

Subj: Fwd: Oflag 64 Tape
Date: 99-12-16 22:47:46 EST
From: W4ZAP
To: TH07448
CC: W4ZAP

Hi Bob

Thank you for your response to my letter.

I will send you a check for \$5 for the tape by snail mail tomorrow.

I have tried to write an autobiography of my military life. I am including a copy of the portion pertaining to Oflag 64. In it you will note that I played baritone sax in the orchestra and can hardly wait to hear what it sounded like. I was not aware that someone had made a recording of it.

I am currently trying to prepare a web site to include in the POW web that is listed on the internet and would like very much to include this at an appropriate place in my story. I am including below the part of it which addresses my time in Oflag 64 and would like to amend it to include the tape as a .wav sound.

I would appreciate it if you would include any narrative or comment or whatever that might be appropriate so that I might provide additional data and give credit to where ever it should go regarding the story of who made the tape, where it has been and anything else that you feel that might be included. Also, please include an authorization for me to do this as I understand that AOL is very touchy about having some documentation about things that are put on the net. You probably know more about that than I do, as this "hear-say" is about all that I know of.

When I wrote, I was not aware that there was anything other than the recording of the orchestra. Please advise whether or not I should include any text, pictures, or whatever else that might be on the tape.

I will include a copy of a picture that was made in Stalag IIIA shortly after the Russians came into the camp.

Thanks,
John Culler
124 Autumn Lane
Lexington, SC 29072

OFLAG 64
POLAND

After about a week-long train ride from Stalag VII A, near Mooseburg in the crowded box car with the waste running out of the wooden box furnished for a toilet and with very little food, we finally arrived at Camp Oflag 64, at Schubin (Altbergan), Poland, on the Noteac River, where we joined a group of about 500 US Officers quartered in several nice buildings which had been as Polish girls' college.

The 40 x 20 dormitory rooms were nice and were heated with large pot-bellied stoves (with coal). There were about 40 of us in each room. The abort was adjacent. It was emptied weekly by a Polish farmer into his "honey wagon" drawn by two horses. He would connect a four inch flexible pipe between his 500 gallon metal tank and an opening in the top of the abort.

Next he would open a port in the top of the tank, drop a match into the tank, and—immediately, after the explosion of the sewer gas—close the port. The resulting vacuum would cause the abort to be emptied, the tank to be filled

with fertilizer for his fields, and away they would go!

Oflag 64 had been in existence for a long time and, therefore, had more permanent arrangements and facilities. There were several majors and a colonel who were captured in Africa when an entire unit of the British Eighth Army, to which they were assigned as observers, was captured by General Rommel before the United States became actively involved in the war. The camp conditions were far more comfortable and adequate than at Stalag VII-A. There was a small but adequate library, athletic equipment of many kinds, several hand-wound record players with a fairly good supply of relatively current records, and slightly more generous rations including a WHOLE RED CROSS PARCEL for each of us when we arrived. (This did not happen again, though). The camp was carefully organized and showed the marks of American organization and planning as contrasted to the British organized camp at Mooseburg. This included kitchen and dining facilities in contrast to "everyone for himself" in the other camp; a regularly scheduled group shower bath; fairly good medical facilities; and an organized camp orchestra.

The orchestra consisted of a piano, drums, three trumpets, two trombones, a tenor saxophone, two alto saxophones, and (lucky for me) there was a baritone saxophone that had not been assigned to anyone. I applied for it, passed the test, and became a member of the orchestra. I had played alto saxophone and a clarinet in a dance orchestra during high school and a clarinet in the concert band at Clemson and was, therefore, able to play the baritone with little difficulty. The director had been an orchestra conductor before the war. We did not quite come up to the quality of Artie Shaw or Benny Goodman, but we had lots of fun. When we gave concerts in the auditorium, there was not an empty seat. We charged a cigarette for admission and used it to get supplies etc. If I had been able to spend all of my POW time here, it would not have been quite so bad. However, I was there for only one month out of the total eight months that I spent as a prisoner-of-war.

Each night, we posted interior guards around our quarters so we would be warned of unscheduled visits by the German guards while we gathered together to hear the "bird"—a reading of the current news from BBC in London. Earlier each day, one of us would copy the news from the secret radio hidden in one of the buildings and later, meet with a representative from each room to pass it on to be read later that evening to the entire group which could be disbanded if an undesired visitor should appear. Since at that time I was proficient in copying shorthand, I was suited to this job and handled it for my group. Of course, this was done without the knowledge of the guards. I don't know what would have been the consequences if we had been detected.

One night during the last week of January, 1945, during a blizzard, we were advised that we would leave Oflag 64 early the next morning to hike ten miles to Essen, Poland. We were to meet a train which was to transport us into Germany and save us from recapture (or release) by the rapidly advancing Russian Army. We bundled up with all the clothes (and meager possessions) we had, put any food that we had "squirreled" into our pockets and prepared to go.

Shortly after we left the dormitory my group came upon a one-horse wagon near the edge of the road. Several of us took a chance of being shot and broke ranks to pull the wagon into the column. We piled our paraphernalia

on the wagon and took turns pushing and pulling. This was much easier than carrying our stuff in our hand or on our backs. Several, who were in poor physical condition, were allowed to ride.

