

# Barney Keogh: A North Dakota P.O.W. in World War II Germany

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## INTRODUCTION

During the past fifty years, the Second World War has been the subject of more publications than almost any other single topic. In the English language alone, the number of books and articles runs in the hundreds of thousands. Given this volume of information, can there be any topics left about the war that have not been more than adequately researched and examined in print? In fact, one of these topics is the experiences of American servicemen who were prisoners of war. In the memoir presented here, a former North Dakotan reflects on his experiences as a prisoner of war in Germany in 1944 and 1945.<sup>1</sup> Barney Keogh wrote his memoir several years ago, at the request of his friend Colonel Horace Lanford, another veteran of the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force. In 1944 Lanford had been Keogh's old commander in the 741<sup>st</sup> squadron of the 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. Portions of Keogh's memoir were later used in the 741<sup>st</sup> squadron's history. Keogh's nephew, John Tandberg, who is the registrar at Minnesota State University Moorhead, gave a typed copy of the memoirs to the editor. Very limited changes to the original text, which is printed here in its entirety, were made for clarity or to further explain military terms.

Barney Keogh was born in 1921, in Fort Yates, North Dakota, where his parents owned a gas station.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on his childhood, Barney recalled that Fort

Yates "is where I learned to respect a nickel and a dime, and to help out those to who didn't have a dime." It was also where he became fascinated with airplanes. "My Fort Yates friends and I read numerous WWI stories in pulp magazines. Through the ages of twelve to fourteen we became obsessed with the flying ability of those guys and my goal was to join our Army Air Corps and become a wonderful and glorious pilot."



In 1936 the Keoghs moved to Lake Park, Minnesota. After graduating from high school, Barney attended the State School of Science in Wahpeton and studied aeronautical engineering. He applied to the Army Air Force in 1941 and was accepted as an air cadet. After intensive training in Texas, Keogh qualified as a pilot on four-engine aircraft. He remained in the United States through 1943 as an instructor, then joined a new bomb group of B-24 Liberators. He arrived with his group and his plane in southern Italy in the early weeks of 1944, joining the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

By early spring Keogh had flown the twenty-five missions that the Army Air Force had considered a sufficient tour of duty. Several of these missions were against well-defended oil refineries near Ploesti, Rumania, the major source of oil for the German military.<sup>3</sup> These attacks had been successful, destroying more than 700,000 tons of oil products. But the price had been high. The 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force lost some two hundred bombers in the Ploesti missions. Most of the crews of

these planes, if not killed outright, ended up as prisoners of the Germans.<sup>4</sup>

The heavy losses in these and other missions had a dire influence on Keogh's future. He had hoped to return home after his twenty-fifth mission, but the rules were changed. As he remembered it later, "the toughest targets became limited [i.e. previous damage by American bombers had made further bombing of many 'priority' targets unnecessary] and a number of short-range targets were being bombed. With this in mind, and having lost so many crews and aircraft to combat loss and attrition, the 15<sup>th</sup> AF increased our mission requirements from twenty-five to fifty."

As Keogh's memoir begins, he was just returning to his base after a "rest and relaxation" leave in Capri.

## JUNE 1944 AN UNSCHEDULED VISIT TO GERMANY

I had completed forty-three combat missions when I was sent to Capri Island, just off Naples, for a short period of "R & R." Capri was pleasant and a nice change from the routine on base in our group's "tent city," but after three or four days I became bored with doing nothing, so I caught a supply boat back to Naples and then hitched a ride on a truck convoy back across the mountains to the Adriatic side of the Italian peninsula. Then [it was] on to our group base just outside of the small town of Cherignolia.<sup>5</sup> I had just seven more missions to fly and then it was back home to the USA!

I was then flying in the 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, the 741<sup>st</sup> combat squadron (H) as a casual pilot.<sup>6</sup> The squadron commander was Major Horace Lanford. He had been a close friend of mine since before the formation of the 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. At that time of that last mission, on June 26, 1944, I was still a first lieutenant.

Shortly after I got back, we were briefed on another mission. The target was a fuel refinery just outside of Vienna, Austria, near a little village named Moosbierbaum. I do not remember that there was anything exceptional about the target; however, our wing was flying four complete groups on the target which meant it was of some importance. What we didn't know then, but what we found out later, was that this mission had been planned one or two weeks earlier. The first try at the mission hadn't gone off for some reason—probably [bad] weather over the target area. In the interim, other missions were flown and other aircraft were shot down. On one such aircraft, the Germans captured a navigator's briefcase, intact, with the complete mission data on the Moosbierbaum

target. So they were ready for us.<sup>7</sup>

On June 26 I had flown with one or two of the enlisted crew before, but I didn't remember having flown with the copilot or the bombardier. There was no navigator on the crew. The crew consisted of the copilot, bombardier, engineer, top turret gunner, two waist gunners, the ball turret gunner, the tail gunner and myself: a nine-man crew.<sup>8</sup> Regrettably, I cannot remember the name of a single one of these crewmen, but I know that most of them had considerable combat experience.



Top: Barney Keogh as a young flight instructor in 1943. Below: First Lieutenant Keogh standing outside the headquarters of the 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in Cherignolia, Italy. Opposite page: Barney Keogh, ca. 1944.

## THE MISSION

The takeoff, the formation assembly, and climb to altitude were normal. Before climbing to oxygen level, we put on our oxygen masks; those who wished to put on their flak jackets did so at this time. As for me, I had never worn the flak jacket as I felt that it would encumber my ability to control the plane and react quickly. I always laid the chest section of the jacket on my seat to protect myself from flak penetration from below. The copilot decked himself out completely with his flak gear. Other than that, I cannot speak for the rest of the crew.<sup>9</sup>

As we neared the target area, I checked with the crew as always, making sure they were in their gun positions and told them to go ahead and test fire their guns. I remember a flight of six or seven P-38 escort aircraft were supposed to be escorting our group as we turned on the initial point and headed directly toward the target. Our bomb-bay doors were open and we were on track to the target. It was then that I saw at two o'clock and slightly above us, the largest flight of enemy aircraft heading into us that I had ever seen or even imagined I would ever see. I broke the "sacred" radio silence: "enemy aircraft—two o'clock high—estimate one hundred and twenty-five." How I came up with that number I don't know, but it was something to grab at and I guess it got everyone's attention. The downing of that crew that I mentioned earlier and the capture of that navigator's briefcase had served the Germans nicely. They had gathered every fighter they could spare, even some of their planes that were not

qualified for that altitude, about 24,000 feet. They seemed determined to knock us out and foul up our run before bomb drop.

In no time at all our guns were going and the usual Focke-Wulf 190s and Me-109s were zipping by. In another second or two I saw a Me-110. This last bird was by 1944 a twin-engine fighter trainer and was not designed to fight at that altitude. I saw what I'm sure was a couple of Ju-87s. This bird was designed as a dive-bomber and low level strafing machine.<sup>10</sup> They put up everything they had.

Fighters hit our B-24 several times, but I didn't feel any power loss. One or two of the rear gunners elatedly called over the intercom system "I got one - I got one - I saw him blow up." By the time the fighter passes were over, our gunners had verified five kills.~ The air was full of enemy aircraft going by us from the rear then turning and coming back for frontal and side passes.<sup>11</sup> I remember watching an FW-190 making a frontal attack. Black smoke was whipping back from his guns and then his propeller appeared just to leave his aircraft. The prop zipped out ahead of the plane; its rotation rapidly slowed down and then took a downward turn. The aircraft went on by with either a dead pilot or one in desperate straits.

