

A reunion for 2007 is still in much doubt. So many of our members are unable to travel that it is difficult to make plans,
So, we will just wait and see.

Postage Fund Donors 2006

PUBLICATIONS

The Waters Story \$19.50
My Tour of Russia \$ 5.00
The Men of Oflag 64 \$ 20.00
The Oflag 64 Directory \$ 3.00
Oflag 64 Audio Tape \$ 5.00
Original Roster-Oflag 64 \$10.00
Tribute to TF Baum \$15.00
Hammelburg Roster \$ 7.50
Make check out to Oflag 64 PF and
mail to the Editor.

In the Presence of Mine Enemies... \$30.00

Author,,Chaplain Eugene L. Daniel
Make check payable to and send to:
Mrs. Eugene L. Daniel, Jr
5100 Sharon Rd Apt 603
Charlotte, NC 28219-4720

Vic Kanners Diary---FREE
Contact- Dave Kanners
1141 Pine Ridge Court
Rochester, MN 48306

Americans Behind the Barbed Wire-By Frank Diggs
New Price....\$22.00 (includes shipping)
Contact: Vandemere Press
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Clearwater, FL 22205

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2006 OFLAG 64 NEW ORLEANS REUNION REGISTRATION

Laissez les bon temps rouler! (Let the good times roll!)

ARRIVAL: Wednesday, September 13th

DEPARTURE: Sunday, September 17th

REGISTRANT'S NAME: _____ NICKNAME: _____

REGISTRANT'S ADDRESS: _____ PHO NO: _____ E MAIL _____

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES: _____ RELATION: _____

_____ RELATION: _____

_____ RELATION: _____

_____ RELATION: _____

Registration fee: \$100. This includes: Welcome Reception, All Breakfasts, Cajun/Creole Dinner at Hilton Hotel, Transportation to and from the National World War II Museum, Entrance fees to National World War II Museum, Gala Banquet at National World War II Museum, Continuous 'Happy' Hospitality Room stocked with beverages. Upon receipt of registration fees, a complete package on New Orleans will be sent to you. Information in this package will include: side trips, restaurants and additional updates on the revitalization of New Orleans.

HOTEL INFORMATION & RESERVATION REQUIREMENTS:

Please make your Hilton Riverside Hotel reservations as soon as possible by calling 1-800-HILTONS. The group reservation is under: **OFLAG 64 at the rate of \$99** a night plus 13% taxes and occupancy tax of \$3.00. Information on the hotel is available at www.riversidemeetings.com.

ALL RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE BY AUGUST 1ST
GUARANTEED FOR LATE ARRIVAL.

TENTATIVE ITINERARY
OFLAG 64 REUNION
SEPTEMBER 13-17, 2006 – NEW OLREANS, LA

WEDNESDAY: 13 SEPT:

CHECK IN -- HILTON NEW ORLEANS RIVERSIDE
Two Poydras Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, 70140
Tel: +1-504-561-0500

5:30PM -- RECEPTION in Happy Suite -- Belle Chasse Room at Hilton
light horsd'oeuvres, open bar

DINNER -- on your own**

THURSDAY: 14 SEPT:

7-9AM -- BREAKFAST Buffet in Belle Chasse Room at Hilton

9AM--9PM -- HAPPY ROOM OPEN in Belle Chasse Room at Hilton

9:30AM -- BUSES LEAVE FOR NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MUSEUM

11AM-4PM -- MUSEUM TO HILTON via continuous shuttle bus service

LUNCH -- on your own (*coffee & sandwich shop available at Museum*)

DINNER -- on your own**

FRIDAY: 15 SEPT

7-9AM -- BREAKFAST Buffet in Versailles Room at Hilton Riverside Hotel

9AM--9PM -- HAPPY ROOM OPEN in Belle Chasse Room at Hilton

9:30AM -- POSTING OF COLORS AND BUSINESS MEETING in Versailles Room

11AM -- RETURN TO NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MUSEUM. Buses available.

SIDE-TRIP TOURS AVAILABLE—please see attached tour information sheet

LUNCH -- on your own

2-4PM -- MUSEUM TO HILTON via continuous shuttle bus service

6 PM -- DINNER: CAJUN/CREOLE BUFFET SUPPER at Hilton (*casual*)

SATURDAY 16 SEPT.

7--9AM -- BREAKFAST Buffet in Versailles Room at Hilton

9AM--9PM - HAPPY ROOM OPEN in Belle Chase Room

SIDE-TRIP TOURS AVAILABLE—please see attached tour information sheet

10:00AM -- RETURN TO NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MUSEUM'S OFLAG 64 DAY
Buses available.

12PM--1PM - OFAG 64 PANEL DISCUSSION at Museum

5PM -- Busses leave for NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MUSEUM RECEPTION
sponsored by Smith Barney

5:30PM - COCKTAIL RECEPTION begins at museum

6:30 - DINNER; Music provided by the Marine Band. Speaker TBA.

9:30PM -- RETURN TO HILTON via buses

SUNDAY 17 SEPT:

8AM -- BREAKFAST: Seated New Orleans style breakfast in Versailles Room at Hilton

9AM -- FAREWELL SERVICE led by Chaplain; Colors retired.

FAREWELL TO ALL.

PLEASE NOTE:

** Dinner on your own is recommended. During this time of rebuilding, New Orleans, most restaurants cannot accommodate large groups. There are numerous excellent restaurants within minutes of the Hilton. It is hoped that all can enjoy more fellowship on a smaller group basis.

Hospitality "Happy" room will be open each day, all day from 9:00AM to 9:00PM

Side trips will be offered from the Hilton Riverside Hotel by a transportation company and the hotel concierge. Please see attached tour information sheet.

