The Kriegies of Oflag 64

September 17, 2006

The POWs are liberated, but it "weren't" easy

Aerial photo of Stalag VIIA, Moosburg. Photo courtesy of Jim Huddleston. Presented by 303rd Bomb Group (H) Association, "Hell's Angels."

As you can see from the photo, Stalag VIIA at Moosburg was a big operation, but it was not big enough to hold the approximately 110,000 POWs from an estimated 27 countries.

Eventually, tents had to be erected at the camp to house the tremendous influx of POWs. Estimates of the final population range from 110,000 to as high as 130,000. Presented by US Air Force Academy.
In their book, *The Dominguez Family: A Mexican-American Journey*, Donna S. Morales and John P. Schmal, Ms. Morales talks about the experience of her uncle, Pvt. Erminio Lujan Dominguez, 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mechanized) at Stalag VII-A. He and others from the 117th were captured on September 3, 1944 at Montrevel in France.

By April 1945, General Patton's Third Army was cutting through Germany like a hot knife through butter. Morales, other inmates and the German guards all heard serious artillery fire on April 28, and the fire was stepping its way toward the area of Moosburg.

The American force had to fight its way through Moosburg and to the camp.

The SS resisted about as well as it could, but the fight was short, and they surrendered. Eric A. Orsini, shown here, then an Army captain with the 14th Armored Division, ultimately served the Army for 64 years and retired as Special Assistant to Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics- G-4, United States Army. During those later years, he told a group of former Stalag Luft I POWs the following:

"The German command would not submit an unconditional surrender. Instead, German SS troops moved outside the city and set up a defense perimeter. They opened the fight and we were ready for them. Every tanker, infantryman, truck driver, clerks and cooks took up arms. By 1030, the SS were lying dead in the fields and along the roads, grey-white faces and open mouths, twisted and staring sightlessly at the cold, blue sky above. And American medium tanks were roaring through the cobbled streets of the ancient city."
This photograph shows the Camp Commandant, Maj. Gustav Simoleit (left), Major Alton S. Kircher, Executive Officer 47th Tank Battalion (center), and Group Captain Willets, RAF, senior British officer (right). This is the moment of official surrender and Major Simoleit is establishing the time needed to get his men in from the many guard posts around the camp, disarm them, and form them up to be trucked away to POW camps. Photo credit: Capt. John Bennett of South Camp with a clandestine camera. Presented by the US Air Force Academy.

By April 29, American armored forces were outside the gate and the camp was liberated.

A very emotional moment as the American flag replaces the Nazi flag. Saluting troops cast respectful shadows on the fence. Presented by the US Air Force Academy.

This liberation of the prisoners at Stalag VII-A was important to the Allies for many reasons, one of which was the lingering fear that the Germans might move some or many to a Redoubt in Salzburg, Austria and hold them hostage. American planes repeatedly dropped leaflets on the camp warning that the camp staff would be held responsible if any of the POWs were moved out of the Moosburg camp.

It is worth noting that while General Patton's 3rd Army has often been acclaimed for racing to Berlin, many of his forces were actually racing through southern Germany and into Bavaria, which had the effect of cutting off any German thoughts of withdrawing to the Alps and Austria, and enabled the Americans to link up with the Soviets south of Berlin. This had to be done.
Part of a group of more than 7,000 former Allied prisoners-of-war, liberated by the Americans at Moosburg on April 29, 1945. Presented by City of Kingston, Australia.

Except for being under American control, which of course was big, very big, the reality was, for the moment, that little at the camp changed. Colonel Goode and Group Captain Willets remained in charge. Some of the German administrative personnel remained at their posts in the camp, while the remainder, including the guards, were taken prisoner.

It still had 110,000 or more people in it. Even though liberated, most of the former prisoners did not immediately run out of the camp, for good reason. They were unarmed, they had no idea what enemy forces were left out there, and they had no way of knowing how to get to safety on their own. That said, many did venture out to walk the Bavarian countryside, with some walking as far as Munich.

