
News About Downed Airmen & POWs

American GIs held in Nazi Germany's Concentration Camps. Reported by Bob Leavenworth

Editor's Note: One of our newer members, Bob Leavenworth sent me a copy of the EX-POW Bulletin that describes that some American Prisoners of War were placed in Nazi Germany's Concentration camps. The following account was published in the EX-POW Bulletin

Jay Stone a former American GI, is being asked to step forward. As a concentration camp survivor, it's a thorny consideration for a non-Jewish retiree who spent fifty years trying to forget Stone's torturous, nearly fatal experience at the Berga slave labor camp in Nazi Germany has only recently been revealed as a little-known chapter in World War II history.

After fifty years, German and U S Governments acknowledged that hundreds of Jewish and non Jewish American GIs and civilians were held in German concentration camps. "Prior to today, prior to this past year, there's never been a reparations program in place for American survivors of the Holocaust," said Bill Marks, a Washington, DC attorney representing several claimants. "The German compensation law didn't say, if you're an American you don't qualify," but it had a set of criteria that effectively excluded Americans and, frankly a lot of people didn't know there were American survivors in the camps. "The deadline for claims was February 23, 1997. Jay Stone decided to file, but, at age 75, he finds the timing a bit ironic "I ain't going to hold my breath, and I sure ain't going to have it spent," he said. But I would like to see it as an acknowledgment of what the German people were capable of.

After Stone became a POW in December 1944, he was sent to Stalag IX-B and from there about 350 American POWs were taken from their barracks and transported to Berga, a slave labor camp with no designation and no regard for the rules of the Geneva Convention. Soon, many would be worked, starved or beaten to death. It was a fate that most Americans believe only applied to European Jews "I didn't know it until afterward but we were in the Buchenwald complex." Stone said of the 350 who entered Berga only 280 returned to the United States. The 8th Air Force personnel who were held at Buchenwald in 1944 fared better, only one died, but witnessed unspeakable atrocities.

A 461st Bomb Group Airman Gets Valuable Information While in Enemy Territory

From micro film files

Combat crew members who are forced down in enemy or enemy occupied territory frequently find themselves in a position to obtain information which might subsequently prove to be of inestimable value to Allied intelligence agencies but too seldom do they take advantage of these opportunities.

It is not recommended that every flyer who bails out or crash

lands under such circumstances should assume the hazardous role of an espionage agent, a profession which requires skill, extensive training and experience - but it is suggested that they observe closely and listen carefully for any items of information concerning the enemy forces, materials, defenses, etc., and mentally record them for later communication to the proper agencies.

An excellent illustration of what can be accomplished along these lines was furnished this Air Force recently when Staff Sergeant Dorance Shaffer of the 461st Bomb Group returned to Italy after he, with the rest of his crew, had bailed out of their disabled B-24 over Partisan controlled territory.

Sgt. Shaffer, a special radio intercept operator, was taken to Bucharest by way of Hungary and during the train ride made the acquaintance of a Hungarian officer who was, before he deserted, in charge of Hungarian and German flak batteries of one sector of the Budapest Air Defense System. The Hungarian was en route to Bucharest for investigation by Russian authorities.

The officer, who spoke English, inadvertently disclosed among his papers a copy of a map of Hungary with the German fighter grid superimposed. Sgt. Shaffer displayed a casual interest in the map and engaged the officer in a discussion of his former duties. According to the latter these duties consisted of the coordination of the Hungarian and German anti-aircraft defense communications and of the Hungarian and German flak position personnel under his command (air defense activities of the Hungarian and German armies were interwoven).

He gave Sgt. Shaffer considerable information concerning the relative merits of the German and Hungarian anti-aircraft batteries and equipment and technical information on their operation, and stated that the German flak batteries could be operated by a smaller number of men and with more accuracy because of their Radar equipment. He further stated that the finder equipment on the Hungarian batteries was not as effective in counteracting our "Chaff" when properly dispensed.

He pointed out that the air defense sections were alerted as soon as our weather planes were spotted. It was then assumed that bomber penetrations would take place about 3 to 4 hours later. Any further warnings or reports of the air situation were given by long distance telephone from the Radio Telephone Stations and only in the case of telephone line failure would Ultra High Frequency Equipment be used for the reception of messages and orders from the R/T ground stations. When Allied bomber penetration was announced from the R/T outposts, the smoke screen would be put in operation so as to be effective by the time the bombers reached the area.

Air support was furnished from a base between Budapest and the Eastern shore of Lake Balaton with the bulk of the force furnished by the Luftwaffe. Altitude corrections and such were constantly being given to the ground defenses by telephone from the R/T stations.

In addition to the foregoing, the officer gave Sgt. Shaffer valuable information on the effect of our Radar "jamming" procedures and counter measures.

Due to the alertness and unusually retentive memory Sgt. Shaffer was able to repeat in detail virtually all of what was told to him by his traveling acquaintance.