Please check OFLAG64.org for updates on the upcoming New Orleans reunion

MAIL CALL

Mg "BUD": Bolling, Dallas, TX writes that he will not be at the reunion in NOLA because of a trip to Germany . He is returning to the place where he was wounded and won the Silver Star, with members of his family. He is also going to retrace his steps as he made his way back to the US lines after Task Force Baum liberated us at Hammelburg. Bud sends in a donation to the Postage Fund. Thanks!

Roy and Helen Chapelle, Kaufman, TX are going to make a determined effort to make it to NOLA. Roy is in pretty bad shape and it is going to take a lot of planning and help to get to NOLA but they think they might make it. I know everybody joins me in wishing them the very best and are hopeful that they can make it.

Rocco Pravidica, Rockford IL, writes that he is thinking about coming to NOLA but is not real sure yet. He did send his best regards to everyone and set a donation to the Postage Fund. We hope his decision is to come to NOLA and we do thank him for the donation to the Postage Fund.

Charlie Wilkinson, Model CO is still chasing cows up and down the mountains in CO, but not quite as much as he used to. He is doubtful about coming to NOLA. Hi did send in a donation to the Postage Fund and we thank him for that!

Herndon Inge, Mobile, AL, sent a change of address/. The new address is: P.O. Box 894, Mobile, AL 36602

Jim Sudmeier, Natick, MA. Jim, together w/Peter Domes and Martin Heinlein, wrote the screenplay for Task Force Baum and submitted it to the officials at The Houston Film Festival in late May. Jim wrote that they had won the prize for first place in their category. Naturally, they are very excited and looking to the future and maybe can come up with a movie of the incident.

MG Douglas O'Dell, Chestertown, MD. , Gen O'Dell is Commanding General of the 4th Marine Division stationed at New Orleans. His father was Capt. Douglas O'Dell who was captured during the Battle of the Bulge and ended up at Hammelburg. Pat Waters has been in touch with him and Gen O'Dell is making arrangements in New Orleans for the 4th Marine Division to participate in our reunion activities. Gen O'Dell's father was at Nurenburg during the bombardment that hit so many of our men from Hammelburg. His father lost a leg during the bombardment and he came home with LtC John Waters in the US Army Hospital facilities. He wrote a nice letter and the closing statement in his letter is:

I look forward to meeting you and your fellow "kriegies" in September during your reunion in New Orleans, and I guarantee that the full hospitality of the Fourth Marine Division will be afforded to all.

Don Wernett, Mescota, MI writes and sends in a donation to the Postage Fund. He will not be able to attend the reunion, but passes along his best wishes to all.

John Creech Columbus, NC writes and sends along a donation to the Postage Fund. His letter follows. Thanks for the donation, John

A LITTLE COMPANY BUSINESS:

We have 10 more books about the **Task Force Baum** that are signed by **Abe Baum** and ready for distribution. If you would like to have one of the books please contact Bob Thompson, 7448 E 68th Place Tulsa, Ok 74133 and enclose a check for \$8.00 made out to Oflag 64.

Elodie Caldwell, Longview, WA, (Reid Ellsworth's daughter), and her family are in the process of putting the Item and all the other information we have accumulated over the years on the Internet. This information consists of all the back and current issues of the Item that go all the way back to when Frank Diggs published it at Oflag 64 and then John Slack and then Herb Garris took up the task until now. In addition to all the issues of the Item she is also putting on the Internet all the books we copied and bound on the Escape to Russia, The Hammelburg Affair, and the Long Cold March! Also being put on the Internet is our book "Looking For Lost Men" which consists of all the men at Hammelburg at the insistence of Col. Goode. You can find the Item @ <http://www.oflag64.org>

Don Waful, Syracuse, NY has been one of our most loyal members of the Oflag 64 family for years and we haven't seen him for a long time. We thought we would take this opportunity to ask him to make a special effort to come to NOLA. **Charlie Eberle** is also one of our bunch that we have missed for several of the latest reunions. There are others that have quit coming and we can't just think of all of them as much as we would like to.

We ran across a place on the internet known as the **Electronic Museum**. They have given us permission to put **LTC Jack Van Vliet's** testimony to a Congressional Committee investigating the **Katyn Forest Affair** in this issue of the Item. They also have a copy of a large book that contains all the testimony before this committee but it is rather lengthy and they will send us a copy and we will bring it to NOLA in September. We will send them a hard copy of this issue of the Item as per their request.



This is Jack Van Vliet's account of his trip to the Katryn Forest Massacre Site
Jack was at Oflag 64 at the time of this trip.



SCENE OF THE CRIME

Allied prisoners-of-war on the edge of a partially emptied pit.

from left: a German officer, German interpreter, Capt. Stanley Gilder (British Army), Lt.-Col. Frank Stevenson (South African Army), Lt.-Col. John H. Van Vliet (US Army), Capt. Donald B. Stewart (US Army). In the background three British lower ranks and a British civilian internee.

Katyn, May 13, 1943

One of seven photographs from a set, submitted by Lt.-Col. Donald B. Stewart to the Select Committee on the Katryn Forest Massacre (House of Representatives) at the hearing conducted in Washington, D.C. on October 11 1951. Lt.-Col. Stewart (then in the rank of a captain) was in the group of eight Allied POWs, forced by the Germans to visit the Katryn exhumation site, where the pits, filled with the corpses of murdered Polish officers, were discovered. Upon their leaving Katryn, each of the four Allied officers received a set of photographs, taken by the Germans to document their presence in the Smolensk area and at the Katryn exhumation site. Lt.-Col. John H. Van Vliet Jr. (US Army) dictated his original report about his May 13, 1943 visit to Katryn in Maj.-Gen. Clayton L. Bissell's (Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, G-2) Pentagon office on May 22, 1945. Gen. Bissell classified the Report as "Top Secret" and made it disappear - instantly, permanently and without a trace. Conveniently too, as its disclosure to the World would irritate the Soviets quite unnecessarily at the time, when their friendship and cooperation were crucial for the United States (unfinished struggle with Japan, San Francisco Conference, etc.). Although President Roosevelt was finally dead, his spirit of pro-sovietism and appeasement was still omnipotent in the highest circles of the Administration.

