

clothing. The men in the tunnel all got out the way they came in. The trap door was replaced and sealed, the stove returned to its position and everything was back to normal in room 23. After a few minutes of quiet, the occupants heard a scratching from under the trap door. An adventurous ferret had crawled through the tunnel and was trying to get out.

Within a half an hour, the entire compound was swarming with guards armed with machine guns and bayonets. Each man was stripped and his clothing searched while he stood naked in the snow. After much bickering, the kriegies finally opened the trap door and allowed the ferret to get out.

In only hours, the entire country side was out on the largest man-hunt of the war. Civilians were alerted and thousands of military, including the navy were scouring the country. Most of the seventy-six escapees were captured within three days, and held in a Gestapo prison in Gorlitz. Fifteen of these men were returned to Stalag Luft III later.

The Gestapo arrived to investigate the situation, but could find nothing, as the Luftwaffe guards would not co-operate in the least. Some sticky fingered kriegie stole two Gestapo flashlights in the process.

A blackmarket was un-covered by the Gestapo, and the Kommandant and his staff were taken away for a court-martial.

Nothing was heard about the escape for two weeks. Then the Senior Ranking RAF Officer was taken to the new Kommandant's office, where an official document was translated for him. Of the seventy-six men who had escaped, fifty were shot, among them all of the leaders. Roger Bush, Tim Waldon of the forgery factory, Al Lake the compass maker. Charlie Ball the photographer and others. Their ashes were placed in a vault in the camp cemetery.

In June, a Dutch pilot in the RAF, sent a letter written in Spanish, letting them know he was back in England. A post-card from Sweden signed with false names carried the news that two Norwegians in the RAF had made it out. This meant that eight men were still unaccounted for. Long afterward news came in that they had been sent to a Gestapo prison at Oranienberg, supposedly escape proof. Within a few months they had tunneled out, but were recaptured.

A new tunnel, George, was started under the theater, and was nearly ready to break-out. January 29th, the entire Stalag was marched out in a raging blizzard to prevent liberation by the Russian Army. Many RAF kriegies hid out in George to await the Russians, who made an appearance two days later.

P.S. The Dutch pilot who had escaped, moved to the U.S., and died in 1994 in Florida.

Unter-Officier Glimnetz, the German Security Chief also died in 1994.

After this episode the Kommandant issued new orders concerning escapes. It said, quote "Escaping has ceased to be a sport". It followed that any where outside the confines of the camp was to be considered out of bounds for all "Kriegesgefangenen", and anyone caught outside the camp could be shot. Anyone attempting escape would be shot immediately. This notice took much of the enthusiasm out of some of us escape happy kriegies. Not so with "Silent Death Sage".

A few days after the notice was posted, Sage had a fellow Kriegie kick him in the ribs, breaking at least two. The camp medic convinced the goons to remove him by ambulance to the hospital. While enroute he worked a window open and jumped from the moving vehicle. The guard was riding in the front with the driver so was unaware of the escape until they stopped at the hospital. This gave Sage a good start on his pursuers. He evaded the search parties for several days and covered about one hundred thirty miles. He never returned to Stalag Luft III, but was lodged in a Gestapo prison in Poland, that until his arrival was considered escape-proof. Within a few days he was on the run again and was rescued by a friendly Russian patrol. He arrived home in Spokane Washington, April 3, 1945, where his family prepared the many delayed Christmas Dinners for him. He died at a ripe old age in 1995.

We had several funerals in the camp during my internment. One was for a kriegie who died of a freak accident the winter of 1943-1944. He had been awarded the Medal of Honor before getting shot down. As a Bombardier in the 90th Bomb Group, his plane was badly shot up with the Pilot and Co-Pilot badly wounded or dead. He was only slightly wounded so took over trying to fly the plane long enough to enable the walking wounded to bail-out. Some couldn't have opened their parachute and would have gone down with the plane if he had of jumped, so he stayed and nursed the plane over the English Channel, crash landing and saving the lives of the wounded crewmen.

For this act of heroism he was awarded our nations highest medal. Many kriegies would walk several laps around the inside of the perimeter each day. After a rain storm, then a cold night, the trail became frozen and was slick in spots. Sconiers slipped and fell on the ice, hitting his head and was knocked unconscious for an hour or so. When he regained consciousness he had lost his memory and was a walking zombie. The Germans would do nothing for him, claiming that he was faking. Later that winter he contracted pneumonia and died.

