



SURVIVOR



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Navy Lt. Ronald Dodge shown as a captive, but Hanoi denies any knowledge of him

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THIS ISSUE:

Comments & Contributions	Page 2
Survivor's Quote	Page 2
Telling Stories In the Fire Circle	Page 3
Recommended Reading	Page 7
Spotlight on a Survivor	Page 12
Wallet Edition SERE	Page 14

Cover Photo from Life Magazine - Lieutenant Ronald W. Dodge was the Navy pilot of an F8E assigned a combat mission over North Vietnam on May 17, 1967 when his aircraft was shot down. Safely on the ground, Dodge talked with his wingman on the radio and waved him off. He made three radio transmissions, one of them reporting being surrounded by North Vietnamese forces and saying, "I'm breaking up my radio."

Dodge's wife was tortured by photos which appeared on the cover of the September 9, 1967, Paris Match, and in a propaganda film made by East Germany called, "Pilots in Pajamas." In the Paris Match photo, Dodge's head was bandaged, but in the German film, he was walking on his own power between guards.

When 591 American prisoners were released in 1973, Ron Dodge was not among them. The Vietnamese denied any knowledge of him, in spite of the widely-published photographs of Ron Dodge in captivity. Then, in 1981, the Vietnamese "discovered" and returned the remains of Ron Dodge to U.S. control.

It is the general feeling among the returned POWs that Ron Dodge was tortured to the point of death.



Survivor's Quote:

"Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing."

Helen Keller

American author, political activist, and lecturer.

COMMENTS:

If there is a topic you would like to discuss or create a forum on, please email it in.

Looking for contributions to SURVIVOR Magazine! Send your SERE related article and/or pictures to the SURVIVOR Magazine in care of KasmennB@yahoo.com

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Telling Stories In the Fire Circle

By SURVIVOR Staff

It was late 80s, I am assigned to my first base level on a Temporary Duty and I met up with a classmate of mine, Brian Drewel. Brian was the first other Survival Instructor I had met who was at a base level. He and I started discussing aspects of our assignments and he told me about an experience he had during an operational readiness event at his base. Fast forward to 2007, I am working as the HQ ACC SERE Specialist for the Inspector General and I am talking and showing the assigned SERE Specialist at the base we are inspecting this aspect of readiness when it hits me where I learned this from...Brian Drewel. His story had been added to my own experiences providing me with examples to teach and instruct by.

Mankind has taught and learned by stories since before there was written word. SERE personnel tend to be some of the greatest story tellers, recounting tales of exploits and incidents (both in glory and self-deprecating), but using a story is not always included in the aspect of teaching. In the realm of instruction, stories are case studies (or case studies are stories). Stories/case studies present realistic situations involving problems or conflicts that must be met and overcome. The addition of a good story/case study can make what you are training much more realistic and relevant to your adult learner. A story can focus your students, allow them to deal with aspects of solving real life isolating situations. Depending on how you use the story it can help them to solve it for themselves or provide them examples of what was done in the past so they can modify and learn from others actions. Case studies have been used most extensively in the teaching of medicine, law and business, but can be an effective teaching tool in any number of disciplines to include SERE. A story/case study can transport your student - operators from an academic theory in a classroom to the practical application of saving their lives. In our own lives, how many times have we learned something from listening to stories and experiences around the fire circle? How

many times do we "pick the brain" of someone who has been there and done that?

Historically a great deal of the instruction related to SERE involves passing on, building, and adapting off what has been done in the past; using others experiences to derive game plans, tactics, techniques, and procedures for extreme situations. While I am sure there are

examples of this earlier, it became a very common practice for the militaries involved during World War II to use it as part of their escape and evasion (E&E)

training. MI-9 used World War I E&E accounts to form the bases of their E&E instructional programs and the development of their E&E equipment. MI-9 used successful evaders, initially from WWI, then those who had made it back from hostilities in Europe as

instructors in their training program, going from unit to unit to pass on advise and relate their stories. This practice and information was passed to the United States of America when we entered in the war. Kind of a side aspect of using stories and case studies to teach E&E, if found in many of the books written by evaders and escapers after WWII. These individuals talked about the books

written by WWI escapers that they had read as boys which inspired and helped them in their own escapes. After World War II it seems this practice was adopted by multiple countries and expanded to being included into most aspects of SERE, contingency, and emergency preparation world-wide. Within the United States of America, lessons learned for SERE have been incorporated from every isolating event, conflict, and opportunity when possible.

With this strong background of using real experiences to gain information to teach SERE, it is not surprising that telling and using the story of events has become a consistent standard in current SERE training. Having talked with SERE and PR personnel from more than 25 countries this use of other's real world experiences to build what is taught today seems to be in use across the globe.

Whether used as an example for a specific aspect of SERE or used to develop group interaction and discussion, storytelling and case studies can be used in



some way to support any kind of SERE training.

Storytelling and case studies can:

- Create interest.
- Provide a structure to support remembering.
- Provide motivation and relevance to the learning.
- Link theory to practice/experience.
- Stimulate critical thinking skills and create new knowledge.
- Capture complexities of situations.
- Reveal multiple perspectives; evaluating courses of action.
- Act as an example and encourage self review.

Determine how you want to use a story/case study such as is it the focus of a group discussion or just an example to highlight a specific point. Then apply these basic rules to your use of storytelling and case studies:

1. Make sure your example is essential, avoid the ramble and digression (always my issue). Make sure that each part of the account is essential to your objectives. Each character, point, or principle must somehow relate to the you are trying to drive home. If it doesn't support the main point or objective, get rid of it. Anything that does not affect the learning outcome in some way (directly or indirectly) can be hacked off the story. Keep in mind in many cases your story can be used to support multiple objectives. For example, back at my first base level I provided my students with the basics to the account of Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571 the first day of a 3 day field event. It's the account of a chartered flight carrying 45 people that crashed in the Andes on 13 October 1972. At the time I had read three books on the event, I used it as examples of decision to travel, sheltercraft, signaling, situational awareness, water procurement, and improvising, but there were countless more examples for survival objectives.

