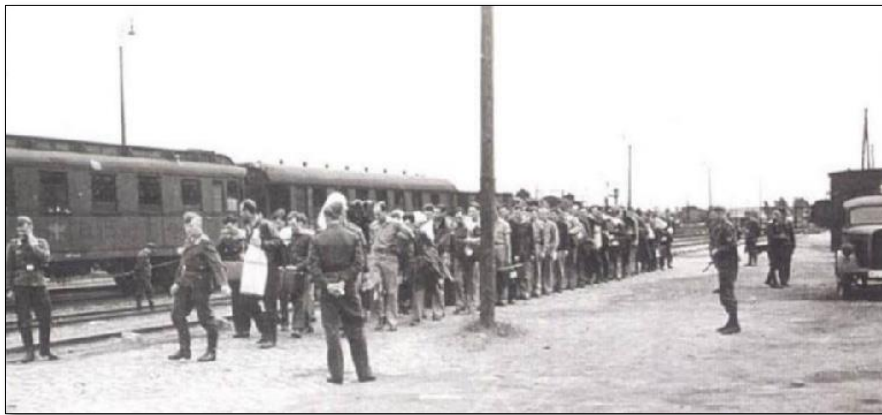
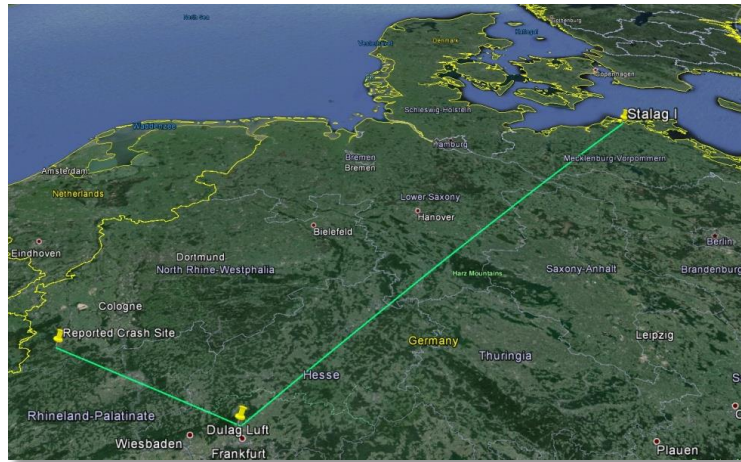


## The Road to Stalag Luft I – October 1944



Newly Arrived Prisoners Assembled at the Barth Rail Yard



Prisoners Marched Through Dammtor Gate, Barth to Stalag Luft I

## Stalag Luft I – Barth, Germany – September 10, 1944 to April 30, 1945

**Overview:** Allied aircrews shot down during World War II were incarcerated after interrogation in Air Force Prisoner of War camps run by the Luftwaffe. These camps were called Stalag Luft, short for Stammlager Luft which translates to Permanent Camps for Airmen. The German Luftwaffe, who were responsible for Air Force prisoners of war, maintained a degree of professional respect for fellow flyers, and the general attitude of the camp security officers and guards should not be confused with the SS or Gestapo.

Stalag Luft I was a German World War II prisoner-of-war camp near Barth, Western Pomerania, Germany, for captured Allied airmen, who referred to themselves as "Kriege's". The presence of the prison camp is said to have shielded the town of Barth from Allied bombing. Approximately 9,000 airmen (7,588 American and 1,351 British and Canadian) were imprisoned there when it was liberated on the night of 30 April 1945 by Russian troops.

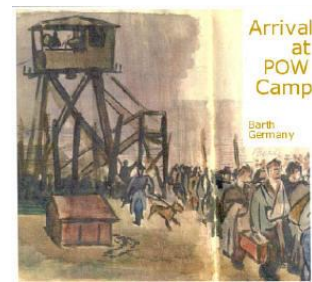
Stalag Luft I	
Barth, Western Pomerania	
	
Coordinates	 54.3736°N 12.7086°E
Type	Prisoner-of-war camp
Site information	
Controlled by	 Nazi Germany
Site history	
In use	1940-1945
Garrison information	
Garrison	900 officers and men
Occupants	RAF SAAF and USAAF POWs

The camp was opened in 1941 to hold British officers, but was closed in April 1942, when they were transferred to other camps. It was reopened in October 1942, when 200 RAF NCOs from Stalag Luft III, Sagan, Poland, were moved there following the infamous Great Escape. From 1943, American POWs were sent to the camp.