I don't remember any flak coming up. Just before "bombs away" we were hit again with a burst of German 20mm shells.<sup>12</sup> Just as we dropped our bombs I noticed an engine fire on the port side. There were reports of "I got one" and then a report from someone of an engine fire on the starboard side. The cockpit was starting to get a bit foggy with hydraulic fluid spraying about. At that point I couldn't have cared less what the source of that spray might be. By that time I had also seen a couple of B-24s wing over and go down.



Courtesy of the author

*The B-24 in flight, adorned with the "nose art" that was standard fare in the U.S. Army Air Force during the war.*

One blew up in a big ball of flame. There were large black smoking lumps [of plane wreckage] that went falling down out of the sky followed by a junkyard of small debris. I knew that I couldn't get the plane back home. It was falling back badly so I turned away from the formation, pulled the landing gear handle in down position and ordered "BAIL OUT."

I must have been the only one in the crew without a parachute on. I had been given a chest-pack chute for that flight inasmuch as my regular backpack chute hadn't been repacked. But flying a B-24 in the pilot or copilot position was nearly impossible with that chest-pack between you and the control yoke. I had the chute harness on and my pack was lying somewhere back on the flight deck among the spare flight jackets, flak jackets, and whatnot.

The copilot had jumped, and I was about to leave when there was a loud crunching and grinding sound; the old B-24 seemed to jerk sideways. I was at a loss as to what that was, but immediately after that, there was a high frequency roar and the plane seemed to be vibrating in harmony with that roar. As I look back on it now, and with what information I later gained, I think an enemy fighter had rammed into us. Up where I was, there was little to nothing I could see. Now I would guess that a propeller shaft had sheared, and that an engine was running away at about 6,000 rpms. If the shaft had sheared ahead of the nose case thrust bearing, the prop would have come off the engine. If it had sheared behind the thrust bearing, the engine would have run away while the prop windmilled. At any rate, I do not know to this day whether I had lost all engine power, lost a propeller, or what the exact circumstance was. With an airplane destined to go down, it just doesn't make a lot of difference. But that high frequency howl terrified me.

I assumed that I had a few precious seconds before the plane exploded or just came apart. Out of the corner of my eye I had seen the top turret man come down on the deck and now was the time for me to leave and to do so just as damn fast as I could. I got back on the flight deck, tossed some junk out of the way, pulled out my chest pack, snapped it on the harness rings and bounced down to the bomb-bay catwalk. I did not even consider fooling with the autopilot. There was no time to waste on that. The top turret sergeant was on the catwalk looking down at the thousands of feet below us. His back was to me and I could see his chute was on. I gave him a friendly knee in the rump and out he went. With one motion I checked my leg straps and stepped out into the air.<sup>13</sup>

## THE JUMP

It's just a guess, but I was about 17,000 feet when I happily saw the last of that airplane and pulled the ripcord. I still remember looking at the "D" ring as it came off in my hand. I gave it a little toss out and it fell alongside me, hanging in the air just out of my reach. A second or two or three must have passed and then the chute popped open. The "D" ring then took off like a bullet heading straight down. The shock of the chute didn't seem significant but the greatest surprise was the immense quiet. I heard some explosions below and some machine guns going and even felt little ripples, as something seemed to lightly tug or nip at the chute canopy. These noises seemed a thousand miles away. The quiet was calming. Throughout the sky were parachutes galore. One would think that it was an airborne invasion. The target, it appeared, had been hit squarely. It was a fuel refinery, producing fuel for their "secret" Me-262 jet fighter that was supposedly to go into use soon.<sup>14</sup> There were flames and smoke soaring skyward for thousands of feet. I remember being significantly concerned for a while, as it appeared that the drift of my chute would take me over the heart of one of the bigger fires on the ground. As I got closer to the ground, I could determine that I would miss the fire by a mile or more. Finally, it seemed as though I was no longer going down but the ground was starting to come up to meet me. That was the signal to get ready to hit the ground, and I knew I was about to go on another unwanted adventure.

## CAPTURE

June 26, 1944, was a bright and shiny day in the Vienna area. There was no breeze, and the parachute and I came straight down on sod ground about ten or fifteen feet off the edge of a grain field. The chute canopy drifted lazily out over the grain field and spread out like a huge blanket. My legs were folded under me and were hurting considerably. I thought maybe I had a broken leg. I unbuckled the leg straps and wiggled [my] toes. All the parts seemed to work nicely so I got up on my hands and knees and began crawling to the grain field with the thought in mind of bundling up the silk and hiding in the field. I don't know why I thought that would work. I didn't have the foggiest notion of what I planned to do next. I heard some loud shouting and then, up over a little rise, a rather large fellow in a dark blue, uniform-type coverall came running toward

me. As the fellow got closer I could see that he was a kid, only eighteen or nineteen years old.<sup>15</sup> I could also see that he was holding a three-tined pitchfork as though it were a rifle with a fixed bayonet. As he got closer, he didn't seem interested in slowing down. An uncle of mine, having served in World War I, had told me stories about Germans surrendering; as they came up out of the trenches with their hands up, they were shouting "Kamrad." Since I had no intention of starting a "one-man front" in the heart of Austria, I promptly got up on my knees with hands held high and shouted loudly, "Kamrad!" He finally stopped a few feet from me and went through a few jabbing motions with that damn hayfork. Then he started shouting "der waffender waffen!" I had no weapon, but apparently he'd heard that many U.S. aircrew members carried Colt 45s and he wanted to be sure that I didn't have a weapon. Possibly, he wanted a souvenir to show off to the "home folks."

He made me stand up, bundle up my chute silk, and head off toward two or three guys about a hundred yards or so from us. There seemed to be some argument going on, and, as we got there, I saw it was a little fat German guy in some kind of a uniform, holding a revolver on the other two guys. One of those guys was my top turret gunner, passively defending himself against this third fellow, a civilian, who was pummeling him with his fists. I dropped my parachute and stepped between them, shoving the German guy back a bit. He took a few disorganized swings at me and then I turned quickly, grabbing at my shirt collar and jumped in front of the little fat guy; I then very sternly shouted "Offizier" and showed him my lieutenant's bars. The little fat guy snapped to attention and then began yelling at the civilian. I heard the word "offizier" several times. At any rate, it stopped the scuffle and the German soldier, the turret gunner, and I walked over to a dirt road and were picked up by a fellow with a horse-drawn wagon. This wagon had in it another German guy in a "Volks Krieg" uniform.<sup>16</sup> A number of our captured airmen were on board. We proceeded to a large farmhouse with a good many outbuildings. There we got out and joined about twenty captured crewmen, [or Kriegies, as the P.O.W.s were called].<sup>17</sup>

I should point out that, having spent my first fifteen years in southwestern North Dakota among first-generation German immigrants, I knew a few simple words of German. After all, good old Lawrence Welk and his German polka crowd lived in that same part of the state. Now, what little German I knew would come in handy.<sup>18</sup>

At this farmhouse we were told to stand in a large grassy area in the backyard. Here, the top gunner and I came back in contact with the ball-turret gunner and the tail-turret man. In conversation with them and from what previous conversations they had while being rounded up, we figured that our crew had knocked down five German aircraft. I heard nothing of the copilot, except that one of our guys had talked with someone else and they had seen our copilot being herded around with another bunch.

