

RECORDS UPDATE

306th BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

(Please complete as much of this form as you wish to, fold and mail as per address on reverse side. Or, if obtained at a reunion, hand to Russ Strong)

LAST NAME: Consolmagno FIRST NAME: Joseph TITLE:
STREET ADDRESS: 751 Carla Dr TELEPHONE: (813) 474 2986
CITY: Englewood STATE: FL ZIP: 34223

DATE JOINED 306th ASSOCIATION:

REUNIONS ATTENDED: (Years) 85, 86, 87

WIFE'S NAME: Patricia

LAST EMPLOYMENT: Director News Relations, Chrysler Corp (1975)

COLLEGE(S) ATTENDED: Tufts U DEGREE(S): AB DATE: 1939

SERIAL #: 0724020

SQDN: 367

MOS: 9

DATE ARR: ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ 7/42

CREW: Bierleffi/Stewart/McKee/Buckey/Fischer
Tunnell

DATE DEPARTED: 4/5/43

HIGHEST RANK IN 306th: 1st Lt

SERVICE RETIREMENT DATE: 1/6/45

RANK or GRADE: 1st Lt

DECORATIONS WITH 306TH:

TOP SERVICE ASSIGNMENT AFTER 306TH:

SPECIAL ASSIGNMENTS WITH 306TH:

QUESTIONNAIRE

CATERPILLAR CLUB - IRVING CHUTE COMPANY

NAME: Joseph E Consolmagno

COMBAT JUMP DATE & MISSION: April 5, 1943 -Antwerp

HEIGHT WHEN BAILED OUT: 20,000

ANY PROBLEMS WITH PARACHUTE: No

306th Bombardment Group. SQDN: 367th

Russell A. Strong
2041 Hillisdale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

A HISTORY OF THE 306th BOMBARDMENT GROUP - EIGHTH AIR FORCE
Russell A. Strong, Rt. 1, Scotch Meadows Dr. Laurinburg, NC 28352

Name Joseph E Consolmagno
Address 890 North Lakeshore - Port Sanilac - Mich 48469
Telephone (313) 622 8559 Date November 22 1976
Occupation Retired Employer former public relations director
Chrysler Corporation
Address _____ Telephone _____

Service Record:

Before joining the 306th:

301st April/May 1942

May/June 1942, detached service to Hawaii for patrols during and following Battle of Midway.

After leaving the 306th:

Stalag VIIA

POW April 5, 1943 - April 29, 1945 (Dulag Luft-Stalag Luft III-/
Detached service, AF Stat. Control School, Harvard Bus. School
July 1945 to terminal leave, Sept. 1945

306th Record:

Arrival Date July 1942 Squadron or other unit 367

MOS Navigator Combat Status _____

Missions Completed Eight

Promotions Oct '42 to 1st Lt

Decorations X AM X olcs DFC olcs SS DSM DSC MH SM

PH Battle Stars _____ other _____

(OVER)

Other personal data:

Description of Air Missions:

(What were the highlights of your combat career? What was your role? What heroics did you witness? What events were there of which you have special knowledge?)

Flew missions with pilots Stewart, Buckey, Tunnell, McKee, Fischer

Original pilot was 1st Lt Arthur L Birleffi at 301st, Hawaii, and Wendover. He was probably among the first casualties of 306th - July 1942 at Wendover - checking out other pilots on night landings when plane crashed on salt flats- later word = unconfirmed - was that plane had been sabotaged and arrests had been made --- Henry Terry, also of 301st and 306th and a close friend of Biff's may have more details.

Most of the flying officers of the 306th wound up at Stalag Luft III. I made a return trip in May of this year with 17 other former inmates - and did an article about it which will appear in a future issue of the American Legion Magazine. The first three rows on the attached contact sheet are from that visit. I'll be happy to loan you the negatives for any you can use --the building is a POW museum built on the site of the camp - Photo #3, Row #3 is Major General Spivy at the monument to the 50 RAF flyers killed after the Great Escape
Some 306ers were involved in the digging and support activities --Quentin Burgett and Bob Hermann, among them, I believe -- but tunnel was broken after Americans had been moved to another compound

Add additional pages, if necessary

Name Joe Consolmagno Address 890 N. Lakeshore Port Sanilac, MI 48469
Telephone 813) 622 8559

MISSING AIRCRAFT REPORT

Pilot Clarence Fisher *(DECEASED AFTER WAR)* / *co-pilot was JAMES CROUCH*
Plane # and Name L-1 Abner *2829 LAS PALMAS (1971)*
Mission Date April 5 1943 Engine plant - Antwerp
Cause of loss: AA fire Fighter attack Other, explain _____
PORT PATHUR, TEXAS

Describe conditions in the plane as completely as you can:

Flak from emplacements at Ghent hit plane on way into target, knocking it out of formation. Fighters swarmed in, made three or four passes, causing damage on each pass. With engine fires out of control, order was given to abandon plane --- all of crew bailed out safely, plane exploded before hitting ground

How and where did you leave plane? Bailed out about five ~~mi~~ miles west of Antwerp, drifted into city --- saw first group s drop bombs while still in chute and formations leaving continent over the Zuider Zee

What happened when you got on the ground? Drifted into a yard ~~in~~ at a factory and a guard had a gun at my head before I could get chute off...being driven from factory to local airfield stopped at a school where injured Belgian kids were being carried out - a ~~stray~~ stray bomb had hit the school ~~minutes~~ by - I stopped feeling like a hero and can't feel much enthusiasm for aerial bombing to this day.

Did you meet any of your crew mates? --Whole crew was picked up and held at airfield, including pilot Fischer who was free for just long enough to get into civilian clothes
How were you treated, if captured? given by a civilian who immediately fled. All in a matter of just a few minutes.

Aside from threats by first Gestapo questioners which were not carried out - as per earlier briefings - Germans seemed to be trying to live up to Geneva convention.

Any additional details, reminiscences, letters, or documents of these events would be appreciated. If you do send such materials, I will copy them and put them back in the mail to you within 24 hours.

Do you know the present, or WW II, addresses of any of your crew or other 306th personnel?



U.S. and Allied prisoners greet liberators at camp near Frankfurt in 1945

POW Fourth of July

By JOE CONSOLMAGNO

THERE NEVER WAS a Fourth of July quite like that one in 1944—speeches befitting a Presidential election year; a parade; a band concert; an all-star game; swimming races and track events; a carnival midway.

But the American flag was nowhere in sight; there were no fireworks; there were no women or children; no oldsters. The only on-lookers watched over gun sights and through barbed wire.

It was the South Compound of Stalag Luft III, a prisoner of war camp at Sagan, deep in the heart of Nazi Germany. The celebrators were downed American airmen, "kriegies,"—a Yank contraction of the German word for war prisoner, *kriegsgefangene*. Six-hundred miles to the west, the Allied invasion of Europe was not yet a month old. To the east, the nearest Russian salient was 400 miles distant. They were in the eye of the hurricane, dead center in the *sturm und drang* of World War II in Europe.

A year earlier, there were only 250 American prisoners at Sagan, but by 1944 their numbers were swollen to nearly 2,000, as great air battles raged over Europe.

Life at Stalag Luft III was not

as hard as it might have been—Korea and Vietnam demonstrated that. Most Germans lived up to the Geneva Convention. They permitted mail and personal parcels from home and Red Cross food packages. Athletic equipment, books, records and musical instruments came from neutral Switzerland under auspices of the Red Cross and the YMCA.

Kriegies were allowed programs in theater, sports and education. Chicago TV personality Ray Rahner and New York radio personage Ted Brown were products of the kriegie theater. Nicholas Katzenbach, U. S. Attorney General in the Johnson Administration, was a student in the educational program.

Still life at Stalag Luft III was not a "Hogan's Heroes" comedy. There were no Colonel Klinks or Sergeant Schultzes in the Stalag Archipelago. Remember that Buchenwald, Dachau and Auschwitz were also in that chain. Six weeks prior to July 4, 1944, some 50 of 80 RAF prisoners who had successfully tunneled out of the North Compound were recaptured and executed. Late in 1944, as the Third Reich began to crumble, there was serious talk of executing all captured airmen.

Horrors were shoved aside as the Americans at Stalag Luft III observed their nation's 168th birthday.

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A skilled kriegie chef could do wonders with Red Cross subsistence issue—one can a week of corned beef and Spam per man, some crackers, powdered milk and concentrated chocolate bars. They produced sauces and meat loaves, patties, puddings and pies devised from little more than imagination and stubborn will. One kriegie cook, Ralph "Bud" Gaston, went into the gourmet food business after the war, with a restaurant in Los Angeles. At Sagan he had an added secret ingredient: hunger.

The menu was only one of the delights that Fourth of July. A concrete-lined reservoir built for fire protection served as a pool for swimming races. Track events were held on a path worn around the inside perimeter of the compound where kriegies trudged daily for exercise or privacy. It skirted a low wooden rail that kept the prisoners away from the high double fence of

barbed wire that enclosed the camp.

The track was the scene of a magnificent hustle perpetrated by William C. Runner of Bridgeton, N.J., a jazz musician nicknamed Dusty. Muzz military meant very little to Dusty. In England a year earlier, he had a uniform tailored as a zoot suit—trousers extremely full at the knees and pegged at the ankles, blouse padded at the shoulders and pinched at the waist, with its length extended beyond the finger tips. Until official wrath intervened, Dusty was the only officer in the Army Air Force uniformed "with the reet pleat and the drape shape."

He also was a superb athlete. In high school and college he had competed in track, cross-country and swimming. Years of training on the trumpet had given him a powerful breathing apparatus. At Sagan, this side of Dusty was known only to his messmates. Starting with a seemingly rash brag, Dusty permitted himself to be goaded into accepting a challenge to complete a three-mile run around the perimeter in less than 18 minutes. Once the bait was taken, Dusty and his messmates pledged their entire food allotments in bets at heavy odds.

Dusty played the character to the hilt, right through the first two laps. But even as he staggered and clowned to the jeers and jokes of the unwary bettors, he had a careful ear cocked for the time called out by his messmates. On the last lap he opened up his kick, suddenly consuming distance with the long, powerful strides of a trackman. Jeers turned to groans and even shouts of outrage. Long before he broke the tape, the sheep knew they had been fleeced. Yet his finish, well under the 18-minute limit, was greeted with cheers from winners and losers alike. As P. T. Barnum observed, Americans love to be bamboozled—provided it's done with style. And Dusty Runner had style.

His prime interest at Sagan was his job as leader of the camp band, an aggregation of professional musicians-turned-fliers who could hold their own on any bandstand. Dusty himself was a top-notch instrumentalist and an all-around entertainer. His talents were lost with his untimely death at war's end.

The most popular athletic event of the Fourth was the all-star softball game. Bill Crowley, later to become director of public relations for the Boston Red Sox, was catcher for the losing team. The one-run loss still rankles. His star pitcher was lured away from his barracks team by a bonus in D-bars.

"There was no reserve clause in the South Compound," Crowley recalls ruefully.

Dedicated camp politicians devoted their holiday to seeking votes for the upcoming election of a kriegie congress that was timed to coincide with the national election that pitted Thomas E. Dewey against Franklin Roosevelt. When organized later that summer, the congress debated political issues under the chairmanship of Emmett Dedmon, who was to become executive editor of the Chicago Sun-Times. One action of the kriegie congress was surprising. It defeated a resolution favoring a peacetime draft.

Politicking, however, was only a diversion on the kriegie Fourth. Holiday games of chance were more popular. Variations of roulette were set up, along with an endless variety of card games. There was a dice table and a rat race featuring real rodents.

There was no official currency in the camp. The pay of prisoners of war, designated by the Geneva Convention to be borne by the holding power, was merely a bookkeeping entry in a master account. Cigarettes were the medium of exchange and chocolate bars were the bullion.

Throughout that Fourth of July there was a great exchange of wealth at the gaming tables. But the majority of the newly-rich soon settled back into their usual economic niche.

Social scientists might ponder the phenomenon. All kriegies entered the insulated society of Stalag Luft III with no more material wealth than the clothes on their backs. Screened originally by rigid Air Force entrance requirements, all had about the same level of education and all were in the same age group. In the camp, all were allotted equal living quarters and the same rations of food and clothing. All received approximately the same parcels from home. Most were about in the same physical condition. Yet in a short time some emerged rich in kriegie possessions and comforts. There was a middle economic class. And there were the poor. The distinctions were subtle and the wealth was relative, but both were real.

(They were wiped out in January 1945 when the camp was evacuated in the shadow of a Russian advance. Individual wealth was reduced to what a man could carry on his back during a week's forced march. Yet before the war in Europe was over three months later, the economic classes reappeared at Stalag VIIA, near Munich, with substantially the

same members in the rich, middle and poor classes.)

But sociological implications were of no concern that Fourth in 1944.

Over the wire in the North Compound, RAF prisoners out for an early turn on their perimeter paused to watch and encourage the parade as it grew steadily with recruits from each barracks.

"Have a care!" called one English officer. "The ruddy British are coming!"

"The sooner the better!" was the reply.

Evening roll call was a sharp contrast. Somehow every kriegie had managed a fresh shave and clean, pressed khakis. With Dusty Runner leading the band, they marched out in dress parade precision rare for airmen. In the spirit of the occasion, the Germans made no count, a once-in-a-wartime omission.