In the end of the 1940s, however, not only Roosevelt and his Soviet-manipulated Administration were long gone - so was the American-Soviet friendship. The issue of the Katryn Massacre, for several years so carefully and sometimes quite ruthlessly suppressed by the authorities in the United States,

resurfaced. Not as an expression of remorse for the original handling of the Katryn Massacre during and shortly after the war - convenience, again, played to the interests of the United States of America.

The war in Korea did not go well - apart from casualties, the American POWs began to appear in the Soviet Gulag, and a possibility that thousands of them could end up in unmarked pits - like Polish officers in the Katryn Forest - hung over the Administration's heads, like the sword of Damocles.

THE SELECT COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION OF THE FACTS, EVIDENCE, AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE KATRYN FOREST MASSACRE (United States Congress) spared no effort or expense to establish the fact, known to the rest of the World already - the Soviets did it!

Equipped with broad legal powers and composed of congressmen, who were not only knowledgeable, but also represented professional backgrounds required for this specific task, within a relatively short period of time the Committee has done an enormous and impressive work. The documentation, consisting of witnesses' testimonials, reports, documents, photographs, diplomatic notes, publications etc., gathered on 2362 pages of evidence and published for the use of the Committee members, is a gold mine of information extending far beyond the scope of the Katryn Massacre.

Among the witnesses, called to testify before the Committee, were Lt.-Col. John H. Van Vliet Jr., US Army and Mjr.-Gen. Clayton L. Bissell, US Air Force (retired). Col. Van Vliet was ordered to reconstruct his original, "lost" Report and testified before the Committee. In 1945, his Report and testimony would bear significant political weight. In 1950, the Report (whether original or reconstructed) and the results of his February, 1952 hearing before the Committee, were worthless.

The performance of Gen. Bissell - the leading figure in the "disappearance" of Van Vliet's Report scheme - before the Committee was not impressive. He lied brazenly, while testifying under oath, and played a village idiot, when confronted with evidence.

Was the "disappearance" of Van Vliet's Report Gen. Bissell's own, unauthorized and politically motivated decision... Was he covering somebody else's decision made in the highest circles of the Administration... Is it possible that Clayton L. Bissell, a major-general of the United States Air Force, was on the Soviet payroll...?!

One thing is certain - although United States Air Force Mjr.-Gen. Clayton L. Bissell's military career crash-landed even before he made his "memorable" appearance before the Committee and the Committee expressed its opinion on his actions in no uncertain terms, the scoundrel was never charged, tried and convicted. And, strange to say - on May 18, 1945, the Polish Government in Exile honoured him with the Polish highest

ivilian decoration - the Order of POLONIA RESTITUTA. Bissell not only accepted the award - in 1952, he submitted it to the Select Committee as a proof of his innocence.

**

Following his liberation from the POW camp Col. Van Vliet, an otherwise honest man, succeeded in his effort to report the Katyn Crime to the US authorities expeditiously and effectively. Then, for decades, he defended the "disappearance" of his Report, which made him an ideal example of an ideal mercenary - great sense of duty with no care for purpose. By defending the "disappearance" of this document, he has also proven to be a devoted American patriot, immune to moral, or ethical dilemmas - fifteen thousand murdered Polish officers may serve, but may not harm the interests of the United States of America.

AN VLIET REPORT (reconstructed)

Quarters 165

Fort. Lewis, Washington

1 May, 1950

Subject: THE KATYN CASE

To: F. L. Parks, Maj.-Gen., USA, Chief of Information

Pursuant to your letter of 26 April 1950 I am personally typing this report of my recollections concerning the Katyn Case. I am retaining one copy for my personal file.

Since five years have elapsed since I made the first report to Maj.-Gen. Bissell, this report will have to omit some details, such as names which I have forgotten. In order to assist in locating my original report, here are the circumstances under which it was made:

On 22 May 1945, Gen. Bissell discussed the case with me alone in his private office in the Pentagon for about twenty minutes. He decided that it was important and directed his civilian female assistant (secretary? stenographer?) to go with me to the closed room across the hall and take dictation. I dictated my report, she typed it up and we added the photographs as inclosures. The General read the finished report, directed that it be marked "Top Secret" and filed. He then dictated the letter directing me to silence, and had me sign a copy of it in his presence. He explained the importance of my remaining silent, gave me my copy of the letter and thanked me.

Narrative: I was a prisoner of war at Oflag IX-A/Z in Rotenburg, Germany in April, 1943. It was primarily a British officers prison camp, headed by Brigadier Nicholson (who had been the defender of Calais). I was the senior of the 125 (approximately) American officers in the camp. At this time the German press began a big splurge on the KATYN case. So also did the German radio (note: mention of this radio violates the certificate had to sign upon being processed as a returned POW).

Hauptmann* Heyl, the German camp commander, told Brig. Nicholson and me that he had orders to send two American officers and one British officer to the railroad station at Kassel, Germany, where they would be met by British Maj.-Gen. Fortune from another nearby POW camp (he had commanded the British 1st Division in France).

Hauptmann* Heyl stated that I would be one of the two US officers; that I would select the other one; that together with other Allied prisoners we would be a "Board of Inquiry" to investigate the Katyn Massacre. I flatly refused to have any part of it. Brig. Nicholson backed me up on this and together we wrote a letter to the Swiss Protecting Power which stated that no officers from the camp would make any visit to Katyn, or make any investigation, or express any opinion. That, if we were forced to go, it would be only as individual prisoners under guard and against our protest. That we could not be considered as representatives of the prison camp, our army, or our nation, and that we protested violently this apparent attempt to use us for German propaganda purposes.