The ball-turret man had not heard the bailout order. He told me that his electrical power had been cut to the turret and that the glass was so shattered that he could not see out. He did what was logical, cranked the turret up, opened the lid and as he looked out, saw the tail end of one of the guys bailing out through a large gaping hole in the right waist of the plane. He was alone up there and he quickly hit the silk.

I forget now whether the bombardier was in that crew of captured airmen or whether I ran into him later, but I knew that he was okay. That accounted for all the crew if the sighting of the copilot was correct. With the bashing that airplane had taken, it was a miracle that someone hadn't been seriously hurt. At any rate, I knew that the bombardier had bailed out through the nose door. In doing so, he had bumped his head on the gear strut, which, as he told me later, had drawn blood. He was later recommended for a Purple Heart award by Brig. Gen. Arthur Vanaman who was our senior U.S. officer at Stalag Luft III.<sup>19</sup>

In due course we were loaded aboard several old trucks and were taken to what appeared to be a military post where there was a "sorta" hospital or dispensary. On the way to this place the trucks made a number of stops, picking up small groups of our downed airmen. There was a number of lightly wounded, a few severely wounded, and a couple of dead airmen, whom they had, for the time being, just wrapped in parachute silk. A great number of men had been burned. Some had skin burned off their faces, their arms, any place the heat of an explosion could get to which was not protected by clothing. I gave particular attention to a Lt. David Brothers of the 742<sup>nd</sup> Squadron. I had known him as a man assigned to my original group. He was in the truck, lying on some parachute silk, and his whole backside was matted with blood. He was in terrible pain. When we got to this makeshift hospital, I helped to get him into a room where they were placing the injured. A large bullet or piece of shrapnel had traveled from side to side through his rump, leaving a hole in one buttock, tearing away



*A map of Germany, showing the P.O.W. camps where Barney Keogh was held. The map and several photographs in this article appeared in *The Longest Mission*, published by the Association of Former Prisoners of Stalag Luft III, 1995, and used with their permission (see endnote 17).*

some of the tailbone and removing a portion of the other buttock. When I looked at this mess, I believe I saw some intestine exposed near the tailbone.

I looked around and saw two or three Germans in white jackets who appeared to be doctors. They were so busy it was next to impossible to get their attention. I managed to thump one on the shoulder, getting his attention. I pointed to Dave, who was groaning, and said, "Morphine, hurry!" I hadn't learned the German word "*schnell*" yet. The German went over with me and had a look at Lt. Brothers. He shook his head disparagingly and then said, "Ja, morphine."

He then waved me away, and I was taken up a flight of stairs to a large auditorium-sized room. There was a very large group of our troops there. We were highly amused by a German cadet officer there who was intent on showing off his power by making two of the German guards parade around like tin soldiers. After each maneuver he would turn and smile at us with self-delight. When he wasn't looking, the German guards gave him the good old-fashioned "finger wave."

In due course we were formed up to be taken away. I got one of those German characters to allow me to make a quick trip down to the injury room. When I got there I found Dave Brothers, sitting up and smiling at me as though he didn't have a care in the world. It was

obvious that he had been given a good shot of the morphine. He asked me about his tail end. I told him that it was quite serious and that his tailbone had been injured badly. He asked me if he would live and I told him I thought he'd come through it okay. He gave me his mother's address and asked me to write her and let her know that he was all right. I didn't get to do that though because the matchbook, which held the address, was taken from me on the next search. Before I left the room, I saw a crewman trying to get my attention; he had no skin on his face, no eyelashes or eyebrows. He was trying to smile. I couldn't identify him, and I apologetically asked him who he was. "You know me, I'm Cpl. Abendenello." Yes, indeed, I knew him. He was a dark-skinned man and a fine tail gunner, again, from the 742<sup>nd</sup> Squadron. I had flown with him on several tough missions. I made a weak joke or two with him and then returned upstairs.

We were then taken somewhere nearby to a building with jail cells. We were turned over to a new set of guards and went through the routine search. They took the matchbook that Dave had given me, with his mother's address. Where they placed all us fellows, I'm not sure. Because I was an officer, I guess, I was alone in a fairly roomy jail cell with two blankets and a cot. It was getting late in the afternoon and, before long, a bowl of soup came along. With the exception of a patrol guard, that was the last I saw of the Germans for that day. At no time did I see one of our officers or enlisted men cower, whimper, or complain. There was no evidence of fear or cowardice. A certain number of the guards made threatening gestures, but they were met with a "steady on" gaze. Our guys would not be bluffed. June 26, 1944, had been a long day.

I remember that a few days later a large number of us prisoners were taken and marched about a mile through Vienna. I remember walking on a bridge over a river with a sign identifying it as the Danube. But the "beautiful blue Danube" appeared to me to be about the same color and texture as "the muddy Mississippi."

A train transported us to a prison encampment about two or three hours from Vienna. This was a special place specially designed as a temporary holding and interrogation facility. There were long rows of solitary cells with a narrow corridor between rows. The cells were scarcely large enough to hold a very small man and a simple cot with a thin straw mattress. As I remember I was there about two weeks. We all had one common but pressing problem: our digestive systems were not attuned to the German black bread. The cell doors had a little handle we could turn to drop



From *The Longest Mission*



From *The Longest Mission*

*The P.O.W.s assembled for appel (roll call) on the parade grounds of Stalag Luft III. Left: A P-51 reconnaissance plane took this aerial photograph of Stalag Luft III. The P.O.W. camp was divided into five compounds, separated by double rows of barbed wire. Many of the photographs in *The Longest Mission* were taken by P.O.W.s using clandestine cameras.*

a little "arm" that signaled a guard that a bathroom trip was urgent. If this guard wasn't too busy with others, he *might* find time to come over and inquire of one's particular needs. For the bathroom, one was issued two squares of thin, shiny, and slick bathroom tissue. Pleading for more was normally ignored. We were told that the American aircraft out of England, while bombing the Schweinfurt ball-bearing plant, managed to scatter a number of bombs over Germany's number one plant for producing toilet tissue.<sup>20</sup> So toilet paper was scarce. Even when we got to our permanent camp, one guarded his tissue carefully. Many Kriegies carried their roll with them morning, noon, and night. At any rate, in this matter we quickly learned to wipe and fold, wipe and fold, etc. until the unused patch was about the size of a postage stamp. After that, one had better be damn careful.

In due course I was interrogated. The interrogator was a German major who said that, a few years back, he had trained in an exchange program with the Canadian Air Force. We went back and forth, he asking questions about my unit, base, and aircraft, and me giving him my name, rank and serial number. When he

asked what air base I had flown from, I said, "You have radar, so you already know that." We found that we had common knowledge about one thing when he asked me if I knew the name of a flower that was on his desk. I responded that it was a geranium. He seemed to brighten right up and said that they called it the same name. He then said, "geranium," only the "g" was pronounced like the "g" in garage. He asked when I thought the war would be over. I said the Allies would surely win it no later than November. This answer seemed to kindle some anger in him, and he quickly stated that "we will win the war!" Then he became a bit pensive and said, "Just suppose we don't win the war; I hope that the Americans beat the Russians into Berlin: we hate Bolshevism!" Beyond that, we didn't have much to say to one another.

