

towards this objective are set forth under the World War II Working Group section below.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

WORLD WAR II WORKING GROUP

The World War II Working Group (WWII WG) has conducted extensive research into the measures undertaken by both the Soviets and Americans in 1944 and 1945 to plan for, document and account for prisoners of war liberated by each side. The efforts of the working group have been based almost entirely on historical records which have been found in Russian and American archives. Thousands of pages of documents have been exchanged by the two sides of the working group.

The principal focus of the U.S. side of the working group has been to research and analyze the wartime experience of American prisoners of war liberated from German POW camps by the Soviet Red Army. In its comprehensive report, the U.S. side of the WWII WG provides a detailed analysis of the historical record regarding the numbers of U.S. POWs freed from the German camps in the Soviet zone of occupied Germany.

Research completed thus far by the WWII WG confirms that over 28,000 U.S. prisoners of war were repatriated under extremely chaotic and stressful circumstances from Soviet occupied territory during the final months of World War II. Information collected to date by the working group indicates that American servicemen were not held against their will as a matter of Soviet policy. However, as General Volkogonov noted on several occasions, at the end of World War II the repatriation of some American servicemen with Slavic, Baltic or Jewish names was delayed because of their

C. CAMPS LIBERATED LATE BY SOVIETS, OR BY US AND SOVIETS

C.1.

Camp. Stalag Luft I, Barth, Prussia

Location. On the Baltic, 23 kilometers northwest of Stralsund, Rostock district; 54°22'N-12°42'E.

Camp population. US and British air force personnel, mostly officers.

Population gains or losses. There was no significant influx from other camps in 1945, but there had been a large increase during 1944; at the time of liberation the POW population approached 9,000 (US, UK, and other nationalities).

Circumstances of liberation. Because of its location further west and north than most German POW camps, Stalag Luft I was not evacuated in the face of the Soviet advance during March and April 1945. When on 30 April, the German commandant did order the Senior Allied Officer (SAO) to prepare the prisoners for evacuation, the SAO stated the Germans would have to use force in order to get the prisoners to move. Faced with the advancing Soviets, recalcitrant prisoners, and the prospect of bloodshed, the Germans abandoned the camp. On 1 May 1945 the SAO, who upon the German departure had assumed responsibility for maintaining order in the camp, sent out contact parties to meet with advancing Soviet troops. Soviet liberating forces were from the 65th Army (Colonel General Pavel Batov) of the 2nd Belorussian Front. Initially the Soviets showed little interest in the camp or the needs of the POWs for food and water, nor did they cooperate with Allied authorities to effect relief efforts or a timely evacuation of the prisoners from the camp. In fact, Soviet troops prevented such actions until 12 May when SHAEF began an aerial evacuation of the POWs; this operation was completed on 15 May.³²

³² Not all liberated Allied POWs at Barth, however, suffered significant deprivations. One American later reported to a former crew member held at a different POW camp: "After we were liberated by the Russians on May 1st were living the life of Riley at camp. Have roll-call at 8:30 A.M. & then have the rest of the day off. The B-17s came in on the 13th of May so we were there two weeks after being liberated. All the food we want and nothing to do but play ball & lie in the sun." "K.C" Micko [F/O Kenneth C. Micko] to "Bill" [1st Lt. William E. Shinn], 7 July

Accounting of US POWs & other remaining questions. As late as 25 June 1945, one recovered POW, SSgt. Anthony Sherg, reported: "Possibility of several hundred American prisoners of war liberated from Stalag Luft One, Barth, are now confined by the Russian Army in the Rostock area..." Sherg indicated that he also had been held for several weeks at Rostock. Follow-up inquiries to the Soviets and further investigation, however, produced no confirmation of Sherg's information.

The postwar debriefing of Colonel Hubert Zemke, Senior American Officer at Barth, includes copies of important contemporary documents relating to conditions at the camp just before and subsequent to the Soviet liberation. One of the documents, dated on 14 May 1945, and signed by Soviet, British, and American officers, is essentially a receipt for 8,498 POWs (1,415 British and 7,083 Americans) turned over to the British and American authorities by the Soviets.

The Veterans Administration list prepared from the Prisoner of War Information Bureau IBM cards contains 4,298 names of US prisoners of war who were returned to military control from Stalag Luft I (code 032). A Military Intelligence Service analysis, dated 1 November 1945, indicates that 7,717 US and 1,427 British POWs returned to military control in May 1945 from Stalag Luft I; the higher numbers probably reflect those POWs who made their own way west from Luft I and were not part of the formal exchange completed 14 May.³³

1945, in "Reports of Death of F/O Alfred H. Janss..." AG 704-Dead (18 March 1945), AGO Central Decimal File 1940-45, box 4120, entry 360, RG 407, NA.