The German guards were called "Goon" by the POWs. It was a nickname which puzzled them. When asked, the POWs told them that it stood for "German Officer Or Non-com"), which they believed for a long time and accepted, even at times referring to themselves as Goons. (In fact the term "goon" was from a Disney character which is described as ridiculous looking with a prolific growth of hair on the legs. (Their language was unintelligible and they were not credited with having much intelligence.)



The tall sentry watch platforms with mounted searchlights and machine-guns were therefore called "Goon Towers". Annoying the guards was known as "Goon Baiting". When a guard was seen approaching an area the POWs would say "Goon Up" as a warning to their fellow POWs. The guards were known to shoot first and asked questions afterwards if any prisoner was rash enough to stray over the knee-high warning wire and then fail to surrender if challenged.





STALAG LUFT I med Barth Skt.Marien Kirke i baggrunden



The German guards specializing in escape detection were known as 'Ferrets' and would enter the compound at any time and search any hut without warning. Often in the middle of the night they would enter, order the POWs out, and they would literally throw everything into a pile on the floor after searching it, leaving the room a huge mess. English-speaking ferrets would lie under the barracks in the crawl space and listen for careless talk. As a rule the POWs were aware of this tactic and were careful not to discuss important information.



There is evidence to suggest that when a tunnel was detected by the guards or ferrets, it was allowed to continue without intervention until it appeared to be near completion at which time they would stop it and collapse it. It is felt they allowed the tunneling to continue to keep the POWs occupied and busy and therefore not working on another escape that they did not know about.

### **Camp Layout:**



Early in 1944 the camp consisted of 2 compounds designated as South & West compounds, containing a total of 7 barracks, in which American officers & British officers and enlisted men were housed. A new compound was opened the last of Feb. 1944 and was assigned to the American officers who were rapidly increasing in number. This compound became North 1. and the opening of North 2 compound on 9 Sept. 1944 and North 3 compound on 9 Dec. 1944 completed the camp as it remained until 15 May 1945. The South compound was

always unsatisfactory due to the complete lack of adequate cooking, washing, and toilet facilities. The West compound, however provided inside latrines and running water in the barracks. North 1 compound formerly housed personnel of the Hitler Youth, and because of its communal messhall, inside latrines and running water taps, it was considered by far the best compound. North 2 and North 3 compounds were constructed on the same design as the South compound, and were as unsatisfactory.

The completion of the last 2 compounds gave the camp an L-shape appearance which followed the natural contours of the bay on which the camp was situated. Guard towers were placed at strategic intervals, and although the compounds were intercommunicating, the gates were closed at all times after the spring of 1944. Prior to that, gates were kept open during the day.

Each barracks contained triple-tiered wooden beds equipped with mattresses filled with wood chips. A communal day room was set aside in almost every barracks, but equipment was negligible. Lighting was inadequate throughout the camp, and since the Detaining Power required the shutters to remain closed from 2100 to 0600, ventilation was entirely insufficient.

In addition to the buildings for housing, North 1 & West compounds contained: 1 kitchen barrack, 1 theater room, 1 church room, 1 library and 1 study room each. These were used by all compounds because no other facilities were available. Maintenance of the buildings was completely lacking, in spite of the fact that the officers volunteered to take care of many of the repairs if furnished the necessary equipment.

Stoves for heating and cooking varied in each compound, except that facilities in all compounds were inadequate. Many of the buildings were not weather proof, and the extremely cold climate of northern Germany made living conditions more difficult for the PW.

**FOOD:** Food was handled through a central warehouse for Red Cross parcels with all German food being prepared in separate kitchens in each compound. The German food was prepared by personnel hired by the German authorities or by Czechs who had been captured while serving with the Allied forces. Red Cross parcels, when available, were issued at the rate of one per person per week. The distribution of this food was made by the barracks blocks, each barrack receiving one-third of its total weekly parcels 3 days a week.

Food, with the exception of the German ration, was prepared by individuals in their own rooms. Only North 1 Compound used their communal kitchen to combine the German rations and the Red Cross parcel items to supply complete meals.

