

Richard B. Parker
3317 P Street NW
Washington, DC 20007
Tel:(202) 342-6543, FAX (202) 342-0954

26 June 2002

Bob Tompson
7448 E 68th Place
Tulsa, OK 74133

Dear Bob:

Don't think I will make it to the reunion at Ft. Benning, but I enclose a couple of things that may be of interest to those assembled there.

The first is a set of xerox copies of various sizes and exposures of a page of photographs from the memoirs of Marshal G. K. Zhukov, the Soviet commander who led the march on Berlin among other things and who, I seem to recall, stopped at Oflag 64 enroute. A friend who reads Russian has gone through the text and finds no mention or explanation of the photographs, but one of them may be of the column leaving the Oflag (although they look much fitter and happier than I remember us looking and I can't figure out who took the picture and how Zhukov got it). The other is clearly of some of us from the Oflag marching up the gangplank to board the *Antenor* at Odessa. The Russian word means "LIBERATED!"

The Soviet ambassador to Morocco, who gave me the book when it came out thirty years ago, thought I was the tall man who seems to be waving, but I don't think so. You may already have these pictures from someone else, but just in case I send them along.

The second is a chapter from The Strange Alliance, by Maj. Gen. John R. Deane, who was the chief of our military mission to Moscow during World War II. He describes the uncooperative attitude of the Soviets about releasing information on our existence and whereabouts. The officer who met us at Odessa, Major Paul Hall, told us, I recall, that they had just learned of our existence. Gen. Deane said it was the day before the arrival of the first contingent.

Again, this account may be old news to those of you who have been following this story over the years, but I just came across it recently and send it along just in case you were not aware of it.

I also enclose a check for your postal fund.

Sincerely,





The following is a chapter from "The Strange Alliance" by MG John R. Deane, Chief of Military Mission to Moscow in WWII. The photograph is from the memoirs of Marshal Zhukov, the Soviet Commander. The caption below the photo means "Liberated" in Russian

As the agreement was actually carried out by the Russians, we were not allowed to meet our men until they had made their way on their own and as best they could all the way across Poland and had come onto Russian soil. The reason for this probably was that the Soviet leaders did not want American or British officers within Poland where they could observe the methods being used to bring Poland under the domination of the Soviet Union. The world was to be led to believe that the Poles were so enthusiastically happy at their deliverance from the Germans that they wanted nothing more than to embrace their Russian liberators, including their ideology. It was true that the Poles were grateful for their deliverance from Nazi domination, but from the reports of our liberated prisoners who made their way through Poland, one cannot but believe that the Polish people soon began to wonder if they had not jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

Article Two of our agreement provided that our respective military authorities would inform each other without delay regarding American or Soviet citizens found or liberated, and that the repatriation representatives of each nation would have the right of immediate access to the camps or concentration points in which their citizens were located, where they would take over the internal administration and discipline of the camps. The article stipulated that facilities would be given for the dispatch of contact officers to camps containing prisoners of their own nationality. It was in the implementation of this article that we met with our most miserable failure.

The first sizable group of Americans to be liberated by the Red Army were those from the American officers' prisoner-of-war camp at Szubin in northwestern Poland. The Germans, forced to leave Szubin in a hurry on January 1, 1945, because of the unusually rapid advance of the Red Army, left behind them about one hundred Americans, some of them quite seriously ill. Those able to travel were taken westward by the Germans. Daily thereafter, American prisoners of war either escaped from the Germans or were liberated by the Russians, but my first

information concerning them came from the Polish Minister in Moscow on February 14, 1945, who sent word to me that there were about one thousand Americans in various Polish cities. Three days later three American officers arrived in Moscow after hitch-hiking across Poland and western Russia. This was almost a month after they had escaped from the Germans, and yet I had had no notification from Golubev concerning their release. The officers who arrived in Moscow were Captain Ernest M. Gruenberg, a medical officer from New York City, who had been captured while serving with the 317th Parachute Battalion on June 8, 1944, near Monteburg, France; Second Lieutenant Frank H. Colley from Washington, Georgia, captured while serving with the 17th Field Artillery on February 17, 1943, in Tunisia; and Second Lieutenant John N. Dimmling, Jr., from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, captured while serving with the 30th Infantry on February 1, 1944, at the Anzio beachhead.

