

The next 23 pages are from a POW Dissertation by Patricia Wadley, former historian for the AXPOW organization, Ft. Worth, Texas

in Oflag 64 at Szubin [also Schubin], Poland, managed to get a letter to the American Embassy in Moscow informing it that there were U.S. POWs in Poland. According to Drury, on January 21 the Germans had marched 1400 American POWs from Oflag 64 to the west. It was known, however, that "120 sick and injured American officers and enlisted men from this column were hospitalized at a farm 4 kilometers Northwest of KCYNIA. . . . 90 wounded and sick American officers and enlisted men prisoners of war remain at Oflag 64, SZUBIN, POLAND. This number is constantly being increased by British and American officers and enlisted men who have escaped." Drury reported that there were unknown numbers of American, Italian, Polish, and Russian POWs at Schocken and Wollstein. He requested that steps be taken to evacuate these men as soon as possible. He was particularly concerned about the sick and wounded remaining at Oflag 64.¹⁹⁸

Drury's letter was most disconcerting to embassy personnel, for the Soviets had failed to notify them of any POWs in Poland. On January 27, George Kennan notified the Secretary of State, in response to a query from Senator Tom Connally, that "as yet, no American prisoners have been

198 NA, RG 84, 711.4 1945, American Embassy Moscow Confidential File, Box 78, Colonel F. W. DRURY to The American Embassy, Moscow, Russia, Oflag 64, Szubin, Poland, January 24, 1945; Telegram No. 166, GREW ACTING to AMEMBASSY MOSCOW, Personal for the Ambassador from Senator Connally, January 26, 1945.

reported as found by the Russians in their present drive."¹⁹⁹

Pressure was being brought to bear on the U.S. Embassy for there were several POWs who were close relations of powerful men in the United States. Prominent Texan Amon G. Carter's son, General George Patton's son-in-law, and Ambassador Winant's son, to name a few, were POWs. Lists were sent to the U.S. Embassy asking General Deane to inquire as to the whereabouts of these particular POWs.²⁰⁰ The pressure worked, as the Soviets began conveying what information they had about U.S. POWs to the U.S. Embassy. On February 8 the Soviets informed the embassy that Colonel John K. Waters, General Patton's son-in-law, had been evacuated to the West from Schubin.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ NA, RG 84, 711.4 1945, American Embassy Moscow Confidential File, Box 78, Telegram No. 267, Kennan to SECSTATE WASHINGTON, January 27, 1945.

²⁰⁰ NA, RG 334, Box 22, Military Mission to Moscow, Unnecessary Delay in Identification and Repatriation of American Officers Escaped From German Control, M 22849, Crockett signed Deane to Bissell, February 22, 1945; M 22865, Crockett signed Deane to Hampton for Wilmeth, February 22, 1945; M 22883, Crockett signed Deane to Bissell, February 23, 1945; M 22897, Crockett signed Deane to Surles, "Soviets have not given us list. We have compiled from various sources a list of 233 officers and 19 enlisted men, U.S. Army, reported freed from German prison camps Oflag 64 and Stalag 3C. Names are continually being added to this list."; M 22911, Deane to Hampton, February 25, 1945.

²⁰¹ NA, RG 334, U.S. Military Mission to Moscow Subject File Oct 43-Oct 45, Entry 309-Box 23, Folder: Prisoners of War (1 January 1945 thru 28 February 1945), M-22623, Spalding signed Deane to General Smith, SHAEF, February 8, 1945.

On February 5, 1945, Major Edwin C. Haggard, who had been a POW in Oflag 64, sent copies of a letter to the president of the Polish republic and the Russian commandant of the Lublin Sector. He pointed out that on February 3, three American officers had arrived in Lublin and reported to the military authorities for repatriation. The Soviets made no attempt to identify the three officers, Haggard, and Lieutenants H.H. Abrahams, and A.F. Bucci, and held them under guard "like enemy aliens instead of Allied Officers." Haggard also reported that there were at least "three to four hundred American officers who have escaped from the Germans into Poland, and who must be identified and returned to American control."