2. Attention Step your case study/story. With any lesson you must gain the student's attention, a case study/story needs the same thing. You may think it's a great story/account, but will your students? It must be relevant and interesting to the learner to support their remembering. In many cases instructors will use the account as an attention step to training which allows you to use it throughout the lesson.

3. Keep It Simple. Complicated stories aren't necessarily better. If you need a wiring diagram or

an outline of the cast of characters involved it may not be the account you want to use or at least the way you want to use it. The impact of a complex idea reduced to the core that can be remembered by your audience can have a fantastic impact.

4. Know your facts. Make sure you know the event. Do your research! Avoid stories that you aren't sure are real. Avoid making up events. The one that I have encountered repeatedly when a student, even today, is when an instructor obviously

is basing the account they are relating on something they heard from another instructor, saw on television, or "read part of an internet article" to get it. Now I am not saying you can't create your own case study. I have seen and used a specific set of parameters created to an environment for a specific guided discussion/problem solving objective; such as giving my students a specific isolating event (environmental w/medical, evasion, or captivity) depending on their missions (realistic and relevant) with details on the equipment available and seeing what they come up with in meeting their needs.

Depending on what you are training, the time allotted, and how you are building on your objectives/goals will determine the length, detail, and how your story/case study is presented and used. A story/case study can:

1. Be told or written out.
2. Require students to examine multiple aspects of SERE, or just a specific part.
3. Provide all the relevant data needed to discuss/resolve the central issue. Or provide some relevant data, requiring the identification of what information is missing or aspects not identified.
4. Require a proposed solution or simply to identify the needs presented by the problem.

A few more points if you are using your case study/story for anything more than just an example i.e. more of a guided discussion:

5. Ensure you give your students the time to think (and possibly read) about the case. Provide some guidelines for how to approach it.
6. Clarify how you want your learners/operators to think about the case (e.g., "Approach this case as if you were a captive in that environment." or "You are a consultant hired by this company. What would you recommend?")
7. If you want the students to disregard or focus on certain information, specify that as well (e.g., "I



want you to put this experience in the context of the equipment and training you have and not what the original IPs had.").

8. Break down the steps you want students to take in analyzing the case. Or evaluate the decisions each character made and their implications.
9. A large class may need to be broken down into groups, ensure you are monitoring them to ensure they stay on track and everyone is involved - giving individuals more opportunities for participation and interaction. The only issue I have with this is having been in training where the same case study was used for five small groups and all it ended up being was a repeat of the same information by each group. Every time this was done, by the fifth group (which I happened to be in) I wanted to saw my ears off. In that case, you may need to develop different objectives for different groups.
10. Have solutions/reasoning presented. Ensure the groups know they are responsible for producing something (a decision, rationale, analysis) to present to the class, they will approach the discussion with greater focus and seriousness. Writing conclusions on the board can be helpful, so you can return to them in any follow on discussion.
11. Ask questions for clarification and to move discussion to another level. Be ready to pursue deeper analysis without over-directing or to explain other options, what could have been done differently and why and the effects of their decisions on those options. As the discussion unfolds, ask questions that call for the learners to examine their own assumptions, substantiate their claims, provide illustrations, etc.
12. Be sure to bring the various strands of the discussion back together at the end, so that students see what they have learned and take those lessons with them. Provide an overview (the instructor or a student). Scientific principles like gravity and electricity can be difficult for young minds. Using analogies can help. For example, to explain an electrical circuit, describe how a train can only move along tracks that are connected to each other.

You are probably thinking, "*Ok, Kasmenn, I am not a book-junkie like you! What is the easiest way to find stories/case studies?*" Finding events to use is not as

hard as you may think, nor do you have to be a book addict like myself. Some options are:

- Straight from the source, use accounts and events from the IP. Keep an eye out individuals who have been in isolating events and are guest speakers. In the past three years, I have sat in on four events not related to anything officially SERE/PR where the guest speaker was an IP.
- Search newspaper and magazines for accounts. This can be done online as well.
- Look for websites related to historic IP isolated events. There are several very good sites related to POWs, captivity, and evasion.
- Go to the library. If you are not someone who wants to spend a lot of money on books, visit your library and look for these accounts. There are several sites that provide free PDFs and other formats such as the Internet Archive at <https://archive.org/>. Plus if you own an e-reader many of their sites have free downloadable books.
- If you are going to choose a book, and again you are not someone who enjoys reading, pick a book which covers basic synopses of multiple accounts. Usually they are related to a specific topic, just a few examples are Prisoner's Duty by Robert Doyle, Survivor by Michael Greenwald, and Escape & Evasion by Ian Dear.
- Once you have a good story to use, I recommend writing down the critical aspects and source, keeping it handy. Even when I was much younger and much less mentally divergent it wasn't always easy to remember every detail or point of a story, but by having it written down it was always handy if I needed it such as after a long trip or leave when I had not been teaching.



SERE training focuses on hands-on to increase the memory of the experience, but as we know that is not always practical or even possible. By sharing how IPs have survived in real isolating events or "putting" your operators into a case study's isolated event we can provide a relevant structure for them to learn and return with honor. Stories allow our students to use other's experiences as well as gaining their own.

