

## JAMES ALFRED DAY

This is a small part of the story and life history of a man who lived part of his life in Laindon and attended Laindon High Road School, served his country during the Second World War and a Flight Officer, was shot down and severely injured, repatriated and then went on to serve various communities across the world during the rest of his life as a Minister of the Church. However, it is equally important to firstly give a precis of his father especially in the First World War.

### James Alfred Day (Senior)



James Alfred Day (Senior) Born on 09 April 1898 and died on 08 April 1978. He enlisted in the Army on 11 September 1914 at Marylebone (Royal Army Service Corps) but was underage, then quoting his date of birth as 09 April 1896 showing a profession of 'Post Boy.'

In October 1917 he joined the Rifle Brigade (Rifleman no. 6567) and on 17 November 1917 was wounded in both thighs and back by a shell blast. He was firstly treated at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 19 November 1917 located at Remy Sidings near Poperinghe in Flanders. A letter to his parents was sent by the Army Chaplain on 29 November 1917 informing them that he had been transferred to Base Hospital on 22 November 1917.

He travelled by no. 23 Ambulance Train to 13 General hospital, a large unit centred on the Casino at Boulogne with 650 patients. It was taken over on 01 November 1917 by American staff and changed from an evacuation hospital to a heavy surgical unit with the new expertise.

In December 1917 he transferred from Boulogne to Nottingham Divisional Hospital V. Transported by hospital ship 'St Denis' to England (St Denis was formerly the 'Munich', built 1908 for the Harwich-Hook of Holland route for Great Eastern Railways). On 05 June 1918 he was sent to the Cedars Convalescent Hospital, Woodthorpe, Nottingham. The Cedars, a large house off Mansfield Road donated by Sir Charles Seely in 1897, provided 20 beds for convalescing patients. On 16 July 1918 he was discharged from hospital. Army treatment card states: 6567 Rifleman - 2nd Rifle Brigade, living at 498 Katherine Road, Forest Gate, London E7. He was discharged from Army service on 31 July 1918 at Winchester as "no longer being fit for Army Service." He was awarded one 'Gold Wound' stripe.

On 10 December 1918 he joined the National Diamond Factories Ltd. At Brighton and was living at 90 The Avenue Brighton West Sussex. In 1919 he moved to 13 Trinity Street Brighton. He married Gladys Margaret Holland on 03 November 1921 at St. Peters Church Brighton and they moved to 90 The Avenue Moulscomb near Falmar Brighton and their son James Alfred Day was born on 21 May 1923. About 1962 James (Senior) moved to Holton-le-Clay Lincolnshire and became Church Warden.

### James Alfred Day (Junior)

#### The early years.

James was born to James Alfred Day (Senior) and Gladys Margaret Day (nee Holland) in Brighton, West Sussex on 21 May 1923.

The family moved to Laindon in 1928 when James was five years old, starting school at Laindon High Road School in September 1920. On 04 November 1930 the family moved to Sandringham Road.



James won a scholarship and in that September went to Palmer's Grammar School in Grays Essex, and around this time he joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Laindon Scouts and also became a Server at St. Nicholas Church in Laindon also with it's sister Church St. Peters. He was in the choir at St. Peters and was a member of the St. Nicholas Fellowship Group.

A later picture of James and his colleagues in Scout uniform.



Five other members of the St. Nicholas Fellowship Group, in addition to James, joined the Royal Air Force:

- Harry Rossiter – Lancaster Wireless Operator with Bomber Command – Survived.
- Victor Nunn – Lancaster Navigator – Killed in Action over Berlin in 1943.
- Eric Jee – Lancaster Navigator – Survived.
- Frank Cock – Bomber Navigator – Fate unknown.
- Alan Robbert Burlton – Survived.

In June 1938 he sat and passed the School Certificate Examination of the University of London and a year later, he left school after passing and gaining exemption from Matriculation. In the September of 1939 he started work at John Lewis in Oxford Street London as a Buyers secretary in the Oriental Carpet department. In 1940 the John Lewis store was bombed and the department moved to the Chadwickham House offices. James father was also working in the John Lewis store.