³³ EX Report No. 678, 19 July 1945, "Col. Hubert Zemke (Stalag Luft I)", CPM Branch, WDGS MIS-X, "Interrogations," Subject File, Prisoner of War Information Branch, box 2006, Entry 460A; Military Intelligence Service, WDGS, 1 November 1945, "American Prisoners of War in Germany", pp. 13-21, Subject File POW Information Bureau, box 2197, entry 460A, RG 389. G-1 Ninth Army to G-1 12th Army Group, 11 May 1945 Message, 12th Army Group G-1 Subject File, "103-A/PWs(US & Br.-General Policy), box 23, entry 165, RG 331. SHAEF to USMMM, 12th AG, 21st AG, 6th AG, 25 June 1945, Message S-92930, 12th Army Group Adjutant General Decimal File, "383.6-POWs Vol. VII," box 200, entry 198, RG 331, NA. CG Ninth Army to SHAEF G-1, 7 May 1945, Message KX-21057, SHAEF AG Decimal File, "383.6," box 186 entry 56, RG 331, NA.

B.2.

Camp. Stalag Luft III, Sagan, Silesia

Location. About 120 kilometers southeast of Berlin; 51°35'N- 15°19'E.

Camp population. The largest officer's camp in Germany; in January 1945 the International Red Cross reported Sagan held over 6,800 Americans. It also included a large British contingent, mostly fliers.

Population gains or losses. On the evening of 27 January, the Germans gave the POWs at Sagan 30 minutes notice to evacuate and move west, away from the advancing Soviets of the 4th Guards Tank Army, 1st Ukrainian Front. The entire camp population, except for about 200 sick stragglers too weak to walk, began to march out of Stalag Luft III shortly before midnight on 27 January.

Circumstances of liberation. The POWs from the south and center compounds of Luft III went directly to Stalag VII-A, Moosburg, where they arrived on 31 January. Part of their journey had been in railroad freight cars. The north and west compounds marched and moved by train to Stalag XVIII-D, Nuremburg, which they reached on 4 February. Conditions at Nuremburg rapidly deteriorated as the influx of POWs from other camps, including Dulag Luft, Luft IV, and Oflag 64, sometimes reached a thousand a day. The Germans evacuated the American POWs from Nuremburg on April 3 and moved them toward Stalag VII-A, Moosburg. During that march, the German guards lost control and authority over the prisoners, many of whom dropped out of the column at will. Intimidated by the approach of the American Army, the Germans did little to stop the disintegration the bulk of the column, however reached Moosburg on 20 April, and was liberated by American units (on 27 April). But many POWs, especially stragglers, the sick, and escapees, who had been in Stalag Luft III in January 1945, returned to military control after being recovered in small groups or singly, often on the road or in the woods or at a private residence, and not from large masses liberated at Moosburg in April.

Accounting of US POWs & other remaining questions. The Veterans Administration list prepared from the Prisoner of War Information Bureau IBM cards contains 6,123 names of US prisoners of war who were returned to military control from Stalag Luft III (code 033).³⁰

B.3.

Camp. Stalag Luft IV, Gross Tychow, East Prussia

Location. Northeast of Berlin, near the Baltic coast, 53°51'N-16°15'E.

Camp population. This was a large camp, estimated in February 1945 to hold 8,600 US POWs, mostly Army Air Forces NCOs and enlisted men.

Population gains or losses. As Soviet troops of the 2nd Belorussian Front (probably 19th Army) advanced on the area, the Germans evacuated this camp beginning 6 February 1945, and marched the prisoners west. The final destination was to be Stalag XI-B, Fallingbostal.

Circumstances of liberation. Most of the POWs from Luft IV did not reach XI-B, but were liberated when the columns made contact with British and American units in late April and early May. Many prisoners had escaped the German columns and found freedom on their own. An American medical officer accompanying one of the columns tried to keep a record of the rations received from the Germans as well as of the sick and dead POWs, in order to later account for casualties and to "aid in establishing the guilt of our German captors as war criminals." Of the experience he reported: "On 6 Feb 1945 we were evacuated by foot. We marched to Stalag II B at Fallingbosted [sic] where we arrived 30 March 1945. It was a march of disease, suffering, filth, and starvation. On 6 April 1945 we were again evacuated by foot and we were still on the road when the English evacuated us on 2 May 1945."

