

12/13/08

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First of all I repeat what I said about The Post Item Oflag 64 (page 21 Item Comments)  
- WOW!

The "old" hands couldn't do what you "new" hands are doing so nicely. So, again my (and all my "old" compatriots) many thanks for continuing a wonderful newsletter.

Speaking of "old" I have a suggestion - check out the original roster for those of, still on foot and have each furnish a photo for your next publication - format up to you Editors - can't be many of us - quite possibly you already have such photos in your files now. As we do get older we tend to communicate (sometimes) with each other, but if not, a recent photo would likely start some sort of dialogue.

Speaking of such, I will acknowledge KATHERINE ROBINSON STEVENSON'S REQUEST from Fernandina Beach, FL through you since there wasn't any specific address listed in The Item.

SO, HERE GOES ---- TRUE, HERVEY was on the Tunnel Committee - he was from South Carolina as I remember and a great friend of my close friend HILL T. (SPUD) MURPHY. "SPUD", BILL FABIAN & I sort of spearheaded the Project. I think FABIAN is long gone now, but was from around Brownsville, TX, who with his Wife Elizabeth (?) came to our 50th Reunion which I had in Louisville in '93.

We three sealed ourselves in the Tunnel January 20th - '45 - when The Germans announced an evacuation back into The West due to the pending overrun by the Russians who had recently crossed the Vistula River at Warsaw. This sounds as though we made that decision Quite frankly, it actually went this way --- I approached Lt. Col. Waters who had overall charge of Intelligence inside the wire --- Asking of him to let a few of us absent ourselves from the Appel and hide away in the Tunnel -- actually, I asked for him to allow up to 60 men which he promptly turned down as though I was some sort of nut -- he narrowed it down to 4!!! This really posed a problem for Spud & me -- who to select so to speak --well, Spud took first crack and picked his good friend HERVEY ROBINSON. I then made a momentous decision and picked the guy I thought had done the most for the Project -- BILL FABIAN. We still had overnight to think about everything which turned out to be damned short. Howsoever, the German Command turned the Camp out for Appel in what was a very cold, wet and sleety day. (We three were down in the Tunnel). It seems from later accounts that the Germans made the rest of the Camp stand in Appel for hours while they counted, and counted, but couldn't come up with the correct total numbers -- "4" missing" I guess they were under some unknown Orders to get moving as they started the "march" Westward leaving some inmates in the local Hospital in Szubin who must have been too wounded to make the march, plus us 3. Quite frankly I've always thought the Germans never had a "REAL" count anyway

I've just re-read the above account, and speaking of the Germans not being able to count, I must add myself -- Col. Waters reduced my request down to 4, not 3 as stated above. So, for you KATHERINE, back to the story so that you can then know as much as your old man (or maybe more?)



This whole Project wasn't accomplished overnight -- all in all . The Committee spent 10 months on this deal. Everyone I'm sure, wishing to take initial credit -- actually, that's of little consequence. So, here is my story, and I don't know if HERVEY was at OFLAG 9 A/Z in Rothenberg with me enroute to Szubin, or not, but it was there in a POW Camp essentially for BRITISH POWs that we were sent enroute to establishing 64 that my part of The Tunnel Committee first began. (Incidentally there was a split-up of our original bunch from Tunisia with about half being sent to OFLAG 9 A/H at Spangenberg which was also a POW Camp for The British). For some reason or other I was selected by the British Tunnel Committee (everyone had a mission to escape somehow or other) to participate in their Project. Another thought here is that neither the BRITISH or our Higharchy knew how long we would be there in 9 A/Z, or 9 A/H.. At this point no one knew that we would soon (I think about 3 months) ~~would~~ be settling in at Szubin which would become OFLAG 64, or for that matter who would be in charge of Inside The Wire Intelligence. Col. Waters had been at Spangenberg, not Rothenberg, so I personally was rather overjoyed when it turned up that he was to be just under Col Drake who was our CEO & head of the 64th in TUNISIA. Col Waters & the Corys go a long way back -- before he went to WEST PONT -- but tha's another story.

168TH  
INF. REGT.

Back a bit to the Tunnel at 64 -- It seemms everyone in our Camp helped in some way or other to make this Project a success. As said before, a code of all Soldiers was to attempt Escape if found to be captured, so there were many and various types of Escapes, none to my knowledge successful. But, as said everyone seemed to help in some way or other. We had to have a very sofiscated communication system so that we kept our secrets from the Germans. By soliciting almost everyone in the Camp we were able to let the "diggers" in the Tunnel know when things wern't normal, such as a German Guard making a suspicious move -- leaving his post, or tower, or coming in the front gate. Special movements by one or more of our personnel triggered extremely fast word throughout, and particularly even down in the Tunnel to cease operations. Some days, we stopped "digging" for days, until we were convinced the coast was again clear. This was most essential to our operation and was largely responsible for probably taking a full 10 months -- even then we wern't finished -- but far enough alng to convince Col Waters to allow us the chance to complete an Escape Plan.