The fact that these three officers could have made their way across Poland and Russia without being taken into custody by the N.K.V.D. was one of the freakish incidents of war that defy explanation. Their story was packed with drama. They had been in the American camp at Szubin and were among those whom the Germans attempted to evacuate to the west. They left Szubin on January 21, 1945, and made long daily forced marches toward the interior of Germany in order to avoid capture by the Red Army, which was close on the heels of the retreating Germans. At night, they would be allowed to sleep in stables or whatever shelter might be available. On the second morning these three officers hid themselves in some hay in the stables at which they had spent the night, and when their German guards formed the columns to resume the march they simply failed to appear. The Russians were so close that the Germans did not take time to search for them.

That afternoon they were behind the lines of the Red Army. The Russians paid little attention to them except to tell them to go to the east. This started their trek that was to end in Moscow. Captain Gruenberg spent some days assisting the Russians in

the care of their wounded. He worked with a woman major who was the surgeon of one of the Russian field hospitals. The three officers made their way to Wegheim, near Exin in Poland, where they found a small concentration of American ex-prisoners in a camp under Russian control. They remained at this camp for a few days; they tried to find out what disposition was to be made of them but obtained no satisfaction from the camp commander. They escaped from the Wegheim camp on February 3, 1945, and started east. During the day, they would get rides on Russian supply vehicles going to the rear for replenishment, and at night, they would seek shelter from Polish farmers and peasants. They met other small groups of Americans, all seeking some American in authority. They avoided forming large groups for fear of being taken to the Russian repatriation camp at Rembertow on the outskirts of Warsaw; they had all been warned of the hardships they would encounter there. Finally, they found a troop train on its way to Moscow. When they got off the train at the Moscow station, a Russian soldier told them how they could get to the American Military Mission. The N.K.V.D. had fallen down. Other Americans who arrived in Moscow later were seized by the Secret Police as soon as they left their trains and taken to a barracks outside the city where they were thoroughly interrogated for a few days before being turned over to my custody.

I don't think any officers ever had a more sincere welcome than those first three bedraggled ex-prisoners did when they came into our headquarters. To us they represented the thousands of Americans who we expected would be liberated and for whom we were prepared to do so much if only allowed the opportunity. At last, I could get firsthand information. It would no longer be necessary to theorize in my negotiations with the Russians. They were taken to one of our officers' messes and given hot baths, clean clothes, insignia of rank, American food, and whisky. I dropped in at the mess later in the evening and found that my officers had promoted a huge party in their honor. Our guests were the center of attraction, and all their hardships seemed to have been forgotten. Certainly by that time, a complete metamorphosis in their appearance had been accomplished, and once again, they looked like officers of the American Army.

I learned from them that about two hundred Americans had either been left behind by the Germans at Szubin or had escaped from the German column before they themselves had left it. They told me of about thirty Americans who were in a Russian hospital at Wegheim. Hundreds of American families were relieved of considerable anxiety when we were able to send word to the War Department of those who Gruenberg, Colley, and Dimmling knew had escaped from the Germans. Among these was First Lieutenant Craig Campbell, one of General Eisenhower's personal aides. We were also able to let General Patton know that his son-in-law, Colonel J. K. Waters was in the best of health but was still in German custody, being moved to a camp in the interior. One story they told which was of considerable interest to me concerned a lifelong friend, Colonel Paul R. Goode, who was the senior American officer at Szubin. He had remained with the column being marched west by the Germans despite his opportunities to escape. He felt a responsibility to look after the welfare of those Americans who were unable to get away from

their German guards. I learned that after Goode had been captured in France he was put in a boxcar train with hundreds of other Americans and sent across France to a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany. During the trip some enterprising prisoners had cut a hole in the boxcar through which they hoped to escape before the train passed the German border. Several of them did, but Colonel Goode, who weighs well over two hundred pounds, got stuck in the escape hole and was in this position when the German guards discovered what was going on. He had to do some fast talking to avoid being executed on the spot for the part he had played in the plot.