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Recommended Reading

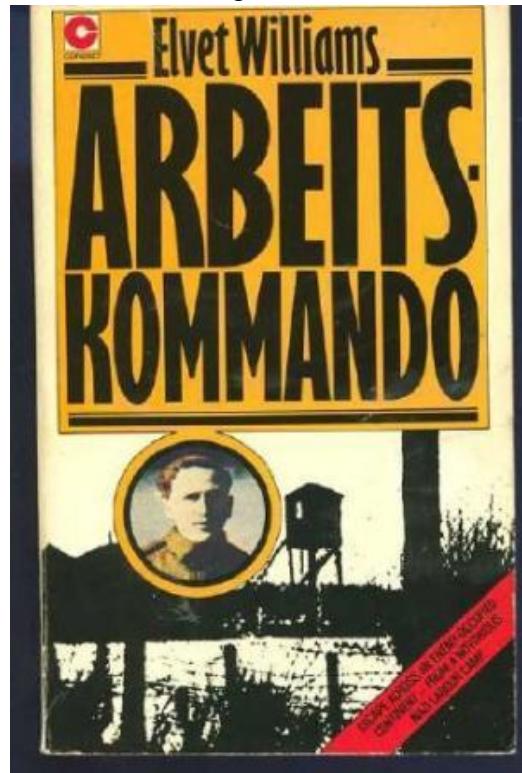
AUTHOR: Elvet Williams

TITLE: ARBEITSKOMMANDO

CONFLICT/CAPTIVITY: World War II/ POW of the Nazis/Work camps

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF BOOK: Private Elvet Williams of the Welsh Regiment was captured in Crete in 1941. He was destined for imprisonment in the arbeitskommados- work camps- of Europe. Isolated in hostile country, these camps worked their ‘other ranks prisoners’ long and exhausting hours at forced hard labor; the whole Stalag system was based on it. There was no energy left for forming ‘Escape Committees’, manufacturing disguises, false papers or money. Escaping involved not only breaking out of the camp, but also surviving the difficult run for home across an

enemy-occupied continent. This is the story of how an ordinary man could still fight and overcome impossible odds to be free. Where enforced idleness dictated the pattern of life and escape for officers, (producing tunnels between tea



breaks to ward off boredom) forced labor imposed a different, more strenuous, and routine on ‘other ranks’. They soon found that they were not to be allowed to choose their bunks, lie on them and plot. Instead they were divided and dispatched to Working Camps, often in very small groups; slave laborers hired out to civilian contractors. With hardly an unsupervised minute to call their own, they were left to sort things out for themselves bereft of officers when they most needed

them, and subject to both military guards and civilian bosses. Escape from such a life meant release from *bondage* rather than from captivity.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE BOOK?

The author maintains that for the vast majority of PWs held by the Nazis, the conditions of captivity were not those of the Oflag or Stalag with which we have all been made familiar, but of the Arbeitskommando. As regards escape, Williams says that the greatest problem, and the real object, was not to get out of a camp but out of an enemy-occupied continent. The most brilliantly conceived breakout, he goes on to say, was only the first, albeit vital, step in the long exhausting run for home, and the only one to be undertaken against *known, calculable* odds. Page 223: “We now realized that getting out of captivity was something akin to going into it, a matter of endurance rather than heroics, and knew the wisdom of avoiding the needless discomforts inflicted by our enemy’s most powerful allies, the rain and the cold.”

NOTABLE QUOTES:

IMPROVISED SOCKS: p. 36- “The Fusslappen (footrags) were simply squares of limp cloth, like large, unhemmed handkerchiefs: one placed the foot on one diagonally, turned the side-corners up over the instep and the front corner up over the lot, then slid the foot into the boot, leaving the spare material from the corners to dangle outside. Maximum discomfort and inelegance were achieved by combining clogs with footrags.”

CAPTOR THREATS: Page 56 details “the rules of the camp”, one of which was that if you were caught attempting to escape, you would be shot. This lead to the following thought: “The subject of escape....had rarely been seriously discussed, and on the very few occasions when the topic had arisen talk had been restricted to the principles rather than the practice, to the duty of each man to attempt escape if he saw a chance, and to the possible consequences of the almost inevitable recapture. Common sense and the only experience would decide what would actually happen and, Convention (meaning the GCs) might lay down certain rules for both sides, but even then, one or two cases could hardly be taken as a blueprint for all, since our captors would remain the final, and only, arbiters. Presently men would try, driven by boredom, desperation, sense of duty, frustration or simply desire for adventure. Then we would all know. (Page 57).

MENTAL BENEFITS OF WORK: p. 62- "Had it been possible- but it never was- to overlook the fact that the work was at the behest of the detested enemy, the work itself would not have been the worst means of getting through the monotony of captivity. It began to toughen men up again... The most salutary effect was on the brooders. They couldn't remain completely unresponsive to work: it got them off their bunks...and thrust them...into company not of their own choosing; it

loosened their muscles, and tongues; and, in spite of themselves, it forced them to swear, sometimes, even, to laugh."