Our protest did no good. Using armed guards, the Germans took me and Capt. Donald Stewart, Field Artillery (regular army) to the Kassel railroad station, where they expected to meet Maj.-Gen. Fortune. He did not arrive, to the surprise of the German guards. We were then taken to Berlin and jailed in an "Arbeits Kommando" - a building overlooking the Spree River, housing POWs of several nationalities, who were performing labor in Berlin.

In this jail we met several US soldiers, who had been brought from a nearby POW camp for the same reason that we had. One of these was Cpl. Paussig, who had been in the same regiment with me for the invasion of Algiers by the 168th Infantry Regiment. There were also several British soldiers and a British civilian (internee) as well as Lt.-Col. Stevenson (British, South African, Signal Corps) and a British captain, Medical Corps, whose name I cannot now remember. In my opinion, these men were actually what they appeared to be, and did not include any "plants". We, prisoners of war, were very careful in our efforts to make certain identification.

Soon we were taken, one by one, to the jail office, where we were interviewed by several German staff officers and some civilian officials, who appeared to be from both, the Foreign Office and the Propaganda Ministry. The procedure appeared about the same for all of us: "Since you have volunteered to investigate this terrible Katyn atrocity, we are taking you to the scene. You will, of course sign a parole not to escape". The hell we did volunteer. We don't want to go. Send us back to our camps". Great surprise and much chatter among the Germans. Then the same thing over again.

Finally, they announced that since we wouldn't give our paroles, they would have to place guards on the airplane with us. This meant that some prisoners would not make the trip, to make room for the guards. The American soldiers were left back.

Lt.-Col. Stevenson was the senior in the group. We cautioned the entire group to do no talking, to give no indications of opinion, and not to cooperate in any way with the Germans. All agreed. It was evident to all of us that we were involved in an international mess with terrific political implications.

An English-speaking German captain was placed in charge of the group together with an English-speaking "Sonderfuhrer", who gave the name of von Johnson, spoke idiomatic American, and said he had attended school at Rice in the USA.

We were flown from Tempelhof to Smolensk about the 6th of May, 1943. At that time Smolensk was about sixty miles from the front and appeared to contain only garrison troops. We were billeted in some of the remaining intact buildings, of which there were only a few. Some sort of a German service unit maintained an officers mess, where we all ate. While in Smolensk, we were taken on a sight-seeing tour by the local service unit commander and a major, who appeared to be an agricultural expert and enthusiast, who was trying to rehabilitate the land with the remnants of the Russian peasant population. His efforts included a model village. In my opinion, this "hospitality" was spontaneous and was prompted partly by his own enthusiasm for his work and partly because he hadn't had many visitors. It did not appear to be organized on orders from Berlin.

A German lieutenant (spoke no English) appeared from the group that was in charge of operations at the scene of the mass graves in Katyn Forest. He acted as our guide. We were driven to the site, where there was a gate, guarded by young soldiers in Polish uniforms. A sickly-sweet odor of decaying bodies was everywhere. At the graves it was nearly overpowering. There were several graves. Professor, "Herr Doktor" Buhtz, a German expert in forensic medicine, was present together with other technicians. Several Polish Red Cross workers were present. Civilian labor was being used to remove bodies from the graves. Each body was searched very carefully, examined, identified, and reburied in a nearby mass grave which was to become a national shrine with suitable monuments. The articles removed from each body were placed in a large manila envelope for safekeeping. The search of the bodies was very thorough, including removal of shoes or boots, where it was possible (sometimes the whole leg from the knee down came off with the boot). The examiners wore rubber aprons and rubber gloves. A typist was present, recording the findings on each body.

We followed our guide right into each of the graves - stepping on bodies that were piled like cord wood, face down usually, to a depth of about five to seven bodies covered with about five feet of earth. About three hundred bodies were laid out beside one of the graves. These all had their hands tied behind them with cord. The rest appeared not to have been tied. All bodies had a bullet hole in the back of head, near the neck, with the exit wound of the bullet being in the forehead or front upper part of the skull.

The graves on the downhill part of the slope were more moist than the others. One end of one grave had standing water in it. German photographers were present and took both still and motion pictures of our party while we inspected the graves. Copies of the still pictures were later given to us. We never saw, or heard anything of the movies.

After we inspected the graves, we were shown several other test holes which had been dug in the vicinity, together with very old human bones, i.e. no meat left on them, which were said to have been dug up there. I am inclined to believe the story, although there was no proof. The Germans made much of the fact that this wooded knoll was a long-standing burial site, used by the Russian secret police. I forgot, whether they called them the OGPU, NKVD, or MVD. There was a rustic lodge on the low bluff overlooking the small landing on the river (Dnieper River, I believe). This lodge was allegedly the scene of frequent tortures, drinking parties, and various other orgies, held by the Russian police as matters of amusement and recreation, as well as routine business. The Germans produced an old peasant, Russian, who claimed that this forest of Katyn had an evil reputation - it was forbidden ground; that he had seen big, closed vans go from the railroad siding (some miles distant) into the forest, and that there were stories of shots being heard very often in the woods. This was supposed to confirm that the Russians had brought the victims to the mass graves by rail and truck some time before the Germans occupied the area.

The British medical captain in the group understood German very well and a little Russian which he had learned while taking care of Russian prisoners.

About a mile down the road, the Germans had taken over a house as a field museum and office. The porch and front rooms were filled with glass showcases containing items removed from bodies in the graves. There were sample uniform insignia ranging from general to lieutenant, there were several Geneva arm bands, many letters, photographs, diaries, news clippings, personal souvenirs, etc. These items were just the better samples. In the back rooms of the house, there were the individual envelopes containing the items removed from the corpses. This building was also permeated with the smell of the graves, coming from the showcases and the envelopes.