Gruenberg and his companions told me that they had had the kindest treatment from the civilian population of Poland. The people were more than willing to share their meager food supply with the liberated Americans. The officers said that the Red Army was indifferent to them—a few cases were reported in which Americans had had their wrist watches confiscated at the point of a gun by Red Army soldiers but these were the acts of irresponsible individuals more or less out of control in the confusion which characterized the Russians' pursuit of the Germans. Apparently the Red Army took no responsibility for caring for liberated Americans and no other Russian agency was interested. Gruenberg reported that liberated American prisoners were being concentrated at Wegheim, Rembertow, and Brest-Litovsk. I learned later that others had seen signs in Poland directing liberated prisoners to report to Wreznia, Lodz, Rembertow, and Lublin.

I interrogated the three American officers on February 18, 1945, and sought an immediate appointment with Golubev, which I obtained the following day. Armed with the data I had received, I tried to obtain his approval to the plan we had been formulating for six months. I asked for authority to send small contact teams of from three to five Americans to each of several key localities as close behind the Russian lines in Poland as possible and to dispatch American aircraft which could carry emergency supplies in and the seriously ill or wounded out to the American hospital at Poltava. I suggested the cities which the Russian field commanders had already designated as concentration points, arguing that every American was searching for some American official to report to and the news would soon get around as to where American officials might be found. They would thus act as magnets to attract concentrations of Americans. The liberated prisoners could then be evacuated to a port of debarkation as transportation became available.

Golubev told me that so far only four hundred and fifty Americans had been liberated and that these were being assembled and sent to a prisoner-of-war transit camp at Odessa. He proposed that we send an American contact team there and suggested the possibility of establishing another transit camp at the northern port of Murmansk, if later releases of Americans justified another camp. Meanwhile, he said, the Foreign Office had approved a request I had made on February 14, five days earlier, that a small group of American officers be allowed to go to Lublin, to contact Americans in Poland.

Golubev's statement that four hundred and fifty Americans had already been liberated came as something of a surprise to me because I knew positively of only the two hundred that had escaped from Szubin. However, I doubted the accuracy of his

figures because of the report that I had received from the Poles that a thousand Americans were in various Polish cities and because of the indications I had received from Gruenberg that most of the Americans were avoiding Russian concentration centers because of the poor conditions known to exist at them. As it turned out, Golubev revised his figures upward every few days until an eventual figure of about three thousand Americans was reached. Golubev's continued uncertainty as to how many Americans had been liberated at any time offered ample evidence of the ineffectiveness of his organization and the lack of foresight which had been displayed in planning to meet a problem which was certain to arise.

His proposal that our contact should be only at Odessa and possibly Murmansk was a shock to me and I felt it to be a serious violation of our agreement. It meant that we could not give aid to our liberated soldiers until they had traveled nearly two thousand miles from the points of their liberation under the most difficult conditions. I was delighted to hear, however, that I would be allowed to send a small group to Lublin. I selected Lieutenant Colonel J. D. Wilmeth, and he was to be accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel C. B. Kingsbury, a medical officer, and Corporal Paul Kisil, an excellent Russian interpreter. I had already sent them to Poltava on February 14, in order that they would be ready to proceed by air into Poland as soon as permission was granted. I was further cheered when Vishinsky assured Harriman that Wilmeth would be allowed to go anywhere in Poland where there were American prisoners of war provided the Polish Government approved and the places were not too close to the Russian front.

My delight did not last long. In the first place, Wilmeth was not allowed to leave Poltava, until February 28. This was maddening because the situation was one that called for immediate action. When he finally obtained permission to go, he was not allowed to use an American airplane to make the trip. This was also disappointing, as I had planned not only to have an American plane take his party to Lublin but to have it remain there for him to use in going to other parts of Poland where he or one of his assistants might be needed, and also to obtain supplies of the necessities we proposed to distribute to our men.

When Wilmeth and his party arrived in Lublin, he was promptly informed that he would be allowed to remain only ten days. This, despite the fact that there were then about one hundred Americans in Lublin who were awaiting train transportation to Odessa. Further, he was not allowed to leave the city because of Soviet rather than Polish restrictions. His operations within Lublin were also restricted. Initially he was refused access to the American ex-prisoners of war then in the city. Restrictions even ran to a point-blank refusal by the Russian commandant to allow Colonel Kingsbury, the American medical officer, to visit two seriously wounded Americans known to be within a few miles of Lublin. Permission was even refused for any messages or supplies to be sent to the two sick men.