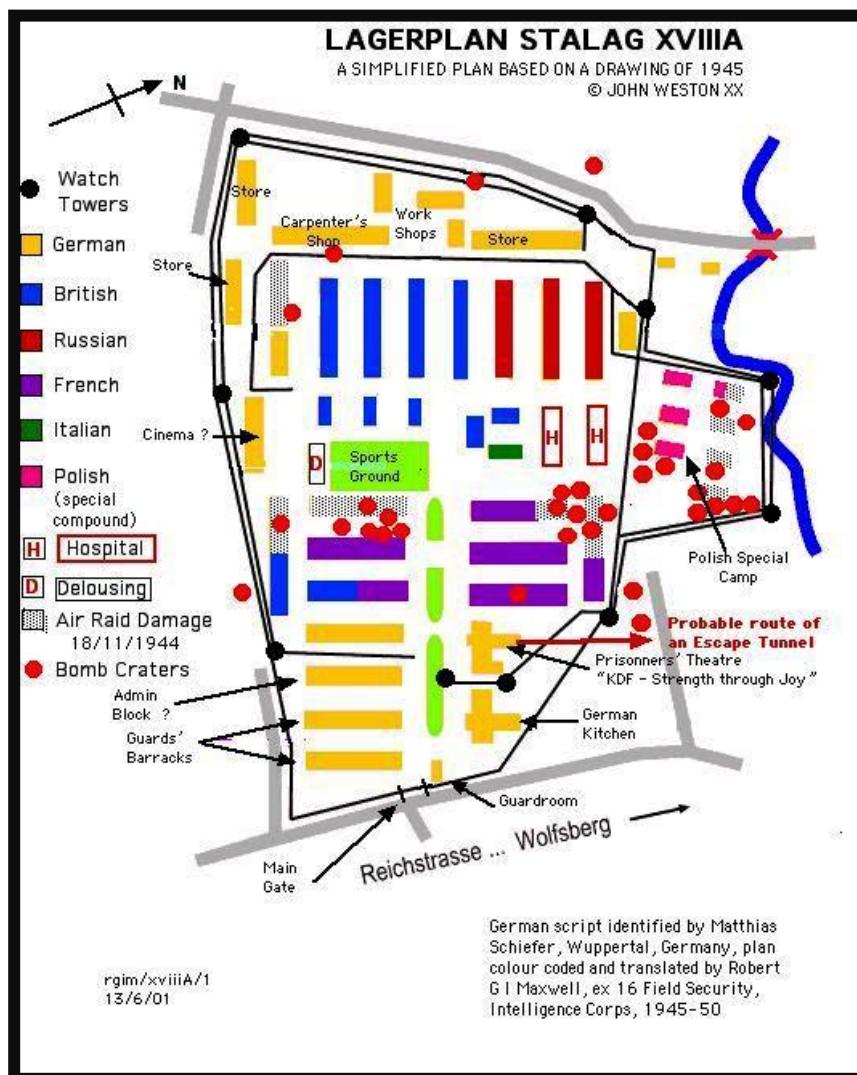
MENTAL DEFICITS OF WORK: p. 75-76- "Whatever the task, it was much easier to perform the work than to resolve the conflict it stirred in mind and soul. Ponder the situation as long and often as one would, no conclusion ever emerged to satisfy. At every order, however reasonably given, hackles instinctively rose. It was pleasant to get out from behind the stockade, it was challenging to split a rock or fell a tree. It

was exhilarating to strain muscles. Often one got lost in the work, caught in the rhythm of the task, then the horrible truth would rush back, the pace would slow and finally stop. One would be left with the emptiness of sheer futility, savagely determined not to do another needless stroke. To get carried away happily by the most fleeting of jobs guaranteed subsequently remorse and deep-felt resentment, feelings difficult to ignore or dismiss."

INFLUENCING THE GUARDS: p. 62- "In the seemingly uneven contest between the prisoners and

their guards-cum-overseers, it was, strangely, but, on reflection, inevitably the latter who weakened first. This taught us an important lesson. In many respects, although the German masters would continue to call the tune, the prisoners themselves could influence the manner and tempo in which it was played. The sentries found the days dragging even more than we did. Their undue interference might have stemmed as much from boredom as from zeal. It was impossible for them to

breathe down everyone's neck at the same time, and, since their primary task was to ensure that none of the prisoners escaped up the closely wooded hillside, they tended to separate and gravitate towards both ends of the lengthy site, where there was no one of their kind to talk to. While the prisoners chatted away and ignored them, the guards became more and more frustrated. They began to find it more companionable to be friendly, and to restrict themselves to their primary function." Page 71- After an issue of new winter uniforms, the Germans were persuaded not to paint 'KG'



(Kriegsgefangene or prisoner of war) on the backs of all the garments. One of the prisoners had made the argument that a prisoner's uniform should be respected.

INFORMATION GATHERING FROM THE GUARD: p. 62- "One of the guards, a sleek, black-haired Austrian of athletic build, claimed to have toured Britain with a professional soccer side, a piece of information which was as good a starting point for conversation as any. It was not long before it was used to elicit the rather more useful information that the nearest club of standing was at Linz and that the journey

took the better part of an hour by stopping train. Thus we obtained a glimmering of a clue as to our whereabouts in Austria."

NO ACCESS TO PARCELS: p. 64- "In conformity with the practice of separating prisoners from their clothes at night, (Note: each night the prisoners were directed to place their trousers and boots in a room occupied by a guard-they were locked into their bunk room) the Germans, while fairly and conscientiously distributing the parcels, took good care that no food could be stored in preparation for escape. They kept the parcels under lock and key. Each parcel was opened in the Kommandant's office, by a guard in front of the prisoner, with Kommandant and Vertrauensmann (PW elected spokesman- Man-of Confidence) standing by to ensure there was no underhand work by either side. The contents, objects of as much interest for the Germans as for the recipients, were pulled out, an article at a time, for the prisoner to note. Chocolate and raisins, or any food in paper wrapping, he could take, but the wrappings were first removed or broken. Only two tins were allowed to be taken at a time, or rather selected, for they had to be opened and the contents turned out. The rest of the tins were then counted back into the box, the number recorded on the lid with the prisoner's identity, and the box left in custody of the guards." Note: on page 66 the author details how a compromise was reached- solids were removed from cans while prisoners were allowed to keep "runny" items in the opened can. Another good thing: they were allowed to keep the can labels and use them as toilet paper.