At this point, the Germans produced two small drinks for everyone, and then we returned to our billets in Smolensk.

We were flown back to the same jail in Berlin and stayed there about ten days. During this time, the Germans were apparently trying to decide, what to do with us. The British soldiers and the civilian internee were returned to their respective camps before the end of this ten day period - or so we were told - leaving us, four officers, to wonder what it was all about. An English-speaking German soldier, or "Sonderfuhrer" von Johnson, would take us for a walk through the Tiergarten every day, along with guards. It was during this walk period that we had a chance to talk without fear of microphones. Our discussion, while in the jail, always avoided any mention of what we thought about who had committed the murders at Katyn.

During these walks, Lt.-Col. Stevenson did a lot of talking with the Germans. He told them that he had once published a book and that as soon as he returned home, he was going to get permission from his superiors to write a book about this experience. We couldn't get him to shut up about any subject at any time except the big question of *Whodunit?* He was a windbag. He claimed to be a member of a group of amateur investigators of the supernatural. He even carried a feather in his wallet which he said was from the headdress of the American Indian Chief (spirit), whom he had contacted through a medium in S. Africa.

We gathered from the Germans that the front office didn't know, what to do with us. There was some hopeful implication that we might be

released, possibly through Spain.

One afternoon, Lt.-Col. Stevenson was bundled off by the Germans on about ten minute notice. He seemed very surprised and quite uneasy as he left the jail. We never saw, or heard of him again. That night, Capt. Stewart and I were returned to our original prison camp, where we were met by Captain Heyl. We asked him, what kind of a story he had told us about going to meet Maj.-Gen. Fortune. He replied that Fortune had been seriously ill with bronchitis. I later met Maj.-Gen. Fortune and he had not been sick at all.

Prior to leaving Berlin, we were told that Germany had not and would not make any propaganda use of our visit to the graves, or the pictures taken of the visit. I have never heard of their doing so.

Throughout the rest of our time in prison camps, Capt. Stewart and I refused to discuss our experiences concerning Katyn, and never stated what opinion we had formed.

We reached the American lines in the sector of the 104th Inf. Div. near Duben, Germany, at the Mulde River line on 5 May 1945, still carrying the photographs given to me at Katyn.

I showed the photographs to G-2 of the 104th Division. I had previously showed these to only one other person, apart from the German prison camp security personnel, who conducted periodic searches, but always allowed me to keep the photographs because they had been stamped "Gepufft". This other person was Col. Thomas D. Drake, senior officer in Oflag 64, who was repatriated for stomach ulcers. Before he left the prison camp, to be repatriated, Capt. Stewart and I talked with him, showed him the pictures and asked that he report the matter to the War Department. He laughed at me and said that I had been taken in completely by the German propaganda experts. I don't know, if he ever mentioned the matter, when he reached the States.

G-2 of the 104th Division recognized that my report was one of interest to both, the State and War Departments, and provided transportation to I.Q., VII Corps in Leipzig. General J. Lawton Collins then commanded the VII Corps.

Gen. Collins, who has known me since I was a child, discussed the matter with me and set the necessary wheels in motion to get me back to the Pentagon with all haste.

In Paris, I stayed with Gen. Barker and at his suggestion discussed the matter with a full colonel (whose name I have forgotten), connected with war crimes investigations. He decided it was a matter for the War Department and the State Department, and took no action.

Col. Drake, Gen. Collins, Gen. Bissell and Gen. Bissell's stenographer are the only persons I have ever told of my conclusions concerning who murdered the Polish officers at Katyn (except, of course, the other members of the party, who visited the site with me).

Conclusions: I believe that the Russians did it. The rest of the group that visited the site stated to me that they believed that the Russians did it (Capt., now Major, Donald Stewart, Field Artillery, can be asked to verify this. I don't know his present address. He is regular army).

Discussion: At the beginning of the newspaper publicity, concerning KATYN, I believed the whole thing to be one huge, well managed, separate lie by the Germans to split the Western Allies from Russia.

I hated the Germans. I didn't want to believe them. At that time, like many others, I more or less believed that Russia could get along with us. When I became involved in the visit to Katyn I realized that the Germans would do their best to convince me that Russia was guilty. I made up my mind not to be convinced by what must be a propaganda effort.

The apparent weak spot in the German story was the fact that Germany had occupied the ground around Smolensk for a long time before announcing the discovery of the graves. The exact dates are a matter of record. I don't have the facilities to look them up for entry in this report. I wanted to believe that whole thing was a frame-up. Could these be bodies from an extermination camp, dressed as Polish officers and "planted"? Could the letters, diaries, identification tags, news clippings - all be forgeries? What about the state of decomposition of the bodies? Did it appear to agree with the German story of when they must have been buried? After all, I'm no expert in body-decomposition. What about the temperature, moisture, soil bacteria? What about the German statements that Polish families had been trying to locate their relatives, known to have been imprisoned, when Russia occupied part of Poland? Was it true that these Polish relatives ceased to get answers from their imprisoned relatives - that a cloak of mystery descended all at once? Where is PROOF of who killed these men? Who saw it done?

And so on, and so on - I tried every way I knew how to avoid believing that Russia had done it. I tried every way to convince myself that the Germans had done it. I wanted to believe that the Germans had done it.

Since the graves were already opened, when we were there, it was not possible to see for ourselves what sort of growth had existed on top of the graves, in order to see how long the graves had existed. And, if we had been present, how could we know that the Germans hadn't cleverly transplanted older bushes to give the appearance of age to the graves?

So, you see that we pursued every line of attack to weaken the German story and avoid the conclusion that the Russians had done the killing. It was only with great reluctance that I decided finally that it must be true, that for once the Germans weren't lying, that the facts were as claimed by the Germans. I have thought about this a lot in the past seven years, and freely admit that there never was presented to me any single piece of evidence that could be taken as an absolute proof. But the sum of circumstantial evidence, impressions formed at the time of looking at the graves, what I saw in peoples faces - all forces the conclusion that Russia did it.