A band concert followed dismissal of the formation, featuring arrangements of the great swing bands. RAF kriegies gathered on their side of the wire to share the Fourth of July concert. They had a special friendship for the band. Once, returning under guard from a rare concert appearance at another American compound, the band had halted outside the North Compound and interrupted an RAF appeal with "God Save the King." As a man, the RAF prisoners turned to face the music, standing at rigid attention until the last note was sounded.

A verboten national symbol, the American flag was nowhere in sight on the kriegie Fourth. But it was there, smuggled into the camp and in the custody of one Lt. Fred Gillogly, who today is a Chevrolet dealer in Buffalo, N. Y. When the tanks of the 14th Armored Division rolled into Stalag VIIA to liberate the kriegies on April 29, 1945, the flag was there to greet them, flying proudly over a barracks.

Following the evening concert on the kriegie Fourth, the band broke up into small combos to play at the various parties that continued in each barracks until lock-up. At lights-out, Dusty's trumpet had the last say, sounding taps over the silenced camp in tones of clear military brass, tinged with a muddy hint of the blues. The call echoed and re-echoed and as the last notes faded into the night a kriegie might have imagined the faint rumble of drums rolling taps all the way back to Valley Forge.

The more prosaic, however, said it was merely the RAF paying a call on Berlin. **END**

This was the Lille raid,
Oct 9, 1942

The plane was
MAN O' WAR
All of crew listed
here, except
navigator, were
killed at
ST MAZARE, Nov 9,
42 - NAVIGATOR
ON THAT MISSION
WAS JOE CREED

U.S. AWARDED
ANDREWS
THE AIR MEDAL

Bob HERMANN
1715 Royal Blvd
Elgin, Ill 60120
CAN GIVE AN EYE-
WITNESS ACCOUNT
OF THIS EVENT

Sign Language on High

Spitfire Waggles Wings To Save U.S. Fortress

By WES GALLAGHER
WITH THE BOMBER COM-
MAND, UNITED STATES ARMY
AIR FORCES, SOMEWHERE IN
ENGLAND, Oct. 15 (A. P.)

NINE American Flying Fort-
ress crewmen are alive and
their \$250,000 plane will fly against
Hitler again because, in one split
second, an alert British Spitfire
pilot improvised an air sign lan-
guage.

But for Flight Lieutenant A. J.
Andrews, fighter pilot of the Royal
Air Force, the Flying Fortress
would have crashed in the rough
English Channel and these men
in its crew might not have been
here today to tell the story:

Lieutenant James M. Stewart,
23, a clergyman's son from Mar-
rowbone, Ky., the pilot;

Lieutenant William W. Dickey,
23, of Beverly, Mass., a former
scoutmaster; co-pilot;

Lieutenant Joseph E. Consol-
mano, 24, of Boston, a former
newspaperman; navigator;

Lieutenant James A. Creamer,
23, of Louisville, Ky., bombard-
ier;

Sergeant U. L. Langan, 22, of
Sioux City, Ia., radio operator-
gunner;

Sergeant Charles J. Merry-
weather, 22, of Sanford, Fla., top
turret gunner;

Sergeant Raymond C. Schmoeyer,
24, of East Greenville, Pa., ball-
turret gunner;

Sergeant Thomas E. McMillan,
23, of Steubenville, O., waist gun-
ner, and

Sergeant Jack M. Wheeler, 19, of
Muskogee, Okla., tail gunner.

STEWART was piloting his
Fortress in the big raid against
Lille last Friday when he was
jumped by swarms of German
fighters. They knocked two
motors out, smashed the radio

apparatus, riddled the life raft
and drilled shell holes in the rud-
der.

The Fortress shook them off but
lost height rapidly over the Chan-
nel until, approaching England's
hills, it had dropped to about
1500 feet.

The third motor was beginning
to cough.

"I knew it was only a question
of several hundred yards before I
would have to make a crash land-
ing and with hills in front of me it
looked like the best chance was to
land in the Channel," said Stew-
art.

"I was picking out a soft spot
in the water, which was very
rough."

AT THIS critical moment
Andrews appeared and in-
stantly sized up the situation. He
could not communicate by radio
so he jumped in front of the fort-
ress, waggled his wings violently
and headed directly for shore.

"I knew he wanted me to follow
him, so I took a chance," Stewart
continued.

The Spitfire sped straight over a
low hill, he said, and "just as he
reached the crest of the hill he
waggled his wings again and
dropped his landing gear to show
me there was a field below."

The struggling bomber just
cleared the hill and rolled onto a
runway directly in front on a field
of which its crew had never known
before. The crew agreed that their
plane probably could not have
flown another 100 yards.

Schmoeyer suffered the only in-
jury. He had been cold on the way
to France and had turned on the
heating apparatus in his electric
flying suit. In the fight and the
return home he had neglected to
shut it off and was slightly
"cooked."

Actually, we had had a rehearsal for this rescue five weeks earlier, when we crossed the Atlantic with the 306th. It had been a stormy crossing and we lost a couple of planes - and one crew - I believe. As we crossed the Irish coast, I tuned the RDF to Prestwick radio and dozed off. A short time later, Stewart called down that he wasn't happy with our direction.. it turned out , later, that the beam we were following was coming from Brest. As we stooged about with our last whisps of gas while I tried to gather my wits and make sense out of the unfamiliar British maps, a twin-engine RAF plane swooped in front of us, waggled his wings, then peeled off.

On the second pass, Stew called down - "What the hell's that guy doing?"

"I think he wants us to follow him," I guessed.

He did, and led us into a field on the Isle of Man.

So, we only had to be signalled once, over the Channel when we were ready to ditch. We all knew what he meant. By this time we were on the deck, and when the Spit lowered his wheels over a rise on the coast - beyond which we couldn't see - we surmised the strip was there. Fortnately it was, because we never could have gotten around for a second try.



U.S. and Allied prisoners greet liberators at camp near Frankfurt in 1945

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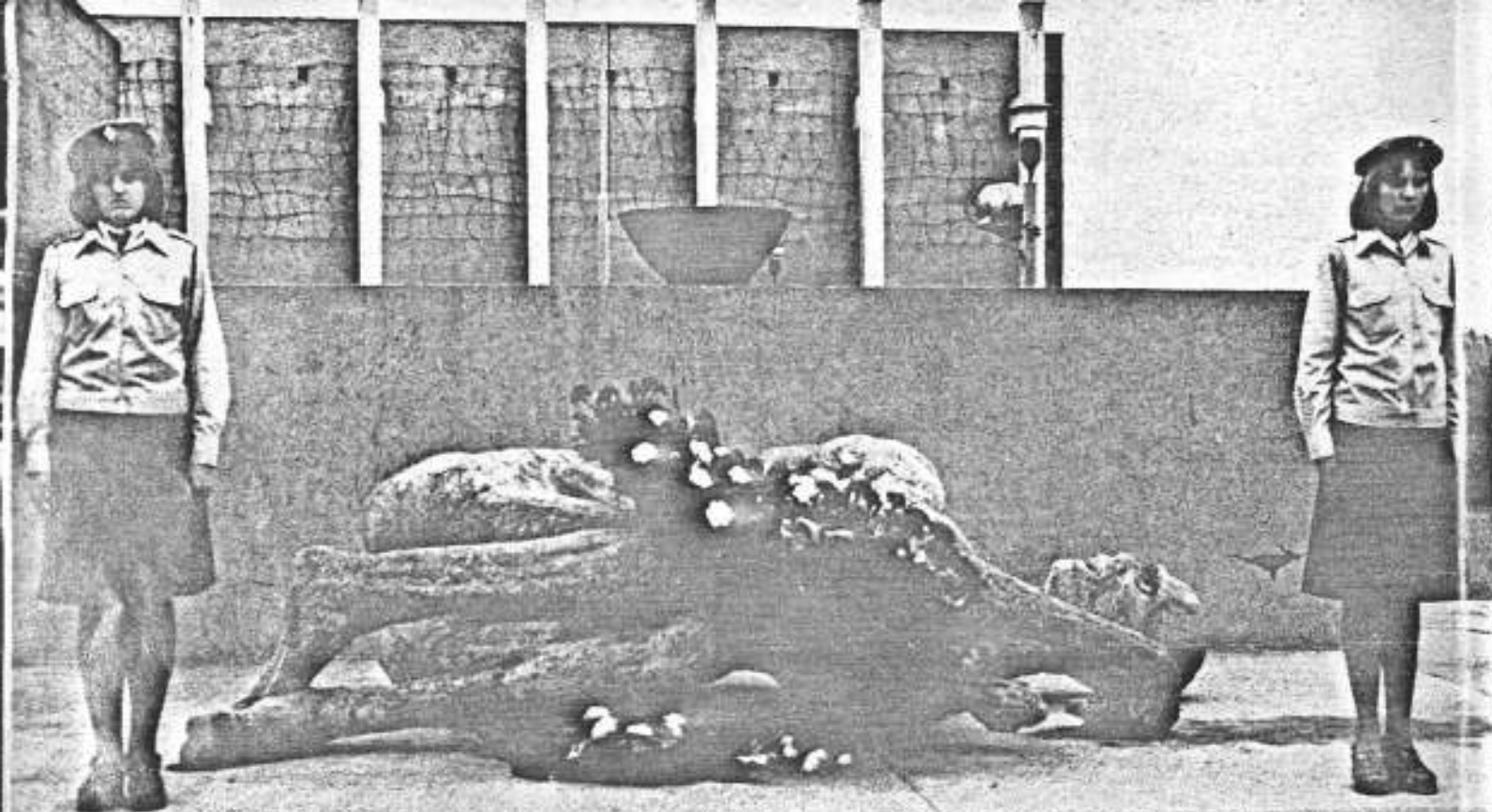
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END



A POW Odyssey to Europe

Polish girl scouts stand at attention at POW museum-monument at Sagan

By JOE CONSOLMAGNO

AT FRANKFURT am Main, modern apartment buildings have obliterated the prisoner of war reception center that was Dulag Luft. At Sagan, in former German territory ceded to Poland, a stark monument and POW museum memorialize Stalag Luft III. At Moosburg, near Munich, Stalag VIIA barracks are now homes and shops in a lower middle-class neighborhood.

It was all so strange to 18 ex-kriegies—former POW's—who made a pilgrimage over the Stalag route traveled by thousands of Allied airmen shot down over the European-North African theater and taken prisoner during World War II.

I was navigator on a B-17 Flying Fortress that went down April 5, 1943, over Antwerp.

Our former POW group flew to Warsaw, where a personable young man from Orbis, the Polish national tourist agency, greeted us. Orbis is the Polish counterpart to the better known Soviet Intourist organization that guides and watches over visitors to the USSR. He was to stay with

our group until we left the country five days later at the East German border. We were also met by our American tour guide and organizer, Mrs. Wanda Rudzinski of Mineola, N.Y., a childhood war refugee from Poland.

That night in Warsaw, some 40 of us—ex-POWs, wives and friends—held a reacquaintance dinner at the Forum Hotel, a modern, western type of operation.

Maj. Gen. Delmar Spivey, USAF, Ret., who as a colonel had been senior American officer at the West Compound of Stalag Luft III, cleared up one mystery that had puzzled us since the summer of '44 when an Air Force brigadier general suddenly turned up as a prisoner in our camp.

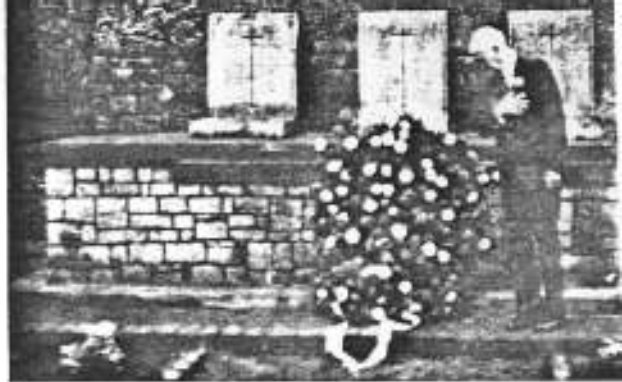
We heard that prior to our entry into the war he had been air attaché in Berlin. We also heard that the plane from which he parachuted had returned safely to England. We were convinced he had been dropped to deal in a political peace settlement.

Not so, said Spivey. The brigadier had merely been out seeking points toward an Air Medal, a common pastime among headquarters brass,

particularly when the risks seemed not too great. His plane was hit, the pilot jettisoned gunners and passenger, then headed for England with his lightened load.

Memories of World War II are still very much alive in Warsaw. Scattered along the bustling sidewalks of a rebuilt, modern city are remnants of war-destroyed buildings—often left standing as memorials to freedom fighters. From the outset in 1939, when it was crushed between German and then Russian attacks from west and east, Poland suffered massive casualties from both enemies. At war's end, it counted 6 million dead, 800,000 in Warsaw alone. Warsaw had been virtually leveled in vicious Nazi retaliation for an abortive uprising in the fall of 1944. (While the Nazis smashed the city, the Russian army sat on the outskirts, waiting for the destruction to be completed before resuming its advance to "liberate" the rubble.)