Three more kriegies died of accidents according to the Germans. They went insane or "around the bend" as we called it. One of these three came into my block one morning. While in the wash room, I noticed this stranger wearing an overcoat, even though it

was summer time and rather hot. As I was washing I watched him in the mirror. He had a wild expression on his face, and was humped over the sink holding a small box under the water tap. Returning to my room, I asked Russell who had been in the wash room before me, if he had noticed this guy in the over coat. He said he had seen him but didn't pay any attention to him. Being of a curious nature, he went to the wash room and asked this kriegie what he was doing. The guy replied that he was in the box or something to that effect, and he had to be kept cool or he would die. Russ went to the Senior American Officer, a Major Eagan, and told him about this character. They returned to the wash room and attempted to reason with him which made him very angry and violent when they took the box away from him. They found some blood in the box where he had bled from a cut finger. Finally they located his block and physically carried him back to it. He had to be reported to the Germans who removed him from the camp. The next day it was reported that he had jumped in front of a train and was killed. It seemed kind of coincidental that the other two also jumped in front of trains and were killed. They had become too religious, one claimed to be Jesus Christ and preached constantly, the other just lay in his bunk mumbling and would not eat or go to the toilet.

This Major Eagan in my block was famous in a way. He was a Squadron CO in the 100th Bomb Group. This Group gained a very bad reputation for losing aircraft. They could be identified by their tail marking, each Group had a distinctive marking, mine being the letter "L" in a triangle. The German fighter pilots seemed to concentrate their efforts on the 100th whenever possible. On occasion the entire Group would be knocked down. There was a good reason for this according to Eagan. He wouldn't have lasted too long if the Germans had heard the story he told the other kriegies. On a previous bombing mission, his plane was badly shot up and he thought he was going down. To stop the enemy fighters from shooting at him he lowered his landing gear as an unwritten sign of surrender. A fighter pulled in on each wing to escort him down to a landing strip. He decided that he could make it back if he could eliminate his courteous escort. Calling his gunners on the interphone, he told them to take dead aim at the German pilots and fire on his signal. He signaled, they fired, and the two Luftwaffe planes went down. He did get back across the channel and lived to fly again. One of the Luftwaffe pilots bailed out and lived to identify the 100th Group by their tail marking. This was the reason for the Group's popularity with the Luftwaffe fighters.

Whether this story is true or not I can't say, but I did have it published in the 381st News-letter. I received some replies regarding this publication and one seemed very plausible. It was from an ex-flyer in the 100th Group and he claimed to have known the good Major Eagan very well. He stated that Eagan had a vivid imagination and you shouldn't believe a word that he said. Also he said that Eagan had passed to the wild blue yonder a few years ago.

The summer and fall of 1943 was the darkest time of the war for the 8th Airforce. They were making long raids into the heart of Germany, Bremen, Hamburg, Schweinfurt, Regensburg, Nuernburg,

Dresden and nearly all of the larger industrial cities. All too far for the U.S. or RAF fighters to escort them in and out. They had to contend with almost a solid blanket of anti-aircraft fire to and from the target besides the Luftwaffe attacks. Consequently many bombers were lost. Before long many members of the 381st began making an appearance in Stalag Luft III. My Squadron CO was brought in, so badly shot up that he was repatriated back to the States. One full crew and half of another in the original Squadron would complete their twenty five missions. Fifteen men of ninety, not very good odds. Half of those that went down were killed, two evaded and got back to England and the remainder joined me in the POW camp. The 8th Airforce made some raids that confused the Germans considerably. They would fly deep into Germany, hit a target and continue on to North Africa. The first few times, the Luftwaffe was laying in wait for their return trip from the target that never happened. They made a few of these shuttle raids, also some in and out of Russia, but discontinued them for some reason.

The 9th and 15th Airforces in Africa were made up of the B-24 Liberator Bomber. It, like the B-17 had four engines and could carry about one thousand pounds more of bombs. However it was much easier knocked down and didn't have the defensive fire-power of the Flying Fortress. We B-17 crews, disdainfully referred to them as Flying Coffins.