That proved, however, to be a formidable task, as the "Polish army is unable to identify an officer [even] with complete papers." Major Haggard, who knew personally most of the officers now free in Poland, wanted to send the three officers to Moscow "to be accredited by the American Ambassador." He was also concerned about the sick and wounded at Wollstein who needed medical care that could be obtained only in America. Haggard was clearly upset but knew that he could not afford to offend the Russians, so he blamed the Polish Army for the failure to help the POWs: "It is considered that this delay is due to inefficiency and lack of interest on the part of the Polish Army and that such delay is unwarranted by any practical consideration. The fact that four British have been held here four days in

similar confinement with nothing done indicated a complete lack of interest by the Polish Army in its allies." As the Red Army was totally in control of the area, the Polish Army could only have been following orders. A copy of this letter was given to the American Embassy.²⁰²

Embassy staffers knew as early as January 24 there were American POWs in Poland without help or support, who needed food, clothing, and medical care. None of these was being supplied by the Red Army. Haggard's report only confirmed the situation. Yet General Deane stated in his memoirs that his first "information concerning them came from the Polish Minister in Moscow on February 14, 1945, who sent word to me that there were about one thousand Americans in various Polish cities." Deane reported that this information was supplemented by the reports of three American officers who had gotten to Moscow by "hitch-hiking across Poland and western Russia. This was almost a month after they had escaped from the Germans, and yet I had had no notification from [Lieutenant General K.D.] Golubev concerning their release." These three officers had gotten to Moscow with little or no help from the Russians. They had, in fact, been held at a small camp in Wegheim, "where they found a

202 NA, RG 84, 711.4 1945, American Embassy Moscow Confidential File, Box 78, Major Edwin C. Haggard to (1) The President of the Polish Republic (2) The Russian Commandant, Lublin Sector, SUBJECT: Unnecessary delay in identification and repatriation of American Officers escaped from German control, [copy to American Embassy], Lublin, Poland, February 5, 1945.

small concentration of American ex-prisoners in a camp under Russian control. They remained at this camp for a few days; they tried to find out what disposition was to be made of them but obtained no satisfaction from the camp commander. They escaped [emphasis added] from the Wegheim camp on February 3, 1945, and started east." Deane noted that these officers embarrassed the NKVD by getting to Moscow.²⁰³ This did not happen again, for the NKVD seized any other Americans or British making their way to Moscow, then imprisoned and interrogated them before releasing them to Deane or British Embassy custody.²⁰⁴

Deane reported that when he next met with Golubev he asked for authority to send contact teams to gather and repatriate US POWs from Poland. He also stated that the February 14 information from the Polish minister and the February 17 arrival of the three officers constituted "my first information concerning" U.S. POWs.²⁰⁵ (That was

²⁰³ Deane, p. 192.

²⁰⁴ Deane, p. 192 also NA, RG 334, Entry 309-Box 23, US Military Mission to Moscow Subject File Oct 43-Oct 45, Folder: Prisoners of War (1 January 1945 thru 28 February 1945), No. 434, British Embassy Moscow to Foreign Office, Copy for Military Mission, February 12, 1945.

²⁰⁵ Aside from reports from the Poles and POWs themselves, the Germans kept the Swiss Red Cross informed of the movements and locations of POWs. On February 14 Acting Secretary of State Grew informed Harriman that "Swiss Legation, Berlin, on basis of information supplied by German High Command reports that 200 American prisoners of war, being evacuated westward from Oflag 64, were abandoned enroute and are now in Soviet hands." RG 84, 711.4 1945, American Embassy, Moscow Confidential File, Box 78, Telegram No. 330, Acting Secretary of State Grew to AMEMBASSY MOSCOW, February 14, 1945.

