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EX-Report No. 678

Prepared by MIS-X Section, CPM Branch

Liberation From STALAG LUFT I
BARTH, GERMANY

COL. HUBERT ZEMKE

479th Ftr. Gp., 8th A.F.

P-51 Explodes

Col. ZEMKE was leading a flight of fighters escorting B-24s on a mission to HAMBURG, 31 October 1944. Evading heavy flak over HANNOVER and during bad weather, subject led eight P-51s into a cumulous cloud at 27,000 feet. His plane went out of control, iced and as he was trying to recover, the plane went to pieces. All eight P-51 pilots were forced to bail out; two were killed and subject and another pilot were taken prisoner. When the plane blew up, subject wrenched his knee and had lacerations all over his body, caused from flying bits of the plane. He fell into a swamp and lay there for one-half hour. Knowing he needed help, he got up and after cutting his parachute to pieces and taking off a new G-suit that he was wearing, he took off cross country in a very hard rain. After about four miles he sat down and opened his aids box. He decided then to approach some people in the field, and ask for help, but the man and woman, who happened to be Poles, took one look at him and fled cross the field.

Captured by Volkssturm

Subject went back into the woods and walked down a road; about 30 minutes later he was surrounded by about 30 members of the Volkssturm. They did not mistreat or threaten him but made him walk, which was difficult. They took him to the small town of NINBORF, north of HANNOVER, where they called the police. Subject was sick from shock and while he was waiting the Germans treated him fairly well, giving him an apple and some water. About 2100 hours, two Luftwaffe officers arrived and he was taken to CELLE airdrome and placed in solitary. At CELLE, where Col. ZEMKE remained for two days, his wounds were not dressed nor was anything else done for him.

-1-

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Dulag Luft

Two days later he was escorted to Dulag Luft at OBERURSEL, guarded by two Luftwaffe EM. He was immediately given a complete search and his maps and other escape equipment were discovered. Previously, the Germans had casually asked him to turn in articles. After the search, subject was placed into a cell and told to sit down. The next morning he was approached by the principal interrogator of the 8th and 9th Air Force fighters, the German Gefreiter Hans SCHARF.

Returned to Dulag Luft (Hohemark)

After ten days, during which he was interrogated three times, subject was moved to the transient camp at WETZLAR, where subject finally received some hospital attention. Subject met Col. STARK and he juggled things a bit so that subject could remain at WETZLAR and recover. Subject stated he had nothing to do while at WETZLAR, and just waited around, taking it easy. Then, about a month after he left Dulag Luft at OBERURSEL, an article on subject appeared in an American newspaper mentioning the fact that he had been in RUSSIA. Immediately subject was pulled back into Dulag Luft and put into HOHEMARK HOSPITAL, where he was showered with excellent treatment; he was given five meals a day and an excellent room. He was then interviewed by the SS and during the course of ten days was also interrogated by three officers from the Luftwaffe Headquarters in BERLIN. The principal information desired by his questioners dealt with conditions in RUSSIA when he was there, the American attitude towards the Russians, etc. They tried to impress upon him that the Russians were going to attack the U.S., and subject remarked that this line of propaganda was used on Ps/W in camps. Subject remained at HOHEMARK ten days doing nothing, and receiving the best of food and treatment (he remarked that it was impossible for him to be moved earlier due to transportation difficulties).

To Barth - SAO at Stalag Luft I

Escorted by a lieutenant and sergeant, he traveled to Stalag Luft I, BARTH, arriving 16 December 1944. Upon arriving at BARTH, since subject was the senior ranking Allied officer, he was thrust into the position of SAO, relieving Col. Jean BYERLY. He remained in this position until the liberation of Stalag Luft I, 16 May 1945.

Germans March Out

Sometime in early April 1945, the Germans threatened to move the camp to LUBECK, which, subject stated, the enemy was trying to have declared an open city for all Ps/W. However, arrangements were that the Ps/W

-2-

S E C R E T

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were to remain in Stalag Luft I, taking over control of the camp themselves. At midnight 28-29 April, the Germans marched out.