In 1940 James (senior) joined the Local Defence Volunteers (Home Guard) with James (Junior) and their HQ. was 'The Fortune of War Hotel'. Then in June 1941 James volunteered for the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve at the Chadwickham House in Bolsover Street London. On 13 October 1941 he was 'called-up' by the Royal Air Force and reported to London Zoo Mess where subsequently he was billeted in flats at Stockleigh Hall Regents Park. He was kitted out at the Lords Cricket Ground. He was in 13/16 Flight number 1393283 LAC Cadet and had all preliminary medicals and injections before being posted on 26 October 1941. He arrived for training at Paignton in Devon of 03 November 1941 with No. 4 Training Wing RAF Paignton and put with 'D' Flight for basic training, navigation and weapons.



He was billeted at the 'Tembani Hotel' on the sea front where the conditions and food as you would expect, were excellent. On 02 January 1942 he was issued with flying kit and following a short leave, was posted to 18 EFTS Fair Oaks Woking in Surrey. On 20 January 1942 with No. 18 Elementary Flying Training School with "C" Flight, they flew from Smiths Lawn, Windsor using DH Tiger Moths and now billeted in private houses which were described as comfortable. His pay was increased to £5 per fortnight and during this time he did a 10 minute solo flight.

James next posting on 14 February 1942 to Heaton Park Manchester in Lancashire. Heaton Park was used by the Royal Air Force for trainee aircrew as a distribution centre. James was billeted with five friends at Waterpark Road Salford which was a large private house owned by Mrs. Neil and she made them all welcome.

His posting in March 1942 to Prince Albert Saskatchewan in Canada. By way of US Troopship from Greenock in Scotland in convoy to New York arriving on 25 March then by train to Montreal and by road to No. 5 Manning Pool at Lachine near Montreal.

On 10 April 1942 they departed by train for Saskatoon taking 4 days and from 14 April 1942 at Prince Albert Saskatoon they carried on with flying training with No. 6 Elementary Flying Training School Class no. 53. They trained on DH Tiger Moths and on 06 May he flew solo and qualified as a 'day' pilot on 28 May 1942. His passing out parade was held on 01 June 1942 and on 04 June he qualified as a night pilot on Tiger Moths. He was posted on 17 June 1942 to Claresholm in Alberta, arriving on 23 June to 15 Squadron Flight Training School, course no. 58 flying twin engine Cessna Crane aircraft and on 04 July 1942 he qualified as a 'day' pilot. On 03 August 1942 he qualified as 'night' pilot and promoted to Sergeant.

On 07 October 1942 at Claresholm Alberta in Canada at a ceremony at the airfield he was formally awarded his 'Wings' and promoted to Pilot Officer. He was then posted back to England on 10 October 1942 via Montreal. At Monkton staging Centre between 15 and 26 October at Halifax Nova Scotia he boarded the Queen Elizabeth for a fast voyage to Liverpool arriving on 06 November 1942 bringing presents of Christmas Cake ingredients, tobacco and cigars for his parents.



He arrived at the Personnel Reception Centre No. 7 The Queens Hotel Park Parade in Harrogate Yorkshire on 07 November 1942 then sent for leave at home until his next posting on 28 November 1942 to No.3 Personnel Reception Centre Bournemouth where he was interviewed for the type of flying he wish to undertake. He chose night fighters but almost everyone there was placed with night bombers. On 15 December he was billeted in the Grand Hotel on the seafront before going to RAF Ossington in Nottinghamshire No. 14 Pilot Advanced Flying Unit. This he described as a very isolated and muddy airfield. Ossington Hall was used as part of the accommodation whilst he trained on Airspeed Oxford aircraft. He then moved on to Scampton Lincolnshire on 12 February 1943 and flew his first solo flight on 22 February 1943. During this time he has a temporary base change to undertake a Beam Approach Training Course.

