

2LT Curtis Scott Jones

1917 – 2014

BACKGROUND



Newton, Massachusetts was the birthplace of Curtis Scott Jones. His parents were Fred and Ruth S. Jones. After his graduation from high school and a move to Swarthmore, Pennsylvania in 1937, he enrolled at Duke University in North Carolina. There he received a degree in Business Administration, but his true calling was in sports arenas. He became the first goalie for the undefeated, unscored upon soccer team, then became manager for the Duke University basketball team during his junior and senior years. After graduation he moved to New York City and worked for International Publishers for South America, his job description: translating American comic books into Spanish. His most memorable moment spent working there was meeting Carmen Miranda, a popular singer and actress during this era.

In February 1942, Curtis was drafted into the U.S. Army, completed Officer Candidate School, then deployed to Europe where he became Executive Officer of C Company in an Infantry Battalion of the 34th Division. Sent next by troop ship to North Africa, he was captured on 10 March 1943 at Kei-El-Amarch, Tunisia.

Possessing a dry sense of humor, he remarked later about watching a one-hour Army training film on how to handle imprisonment by the enemy then becoming a prisoner himself.

CAPTURED ON 10 MARCH 1943

That particular March day in 1943 was a blur. Mr. Jones is still not quite sure what went wrong, but he is not one to second-guess the events of his life. *“Hindsight’s 20/20.*

Sometimes I think about how I got captured. Other times, I wonder if I'd still be alive if I hadn't been."



In Tunisia, West Africa, the 34th Infantry Division pushed Germans from the West, while the British Army tried to squeeze them from the East and within this wedge, LT. Jones, five fellow army officers, and more than three dozen privates became prisoners of war. *"We saw the Germans walking toward us. We had no ammunition. There was no use fighting,"* says Curtis, explaining that he became a *"guest of the Germans"* that day.

Like 16 million American men and women his age, he would spend the next few years of his life on foreign soil, fighting for a cause gripping nations an ocean away. But for Jones and many thousands of others like him, the war years would be spent behind barbed wire fences, inside railroad cars, and confined in the stalls of abandoned horse stables dotting the countrysides of Western Africa, Italy, Poland and Germany.

Jones, now a reedy but towering 87, talks almost casually about his life as a prisoner of war. Captivity was his lot. *"Things happened. What were you going to do?"* He feels the same way about being drafted to war, about being sent to Officer Candidate School, and about being hauled to Scotland aboard the Queen Mary with more than 15,000 fellow Americans. This was war, and America had signed on to the cause.

He entered World War II as a private, and then signed on to an army officer training program — the one decision he actually got to make over the next three years of his life.

"You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know that being an enlisted man is not the best place to be, especially when you enter as a private. A second lieutenant isn't much higher, but you are extended a few privileges."

Some of those same privileges were extended to him in prison camps, a result of the Germans following the Geneva Convention — an international understanding which governs the care and treatment of prisoners of war. Military officers, according to the Geneva Convention, are to be excused from manual labor. As he recalls it, the Germans actually treated Lt. Jones and his fellow officers rather civilly.

“They respected the fact that you were an officer, but they expected you to act like it. There was no complaining allowed. To the Germans, you were a problem, a hassle. They’d rather not deal with you.”

Life was not pleasant but bearable, Mr. Jones says. Food was scarce. Some 53 pounds fell from his six-foot, three-inch frame in the first month of his captivity. Although Red Cross parcels — filled with staple rations like milk powder and canned meat — were prepared for prisoners of war, months sometimes passed without delivery of these provisions. That’s how American POWs knew, he says, that the Germans were losing ground in the war. A contraband radio, on which they listened to nightly British Broadcasting Corporation reports during imprisonment in Poland, confirmed their suspicions.

After being hauled out of Tunisia that spring of 1943, Lt. Jones and his fellow POWs joined British captives at a prison camp near Rome. The Italians extended more kindnesses to the American soldiers than the Germans had. But when the Italians capitulated later that year, abandoning the prison camp where Jones was kept, he and fellow captives were too weak to flee.

OFLAG 64 ARRIVAL ON 19 OCTOBER 1943

“The Germans moved in too close for us to get away. We were just not in good enough shape to get away. We would have had to go over the mountains to the south.”