Tragedy of such catastrophic proportions cannot be erased in a single generation. Moreover, perpetuating the war memory is obviously official policy of the Soviet satellite govern-



Former POWs and families tour stalags, above and bot. right, Maj. Gen. Delmar T. Spivey, USAF, Ret., top right, at monument in Poland

ment sitting in Warsaw, though the accusing finger is always pointed west, toward Germany.

A flight to the former German city of Breslau, now Wrocław, an overnight stay there, and a 90-mile bus drive through the countryside of Lower Silesia took us to Sagan on a gray, misty morning.

Set back from the road stands a POW museum and monument. Barbed wire is embedded in its stark, cement facade. The statue shows a fallen prisoner, a recumbent, emaciated giant, curled up on his side. British and American prisoners were spared starvation by Red Cross food parcels from home; but no such good fortune was permitted prisoners taken on the Russian front and millions of concentration camp victims.

Schoolchildren were lined up along the walkway to this grim monument, waiting to greet us. But first we had to satisfy the demands of protocol. We drove into town, where we were greeted at the ancient city hall by the mayor of Sagan, representatives of the state, the military, the Communist Party and other dignitaries. Pepsi-Cola flowed freely—it is apparently the national soft drink. The inevitable toasts were drunk in champagne. A television crew interviewed General Spivey. He interested them because he had been a witness at the Nuremberg war crime trials.

"What did you testify against the

Nazi war criminals?" was the first question. It was the last, too.

"I was a witness for the defense," answered Spivey.

The TV crew packed up their camera and left. They were not interested in hearing about a Waffen SS officer who refused to carry out Hitler's orders in the waning days of the Third Reich to execute all POW fliers.

After the city hall, we were shown to the library at Sagan's 12th century monastery, where the German astronomer Johannes Kepler had once studied, and the chapel, where Hungarian composer Franz Liszt once played the organ. As we entered the aged chapel, that same organ filled the vaulted chamber with the rich, reverberating tones of the "Ave Maria." The group's chatter had been diminishing all morning and now subsided completely. These were somber moments. Our thoughts were on the grim past.

The POW museum and monument are built on the spot once occupied by the "Kommandatur," the command headquarters for the prison camps at Sagan. Nothing else remains of Stalag Luft III, only an empty field and a scrub forest.

Schoolgirls presented each of us with a single, symbolic rose, and as a recorded "Star-Spangled Banner" thundered from the public address system, we proceeded through the

children's honor guard toward the POW monument. Suddenly, it all rushed back in a wave—653 days of my youth spent in that open field beyond the monument. Barbed wire and barracks and long-forgotten faces materialized, then disappeared again in the misting, drizzling rain.

The final notes of the anthem sounded as we reached the monument. The young people's drum corps picked up a tattoo that rolled continuously while the general placed a wreath by the figure of the fallen prisoner.

We visited the museum for a few moments. The photos and exhibits under glass were at once familiar and unreal. Then we moved on to an earlier POW monument. In a wooded area where part of Stalag Luft III once stood was a clearing where kriegies had built a memorial to 50 RAF prisoners executed after the Great Escape of 1944 and had erected grave markers for the other airmen who had been killed or died in the camp. We left our roses there. Our mission to Poland was over. On the way out of the Stalag area, our hosts pointed to another clearing where a mass grave had been discovered several years after the war. It had been concealed under a newly-planted forest and contained, they said, some 30,000 bodies. The roads through the woods carried other memories.

At 21:00 hours on the bitter cold night of January 27, 1945, an order came down from the Kommandatur to evacuate Stalag Luft III. Sounds of battle a scarce 20 kilometers to the east were borne into camp on freezing winds. By midnight, a long, winding line of 10,000 prisoners and their guards staggered along a snow-covered road like a wounded snake, writhing in an agony of cold; lashed by bitter, blizzard winds. At daybreak, the long line had splintered into several shorter ones. The portion that had been the West Compound found brief shelter in and around a little village church at Halbrau, now renamed Ilowa.

Now, leaving Sagan, our bus followed that route of the West Compound's march into Ilowa. There, in an upstairs dining room of a new restaurant, we sat down with our Polish hosts to a lavish banquet of countless courses and endless toasts in vodka, brandy and cola drinks.

It fell my lot to offer the last toast.

"May we always have the wisdom to know who our friends are," I said.

The route of our winter march in 1945 wound 45 miles overland to Spremberg, now in East Germany. There we had been loaded into 40-and-eight box cars, 50 to a car, for a torturous three-day rail trip to Stalag VIIA at Moosburg. Our tourist bus was refused permission to follow that route into Germany. Soviet satellite or not, the East German Democratic Republic wants no part of war memories. Not that war, at any rate. It grudgingly allowed us to cross its border at Frankfurt am der Oder, provided we drive right through to Berlin without a stop, not even for lunch.

At West Berlin we were joined for drinks and dinner by Hermann Glimnitz, a former master sergeant in the Luftwaffe, who had been the ranking non-commissioned officer in the security detail at Stalag Luft III. He was so good at his job that all escape activity halted whenever he set foot in a compound. Tunnelers, tailors, forgers all closed up shop until he was safely outside the gate. Ramrod straight at 78, he remains very much the old soldier, still respected by his former adversaries.

And on that Berlin morning 31 years later, *Oberfeldwebel* Glimnitz assembled his last appel—roll call—of the prisoners of Stalag Luft III, at the entrance of the Hilton Hotel to present each a souvenir of his city and to bid them farewell as they departed for Moosburg.

"You people are crazy; you are absolutely crazy!" exclaimed Mrs.

Rudzinski, our war-refugee guide.

How do you explain a Hermann Glimnitz to a non-soldier?

How do you explain a Luftwaffe pilot who willed his prized war decorations to the kriegie he had shot down 20 years earlier? The recipient was Col. Cy Widen, USAF, Ret., now living in Colorado Springs, CO.

Cy was a lieutenant when we were fellow POWs.

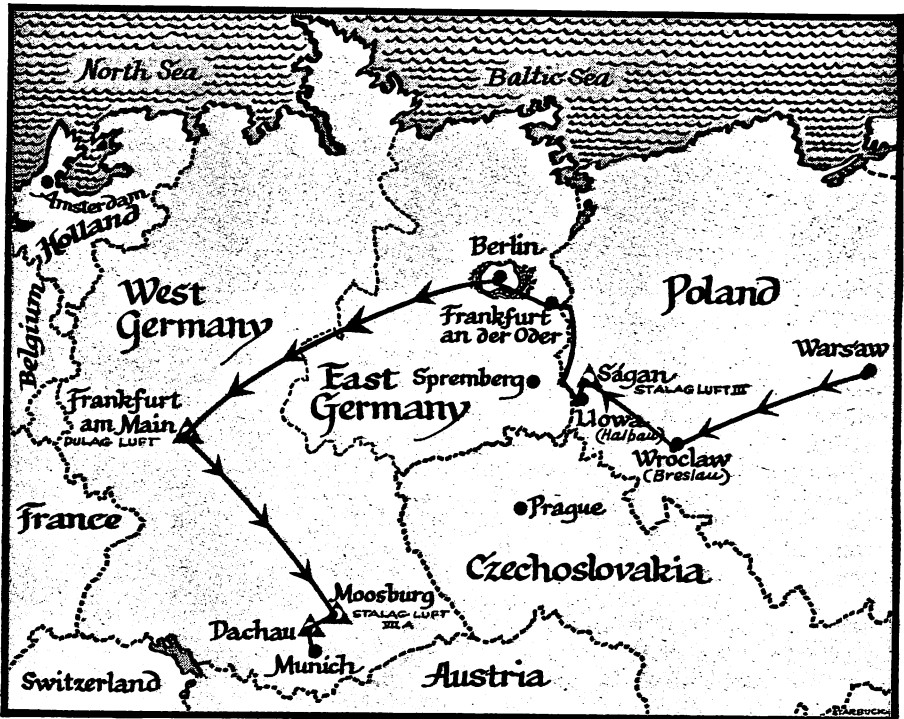
Since Dulag Luft was buried without trace by the postwar building boom, Frankfurt am Main was merely a pass-through point for our group. We also might never have found the remains of Stalag VIIA without the aid of former Major Doctor Simoleit, who had been adjutant to the Luftwaffe commander

he could not understand why we wanted to make this visit.

"There is nothing there," he asserted.

That night our guest at a beer hall in Munich was a man we called "Popeye" when he was chief ferret at Sagan, poking about for tunnels beneath the prison barracks. After his men had discovered and foiled our 99th escape tunnel, they bought a barrel of beer to tap in celebration when they found the 100th. But they missed the next one—Tunnel Harry. It brought escape to 80 prisoners, death to 50 and freedom to three.

Once, a long-time British prisoner in the North Compound, irritated to the breaking point by the rat-like scraping of a ferret beneath his cell,



Arrows trace route of POW's 'odyssey' through WWII camps

at Stalag Luft III. As our volunteer guide, he led us to the neighborhood on the outskirts of Moosburg where the camp once stood. Even then, it took careful study of the nondescript buildings to pick out the former barracks in their civilian disguise as modest homes, apartments and business places. There was no hint of the moment when General Patton's tanks burst through to liberate us on April 29, 1945.

Outside Munich, we also made a sorrowful visit to Dachau's notorious death camp, partially preserved as witness and warning to future generations. Our German bus driver, who carried in his wallet snapshots of his grandchildren and of the panzer tank he had driven to within binocular-range of Moscow, claimed

drilled a hole in the floor, then sat in ambush, mallet in hand. Lured by the light streaming down into his domain, one unfortunate ferret poked an exploratory finger up into the hole. The mallet struck, the ferret finger was in splints for weeks, and the assailant spent a month in soul-satisfying solitary confinement.

Now puffed and in his eighties, chief ferret Popeye brought the jam-packed Munich beer hall to silence when he rose at his table and in his old soldier's voice sang "Lili Marlene." His American hosts led the house in a standing ovation.

Somehow I kept hearing, over and over again, the sentence I first heard 33 years ago, when a German pointed a gun at my head. "For you the war is over." END

Cousolmaggio

25 March 1980

Dear Joe:

I want to thank you and your wife for your warm and savory hospitality. It certainly beats Holiday Inn!

I had a good trip the rest of the way, visiting in Largo with Jack Lambert, who became a squadron commander long after you had departed the group.

Then in Washington I was able to see a later addition, Manny Klette, who became a 91st group squadron commander after having flown a tour with the 306th, and then fashioned a distinguished career in the Air Force, in private research, and in governmental service.

All in all, it was a lot of fun, and a bit wearing. But, I'd do it again soon.

Hope to see you another year when I get to Florida.

Enclosed are your records, and I do appreciate the loan of them. Each little piece adds to my lore on the 306th, and I hope that a lot of the good parts come through in the book.

Sincerely yours,

Russell A. Strong

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO
890 N. Lakeshore Road
PORT SANILAC, MICH. 48469
(313) 622-8559

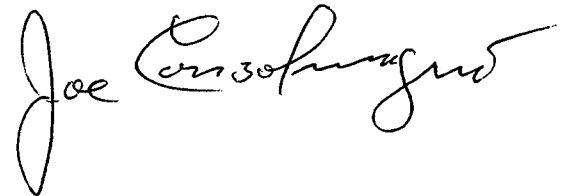
April 23, 1977

Dear Russ:

Here are a couple of pieces I did last year that might be of some use in your 306th research. Bud Gaston and Fred Gillogly were also 306ers..they're referred to in the 4th of July piece.

Bud starred in one historic moment at Thurleigh. Stepping out of the barracks one day he was confronted with an approaching entourage surrounding George VI on a surprise visit. With the group at his heels, Bud stepped back into the open door and heralded the King of Great Britain and Ireland, Emperor of India, Monarch of the Realm, and Defender of the Faith: "Hey, fellows! Here's the fucking King of England!"

regards

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe Consolmagno". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed word "regards".

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

P.O. BOX 283
ENGLEWOOD, FLORIDA 33533
(813) 474-2888

Russell Strong
2041 Hillsdale
Kalamazoo MI 49007

2-8-80

Dear Russ:

The excellent summary in the latest Echoes noted a plane lost in crash landing at Manston on return from the 9 Oct 42 raid on Lille. Enclosed is the story on the incident from the Associated Press as it appeared in one of the Boston papers.

The plane was not crash landed; Stew brought it in neatly. It was so badly shot up, however, that I don't think it was repairable under the circumstances. I was under the impression that it had been cannibalized to keep other planes flying.

Personal item: my address is changed from Port Sanilac, MI, to: 751 Carla Dr, Englewood, FL 33533. Would you be so kind as to have the record changed for me?

Second item: if you need any help in writing, rewrite, editing or reporting, I'll be happy to donate my services.

Keep up the good work.

best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

P.O. BOX 283
ENGLEWOOD, FLORIDA 33533
(813) 474-2986

Feb. 12 1980

Russel A. Strong
2041 Hillsdale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

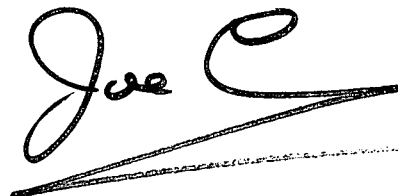
Dear Russ:

The enclosed orders reflect some of the prenatal history of the 306th. With the Battle of Midway brewing, eight crews and planes each were pulled out of the 301st at Spokane and the 303rd at Boise and sent to Hawaii under the command of Lt. Arthur Birleffi.