despite the letters from Drury and Haggard.) In any event, Deane suggested that contact teams be sent to areas that Russian field commanders had already designated as concentration points for POWs. The POWs would gather at these points, from which they could then be evacuated.²⁰⁶

Golubev said that only 450 U.S. POWs had been found, and they had already been evacuated to Odessa, where they were awaiting transport. Deane reported that Golubev's statement "came as something of a surprise to me." He asserted that he "knew positively of only the two hundred that had escaped from Szubin," despite Haggard's report of three to four hundred. Deane also noted that the Poles had told him "a thousand Americans were in various Polish cities."²⁰⁷ The figures did not remain static. Only the fact that the U.S. Embassy was receiving information from primary and secondary sources could have forced the Soviets to admit that there were more than the 450 men Golubev had reported to Deane on February 19.²⁰⁸ Deane noted that over the next few days the Soviets continually revised their figures upward until they reached a total of three thousand POWs.²⁰⁹

206 Deane, p. 194.

207 Deane, p. 195.

208 NA, RG 84, 711.4 1945 POW in liberated areas, American Embassy Moscow Confidential File, Box 78, Note concerning information from Mr. Ciechanowski of the Polish Embassy Moscow to American Embassy, February 12, 1945.

209 M-23119, Ambassador Harriman to President Roosevelt, March 8, 1945 in FRUS 1945:V, The Soviet Union, pp. 1074-1075; NA, RG 84, 711.4 1945, American Embassy Moscow Confidential File, Box 78 Conversation minutes, Subject:

Golubev turned down General Deane's request to send contact teams into Poland. He suggested instead that the U.S. send a team to Odessa, and possibly another to Murmansk. This was a violation, as Washington and London saw it, of the Yalta Agreement. Deane pointed out that this would require U.S. POWs to travel almost two-thousand miles east to be repatriated to the West. In addition to the great distance to travel, the men would not receive any supplies or medical care until they reached Odessa.²¹⁰ Despite Soviet refusal, General Deane told Colonel James Dudley Wilmeth to be ready to go to Poland as soon as possible. On February 13, Deane told Wilmeth that he "was going on [a] trip to Lublin to evacuate 600 POW in Poland."²¹¹ On or about February 13, the Lublin Government of Poland conveyed a message received from Polish sources in Lublin. It said that there were "several thousand American POWs wandering around loosely over Poland not knowing where to go." The message was from two American officers, Colonels Charles Kouns and Jerry Sage.²¹² If, as Deane said, he had no information on POWs in Poland until February

Evacuation of Liberated American Prisoners of War, Present: Harriman, Deane, Page; Dekanozov, Timofeev, Moscow, March 7, 1945.

²¹⁰ Deane, p. 199.

²¹¹ Personal Diaries of Colonel James D. Wilmeth, in possession of author, entry for Tuesday, February 13, 1945.

²¹² Colonel Jerry Sage, Sage, (Wayne, Pennsylvania, Miles Standish Press, 1985), p. 406.

14, why did he order Colonel Wilmeth a day earlier to go to Lublin to evacuate six hundred POWs?²¹³

In fact, General Deane and the U.S. Embassy were well informed on the movement and dispersal of POWs in Poland. Information was coming not only from the Polish government; Polish radio was broadcasting POW appeals, the State Department was receiving information from the Swiss on the movement of POWs in Poland and Germany, and finally, POWs themselves were telling the embassy that there were many others in Poland.²¹⁴

Why did Deane and Harriman attempt to confuse the issue on when and how many POWs were found in Poland? Drury's letter would have come before the Yalta negotiations, and it may have been that Deane was hesitant to provoke the Soviets before that agreement was signed and in place. It is possible that the other letters and reports arrived while Deane was at Yalta, and he did not see them until shortly after he returned to Moscow. In any event, both Harriman

²¹³ It is probable that Deane and Harriman had been ordered to cover up the true story of Soviet treatment of POWs and the numbers that the Soviets failed to repatriate in order to safeguard the POWs. Deane wrote that Golubev told him three thousand POWs had been discovered in Poland and then used the same figure as the number of POWs repatriated thru Odessa. He ignored the fact that Stalin and others had said all POWs had been repatriated from Poland and sent to Odessa before Wilmeth arrived in Poland yet while Wilmeth was in Poland he reported another three thousand sent to Odessa. Deane, p. 197.