Wilmeth was invited to leave Lublin and return to Moscow on six different occasions. I could get word from and to him occasionally through Polish channels, and I directed him to remain in Lublin as long as there were any Americans whom he could assist unless he was forcibly removed by the Russians. When the last Americans were entrained at Lublin for Odessa, the Russian

commander in Warsaw sent word to Wilmeth in writing that he should leave Lublin. Wilmeth's group was in Poland for about three weeks, and his was the only contact team that reached a point within five hundred miles of the localities at which American prisoners were liberated.

I took advantage of Golubev's offer and sent a contact team to Odessa. Major Paul S. Hall was in command, assisted by Major Earl D. Cramer, a medical officer, and Sergeant Emil W. Doktor, an interpreter. They arrived in Odessa on February 26, 1945, one day prior to the arrival of the first group of our liberated prisoners. They were the first Americans the ex-prisoners had seen and they were regarded as angels from heaven when they produced the supplies they had brought. Hall and his party remained in Odessa for about two months, and during that time, they sent three thousand Americans through the port. Our men were sent home on British transports, which had brought liberated Russians home from the western front. The British authorities, under the direction of Admiral Archer, did everything possible for the welfare of our men, even to granting them loans of one hundred dollars apiece on no more security than Hall's say-so.

The facilities provided by the Soviet Repatriation Commission at Odessa were as good as might have been expected. They were hastily improvised but improved steadily during the period in which our soldiers were passing through. Food was meager but it was well prepared, and the Soviet ration was amply supplemented by American food. Medical attention was almost nonexistent except for that provided by Major Cramer. Our men were confined to the buildings in which they were housed from the time of their arrival in Odessa until they were placed aboard ships for the trip home. Hall and Cramer were allowed to visit them at certain hours each day. The trains on which they arrived at Odessa were made up of boxcars without heat or sanitary arrangements. The conditions were bad and the journey difficult, but the transportation facilities were the same as those provided for soldiers of the Red Army. Those of our men who retained their health during their hitch-hiking journey across Poland and on the train trip from eastern Poland to Odessa had few complaints concerning their hardships. In fact, most of them emerged from the ordeal hard as nuts and in the pink of condition. However, each group that arrived in Odessa told Hall of sick and injured Americans scattered throughout Poland. These were the men about whom Harriman and I were most concerned.

Of course, the situation was extremely fluid. By the time a report was received in Odessa concerning American boys who were sick in Poland, several weeks had elapsed since they had been seen. Golubev continued to assure me that all our men were being evacuated, but I could not be sure that this was the case until the men who had been reported as being ill actually arrived in Odessa. I was eager to go to Poland and see the situation for myself. I asked Golubev for authority to make such a trip, offering to take one of his officers with me so that we could work out joint plans to overcome whatever situation we might find. He told me that I would have to obtain permission from the Foreign Office. Averell went to see Vishinsky, who said that I might go if I could obtain approval of the Polish Government. Considering the degree of independence exercised by the Polish Government, the condition imposed of requiring its approval of

my trip was ridiculous. Averell then radioed to President Roosevelt and asked him to send a message to Stalin requesting that I be given permission to visit Poland for the purpose of locating Americans who might be ill or hospitalized there.

The President sent a message to Stalin on March 18, 1945, in which he said he understood that I had not been allowed to survey the United States prisoner-of-war situation in Poland. The President referred to a previous request which he had made of Stalin, at Harriman's instigation, asking that American aircraft be allowed to fly supplies to Poland and evacuate the sick. He pointed out that Stalin had refused his previous request on the grounds that all of our ex-prisoners had already been sent to Odessa—a statement not borne out by subsequent events. The President told Stalin he could not understand his reluctance to permit American contact officers to assist their own people in Poland and asked that Stalin accede to his desire to have me go to Poland at once.