The uniforms on the bodies were obviously of the best material and tailor-made. The footwear appeared to be of the best and included many pairs that were obviously made to order. The uniforms and footwear all were obviously well-fitted. This convinced me that the bodies were truly those of Polish officers. The degree of wear on the clothing and particularly the wear on the shoes led me to believe that these officers had been dead a long time, otherwise the shoes and clothing would show much more wear. This was the point that was not called to our attention by the Germans. It is one of the strongest arguments by which to fix the date of the killing.

(signed) John H. Van Vliet Jr.
Lt.-Col., 23 Infantry Regiment

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Robert Galloway is making some arrangements for the reunion in NOLA and asked that the following message be put in the ITEM. If you are interested, please contact Robert at the following email address, or phone number.

I am trying to arrange a large, very large conference call during the reunion. I would like for anyone who is not able to attend New Orleans to call into us at a designated time and join us via phone to give their name, when they were captured, and a brief greeting to others.

If you are not attending reunion and would be interested in calling in to say "hello" during a specific meeting time, please email me with your contact information at rgalloway5@comcast.net or call me at 843-416-1145. There are so many folks who want to attend but can't, and I think it would be great to hear from them while we're there. I will contact those who contact me with further details on our conference call attempt. Thanks.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

The National World War II Museum: "We Want Your Story"

D-Day, The National World War II Museum in New Orleans, is planning a small, temporary exhibit about Americans held as prisoners of war in Europe during World War II. The exhibit will contain artifacts and letters relating to individual stories, the role of the Red Cross, and escape & liberation. If you or your spouse have saved any items from your experiences with Oflag 64, Oflag XIIB or the Hammelburg Raid, and would like to participate, please contact

Stacy Peckham, the museum's Registrar and Assistant Curator. Call (toll free) 877-813-3329, e-mail stacy.peckham@ddaymuseum.org or write to Stacy Peckham, The National World War II Museum, 945 Magazine Street, New Orleans, LA 70130.

We will accept permanent donations, and for this exhibit only, temporary loans of original material. Space is limited and we want plenty of time to tell the New Orleans community about your participation, so call as soon as possible! Also, let us know if you are interested in reserving a time to record your oral history with one of our research historians during your visit in September 2006.

Dr. John L. Creech
Tryon Estates
621 Laurel Lake Drive B127
Columbus, NC 28722

Dear Bob:

Its been a long time since I wrote to O flag 64. But like others, I suffered a brain tumor last May (2005) and it was encapsulated so I am O.K. at least for now.

Of course, if the last band of knieges will meet in N.C. I surely will try to come. It will be a struggle for many but to be the last of the few is so important!

I have a biographer who is going to Poland in June. She has already contacted the museum in Schubin and plans to spend a day there. Hopefully she will visit to entrance of the camp where I planted a Fraser fir the last time we visited. It should be a tall tree that we dedicated to O flag 64. I have given her a few mementoes to place in the museum and have urged her to take photos.

Here where I live, we have a Colonel John Albee who was General Waters aide in Korea and knows Pat quite well.

Enclosed is a Postage Stamp Check.

Sincerely,

John

Pain, Hustle and Frustration

Story of WWII Capture

By JIM MARRS

The frost of the cold Tunisian night fled before the broiling rays of the desert sun on that February day in 1943.

The temperature climbed from below freezing to over 100 degrees in the sun as a young American artillery lieutenant roused himself from his hiding place in a patch of tall cactus.

He squinted and gazed off across the desert. No sign of the Afrika Korps. That was encouraging.

* * *

A FEW DAYS before, tanks and soldiers of the famed 19th and 21st Panzer divisions had literally covered the desert floor in front of the lieutenant's hilltop position at Faid Pass.

The Germans were desperate. British Gen. Montgomery had pushed them west across the North African desert all the way from El Alamein, near the Egyptian border.

Now they were caught between the veteran desert-hardened British Army and the newly landed American force in Tunisia. The choice of penetration was not difficult. It was to be the untested Americans.

But, the young American lieutenant knew nothing of this when dawn had broken 10 days before at Faid Pass. All he knew was that what appeared to be the entire German army was coming toward him.

He watched helplessly as German armored columns followed by infantry pushed past the hill he was on and pressed the rest of his artillery unit.

Individual battles raged all around as the artillerymen tried desperately to fight the Germans while at the same time retreat to stronger positions. The sounds of the battle gradually moved off to the west.

* * *

THE LIEUTENANT and his sergeant waited for more than a day and then slipped off the hilltop.

For 10 days they made their way across the desert trying to reach their own lines. They walked during the mornings and evenings and slept in caves and ravines during the days. They

ate the moist lining of cactus plants which they stripped off with a pocket knife.

Once they thought they had reached their goal. The two bedraggled GIs spotted a large encampment bristling with soldiers and equipment and had walked up thinking it was Americans. It was an Afrika Korps encampment and the pair managed to beat a hasty retreat into the early morning darkness without being discovered.

Trying to cross a mountain range, the pair had watched German Mark IV tanks rip apart the undergunned American Sherman tanks at Kasserine Pass. It was a disheartening display but the pair kept on moving.

But then the thought of food pushed the memories further back into his mind and the lieutenant prodded the sergeant. Time to move.

* * *

ANOTHER DAY'S trek across the desert. One foot in front of the other. And another night spent hiding in a cactus clump.

By their reckoning, they should have reached the American lines by the end of the next day.

They never made it.

The lieutenant was awakened the next morning by a nudge in the back. He found himself staring at the business end of a rusty double-barreled shotgun being held by a craggy-faced Arab.