²¹⁴ NA, RG 84, 711.4 1945, American Embassy Moscow Confidential File, Box 78, Telegram No. 330, Acting Secretary of State Grew to AMEMBASSY MOSCOW, February 14, 1945

and Deane in their respective memoirs tell just enough to excuse Washington's forcible repatriation of Soviet nationals but not enough to lead to the exposure of the non-repatriation of American POWs. It is probable that knowledge of the failure of the U.S. Government to press the Soviets on the numbers and locations of liberated POWs would have led to public outrage over Soviet actions. Public pressure would not have done anything to force the Soviet Government to repatriate Allied POWs but would have complicated the issue. In addition the Allies thought they needed Soviet help with the war in the Pacific. It is likely that the resolution of the POW issue was temporarily postponed until Japan was defeated. There was no way to force the Soviets to repatriate the POWs unless they desired to do so, in fact any public pressure would have proved detrimental to the POWs. Millions of Soviet citizens had disappeared into the Soviet GULAG, and twenty thousand U.S. POWs could disappear there without a trace. It should be borne in mind that the Soviets would have successfully covered up the slaughter of over fourteen thousand Polish officers in the Katyn massacre if it had not been for the German discovery of the grave site. It is probable that the U.S. Government thought that diplomacy might work to bring the POWs home. For whatever reason a cover-up began and has continued to the present time.

The Soviet failure to inform the U.S. or U.K. representatives about the discovery of Allied POWs in Poland

was a clear violation of the Yalta Agreement. The U.S. and U.K. Governments had been most expeditious in informing the Soviets as to the discovery of Soviet personnel, for the Soviets had been most insistent on this even before the Yalta agreement. They had consistently accused both the U.S. and the U.K. Governments of failing to inform them when Soviet POWs were found.²¹⁵

It was probably the Soviet refusal to inform the British or the U.S. Governments when they "liberated" their respective POWs that led to the realization that an agreement had to be concluded between the powers in order to force the Soviets to care for and repatriate POWs. This and the desire to move the thousands of Soviet POWs behind Allied lines were a major impetus towards the Yalta Agreement on the repatriation of prisoners of war.²¹⁶

The United States Military Mission had taken pains to prepare for the recovery of American prisoners liberated by the Red Army. Twenty-five thousand tons of medical supplies, food, and clothing were collected at the airbase at Poltava. There were also greater amounts of supplies in warehouses at Archangel. Arrangements had been made for General Spaatz's Fifteenth Air Force to transport supplies and evacuate the prisoners as soon as possible. The

²¹⁵ Memorandum by the Chief of the Division of Eastern European Affairs (Bohlen) to Secretary of State Stettinius, December 1, 1944, also Kennan's 4526 above, November 27, 1944 both in FRUS 1944:IV, The Soviet Union, pp. 1267-1272.

²¹⁶ Deane, pp. 184-187.

Americans also expected to send contact teams to collection points behind Red Army lines.²¹⁷

In early February 1945 the front line was about sixty miles from Berlin. American estimates were that there were thousands of American prisoners from German POW camps behind Soviet lines. Though the Soviets insisted that there were few if any American prisoners behind their lines, letters from U.S. prisoners were arriving through the good offices of the Lublin Government of Poland. The officials in the U.S. Embassy had been aware since the beginning of February that there were U.S. POWs in Soviet-occupied territory. General Deane applied to the Soviet Government for immediate permission to send a contact team into Poland for purpose of repatriating these Americans. Deane instructed Colonel Wilmeth to take a team composed of a medical officer, Colonel Kingsbury, and a Polish and Russian interpreter, T/5 Kisil, along with any supplies and equipment they would need to Lublin. The orders were verbal; written orders would be cut after the fact. Colonel Wilmeth was ready to leave the evening of February 14, but the Soviets had yet to give permission for the trip. On February 16, two Americans who