The German food ration, up until 1 Oct. 1944, consisted of 1200 to 1800 calories per man. The ration was gradually cut until it contained only 800 calories. In Sept, Oct., and Nov. 1944, Red Cross supplies became so low, that they too, had to be cut. During this period, men were put on half-parcels each week. A shipment was received in Nov. and PWs then drew the normal parcel each week during Dec. (in addition to a Christmas parcel). In Jan. the parcel supply again took a drop, and the men received 1/2 parcel week. From 3 March 1945, until the last of the



Twenty-two Men Slept Here

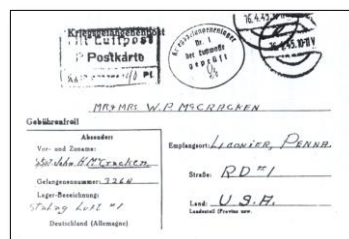




month, no parcels were distributed, and German rations deteriorated to an extent that toward the end of the month, men became so weak that many would fall down while attempting to get from their beds. American "MPs" were placed around garbage cans to prevent the starving PW from eating out of the cans and becoming sick. About 1 April 1945, a shipment was received from Lubeck via Swede. From that time until the evacuation, the men obtained sufficient food.

Until this "starvation" period, the normal daily menu would consist of about 6 potatoes, one-fifth of a loaf of bread, margarine, marmalade, a small piece of meat (usually horsemeat), 2 vegetables (cabbage, parsnips, beets or turnips) tea & coffee, and an amount of sugar. In addition, a thin barley soup was frequently served.

**MAIL:** All incoming mail at Stalag Luft I was censored at Stalag Luft III until Jan. 1945. Some pieces of mail received at the camp had been in transit 6 & 7 months, and normally men would be in the camp 7 months before receiving their first news from home. The average time in transit from the United States was 19 weeks. Toward the end of the war, the transit time was longer due to the transportation tie-up.



Great difficulty was experienced in getting letter and card forms in sufficient quantities to have the normal ration issued each month. On several occasions none were available even though the commandant was informed that stocks were low and that additional supplies should be requisitioned.

Officers were permitted to send 3 letters and 4 postcards per month, while the enlisted men were allowed to send 2 letters and 4 postcards per month.

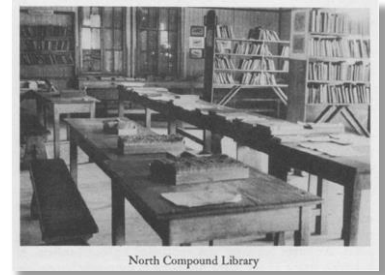
**RECREATION:** Outdoor recreation was hampered through lack of sufficient sports grounds. Only West & North 1 Compounds were there full-sized football & baseball fields, and although teams from other compounds were permitted to use this field for competitive sports, spectators were excluded. Excellent sports equipment was available throughout the camp, however, and the men in the other compounds managed to improvise games suitable to the limited space.



The 2 bands formed at the camp offered extremely good entertainment and provided music for theatrical productions which were frequently given. A radio was received through the YMCA, but the extra loudspeakers were not permitted in barracks by the Detaining Power.

An educational program was started early in 1944. When the camp became overcrowded, and communal rooms had to be sacrificed for living quarters, group study was no longer possible. Technical books of all kinds were available in the well stocked 'libraries for individual study.

Many of the men with artistic talent spent their time in creative work, such as woodcarving, painting, drawing, and constructing models. The Recreation Officer collected all of these items for a post-war exhibit since an unusual amount of talent was apparent in the results.



North Compound Library

**German Personnel:** The German personnel changed frequently during the existence of the camp. The officers, their positions, and the dates that they served during the imprisonment of Captain James W. Harrison are listed below:

- *Commandant Oberst (Colonel) Scherer* – October 1942 to January 1945:

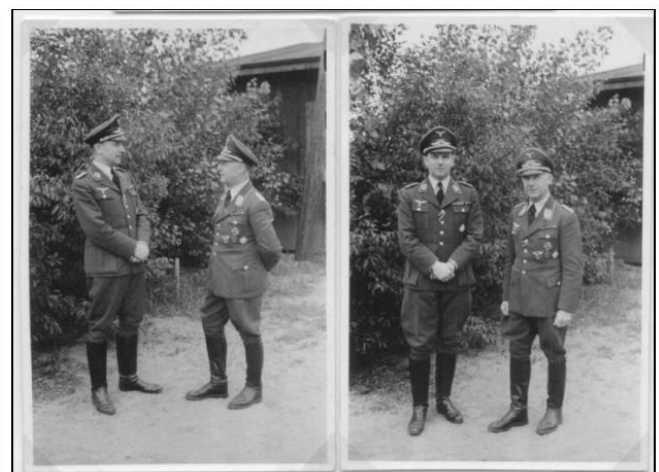
The Commandant was rarely seen. Prisoners contact with him was most frequently through orders signed with his name which were issued from time to time, threatening to "shoot to kill any prisoner found doing something or other." On one notable occasion to the contrary he gave the order that men in the cooler (solitary confinement) could have three cigarettes a day – generosity that would cost him his job and almost his life in the late stages of the war.



He was a man of medium height, florid complexion, grey hair, in all a fairly neat looking officer. With the German High Command on one side and Allied Senior Officers threatening him with trial for war crimes after the war he was in a very precarious position. [From Charles Early's Wartime Log] Scherer was actually a very cultured man, a competent musician, and the best type of officer. He was eventually removed from Stalag Luft I and sent to Berlin to face charges of undue leniency toward the POWs. Luckily the end of the war saved him from any punishment.



Stalag Luft I - Barth, Germany - August 1943 - The Protecting Powers visit.  
L to R - Hauptmann v. Miller, Secretary Burchard, Attaché Auckenthaler (both from Switzerland), Oberst Willibald Scherer, Dr. Thams and Hauptmann Eilers.



Oberst Scherer (on right), together with the Director of the Ministry, Dr. Bottiger of the German Air Force  
The above photos are from the personal collection of Stephan Scherer - son of Oberst Scherer.



Stalag Luft I administration and intelligence officers group photo in front of barracks

Identified as follows:

- 1 - Oberst Scherer - Camp Commandant until January 1945
- 2 - Major Von Miller - Head of Intelligence in the Camp
- 3 - Edith Hückstedt - Secretary in the camp - lives near Barth today
- 4 - Heinrich Haslob - "Henry the butcher"
- 5 - Kröber
- 6 - Dobbert
- 7 - Jäckel
- 8 - Rattmann
- 9 - Nimkow

- *Commandant Oberst von Warnstedt* – January to April 1945:



Watching a camp sporting event. Ross sits in the front row next to four German officers. Camp commandant von Warnstedt is the second man from the right side of the photo.



Commandant Warnstedt and his administrative staff

- *Adjutant Major Buchard* – June 1944 to April 1945
- *Lager Officer – West – Hauptmann von Beck* – June to October 1944:

From the memoirs of Charles Early and John Vietor -- Perhaps the best known of the German officers was Hauptmann von Beck - Managetta, the senior Lager officer. He was an Austrian nobleman and between wars he had owned large baronial estates throughout Austria. He was fond of skiing; he hunted big game and was a crack shot hunting in Scotland in happier days. His family was impoverished after the World War I, losing the ancestral castle and much of their wealth. Before the war he visited America and England and had spent his summers in the south of France.

He was a flyer in the WWI and at sixteen had been the youngest Austrian pilot in war. He had a psychopathic fear and hatred of the Russians and imperfectly concealed the friendliness he felt towards the British and Americans. Although he was cautious in mentioning it, he had little empathy with the Nazis. Had he joined the Party, he would have been a Colonel or possibly a General in the Luftwaffe. Instead, because of his lukewarm support of the Nazis, he was relegated to the thankless task of supervising prisoners of war.

He was every inch an officer and a gentleman, and regardless of whether the prisoners liked him or not, they respected him. During the early part of the war he was a flak officer on the eastern front. He spoke tolerable English, which was expected to be better, as he was reported to be quite a linguist. He was always dressed immaculately in a beautifully cut uniform and highly polished black boots. In spite of the fact that he was only forty-five, he appeared old, frail and graying - a little forlorn and lost in the frantic fervor of Hitler's Germany.

Von Beck had undoubtedly been instrumental in making conditions in the camp somewhat more comfortable and had come as near to capturing the affection of the camp as any German could. Von Beck made frequent social visits with the prisoners in the evenings requesting the shutters be closed so the guards would not see him.