After about two weeks we were moved to an outside holding area and were issued a pair of trousers, a shirt, some underwear, and some toilet articles. These last items came in a small box that was held together by a small canvas strap. I saved the box for storage in my "patch" under the bunk bed at the P.O.W. camp. And, for me, that canvas strap had a very impor-

tant part to play later. By this time I had lost track of the date and even the month. Some of the people I knew were gone, taken elsewhere, and many new people were added. We were placed on a train and taken to our permanent camp, Stalag Luft III.

## KRIEGSGEFANGENEN (Prisoner of War)

Stalag Luft III was located on or near the Oder River near the town of Sagan, which had maybe 20,000-25,000 people. Sagan was about ninety miles southeast of Berlin in Silesia. Luft III was an officers' P.O.W. camp. From start to finish, the Germans maintained a strict separation of enlisted men and officers where and whenever possible. The men already at the camp had made some space for this new contingent of personnel. Colonel Delmar Spivey commanded the Kriegies. He was well liked and a very fine officer. He always stood firm in letting the German commander know that they were expected to comply with the international rules regarding prisoners. When I got there, they were pretty good in doing that, but, as the war dragged on, their compliance dropped from slim to almost not at all, especially where food was concerned. But I'll get to that in a moment.

We also had a general among the prisoners. He acted kind of as an observer, but generals were usually in different camps. General Vanaman largely let Colonel Spivey carry on in command. The two of them had established a committee of P.O.W.s to brief, interrogate and assign us incoming folks to barracks. Each man in our group was positively identified, and this was important because the Germans had tried to run in a "ringer" to snoop on the prisoners several times in the past. It never worked. Each barracks building was divided in two parts by a wall with a door. Each section had its senior officer who was referred to as the "Fuehrer." By arranging the bunk beds (which were three tiers tall when I arrived and later became four bunks tall), each half was sectionalized further into living groups, which we called combines. These combines functioned like living units—everyone there sharing and dividing all food. The combine scheduled cooking and cleaning. Barracks-wide meetings were normally attended by one individual for the group.

What can I say about the food? Well, the Germans gave us some food, mostly a heavy, dark-brown bread that they portioned out to us at so many kilos per man per week. They'd have some of the Kriegies bring the bread to each barracks, and then we'd divide it up to

each combine. They also gave us boiled potatoes, usually pretty small potatoes—if you peeled them, there wasn't much left. And we got soup. This amounted to a very small bowl for each man, with a little cabbage or other vegetable in it. Sometimes there was a hint of fat or fatty meat in it. Someone told me that the local butcher, if he had some animal bones, would let them boil those in the soup, so there was a little meat flavor in the soup.

We'd take this bread and potatoes—we called it "goon" food—and mix it with stuff from the Red Cross packages, making a soup, or mix up another flavor to serve as flavoring. We almost filled our stomachs sometimes. We really looked forward to those Red Cross packages. The air force had advised us that, if captured, we should give only our name, rank, and serial number to the Germans. The Germans took this, plus the names of the dead fliers, from their dog tags, and sent this information to the International Red Cross. That group relayed this [information] to Washington, and the government relayed it on to the families. All this took a bit of time. You know the U. S. didn't join the International Red Cross after World War I, so the Swiss wouldn't accept Red Cross packages [directly] from the Americans back home. The U. S. government had to ship the packages to Canada, and the Canadians sent them on to Switzerland. The Swiss



From *The Longest Mission*.

*Food rations were sparse, supplemented occasionally by Red Cross packages. The kriegies cooked communally, either on the one stove in each compound or outdoors over burners on the ground.*





*Rooms in the wooden barracks at Stalag Luft III typically had four triple-deck bunks. Conditions became more crowded and desolate as the war dragged on.*

then sent them to us.<sup>21</sup> First we got a package each week, then, as the war wore on, it became half a package a week, then even less. By the end of the war, Germans were using Red Cross markings on trucks to move military supplies, so our fighters began shooting up anything that moved on the roads.

We used things from the Red Cross packages to bribe the guards. The large concentrated sweet chocolate bar (the D bar) in those, and the American cigarettes, were the most valuable tools in all Germany. There were few Germans who couldn't be bribed with cigarettes or chocolate. With them we could get items which were forbidden to us by German law—certain hard-to-get things like salt, a fresh egg or two. Once I even saw a skinned rabbit come flying over the fence to one of our boys who seemed to be standing at an exact spot. He fielded that rabbit like a professional. We had a chimney sweep come in from the town nearby and clean out the soot from our central stove. He had the top hat that sweeps usually wore and he'd smuggle in veggies and other things under it, and we'd pay him off in chocolate and cigarettes. One day, though, he tripped and off rolled his hat, and the guards decided he was taking bribes. We never saw him again. But many others took the bribes.

Our mail also came through Switzerland. Once in a while someone would get a package from his family at home that way. We could see where they'd been inspected a time or two on their journey. I didn't get any mail myself for some time. My family had been told I was "missing in action," also that I'd been pro-

moted to captain and awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for that last mission. They didn't know I was alive until about five months after I was captured. Finally, I heard from them and learned that I had been awarded a Distinguished Service Cross. I didn't know until after the war that my commanding officer in the squadron thought I had been killed on that raid.<sup>22</sup>

Learning the news was a big part of Kriegie existence. We kept in contact with the outside world with a radio. When we first came into Stalag Luft III and we were positively identified, we were told that there was a radio in camp but that was the last time we were to hear the word "radio" mentioned, and we were never to mention the word. From then on, we said "Johnnie Walker" when we referred to the radio. In fact, they had gotten the parts for the radio by bribing Germans at the camp. I never knew where the radio was until after the war was over. It had been hidden in the leg of a table! They cut a piece of 2 x 4 in half the long way, hollowed out the inside, put in the radio, and left minute holes for plugging in a power source and earphones. Then they glued the 2 x 4 back together and used it as a leg on our central meal table.

Did we get BBC news every evening? Yes! Did we relay the news every evening? Absolutely! Did the Germans know we had a radio? Yes! Could they find it? No! The camp was run by the German air force, and the Luftwaffe made several searches for the radio. They couldn't find it so the Gestapo searched for it and couldn't find it. Then the almighty SS searched for it and they didn't find it. Since the highest level of German intelligence and enforcement couldn't find it—they solved the problem by declaring, "It does not exist."

We fought boredom constantly. We had thousands of books in a library—from donations from the Red Cross, the YMCA, folks back home. There were musicals, theater productions, sports teams, and so on. The YMCA had provided musical instruments and we had a fine band and an orchestra. Some of the guards who were off duty came to the plays or to hear the music. There were many men there who could teach college classes, and so we had those. I took classes in Spanish. Every day we hoped to catch news that the war was coming to an end. It was a long wait.

## WE MOVE

**W**e also got news from the German radio, but we didn't trust most of it. The German news never



From *The Longest Mission*.

