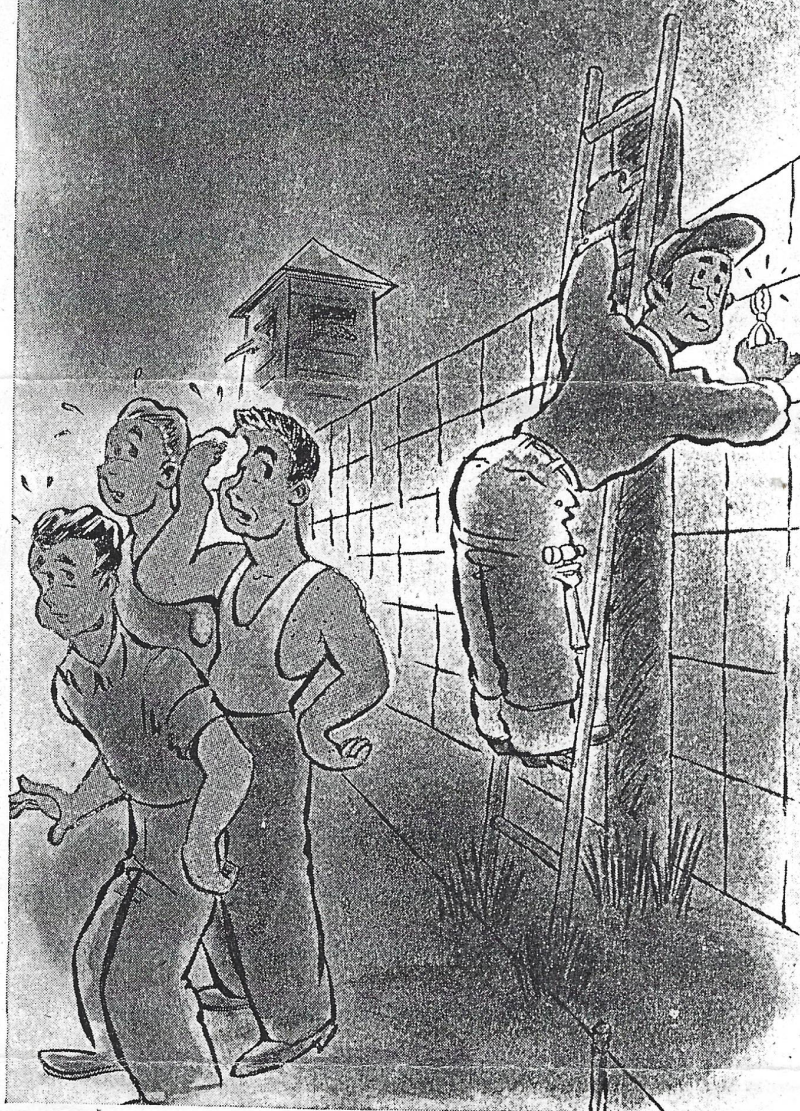


We..drow..



"With a pair of pliers, he began to test each strand of wire, as if searching for a break in the wire. . ."

By Albert B. Powell, Jr., and Duane Yarnell

The Authors Albert B. Powell, Jr., a native of Birmingham, Ala., now resides in Daytona Beach, Fla. A captain in the 334th Squadron, 95th Bomb Group, Powell was shot down, captured and imprisoned at Moosburg, Germany. The following is a true account of conditions and events, as he saw them, during his imprisonment. Comrade Powell is a member of Post 1590, V.F.W., at Daytona Beach. He is married, and at present operates a commercial flying service.

Co-author Duane Yarnell is a native of Wichita, Kans., now living in Florida. He held the rank of master sergeant at the Camp Swift Station Hospital, later was a sergeant major in the Individual Services Branch at Camp Crowder, Mo. Yarnell is married, resides in Daytona Beach, and is a prolific writer both for "pulp" and "slicks" in the magazine trade.

TEN DAYS after my B-17 was shot down over the Reich, I was taken to Sagan, Germany, a prisoner-of-war camp for captured American fliers.

As we rode through the gate, one of my captors pointed to a group of Americans inside the fence. "For those Americans," he said arrogantly, "the war is ended. They do not escape from here!"

I didn't realize it then, but this smug boast to which I was listening was nothing but hot air. Very shortly, the boast was destined to boomerang into a lot of embarrassed German faces . . .