His next posting on 09 March 1943 was to RAF Hixon in Staffordshire where he undertook training on twin engine Vickers Wellington Bombers where his crew was also established together with trainee's and their first operation was for a leaflet drop over Paris. On 04 June 1943 he was posted to RAF Lindholme near Doncaster where he undertook training on four engine Halifax bombers and gain a high assessment rating of his ability.

His posting on 10 June 1943 to Heavy Bomber Training at RAF Blyton near Gainsborough in Lincolnshire with 1662 Heavy Conversion Unit and here he trained on Lancaster Bombers gaining a high 'above average' pilot assessment enabling his next posting on 09 July 1943 but not before a couple of weeks earlier where he first met Muriel Edenbrow, introduced to him by his Bomb-Aimer Joseph Brown who was dating Muriel's sister Kathleen.



The next posting was to 103 Squadron Elsham Wolds near Brigg in Lincolnshire and it was from here that his operations on Lancaster bombers began which was to Hamburg and the use of “windows” radar deflection material for the first time and from here he completed one half of a ‘tour’ which was sixteen operations.

On 15 September 1943 at RAF Upwood near Peterborough he and his crew had volunteered to convert to RAF Pathfinder Force and he joined the 1662 Conversion Unit and although he did not expect to be sent at such short notice he was posted on 25 September 1943 to RAF Warboys in Huntingdonshire joining 156 Pathfinder Squadron.

The flying career of Flight Lieutenant James Alfred Day DFC (no. 131599) with 156 Squadron Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve was fully documented in Flight Operational records and these are reproduced as a testimony to his and his crews courage.



He and his crew arrived on squadron on 04 October 1943. 156 Squadron was a Founder Squadron of the Path Finder Force with the motto “We light the Way” Their designated Code letters were GT and they flew Wellingtons converting to Lancaster’s in January 1943. During their war time operations they suffered 892 pilots and crew killed with 180 aircraft lost.



The first operation, his aircraft designated LM344, was to Frankfurt on 04 October 1943 and they were part of a 14 aircraft mission of which 12 actually took off but one failed to return piloted by Squadron Leader Cook of the Royal Australian Air Force who was 21 years of age. He had received the DFM during his service with 103 Squadron. Flight Officer Day took off at 18.38 hours returning at 01.07 hours. The operational height for them was 19,500 feet.

On 07 October 1943 their next mission, aircraft designated JB217, was to Stuttgart and they were part of a twenty-one aircraft raid in which all took off and returned safely. Day took off at 20.50 hours and they were over their target area at 00.03 hours with their flight ceiling at 20,000 feet. They returned to base at 03.21 hrs.

Their next mission was to Hanover on 18 October 1943 as part of a ten aircraft raid in which all took off and returned safely. His flight was designated JB317, a Lancaster Mark III taking off at 17.46 hours, over Hanover at 20.24 hours and returning at 22.45 hours. The operational ceiling was 19,000 feet. The operational log shows that one aircraft returned early owing to the Navigator being unable to plot a course due to unreliable compass readings.

The mission of 22 October 1943 was to Kassel, Lancaster JA694 with twenty-one aircraft designated of which twenty took off but three returned early. Two aircraft due to freezing up and one due to one engine failure. Day took off at 18.21 hours and was over the target at 20.52 hours. The operational ceiling for them was 19,000 feet and they returned safely at 23.31 hours.

On 03 November 1943 their mission in JA697 was to Koln (Cologne) taking off with eighteen other aircraft all of whom returned safely. Day took off at 17.20 hours and was over the target at 19.36 hours. Their operational ceiling was 19,000 feet and they returned to base at 21.37. During their homeward journey they were hit by flak causing a slight injury to the Second Pilot Sergeant Turner. It was during the period between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> that James and Muriel announced their engagement on 7<sup>th</sup> whilst in London where she worked.