The 9th Airforce made a few shuttle raids to and from England. One of their most spectacular raids was on the Ploesti Oil Fields. If the targets were hit and destroyed, all planes and men were expendable. About two thirds of the formation was wiped out, mostly because of unforeseen circumstances. They were to go in, on the deck, [zero altitude], in three waves. The bombs were fused to explode at the same time after the third wave had passed over. During the flight into the target some planes carried incendiary bombs to drop on the thousands of acres of ripe wheat fields in the Ukraine and set them on fire. The three waves of planes became separated which threw their timing off so that the bombs of the first wave got most of the second wave and their bombs in turn blew the third wave out of the air. A few of the survivors were captured and brought to my camp. One of them, named Perkinson was assigned to my room. He had been a reporter for the Baltimore Sun and gave us his report of the circumstances. The mission as a whole was considered a success despite the huge loss of planes and lives.

There were two colored flying officers captured in this Ploesti raid and brought to Stalag Luft III. They were first assigned rooms according to name and number the same as any one else. One of them was assigned to a room in my block. No one in the room objected because of his color but he objected to the food fuhrer handling his food. This kriegie was badly burned about the face and hands, he was later repatriated. Having been a head chef in some New York restaurant he was very clever at disguising our meager rations into something good, and his room-mates were very proud of him. When this black guy voiced his objections the entire room paid the Senior Ranking Officer a visit. The other black was having some trouble fitting in also, so the camp was checked out and finally

after much to-do about nothing they were given one of the two man rooms that was in each block.

By this time, instead of eight men to the room we had expanded to twelve by converting the two man bunks into three man bunks. The top bunk was less than a foot from the ceiling and rather hard to get accustomed to. When two of our new arrivals came in, one was a Jewish boy, Irving Fredrick Baum and an Italian, Vincent DeMartino both from New York which partially explains their behavior. Naturally they were given top bunks, and Baum started complaining that this wasn't fair. He said we should draw straws and see who had to take the top bunks. To us older kriegies our bunks had become our castles and we weren't about to part with them. When he insisted on taking my bunk and moving me to the top, I had to threaten him with bodily harm. Later, I found an easy way to straighten him out when he became obnoxious. He thought that by telling the Germans that he had no middle name [Fredrick], they wouldn't recognize him as being Jewish. He lived in mortal fear that they would discover his secret, so whenever he got out of hand I would use this as a lever by threatening to turn him over to the Germans.

The other new kriegie, DeMartino, was a little difficult breaking in also. The first morning they were in the room, I got up first as usual, sliced one thin slice of our sawdust bread per man, dropped a small lump of ersatz jam on it, put a spoon of Nescafe [instant coffee], and a ration of sugar in a cup for each man and breakfast was ready. Martino swallowed his slice of bread in one gulp, picked up the loaf of bread and sliced off a slab about an inch thick. I told him that if he ate it, he would have to go without breakfast for four days. He said that was okay with him, and that he would take care of his own food and wanted his weekly ration now. He accused us of being flak-happy and around the bend anyway. We older kriegies talked it over during Appell and decided to grant him his wishes. We also agreed that when he ran out of food, he would just go hungry until his next issue. After Appell I carefully gave him his German ration of bread and potatoes and a full American Red Cross parcel to last him a week. Our breakfast was always the same and for lunch another thin slice of bread with cheese or the liver spread from the British parcel, and sometimes a ration of German soup. This soup was an experience in itself. Barley, millet, peas and dehydrated vegetables were used with a generous sampling of a variety of weevil, bugs and worms. We usually dumped the vegetable and animal soup in the latrines without even trying to eat it. The others were quite good. The evening meal was when the Food Fuhrer could show off his talents. We had Spam, Corned beef and canned fish to choose from as the main course. We would usually dress these up with cheese and the German ration of potatoes. The dried milk [Klim], was a very versatile commodity. We used it in about everything, mainly desserts. We could make a tasty prune whip, with Klim, prunes and sugar. A can of lemon powder, Klim and sugar in a pie shell of crushed Canadian crackers made a delicious lemon pie. Sorry, no meringue. We made fabulous cakes using the crushed Canadian

crackers as flour, anything we could think of as flavoring and the German ration of tooth powder to make it light and fluffy. Almost. These tasty repasts were never quite enough, we always left the table still hungry. I started planning a Thanksgiving dinner that would fill everyone, including DeMartino, just one time. More about this later.