The camp looked impregnable. A high wire fence surrounded the buildings and tough looking armed guards were everywhere. A few feet inside the fence was a low strand of wire—the warning wire. Under the local ground rules, the guards were permitted to shoot any American who crossed the wire in an attempt for extra bases.

It seemed incredible that a man could get out of that camp alive. Yet many Americans did get beyond those walls and the methods they used deserve a high place under the general heading of 'American ingenuity.

One afternoon, shortly after I arrived at Sagan, I was standing out near the warning wire, chewing the fat with a young fighter pilot. The area was literally swarming with German guards and I wouldn't have given a dime for the chances of anyone to break out of camp at that moment.

As I glanced around me, I saw a German workman come walking from between two buildings. Over his shoulder was slung a ladder. Suddenly, I began to feel giddy, but this time it wasn't from a lack of food. The "workman" carrying the ladder was really a disguised American flier, a lieutenant whom I immediately recognized. When he reached the warning wire he paused a moment, then nodded to a bored German guard nearby.

Beside me, I heard a hoarse whisper, "Migawd! If he steps over that wire, he's a dead duck. . ."

It was an effort to keep my eyes averted. But every American in that area went on about his business as if nothing out of the ordinary were happening. Finally, I decided it was safe to turn around for an-

the Germans..

Illustrations by Bill Champe

other peek. By then, the lieutenant had reached the outer fence.

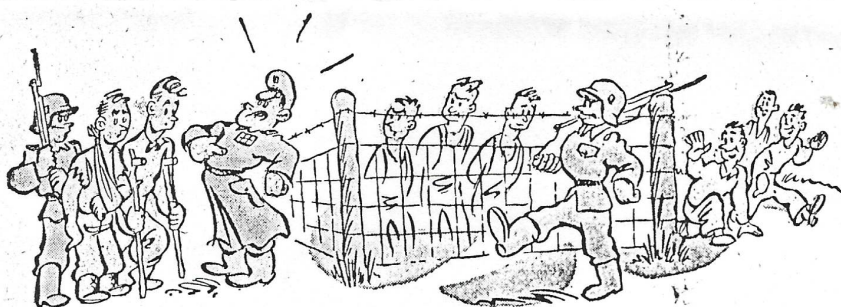
Quickly, he propped the ladder against the fence, then began to climb toward the top. From the guard towers, the Germans watched curiously through the sights of their machine guns. But the lieutenant seemed totally oblivious of them. With a pair of pliers, he began to test each strand of wire, as if searching for a break in the wire. At last, he reached the top. He sat there

took a few gulps of free air, put the ladder over his shoulder, then sauntered down the street. Not a gun was fired in his direction.

Unfortunately, the escape was short-lived. The lieutenant was recognized after he'd put several blocks between himself and the camp. He was brought back and thrown into solitary. The Germans were furious. They stormed into the area and began an immediate investigation. Tempers flared and faces were red

angered Germans gave up the investigation. For them, the escape, brief though it was, meant humiliation. But for the Americans, it was a great moral victory....

To under-



for a moment, then deliberately turned and waved to one of the guards. By then, dozens of American hearts were threatening to jump through chest walls for the lieutenant atop the wire was a fat target if the Germans ever recognized him.

Casualty, the American lifted the ladder, then placed it outside the fence. On the way down the ladder, he paused from time to time to examine the wire. You'd have thought that he was tuning a concert piano for Oscar Levant, the way he'd tap a wire, then bend down to listen. Reaching the ground, the lieutenant