217 The following information, except for where cited, was obtained from three sources; Colonel Wilmeth's personal diaries, unpublished memoirs and his written report to General Deane concerning his experiences in Poland. NA, RG 344, Military Mission to Moscow, Box 22, Report on a Visit to Lublin, Poland, February 27-March 28, 1945 for the purpose of Repatriating American ex-Prisoners of War also Memorandum to General Deane reference LUBLIN TRIP, April 13, 1945.

had been in the Canadian Army showed up at the American Embassy. They reported that there were many American POWs "scattered in small groups throughout Poland."²¹⁸ As a result of their reports, Harriman wrote Molotov that he had first-hand reports of American POWs in Poland, and he wanted to send Wilmeth and his repatriation team into Poland as soon as possible. Harriman did not threaten the Soviets with retaliation, but he did point out that "my government places the most urgent importance on the question of prompt and expeditious repatriation of liberated POWs. This evidenced by cables that I am receiving from my government making inquiry as to what action we are taking to repatriate." The Soviets could not ignore Harriman's request.²¹⁹ That afternoon Wilmeth received Soviet permission to go to Poltava.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Wilmeth's diaries, entry for Friday, February 16, 1945.

²¹⁹ NA, RG 84, 711.4 1945, American Embassy Moscow Confidential File, Box 78, Chr. No. 57, Harriman to Molotov, February 16, 1945.

²²⁰ Wilmeth's diaries, entry for February 16, 1945. Poltava was one of three bases operated jointly by the United States military and the Soviets. The U.S. commander of the base was responsible for air operations at the base whereas the Soviet commander was responsible for the physical operation of the base itself. Washington had requested the establishment of bases not only in the Ukraine but also in Siberia. Finally in early 1944 Stalin gave permission for the establishment of bases, but only in the Ukraine. The base at Poltava was to be used for shuttle bombers flying from Italy and Great Britain that bombed German targets. The other two bases joint U.S.-Soviet were at Mirgorod and Pryatin. Missions at all three bases could only be flown with the permission of the Soviets. Poltava began operations in April, 1944. Despite attempts to keep the location of the base secret it suffered a major German air raid on June 21-22, probably the result of a German

At Poltava, Wilmeth applied for permission from General Kovelov, the Soviet Commander of the base, to continue on to Lublin. Kovelov reported that he had no authority to allow Wilmeth and his team into Poland. Wilmeth and the American commander of the base, Colonel Thomas K. Hampton, requested that Kovelov check with Moscow, which he agreed to do. Wilmeth also notified Deane of Kovelov's refusal. It appeared that this was part of a deliberate Soviet tactic of subterfuge and deception to keep U.S. or U.K. representatives out of Poland.²²¹ Wilmeth and Hampton discussed taking an American plane and continuing on into Poland without Soviet permission. Hampton reported that it could be done, but it would result in "certain punitive treatment at the base." Hampton told Wilmeth, however, that he was so fed up with the Soviet interference that he would ready the plane and fly Wilmeth out. At that point, Wilmeth, despite his impatience with Soviet obduracy, felt that it would be better to inform Deane of the difficulties encountered. He sent Deane a wire informing him that the local Soviets "seemed to know utterly nothing about the

reconnaissance plane following a bomber group from England on June 21. The raid was devastating. The German attack destroyed fifty B-17s. Soviet defenses, Deane reported, "failed miserably." Twenty-eight thousand rounds of anti-aircraft shells failed to bring down a single German plane. Though the Poltava base was open less than a year it did enable the Allies to carry out strategic raids on previously immune German targets. The last U.S. soldier was removed from the Ukraine in April 1945. Deane, pp. 107-124.