PSYCH ASPECTS: p. 71- "The long-delayed arrival at our ultimate destination had eventually confronted us with the hard, previously-unguessed-at shape of the captivity to be endured. The clothing, on top of the food parcels, presented us with the physical equipment to face it. Gradually, mental fortitude and strength of character became the keys to survival, in place of sheer physical endurance."

p. 74- "...we entered one of captivity's most deceptively easy, but dangerous phases, a time when, more than ever, one's inner strength would be decisive. To lift one's eyes and look straight forward into the vista

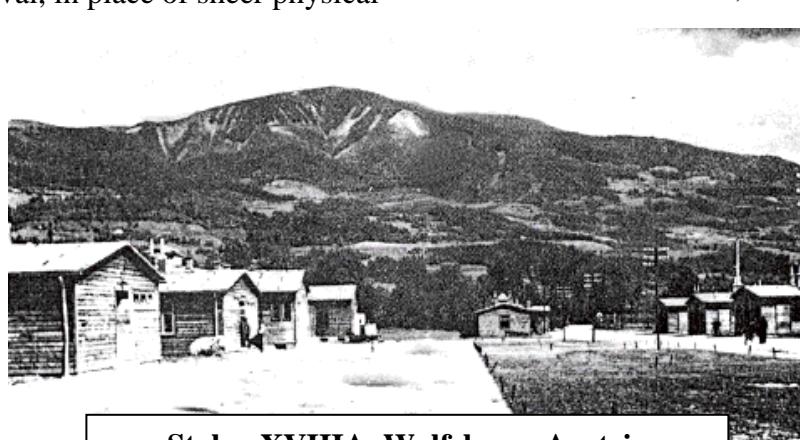
of the years ahead required more resolution and a steadier nerve than to set the gaze no further than on the next pitiful meal. Minds, however dulled, had to fix on something, and their testing time came as day by day they needed to focus less and less on the overriding needs of the bodies in which they functioned. That was when, having so far survived largely by instinct, men began fully to appreciate the true implications of their predicament, and to ask, 'survived for what?'

p. 74- "Most men gave a long, hard look or two down the dizzying vista of the endless years ahead, dropped their gaze before their heads began to spin, and got down to the job of seeing each other cheerfully through each day as it came."

p. 127- "A graph of the moods of any prisoner would show that it rises and falls according to the impact of three main, interacting factors: the progress of the war, conditions of immediate confinement and, above all, especially when the first two factors are relatively stable and satisfactory, the news from home. Assuming always that the prisoner survives- and all soldier on with that assumption- both war and confinement will end of themselves, whereas the home will remain, a simple, indisputable fact giving the home an ever increasing importance the longer captivity lasts. The prospect of ultimate reunion with family and friends remains the one constant feature with hope, but the reverse side of the coin is the growing knowledge that the longer incarceration persists the weaker is the P.O.W.'s ability to influence events and the stronger his feeling of impotence."

IGNORANCE OF LOCATION: p. 74- "None of us even knew where we were, other than that we had arrived from Wolfsberg via a place called Rottenmann, and that a guard had hinted that the nearest town was Stainach." Note: From the bottom of page 47 through 50 describes the remote, mountainous location of the

work camp as well as the structures they had to live in.



Stalag XVIIIA, Wolfsburg, Austria

RULES AMONG THE PRISONERS: p. 73- A sock stealing incident, and the aftermath of the ensuing huge argument about what to do with the alleged perpetrator, brought this question to

the fore-“...where British writ couldn’t reach and German jurisdiction was taboo, *who* would enforce *what* law?” Note- on pages 117-119 is an excellent example of how a meeting was held to hear disputes and of the clever phrasing of one of the men that saved the day.

AN ESCAPE MINDED MAN: p. 78- “When Lionel and I were paired up for work, the only conversation capable of being pursued for any length of time arose from his persistent and confident assertions that he could and would escape, that he only had to apply his mind to the exercise and choose the moment, and the stupid Jerry Huns couldn’t hold him in. ... To him, in spite of everything which had happened and was still happening about him, the world was the same old British oyster, and he was just the boy to open it. ...I owe it to Young Lionel that, maddeningly, he parried everything thrust at him, with the result that he caused me to kick around all the pros and cons of escaping, to conjure up every argument I could and re-run in my mind all the many discussions I had been involved in, or had listened to, in Stalag and in Salonika.”

THE REAL BARRIER: p. 79- “What kept us prisoners was not the stockade, nor the guards, but the sheer physical barriers of distance and mountains in a land where everyone was an enemy and the escapee an outlaw.”

IS IT LUCK? p. 79-80- “Escape had to be far from impossible, but it would only come after careful planning, and even then only to the man for whom the ball consistently bounced right. It would be bound up with luck, but luck would only run with the careful who fostered it, never with the careless just ‘having a go’.

EARLY ESCAPE: p. 80- “Even for prisoners like us, taken on battlefields separated from friendly frontiers by hundreds of miles of sea, the best chances had been lost by not attempting the break when still strong and fresh, immediately after capture. The double shock of defeat and capture had numbed perception of the possibilities still existing in areas where the enemy effort, concentrated on victory and conquest, was ill-organized for holding men eliminated from the contest. The loss of a few prisoners in forward fighting zones would have

caused no great stir; one single man adrift for only hours in the heart of the Reich would unbalance the books and set in motion all sorts of relentless machinery.” Note: See pages 121-122 for how the prisoners calculated the total number of candidates for what they termed “the Spring Handicap”- the number of escapers leaving from all the camps. They also muse on these pages upon the lack of info regarding successful escapes.

A CONSIDERATION....: p. 80- “To rush into escape attempts with no true appreciation of the conditions prevailing in the countryside seemed ill-advised; to do so with no knowledge of the consequences of the almost inevitable re-capture might, even in cases where demoralization was not the result, mean lengthy imprisonment under more rigid discipline which would rule out all chances of success should the overall possibilities improve.”

LEARNING FROM THE NATIVES: p. 85- “...but it was some time before we absorbed the lesson that a loose undergarment, such as a pair of pajama trousers, underneath ordinary wear formed a better insulation barrier than tight-fitting long drawers.”