On March 23, Stalin replied to President Roosevelt stating that all Americans, except seventeen who were then ill, in Poland, had been sent to Odessa. The remaining seventeen were to be sent within a few days. As far as my visit was concerned, Stalin said that his personal inclination was to accede to the President's request but that he could not burden his front commanders by having superfluous foreign officers around them who would require special communication facilities and protection from German agents. Stalin concluded his message by saying that all Americans were being well cared for in Soviet camps, in contrast to former Soviet prisoners of war in American camps who were housed with German prisoners and had suffered unjust treatment.

Stalin's reply effectively killed any hope of satisfying my desire to get to Poland. The efforts of the President and Harriman were not entirely wasted, however, as they served to maintain a constant pressure on the Soviet authorities which resulted in their evacuating all our men to Odessa much more expeditiously than might otherwise have been the case.

When it appeared that all our men had finally been sent to Odessa, I had one of them, Captain Richard Rossback, come to Moscow to give Golubev a narrative account of what he, as a typical case, had gone through from the time of his liberation to the time of his arrival at Odessa. Rossback did not spare the horses and must have left Golubev wondering if his Repatriation Commission was actually as high-powered as he had previously considered it to be.

Article Three of our agreement stated that the United States and the Soviet Union would provide liberated citizens with adequate food, clothing, housing, and medical attention, and with transportation until they were handed over to United States or Soviet authorities at places agreed upon between those authorities. In this connection it has already been pointed out that our liberated men had to depend on the generosity of the Polish people for their food and on the generosity of individual Russian or Polish truck drivers for transportation during the four hundred to five hundred mile journey from their points of liberation to the places where the Soviet Government provided boxcars to carry them to their destination at Odessa.

Article Four provided that each of the contracting governments would be free to use such of its own means of

transportation as might be available for repatriating its own citizens and bringing supplies to them. In anticipation of the need, we had accumulated thousand tons of supplies in Russia to distribute to our men. But, in spite of the agreement, we were never allowed to use our own aircraft and I was unable to give our men American supplies until after they had arrived at Odessa.

The remaining five articles covered such matters as the advance of money loans to liberated citizens, the conditions under which they might be employed as laborers, arrangements for the most rapid means of evacuating them to their homelands, and a saving clause that the execution of the entire agreement would be subject to the limitations existing in each theater in the availability of supply and transport. None of these articles occasioned us any difficulty in their implementation.

During the entire course of the reciprocal repatriation program the Soviet authorities, including Stalin, Molotov, and others, poured forth a continuous stream of accusations regarding the treatment which Soviet citizens were receiving at the hands of the United States forces which had liberated them. In almost all cases, these accusations were proved false and were admitted to be unfounded by Soviet representatives at American field headquarters. On one occasion we were charged with attempting to poison Soviet nationals by giving them methyl alcohol in their food. Investigation revealed that there was a tank car containing methyl alcohol at one of our camps in France occupied by liberated Soviet citizens. The car was looted by the Russians, and many of them died from the alcohol they had stolen despite all our doctors could do to save them. We immediately placed guards over the tank car, posted signs of warning, and destroyed every bottle found in the camp containing methyl alcohol which had been taken from the car.

The Russians had none of the administrative problems which confronted General Eisenhower in the care of liberated nationals of Allied countries. Where the Russians liberated hundreds, we liberated thousands. General Eisenhower created a special section of his staff to handle the problem and their plans had been made well in advance.

He had over one hundred and fifty Russians at his headquarters who were given every facility to assist in caring for their own people.

No one has ever had more support from his own people in carrying out a mission than I had in endeavoring to obtain reasonably good treatment for the American prisoners of war liberated by the Red Army. On two occasions the President attempted to help through personal appeals to Stalin. Averell Harriman was relentless in his pressure on the Soviet Foreign Office. The Army Air Forces made eight four-engine transports available to me. The United States Navy sent a special shipload of supplies from Italy to Odessa to provide medicines, clothing, and food for our men. Extra supplies were received from the United States, England, and the Persian Gulf Command. Colonel Wilmeth's and Major Hall's parties accomplished the impossible in caring for those Americans who came under their control.

With a little co-operation from the Soviet authorities my problem would have been relatively simple.