²²¹ NA, RG 84, 711.4 1945, American Embassy Moscow Confidential File, Box 78, Translation of letter from V. G. Vyshinski to Ambassador Harriman, February 18, 1945.

situation," but that he could get to Lublin without Soviet help. Wilmeth further noted that, considering Deane's "urgent orders to get to Lublin in all possible haste," unless he heard differently from Deane he would fly on the next day.²²²

Deane replied that it would be better to wait; as he was sure the delay would only be for a few more hours. While awaiting Soviet permission, Wilmeth and Hampton made plans for the expected arrival of the liberated POWs. Housing, food, clothing and medical care would be provided until Hampton's crews could fly the POWs to Teheran. Wilmeth also asked Hampton to make arrangements to send his planes into Poland to pick up the POWs and transport them to Poltava.²²³

Hampton cooperated with Wilmeth and began to turn the air base into a POW processing center. Poltava was no longer being used by General Spaatz as a shuttle bombing base because of Soviet interference. The Air Force was now

²²² Colonel Wilmeth, *Memoirs*, p. 242; also NA, RG 84, 711.4 1945, American Embassy Moscow Confidential File, Chr. No. 73, Harriman to Vyshinski, February 23, 1945.

²²³ NA, RG 334, US Military Mission to Moscow, Subject File October 1943-October 1945, Prisoners of War, PLAN FOR THE EVACUATION OF POW FROM TERRITORIES UNDER RUSSIAN CONTROL, re: War Dept. letter, file AG 383.6 (11 Sept 44) OB-S-A-M, dated 3 October 1944, U. S. Military Mission Moscow, U.S.S.R., (no date), this document lists Hq, Eastern Command, USSTAF, Poltava, U.S.S.R., as the PWX Staging camp from which POWs would be transported to Teheran, Iran, for shipment to reception camps in the U.S. In addition, PWX HQ in Moscow, not the Soviets, was to decide the method and time of evacuation or least that was what U.S. authorities thought.

considering moving the base farther west, closer to the front lines.

Three U.S. ex-POWs arrived at Poltava and reported that there were thousands of Americans wandering around in Poland with the Soviets providing no help or transportation. They reported that many of the prisoners were still locked in German POW camps or "Soviet concentration camps, where they received practically no food, no news, no nothing."²²⁴

All of this information was conveyed to Deane, who reassured Wilmeth that clearance for the team to go into Poland would be forthcoming. Wilmeth had arrived on February 16; on February 23 another repatriation team, commanded by Major Paul Hall, reached Poltava. No permission had been received from Moscow to allow Wilmeth's team into Poland.

Hall was being sent to Odessa, for the Soviets had informed the U.S. Government that all POWs would be sent there for "water shipment back home." Though Washington would have preferred that U.S. POWs be flown to Teheran on American planes rather than shipped two thousand miles east to Odessa there was nothing that could be done about it. The Soviets refused permission for additional U.S. planes to fly into Poltava for possible POW removal; nor did they allow the other ten POW repatriation teams into the area.

224 Wilmeth, Memoirs, p. 243.

Those teams, which had come from London, remained in Teheran awaiting Soviet clearance.

On February 24, Wilmeth and Hall went to the train station to see if rail connections between Poltava and Lublin and between Poltava and Odessa were operating. There was daily train traffic from Poltava to Lublin. The only requirement for a ticket was a written request from the airbase. Wilmeth notified Deane that he could leave the next morning by rail from Lublin and be there within six days. It was an alternative possibility if permission for flying was not received.

Within a few hours Wilmeth received notification from General Kovelov that a Soviet plane was being sent to fly him and his group to Lublin. Wilmeth pointed out that was not necessary as there were plenty of American planes at Poltava capable of flying not only his party but their supplies into Lublin. Wilmeth noted that he and Hampton had already made preparations and that he wanted to keep the plane as a means of communication with Poltava. Kovelov told him that he could keep the Soviet plane in Lublin as long as he needed it. Wilmeth accepted the arrangement as too much time had already been wasted waiting to get to Lublin.