Previously subject had permitted the escape of two parties of two men each, which were to contact the Russians and give them the location of the camp. Also, three parties of two men each were dispatched toward American lines with instructions for some of the men to go directly to LONDON and SHAEF; one party was to return after making contact with the American forces. All parties did escape, subject stated, and got through. One party, a South African lieutenant colonel and a Canadian, which headed for the Russian lines, made first contact with forward patrols near STRALSUND, 60 miles west, on the night of 1 May. The other party sent to contact the Russians, traveled further south of BERLIN and then turned west.

Russians Arrive

The first party that made contact brought back a Russian infantry officer and his orderly. Subject, his chief of staff and others, with the two Russians, drove down the road the next day past BARTH. All arrangements had been made to meet the Russians so there would be no incident, and after traveling 20 miles from the camp, contact was made. In the meantime, everyone was secured in Stalag Luft I and remained there in good order until 3 May, when a group of intoxicated Russians came in. These Russians, whose object it was to free the camp, could not understand why the Ps/W were still held in the camp, and after arguing several hours, they forced subject and his staff to open the gates and let the Ps/W out. The men proceeded to wreck the place, tear down the guard towers, etc. Many men escaped, with the result that 692 men were not in the camp when the evacuation planes finally arrived.

The Americans, after liberation, planned to fly the German planes on the near-by field to ENGLAND, however, the Russians would not permit this. The Americans put the 38 planes in working order and turned them over to the Russians. As soon as the men were liberated, they commenced repairing the field, clearing mines, filling bomb craters, etc., and on 4 May 1945 they reopened it. The officer in charge of the repair work was Major F. A. RABO.

Evacuation

Through the efforts of the 18th Corps at HAGENOW, with which subject had been in liaison, all arrangements were supposedly made for air evacuation, however, the Russians would not guarantee they would not shoot

-3-

S E C R E T

4
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Authority NND 135027

the American planes down. Therefore, subject arranged that Group Capt. C. T. WIER, his chief of staff, was to go with a Gen. BATOW with some Russians to Field Marshal MONTGOMERY's headquarters, in the north around WISMAR. This was done and it was explained that the Americans had SHAEF authority to fly the Ps/W out, that the field was cleared and that arrangements had been made. It was explained to the Russians that all was in order and that the planes would arrive as soon as Russian authorization was given. They returned to Gen. BATOW's headquarters and it was arranged that at a certain time, Russian ack-ack would cease for two days, and this information was transmitted to the 18th Corps. That afternoon, at 1400 hours, six C-47s and thirty-six B-17s came to the BARTH airfield and took out a load of Ps/W. At 0700 hours the next morning, the planes returned and continued flying out Ps/W all day long. Wounded and hospital cases were evacuated first, and then each compound moved out separately and in order. The men were marched in groups of about 200 to the field and 30 were put in each plane. Subject was the last to leave, with Brig. Gen. William GROSS, and in about 48 hours about 8500 prisoners were evacuated.

It had been arranged that the British would be immediately taken to ENGLAND and the Americans to an airdrome near REIMS (FRANCE), where they could be shuttled to Camp Lucky Strike. Subject was requested, with his staff of about 12, to make a report at USTAAF, and all documents were loaded on the planes and flown to USTAAF. Six men were immediately ordered to return to the U.S., including subject, but since 692 men were still missing, Gen. VANAMAN sent subject to HALLE. Here a conference was going on under a Russian Maj. Gen. GORA, SHAEF representative Maj. Gen. BARKER and an English Brigadier. The Russians would not permit the Americans to fly across the temporary international border, so it was arranged that certain pick-up points would be established where the personnel would be traded, American personnel to be sent to airdromes in the LEIPZIG area. Subject traveled all over north GERMANY, rounding up Ps/W for evacuation, and eventually most of the 692 missing men were picked up. Subject was then given a job on air technical intelligence at SHAEF and subsequently returned to the U.S., arriving at LA GUARDIA FIELD on 16 July 1945.

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-4-

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