The lieutenant and the sergeant tried to explain that they were Americans and were in need of help.

The sergeant tried to run but was struck down by a thrown rock. Then the beatings began.

The lieutenant feigned unconsciousness. Thoughts milled through his groggy mind.

Thoughts of his hometown of Fort Worth, of his father, a wealthy and respected business executive and civic leader, his schooling and his days in Army Reserve training.

* * *

WITH HIS body beaten and sore, the lieutenant could not possibly have imagined that 30 years after the war in which he was playing his part, he would be filling his father's shoes.

He had no way of knowing that he

too would be widely known as a publisher and civic leader. That he would meet and become friends with presidents and generals.

He little realized that, like his father, the name of Amon G. Carter Jr. would become nationally known as a Southwestern business executive and community leader.

All he knew was that his body ached from the Arab beatings and that those cruel desert nomads might end his life at any time.

But, cruel though they were, they also were pragmatic. Better bounty money from the Germans than a dead man on their hands. So, Carter and his sergeant were turned over to a German tank commander.

And, thus began a trail of war experiences which led from the dust of the North African desert to the devastation of Europe and Victory in Europe Day.

* * *

CARTER'S momento-filled office in the Star-Telegram building today still has items attesting to those desperate days of World War II.



P.O.W. AMON G. CARTER JR.

PAIN, HUSTLE... Continued

There is a photograph of Carter as a German prisoner in Poland, a German tanker's helmet taken along the way to his final liberation and rubber stamps stolen from railway stations and post offices where he scrounged for food for his fellow POWs.

Each souvenir sparks a memory in Carter's mind.

Memories of the flight from North Africa aboard a German transport plane which was forced to land in Sicily because of engine trouble. Memories of the rail coach ride to Rome and the Italian major who threw a fit at such good treatment for American prisoners. Memories of the deteriorating conditions of the trip as more and more Allied prisoners joined the tortuous journey to captivity.

The final leg of the move to a prison camp was in box cars with the POWs so packed together that they had to take turns sitting on the floor to make room for the others.

Once at a prison camp, Carter was separated from his sergeant.

Life in the prisoner of war camp at "Offlag 64" in Szubin, Poland, was a combination of deprivation and ingenuity. A veritable "Stalag 17" but for real.

A POLISH woman in the railroad station which Carter was assigned to clean each day listened to the BBC war broadcasts. She then painstakingly wrote the war news on a piece of paper and tossed it into the station's wastebasket.

Carter would smuggle the notes into camp and, after translation, distribute the news around camp on bits of toilet paper. A crude but effective news system.

Everyone concerned with this "journalistic" enterprise could have been shot if the Germans had discovered it.

Red Cross packages kept many men from starving to death as the war progressed and shortages became more acute, for the Germans as well as their prisoners.

Then, after more than two years of dulling prison life, word came that the Russians were approaching the camp.

IN JANUARY 1945, with the rattle of Soviet smallarms fire in the distance, the German guards rounded up the Allied prisoners and marched them westward toward Germany.

For almost a week, the Allied officers were marched more than 100 miles through freezing weather. Some died

and a few managed to slip away to take shelter in Polish homes and await the Russians. Most of them decided to stick together.

One day it appeared that V-E Day was coming faster than expected. The prisoners were told that the small town where they had spent the night was surrounded by Russians and that the Germans were going to make a run for it.

The guards fled and the officers managed to scrape together a little food and a few bottles of wine to celebrate.

Their freedom was shortlived, however. A unit of dreaded SS troops suddenly arrive in town and their officer demanded to know what was going on.

"We're celebrating the liberation," replied one officer. The SS officer replied words to the effect of, "That's what you think" and the Allies were rounded up and once again marched to the west.

As the group neared Berlin, they were loaded onto railroad boxcars. It seemed like a Godsend after the grueling marches but events were soon to prove otherwise.

CARTER WAS one of 70 officers crammed into one boxcar and as the train they were on pulled into the main Berlin railroad yards, the men had been without food or water for several days.

Before they could detrain, the air raid alarm sounded and the Germans locked the car doors and ran for the air raid shelters.

The Allied officers sat helplessly on a train siding while one of the biggest daylight air raids of the war was conducted over the German capital.

Carter counted more than 1,200 American bombers over the city and blockbuster bombs were whistling all around. The city, which already looked like the lunar surface from previous bombings, was turned into a flaming holocaust.

Several prisoners on the train were killed when bombs hit their cars, but the group Carter was in miraculously escaped injury.

With Europe, and particularly Germany, in a shambles, the trainload of prisoners managed to go only as far as Luckenwalde, a suburb about 25 miles from the center of Berlin.

FOR ALMOST a month after their arrival at Luckenwalde there was no food for the prisoners. They lay in their bunks, too weak from hunger to move.

Finally some Red Cross packages arrived and literally saved their lives.

One day as the war in Europe drew to a close, word came that a large battle was taking place south of Luckenwalde between the Russians and the desperate German reserves.

Carter and the other prisoners awoke one morning to find the German guards had fled.

A short time later, Russian troops arrived at the prisoner's camp. The German guards were replaced by Russians. The Allied prisoners were not allowed to leave.

However, Carter and few others were allowed to leave the camp for short periods to scrounge food for the other prisoners.

It was during this time that Carter poked through German post offices, train stations and other buildings in search for food. Many of the buildings were filled with the corpses of German casualties.

Carter met a Russian officer who spoke English and soon convinced him to let him try and make the American lines on a motorcycle which a fleeing German had left behind.

THE RUSSIAN agreed and wrote out a pass in Russian explaining that Carter was an American and authorized to drive through the Soviet lines in search of help.

Carter made it two blocks. Then he was stopped by two Russian soldiers who demanded his motorcycle.

He attempted to show his pass, but the soldiers couldn't read. And when he tried to argue with them, they both leveled their rifles at him. They got the motorcycle.