After about a month of flying patrols out of the islands, the crews were sent back to the States, most - if not all - for assignment to the 306th at Wendover. The 28 May 42 orders list the crews involved from the 301st. More than 10% of the 306th original combat crewmen are on these lists.

About Biff Birleffi: he and part of his crew were killed in a crash at Wendover while he was checking out a couple of other pilots, whose names I don't remember. Later, in England, Warren Terry - I believe it was - told me the plane had been sabotaged and a civilian alien arrested as a suspect. If this is true, then the 306th's first combat casualties actually occurred at Wendover.

regards

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joe", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

P.O. BOX 283
ENGLEWOOD, FLORIDA 33533
(813) 474-2986

Russell Strong
2041 Hillsdale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Dear Russ:

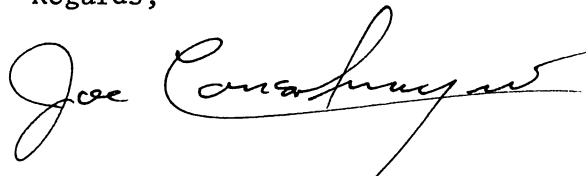
That wedding photo of Warren Terry (Henry?)..the other officer is Hugh Toland, Terry's bombardier. (Didn't you visit Toland's family in Philadelphia?)

I have your note about copy for Echoes. The Muse hasn't struck yet...but I did have a couple of articles on the 306th resort in Germany ---Stalag Luft III in the American Legion Magazine, and they're not stingy about reprint permission.

Incidentally, Ed Pipp did a series for the Detroit News on his trip back to Sagan which predated mine by about a year. And it's a much better piece than mine on the same subject. I'm sure the News would yield reprint rights.

Good luck with the history.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe Consolmagno". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name "Joe Consolmagno".

Feb 22 1981

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

P.O. BOX 283
ENGLEWOOD, FLORIDA 33533
(813) 474-2988

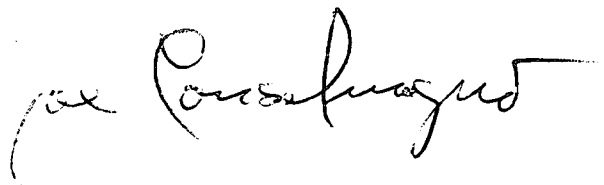
Russell Strong
2041 Hillsdale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Dear Russ:

In the interest of added information:

The uncaptioned photo of the B-17 "Man O' War" in the April, 1983, Echoes, first appeared in a London newspaper on November 10, 1942. Ironically, the plane was lost with its entire crew on the preceding day at Saint Nazaire. It was Jimmie Stewart's plane. Stewart was from Marrowbone, Kentucky, and the bombardier, James Creamer, was from Louisville, hence the choice of a Derby great as a namesake.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joe Consolmagno". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name "Joe Consolmagno".

May 8, 1983

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

P.O. BOX 283
ENGLEWOOD, FLORIDA 33533
(813) 474-2888

Dear Russ:

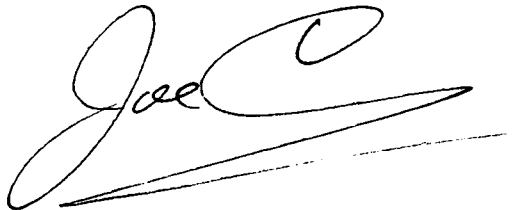
Many thanks for the photo of Man O' War. It means a lot to me.

Perhaps you have heard from the Belgian writer who is working on a book about the disaster at Mostel on the Antwerp raid of April 5, 1943. His name is Achiel Rely. He sent me a copy of an article he did on it for a publication called "After The Battle," quite detailed with extensive photos. He quotes heavily from your book - even lists where it can be ordered in England, so I assume you have seen the piece. If not, I'll be happy to pull a copy for you.

At any rate, he asked me for my There-I-Was story for his book. Under all of the circumstances, it's the kind of request I'd pretend I never received, if I were my own PR counsel. But I can't start copping out now, at this late date. And so, the enclosed, a copy of my reply.

By your count, some 900 of the 306th guys could tell this story, with variations here and there. As representative of the lot, perhaps this might be of some use for the archives, or whatever other purpose might be served.

Best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe C." with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Mr. Russell A Strong
2041 Hillisdale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Feb. 13 1985

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

P.O. BOX 283
ENGLEWOOD, FLORIDA 33533
(813) 474-2986

Reg Robinson, Chairman
1984 Reunion Committee
306th Bomb Group Assn
PO Box 16917
Fort Worth, TX 76162

Dear Robbie:

I note from the July Echoes that the Committee wants to identify the ex-POWs who will be attending the October reunion.

I see three Clay Pigeons on the list who were kriegies: Al LaChasse, who bills himself as the First Pigeon, having been shot down on that first mission, Lille, October 9th, 1942; Bob Herman, March 6, 1943, at Lorient, and myself, April 5, 1943, at Antwerp. We were together at Stalag Luft III, Sagan, until January, 1945, and Stalag VIIA, Mooseburg, until we were liberated April 29, 1945.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe E.", with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the bottom right of the page.

Sept 1 1984



**Stalag Luft III
40th Reunion
Denver, Colorado**

May 2 - 4, 1985

Dear Russ:

It was good seeing you, if only for a brief visit, at Colorado Springs .

Enclosed is another letter from friend Rely in Belgium and some additional information he dug up concerning the Antwerp April 5, 1943, mission. I 'm sending it along in case you don't already have this stuff.

And I haven't forgotten my promise to write something about my opus Tunnel Bierstein. We're still digging out here from the seven weeks of neglect we left behind to go travelling this summer, but we're beginning to see daylight now and I should be able to get to it in the next couple of days or so.

Best

Sept 17 1985

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

751 Carla Dr.
Englewood, FL 33533

Dear Russ -

Please change my
address listing from:

To

751 Carla Drive
Englewood, Fl. 33533

Regards

Joe Consolmagno

3/3/86

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

P.O. BOX 283
ENGLEWOOD, FLORIDA 33533
(813) 474-2986

Hi, Russ:

Attached, per your request. Perhaps, in your capacity as historian, you could obtain a print of the AP photo enclosed, from the Free Press or the AP. It came from the AP's Denver bureau.

I would appreciate return of the other photo when you've finished with it.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joe", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Sept 21, 1985

MR. JOSEPH EDWIN CONSOLMAGNO
BOX 283
ENGLEWOOD, FL 33533

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

751 Carla Dr.
Englewood, FL 33533

Dear Russ:

Many thanks for the photo of my crew. It's quite a jolt seeing these guys again as I always remembered them.

The date of the photo is significant---four days before they bought it at St. Nazaire. And it's difficult to realize that was only four months after our first pilot, Biff Birleffi, was killed at Wendover. But those days were so concentrated that every month was a year long.

Incidentally, Pat has just finished reading your book from cover to cover. She was particularly impressed by your ability to sustain interest and avoid repetitiveness in recounting what was essentially a constantly recurring series of events.

Take care, Old Buddy. See you in Dayton.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe". The signature is written in black ink and features a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

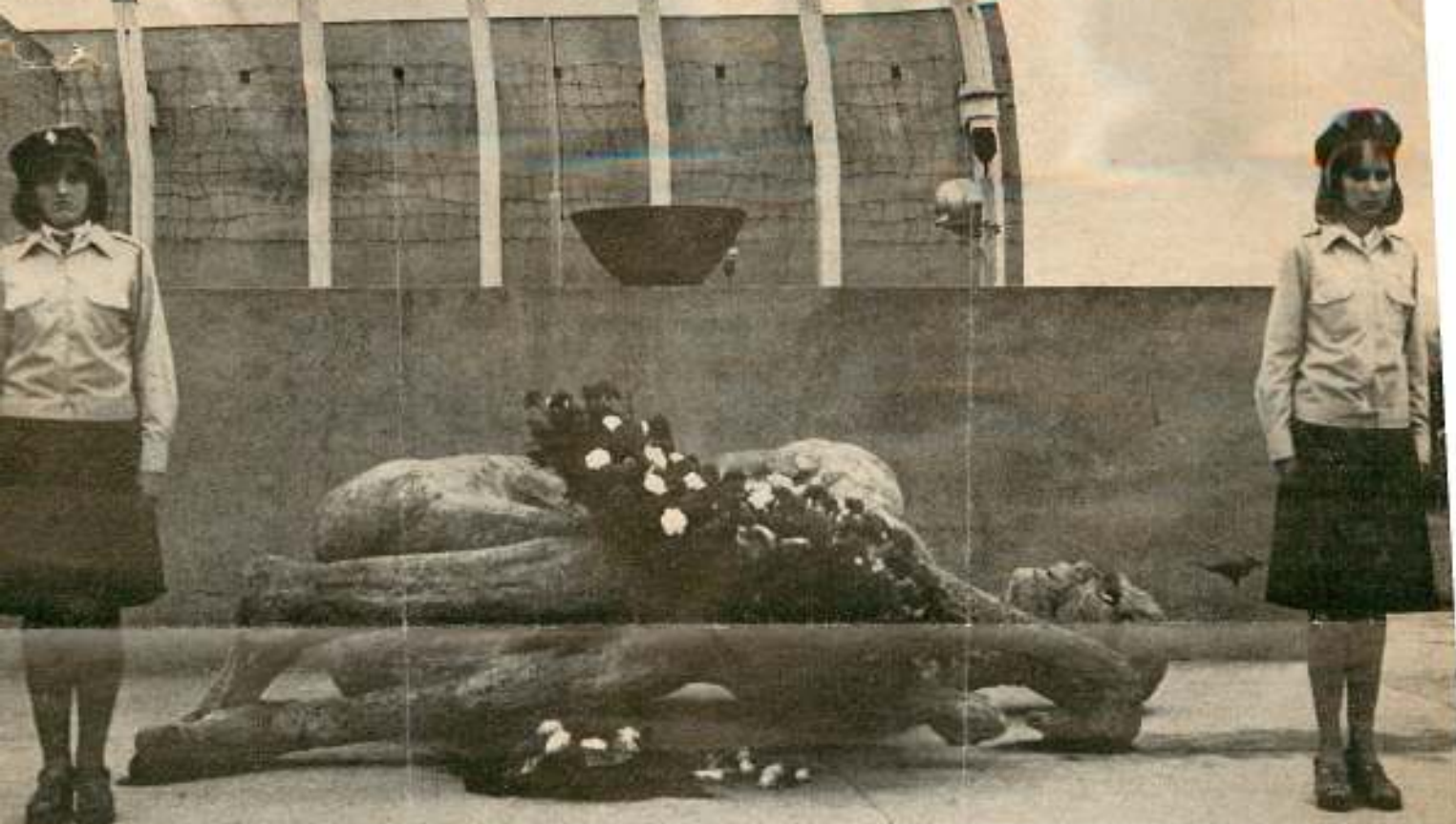
June 28 1986

4-24-85

Russ,

Why not check
with Joe Consolmagno
about using this
article in Echoes.

Bob Hermann
See you in Sept.



A POW Odyssey to Europe

Polish girl scouts stand at attention at POW museum-monument at Sagan

By JOE CONSOLMAGNO

AT FRANKFURT am Main, modern apartment buildings have obliterated the prisoner of war reception center that was Dulag Luft. At Sagan, in former German territory ceded to Poland, a stark monument and POW museum memorialize Stalag Luft III. At Moosburg, near Munich, Stalag VIIA barracks are now homes and shops in a lower middle-class neighborhood.

It was all so strange to 18 ex-kriegies—former POW's—who made a pilgrimage over the Stalag route traveled by thousands of Allied airmen shot down over the European-North African theater and taken prisoner during World War II.

I was navigator on a B-17 Flying Fortress that went down April 5, 1943, over Antwerp.

Our former POW group flew to Warsaw, where a personable young man from Orbis, the Polish national tourist agency, greeted us. Orbis is the Polish counterpart to the better known Soviet Intourist organization that guides and watches over visitors to the USSR. He was to stay with

our group until we left the country five days later at the East German border. We were also met by our American tour guide and organizer, Mrs. Wanda Rudzinski of Mineola, N.Y., a childhood war refugee from Poland.

That night in Warsaw, some 40 of us—ex-POWs, wives and friends—held a reacquaintance dinner at the Forum Hotel, a modern, western type of operation.

Maj. Gen. Delmar Spivey, USAF, Ret., who as a colonel had been senior American officer at the West Compound of Stalag Luft III, cleared up one mystery that had puzzled us since the summer of '44 when an Air Force brigadier general suddenly turned up as a prisoner in our camp.

We heard that prior to our entry into the war he had been air attaché in Berlin. We also heard that the plane from which he parachuted had returned safely to England. We were convinced he had been dropped to deal in a political peace settlement.

Not so, said Spivey. The brigadier had merely been out seeking points toward an Air Medal, a common pastime among headquarters brass,

particularly when the risks seemed not too great. His plane was hit, the pilot jettisoned gunners and passenger, then headed for England with his lightened load.