Our guards were older and in poorer physical condition than we were. They were too old to be in the army and served to guard us. Therefore, we took frequent rest breaks. It was imperative, though, that we not fall behind. On several occasions, someone who was unable to get up after the break would fall behind, and soon we would hear rifle shots. This was out of our sight, but we could only assume the worst. Therefore, we tried to help each other in any way we could.

At one point during our long march a small flat-bed truck overtook our column and, as it hit a bump in the road, a box bounced off and broke open when it hit the ice. It was filled with oleomargarine. You can imagine the scramble that was made for it! I got a box that had about a Pound (probably 0.5 kilo) that was divided into four sticks. I shared this with three others and proceeded to eat mine. I had several sugar cubes in my pocket and I would take a bite of butter (like eating a banana) and follow it with a sugar cube. Today, this seems nauseating, but, under my physical condition at that time due to a prolonged inadequate diet, this butter and sugar seemed to me to have the best taste imaginable. I assume that one's taste buds in some way respond to the needs of the body in critical conditions.

There were several who hid in or behind haystacks, bushes, houses etc. I was tempted to do likewise, but felt my chance of survival would be less if I were to attempt escape since I had heard that some of the civilian population were unfriendly and I had no way to determine this until it was too late.

A few nights later, we were directed to go to a large metal barn. It had from five to fifteen feet of loose hay in piles and it was nice to anticipate using this as a mattress and to look forward to being out of the rain, ice and wind for the night. However, I had the scare of my life and hardly could get my eyes to close for the rest of the night. Shortly after everyone got inside and got a place he could comfortably stretch out, someone decided he needed a cigarette and inadvertently set the hay on fire. I saw the flame from about 30 feet away when it was about 2 feet high. I instantly got up to head for the one and only exit about ten feet away, when someone beat the flame out with his coat. Had it not been for his quick thinking and reaction, most of us would have undoubtedly cremated or trampled!

The road was packed with our units plus civilians. Someone who could speak German had conversations with some of them and he said that they were Germans who had moved into Poland after the German army had devastated Poland and killed so many of them (the Poles) a few years earlier when Hitler had made his assault toward Moscow. Now, they were returning to Germany so they would not be there for the rapidly advancing Russian army to retaliate and treat them like the Germans had earlier treated the Russian civilians. Some were walking and pushing wheel barrows, baby carriages and some were riding on enormous wagons pulled by beautiful teams of horses—like the Budweiser beer advertisements on TV a few years ago—loaded with all their worldly possessions as they frantically tried to keep ahead of the Russian forces.

After about fourteen days of marching in the snow, which partially melted each day and soaked through our shoes, we were told that there was some

transportation available for those with problems. A German doctor came to examine and to select those who needed to be transported. When he saw my feet he sent me to the depot where there were two 40 & 8's made available for us. I was reluctant to go with this as we had heard rumors of the treatment that was given to the Jews in Germany and feared that this might be a one-way trip for us. However, considering the condition of my feet and the shots that we had heard at the rear of our unit earlier, I felt that I would have a lesser chance of survival if I did not go on the train. The two cars were loaded with 126 of us plus a guard on each car. The first thing the guard on our car did was to remove the ammunition from his rifle and park it in one corner. He was about 70 years old and in very poor health and obviously glad to get out of the weather even though he was out-numbered on the car about 60 to 1. Some of the others knew him and, since he was undergoing the same treatment we were, we considered him as one of us. He made no attempt to object to anything that we wanted to do. Of course, there was not much that we could do, though. There was a very small stove--almost a toy--that was in the car and someone got some coal from the engine to provide some heat. However, we needed the space more than we did the heat. It was very cold, but since so many of us were packed in such a small space, our body heat was sufficient to keep us relatively warm. We had to take turns sitting down and standing. There was no such thing as lying down. There was no water available, but most of us had a can or cup of some sort and by filling it with snow from the ground when we stopped and letting it melt inside the car, we did fairly well as far as water was concerned. After being on this train for seven days, we were given one small bowl of oatmeal by the German Red Cross as the total rations supplied to us. Needless to say, the little food that we had squirreled away in our pockets in anticipation of a move of this sort, had given out long before then. After five more days on the train, we reached Berlin. The American Air Force bombed the rail yards while we were parked beside a train loaded with tanks. The bombs hit all around, but we were spared from all but the noise and the apprehension that the next one would land on us. This was a frightening experience. I found later that this air raid was the heaviest up to this date--February 1945.

Some of the civilians mentioned earlier had gotten on the train too. They were inside, on top of, and hanging onto any place they could. Every time the train stopped, everyone got off to respond to the demands of nature at the nearest spot--male and female, young and old--with privacy completely ignored, of course. When I see TV reports of mass migration and civilian abuse, I shudder as this brings to my mind the conditions I experienced.

Our next camp was Stalag III-A near Luckenwalde, located about 50 kilometers south of Berlin. The conditions here were much the same as my first camp, Stalag VII-A. We received Red Cross Parcels from England, Australia, Finland and Denmark, but the regularity (or irregularity) was about the same. The entire Norwegian army was in the compound next to ours. We were separated by a barbed wire fence. It seemed that they were taken prisoner directly from their homes and military bases in Norway without a shot being fired. They spent the entire period of the war in this camp. This information came from them. I have not tried to confirm it since the war [The picture or image contained in this e-mail cannot be viewed using this version of AOL.]

Forwarded Message:

Subject: Oflag 64 Tape
Date: 99-12-16 14:40:36 EST
From: THO7448