The mission to Mannheim on 17 November 1943. aircraft designated JB317, included sixteen aircraft of which fourteen actually took off and returned safely. There were no incidents reported on this flight. Day took off at 17.11 hours was over the target at 20.04 hours and returned at 23.01 hours. His operational ceiling was 19,000 feet. All aircraft landed within 34 minutes of each other.

The next evening 18<sup>th</sup> November 1943 their mission along with twenty other aircraft was to Berlin. Their call sign was LM344 and they took off at 17.18 hours and was over the target at 20.50 hours. Their operating ceiling was 20,000 feet and they returned to base at 01.24 hours. This mission however had incidents, the first of which was the Lancaster piloted by Wing Commander White crashing near Doberitz. White and both air Gunners were buried in Berlin whilst the rest of the crew have no known grave. Other log entries on this flight included a rear-gunner with frostbite due to oxygen supply being frozen up. Another, similarly with heating system failure and Mid upper gunner suffering from frostbite.

On the 22 November 1943 their mission, was to Berlin again and all twenty-one designated aircraft took off. Days call sign was JB217 taking off at 17.05 hours arriving over the target area at 20.04 hours. Their operational flying height was 20,000 feet. They landed back at base at 23.33 hours but there were two aircraft casualties. Squadron Leader Anset and crew were reported lost without trace. Flight Sergeant Cromarty reported the target being identified by skymarker flares and a very large explosion occurring following their bombing. Flight Sergeant Stephens and crew crashed near Doberitz. Pilot Officer Palmer's plane returned early due to outer engine emitting flames.

The next mission on 26 November 1943, again to Berlin, with a total of twenty-one aircraft. Flight Officer Day in Lancaster JB317 took off at 17.41 hours but left the mission early due to the controls stiffening to a point where landing at 21.00 hours was a major concern. Two other aircraft, JA909 and JB282, also returned early due to technical problems.

On the 03 December nineteen aircraft were detailed for a raid on Leipzig. Seventeen aircraft actually took off and returned safely. Flight Officer Day in JB307 took off at 00.21 hours, was over the target at 03.58 hours and returned to base at 07.33 hours. His operational ceiling was 19,000 feet. One aircraft Lancaster EE108 returned early as oxygen supply was not operating. On 18 December 1943 Flight Officer James Alfred Day was promoted to Flight Lieutenant.

The mission to Frankfurt on 20 December 1943 had twenty-one aircraft detailed including Flight Officer Day in JB721. They took off at 17.30 hours arriving over Frankfurt at 19.34 hours and returning to base at 22.40 hours. His operational ceiling was 19,000 feet. Two aircraft failed to return, Flight Lieutenant Sullivan in JA674 and he and his crew are buried in Hanover War Cemetery and Flight Officer Watts, JB113, who crashed near Rothenbergen some 14km East North East of Hanau. All were taken to Gelnhausen for burial since when their remains were exhumed and removed to Durnbach War Cemetery.

On 23 December 1943 the mission was again to Berlin with nineteen aircraft detailed for operations. Flight Officer Day in Lancaster JB721 took off at 00.31 and arrived over the target area in Berlin at 04.04 hours. They returned to base at 07.34 hours. Their operational ceiling was eighteen thousand five hundred feet. One aircraft JB711 with Flight Officer Warfield was lost without trace.

The mission on 29 December 1943 was to Berlin with twenty-one aircraft detailed all of whom took off with one Lancaster JB640 returning early with the Port Inner Engine failure and JA975 returning due to the Port Centre Tank not feeding the engines.

New Years day saw another raid on Berlin with eighteen aircraft detailed. All took off but four aircraft failed to return. JB476 Piloted by Flight Officer Docherty and his crew now at rest in Berlin War Cemetery. Lancaster JA 925 with Squadron Leader Fawcett all lost without trace. ND384 with Pilot Officer Bond who crashed on the homebound journey at Grandrieu (Hainaut) a village 7km South West of Beaumont. All are buried in Chievres Communal Cemetery. Squadron Leader Stewart in JB703 and his crew were lost over Berlin and now rest in the Berlin War Cemetery.