One evening after roll call, they heard his knock on the door of Room 2. He took a fancy to the occupants of Room 2 and often visited them in the evenings, bringing a loaf of crisp, white French bread - a sheer luxury to Kriegies who were used to the harsh and unappetizing black German bread. It was obvious that he preferred the company of Room 2 to that of his mess, where, as he told them, he was unpopular, being not only an Austrian, but also not in the supposedly invincible Luftwaffe.

After his customary cup of coffee and American cigarette, he rose from the table and went over to check if the shutters were firmly shut. To their astonished eyes, he then stood in the corner of the room, carefully lowered his breeches and solemnly pulled out a long eared rabbit. He made a courtly bow as he presented it. He told the men to be extremely careful in cooking it and to be sure to dispose of the bones to protect both himself as well as the prisoners. He then left the room in his usual manner. Ultimately the Germans caught up with von Beck. In the winter of '45 he disappeared from camp and we later heard from the guards that he had been shot for excessive fraternization with Allied officers. It was a humiliating end for a proud and gallant gentleman.

- *Hauptmann Luckt* – October 1944 to January 1945
- *Major Opperman* – January to April 1945

Lager Officers of the North 2 Compound

- *Major Sprotte* – September to October 1944

- *Major Steinhower* – October to December 1944:

From the memoirs of Ross Greening and Hubert Zemke -- Major Steinhower was Commandant of North 1&2 Compounds - a fine man. He possessed a rational approach to life, was well educated and not obsessed with the fanaticism of Nazi superiority but he had to be careful about this because it was dangerous for a German to appear to be opposed to it. He had been a professor in mathematics and history at a boys' school in Wuppertal, Germany prior to being drafted into Luftwaffe uniform. Well along in years, this mild mannered ex-teacher would have much preferred to be back in his seminary writing European history rather than involved in the thankless task of trying to resolve the endless problems and complaints of a POW compound. He was fluent in English, and of reasonably open mind, he could be talked to and reasoned with. That said, Steinhower was anything but a dumb stooge; he well knew his paychecks came from the Third Reich. On the other hand I doubt if he condoned negative attitudes and deprivations as dealt out by those with the real power in Stalag Luft I administration. Much credit could be given to his efforts in assisting the establishment of theatrical plays, POW band performances, a library, educational courses and sundry projects.

He had a wife and a son whom he seemed to have on his mind all of the time. His face and head were covered with old dueling scars inflicted during his school days when such marks were considered to be in good taste. He is remembered as having tried to help the POWs out as best he could.

- *Hauptmann Bloom (Blohm)* – December 1944 to April 1945

### James W. Harrison's Quarters

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. James W. Harrison, Jr., was billeted with airmen from all over the United States. All officers, they were pilots, co-pilots, bombardiers, navigators and engineers, each with their own stories to tell.

Timothy H. Bradshaw	Oklahoma City, OK
Charles L. Dolby	Bridgeport, PA
Kenneth E. Frazee	Winston, CT
Proctor H. Grigg	Narberth, PA
James W. Harrison	Norwood, OH
Gordon E. Ingersoll	St. Louis Park, MN
Lee R. James	Gulfport, Mississippi
Robert A. Lang "Bob"	Joliet, IL
James P. Lilligren	St. Louis Park, MN
William P. Long	Oakland, CA
Howard E. Lowe	Indianola, IA
Charles F. Olson	Grand Rapids, Michigan
Ralph J. Reggio	Mountain, WS
John R. Sacks	Kansas City, Kansas
John M. Shelly	Trenton, NJ
Thomas J. Steed	Chicago, IL
Wray M. Stitch	Plainview, MN
Ben E. Upshaw	Atlanta, GA
Arthur M. Upshaw	High Point, NC

They were assigned to the newly constructed North 2 Compound, Barracks 209, Room # 4 – twenty-one men crammed into 384 square feet of space (3'X6' per man)!