Once more afoot, Carter returned to the prison camp.

A few days later, Carter was again out searching for food when he saw an American Jeep driving through the streets of Luckenwalde.

Flagging it down, he discovered it contained some American war correspondents, one of whom knew of the Carter family.

Promising to help, the newsmen drove back to the American lines.

Soon a column of American tanks appeared and met the Russians guarding the camp.

The Russians said the prisoners were in their control and refused to release them. The American tank commander, after some uncomplimentary words to the Soviets, drove his tank



1975—PUBLISHER
AMON G. CARTER JR.



1943—LT. AMON G. CARTER JR.



Note from the Oflag 64 Item Editor

This article about Amon Carter appeared in the July, 1975 issue of the AXPOW Magazine.

There were a lot of stories about what he did when liberated at Luckenwald, and this story seems to clear up some of the mystery. One story, was that when liberated, he broke into several banks and lifted some money and another was that he broke into several post offices and lifted a lot of valuable stamps. When we went back to Oflag 64 in 1971 we went to Sweden from Denmark and he was upset that the Swedish authorities wouldn't stamp his passport. Evidently, he was saving things like the passport stamp as a means of proving he had been to a certain place. So he was stealing rubber stamps from the post offices as a means of proving that he had been to a certain place. He also found the women that passed him news at the train depot by wadding them up and putting them in the wastebasket. Their photo was "Amon, is here

Hustling for Food Marked Captivity

right through the front gate of the camp and the grateful Allied prisoners whooped for joy.

A SHORT time later trucks arrived and the prisoners were on their way home.

Carter rode back through the American lines with the news correspondents and had just begun to relish his freedom when he suddenly spotted a familiar face.

Amon G. Carter Sr., then publisher of the Star-Telegram, had been chosen by Gen. Dwight Eisenhower to join a select group of American news executives to journey to Europe.

Knowing his son was a German prisoner undoubtedly played a part in his trip to the continent, but there also was the desire to see the war situation for himself.

ON SATURDAY, May 5, 1945, the elder Carter was standing with a group of Army officers and newsmen at the command post of the 83rd Division near the Elbe River in Germany.

Suddenly a Jeep pulled up and a young man got out and calmly walked up to the publisher.

"Here I am, Dad," said the younger Carter.

For Amon G. Carter Jr., Victory in Europe Day had occurred three days earlier than the rest of the world.



THE RECOMMENDED CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PRISONERS OF WAR

No prisoner of war will be forgotten by the United States. The support and care of dependents of prisoners of war is prescribed by law. Every practical means will be employed to establish contact with, to support and to gain the release of all prisoners of war.....

I

I am an American fighting man. I serve in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.....

II

I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command I will never surrender my men while they still have the means to resist.....

III

If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.....

IV

If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information or take part in any action which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.....

V

When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am bound to give only name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause.....

VI

I will never forget that I am an American fighting man, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America.....

A man in the Tulsa Chapter of the AXPOW was invited to the survival School at Airbase at Spokane to address the students at the school. They were so impressed with him that they invited him back the second time. He was a POW of the Chinese and North Koreans for a year or so and had a very difficult time. He was a private in the army so the Air Force made him a temporary COL while at the base so he could eat at the Officers mess and sleep in the BOQ. This code of conduct was given to him at Spokane.



Walter L. Gill
Wise, kind and generous

Walter L. Gill

Funeral services will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2006, at Grace Community Church for Walter L. Gill, 86, of Roswell. Mr. Gill passed away on February 19, 2006, at Eastern New Mexico Medical Center. The Rev. Max Jones of Granbury, Texas, and Pastor Phillip Grassie of First Christian Church will officiate. The eulogy will be given by John Gill and Eric Glover. The music will be provided by Brenda Morrow, Teresa Crosby and Sean Lee.

Walter L. Gill was born in Roswell, N.M., on Feb. 18, 1920, at St. Mary's Hospital. He attended Missouri Avenue Elementary School and Roswell High School, Class of 1938. He attended New Mexico College of Agricultural and Mechanical Arts (now known as New Mexico State) as a freshman, transferred to Texas Tech for one year, then returned to NMA&MA (NMSU) to complete his college education with a major in Agronomy. He graduated from NMSU in May of 1942 and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Also in May of that year, he married Iola McCombs.

He served the U.S. proudly in World War II, participating in many European campaigns. He was captured by the Germans and was held as a prisoner of war for several months. He was discharged from the Army in December of 1945 and returned to Roswell. At that time, he joined the family business, Roswell Seed Company, with his brothers Ivan and

1898. Walter has remained in the family business in which he operated with his son, Jim. In 2000, he was honored as co-Grand Marshall of the ENM State Fair Parade. Walter was a member of First Christian Church, and he will be remembered to all who knew him as a very wise, kind and generous man.

His survivors include his wife, Iola, of the family home; sons Walter Gill and his wife, Vanda, of Albuquerque, N.M., and James F. Gill and his wife, Shirley of Roswell; grandchildren John Lee Gill, Jennifer Gill Morgan and her husband, and, Alex, and Jamie Beth Gill and Emily Gill.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Walter and Florence Gill; his brothers, Verdi F. Gill, and Ivan J. Gill; and one sister, Faye Conner.

Pallbearers will be Eric Glover, Cliff Frosch, DeWayne Wolfe, Dee Morrow, Phil Messtek and Gordon Patton. Honorary pallbearers will be Morgan Nelson, Ruth McPherson, Robert Owen, Jason Bond, Tom Bromley, E.D. Sons, Cooper Malone, Jim Ogden and Gus Barron.

Memorial contributions can be made to the Historical Society for Southeast New Mexico at 200 N. Lea Ave, 88201.

Arrangements have been entrusted to the care of Ballard Funeral Home and Crematory.