Soon thereafter, the Germans hauled the American military officers to Oflag 64, a ground force prison camp for American military officers in Szubin, Poland.

New arrivals at Oflag were shunned until a fellow prisoner could vouch for his authenticity. Occasionally, German officers planted a German spy among the American prisoners to eavesdrop. *“We’d drop references like the ‘Boston Yankees’ to see if they’d react. The Germans looked just like Americans.”*

American military officers made the best of life in Oflag 64. The Swedish YMCA provided sports equipment, books and instruments to the prisoners. American POWs held weekly orchestra performances, planted a garden and taught classes to one another.

He remembers that intelligence from Americans made its way into the camp in rolled-up cigarettes. Prisoners used maps to dig a 150-foot tunnel to the exterior of the prison wall. They completed the tunnel by January 1945, but by then had received word that Germany’s war machine would soon collapse.

THE LONG MARCH - JANUARY 1945

The Germans held tight to these POWs until the bitter end of the war. When the Russians drew close enough to this Polish camp for the prisoners to hear their gunfire, the Germans retreated to their homeland, prisoners in tow. Twelve feet of snow blanketed the ground, and the temperature fell to 22 degrees below zero. Curtis Jones and hundreds of other POWs marched for 48 days, traveling more than 350 miles from Poland to Germany. They ate no more than one meal a day.

The final destination was a camp near Munich. General George S. Patton Jr. stormed the camp and freed the Americans in late April 1945. Jones remembers *“Red Cross girls coming into the camp and throwing doughnuts to the soldiers.”*

HOMEWARD BOUND WITH R&R

When the war on the European front ended June 6, 1945, Jones flew to Belgium to be prepared for his return home. Being a POW earned him 60 days’ rest and relaxation before a return to active duty. After several more months of service, military leaders then *“guilted”* him into joining the military reserves — a duty he

fulfilled for nearly two more decades. He was recalled into active service during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1961 and was in charge of the Strategic Intelligence Transportation Services for a year while stationed at Fort Eustis, Virginia.

His prisoner of war status meant little to his fellow Americans, Mr. Jones says.

“There were no parades, no big honors. Occasionally, a guy at the end of the bar would buy me a drink,” he recalls with a laugh.

Curtis married Norma Atherholt from Norwood, Pennsylvania in 1946. They spent their early years residing in Wallingford, Beaver, and Swarthmore, Pennsylvania where they started their family. They had an active social life and spent New Year’s Eve with the same group of friends for 50+ years.



His employment was spent with the Honer Laughlin China Company for 30 years, from 1956 – 1986. His major account was the Marriot and upon his retirement he still kept that account for the company [for some period of time].

Growing older now, Curtis and Norma moved to Martha’s Vineyard to be near family. A life spent loving libraries; he always had a stack of books from the local facility next to his chair. Always community minded, they also volunteered at the Martha’s Vineyard Museum and the West Tisbury Framers’ Market; in addition, Curtis maintained his active membership in the Cape Cod Chapter of the Military Officers of America Association.

Still able to travel, they sought out unique places to stay and visited 29 Elderhostels all over the world, collecting a lifetime of memories.

Fewer and fewer people like Curtis Scott Jones are still around to share their World War II memories in first-person. Only a quarter of the 16 million men and women who served America during World War II are alive today [2005]. Currently, these veterans, the youngest of whom are at least 75 years old, are dying at a rate of 1,000 a day.

TAPS

Curtis Scott Jones died on 22 June 2014 at the age of 97. A memorial service was held for family and friends at Grace Church on William Street. He was buried in the Grace Episcopal Churchyard located at Vineyard Haven, Dukes County, Massachusetts, with full military honors offered by the Veterans of Martha's Vineyard.

SOURCES USED

Three online sites were used in-concert style to canvas the life of World War II Veteran Lt. Curtis Jones.

The Vineyard Gazette at http://vineyardgazette.com/news/2014/06/26_world-war-ii-veteran-was-prisoner-war_1917_-_2014

Ancestry.com at http://ancestry.com/search/categories/mil_pension/

Find A Grave – Millions of Cemetery Records at <http://findagrave.com>

Biography written by Kriegy Research Group bio writer Ann C. Rogers