American artillery batteries set up shop in the fields near the camp.
For their part, the troops who took the town uncovered arsenals of weapons. Some prisoners walked the streets of Moosburg. Some broke into liquor stores and warehouses, food shops, and clothing stores, others took motorcycles and cars and rode them around. Most of the ex-prisoners threw themselves a party in the streets.

American support troops began arriving at Moosburg on April 30 with food rations. Frank D. Murphy, 418th Bomb Squadron, 100th Bomb Group, has written that General Patton arrived on May 1. He described Patton's visit this way:

"On May 1, 1945 a grim-faced Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., commander of the U.S. Third Army, paid us a visit at Stalag VIIA. He was dressed in a crisp, neat, fresh uniform and wearing his legendary wide black leather belt with a huge silver buckle to which were attached his famous paired set of ivory-handled six-guns. Maj. Gen. James A. Van Fleet, III Corps Commander, and Maj. Gen. Albert C. Smith, commander of the 14th Armored Infantry Division accompanied General Patton. As he walked briskly through the camp General Patton occasionally stopped and exchanged a few brief words with small groups of American prisoners. When he came upon my group the General paused, looked at us, shook his head in disgust at the sight of the thin, unkempt scarecrows standing before him and said in a low voice, 'I'm going to kill these sons of bitches for this.'"

While most surely the troops loved that kind of talk, a story by another prisoner reported that the arrival of two Red Cross women overshadowed even General Patton's visit. GIs are GIs, thank God.

Frank Murphy said they were deloused and allowed to bathe and shower, given new uniforms, and on May 9 they were trucked with other POWs to a former Luftwaffe base at Regensburg, placed aboard US C-47 transport aircraft, and airlifted to Liege, Belgium. Milton Long has recorded that over the ensuing days the POWs were trucked to Landshute Airfield and "hundreds of C-47s flew out the former
POWs on their first leg of the trip back home."

That first leg was concluded at a place known as to **Camp Lucky Strike**, about 40 miles outside LeHavre, France, which was used as a collection point and rehabilitation center for former American POWs.

Tent city at Camp Lucky Strike, France. Extracted from *With a weapon in his hands, but his heart toward home, WWII, my grandfather's story,* by Jordan Abbott. Presented by angelfire.com

An aerial photograph of Lucky Strike taken August 27, 1945 by the 540th Photorecon Squadron. At times this camp hosted more than 100,000 US soldiers. Almost all liberated American POWs went through this camp on their way home. Contributed by Wesley Johnson; reprinted courtesy John Kline, CUB Magazine. Presented by The Skylighters, the 225th AAA Searchlight Battalion.

For his part, Murphy was X-rayed and found to have a touch of pneumonia and was down in weight by about 50 pounds. He was treated in hospital for two weeks with a new miracle drug, penicillin,
released, and put on a commercial ship re-fitted as a hospital ship and sent home, in a 30-ship convoy. The crossing took 12 days.

It is very hard to determine how many men from Oflag 64 survived the war and made it home. Oflag 64 prisoners have estimated anywhere between 400-500 made it to Moosburg. Of the remaining 900-1000, some ended up in local hospitals, some were liberated by the Russians, some were sent to other German camps, and, we are certain, some, perhaps many, died.

We will never know how many Americans were held as POWs during WWII in Europe, or the Pacific for that matter, how many died in captivity, how many were murdered, or how many were taken against their will to the USSR or hideaway destinations of German political and military seniors.

The Russians have acknowledged that some American POWs liberated from German POW camps at the end of WWII were imprisoned by the Soviets.

One final note. We have seen an estimate that only 20 percent of US POWs from WWII remain alive today. If you meet one, for God's sake, kiss him, hug him, shake his hand, and thank him for his service.

**Go to:** [Some of the men of Oflag 64 whom you have not yet seen](#)