## ON THE CONTINENT Stalag Luft 1

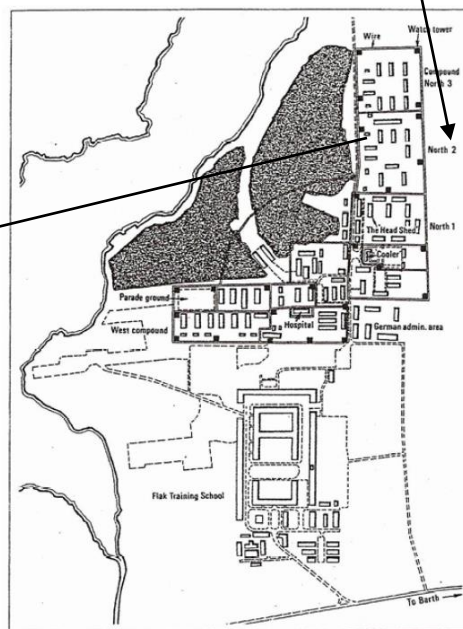
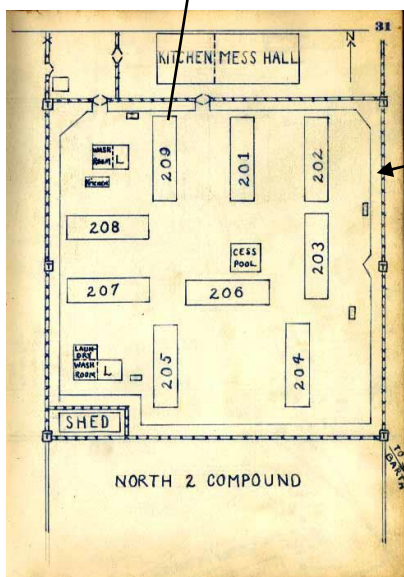
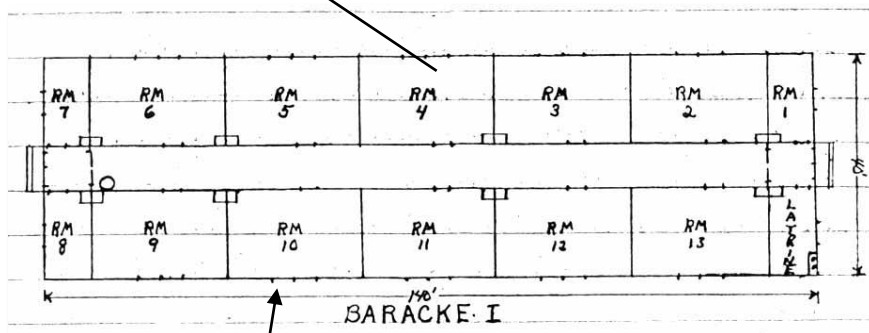
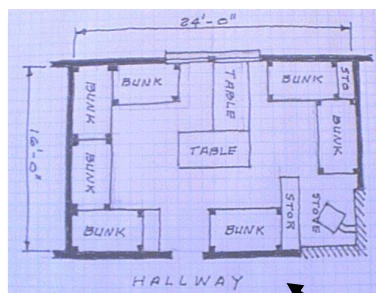
► Colour photography may have been comparatively rare during the Second World War but this and the following four colour pictures, taken at a prisoner of war camp in Germany, must be unique. On 11 December 1943 2/Lt Linn Stuckenberg parachuted from a stricken 385th Bomb Group Fortress over Holland. He had his camera loaded and a 35mm Kodachrome film in his pocket. When he was captured the camera was taken and followed him to the Oberursel interrogation centre and then to Stalag Luft I, where it was kept in the Luftwaffe administration offices. The Germans could see that none of the film had been exposed and it was apparently of little interest to them, although someone had unsuccessfully tried to prise the camera open, letting in a little light which was to affect the colour process. When the



Luftwaffe handed over the camp to the Allied prisoners on 1 May 1945, Stuckenberg found and retrieved his camera, and some of the pictures taken during the first few days of liberty at Stalag Luft I are shown here.

This view shows barracks huts in North 2 compound, looking north-west from a guard tower. The buildings were raised above ground level to enable guard dogs to search beneath for escape tunnels. Excavations

beside the huts are trenches dug as air raid precautions at the end of the war in case the camp was mistakenly attacked by Allied aircraft after the Germans departed. (Linn C. Stuckenberg)



Amerikanischer Plan des Areals des Lagers Stalag Luft I und der Flak Schule in Barth, 1945. Alle Abbildungen: Förderverein Dokumentations- und Begegnungställe Barth e. V.

The officer airmen who were POWs in the German camps arrived there through an accident of war. They varied widely in age, military rank, education, and family background, but had several common experiences:

- They all volunteered to go to war as airmen.
- They all managed successfully to complete flying training.
- They all entered into combat flying in airplanes.
- They all were survivors of a traumatic catastrophe in the air.