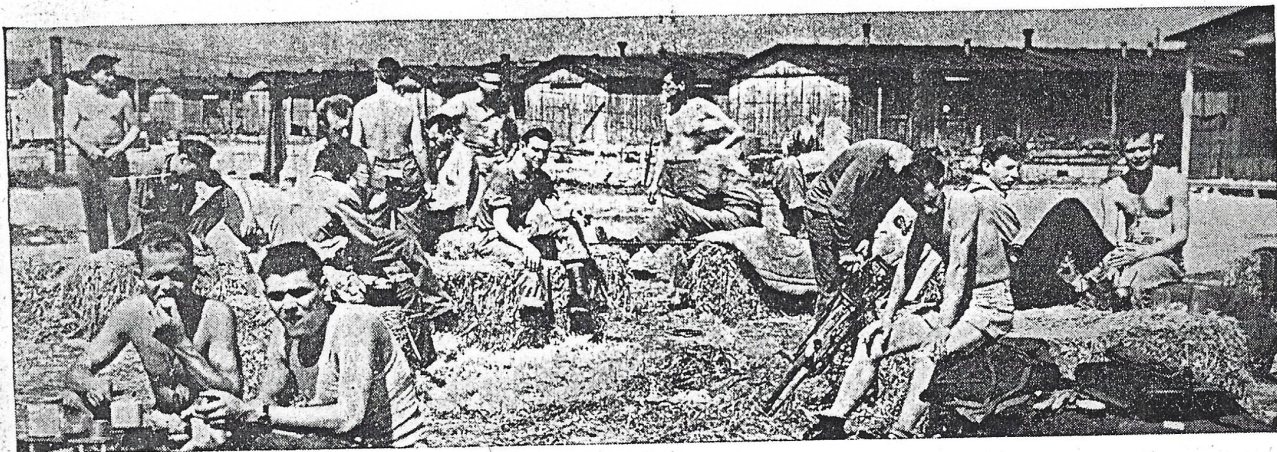
as guards stammered shame-faced alibis to their superiors.

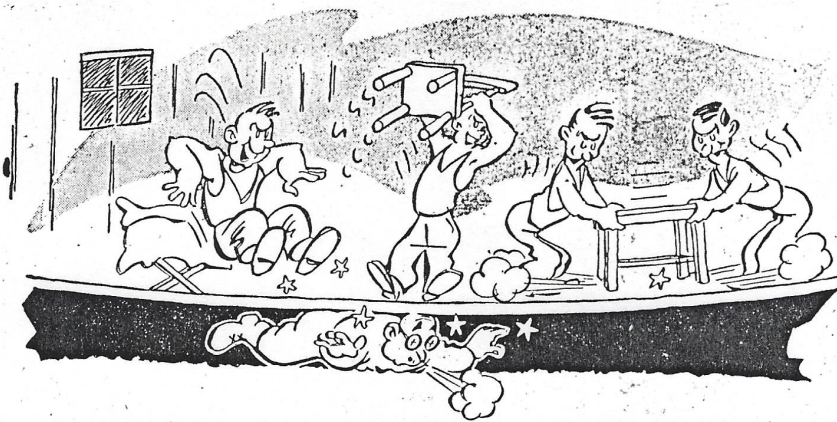
The guards swarmed through the barracks buildings, wrecking beds and, incidentally, stealing cigarettes and Red Cross canned goods. But they learned absolutely nothing, where the ladder had come from or from where the lieutenant had stolen the work uniform. In the end, the

stand why American prisoners were willing to risk death in million-to-one-shot escape attempts; you've first got to understand something of the German mind.

My own case offers a perfect insight into the German mentality. To say that I was scared the afternoon I parachuted into hostile Germany is putting it blandly. I was petri-

(Below) American prisoners of the Germans at Moosburg awaiting their turn for evacuation by C-47 troop carriers of the 9th U.S. Air Force. The men, many of them imprisoned since November, 1942, said their rations consisted of three potatoes per day per man and a loaf of black bread divided among nine. Red Cross packages kept them going. The straw and other evidence are signs of their impending freedom.





"... someone yelled 'Goon under the barracks!' Immediately we went into action."

fied. When I landed, there were exactly six bad flak wounds in my head. My right ankle was broken and I was weak from loss of blood. Later, when I was discovered by six Germans, they gave me a treatment that I subsequently learned was almost routine.

While two soldiers covered me with guns, four German civilians worked me over. Using fists and clubs, they beat me into insensibility, breaking my nose in the process. Finally, I was forced to march eight miles, despite my broken ankle. For two days, I was denied first aid. Then a German surgeon operated on my head, but failed to use an anesthetic. My diet, for five days, consisted of bread and water.

But at Sagan, I found hundreds of Americans who had undergone even worse treatment. Men who, out of sheer contempt for the Germans, were willing to do anything to make life miserable for them, even to a point of paying with their lives, if necessary. . . .

At Sagan, men were united by a single emotion. Good old rip-roaring anger. The Germans had their arrogant guards, their guns, their high fences. Yet, in the face of these odds, the Americans refused to be cowed into submission.

Your body could be conquered, but why allow the Germans to conquer your soul? You could let them drive you out of your mind, or you could fight back, matching German intimidations with American ingenuity. So the Americans fought back.

Escape! Not a chance in a million! But why not give it a try? It gave you something to talk about while you hoarded food and made your plans. If you failed, rack up one for the Germans. But if you succeeded, you had the knowledge that hundreds of Americans would grow drunk on your success. You had to think of American morale. If you didn't, where else could you go, except crazy?