Reading at Stalag XVIII

THOUGHTS ON GOING TO A NEW CAMP: p. 92- The prisoners wondered what it would be like if the Russians took over their camp. They decided: “On balance, I believe, most, at that time, would have opted to stay and endure the known captivity rather than face the threatened disruption and the uncertainties of continued captivity elsewhere. We believed, with much justice, that we had ‘tamed’ the guards and civilians at our camp, and also brought the work down to our own pace. As the Australians put it, it would be ‘crook’ to have to start afresh at a camp which might prove to be no better, and might conceivably be worse than the one

we had got to know the hard way.”

HOW THREE ESCAPED: p. 110-111- Three prisoners had arrived from another camp to the work-camp that milled wood products. The Escape Committee at their ‘home’ camp had evidently figured that escape would be easier from the mill. Their plan was to make a quick run for Switzerland. When the three who were to try to escape entered the work area, three ‘regular’ prisoners left the area so as to keep the

numbers correct from the guards' point of view. After the three escapers walked out the gate and up the road, the three who had purposely left the work area returned so the count would remain correct. Unfortunately, they were recaptured the following day and one of them was wounded in the process.

LANGUAGE: p. 111-

"My German was improving with the increased and more varied contact with civilians, and even more so from reading" "There being no German text-book or novel in camp, reading of German was at first confined to a daily perusal of the factory notice-board. Every single notice was prefaced by 'Arbeitsbetriebsgesellschaftangehörige', for 'employees'."

p. 112- "The breakthrough came with the discovery of an unattended copy of *Das Kleine Blatt*, the local paper circulating among the older civilians." At first he would only take a section of the paper, but after a while he would steal the whole thing every once in a while.

Note: pages 156-157 describe how, at another camp he was able to trade for German coins and subsequently buy a newspaper.

TOO MANY ESCAPERS?: p. 126-127- "The most intriguing statistic one would never know was what proportion of the recaptures were of men who fell into traps set to catch other escapees trying their luck from other camps along the chosen route. The fact that so many were having a go from so many different places at the same time, with no co-ordination of effort, might have contributed considerably to reducing the chances of any single man getting through. The best bet was to start from the fringe of the camp concentration."

NAMES OF MAJOR DETENTION FACILITIES:

#1-Prison camp briefly at Salonika, Greece, #2- , #3- an Arbeitskommando in an alpine valley somewhere near the town of Stainach, Austria, #4- a wood/paper mill at the village of Weissenbach, #5- camp at a place called Thesen, very near the town of Marburg near the Yugoslav border.



Summer at Stalag XVIII

DESCRIPTION OF THE ESCAPE PLAN: The catalyst for having a go at escape was the fact that he got a 'Dear John' letter. This moved him to think that the only reason his girlfriend did this was the fact that he had been gone for so long. His reasoning was

something like 'if I'm not a prisoner, other bad things in my home life won't occur'- so he decided to try and escape. The first move was to try and get sent to a camp on the outer perimeter of the camp system so as not to have to evade through numerous security zones. The first step in this plan was getting sent from the paper mill work camp back to the Stalag. See page 130-131. He decides to

play up a medical problem, and starts things off by trying to lose his suntan by getting on the night shift. As soon as he again began to experience blotching of the skin- he immediately began to scratch at them to make them look worse than they were (p. 133). In October of 1943, he succeeded in getting sent back to the Wolfsburg Stalag by train. While at the Stalag, he was able to gain knowledge about other camps (p. 144). Based on what he found out, he started trying to get himself moved into, or near, the Alps. The author gained further insight about methods by participating in an event called 'Confessions'. Page 144-145 details how after musical evening concerts put on by the prisoners, that someone who had experienced an unsuccessful escape would describe what had happened. On 11 November, he left Stalag and went to a new work camp, Thesen, near the border of Yugoslavia. He knew that Yugoslavia, while occupied, had never stopped actively fighting its invader (The contribution the partisans made in overthrowing both Prussian might and Nazi fanaticism was nothing short of epic.). After hearing the news of the Normandy invasion, he decided to join the 'Autumn Handicap' (those who try to escape prior to winter). Note: on page 170 he tells this- While reading one of the German newspapers he stole or bought, he came across this sentence "*In Yugoslavia a British plane was captured before it could take off after landing supplies to the partisans.*" It then dawned on him that if the planes could land to off load supplies, it could take off with someone such as himself aboard. 'All' he had to do was get far enough inside Yugoslavia to be led to one of the clandestine airfields. He is

assigned to a work crew in the forest where he proceeds to ‘train’ his guard (the same one he buys occasional newspapers from) into accepting him being gone on latrine breaks for longer and longer periods of time (page 171). After being directly asked, (see page 172 for ‘escape etiquette’) he agrees to join a small group (10 men) who planned to escape to the partisans. Page 174 discusses how their forest work area would be great for hiding a cache of food. Additionally it goes on to explain the big problem of feeding oneself while evading- this is one reason why they waited until the Fall- it was hoped that there would be ripe crops to eat along the route. The Germans had grown slack at this work camp; the prisoners could even engage in black-marketeering. See the top of page 175 for how they built up their hidden food supply. They left during the morning of September 14th. The night prior, they had picked the lock of the Red Cross store room and the senior NCO gave each escaper a packet of biscuits, a bar of chocolate, and a box of cheese (see page 188). Interesting note: they all crushed their biscuits and poured the crumbs into cloth bags they had sewn. Evidently they could carry this in better concealment. Pages 194-6 detail the actual ruse they used to fool their guard as well as the actual break away from the work area and the initial hide site. Page 209 tells of how partisans lead the group, across fields, rail lines etc., and how they used a trench dug in a field and camouflaged with cornstalks to hide from searchlights. They were left in the trench and the partisans did not return. So after a few days, they set out on their own. Page 215 describes how they picked a farmhouse to approach for aid. On page 225 they literally stumble into more partisans in a fruit orchard. They and the partisans never stayed more than two nights in any one place. (Page 228) This way it was easier for the population to feed them as well as making it tough for the Germans to plan and launch an attack on their camp. Eventually, they were passed along an escape net route (page 230-231). Finally, on 11 November, their 58th day at large (and one year after he had left Stalag full of vague ideas about escaping), they were walking along a road and stopped a jeep in which were two New Zealand officers page 238. They had made it, however, they had missed the last flight out (winter was approaching) by one week! They got back to England by ship at a later date.