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chauffeur. Wilmeth knew the only reason that the Soviets had supplied a plane was in order to control the team's movements. That was also the reason Kovelov insisted that he use a Soviet driver. In addition to the driver, Kovelov insisted that the team take two other Soviets. All three, Captain Pustayutov, Lieutenant Karkovyets, and the driver, Sergeant Ilchenko, were NKVD personnel. Wilmeth had requested a mechanic from the airbase in case the jeep or any of the other equipment broke down. Kovelov refused this request. After waiting two weeks and fearing other delays, Wilmeth's team finally departed for Poland on February 27.

The plane flew to the Red Air Force Base at Zamosc between Lvov and Lublin, just as the weather turned colder and it began to sleet. There was no one to meet them, as the base had been abandoned when the Red Air Force moved farther west. The team spent the night near the base in the homes of Polish citizens. Wilmeth learned that the Poles not only considered the Soviets as bad as the Nazis, but they were also afraid of their "liberators." Wilmeth was aware that the "situation in Poland was unpleasant," but he could not jeopardize his mission by being party "to a talk about the unhappy condition of the Poles."

Wilmeth's group arrived in Lublin on February 28. There was no one to meet them, as their arrival was unexpected. Their Soviet escorts left them to report their arrival. While the Soviets were gone, Kisil found a Soviet truck driver who helped them unload the jeep. (The truck

driver allowed them to use his truck to off-load the jeep onto his truck, which he then backed up to a pile of dirt, enabling Kisil to drive the jeep off the truck.) The Americans managed to unload the plane without any other help. The team then found the Soviets in their group and, at their insistence, all six reported to the Soviet Commandant.

The Commandant, Colonel Bogdanov, acted surprised when Wilmeth informed him of his mission. Bogdanov, evidently unaware of Wilmeth's mission, summoned four other Soviet officers: Major Sigula, chief of the Lublin collections point, Major Karneyev, assistant to the chief, Major Dimitrichev, the surgeon, and Lieutenant Pavlov, also Sigula's assistant. Major Sigula was General Revakin's representative from the main repatriation headquarters that had, that morning, moved to Praga, a suburb of Warsaw. According to Sigula, Revakin was unavailable, having just left for Moscow.

Wilmeth noted that, as repatriation headquarters was in Praga, he had come to the wrong place so he would go to there. He also wanted to make arrangements to bring in the other ten repatriation teams then in Teheran but which Wilmeth thought would soon be in Lublin. Sigula replied that it was impossible for Wilmeth to go to Praga without General Revakin's permission, as he had given permission only for Wilmeth to visit Lublin. When Wilmeth asked about the situation in Lublin, Major Karneyev reported that the

Soviets expected to ship five hundred American POWs from Lublin to Odessa. Wilmeth pointed out that would be unnecessary, as the Americans had planes at Poltava that could land at Lublin and take the men out by air. The planes could also bring in more supplies for the POWs to make their trip more pleasant. Karneyev refused, saying he had authorization only to put the POWs on trains and ship them to Odessa. If the men were actually to leave within the next two or three days, then that would be quicker than trying to get permission. Wilmeth thought that the planes could simply fly to Odessa, pick up the POWs, and take them to Teheran.

Wilmeth then asked if they could send in several plane loads of supplies. Karneyev also refused this request, claiming he had no authorization. Wilmeth asked him how many American POWs were in Poland; Karneyev replied he did not know--only headquarters in Praga knew that. When asked how many POWs were in Lublin, Karneyev replied that there were ten officers and sixty-six enlisted personnel. Wilmeth was shocked when Karneyev refused his request to see them. Wilmeth pointed out that was why he had come to Poland. Sigula concurred with Karneyev and told Wilmeth that he would not be allowed to see the American POWs unless permission was received from Revakin.