*Beginning the night of January 27, 1945, Barney Keogh and his fellow kriegies marched in frigid temperatures from Stalag Luft III, near Sagan, to Spremberg, Germany, where the prisoners were loaded into boxcars meant for no more than forty men or eight horses, for the three-day railway trip to Stalag VIIA (see page 13).*

mentioned that their ground forces ever retreated. However, they repeatedly "withdrew to more strategic positions." Late in January 1945, after I'd been at the camp about five months, we began to hear the sound of big guns. The Germans were withdrawing to more strategic positions along a front that included Stalag Luft III. The Russians were rapidly filling the space they'd vacated. By this time we were beginning to believe the rumors that the Germans "just kept us alive to use as hostages." Colonel Spivey and General Vanaman were taken out of the camp by German officers. We heard they were going to "help" the Germans negotiate a truce with the British and Americans. That was another battle the Germans lost because Vanaman and Spivey wouldn't help them at all.<sup>23</sup>

Early one evening after hearing the big guns firing, we were told by the camp commandant that we'd be marched out after midnight. Our senior officers and every Kriegie in camp knew that the camp had to be moved or the Russians would overtake us.<sup>24</sup> Neither of these conditions was anticipated with delight. Each of

us had to prepare ourselves for such a contingency. We had all made small backpacks and each of us had learned to make a blanket roll. The blanket roll was the best vehicle to convey our two blankets, a pillow, whatever clothes weren't on our backs, and what food that would be given to us. That night after the alert, we each were issued a Red Cross parcel. This parcel consisted of items such as soap, a small game (cribbage board/checkers/cards/etc.), canned food and cigarettes.

By 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning we marched out on the road, moving west. A group of German guards had been rounded up with a contingent of guard dogs. These dogs were large, chesty Doberman Pinschers. By then the guards were getting older and older; even the middle-aged guards had been transferred to "more active duty." Many of these guys had clearly lost their fanatic love for Hitler, but their love for their country and countrymen remained intact. I never saw a German appear to sympathize with us in the camp. And they didn't like escape attempts.

## TWO ESCAPE PLANS ON THE MARCH TO THE NEW P.O.W. CAMP

Our first "leg" of the trip was a sixty-mile march west to the town of Spremberg. On this march, Johnnie Strikatinko, an old friend, and I agreed that, if the right situation presented itself, we'd attempt an escape. We'd work our way back into the Russian lines and then, with Russian help, we'd get down into Russian Georgia, across the Black Sea and into Turkey. Once there we'd check in with our consulate and get back to the USA.<sup>25</sup> Johnnie was a fine and energetic fellow of Polish descent from Battle Creek, Michigan. He could speak fluent Polish, some Russian, and could get along quite well in German. Our second night out we were billeted in a barn, and Johnnie took a chance to take off on his own.

For this march, I had been put in charge of a flight of about sixty Kriegies. This, of course, was not counting our German overseer and his damn dog. That next morning while I was getting our flight together, Johnnie asked the guard if he could use the outhouse between the house and the barn. The guard agreed. This squad, along with the long line of squads, moved out when the confusion had settled down. The German guard had forgotten about the guy sitting in the "two holer" and when the long dreary line of P.O.W.s had moved west, "Strak," as we sometimes called Johnnie, pulled his stocking cap down low over his ears and, while we went west, strolled off to the east. It was a good try, but he didn't make it, as I'll explain later.

I got involved with another escape while on this march. In this case I agreed only to help implement the escape but not to try and take a powder myself. When we made our way to Spremberg, we were crowded into a bunch of 40 x 8 boxcars. Remember the old 40 x 8s—40 Hommes or 8 Chavoux, 40 men or 8 horses? The French had made general use of such cars in World War I.<sup>26</sup> I had my doubts about these as safe transport, both because they were designed by the French and because they were then about thirty years old. On one side of the 40 x 8 was a sliding door. On that same side were two small windows, one forward of the door and one aft. To hold us, the Germans had put soft iron bars over the windows, and the sliding door could only be opened from the outside. They loaded sixty-four of us into each car. Just inside the sliding door, a German sergeant or corporal sat watching us with a machine pistol. He was sitting on some straw piled into a little "bin" set up to keep him beyond our reach.

It was so crowded in our car, that all of us men could not sit or squat down at the same time. So we set up a system of taking turns. By lying on our sides so that we were bundled up back to front, we could sleep about half the men at a time. Our guard wouldn't share the luxury of his little pen.

The situation was intolerable when it began and it soon got worse. The Germans had mistakenly placed a U.S. Army captain in Luft III, which was supposed to be exclusively an air force camp. The captain had been riding in a light plane, acting as a fire director and spotter for an artillery unit. They had the word that the German soldiers hated these spotters so much that if they caught one they'd shoot him on the spot. With that in mind, this guy, when flying as a spotter, wore an air corps insignia. When his plane went down, the Germans put him in with us because they thought he was air force. This guy was ten or twelve years older than most of us. He was very quick to let us "junior" airmen know how much more experienced and knowledgeable he was. He knew just about everything, or at least he told us he did. He was a pain in the ass is what he was mostly.

A navigator had taken up with this captain and together they were going to escape. Being so knowledgeable about living off the land, they expected to escape and live in veritable luxury while working their casual way into the welcoming hands of the Allies.<sup>27</sup> It was the beginning of our second night on the train, and the captain was going on in whispered tones about what he would and could do if he and the navigator could just get out and away. On our march, I had slept in a very cold church steeple with a Lieutenant Heinberg. Heinberg had been a member of our combine back at Luft III. In talking with others, I knew that he had a hacksaw blade secreted away some place, but he would not admit to it. Heinberg was Jewish, and if the Germans had found his blade, they might have elected to shoot him. I was getting up to my eyeballs with the captain and his silent navigator. I asked the captain if he and the navigator would each give me a blanket and a can of "bully-beef" if I provided them a way to escape. I told them that I had access to a hacksaw blade; I could cut one end of each window bar and bend it back, and there would be plenty of room then for them to slip out between. They checked it out and agreed that they could quite easily do it. "What if the guard woke up?" the captain asked. "We'll have someone watch him and give you a signal" I said. They agreed to give it a try.

I made my way to where Heinberg was and ap-



From *The Longest Mission*.

proached him about using his hacksaw blade. He almost denied that he had one, then he said that he wouldn't lend it to me. I told him about the blanket and the "bully-beef" deal I had and that I'd split the loot with him just for the use of the saw blade. He said we had a deal under the condition that if I got caught, I would swear that the blade was mine so that he would in no way be involved. The deal was made. Out of the bottom lining of his coat came about a seven-inch piece of broken blade from a cutting saw. Where he got it was of no interest to me. Our German friend was asleep by now, so soon I was busy stroking the center bar covering one of the windows. With very short strokes to reduce the noise, it took me about thirty minutes to cut the bar. In fact, the little noise of the saw was well concealed by the rattle of the wheels on the rail. I finished up, grabbed the bar and gave it a good bend inward and back. There was more than ample room for them to get out. I told them to skin off a blanket and a can of food apiece.

Their mental picture of escape seemed to change significantly as they looked out the window and saw the countryside rushing by. They wouldn't go then because the train was going too fast. We'd wait until the train slowed down. Well, when the train slowed down, they looked over toward the little German sergeant and told me that he looked to be a bit too restless, that he might wake up about the time they were crawling through the bars. By the time they'd worked up their nerves, the train had sped up. This went a number of times with them using the same excuses each time. I finally woke up to the fact that they'd probably never get up the guts to go. I'd risked my tail cutting the bar for them. I could have been shot if the guard had opened an eye and caught me in the act. They'd risked nothing. By that time, it was getting light out and I was so damned mad at them I wanted to punch each of them in the mouth. In a surge of anger, I

reached down, grabbed their two blanket rolls, and chucked them out the window. I knew and they knew that with those blanket rolls went their food for at least a week and a half. No sooner had the blanket rolls hit the cinders, when, like a pair of athletic jackrabbits, the captain and the navigator bounded through the opening. I gave Heinberg back his blade and the loot I had gotten for cutting the bar. I hadn't wanted the loot so much as to be rid of that guy.