WHATEVER MOTIVATES YOU: p. 171. An acquaintance of the author revealed his two big reasons to try to escape- one was to better his record (he got out once and was on the run for 59 days) the other was to be

in the center of London on the day the war ended to enjoy the party!

HOW TO SMUGGLE LETTERS PAST A SEARCH:

p. 135-136. Basically he let the guards ‘find’ one letter- this takes their mind off searching for more. He hides the two he wants to keep- one, inside the pull cord of a ditty bag, the other inside a slit made in the flap of a Red Cross box.

GERMAN APPELLS: From the bottom of page 140 to 143 discusses how the prisoners controlled the camp to the extent that they were able to falsify the daily head counts. Page 177 gives more details on this – proof that for the *captor* simple is better- the prisoners took total advantage of the huge flaw exhibited here by the Germans.

MANNERS WHILE EATING FROM A COMMUNAL BOWL:

p. 231. This sounds like a stupid topic, however, while traveling with the partisans in a small group, food was often served to them in one large bowl. The only thing on the table was a spoon for each person, and the bowl. The author describes the important etiquette involved in eating in this manner- it all goes into staying on your host, and your E&E net guide’s, good side.

INTERESTING PSYCH COMPARISON ON STATE OF MIND: P. 240-241

“The file of men which trooped into the room a night or so later showed signs of weariness and strain. Even had there not been a sprinkling of R.A.F. blue among the familiar khaki, most of us in the room would have been able to distinguish the crashed airmen from the escaped prisoners. A large group of ten men showed, both in the state of their uniforms and the exhaustion of their bodies, more obvious traces of wear and tear; but the fitter-looking men in blue appeared more bewildered and out of place. The ex-prisoners resembled our own tired but triumphant selves of a few days earlier; the airmen, our dejected selves of 1941. There was a striking contrast between the tired faces lit up by confidence, hope and achievement, and the fresh ones, cast down by uncertainty, doubt and recent shock; between men succeeding in a long familiar element and men still bemused at finding themselves out of their depth; between prisoners with the scent of freedom, home and reunion strong in their nostrils, and airmen with fear of capture, exile and separation clouding every thought.”

Spotlight On a Survivor

By SURVIVOR STAFF

As a young man prior to joining the military, I remember reading books and seeing movies in which flying officers (American and British) escaped captivity. While at Fairchild AFB Instructor Training to be a Survival Instructor, I heard a great deal of stories of military officers of all branches being evaders, prisoners of war, or trying to escape from WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. Rarely did I hear of any accounts of enlisted POWs, escapers, or enlisted evaders (with the exception and fantastic job of Doug Hegdahl).

So I made it my goal to find out more about enlisted POWs, evaders, and escapers which brought me to the Survival Library and specifically the book The Sergeant Escapers by John Dominy (also the first book I bought



online). It is an excellent book which covers multiple accounts World War II Royal Air Force NCO escape and prisoner of war events.

It is a great book which talks about the enlisted POWs, their Man of Confidence, how they dealt with their captors, and their aspects of escape and survival. It also goes into detail on how the NCOs, who could be placed on work details under the Articles of the Geneva Conventions (3rd Convention, Section III Labour of Prisoners of War, Articles 49 - 57), made contact with members of the resistance and worked towards developing an escape/evasion lane for their personnel. Something like this was also accomplished in the officer camps in **Oflag VIII-F** when it was located first in Mährisch-Trübau, Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (now Moravská Třebová, Czech Republic) and was **Oflag IV-C** (Colditz Castle) in Germany. The contact at Colditz was more oriented towards helping the POWs if there was a final solution enacted towards the end of the war.

In Dominy's book it talks a great deal about the NCO's escape organization and how they worked towards resisting all forms of exploitation by the Axis. One of the key escapers/member of the escape organization (called the Tally-Ho Club) was Flight SGT (later on Warrant Officer) George Grimson. George Grimson was the wireless operator aboard a RAF Vickers Wellington, a British twin-engine long-range medium bomber - serial number "L7792" - squadron codes "LF-L", which was shot down on 15 July 1940 by the anti-aircraft defenses over Bremen. He was one of only two survivors who bailed out before the bomber exploded.

Grimson's escape attempts from his initial captor to his final escape were incredible. He experienced captivity at **Dulag Luft** the Luftwaffe interrogation center, **Stalag Luft I** at Barth, **Stalag VIIIb** at Lamsdorf, back to **Stalag Luft I**, **Stalag VIII-C** at Sagan, **Stalag Luft III** in Sagan, and finally **Stalag Luft VI** located near the town of Heydekrug, Memelland (now Lithuania).

George Grimson became one of those individuals in captivity that learned from his escape mistakes and then worked on overcoming them (as well as sharing his knowledge) before starting on his next attempt for freedom. He focused on what he needed to blend in once outside of the camp as much as how to get through, over, or under the wire. Grimson was respected for his focus and determination to escape and his dedication to "beat" the enemy by his fellow NCOs as well as the officers who met him. Grimson focused on how best to overcome and mitigate the obstacles set by his captors. In most of his escapes, Grimson made it out the gate mostly seeming to prefer to go through (disguised as a guard, ferret, or authorized individual, but unfortunately was caught usually a distance from the camp (in all but one case when he was caught at the gate dressed as a German soldier escorting four prisoners).