This unique selection process seemed to give these men some common characteristics. They had an uncommon love of country and a loyalty to each other. They were very resourceful and applied great skill to improve their living conditions and to conduct escape and other clandestine activities. They indeed became a band of brothers.

In retrospect, most later acknowledged that their experience as prisoners was not simply an unpleasant waste of time but that they came out of it with, among other things, a clearer sense of values, a strengthened love of country, improved leadership skills, and an improved ability to live in harmony with others under difficult circumstances.

Germany was a signatory of the Geneva Convention of 1929, which prescribed humane treatment for prisoners of war (POWs). However, there were many failures to abide by the convention's provisions and marked differences in treatment of POWs and in living conditions at German World War II camps. Officers in at least one camp controlled by German air force personnel at times found camaraderie existed among flyers of the warring nations. They received reasonably humane treatment, including distribution of recreational equipment, some medical and dental care, and delivery of mail and Red Cross food parcels. But conditions in some other officer camps fell below this level. Enlisted AAF POWs often faced the harshest conditions, such as shortages of food and water, no medical care, no mail or clothing distribution, and brutal treatment by guards. By late 1944, as the war progressed and conditions in Germany deteriorated, the plight of all POWs had worsened, sometimes almost to starvation. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. James W. Harrison, Jr. arrived as things began to collapse. Life would be terrible but fortunately at war's end, most of these AAF POWs returned home, often bitter, but safe at last.

### **Desperation – Spring of 1945**

By early February it was known that the Russians were closing in on the eastern German front. Although it was good news for the Allies it was confusing and brought much tension to the folks back home. The pressure was on and by February 15, 1945, it was clear that the Germans were taking action to prevent liberation of the remaining POWs, especially the American and British flyers in the camps to the east. It was Hitler's intent to march them all to camps near his Bavarian headquarters in southern Germany to be used as a bargaining chip as Germany capitulated. If that were to fail he would have them all exterminated as a last act of defiance.

While the rumors of the advancing Russian Army were rampant at Stalag Luft I, many of the POWs in the eastern camps were already in motion. The evacuations of these POW camps have many names and are recollected in numerous stories. One thing was certain, however, every eastern prison camp had its march. They are called "The Great March West", "The Long March", "The Long Walk", "The Long Trek", "The Black March", "The Bread March", "The Death March", but most survivors just called it "The March".

Some were only a few days long, some covered 500 miles lasted for months. Some took place during one of the worst blizzards in history. For the POWs some ended as the evacuees and their guards were overtaken by Soviet units coming from the east, others ended in another prison camp and some ended in liberation. Each prisoner remembers his march differently, very differently!! Individuals often cannot even agree on the route, let alone the temperature, the weather, the behavior of the German guards, the German civilians, or one's fellow Kriegies. Although the specifics in these memoirs vary there is a common theme – uncertainty, brutality and, for some, death.



At Stalag Luft I there had been news for over a week that the Russians were close. There had been speculation that the Germans might force march the camp to another location (as they had done at Stalag Luft III) or make a stand and fight the Russians where they were. In anticipation of the Russian Army arrival the Germans had given the POW's permission to dig foxholes. It was said that it looked like the "gold rush of '49 was back on."

On April 30, 1945, the Senior American Officer (SAO) had several conferences with Kommandant von Warnstadt, who had received orders to move Stalag Luft I to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Russians. The Germans had been packing their things all the previous day. The SAO stated that POWs would not move unless force was used, and the Kommandant finally agreed to avoid bloodshed. The rest of the day was spent watching the "Goons" pack. About 2200, after listening to the sounds of the Germans leaving and watching the lights turn off, the American senior officers took over the camp. They took five Germans who chose to stay and surrender to the Americans as prisoners.

The Germans had been blowing up military installations all day prior to their departure. The prisoners discovered there were thousands of Red Cross parcels in a nearby hangar that had been kept from the POWs by the Germans. POWs remember unloading parcels at one end of the hangar while civilian refugees were grabbing all they could from the other end. Before trouble could develop, some of the Germans who had chosen to stay behind chased the civilians away.

They now had plenty of food. The Germans had left a radio and there was news of other camps being overrun by the Allies. Everyone was ordered to remain in the compound, and MPs were stationed in the watchtowers.