With a little help, we bent the iron bar back into approximate alignment. To cover the raw cut, I used the little canvas strap from that box I mentioned earlier. I also had a small tin cup with a handle on it. I wrapped the strap around and around the break in the bar, covering the cut. Then I put a little loop on the strap and hung the little tin cup on it.

The train pulled into Munich. From there, we were to be taken to Moosberg and Stammlager VII A. At the railyard, the Kriegies were brought out of each boxcar, one car at a time. We were carefully counted and transferred over to the receiving authorities. Our turn and we were formed up in rank and counted. The count came out at sixty-two. Obviously, the count was incorrect because the paperwork said there were sixty-four of us. The guards searched the 40 x 8 car. The car's door had been locked from the outside and there were no cracks or holes in the car that were big enough to get a butterfly through. No one could break through the iron bars. The guards decided they must have another count. It again came out sixty-two. The sergeant who had been in our car and the receiving sergeant got up into the boxcar again and looked around to see if they couldn't find two more Kriegies. They came out shouting at one another. Then the receiving sergeant left and came back with a German lieutenant. He ordered another count. Once more they counted sixty-two. After a little butt chewing, the three of them got back up into the boxcar, paraded up and down a



*Stalag VIIA was built to house 14,000 P.O.W.s but held about 130,000 before the end of the war. Tents were set up to supplement the very overcrowded barracks.*

few times, and came out proclaiming loudly that two prisoners could not just evaporate.

How would they report this to their superiors? The lieutenant left and came back with a big wheel, an Oberst. The German colonel talked it over with them quietly for a while. We were lined up one more time and were counted. Back up into the little 40 x 8 went the four of them, parading up and down looking at four bare walls and a bare floor. Out they came and the colonel bellowed at the poor little sergeant from our car. It appeared to me that they blamed him for making an incorrect count at the beginning of the trip. There was then a little messing around with the paperwork, and it appeared that a few corrections were made. As they paraded away to get on [to] the last leg of the trip, I could almost see the little canvas strap and the little tin cup smiling at me with their secret.

## STAMMLAGER VII A

**S**tammlager VII A was about twenty miles north east of Munich. It had been an internment camp in the 1930s to hold members the radical group called the "Brown Shirts." These were the early thugs of the Nazi movement. After Adolf [Hitler] took power with the

help of this bunch of ruffians, he turned around and imprisoned thousands of them.<sup>28</sup> Now this camp, which had held many of them, had been reconditioned to accommodate the thousands of Americans, English, and other allied prisoners. Germany was being squeezed more and more between the American and English armies on the west and Russians on the east.

For a while during the first few weeks of February 1945, we enjoyed a little elbow room. However, that was short lived. General George Patton kept on the move, and the Germans started evacuating camps from the Nuremberg area, moving the P.O.W.s down to the Munich area.<sup>29</sup> This was a walk of about 125 miles. The Germans no longer had the luxury of boxcar transport. Their boxcars were few, and there was hardly any place left to go. March and April saw many large groups of very tired Kriegies moving into our area. As many of us as possible would stand as close to the main gate as the guard wire permitted, watching for someone we might know. There was always someone shouting to someone else he recognized.

Sometime near early April, just about a month before the war was over, I saw Johnnie Strikatinko marching down the road leading into our new camp. He, along with a contingent of others, had been marched 125 miles from the Nuremberg Kriegie camp

to our Moosberg camp. After walking away from our column back in January, Johnnie had selected a small, vacant German farmhouse in which to spend the night. Shortly after making himself comfortable, Johnnie made the acquaintance of two German soldiers who had selected the same house in which to bed down for the night. In the morning, Johnnie was returned to German control and sent to one of the three Kriegie camps in the Nuremberg area. The Germans didn't billet Johnnie in our compound, but I got his story of hard luck from someone who knew him in the Nuremberg camp.

Dave Brothers showed up too. He was the man who took the shrapnel in his tail end and I'd last seen him the day I was captured. Dave ended up in our compound, so when I could talk with him in barracks, he slipped down his trousers and showed the repair job the German medics had accomplished. The repair job was rough but effective. There was a place on the tailbone that refused to heal satisfactorily and remained covered by a bandage pad. He appeared quite pleased that he could show me the repair job. But he was mad when I told him that I hadn't thought he was going to live. "Damn you, Barney," he said. "You promised that I would make it okay." I admitted that my remarks on that day had been made more as hopeful encouragement.

Some days later, another surprise. Another group of P.O.W.s marched in from somewhere. There, like two dejected heroes, shuffled in the army captain and his air force navigator. Those two were not assigned to our compound but some others in that group were. It was from them that I got the details of their story. It seems that they fared very well for a couple of days until their food ran out completely. It was when they were reduced to the captain's ability to live off the land that things went real sour. They got desperately hungry for a few days and then it appeared that "Lady Luck" had turned in their favor. In a clearing off from a wooded area, they saw a farmer stacking hay. The horses had been unhooked from the wagon and were tied to a wagon wheel. The farmer was up on top of the stack squaring it up for the next load. There, just sitting on the wagon tongue in all its big black, beautiful glory was a very large lunch basket. They decided to try and steal the basket. They would crouch low, keeping the hayrack and the horses between themselves and the laboring old farmer while they were sneaking to get the "goodie" box. They knew that many of the rural Germans kept a gun with them. Germany, by this time was full of a number of foreign nationals who had



From *The Longest Mission*.

*General George Patton visited Stalag VIIA on May 1, 1945, after his troops liberated the camp.*

been conscripted to do farm and menial labor. Many of these had abandoned their work in the last months and were roaming the countryside. Knowing this, these two thought that if the farm fellow had a gun, it would not be by the haystack but it would be in or at the hay wagon. Possibly it was the fault of the horses; as they got closer, one of the horses got wind of them, turned its head and snorted. The farmer looked up and saw them, and it turned out his shotgun was laying beside the haystack. He grabbed up the gun and, just as our brave lads grabbed the lunch basket, he leveled the gun and told them to put their hands up. Oh well, some days are like that. Even a well-planned and beautifully executed escape plan can go discouragingly wrong.

## LET'S GO HOME

On April 28 we heard small arms and some artillery fire. The next day it got louder, and soon we heard machine guns not too far away. Many of our guards disappeared from the fence patrol. The corner [guard tower] guards disappeared. Some of the outside guards threw their guns over the fence into the compound, climbed up over the fence and through the barbed wire and made it known to us that "now we are your prisoners." We saw some heavy fighting in the town of

Moosberg, but it soon quieted down. We observed the German flag in the town square being pulled down from its pole. Of course, we were wondering what was going on. Very soon we found out. "Old Glory" was run up the flagpole amidst a few squirts of machine-gun fire. Then all hell broke loose in the compound. There were shouts of elation, whooping and jumping. Some just sat down and cried right where they were standing. The few German guards who had joined us seemed equally happy. They, too, had tears in their eyes. The days, months, and years of war were almost over. Our worries, our doubts, our waiting, were all over. It was time to sit down and take a large breath of new, free air.