Memories of World War II are still very much alive in Warsaw. Scattered along the bustling sidewalks of a rebuilt, modern city are remnants of war-destroyed buildings—often left standing as memorials to freedom fighters. From the outset in 1939, when it was crushed between German and then Russian attacks from west and east, Poland suffered massive casualties from both enemies. At war's end, it counted 6 million dead, 800,000 in Warsaw alone. Warsaw had been virtually leveled in vicious Nazi retaliation for an abortive uprising in the fall of 1944. (While the Nazis smashed the city, the Russian army sat on the outskirts, waiting for the destruction to be completed before resuming its advance to "liberate" the rubble.)

Tragedy of such catastrophic proportions cannot be erased in a single generation. Moreover, perpetuating the war memory is obviously official policy of the Soviet satellite govern-

The Man Who Could See Tomorrow

He set out to make a survey of the West Coast defenses.

Those defenses which did exist near some of the larger cities were not adequate. Lea noted that the heavy coastal guns all pointed seaward and could not be trained on forces approaching from land. (This was a fatal flaw in the 1942 British defense of Singapore.)

Lea outlined all of his findings and then wrote Gen. Adna R. Chaffee, a former chief-of-staff, and told him of his fears. The retired general was impressed by Lea's ideas and tried to get him a hearing in the nation's top military councils, but high-ranking officers dismissed "the vaporings of an amateur."

Chaffee persisted and finally succeeded in organizing war games.

The games opened with Lea maneuvering his theoretical forces on a huge map. Striking without warning, he attacked and defeated defending Naval units. He sent his "troops" ashore on undefended beaches.

Regular Army commanders began to move desperately to new defensive positions, but as the umpires began to tally the results, it became apparent that Homer Lea, indeed, had "defeated" the defending army and had captured the entire West Coast from Seattle to San Diego.

Lea pulled all his materials together and began his book, "The Valor of Ignorance."

He contrasted the American Army of 50,000 with the well-armed Japanese Army of more than one million men, the over-aged American fleet with the modern, faster and more heavily armed Japanese fleet.

Then he outlined the steps by which Japan, feeling thwarted in its Pacific ambitions by the United States, would proceed to assert its power. First would be the surprise attack on the U.S. fleet which would in effect destroy American seapower. Declarations of war are a thing of the past, he said. The Japanese would then attack the Pacific islands. In the Philippines, the Japanese would land at Lingayen Gulf and Polillo Bight (exactly where they did in December 1941) and would move in a pincers on Manila. The city would fall to the Japanese in three weeks. (Actually it held out for 26 days.) The remaining American forces would fall back to Corregidor and other fortified positions around Manila where they would be starved into surrender. Landings on Hawaii, defended at that time by only a battalion of Americans, could be ef-

fectured easily, Lea said. Most experts now agree that if the Japanese had moved boldly right on the heels of Pearl Harbor in 1941, they could have captured the Hawaiian Islands.

When "The Valor of Ignorance" was published in 1909, it created something less than a sensation in the United States. Most military men dismissed it as pure fantasy. The general public paid it no attention. It sold 2,000 copies in the United States. In Japan, however, it was made compulsory reading at the Japanese military and naval academies. Germany made it compulsory for all staff and field grade officers.

Kaiser Wilhelm was so impressed that he invited Lea to visit Germany and observe army maneuvers. Lea also visited England at the joint invitation of Field Marshal Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener.

Lea returned to the United States with the definite feeling that England and Germany were on the brink of a collision. He wrote a second book, "The Day of the Saxon," in which he predicted a war between the two. It would be a war, he pre-

dicted, that neither one would really win, and after which both would decline as military powers.

India, he said, would be lost to Britain. If it was not invaded by Russia, it would become independent, he said. Britain also would lose Egypt, its Middle East mandates and its African colonies.

If in its war with England, Germany also sought to attack Russia, Lea said, the Germans would suffer the same fate Napoleon did and lose so heavily in men and materiel that they would be forced to withdraw.

If we view World War I and World War II as one conflict—and historians are moving in this direction—we can see how accurate was Lea's view of the global situation.

He apparently felt that the forces of pacifism and isolationism were so strong in the United States that this country would not intervene in a European conflict. Indeed, if Germany had not gone to such excess in its submarine warfare early in World War I, we might not have done so.

Homer Lea died in 1912. He lived to see Sun Yat Sen gain power in China. Death denied him the opportunity to see the United States rally to defeat aggressor nations in two World Wars.—Miles E. Denham

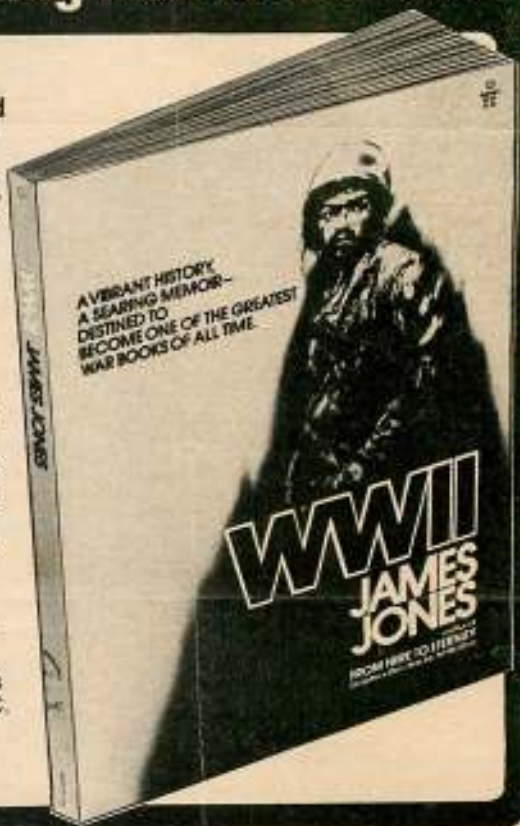
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Former POWs and families tour stalags, above and bot. right, Maj. Gen. Delmar T. Spivey, USAF, Ret., top right, at monument in Poland

ment sitting in Warsaw, though the accusing finger is always pointed west, toward Germany.

A flight to the former German city of Breslau, now Wroclaw, an overnight stay there, and a 90-mile bus drive through the countryside of Lower Silesia took us to Sagan on a gray, misty morning.

Set back from the road stands a POW museum and monument. Barbed wire is embedded in its stark, cement facade. The statue shows a fallen prisoner, a recumbent, emaciated giant, curled up on his side. British and American prisoners were spared starvation by Red Cross food parcels from home; but no such good fortune was permitted prisoners taken on the Russian front and millions of concentration camp victims.

Schoolchildren were lined up along the walkway to this grim monument, waiting to greet us. But first we had to satisfy the demands of protocol. We drove into town, where we were greeted at the ancient city hall by the mayor of Sagan, representatives of the state, the military, the Communist Party and other dignitaries. Pepsi-Cola flowed freely—it is apparently the national soft drink. The inevitable toasts were drunk in champagne. A television crew interviewed General Spivey. He interested them because he had been a witness at the Nuremberg war crime trials.

"What did you testify against the

Nazi war criminals?" was the first question. It was the last, too.

"I was a witness for the defense," answered Spivey.

The TV crew packed up their camera and left. They were not interested in hearing about a Waffen SS officer who refused to carry out Hitler's orders in the waning days of the Third Reich to execute all POW fliers.

After the city hall, we were shown to the library at Sagan's 12th century monastery, where the German astronomer Johannes Kepler had once studied, and the chapel, where Hungarian composer Franz Liszt once played the organ. As we entered the aged chapel, that same organ filled the vaulted chamber with the rich, reverberating tones of the "Ave Maria." The group's chatter had been diminishing all morning and now subsided completely. These were somber moments. Our thoughts were on the grim past.

The POW museum and monument are built on the spot once occupied by the "Kommandatur," the command headquarters for the prison camps at Sagan. Nothing else remains of Stalag Luft III, only an empty field and a scrub forest.

Schoolgirls presented each of us with a single, symbolic rose, and as a recorded "Star-Spangled Banner" thundered from the public address system, we proceeded through the

children's honor guard toward the POW monument. Suddenly, it all rushed back in a wave—653 days of my youth spent in that open field beyond the monument. Barbed wire and barracks and long-forgotten faces materialized, then disappeared again in the misting, drizzling rain.

The final notes of the anthem sounded as we reached the monument. The young people's drum corps picked up a tattoo that rolled continuously while the general placed a wreath by the figure of the fallen prisoner.

We visited the museum for a few moments. The photos and exhibits under glass were at once familiar and unreal. Then we moved on to an earlier POW monument. In a wooded area where part of Stalag Luft III once stood was a clearing where *kriegies* had built a memorial to 50 RAF prisoners executed after the Great Escape of 1944 and had erected grave markers for the other airmen who had been killed or died in the camp. We left our roses there. Our mission to Poland was over. On the way out of the Stalag area, our hosts pointed to another clearing where a mass grave had been discovered several years after the war. It had been concealed under a newly-planted forest and contained, they said, some 30,000 bodies. The roads through the woods carried other memories.

At 21:00 hours on the bitter cold night of January 27, 1945, an order came down from the Kommandatur to evacuate Stalag Luft III. Sounds of battle a scarce 20 kilometers to the east were borne into camp on freezing winds. By midnight, a long, winding line of 10,000 prisoners and their guards staggered along a snow-covered road like a wounded snake, writhing in an agony of cold; lashed by bitter, blizzard winds. At day-break, the long line had splintered into several shorter ones. The portion that had been the West Compound found brief shelter in and around a little village church at Halbrau, now renamed Ilowa.

Now, leaving Sagan, our bus followed that route of the West Compound's march into Ilowa. There, in an upstairs dining room of a new restaurant, we sat down with our Polish hosts to a lavish banquet of countless courses and endless toasts in vodka, brandy and cola drinks.

It fell my lot to offer the last toast.

"May we always have the wisdom to know who our friends are," I said.

The route of our winter march in 1945 wound 45 miles overland to Spremberg, now in East Germany. There we had been loaded into 40-and-eight box cars, 50 to a car, for a torturous three-day rail trip to Stalag VIIA at Moosburg. Our tourist bus was refused permission to follow that route into Germany. Soviet satellite or not, the East German Democratic Republic wants no part of war memories. Not that war, at any rate. It grudgingly allowed us to cross its border at Frankfurt am der Oder, provided we drive right through to Berlin without a stop, not even for lunch.

At West Berlin we were joined for drinks and dinner by Hermann Glimnitz, a former master sergeant in the Luftwaffe, who had been the ranking non-commissioned officer in the security detail at Stalag Luft III. He was so good at his job that all escape activity halted whenever he set foot in a compound. Tunnelers, tailors, forgers all closed up shop until he was safely outside the gate. Ramrod straight at 78, he remains very much the old soldier, still respected by his former adversaries.

And on that Berlin morning 31 years later, *Oberfeldwebel* Glimnitz assembled his last appel—roll call—of the prisoners of Stalag Luft III, at the entrance of the Hilton Hotel to present each a souvenir of his city and to bid them farewell as they departed for Moosburg.

"You people are crazy; you are absolutely crazy!" exclaimed Mrs.

Rudzinski, our war-refugee guide.

How do you explain a Hermann Glimnitz to a non-soldier?

How do you explain a Luftwaffe pilot who willed his prized war decorations to the kriegie he had shot down 20 years earlier? The recipient was Col. Cy Widen, USAF, Ret., now living in Colorado Springs, CO.

Cy was a lieutenant when we were fellow POWs.

Since Dulag Luft was buried without trace by the postwar building boom, Frankfurt am Main was merely a pass-through point for our group. We also might never have found the remains of Stalag VIIA without the aid of former Major Doctor Simoleit, who had been adjutant to the Luftwaffe commander

he could not understand why we wanted to make this visit.

"There is nothing there," he asserted.

That night our guest at a beer hall in Munich was a man we called "Popeye" when he was chief ferret at Sagan, poking about for tunnels beneath the prison barracks. After his men had discovered and foiled our 99th escape tunnel, they bought a barrel of beer to tap in celebration when they found the 100th. But they missed the next one—Tunnel Harry. It brought escape to 80 prisoners, death to 50 and freedom to three.

Once, a long-time British prisoner in the North Compound, irritated to the breaking point by the rat-like scraping of a ferret beneath his cell,



Arrows trace route of POW's 'odyssey' through WWII camps

at Stalag Luft III. As our volunteer guide, he led us to the neighborhood on the outskirts of Moosburg where the camp once stood. Even then, it took careful study of the nondescript buildings to pick out the former barracks in their civilian disguise as modest homes, apartments and business places. There was no hint of the moment when General Patton's tanks burst through to liberate us on April 29, 1945.

Outside Munich, we also made a sorrowful visit to Dachau's notorious death camp, partially preserved as witness and warning to future generations. Our German bus driver, who carried in his wallet snapshots of his grandchildren and of the panzer tank he had driven to within binocular-range of Moscow, claimed

drilled a hole in the floor, then sat in ambush, mallet in hand. Lured by the light streaming down into his domain, one unfortunate ferret poked an exploratory finger up into the hole. The mallet struck, the ferret finger was in splints for weeks, and the assailant spent a month in soul-satisfying solitary confinement.

Now puffed and in his eighties, chief ferret Popeye brought the jam-packed Munich beer hall to silence when he rose at his table and in his old soldier's voice sang "Lili Marlene." His American hosts led the house in a standing ovation.