³⁰ Military Intelligence Service, WDGS, 1 November 1945, "American Prisoners of War in Germany", pp. 22-34, Subject File POW Information Bureau, box 2197, entry 460A, RG 389, NA. EX Report No. 585, 16 April 1945, "Maj. Charles H. Diamond (Stalag Luft III)," EX Report No. 646, 17 May 1945, "Col. Delmar T. Spivey (Stalag Luft III)," EX Report No. 652, 26 April 1945, "Lt.Col. Wilbur W. Abing (Stalag Luft III)," CPM Branch, WDGS MIS-X, "Interrogations," Subject File, Prisoner of War Information Branch, box 2006, Entry 460A, RG 389, NA. Arthur A. Durand, Stalag Luft III (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1988), pp. 326-56.

Accounting of US POWs & other remaining questions. The Veterans Administration list prepared from the Prisoner of War Information Bureau IBM cards contains 6,100 names of US prisoners of war who were returned to military control from Stalag Luft IV (code 091).³¹

³¹ MIS-X, WDGS, 15 February 1945, "German Prisoner of War Camps With American PWs"; EX Report No. 619, May 15, 1945, "TSgt. Francis S. Paules (Stalag Luft IV)," CPM Branch, WDGS MIS-X, "Interrogations," Subject File, Prisoner of War Information Branch, box 2006, Entry 460A, RG 389, NA. Sgt. Mark N. Davis, 9 August 1945; TSgt. William P. Hurley, 14 August 1945; SSgt. James A. Lires, 11 September 1945; SSgt. Paul E. McNally, 11 September 1945; SSgt. June E. Roberson, 28 July 1945, "Statement or Report Of Interview Of Recovered Personnel," AGO Classified Decimal File, 1943-45, "383.6 (21 August 1945) (31 August 1945) (18 September 1945) (7 September 1945)", box 2438, entry 360, RG 407, NA. Capt. Leslie Caplan (MC) to Casualty Branch AGO, "Report on Stalag Luft IV," n.d., AG 704(2 April 1946), AGO Central Decimal File, 1946-48, box 1543, Entry 363, RG 407, NA.

C.5

Camp. Stalag XVII-B, Gneixendorf, Austria

Location. 6 kilometers northwest of Krems; 48°27'N-15°39'E.

Camp population. The US prisoner population was mostly Army Air Forces enlisted men.

Population gains or losses. In the last weeks of the war the number of US POWs grew to over 4,200 as evacuees from other camps swelled its ranks. The entire camp approached nearly 30,000 POWs of various nationalities.

Circumstances of liberation. On 8 April 1945, about 4,000 able-bodied US POWs from XVII-B began an 18-day, 280-mile march under German guard to Braunau, Austria (on the Austrian-German border about 70 miles east of Munich).³⁸ Some 200 sick POWs remained behind in the camp hospital; on 9 May Soviet troops (likely from the 4th Guards Army, 2nd Ukrainian Front) overran Krems and liberated these men. Meanwhile, about 75 other Americans had escaped from the march columns and returned to XVII-B, also to be eventually liberated by the Soviets. Their treatment, while briefly in Red Army custody, was reported to have been "good."

On 3 May 1945, troops from the US 13th Armored Division, Third Army, arrived at the prison camp north of Braunau to which the American POWs from Stalag XVII-B had been moved. American and Soviet troops also liberated some POWs originally from Gneixendorf, who had escaped from the march columns headed to Braunau.

Accounting of US POWs & other remaining questions. The Veterans Administration list prepared from the Prisoner of War Information Bureau IBM cards contains 2,983 names of US prisoners of war who were returned to military control from Stalag XVII-B (code 025).³⁹

³⁸ Greg Hatton, Stories My Father Never Told Me: The Journal of the "San Antone Rose" (Brooklyn: Greg Hatton, 1993), pp. 85-89, plus one page of maps and three pages of photographs, relate to the march from XVII-B to Branau.

³⁹ Military Intelligence Service, WDGS, 1 November 1945, "American Prisoners of War in Germany", pp. 100-08, Subject File POW Information Bureau, box 2197, entry 460A, RG 389. ETO MIS-X Interviews with SSgts. Kenneth Kurterbach and Jos. A. Dillard, 29 May 1945, ETO MIS-X, Decimal Correspondence, "383.6-POWs(Allied)," box 9, RG 332. SSgt. Isaac Abeyta, 5