

CPT James Franklin Bickers Jr

(17th Field Artillery)

1919 – 2010

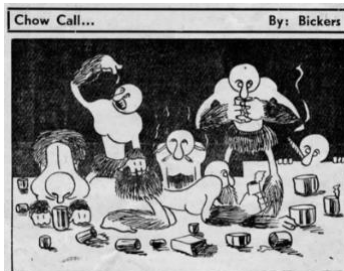
James Franklin Bickers Jr was born on 2 March 1919 in Bartlett, Tennessee. He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from the University of Illinois, February 1941, as well as his ROTC commission as a 2LT in the US Army. He reported for duty August 1941 at Fort Bragg North Carolina, and was assigned to the US 17th Field Artillery. Bickers was then shipped overseas in 1942, where he served during WWII. His capture by Rommel's Afrika Korps occurred on 14 February 1943 in Tunisia, North Africa.



17th Field artillery

OFLAG 64 CAMP INVOLVEMENT

Held captive for 28 months in Oflag 64, Szubin, Poland, Bickers was very active in camp activities, including the organization of and participation in sporting events, educational classes, camp newspaper known as THE ITEM, theatre productions, and library collections. His degree in fine arts contributed greatly to morale as a camp cartoonist and architectural artist. Bickers' cartoons, drawn and placed around the camp, were whimsical, clever, and incredibly meaningful because they expressed what Kriegies felt. For example, German guards were depicted in scenes which emphasized their nosiness into Kriegy daily affairs by goonish figures drawn as Goons peering over fences or around corners. One cartoon was particularly politically motivated. Goons often performed no-notice searches through Kriegy barracks, and after one obnoxious, unnecessary raid, Bickers' cartoon showcased demented-looking Goons gorging on parcel contents, one character smoking multiple cigarettes. The caption: Chow Call....



Bicker's "Chow Call" cartoon

When asked about the figures, Kriegies replied that they were characters taken from American cartoons; the Germans never realized that they were being ridiculed. On another occasion concerning the fall of Rome to the Allies, ITEM editor Frank Diggs asked Bickers to rework an old German news photo to which this caption was attached: "Victorious American troops marching into Rome."

Other cartoons featured "Prison Daze", celebrations, and Kriegy portraits which centered on the ebb and flow of camp activities. One of his most expressive was a cartoon featuring members of the camp orchestra with Bob Rankin as leader, all easily recognized.



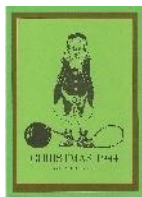
Bicker's "Prison Daze" cartoon

Impromptu entertainment was also a well-attended activity in which Bickers excelled. For example, the following passage from the book, *Escape To Russia*, by fellow Kriegy Howard Randolph Holder, illustrates this point:

A very popular act of the evening was put on by Jim Bickers who drew lightning blackboard cartoons and gave a patter as he did so. He invited the Kriegies to step up on the stage and draw any kind of a line they wished, and then he'd draw a picture from it. This he did with the consummate skill he used in drawing cartoons for the camp paper many of which are in this book.

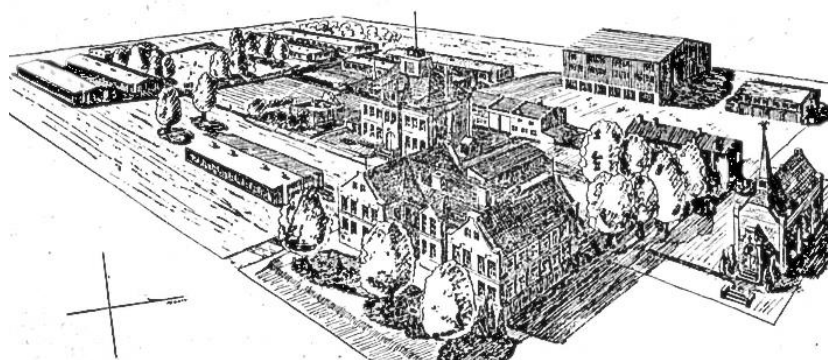


Bickers' "The Band at Work" cartoon



One of the most memorable is the demeanor of Szubin's Santa Claus—a somber looking Santa with hands being shoved into his pockets, donning an ill-fitting Santa suit, appearing cuffed at the ankles and chained to a dark colored holiday ball. The caption beneath read "CHRISTMAS 1944".

Bickers' artistic talents were clearly versatile. As an architectural artist he was also well known for his pen drawings including the bird's eye view of the camp area, the Chapel, and other Oflag 64 buildings.



1LT James Bicker's "bird's eye view" of Oflag 64.

CIVILIAN LIFE

Discharged on 20 May 1946, Bickers entered the business world of printing in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His next professional move occurred in 1952, when he joined the corporate headquarters of RR Donnelley in Chicago, an American Fortune 500 company providing marketing in business communications and commercial printing. His professionalism and extensive knowledge concerning the multiple facets of printing enabled Bickers to pilot his way up the promotional ladders during the 32 years he worked there. He retired as a Group President. Listed in *Who's Who in America* in multiple editions, Bickers was active in Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity, the Direct Marketing Association, and the Sunset Ridge Country Club.

James Franklin Bickers is remembered for his keen intelligence, his entertaining wit interlaced with humor, and his deeply felt love of family.

Survivors included his wife of 69 years, Emily Powers Bickers, whom he married on 3 May, 1941; his two sons, James and John; and his daughter, Barbara.



James and Emily Bickers

CPT Bickers was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.



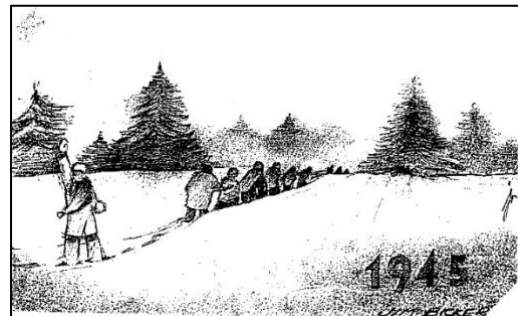
JIM'S REFLECTIONS

Forty-six years after American Kriegies were freed from POW status, Jim Bickers attended the 1991 Oflag 64 Reunion at Norfolk, Virginia, and committed his thoughts to paper concluding with this summation:

In October 1991, the American Officers who were in Oflag 64 at one time or another convened to celebrate, and I am proud to be one of them. In closing, I quote the young sailor who was our tour guide at the Naval Base. "My grandfather was in World War II and I'm only 22."

My answer, "My grandfather was in the Civil War, and I'm only 72."

We are a helluva bunch of geriatrics!!!!



Bickers' Long March drawing

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Ann C. Rogers