On 05 January 1944 the mission was to Stettin. Eighteen aircraft were detailed all of whom took off with one aircraft JB239 with Flight Sergeant Trotter returning early due to various component failures on the aircraft.

Flight Officer Day took off at 23.47 hours arriving over the target at 03.44 hours and returning to base at 08.18 hours a total flying time of eight and a half hours. Lancaster JA975 was attacked by an ME109 and sustained some damage.

The mission on 14 January 1944 was to Braunschweig / Brunswick with twenty-one aircraft detailed. One aircraft did not take off and five failed to return. Lancaster ND357 Wing Commander Mansfield was shot down by a night fighter and crashed at 2035 hours at Kolhorn (Noord-Holland) 7km East North East from Schagen. All were taken for burial to Huisduinen on 17 January 1944 since when their remains were exhumed and taken to Bergen op Zoom War Cemetery. Lancaster Aircraft LM344 Pilot Officer Bagot crashed and burst into flames at Watenstedt 7km East South East of Lebebstadt.

Charges to Pay  
RECEIVED  
3.33  
Prefix  
Time handed in  
Office of Origin and Service Instructions  
Words  
No. 25  
OFFICE STAMP  
25 FEB  
4A  
ESSEX  
POST OFFICE  
TELEGRAM  
From R.M.  
To Mr. J.A. Day at Sandringham Rd London E5  
Priority 22  
Regret to inform you that your son 7/2  
James Alfred Day DFC is missing as  
result of air operation on the night of 24th  
Feb 1944 Letter follows stop. Any further  
information received be communicated  
to you immediately stop. pending receipt  
of written notification from the RAF  
Ministry. No information should be given  
to the press. J.A. Day  
For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form 8 or c  
at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and if possible, the envelope

All now rest in Hanover War Cemetery. JB483 with Flight Officer Palmer all now at rest in Berlin War Cemetery. Lancaster JA975 with Flight Lieutenant Stannard was shot down by the twin efforts of a night fighter and flak, crashing at Bockern around 7km West South West from Vecht where the burials are reported to have taken place on 17 January.

Six now rest in Sage War Cemetery. Lancaster JA698 with Pilot Officer Illingworth was attacked at 21,000 feet by a night fighter and crashed in the target area. Flight Officer Day in JB721 had taken off at 16.56 hours and returned to base at 22.44 hours.

On 15 February 1944 fifteen aircraft were detailed for operations over Berlin, all taking off but one Lancaster ND504 with Flight Lieutenant Stimpson was lost without trace. The Lancaster ND444 with Flight Sergeant Doyle was attacked at 21.02 hours at 20,000 feet and was damaged, both Gunners were wounded. The aircraft made a crash landing at Woodbridge in Suffolk. Lancaster JB721 with Flight Lieutenant Day had taken off at 17.15 hours was over the target area at 21.29 hours and returned to base at 23.54 hours. His operational ceiling was 19,000 feet.

The mission on 19 February 1944 was to Leipzig and twenty-one aircraft detailed all of which took off but two did not return. Lancaster ND358 Squadron Leader Saunders fell victim to a night fighter at 03.10 hours coming down about 1km South of Zasenbeck. The crew are buried in Hanover War Cemetery. JA921 with Pilot Officer Stanners crashed at 05.30 hours in the area known as Zuidpolder South East of Eemes (Utrecht) in Holland. Some members of the crew are buried in Amersfoort General Cemetery. Flight Officer Day in JB721 took off at 23.44 hours was over the target at 03.57 hours and returned to base at 06.42 hours. His flight ceiling was 19,500 feet.