Somehow I kept hearing, over and over again, the sentence I first heard 33 years ago, when a German pointed a gun at my head. "For you the war is over." **END**

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

P.O. BOX 283
ENGLEWOOD, FLORIDA 33533
(813) 474-2886

Reunion

THERE'S JUST SO MUCH sentimental baggage you can carry through life. I'm not much for reunions. Anyone who has reached the age of 60

could easily spend the rest of his days just sitting around, remembering.

I returned to an old U.S. Eighth Air Force Base near Bedford, England, though, because members of the 306th Bomb Group were having a reunion and I flew with them on one of the first U.S. bombing raids on Nazi Germany in February 1943. It's sentimental baggage I carry easily, and with great pride.

It has been over 40 years now since these men flew their four-engine B-17 Flying Fortresses out of Bedford. They're men we like to think are typical Americans, but they're better than typical. They're special. A lot of World War II airmen were.

It was a terrible war for them, although during this reunion they managed to recall a lot of the good things about it. It would have been too sad if they hadn't—because so many were killed. One evening they'd be sitting around talking, worrying, playing cards and writing letters home. The next evening, if there had been a bombing mission that day, the bed next to theirs or the one next to that—and maybe both—might be empty, its former occupant, their pal, dead.

As a young reporter for the Army newspaper, *The Stars and Stripes*, I was in a strange position. I came to this base often when the bombers went out, and when they returned—if they returned—I talked to the crews about what had happened. Then I'd write my story. I often felt ashamed for not being one of them. I was having the time of my life as a newspaperman and they were fighting and dying. That's how I came to fly with them to Wilhelmshaven. It

made me feel better about myself.

Looking out at the crumbling remains of the old runways at the airfield, I was haunted by flashes of memory. In April 1943 I was here when the bombers came back from a raid deep in Germany and one pilot radioed that he would have to make an emergency landing. He had only two engines left and his hydraulic system was gone. He couldn't let the wheels down and there was something even worse. The ball-turret gunner was trapped in the plastic bubble that hung beneath the belly of the bomber.

Later I talked with the crewmen who survived that landing. Their friend in the ball turret had been calm, they said. They had talked to him. He knew what they had to do. He understood. The B-17 slammed down on its belly—and on the ball turret with their comrade trapped inside it.

Last evening I had a drink at a bar where some of the men attending the reunion had gathered, and a strong-looking weather-beaten man came over and quietly said he'd like to buy me a drink. He's a Nebraska farmer now. He had been the tail gunner on the *Banshee*, the B-17 I flew in over Wilhelmshaven. We had been hit that day and it was a terrifying trip, but it made a good story for me. We laughed and talked together and he paid for the drink. As we lifted our glasses in a mutual toast, I noticed that two fingers on his right hand were missing. It often happened to crewmen who stuck by their guns while their hands froze in the sub-zero temperatures of the gunners' turrets. And he was buying me a drink.

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Dear Russ—

Bombardier, indeed!
But thanks, anyway, for the
extra copies of Echoes.

and have you seen
this Andy Rooney bit
about the Othmanleigh
reunion?

See you

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T U R E
C T I O N

POWs forgive, but don't forget, their Nazi jailer

By GARY BLONSTON

Free Press Western Bureau

DENVER — Bill Nance clutches Hermann Glemnitz with a hearty, oilman's handshake and booms: "This guy threw me in solitary four times."

"Ah," says Glemnitz with a paternal smile in his eyes, "you deserved it."

Let it be said, here at this warriors' reunion, where the liquor and the stories and occasionally the tears flow, that neither of them thought it was very funny at the time, four decades ago when Nance was a shot-down American bomber pilot and Glemnitz was sergeant of the guards in Stalag Luft III.

BUT NOW, on the 40th anniversary of the prisoners' liberation by Gen. George Patton's advancing army, as 900 former inmates of the camp gather to remember the days when they were frightened college kids turned imprisoned combat pilots, Nance can joke with the reunion's special guest, their cherished guard, Glemnitz.

JOSEPH E. CONSOLMAGNO

751 Carla Dr
Englewood, FL 34223
(813) 474 2986

Russell Strong
2041 Hillsdale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Dear Russ:

I am sending the following letter to all officers and directors of the 306th Assn. Please believe me, there's nothing personal in this. I just do not believe an association such as ours should have a paid secretary. I'd feel that way even if I were stuck with the job!

Despite my warm personal regard and admiration for Russ Strong, I feel I must agree with John Ryan in strongly opposing a monthly stipend to Russ out of the treasury of the 306th Bomb Group Association.

I sincerely hope that even if the proposal is sprung as a surprise on the general membership, it will be allowed to get a fair hearing, pro and con, in open meeting at the forthcoming reunion.

Fraternally,



Aug 13, 1987

Joe Consolmagno
Press Information
Ex-POWs of Stalag Luft III
751 Carla Dr
Englewood, FL 33533
(813) 474 2986

May 1, 1987

MEMO TO THE EDITOR:

More than 1,000 former prisoners of war, their wives and friends, will meet in Seattle May 21-24 for the 42nd Anniversary Reunion of the ex-prisoners of war of Stalag Luft III.

The former airmen were casualties of the great air battles that raged over Europe and North Africa from 1942 to 1945. Parachuting or crash-landing in enemy-occupied territory, they were captured and held at the German Luftwaffe prison camp at Sagan, Upper Silesia, in territory ceded to Poland after the war. The camp was the site of the massive breakout and executions related in the book and movie, "The Great Escape."

The reunion will be the first meeting the group has ever held on the West Coast.

Among those scheduled to attend are:

Bram van der Stok, one of only three "Great Escape" tunnellers to make it safely back to Allied hands. (Fifty of the recaptured escapees were summarily executed on Hitler's direct orders.)

David M. Jones, a flight commander on the Doolittle Tokyo raid of April, 1942, who escaped from China to be shot down at Tunis a few months later.

Albert P Clark, a fighter pilot shot down in France flying a Spitfire on assignment with the RAF. He directed escape activities at the American South Compound at Stalag Luft III. A retired Lieutenant General, he served as Superintendent of the Air Force Academy from 1970 to 1974.

Jerry Sage, an OSS operative and protege of Wild Bill Donovan, captured behind enemy lines in North Africa. He escaped execution by posing as a shot-down airman and eventually escaped to return to Allied hands through the Russian lines.

Hermann Glemnitz, a German pilot in World War I and senior non-commissioned officer in charge of security for the Germans at the Sagan POW camp during WWII.

(MORE)

Henri Soderberg, neutral nation (Sweden) International YMCA representative to prisoners of war in Germany and England.

Rev. Murdo "Padre" MacDonald, a British paratrooper captured behind enemy lines in North Africa. He served as Protestant Chaplain at the American compounds at Sagan. Following the war he was head of the School of Theology at the University of Glasgow.

Eric Orsini, historian of the 14th Armored Division which fought through to liberate the Bavarian prison camp to which most of the Sagan prisoners had been moved just before Stalag Luft III was overrun by Russian troops. He is currently Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army.

Press Contacts

(From May 17, 1987, all contacts listed below may be reached at the reunion headquarters hotel, Red Lion Inn, Seattle/Tacoma Airport: Telephone (206) 246 8600)

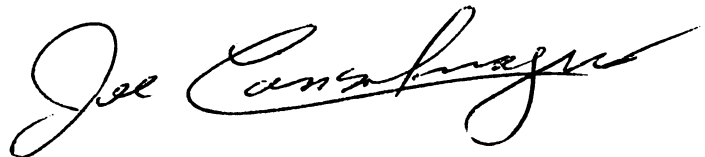
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JE CONSOLMAGNO 751 Carla Dr Englewood FL 34223



Former Prisoners of War
of
Stalag Luft III



Dear Don:

From the tenor of the 306th meeting and the reception of the Strong resolution, your proposal proved to be in no way divisive, after all - or even debatable. When it came to a vote, I didn't hear a single dissent from the back of the hall; I'm sure you didn't either, up front.

While the reception was obviously moved by an appreciation for Russ and his work, I think it was also due to the reasonableness of the wording of the resolution and your skill in presenting it.

It's always a pleasure to see a real pro at work.

Regards,

Sept 28, 1987



367th, 368th, 369th, 423rd Squadrons, and service organizations
Thurleigh, Bedfordshire, England – September 1942-April 1945

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October 1, 1987

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(402) 221-4647

Russ: FYI

Dear Joe,

Thanks for your letter of September 28. I appreciate your kind thoughts. We were all pleased the way the business meeting worked out.

I think we are going to move forward now and strengthen our organization substantially. The new projects Russ has in mind are going to be well received by the membership.

I look forward to seeing you in Las Vegas.

Sincerely,

Donald R. Ross

mg

Mr. J. E. Consolmagno
751 Carla Drive
Englewood, FL 34223

bc: Russ Strong w/copy of Consolmagno letter



Former Prisoners of War
of
Stalag Luft III

J

Joe Consolmagno 751 Carla Dr, Englewood FL 34223

Dear Russ:

I'm delighted to read that you've made back issues of Echoes available on microfiche.

Enclosed is my \$5 check for the set.

Hope all continues well with you. Do you still have plans of getting down this way?

Regards,

2/18/88

Joe Consolmagno

Joseph E Consolmagno
751 Carla Dr
Englewood, FL 34223
(813) 474 2986

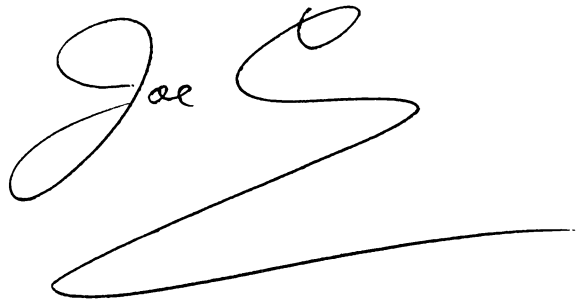
Dear Russ:

In the event you haven't received it, too, I've just gotten a note from the Casey family to the effect that Bill Casey died on March 17, 1968. He had just turned 68 on March 12. Interment was at the National Cemetary at St. Augustine.

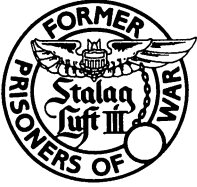
Bill was part of the Hamilton Field contingent that was assigned to the 306th in June, 1942, following our return from the Pacific, at the time of the Battle of Midway. In all, there were 16 crews in that contingent, pulled from the 301st and the 303rd Groups. Bill was the first person I met when we both reported to the 301st on Easter, 1942 --- a fun-filled year before we were shot down. (He lasted ten days longer than I did.)

I hope all goes well with you.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe S.", with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.

May 8, 1988



Former Prisoners of War
of
Stalag Luft III

JE CONSOLMAGNO : 751 CARLA DRIVE : ENGLEWOOD FL 34223 : 813-474-2986

Oct 6 1988

Dear Russ:

I have received the Durand book. Reading the early chapters and looking over his sources, I would say that a more authentic history of Stalag Luft III can never be written.

I'm aiming at a November 1 deadline to get the review and book back to you. Sorry, we won't be at Las Vegas this time.

Regards,

~~Joe Consolmagno 751 Carla Drive Englewood, FL 34223 (813) 474 298~~

~~Book Review:~~

Stalag Luft III: The Secret Story
by Arthur A. Durand
Louisiana State University Press, 1988

ref 10/12
29 pieces

~~reviewed by Joe Consolmagno~~

~~NEW BOOK SHEDS NEW LIGHT
ON LIFE AT STALAG LUFT III~~

One by one, seventeen hundred air crew men of the 306th had to face the eye of the needle, defined by historian Arthur A. Durand as "that indescribably small window between life and death that virtually all downed fliers had to squeeze through on their brutal journey from cockpit to prison camp."

It was a trying and lonely passage. As Durand notes, "Airmen came out of the sky one by one and usually faced their captors the same way, adding a significant dimension to an already traumatic experience."

Fliers shot down late in the war faced the real danger of lynchings and mob actions, often condoned and abetted by the German authorities as their cities were being pounded into rubble. At least 165 of the downed airmen learned about the horrors of concentration camps from stints at Buchenwald before being routed to Stalag Luft III and other Luftwaffe camps.

Nine hundred of the 306th casualties made it through the needle. Among them most of the officers and some of the NCOs wound up at Stalag Luft III, a POW camp run by the Luftwaffe at Sagan in Silesia, 90 miles southeast of Berlin.

Stalag Luft III: The Secret Story, recently published by the Louisiana State University Press, is the result of an exhaustive study of the Sagan camp undertaken by Durand.

This is not just another old soldier's story, with hardships and heroics magnified by the

passage of time . It is a serious work that had its beginnings some 15 years ago as a doctoral dissertation by a military scholar. Born in 1944, Colonel Durand is not of the same generation as the people and events he is examining. Consequently, he has no ax to grind, no personal justifications to make.

Thanks to several popular books and movies based on the camp, some aspects of the Stalag Luft III story have become well-known, particularly events surrounding the Great Escape of March, 1944, and the subsequent murder of 50 of the escapees. With meticulous accuracy, Durand covers the familiar terrain of the mundane daily routine of the kriegies, as the POWs were known, as well as their persistent escape attempts. But he also covers other aspects that will be new even to many former kriegies.