To get back to DeMartino's trials and tribulations. He devoured his weeks supply of food in four days. We stood fast and wouldn't give him even a slice of bread for three days. All he had to eat was the German issue of soup, potatoes and, or blood sausage that was so vile we dumped it in the latrine without even taking it to the room. Even Martino couldn't eat it. The second week he did a little better by stretching it out to five days. The third week he decided maybe it would be better to join the rest of us in pooling everything and allowing me to prepare the meals. So this crisis was over and we were happy and hungry together again.

To hungry people the ten pound Red Cross parcels didn't look like much food. Nearly every week some one would announce that he was going to eat and hold down a parcel in twelve hours. I was always suspicious that this was just a clever ruse to fill their bellies once again. Bets of all kinds were made on these brave endeavors. Usually food parcels, but once Bill Roberts bet a \$1000.00 check against a food parcel and won the bet. I got the approval of my room-mates and backed one of these brave souls. In my block was a giant named O'Brian. We all agreed that if this was possible to accomplish, then it would be Obie that could do it. The people betting against, as well as the backers, would never let the star out of their sight during the twelve hours. They wanted to be sure that everything went down, and anything did or did not stay down. O'Brian had his schedule laid out so that he would eat so much, then walk or jog awhile, then eat some more, etc. He started at 6:00 am and performed like a champ until about 2:00 pm. He had devoured everything except a large stack of cookies. These were very rich and contained about a pound of sugar, the chocolate D-bar, the can of crackers and pound of raisins. Probably about three pounds in all. He could only get one down at a time, then rush outside and walk. He tried eating while walking, but was still having trouble holding them down. Finally about 4:00 pm the last one was swallowed whole, but Obie had turned a dull green. Only two hours to go now. He had a huge crowd with him as he walked lap after lap around the perimeter. Those for him were cheering him on while those against, were making gagging noises and gestures trying to encourage him to vomit. At about one hour short of the deadline, O'Brian literally tossed his cookies. He did have the distinction of being the first and only one to consume the entire parcel. With his failure, I was convinced that this was an impossible feat, so whenever this was tried, I would bet a parcel or two against it being successful. Sometimes it was without the knowledge of my room-mates so I would turn my winnings into Food-Aco credits in preparation for our one big bash. This Food-Aco was an exchange where one could buy or sell different foods. Each item was rated at a given number of points, dependent on the popularity

and scarcity of it. Shortly before Thanksgiving, 1944, we received special holiday food parcels. These contained canned turkey, dried dressing, cranberry sauce, plum-pudding and mince-meat. All the ingredients for an All American Thanksgiving dinner. Naturally not many of these items reached Food-Aco, and those that did were very high priced. Nevertheless I acquired enough to satisfy my room-mates hunger for one day. We had plenty of turkey and dressing, mashed potatoes with gravy, corn bread made from crushed millet with the hulls blown away, plum pudding and mince-meat pie. I took Bill Roberts into my confidence and he made up some beautiful menus that I think Nobody got home with. We all ate till we could hold no more and still there was food left on the table. Needless to say there were twelve very uncomfortable stomachs in our room that night. I'm sure my room-mates will remember that meal every time they sit down to a Thanksgiving Dinner. It was the only time that I can say that I was completely full of food in my two years of captivity. I considered the extra time and planning well worth the effort, just to see DeMartino give up eating and admit that he couldn't eat another bite.

The International YMCA working out of Switzerland, furnished the camp with all the recreational equipment that the Germans would allow. Besides musical instruments, they sent us baseball, football, volley ball and even ice skates and hockey sticks. The winter of 1943-1944 we persuaded our hosts to allow us to flood an area for ice skating. The skates were the old clamp-on types and didn't work too well with my oxfords, but I joined the hockey team for my block. One kriegie in my room from Wisconsin had played hockey in school, so we had a good coach. In our first game, I tried to block an opponent who had played hockey at Princeton, and he layed something on me that nearly knocked me out of my skates. I found myself with two twisted ankles and a very short hockey career.