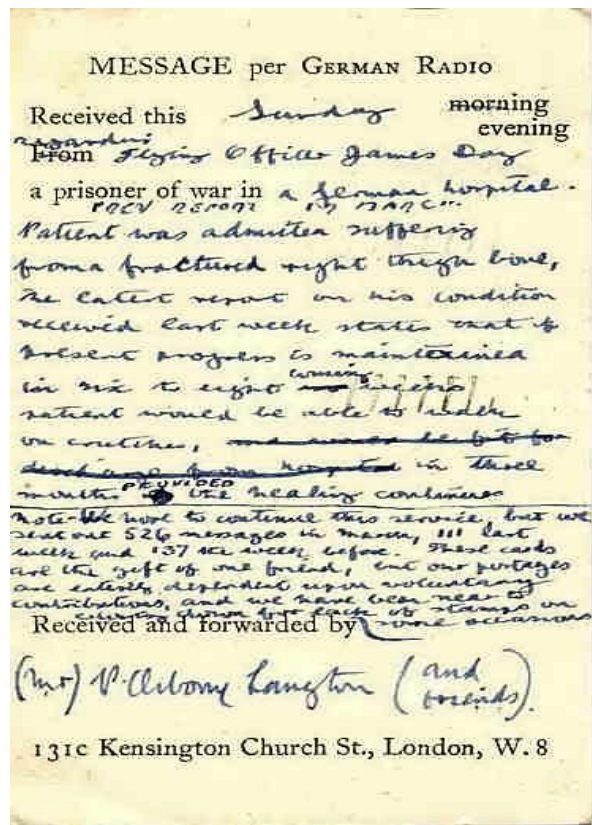
The London Gazette of 18 February 1944 shows that Flight Lieutenant Day has been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

On 24 February 1944 twenty-four aircraft were detailed for a raid on Schweinfurt. Two aircraft returned early and three aircraft did not return. Lancaster ND454 Pilot Officer Neighbour crashed between Schalbach in Mosell Province and Hirschland (Bas-Rhin) two villages in an arc 14km North East of Sarreboth in France. Six of the crew are buried in Schalbach Roman Catholic Cemetery and Sergeant Morton in Hirschland Churchyard. His plane was brought down by a night fighter. Lancaster JB479 Wing Commander Porter who crashed and his crew are buried in Durnbach War Cemetery.

Lancaster JB721 with Flight Lieutenant James Alfred Day, was believed to have exploded and crashed between Briey (Meurthe-et-Moselle) where three are buried in the town's Communal Cemetery and Abbeville-les-Conflans a village some 12km North North West of the town.

In Abbeville Churchyard is the grave of P/O Tandy, whilst Sergeant Hollis rests in Choloy War Cemetery. Flight Lieutenant sustained a very serious fracture to his right leg. The Flight Engineer Ernest Maggs also survived this crash.

On 26 February 1944 he was transferred to the POW Hospital Fort St. Julien in Metz and following operation by the German Surgeon including resetting his Femur he spent three months in Stalag 12F Hospital where he met and talked with Edmond Lahaye, a French Catholic Priest. He left the hospital in July 1944 transferred back to the prison camp on a two-day Ambulance train journey to Sagan. His prisoner number was 20796.



In the August of 1944 Flight Lieutenant Day was taken to the now famous Stalag Luft 111 which was a *Luftwaffe*-run prisoner of war (POW) camp during World War II, which held captured Western Allied air force personnel.

Flight Officer James Day was put in the North Compound, allocated a lower bunk near the stove in an eight man room of the hut.

The *Stalag* was established in March 1942 in the German province of Lower Silesia near the town of Sagan (now Żagań, Poland), 160 kilometres (100 miles) south-east of Berlin.

The site was selected because its sandy soil made it difficult for POWs to escape by tunneling.

## Stalag Luft 111.

It is best known for two escape plots by Allied POWs.

- One in 1943 that became the basis of a fictionalised film, *The Wooden Horse* (1950), based on a book by escapee Eric Williams.
- The so-called **Great Escape** of March 1944, which was conceived by Royal Air Force Squadron Leader Roger Bushell, and was authorised by the senior British officer at Stalag Luft III, Herbert Massey.
- A heavily fictionalised version of the escape was depicted in a film, *The Great Escape* (1963), which was based on a book by former prisoner Paul Brickhill.
- It would be reasonable to assume that although James Day was severely injured, he would have known of the efforts, stories and eventual escape and murders of others at the camp.