We stayed at the camp because it had more room for us than anywhere else. The infantry from our liberators, the Third Army, gave us some food from their supplies. We also got visits from the medical people. General George Patton came himself a day or so after the camp was liberated. With him was a congressman, making political hay, while the Germans were surrendering about as fast as they could. With the congressman were his news staff and photographers. This guy wanted his voters to know that he, along with the soldiers, was one of the conquering heroes of the day. Somehow the soldiers rounded up a small podium. General George quickly got up and welcomed us back into the hands of the allied powers. The congressman then got up with a handful of notes and proceeded to give us his oratorical best. After a few sympathetic comments about us poor P.O.W.s, he launched

into telling us about the trials and tribulations and deprivations of the poor folks at home. What with rationing and all, the home folks had had to reduce their meat consumption, their fuel consumption, and some were reduced to black-marketing to get adequate tires for their cars. At first, there were a few muffled boos and then the boos got louder. This stalwart congressman just raised his voice and kept going. After a bit, Patton got up and announced that they had to go. He placed a firm grip on the congressman's arm and marched him off the podium into a waiting personnel carrier.<sup>30</sup>

We stayed in the compound for another five days. Then trucks came in and took us up to a former German fighter base. We slept right in the open for three days and then C-47s started coming in.<sup>31</sup> They started flying us out in groups. We landed in France at a hastily prepared camp called "Camp Lucky Strike." At Camp Lucky Strike we were fed chicken, chicken, and more chicken. The medics had told the quartermaster and the cooks that chicken would be easily digestible for our poor P.O.W. stomachs. We ate so much chicken that we could almost fly without a refresher course. We were issued clothing, toilet articles, and, most important, some of our back pay. About six days went by and we were transported to Le Havre, placed aboard an army transport ship, and, after fourteen days at sea, we sailed into port in Boston harbor. They then took us to Camp Miles Standish. HOME AT LAST! That evening, the mess hall boys served us up a beautiful big meal of . . . chicken.

*Following liberation but before evacuation, the P.O.W.s left the crowded, vermin-ridden barracks and crowded into tents.*



*From The Longest Mission.*

Lower right: Major Barney Keogh in the United States Air Force, early 1950s. Among the medal ribbons visible is the ribbon for the Distinguished Service Cross, which he earned during his last bombing mission in World War II. Keogh retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1963. The author is pictured in his den, surrounded by air force memorabilia, April 2000. Photo by John Sidwell.

Both photos courtesy of the author.



## EPILOGUE

After returning to the States, Keogh made a quick trip home to Lake Park, then went on to Florida where he would be discharged.<sup>32</sup> He might have been able to stay on in the service, but decided to get out because he thought he had a job lined up with Pan American Airways. "I had talked to their manager for their Caribbean division," he recalled, "and he wanted to sign me up as soon as I was discharged." But once he received his discharge, Keogh got a different story. "Now they said they had all the air crew they needed. At that point I was out of the service, out of a job, and out of my element." So he returned to North Dakota and began taking courses in business administration at North Dakota Agricultural College in Fargo. There he met a fellow from Parshall "who needed a partner in heavy earth moving and road construction. We bought some equipment from military surplus and went to work." While working in Parshall, Keogh met and, in due course, married Joyce Kline. Keogh related that his business partnership fell apart after a while and I sold out to his brother." He then decided to try to return to flying.

He successfully applied for recall to the United States Air Force in 1947 and reentered at the rank of technical sergeant:

About six months after going back in, I heard that the Air Force needed weather forecasters. Having had math, physics, and chemistry classes, I applied for a spot. They accepted me, activated my reserve grade as a captain, and sent me to forecaster's school at Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois. Once again, I had my feet on solid ground for a career in the service. But since I still had my flying rating, I could also get up in the clouds.

Keogh spent the early 1950s in Okinawa, handling weather information for B-29s that flew missions in Korea. Then he went on to the Philippines before returning to the United States. "Before retiring from the Air Force in 1963 as a lieutenant colonel, I ran various weather stations, and sometimes flew the large cargo aircraft (100 ton gross weight) to military stations around the globe, wherever things were needed."<sup>33</sup>

Today, Barney Keogh lives in Boulder, Colorado. His wife Joyce passed away early in 2000. He has not attended many military reunions, but in 1957 he and seven other active duty veterans of the war went to Europe as the United States Air Force's representatives of the 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group at the dedications of various American military cemeteries. Keogh feels that this was the trip that placed his war years in perspective.<sup>34</sup> He wrote, "I feel no regrets at having gone through the rigors of being a P.O.W. I feel fortunate to have gotten home. When I think of those boys who lie under the white marble crosses in France, England, and Italy, I look off into space and shiver."



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#### NOTES

1. For the continued increase in World War II literature, compare A. G. Enser's *A Subject Bibliography of the Second World War: Books in English, 1939-1974* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1977) to Enser's update, *A Subject Bibliography of the Second World War and Aftermath: Books in English, 1975-1987* (Brookfield, Vt.: Gower, 1990). Recent works containing reminiscences of American P.O.W.s include Tom Bird, *American POWs of World War II: Forgotten Men Tell Their Stories* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992) and Lewis Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners: An Oral History of World War II American and German Prisoners of War* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997).

2. Background on Keogh in letter to Shoptaugh [May 1999].

3. Background on the many missions against Ploesti can be found in Steve Birdsall, *Log of the Liberators: An Illustrated History of the B-24* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973), 221-33; Leroy W. Newby, *Target Ploesti: View from a Bombsight* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1983).

4. Alan J. Levine, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992), 153-55.

5. Keogh's group base in Cherignola was part of a large complex of airfields centered around Foggia on the eastern side of the Italian peninsula. Here, until the fall of 1943, the German Luftwaffe maintained bases. After the Allied landing at Salerno in September 1943, the Germans withdrew northward. The United States Army Air Force then rebuilt the Foggia airfields for the use of its newly organized 15th Air Force. For detailed accounts of the Foggia bases, see Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948-58), vols. 2 and 3. The essentials are in Geoffrey Perret, *Winged Victory: The Army Air Forces in World War II* (New York: Random House, 1993), 231-32, which notes that living conditions in the tent encampments "were miserable."

6. A "casual pilot" was one who reported to a squadron without a plane or crew, and was then assigned to an aircraft that needed a replacement pilot. Keogh thus flew his last mission with crewmen who were mostly strangers to him.

7. Army Air Force records show that on this mission 677 B-17s and B-24s of the 15th Air Force struck at refineries at Moosbierbaum and in other small towns, as well as an aircraft factory, all near Vienna. The records note that 150 to 175 German

fighters attacked the bombers and that "nearly 30 US aircraft (mostly H[eavy] B[ombers]) are lost." American flyers claimed to have shot down some sixty German planes. See Kit C. Carter and Robert Mueller, comps., *U.S. Army Air Forces in World War II: Combat Chronology, 1941-1941* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force History, 1991), 382.

8. Normally, the crew of a B-24 was ten men. On occasion the crew was smaller in order to increase the weight of bombs carried on a mission, or because the mission planners did not anticipate heavy opposition from German fighters or anti-aircraft guns. For this June 26 mission, Keogh's crew lacked a navigator, who could, in a pinch, operate machine guns in the nose of the plane. This suggests that the mission planners did not expect many German fighters.