DeMartino was a typical jock-strap, he played all sports and was pretty good at most of them. He would be lying in his top bunk apparently asleep when from somewhere in the camp, someone would holler "Volleyball". Martino would hit the floor and spring through the open window on the next bound and was ready to play. He wasn't a bad egg after he got as goofy as the rest of us. Little Irving Baum never changed though, just continued to be his own obnoxious self. I felt sorry for him once though when he got the word that his Father had died, and he cried for days afterward. His Father's family had left Germany when he was a small boy and immigrated to the U.S. Baum could speak German fluently but he would never let the Germans know it, as he was afraid they would recognize him as a German-Jew, and their ovens were full of them.

When they started clearing trees for the West Compound, the Germans brought in a large group of Jewish workers. They had to wear coveralls with a large Star of David painted on the back. They were so weak and emancipated that it seemed a waste of time trying to get any work out of them. Occasionally a tree would fall, they would trim the branches, then eight or ten of them would pick it up and struggle away with it. One healthy man could easily

have carried it away by himself. The guards were very brutal with them, beating them with their rifle-butts at every opportunity. I'm sure they killed several like this as we watched. Work on this project was going so slow that the Jews were shipped off to a furnace and replaced with Russian-Mongolian POW's. They were in direct contrast to the sick and emaciated Jews. These characters were all big and healthy with long black hair and beards. Really a fierce looking crew. They could have pulled the trees up by the roots I'm sure. They didn't do any more work than the Jews, despite their size and health. They were either sitting down all the time or scuffling around to antagonize their guards. They were also beaten with the rifle-butts, but they would just laugh until the beater would give up in disgust. Finally they were replaced with regular Russian POW's. We had a Russian speaking officer in our camp who would exchange news with them. These prisoners were good workers and the new compound began to take shape. Once that winter these Russian prisoners were being punished for some infraction of the camp rules by having their rations cut off for a few days. Their compound was outside of ours in the vorlager. About the third day without rations, one of the guard dogs couldn't be located in the compound. The prisoners were herded into an open area of the compound under guard while their camp was searched. Finally some dog hair and some small bones were found in the barracks. The German Kommandant literally threw a fit. The prisoners were forced to strip and their clothes were taken away. A concertina fence was set up around them and they were left in the open with no clothes. The temperature stayed below freezing during the day and dropped to near zero at night. They were left here for three more days with no food nor shelter. Nearly half of them were carried away dead. Our Russian speaking American kriegie talked to some of the survivors about this inhumane treatment. They said it was just the war and they knew that no matter how bad the Germans treated them, the Germans held by the Russians were being treated much worse. Small consolation, but they seemed to get a lot of satisfaction out of this knowledge. About two hundred men died here for eating one dog.

Chadwick and I were strolling around the perimeter one afternoon, when we heard a volley of shots from the North Compound. Looking that way we could see one man hanging on the inside fence, another crumpled figure on the ground. We heard later that two Poles had let the pressure get the best of them, so had committed suicide by charging the wire in daylight. The goon guards had happily obliged by mowing them down with their machine-guns.

Our guards, were for the most part, either misfits or cripples that couldn't be used at the fronts. They were very unpredictable, so it was wise to assume they were all a little insane and never provoke them. Occasionally one would go berserk and spray the compound with lead. Some kriegies were slightly wounded from these little shows of hostility, and was a good reminder of what they were capable of doing. After one of these fits of anger, we found that the guard responsible had just received word that his family was wiped out in an American bombing raid. We could then



understand why these incidents did happen, because some of us did have a slight feeling of guilt. But as the Russian said, and the French before him, "cest le guerre", or "It is the War."

The International YMCA sent in a supply of log books that could be used as diaries or whatever. There were many very talented people in the compound. One had been a Walt Disney artist. There were many good poets and several could write short stories. We had a weekly newspaper [one copy], that even had a comic strip. I wrote a short story, "A Day in the Life of a Kriegie." My book was filled with pictures drawn by kriegie artists, poems and stories. The Disney artist drew cartoons of Donald Duck as a kriegie in various comical situations. I also had a great idea, if only I had brought it home. Every man there had a "There I Was" story about how he was shot down. Some of these were really outstanding and unusual. One I recall was of a kriegie who after opening his chute, started slipping out of the harness. He had neglected to fasten all the straps and didn't realize what was happening until he was hanging upside down with only one foot tangled in the harness. I had this story in his own handwriting in my log book along with many others. I'll rewrite the few that I can still recall.