Kommandant Friedrich Wilhelm von Lindeiner-Wildau, Kommandant of Stalag Luft III. The German military followed a practice whereby the different branches of the military were responsible for all POWs of equivalent branches.

Hence the *Luftwaffe* was normally responsible for any Allied aircrew taken prisoner. This included captured naval aviators, such as members of the British Fleet Air Arm. In a few cases, other non-air force personnel were also held at *Stalag Luft III*.



The first compound (East Compound) of the camp was completed and opened on 21 March 1942. The first POWs, or *kriegies*, as they called themselves (from *Kriegsgefangene*), to be housed at Stalag Luft III were British and other Commonwealth officers, arriving in April 1942. The Centre compound was opened on 11 April 1942 and originally held British and other Commonwealth NCOs; by the end of 1942, however, they were replaced by USAAF personnel. The North Compound for British airmen, (where the "Great Escape" later occurred) opened on 29 March 1943. A South Compound for Americans was opened in September 1943 and USAAF prisoners began arriving at the camp in significant numbers the following month and the West Compound was opened in July 1944 for U.S. officers. Each compound consisted of fifteen single-story huts. Each 3.0-by-3.7-metre (10-by-12-foot) bunkroom slept fifteen men in five triple-deck bunks.

Eventually the camp grew to approximately 24 hectares (60 acres) in size and housed about 2,500 Royal Air Force officers, about 7,500 U.S. Army Air Forces, and about 900 officers from other Allied air forces, for a total of 10,949 inmates, including some support officers.

The prison camp had a number of design features that made escape extremely difficult. The digging of escape tunnels, in particular, was discouraged by several factors: the barracks housing the prisoners were raised approximately 60 centimetres (24 in) off the ground to make it easier for guards to detect tunneling; the camp had been constructed on land that had a very sandy subsoil; the surface sand was bright yellow, so it could easily be detected if anyone dumped the darker, grey dirt found beneath it above ground, or even just had some of it on their clothing. The loose, collapsible sand meant the structural integrity of any tunnel would be very poor. A third defence against tunneling was the placement of seismograph microphones around the perimeter of the camp, which were expected to detect any sounds of digging.

A substantial library with schooling facilities was available, where many POWs earned degrees such as languages, engineering or law. The exams were supplied by the Red Cross and supervised by academics such as a Master of King's College who was a POW in Luft III. The prisoners also built a theatre and put on high-quality bi-weekly performances featuring all the current West End shows. The prisoners used the camp amplifier to broadcast a news and music radio station they named *Station KRGY*, short for *Kriegsgefangener* (POWs) and also published two newspapers, the *Circuit* and the *Kriegie Times*, which were issued four times a week.

POWs operated a system whereby newcomers to the camp were vetted, to prevent German agents from infiltrating their ranks. Any POW who could not be vouched for by two POWs who knew the prisoner by sight was severely interrogated and afterwards escorted continually by other prisoners, until such time as he was deemed to be a genuine Allied POW. Several infiltrators were discovered by this method and none is known to have escaped detection in Luft III.

The German guards were referred to by POWs as "Goons" and, unaware of the Allied connotation, willingly accepted the nickname after being told it stood for "**G**erman **O**fficer **O**r **N**on-**C**om". German guards were followed everywhere they went by prisoners, who used an elaborate system of signals to warn others of their location. The guards' movements were then carefully recorded in a logbook kept by a rota of officers. Unable to stop what the prisoners called the "Duty Pilot" system, the Germans allowed it to continue and on one occasion the book was used by Kommandant von Lindeiner to bring charges against two guards who had slunk away from duty several hours early.

The camp's 800 Luftwaffe guards were either too old for combat duty or young men convalescing after long tours of duty or from wounds. Because the guards were Luftwaffe personnel, the prisoners were accorded far better treatment than that granted to other POWs in Germany. Deputy Commandant Major Gustav Simoleit, a professor of history, geography and ethnology before the war, spoke several languages, including English, Russian, Polish and Czech.