The book reveals that covert activities went beyond the much-publicized escape efforts. After forty years, it is now declassified information that military intelligence picked up by captured airmen en route to POW camps was secretly transmitted to Allied Intelligence encoded in personal letters from Stalag Luft III. Information and instructions were sent into the camp by the same method.

Some 40 prisoners in the South Compound and an unspecified number in the other compounds were engaged in the operation. Clearly falling within the legal definition of espionage, Durand points out, the activity carried with it risks beyond those encountered in escape efforts, which were a soldier's recognized duty acknowledged under the Geneva Convention.

(For security reasons, the kriegie participants rarely knew who else was doing covert correspondence. I knew Don Eldredge of the 367th was involved because he recruited me for the activity shortly after my arrival at the camp. And I learned that Fred Gillogly of the 368th was another one of us only when we were being flown together from Paris to Washington for debriefing shortly after liberation.)

Former Air Force Academy Superintendent, Lt. General A.P. Clark, who spoke at the

306th's Colorado Springs reunion, figures prominently in the Sagan story. Then a lieutenant colonel and shot-down Spitfire pilot, Clark directed American clandestine operations at Sagan that by his count involved 60 to 70 percent of the prisoners.

But what was probably Clark's most significant and lasting contribution to the lives of the Luftwaffe kriegies was not of the stuff that Iliads are written. He redesigned the latrine system.

Dysentery and impetigo were rampant when Clark arrived in the East Compound in the summer of 1942. Drawing on memories of visits to Civilian Conservation Corps camps with his father, an Army doctor, Clark set about correcting the primitive aborts that were the source of the epidemic. His model was adopted by the Luftwaffe for all of its POW camps.

In the complex structure of German prison camps that at one time held as many as six million persons, the six camps that the Luftwaffe administered for downed Western airmen came closest to adhering to provisions of the Geneva Convention for the humane treatment of prisoners of war. Camp administrators and prisoners alike give credit for this fact to the express direction of Luftwaffe commander-in-chief and World War I ace, Hermann Goering, who was elsewhere completely steeped in the full catalog of Nazi crimes.

As a sidelight, author Durand notes that one of the earliest treaties on the treatment of prisoners of war by nations not at war with each other was reached between Prussia and the United States in 1785. It was prompted on the American side by ill-treatment of its Revolutionary soldiers captured by the British. During World War I it was the only effective agreement between the United States and Germany for the treatment of POWs.

Under the command of a traditional military man, Luftwaffe Colonel Friedrich Von Lindener, Stalag Luft III was probably the most favored of the Luftwaffe camps. Food parcels provided by the International Red Cross sustained life and health of the prisoners above the bare subsistence level of German rations. There was never the slightest evidence of pilfering of the

Red Cross stores at this camp despite the desperate food shortages the Germans themselves were suffering.

In one of the major anomalies of the war, while the German war machine was looting food supplies and starving all of its conquered lands, it was providing minesweepers to clear the Baltic Sea ahead of the Swedish ships transporting Red Cross food for the prisoners.

Books, athletic equipment, and musical instruments provided by the International YMCA were put to good use by the prisoners. They organized bands, sports teams, theaters, and extensive educational programs to sustain physical and psychological fitness.

"The prisoners in Stalag Luft III made such excellent use of the limited diversions available to them that many people gained erroneous impressions about the camp, impressions that obscured the dismal and unpleasant realities of life in a prisoner of war camp," Durand notes. "In terms of what a prisoner of war camp is supposed to offer captives, as specified in the Geneva Convention of 1929, Stalag Luft III was only the norm and not the exception."

In the 23 months of Von Lindeiner's tenure there were 262 escape attempts and 100 tunnels dug from the camp. He paid a bitter price for trying to go by the book in running Stalag Luft III. He was arrested by the German authorities the day after the Great Escape, and received a one year sentence from a court martial. After the war he spent two years in a British prison camp.

The mass escape that was Von Lindeiner's downfall was the final straw that gave victory to Heinrich Himmler, commander of the SS and Gestapo, who had been waging an unrelenting struggle to wrest control of the prison camps away from the Luftwaffe. In the summer of 1944 the whole German POW apparatus was placed under his Waffen-SS. Fortunately, the change came too late in the war to have much adverse effect on the kriegies.

Durand's chapter on the evacuation of Stalag Luft III before a Russian advance reads like something out of Tolstoy. Kriegies from the South Compound, which included most of the 306th officers, led the American exodus at 11:00 PM on the night of January 27, 1945. As

they set out they saw flames over in the North Compound consume RAF Barracks 104 from which the Great Escape was tunneled nine months earlier.

The South Compound seems to have suffered the most on the forced march in driving snow and sub-zero temperatures, according to Durand. Noting that the Geneva Convention specifies that prisoners of war are not to march more than 12.5 miles a day, Durand records that the men of South walked 34.5 miles in 27 hours, with one 4-hour stop, arriving at Moskau at 2:20 AM on January 29. Ahead of them, they had another day's march of 15.5 miles to Spremberg, where they were jammed into 40 & 8 boxcars for the final leg of their journey to Stalag VIIA, outside Munich.

Durand's history of Stalag Luft III draws from official records of the Allied and German governments, as well as those of the neutral protecting power, the International Red Cross and YMCA, whose representatives made frequent visits to the camp throughout the war. The author also had access to published and unpublished memoirs, diaries, and manuscripts of key participants among the Allies, Germans, and neutral powers. He was editor of the memoirs of Colonel Von Lindelner.

His extensive personal interviews and correspondence included the senior American officers of each compound and many former kriegies. Al LaChasse, the 306th's earliest POW and self-styled "First Pigeon" from the 367th, is cited as one source for the early history of the compounds.

Because of the thoroughness of Durand's research, the completeness of his documentation and his access to key eye-witnesses, many of whom are no longer around, there probably can never be a more accurate and complete story of Stalag Luft III than this account.



Joe Consolmagno
751 Carla Drive
Englewood, FL 34223
(813) 474 2986



Russell A Strong
5323 Cheval Pl
Charlotte, NC 28205-4937

10 June 1991

Dear Russ:

For the Former Prisoners of War of Stalag Luft III, I have been putting together a book of first-person "shoot-down" accounts of some of our members. I have already completed the selection, editing, and formatting phase and am now in the process of locating and selecting photographs, and I wonder if I could impose on your good offices for some help.

Of the 65 stories I have, nine are from the 306th:
Eldredge, La Pallice, 18 November 42
Ryan, Herman, Lorient, 6 March 43
Consolmagno, Crouch, Seelos, Antwerp, 5 April 43
Sorden, Bremen, 8 Oct 43
Dowden, Schweinfurt, 14 Oct 43
Vaughter, Schweinfurt, 14 Oct 43

Do your files contain any photos of these people or missions that you would be willing to loan me to copy - with credits - for this book?

I've got a date at the Academy next month for a photo search (General Clark and Duane Reed got me into this project in the first place). But I would appreciate any assistance you could give me on these specifics.

Best regards



13 June 1991

Dear Joe:

I gave your project a good effort and couldn't come up with much.

But perhaps some of these can be of use.

I tried to find a picture of a plane that figured in at least one of the missions, but couldn't come up with them.

The mess hall ceiling has some good dates and places on it that might tie in with several stories.

Ryan is the only identifiable person for whom I have a decent picture.

Return them when you can.

All the best,



Joe Consolmagno
751 Carla Drive
Englewood, FL 34223
(813) 474 2986

Russell A Strong
5323 Cheval Pl
Charlotte, NC 28205-4937

19 June 91

Dear Russ:

Many thanks for your quick response to my request for photos. Would that my authors were so prompt!

I'll hold on to these until I return from my photo foray to the Academy next month, to see what I have to work with.

Best regards

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads 'Joe'.

Joe Consolmagno
751 Carla Drive
Englewood, FL 34223
(813) 474 2986

Aug 1, 1991

Russell A Strong
5323 Cheval Pl
Charlotte, NC 28205-4937

Dear Russ:

In checking my files for the book I am preparing for the Former Prisoners of War of Stalag Luft III, I find I haven't received your permission to use a quote from your book in my own shoot-down account (essentially the same account as the one I did for *Echoes* a couple of years ago.)

The quote I would like to use:

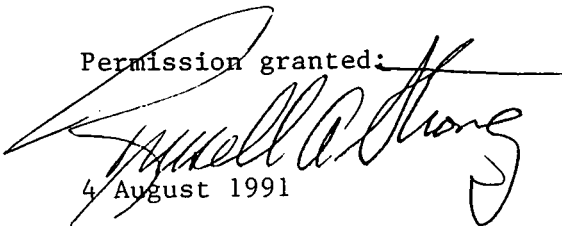
"The raid on the Erla Works was a disaster! The fighters not only downed four 306th planes, but they also diverted the attack so that most of the 8th AF bombs fell on the tiny Belgian town of Mortsel where 943 people were killed and 1300 injured. Only five bombs hit the Erla works; they did, nevertheless, cause extensive damage."

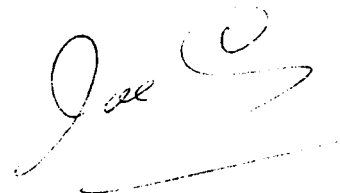
*"First Over Germany", Russell Strong
Hunter Publishing Co., 1982*

I'd appreciate hearing from you.

Best regards

Permission granted:


4 August 1991



Check the form below:

Name Joseph E. Consolmagno

Address 751 CARLA DRIVE

City, State and Zip Code ENGLEWOOD, FL 34223-2219

Telephone #, with the correct area code (813) 474 2986

Can you give us the four-number addition to your zip code? (Look on one of your utility bills for this, if you can't remember it).

On that street address, please designate whether it is St., Ave., Blvd., Road, etc. Rural routes AND box numbers need to be spelled out. In the alpha listing of the Directory, be sure your unit designation is correct. That's the one that counts. (If you were placed in the wrong listing under organizations, don't worry about it. We plan to get it right this time.)

Other data we will store away for possible later use:

Wife's first name PATRICIA

Your birthdate APRIL 7, 1918

Social Security # 017-16-0706

Retirement date/place of employment/job title APRIL 1, 1975

CHRYSLER CORP., DIRECTOR NEWS RELATIONS

Send the above to Russell A. Strong

5323 Cheval Place
Charlotte, NC 28205-4937
704/568-0153
367th
June
20 April 1924
379-12-7272
January 1988/Western Michigan University/Senior Development
Officer & Director of Research for the WMU Foundation

1992 England Trip

Reunion Sets Big Schedule For Thurleigh and London

Fifty years ago next September, the 306th Bomb Group flew into history, with its arrival in England for combat duty with the U.S. 8th AF. That signal event in aviation lore will be recalled once again in August when the men of the 306th, their spouses families and friends will join in a reunion visit to Bedford, the old base at Thurleigh, Madingley cemetery at Cambridge, and to the venerable city of London.

Specific details of the trip were included in the mailing of the October issue of **Echoes**, having been announced in detail earlier that month during the Group's reunion at Pittsburgh. When the festivities were over in the steel city, people left for home with the six-page folder in their hands.

The October issue of **Echoes** announced that the program was open to all friends of the 306th, and the folder

Two options are being offered for those participating in the main trip: A. being to spend two nights in Bedford, at either the Swan or Moat House hotels, which lie across the Ouse River from each other at the bridge; or, #2. to spend four nights at Bedford and the remainder in London. Group A will go on to London after the visit to Duxford, a WWII airfield that served both the RAF and USAAF and which has been restored as a WWII field.

As an added fillip, the travel description includes two extended week-long trips following the activities in Bedford and London: One will go north to Scotland by bus, offering a good look at the North Country, staying three nights in fascinating Edinburgh, and will stop among other places at Oxford, Stratford, Coventry, Harrogate, Carlisle, Chester, Cheltenham (with a brief excursion into

Joe Consolmagno
751 Carla Drive
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(813) 474 2986

Russell A Strong
5323 Cheval Pl
Charlotte, NC 28205-4937

March, 1992

Dear Russ:

Under separate cover, I am sending you an author's copy of *Through the Eye of the Needle* in appreciation and thanks to you for the photos your provided for this project.

The original manuscripts and related correspondence that served as the basis for the collection have been turned over to the Library of the Air Force Academy, where they will serve as valuable reference materials for scholars, writers, and students of this period of air history.

Distribution of the book is planned for military schools, survival training units, and libraries of colleges and universities that conduct major Air Force ROTC programs. In addition, the book will be a special gift to individuals and couples registering at our reunion in Saint Louis this spring.

Until the remaining supply is exhausted, copies will be on sale by mail and at the reunion for \$16.95 each, with quantity discounts of 25% for 5 to 10 copies and 33% for 10 copies and over.

Again I want to express my sincere thanks to you for your contribution to this book.

Best personal regards



26 March 1992

Dear Joe:

Finished your opus last night, and I really got a kick out of reading it.

It made me happier than ever that I never had to take that long step out the nose escape hatch. One cannot imagine what some of the men went through and survived.

As I said in my review in the April issue of Echoes, the only thing wrong with the book is that most of the stories could have been a lot longer. Fortunately, the longer ones you used were usually the best written. I turned the page on a number of them and wished there had been more said.

I think the one that really got me was the one where both the navigator and the pilot each lost a leg, and met early on after reaching the ground.