One day, a Red Cross representative visited Sagan. He was accom-

panied by a German officer. This pair hadn't been in camp long when there appeared at the exit gate a very spit-and-polish officer and another man, dressed like the Red Cross representative. Naturally, this pair consisted of one American flier and his equally American sidekick. They had just one thing in mind, which was to scam the hell out of there.

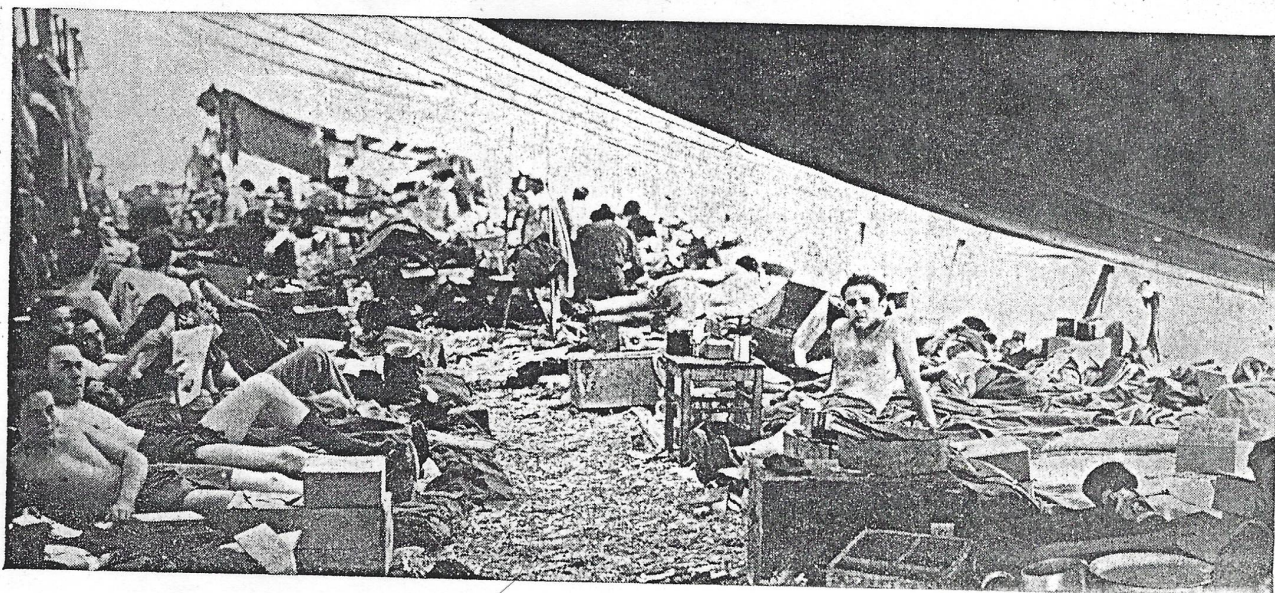
The guards on the gate gave out with the Hitler hi-ball. The American, in German disguise, returned the salute, then walked outside to freedom. When the real German officer returned to the gate, he failed to see the humor in the situation. The alarm was given and in due time the two Americans were captured.

The Germans literally tore up the camp in an effort to get to the bottom of the escape plot. Where had the uniform come from? How had the Americans known of the impending visit? Who was responsible for the leak? German brass screamed at their subordinates and so it went, all down the chain of command. But from the Americans, they could learn nothing.

Thwarted at every turn, the Germans found other means to get their revenge. Red Cross packages were cut to half rations. The Germans blamed it onto the disruption of their supply lines. Actually, when the war ended, we found every house within a walking radius of

(Please turn to page 28)

(Below) Interior view of a tent at Moosburg camp which housed more than 450 men of the U.S. Air Corps and Ground Forces while prisoners of the Germans. The men slept on gravel floors. The tent, pitched in a hollow, was flooded during rainstorms. This picture was taken while the Americans awaited their pending repatriation.



We Drove the Germans Nuts

(Continued from page 18)

our P-W camp completely stocked with Red Cross provisions.

The Germans had other ways of striking back at us. Once, when a group of Americans refused to leave their barracks for a routine head count, the Germans solved the problem by spraying the barracks walls with gunfire. But this method of retaliation only strengthened our desire to outwit the Germans next time.