The Tunnel itself was begun in a Laundry Pot in the middle of one of the 1-story Barracks -- the fire box under the Pot was falsefied by creating an illusion of having been used by spreading ashes around. Actually, this was our entrance -- about 25 feet down, chamber was roughly 30x30 with bed-board slats used to shore up the sides to prevent dirt or sand slides or cave-in. ( To explain, each inmate slept on straw mattresses, held up by bed boards) These boards were the ones used for our Tunnel. It doesn't take much imagination to realize that many Inmates ended up sleeping (if they could?) with a board for their head, shoulders, butt & heels. About every 50 feet, or so, we had a small chamber big enough for a "digger - helper" to sit cross-legged to facilitate the boxes (mostly Red Cross food boxes) which were filled with dirt/sand, or empty to be used as sleds with ropes fore & aft to be pulled back & forth. Under no-see by the Guards (again under close watch by our many Camp Helpers) we put the dirt/sand up in the attics between rafters of the Barracks.

We had left instructions with a Col Drury who was left in the Local Hospital to use an agreed "Password" 3rd Cavalry to let us know when all was clear of Germans so we could come out, (we were prepared to spent days down if necessary). He thoroughly botched up our deal with him by yelling to us through the POT to "come on out it's OK. We thought this sounded too much like a threat, and so did not respond for a day or two (?) But then we decided to get out, and Bill Fabian who was by far the best of our combined physical shape (beleive me it wasn't very good) to use his brute force to nudge the Pot upward so others above could remove it for our Escape.



KATHERINE;, quite frankly my memory fails me at this point, but I cannot remember what happened to HERVEY. Somewhere along the line Spud & I lost track of him. At any rate we were all so excited at being what we imagined as FREE, that the next hours or days are a bit lost. I know we took off to the village, countryside and were really treated, by the POLES -- shelter, food, secrecy, whatever -- we made our way EAST. I know that Spud & I met up with The Russian Army somewhere, and like Soldiers everywhere the reunion was wonderful. It only got worse as we found higher Headquarters. At some point some of the POWs, probably some who had Escaped on the Forced March, found ourselves in WARSAW. My God, what devastation we saw. At any rate we left some at a Hospital in Rembertow (probably an outlying town of WARSAW). So, Spud & I decided we desperately needed some one who could understand the Russians-Poles as we certainly couldn't. We found one Peter Gaisch, a Paratrooper captured in Sicily I think, to interpret for us, and so we made our way looking for an irfield to get to MOSCOW! We ended up in SW Poland at LVOW (Lemberg to the Germans) where the Russians promptly put us in jail thinking we were German spies (we had no identity, only our glib talk!) A Jewish Lady who had somehow escaped the plight of other Jews in LVOW who were put to death down in the city sewers, and a Russian Newspaper Correspondent by the name of VLADMIR BELAYEV convinced the Russian KGB (NKVD in those days) to release us as American Allies which we had professed -- otherwise, shoot us if he proved right in his contention. After that traumatic time, we were turned over to the General so called Commander of LVOW (The Russian Commandant - a Lt.Col. was the real boss however)

With this scene we 3 enjoyed a first hot bath in Spud & in my case, 2yrs & some good food. Upshot of it all was the GENERAL... a phone call announced the arrival in the Hotel <sup>there</sup> where we were of 4-5, or more Americans. Immediately we thought now they will really believe us as obviously more escaped POs had arrived. Little did we know until meeting them that they were US Air Force personnel flown in to recover any survivors & Norden Bomb sights from shot down B-17s. After a day or two and arguments with the Russians we were flown EAST to their Base at Poltava, Ukraine (Incidentally a Russian Flight Engineer always flew on American aircraft). 1500 MILES TO THE EAST!

The rest was easy. Home by way of Teheran, Cairo, Casablanca, Azores, Bermuda & Miami. It was February 1945!!! *SECRET Analysis of flight to end of - took TRAMP TRAIN MARCH 1945 - WASHINGTON, D.C. - met by parents Feb 28!*

I do hope this gives you some background on your Father. Nothing accomplished could have been done without his wonderful help, and I ask you to please give him my personal best regards.

P.S.: If only I had known of his whereabouts a few years ago, as I spent many times visiting my good friends the Robinson Browns in Amelia, -- and always seemed to go to Fernandina to get shrimp!!

I would love to hear from him.

Regards  
 Bin Corey

*Algiers Nov '42  
 captured in the Field Post, Tunisia Feb '43  
 Battle was Feb '44 - soon w/5 men for 3 days  
 left 04 '45 Jan '45  
 VE DAY MAY '45*