

**HISTORICAL COLLECTION
of the
STALAG LUFT III
FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR**

**Clark Special Collections Branch
McDermott Library
United States Air Force Academy
Colorado Springs, Colorado**



ABOUT THE COLLECTION

The Air Force Academy Library holds an interesting and historically significant collection of documents, photographs, diaries and memoirs which tells the story of the Allied airmen shot down in combat over Europe in World War II, who were imprisoned in Stalag Luft III, a German camp located in Silesia (now Poland). This camp became famous for its escape activity including the tunnels depicted in the movie *The Great Escape*.

This collection, assembled through the efforts of the Stalag Luft III Former POW Association, has become the centerpiece of the Clark Special Collections Branch of the Academy Library. It includes hundreds of photographs, many taken in the camp during the war by clandestine cameras in the possession of the POWs. There are official photographs taken by the Germans and acquired after the war. Among the many research documents are the light-hearted drawings of Capt. Emmet Cooke, the memento-filled diary of Lt. Robert Jacks, and the scrapbooks compiled by Lt. General A. P. Clark. Also available is the oral history of Oberfeldwebel Herman Glemnitz, a senior German non-commissioned officer in charge of preventing escapes and the memoirs of Major Gustav Simoleit, temporary commandant of the camp. There is also the account of the adventures of General Arthur Vanaman and Colonel Delmar Spivey who, near the end of the war, were taken to Berlin on Hitler's orders. They were briefed by the German High Command and then sent into Switzerland armed with peace proposals to be delivered to the British and American governments.

Another highlight of this remarkable collection is the assembled work of Henry Soderberg, a Swedish volunteer with the International Y.M.C.A. He spent much of the war servicing the Allied camps in Eastern Europe and kept copious diaries, photographs and

official reports of his life in wartime Germany. Soderberg's remarkable freedom of movement within Germany enabled him to record a rare picture of the prisoner's life and of the German people. He visited the Russian prisoners in their camps and recorded their desperate conditions. Soderberg also witnessed the bombing of Dresden and volunteered among the ruins to help save lives.

Many rare records, such as diaries and photographic negatives, were carried out of Germany by former prisoners. On Hitler's direct orders, Stalag Luft III was evacuated on the bitter cold night of 27 January 1945. On very short notice some 11,000 British and American officers were forced marched westward to avoid their liberation by the advancing Russian armies. The fact that any of this historically significant material survived the war is most unusual and reflects a deep sense of history among many of

these men. For example, one officer carried on his back several large ledgers filled with the names and brief accounts of how each of 2000 prisoners in one American compound was shot down and captured. Another prisoner brought out a file of weekly camp newspapers.

As early as October 1944, the prisoners of this camp learned of the atrocities occurring in concentration camps and carefully documented the facts. One of these documents was carried, at great personal risk, through the German searches and returned to the United States after the war. Another paper outlines the official American escape policy of one of the camps. Of great importance are the end-of-war reports written by the respective camp Senior American Officers, as well as reports of incidents and shootings that occurred in the camps.

This collection commenced with the extensive collection of photographs and important documents assembled by General A. P. Clark after he retired as Superintendent of the Academy in 1974.





While a Lt. Colonel, he was a POW in Stalag Luft III. Now comprised of over 120 donated manuscript collections, it constitutes a rich source of unique original historical documents. Academy cadets study it to learn the importance of using primary source materials for their research papers. A growing number of scholars use the collection. It was heavily utilized by Arthur Durand for his book, *Stalag Luft III : The Secret Story*, which is the best account of the POW experience. More recently it was used by the National Park Service for its Fort Hunt, Virginia, exhibit and authors interested in specific aspects of the camp, such as health and interrogation techniques unrelated to the famous escape. It is increasingly consulted by families of POWs interested in heritage that their fathers or grandfathers did not share. The Library's goal is to collect primary source material covering the experiences of American airmen who were POWs in recent American wars; its Vietnam collections are significant.



HOW TO HELP

Over the years, the existence of this collection has become more widely known and offers of relevant historical material continue to be received. The Friends of The Air Force Academy Library, a non-profit group dedicated to the support of the Academy's McDermott Library, is pleased to handle these offers. Individuals considering an offer of a gift of materials are invited to write to:

The Friends of the Air Force Academy
Library
P.O. Box 188
USAF, CO 80840-0188
Email: friends@usafalibrary.com
website: www.friends.usafalibrary.com

The Stalag Luft III Former POWs have established through The Friends, a memorialization fund. With your donation of \$50 or more, a certificate with the name of your deceased Kriegie buddy or other person of your choice will be preserved in the Special Collections Branch of the McDermott Library.

Persons interested in personal or scholarly research should contact:

McDermott Library – Special Collections
Branch
2354 Fairchild Drive, Suite 6A54
USAF Academy, Colorado Springs, CO
80840-6214
Tel: (719) 333-4674