Now, will it be possible for me to use at least two of the stories in upcoming issues of Echoes? I have never done anything with Keith Conley or Myron Sorden, and might pick up another one or two. With proper credit, plus mention of how to get copies, it would also give you some more advertising.

Thanks for doin g another great job on the behalf of those guys who sat out the war in Stalag Luft III!

All the best,

PS: Got to Florida for 10 days a while back. June's brother has a condo in Bellaire Beach. He retired as vice chairman of USX, so feels no pain in the bank account. We didn't life a finger or spend a dime all the time we were there.



Joe Consolmagno
751 Carla Drive
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(813) 474 2986

February 9, 1994

Russell Strong
5323 Cheval Place
Charlotte, NC 28205

Dear Russ:

This might be of some small help in your pilot feature of February, 94.

When Gerry Clymer took the bunk next to mine at Thurleigh, he told me he was a transfer from the RCAF.

I was under the impression that Biff Birleffi was a classmate of Warren Terry, but that doesn't seem to be borne out by their serial numbers. Terry's was 0-375352 and Biff's was 0-24109. Note that Biff's number has one digit less than those we're familiar with. It shows up that way in two different orders that I have. It does make him an early bird.

I note you have Birleffi listed with the 369th. I was his navigator at Wendover (and before) and James Stewart was his copilot. We were in the 367th.

Best regards



Joseph E. Consolmagno
751 Carla Drive
Englewood, FL 34223
(941) 474 2986

July 7, 1995

Russell A Strong
5323 Cheval Pl
Charlotte, NC 28205-4937

Dear Russ:

Thanks very much for the phone message about Joe Goepner. We were together on the Birleffi crew when we went from the 301st to Hawaii and back to Wendover to join the 306th. I don't remember if he made it to the Stewart crew after Biff was killed. But I think I can almost see the guy to this day.

We billed our 50th anniversary kriegie reunion as our last bash and spent about three quarters of a million on it. Enclosed is a copy of our latest Klarion which has a rundown on the 50th and our return to the camps in Germany a couple of weeks earlier.

Hope all continues well with you.

Take care.

A handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style, starting with a large 'J' and ending with a long, sweeping horizontal line that extends to the right.

By Joe Consolmagno

There were only sporadic bursts of flak from the emplacements at Ghent as our B-17 passed that city on our way in to Antwerp, harmless black puffs at first. By then our escort of Spitfires had been replaced by FW-190s. Just beyond Ghent we took a direct hit from flak in one of our engines and dropped out of the formation into the vacuum between the 306th Bomb Group the 91st, which was next in line behind us.

We were immediately attacked by waves of FWs, coming at us in twos and threes. We took hits on each assault amid a shattering din of flailing engines, explosions, plane-shuddering impacts and our own clattering guns. In our violent evasive action, the belt of .50 caliber bullets feeding into my weapon kept buckling, jamming the gun, always it seemed just when an attacker was flying straight into my sights, his wings ablaze with his own gunfire.

In a momentary respite between attacks, I decided it was time to attach my chestpack parachute to the harness I was wearing. After a third--or fourth or fifth-- attack, a voice on intercom called that engine fires were out of control.

Acknowledging this last in a series of disastrous reports, pilot Clarence Fischer replied calmly, "OK--bail out." The bailout alarm jangled.

I ripped out the intercom wires and oxygen tube that had made me an organic part of the dying aircraft, and quickly scrambled back to the crawlspace between the nose and the cockpit. I pulled the emergency release lever on the forward escape hatch. Nothing happened.

As if he were talking to me, I could hear Bill Gise telling his there-I-was story upon returning to base weeks after being shot down at Lille (ed.note: 9 Oct 42 on Group's first mission). "I was surprised that the hatch didn't drop off," he said. "It was stuck in place by the slipstream."

"So I rared back and kicked it out," he said.

I followed suit, even as his words flashed through my mind.

Looking down through the opening at the earth some four miles below, I fought back a sudden spin of vertigo.

Gise's words continued flashing. "My first impulse was to ease out and hang there before dropping. But I knew that would only splat me up against the belly. So I grabbed the rip cord and dove out head first."

I hooked the thumb of my left hand through the rip cord ring, not being able to reach it with my right hand across the bulky chestpack. On the periphery of my vision I caught sight of the flight engineer dropping down from the cockpit into the crawlspace, as I tumbled out through the hatch.

I pulled the ripcord as soon as I hit the slipstream; I wanted time to feed the chute out manually if something didn't work. A giant hand seemed to yank me back by the scruff of the neck as the chute streamed open. The jolt snapped off one of my flight boots. Scrounged from the RAF, my flight boots were an envied possession because they were insulated and wired for heat, the only boots of that kind in the squadron.

"On 5 April 43, a 17 year old girl, Gisella Vercauteren, heard the drone of the coming air armada and left her work in the wooden shoe factory of her parents to see what was coming. When the aircraft were overhead someone pointed to one of them which showed a flash and started smoking. A little later parachutes opened.

"While they were still following the chutes, a neighbor came running with a boot. He saw it coming down in a field close to the one he was working on. It was a strange boot by local standards. It was brown (or grey) and there was sheepskin inside which made the finder go looking for the other one. He sure could use them!

"One puzzling point was a wire attached to the boot. (Electric heating?)

However, the boot was the attraction in a local pub where it was shown in secrecy, as the people feared the Germans would confiscate their booty. In the early seventies the owner died. The boot was now in the attic and every time the hatch was opened, one was confronted with the boot, which stood right before it as a memento."

-Letter from Jean Dillen
Belgian aviation researcher
23 Nov 86

Freed of the thunderous death throes of the B-17, I was suddenly engulfed in an eerie silence, broken only by the hissing of air escaping through the vent at the top of the parachute and my own labored breathing in the rarefied air. I watched our plane descending steeply below me and about a mile off, trailing smoke and fire from both wings, but still flying level as it dropped off its line of parachutes. I tried to count them, but lost track.

"My information tells me that your aircraft was under attack by Hauptmann Galland, brother of General Inspector of the Luftwaffe, Adolph Galland. First there came a series of 4 or 5 parachutes from the burning aircraft which was -till going toward the target. Galland made another pass and then the rest of the crew came out. The aircraft made a few loopings and hit the ground."

-Letter from Jean Dillen, 21 Jul 86

Other bomb groups droned by overhead in a stretched-out parade, until finally I was alone again, miles high and gasping for air. I ripped off my useless oxygen mask, dropped it between my legs and watched it slowly spin into the nothingness below me.

The sound of a single engined aircraft came into range before I saw it--an FW-190. I braced to feel the shock of gunfire. But the enemy didn't fire. He circled me so closely that I could see his oxygen-masked face, and he waved. I waved back. It didn't seem appropriate to be impolite.

Major Wilhelm-Ferdinand Galland was killed in action on 17 August 1943 during an attack on US bombers over the St. Trond/Liege area, Belgium. He was shot down by escorting Thunderbolts.

-Letter from Achille Rely
Belgian historian, 4 Apr 93

The German left me and went on to the other chutes in a line spread out far ahead of and below me, circling each one as he came to it. I was still miles above the open country, being borne by the winds toward Antwerp, which I could identify by the forts described to us that morning at the navigators' briefing.

I watched our flights of bombers, from the lead group to the last, drop their

bombs and make the turn back toward the fingers of the North Sea that reach through the bordering ialands of Belgium and The Netherlands.

The parachute drop from 20,000 feet seemed interminable, but eventually I was breathing more easily in the richer atmosphere nearing ground level. At length I realized that I was not going to land in open country, as I had hoped. I was drifting rapidly toard the stricken city and the black palls of smoke now rising from it.

As I approached the Schelde River on the city's outskirts, I had a momentary hope of hitting the parachute quick-release and dropping into the water to attempt evading capture. But, to my good fortune, I was baffled for a moment by the turn direction of the release button of the British-made chute. As I fumbled with the contraption, I noticed that I was passing over a ship berthed on the near shore, perhaps 200 feet below me. I was too far for a free fall.

Nearing the ground my forward motion seemed to be at an incredible speed. A factory building loomed up ahead of me, and I tried to anticipate what I would do if I were swept into its towering walls. I had a quick flash of a newspaper photo I had seen of a German parachutist dangling from a tall factory chimney.

As I dropped I raced by clsuters of people, white faces peering up at me. Several raised their hands in what I took to be the V-for-Victory salute. I saluted back with the V.

"On April 5 no alarm was sounded at all and the first sign of trouble was a tremendous explosion across the river. As we started to run towards the sand pits, small items started to rain down on us and later we found large quantities of empty shells and pieces of the bandoleers that held them.

"Obviosuly the plane had started to break up as it came screaming toward us. After it passed over our heads at about 1,000 feet pieces started coming off. I saw what could have been a tail piece and wing piece or wing section. It pulled up due to excessive speed, stalled and turned on its back. I believe it went all the way around when it finally went in.

"As we stood there, a plane suddenly came across at no more than 200 feet. I recognized it as a Focke-Wulf 190, probably checking the kill. While still shaking from the last scare, we saw some friends pointing at a chustist, who turned out to be you.

"I have told Jean Dillen that when you came close enough for me to see you rather well, I noticed you were missing a boot. But I also noticed that you seemed to be pulling on the other one and I naturally thought you expected a water landing in the Schelde River, had managed to get ride of one boot and were now trying to drop the other one.

- Letter from Henry Siegers,
Belgian Shipyard worker in 1943
12 July 86

I struck the ground, hard, landing on my one boot and collapsing in a heap against a pile of rails, my chute draping over it. In the instant it took me to recover and attempt to release my chute, there was a German soldier standing over me, holding a pistaol at my head. I thought it funny for an instant that the man holding the gun should be the one who was shaking. But I raised my hands, slowly. I didn't want him to get any more nervous than he already was.

"All witnesses remember you wearing one boot, your face flushing red while the German arresting you looked very pale. He was a fireman of the Wehrmacht, not used to wage war."

- Letter from Achille Rely, 7 Nov 85

Almost immediately we were joined by the plant manager, a Belgian.

"Ete-vous blesse?" he asked.

"No, I'm all right," I answered.

"Englander?" he asked.

"American," I replied. He seemed surprised.

I removed my chute, he helped me to my feet, and a German soldier frisked me for weapons. I had none.

The manager walked with me toward the office, a German with a rifle at the ready behind us. As we passed groups of civilians--men and women--a furtive hand would frequently shoot up from among them ub the V-salute. There were scattered calls of "Vive l'Amerique!" all along our way. Each time I responded with the V-salute, the guard nudged me with his rifle.

As we walked, the manager spoke to me quietly and rapidly, informing me in English that except for the plant guards there were few Germans in this section of the city.

"According to witnesses, you dropped into the middle of the Cockerill Shipbuilding Yards situated at Hoboken nearby the Schelde River, southwest of Antwerp. He was very much involved with the Belgian underground resistance. In fact, he helped me on my way through Belgium after my escape from Stalag Luft III.

-Letter from Bob Vanderstok,
RAF escapee in the "Great Escape"
24 April 91

A short time after landing, I found myself sitting in a reception office looking out the window at the Nazi flag and feeling that I was really on a stage set back home, trying to remember my lines. A distraught young woman was speaking tearfully to a blond uniformed girl at the desk. The girl said something I couldn't hear and directed the woman's attention to me with sheer hatred. The woman turned a piteous glance toward me. I knew it had something to do with the bombing, and I stared at the floor.

And there is one memory that refuses to dim with passing years. I was squeezed into the back seat of a little car. There was a German guard beside the driver in the front seat, and another next to me in the back. We were in another section of town and we came to an area where fire hoses were stretched across the street. There was debris and rubble all around. Out of a smouldering building, obviously a school, a man emerged carrying the limp form of a child in his arms.

"What do you say to that?" asked the guard up front. "These are your friends, your allies."

There was no possible answer, and yet evenappalled silence was inadequate.

"My mother's boss lost his 5 year old daughter in the school you passed with the German escort. In all 35 kids were killed. Yet this fellow knew that the bombing of the school was one of the unavoidable horrors that make war the stupid thing it is. Never, at least not while my mother heard it, did he blame the U S Air

Force for his misfortune."

- Lette from Henry Slegers, 12 July 86

St. Giles Prison in Brussels was my last stop in Belgium. From the truck to the railroad station en route to Dulag Luft, I CAUGHT a fleeting glimpse of a one-word headline, framed in a black border, at a kiosk along the way--"MORTSEL."

"The raid on the Erla Works was a disaster! The fighters not only downed four 306th planes, but they also diverted the attack so that most of the *th AF bombs fell on the tiny Belgian town of Mortsel where 943 people were killed and 1300 injured. Only five bombs hit the Erla works; they did, nevertheless, cause extensive damage."

- "First Over Germany", Russell Strong
1982

Among the dead were 209 children in three schools that were hit by bombs.

#

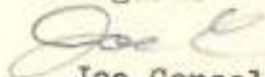
A couple of items on planes' names:

Man O War F 367 orig. down 11-9-42

Officers: Stewart, Dickey, Creel(?) , Creamer
all lost.

Lil Abner F 367 down 4-5-43

regards



Joe Consolmagno

Box 59

Port Sanilac, MI 48469



Russell A. Strong
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Laurinburg, NC 28352