Wilmeth asked Bogdanov, the senior Soviet officer present, for permission to see the Americans. Bogdanov refused; he told Wilmeth that he would have to get

permission from Praga but that unfortunately the telephone lines to Praga were down. There was nothing more to discuss, and Wilmeth considering he would have to work with them, did not want to antagonize the Soviets any more than necessary. After the others left, Wilmeth asked for communication facilities to Moscow, and Bogdanov said that he would see that any message got through.²²⁵

In his message to Deane, Wilmeth reported that the team had arrived in Lublin but he had been denied access to American POWs present there. Bogdanov took the message and promised to transmit it.

After leaving Bogdanov's office, Wilmeth and the rest of his team went to the Mal-Europa Hotel where the Soviets had reserved rooms for them. The Americans and Soviets were placed in one of two rooms, with the Soviets occupying the front room and the Americans in the back room. For the Americans to leave their room they had to go through the Soviets' room, which of course allowed the Soviets to keep close watch on them as well as to determine if they had any visitors or if they tried leave without permission. Wilmeth refused the rooms, but the Soviets told him he would have to use them as no other had been paid for by the Soviets. Wilmeth ignored this and secured rooms, for which he paid. The Soviets then demanded that one of their own people move

²²⁵ General Deane noted that he "could get word from and to him [Wilmeth] occasionally through Polish channels" but other than that he had no direct contact with Wilmeth as the Soviets would not allow it. Deane, pp. 196-197.

into the rooms with the Americans, which Wilmeth refused. He pointed out there was just enough room for the American team. The Soviets then demanded that the Americans clear it with them whenever they left the hotel. They also demanded that the jeep, although American, be left with the Soviet driver at all times.

Wilmeth asked for an explanation for these requirements and was told that there were many Nazi sympathizers among the Polish people who might be unpleasant to the Americans if they left the hotel "unprotected" by the Soviets. These arrangements were, he was told, "solely for your protection." Wilmeth was not stupid. He knew that this was only an attempt to control his movements and contacts but he promised to keep the Soviets informed of his trips from the hotel.

At 10:30pm Wilmeth was summoned to the Soviet commandant's office, where he was informed that permission had come for him to visit the American POWs. All the Soviets who had been present that afternoon were again on hand. As all the Soviets insisted on going, it took three trips by the jeep to get everyone to where the POWs were housed.

The American POWs were quartered in a "ramshackle torn-down building" located near Lublin University. The windows were broken out and there were no doors or heat except for one or two small coal stoves. The building held ninety-one Americans, (thirteen officers and seventy-eight enlisted

men) as well as 129 British personnel (four officers and 125 enlisted men). All of the POWs slept on straw-covered wooden benches or on the floor. The officers had come from Schubin (Szubin) Poland, where several POW camps had been located, of which one of the most important was Oflag 64. These camps had been overrun by the Red Army around the end of January 1945.

Lieutenant Fred Mitchell, the ranking U.S. POW officer, reported there were Americans all over Poland in the same conditions. He and his group had traveled around Poland looking for help. They had gone to one POW camp near Warsaw but received no help, no food to speak of, and no medical attention. No one seemed to be doing anything for the former POWs, nor was any provision made for them. They had been traveling south, on their own toward the Black Sea. When they arrived in Lublin they had been detained by the Soviets and promised train passage to Odessa. In the meantime they had been quartered in one of the buildings at the Maidanek concentration camp. Around February 24, they had been moved into Lublin, shortly before the arrival of the American repatriation team. The Americans were relieved to see Wilmeth and his team as they had nearly given up hope. If a train had not been available in the next two or three days, they had planned to set out on their own.

Wilmeth compiled a roster of the men for Major Sigula to send to the U.S. Military Mission in Moscow so that the prisoners' names could be sent to the States. Further