9. "Flak" was the term used by flyers for the shrapnel caused by exploding anti-aircraft shells. Many American flyers and gunners preferred to sit or kneel on the flak jackets in an effort to better protect their genitals from shrapnel.

10. The Focke Wulf 190 and Messerschmidt 109 were the main fighter aircraft of the German Luftwaffe. Each was a single-seat fighter, capable of flying as high as 40,000 feet and reaching speeds above 400mph. Armed with 20mm cannon as well as machine guns, these fighters could do lethal damage to an American bomber within seconds. There are a number of schematic drawings and photographs of these and other German planes in Alfred Price's *Luftwaffe: Birth, Life and Death of an Air Force* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969).

11. Because the B-17s and B-24s were able to deliver concentrated fire on German fighters attacking from behind, the Luftwaffe had trained its pilots to make head-on attacks against the bombers. The lack of a navigator to operate the nose turret made Keogh's bomber very vulnerable to frontal attacks.

12. Both the ME-109 and the FW-190 fighters had 20mm cannon as their main armament. American bombers and fighters were armed with .50-caliber machine guns.

13. Keogh would receive a high military decoration for this mission, but he would not learn that for several months.

14. The Messerschmidt 262 became operational as a fighter in October 1944.

15. Keogh was at that time twenty-three years old.

16. Keogh here is probably thinking of the *Volkssturm*, home guard units. However, the *Volkssturm* was created in September 1944, three months after Keogh was shot down. The uniformed man in the wagon was possibly part of the German Civil Aerial Defense corps, *Ziviler Luftschutz*.

17. "Kriegie" is the universal term that prisoners of the Germans used for themselves. It is the English slang for the German term for prisoner of war, *kriegsgefangenen*. Another story of life for "kriegies" in P.O.W. camps is vividly told in text and photographs in *The Longest Mission*, a commemorative book in honor of the fiftieth year of liberation of the former prisoners of Stalag Luft III (The Association of Former Prisoners of Stalag Luft III, 1995). A web site relating to the experiences of P.O.W.s is maintained by the United States Air Force Academy, <http://www.usafa.af.mil/dfsel/s13>.

18. Lawrence Welk's hometown of Strasburg is about fifteen miles east of Keogh's hometown, Fort Yates.

19. Vanaman, a major general in 1944, had been chief of staff for operations with the 8th Air Force, flying out of Great Britain. He was shot down in a raid over Germany in June, just days before Keogh's last mission. Like Keogh, he was a P.O.W. until the war ended. He served in the postwar air force, then retired in 1954. See R. Manning Ancell and Christine M. Miller, *The Biographical Dictionary of World War II Generals and Flag Officers* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 452-53.

20. The 1943 bombing raids on ball-bearing plants in and near Schweinfurt are described in detail in Thomas Coffey, *Decision*

*Over Schweinfurt: The US. 8th Air Force Battle for Daylight Bombing* (New York: D. McKay, 1977).

21. The Red Cross parcel usually contained various canned meats and cheeses, some instant coffee, chocolate, margarine, soap and cigarettes; see the list in Lewis Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners: An Oral History of World War II American and German Prisoners of War*, 68-69. The nature of how Red Cross packages were sent to the P.O.W.s in Germany is described in detail in Foster Rhea Dulles, *The American Red Cross: A History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), 489ff., which notes that "relief [i.e. the "Red Cross" package] was financed by the Army and Navy," and "in no case did [the American Red Cross] distribute them." The American Red Cross limited its activities to coordinating the "procurement and transportation" of the packages from Canada, which usually went by specially marked ships to Lisbon, then Marseilles, and finally by rail to Switzerland. For further details on life in the camp and the Red Cross, see Arthur A. Durland, *Stalug Luft III: The Secret Story* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

22. The Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), the second highest military decoration, was awarded to Keogh in August 1944, "for extraordinary heroism while piloting [his] B-24 . . . Despite continued aggressive enemy fighter attacks and a [damaged] virtually uncontrollable aircraft, he successfully completed the bombing run . . . [and then] turned his aircraft from the formation so it would not endanger the rest of the group, and at this time his aircraft was seen to explode in mid-air." *General Orders 41: Section II - Awards of the Distinguished Service Cross, Extract*, August 22, 1944 (citation copy given to Shoptaugh by Keogh). Horace Lanford, commander in the 741st squadron, did not learn Keogh had survived the war until about 1991.

23. For details on the Russian army advance to the Oder River, see David M Glantz and Jonathan House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 241-47. For information on Vanaman and Spivey, see Durand, 339-42.

24. For further information on the German decision to move P.O.W.s west, ahead of the advancing Russians, see Durand, 326ff., Cornelius Ryan, *The Last Battle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966); William P. Maher, *Fated To Survive* (Spartanburg, S.C.: Honoribus Press, 1992).

25. Had this escape succeeded, Keogh and his friend would more likely have been interned by the Russians. In 1942 the Russian government interned American fliers who landed near Vladivostok after they had bombed Tokyo, and in September 1944,

Stalin refused several requests by the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force to fly shuttle missions in order to supply Polish rebels in Warsaw. By the time Stalin relented and allowed the shuttle missions to land in Soviet-controlled territory, the Warsaw revolt was all but crushed by German troops. On this, see Glantz and House, 213-14.

26. There is a 40 by 8 rail car on display outside the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck. See inside back cover for more information.

27. In his accompanying letter, Keogh noted that he would not divulge the names of these two men because he "didn't want to embarrass them" over how the escape attempt turned out.

28. To increase his popularity among the German army officers and German business interests, in 1934, Adolf Hitler purged the leadership of his party's street fighters, the SA, also known as the "Brown Shirts," because of the color of their Nazi party uniforms. Hundreds of SA leaders were executed or imprisoned in concentration camps. Stammlager VII A apparently originated as such a camp. For details on this event, see Max Gallo, *The Night of Long Knives* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *The Hundred Days to Hitler* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974).

29. For details of Patton's advance through Germany, see Ryan, *The Last Battle*.

30. In his diary, George Patton wrote that on May 1, "we drove to the Allied prisoner of War Camp at Moosberg, where some thirty thousand Allied prisoners of war, mostly officers, had been confined . . . The prisoners were well disciplined and quite clean." Patton refrained from mentioning the congressman's speech; see Patton, *War as I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947), 319. Patton's aide, Charles Codman, also mentioned Patton's visit to Moosberg, but devoted his attention to the Russian prisoners who had been liberated in the vast P.O.W. compounds near the town: ". . . the Russian column marched out at a fast rhythmic clip. Bearing, precision, staying power, discipline." See Codman, *Drive* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1957), 294.

31. The C-47 Skytrain was the military version of the DC-3 commercial airliner, built by Douglas Aircraft Corporation. It was the most widely used transport aircraft in the Army Air Force.

32. Information here and following from letter of Keogh to Shoptaugh [May 1999], and a second letter, Keogh to Shoptaugh, September 9, 1999.

33. Letter of Keogh to Shoptaugh, November 4, 1999.

34. For an account of these dedications, see Howell Walker, "Here Rest in Honored Glory," *National Geographic*, 111 (June 1957), 738-65.



Courtesy of the author.

Keogh took this photograph of a B-24 aircraft in his group during one of their missions over Germany or Austria.