Colonel McNickle from South Dakota, was a P-47 pilot flying escort for bombers. His unit engaged some Luftwaffe fighters and Colonel Mac's plane was badly damaged. He went into a spin and blacked out at about eighteen thousand feet. He awoke several days later in a German hospital with nearly all the bones in his body broken. He and his plane was dug out of about twenty feet of mud in a drained lake bed. He later couldn't turn his head and walked with a crooked shuffle, but was sound otherwise.

This kriegie's plane was shot up badly, and they were trying to reach Switzerland for a belly landing. Realizing they weren't going to make it, the pilot ordered to bail out. They were above the Alps mountains with only snow covered peaks below. His parachute didn't open and down he went toward the mountain peaks. He felt himself hit, then a mad slide down the mountain side in about twenty feet of snow. When he finally came to rest his clothes were nearly torn off but with not a broken bone.

Another story similar to this one, was a flyer on the low level Ploesti raid. He was blown out of his plane when it exploded in mid-air, then he drove into a hay stack. Crawling on out he found his clothing shredded and badly skinned up, but otherwise okay.

A pilot told of his narrow escape from his burning aircraft. After the crew had all bailed out he was forced to go out the small window on the side. It wasn't large enough to squeeze through wearing his parachute. Leaving his chute in the seat, he went through the window, reached inside for his parachute and managed to strap it while standing on the wing.

A P-38 fighter pilot had this one to tell. He was in a dog-fight with an ME-110 and they ran head-on into each other. Miraculously, the American pilot wasn't injured, but the two planes were tangled up and dropping down as one. After falling about twenty thousand feet he managed to free himself from the wreckage

and opened his chute. His German audience quickly captured him upon landing.

I got this one from a B-24 flyer from the 9th Airforce based in Italy. He was bombing a target in Budapest, Hungary. After he was shot down and captured by the townspeople, he was hung from a light pole with his parachute cords wrapped around his neck and upper body. The cords were knotted in such a way that he could hold most of his weight with his arms, so relieved the pressure on his neck. He played dead for an hour or two before he was cut down and left lying in the street. After dark he managed to untie himself but was promptly captured by a German Army patrol. He was very glad it was Army instead of civilians that had recaptured him. We read of this raid and seen pictures of it in the German newspaper, the, "Volkischer Beobachter", that was delivered to the camp each day. Nearly all of the "Luftgangsters" caught in the city that day by the civilians were hung, but he lived to tell about it. There was a big spread of pictures in the paper, showing these flyers hanging from light-poles, trees, buildings and anything that was high enough and would support a human body.

When on our evacuation march I threw this log book away to lighten my load and will forever regret this act. At the time I thought it a necessity.

My good friend Chadwick slept in the bunk below me and I would always get a laugh whenever I had to awaken him for Apell. In the winter time he was continually scrounging rags, old newspapers and anything he could pile on his bunk that might help keep him warm. His bunk resembled a rat's nest and when I would awaken him, first there would be a stirring of the heap of rags, then a shaven bald head would appear from the heap, followed by a pair of beady black eyes and a course black beard. He'd blink his eyes, lick his lips and shake his head like a giant mole just emerging from hibernation.

The two ersatz wool blankets the Germans issued us were not sufficient to keep us warm in the winter, so most of us would gather newspapers, shred them, then place the shredded paper between the two blankets and quilt them together. This made a noisy but very warm quilt. Chadwick just never got around to putting his together.

We had a continuous bridge tournament running in the camp. I forget what it was called but it was a ladder type of thing. Players would advance up the ladder with each win and upon reaching the top, would stay there until defeated which would cause them to return to the bottom. Chadwick and Bill Roberts held this top position about as long as any team in the camp. They worked out their own bidding system, instead of using the customary Culberson and Blackstone methods. According to the rules of tournament bridge this was legal, but they must explain the system to their opponents before play started. I think that after their explanation of the system, the opponents were more confused than ever. Anyway they were expert players and they taught me the game.

Sometime in 1943, a group of fourteen new kriegies were brought into the camp. What a story they had to tell. They had been sent