After one of Grimson's escapes he was spotted by fellow POWs who were being transported by German soldiers. On the train, a German officer started yelling at something one of the guards had done. The POWs

realized that it was George Grimson wearing a German Military Officer's uniform.

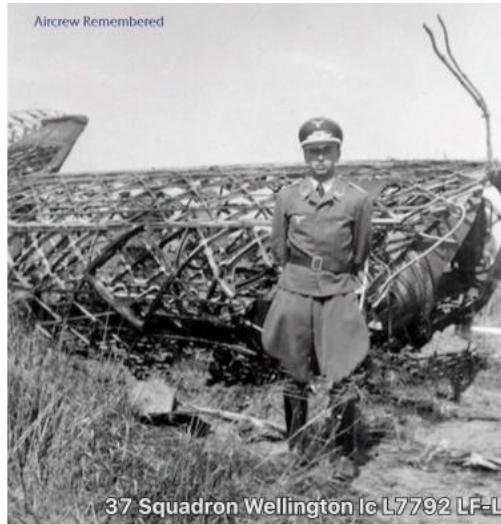
An example of Grimson's and the Tally-Ho's planning, preparation, and organization skills for escape was when he combined over and through the wire to escape.

Grimson dressed as a Camp "engineering ferret"

(specialized guards whose only duty was keeping the camp secure). Grimson's disguise consisted of him wearing coveralls, a German forge hat, carrying a tool box with wires sticking out, and a

large ammeter fashioned from tins and dangling leads hanging from a work belt, he carried a ladder (constructed and hidden at the POW's theater). He walked up to one of machine gun towers calling up to the guard in fluent German before he stepped over the warning wire, telling the guard he was checking the lights. He then used his ladder to climb up to the lights, placing a plank across the two barbed wire fence lines. He tested a few bulbs and then shouting up to him each time he had to move. Twice Grimson was greeted and asked questions by patrolling guards, but each time he convinced them he was looking for a broken wire. After approximately 30 minutes, Grimson dropped a pair of pliers just inside the outer wire, swearing at his clumsiness. He then asked the guard in the tower if he could climb over, pick them up, and walk around the perimeter to the entrance to comeback to continue his work. The bored guard nodded his approval and Grimson did everything he told the guard, except for the part about coming back. Grimson slowly lowered himself down entering the Vorlager (German military's administration part of the camp), cracked a joke with the guard about the prisoners, and retrieved his pliers. He then hid for several hours before marching through the two gates presenting his forged papers to find himself outside of the camp. Once away, he removed his "ferret" disguise to reveal a smart "official" looking suit.

It was after this escape that another group of POWs met Grimson again traveling by train. As the prisoners sat



on the train they noticed a smartly dressed man drinking a beer at the train station cafeteria on the platform. The man then got up and approached the Officer in charge of the train. The man seemed to have a very stern conversation with the Officer, who after the conversation looked very afraid. One of the POWs said "Gestapo" out loud, but the other recognized him as a cleaned up George Grimson. Somehow Grimson had convinced the Officer in charge of the train that he was a Gestapo agent acting as the "security representative" for the train; the job of checking other traveler's identity and travel

documents to see if they were *authorized* to travel. This is a prime example of George Grimson's ability to analyze his enemy utilizing their weaknesses and protocols to aid in his escape. Unfortunately on his fifth day of freedom, Grimson was arrested as he tried to board a Swedish ship.

On 21 January 1944 the Escape Committee used the 1500 Appell (head count) to effect George Grimson's last escape. Tally-Ho had realized that during the winter count the guards usually marched in before the prisoners, taking up their allotted positions, which they maintained until dismissed by the Lager officer. When released, the guards did not form up and march out, instead they just individually moved out the camp gates into the Vorlager. Tally-Ho had several prisoners "help" the guards during the head count causing the whole process to be delayed until it was dark. Finally the count was accomplished and accurate. Twenty guards had come in. Twenty-one went out. Grimson had marched out in a German uniform and a beautifully made dummy rifle, walking out to the Vorlager as the third or fourth soldier. Once in the Vorlager, he moved to the building which held Red Cross parcels, extra clothing, and food - taking apart the rifle, packaging it and the uniform up like a parcel for pick-up the next day by the prisoner's who worked under the guards in that building. Grimson changed into pre-staged trilby hat,

civilian clothes, and a briefcase filled with documents prepared for him.

Once out of the camp, George Grimson established contacts made by Tally-Ho with the Polish underground, forced laborers from German occupied countries, and anti-Nazi Germans to develop an escape route for his fellow POWs. He sent word back to his fellow POWs using "tamed" German guards on the escape organization's "payroll". During this development time, Grimson traveled all around north-eastern Germany (and occupied territories) while maintaining contact with the camp. Grimson was able to secure safe passage for his fellow RAF NCOs to escape to England via the underground escape route that he established using Swedish ships as the final transportation. During this time, Grimson was hunted by the SS, who even placed a price on his head. Grimson and the NCO escape committee at Stalag Luft VI were able to get several escapers through this route to make successful home runs. Escapers involved in another group never made it to the final contact point in to meet Grimson. And even though , he search, Grimson was unable to find out what happened.

In April 1944, while another group was in the "network" Grimson disappeared. He was last seen in the Danzig area and was probably seized by the Gestapo, disappearing in captivity. The Tally-Ho tried to determine what had happened to him, but without any luck. After the war, multiple efforts to locate what had happened to him were unsuccessful. After the war, George Grimson's name appeared in multiple official reports sent to the high command, describing his actions in the face of the enemy.

George John William Grimson body was never recovered, but his family and the RAF have a marker at Runnymede Memorial Cemetery Panel 213.

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