Of all the guards in our area, the most obnoxious was a guy we called "Specs." Specs was short and dumpy. He had a long hook nose and was always peering over the tops of his glasses. Specs had a way of making life miserable for us. But one night, we got even with him.

Specs was a ferret—a snooper. His job was to stick close to us and to report our conversations to his superiors. One night, someone saw Specs crawling under our barracks. Apparently, he was bent on listening to our conversation through the floor. There wasn't much space, certainly no more than enough to accommodate Specs' rotund shape. But he was allowed to get well under the barracks before someone yelled, "Goon under the barracks!"

Immediately, we went into action. We leaped off beds. We lifted tables and pounded them against the thin floor. Shouts of "Get out from under there, you Goon b-----!" were in-

terspersed with cries of "Bombs away!" and "Blockbuster!" Down below, it must have sounded like the fall of the Roman Empire.

Soon, a white face emerged from beneath the barracks. Specs was covered with dust and dirt. His clothes were twisted and torn. But when he heard us screaming at him, he ducked his chin and fled. After that, Specs was never the same. His spirit was broken.

But for every "Specs," there was a German guard who refused to tolerate such treatment. Those were the treacherous babies we had to watch. We soon learned their names and we were careful to give them a wide berth. In the game we were playing, you had to know how far you could go and when to stop.

One night, a couple of my pals, Steve and Charlie, decided to take advantage of a howling blizzard. From the latrine, I watched them cover themselves with sheets, then burrow down in two feet of snow. Under the perfect camouflage, they wriggled past the warning wire and out to the fence. With wire cutters, they made a hole in the fence, then squeezed through. It was two hours before one of the guards discovered the hole.

This time, the Germans meant business. They swarmed into our buildings, routed us out of bed. They carried small identification pictures of every prisoner. While one guard would prod an American forward, another would identify him by his picture.

The Germans were raging, but they still weren't sure that a real escape had been made. Our position was ticklish, for they seemed in no mood for jokes. But there was always the thought that the longer these guards could be detained, the better chance Charlie and Steve would have of making good their escape.

The late departed Charlie had worn his hair shaved close. One of our guys decided to gamble on palming himself off as Charlie. When he stepped forward—sporting a completely shaved head—he answered to Charlie's name. He got away with it for awhile. But eventually, the Germans got wise.

The officer in charge ordered one of the guards to bring Charlie's hapless "double" in for questioning.

Then he went stalking out of the building. What happened next was strictly unpremeditated. All of us began to close in around the lone German guard. A foot snaked out and the guard was tripped. Suddenly, he whipped out his gun and his eyes were the eyes of a killer.

Fortunately, someone turned off the lights. Then we really went to work. We roughed the guard around. We stole his bayonet, his canteen. Someone untied the guard's shoes and another guy unbuckled his holster.

When the lights finally went on, not a man was within ten feet of the guard. He stood there uncertainly and his gun wavered. Dozens of eyes were glaring at him. Suddenly, the guard's courage began to ebb. He had a gun, but he was afraid. He knew that if he shot one of us, the rest of us would kill him before help came. It gave us a feeling of exhilaration to see a German afraid. We watched him shuffle out and we knew that he would not say anything to his superiors. We knew that he didn't have the guts to admit that we had him cowed.

We didn't sleep much more that night. Two men had escaped and we had given a Goon guard a rough time of it. We were in the clouds. No matter what form the German retribution took, they could not rob us of our satisfaction. Morale, at Sagan, had never been better. . . .

One night, shortly thereafter, the Germans routed us out of bed. They told us that we were moving to another camp. The night was bitterly cold and the thought of making a long march in our weakened condition did not appeal to us. We knew our German captors would make us double-time it unless we thought of something to slow them down. Finally, one of our boys hit upon a plan. We have saved back considerable food from our last Red Cross packages. Since it was too heavy to carry, we decided to put it to good use.

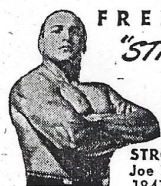
So we called in those Goon guards who had been particularly obnoxious. We stuffed them with food. The Germans were overwhelmed by our generosity and they ate until they could hold no more.

It was a woeful waste of food, but it was worth it. During that stage of the war, even the German stomach lacked the capacity to cope with that quantity of food. Many of the guards were sick that night and the pace was held to a minimum. We had done everything we could do with the facilities at our command. But, that first night at least, it had been enough.

For two terrible weeks, we wan-



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