Transferred to Sagan in early 1943, he proved sympathetic to allied airmen. Ignoring the ban against extending military courtesies to POWs, he provided full military honours for Luft III POW funerals, including one for a Jewish airman.

Food was an ongoing matter of concern for the POWs. The recommended dietary intake for a normal healthy inactive adult male is 2,150 kilocalories (9,000 kilojoules). Luft III issued "Non-working" German civilian rations which allowed 1,928 kcal (8,070 kJ) per day, with the balance made up from American, Canadian, and British Red Cross parcels and items sent to the POWs by their families.



As was customary at most camps, Red Cross and individual parcels were pooled and distributed to the men equally. The camp also had an official internal bartering system called a *Foodacco* – POWs marketed surplus goods for "points" that could be "spent" on other items. The Germans paid captured officers the equivalent of their pay in internal camp currency (*lagergeld*), which was used to buy what goods were made available by the German administration. Every three months, weak *beer* was made available in the canteen for sale. As *NCOs* did not receive any "pay" it was the usual practice in camps for the officers to provide one-third for their use but at Luft III all *lagergeld* was pooled for communal purchases.

As British government policy was to deduct camp pay from the prisoners' military pay, the communal pool avoided the practice in other camps whereby American officers contributed to British canteen purchases.



Stalag Luft III had the best-organized recreational programme of any POW camp in Germany. Each compound had athletic fields and volleyball courts. The prisoners participated in basketball, softball, boxing, touch football, volleyball, table tennis and fencing, with leagues organized for most. A 6.1 m × 6.7 m × 1.5 m (20 ft × 22 ft × 5 ft) pool used to store water for firefighting, was occasionally available for swimming.

Many amenities were made possible by Swedish lawyer Henry Söderberg, who was the YMCA representative to the area, and frequently brought to its camps not only sports equipment, and religious items supporting the work of chaplains, but also the wherewithal for each camp's band and orchestra, and well-equipped library.

## The first escape (The Wooden Horse)

The first escape occurred in October 1943 in the East Compound. Conjuring up a modern Trojan Horse, *kriegies* (prisoners) constructed a gymnastic vaulting horse largely from plywood from Red Cross parcels. The horse was designed to conceal men, tools and containers of soil. Each day the horse was carried out to the same spot near the perimeter fence and while prisoners conducted gymnastic exercises above, a tunnel was dug. At the end of each working day, a wooden board was placed over the tunnel entrance and covered with surface soil. The gymnastics disguised the real purpose of the vaulting horse and kept the sound of the digging from being detected by the microphones.

For three months three prisoners, Lieutenant Michael Codner, Flight Lieutenant Eric Williams and Flight Lieutenant Oliver Philpot, in shifts of one or two diggers at a time, dug over 30m (100 ft) of tunnel, using bowls as shovels and metal rods to poke through the surface of the ground to create air holes.

No shoring was used except near the entrance. On the evening of 19 October 1943, Codner, Williams and Philpot made their escape. Williams and Codner were able to reach the port of Stettin where they stowed away on a Danish ship and eventually returned to Britain. Philpot, posing as a Norwegian margarine manufacturer, was able to board a train to Danzig (now Gdańsk) and from there stowed away on a Swedish ship headed for Stockholm, from where he was repatriated to Britain.

## The Great Escape

In March 1943, Royal Air Force Squadron Leader Roger Bushell conceived a plan for a mass escape from the North Compound, which occurred on the night of 24/25 March 1944. He was being held with the other British and Commonwealth airmen and he was in command of the Escape Committee that managed all escape opportunities from the north compound. Falling back on his legal background to represent his scheme, Bushell called a meeting of the Escape Committee to advocate for his plan. He said:



"Everyone here in this room is living on borrowed time. By rights we should all be dead! The only reason that God allowed us this extra ration of life is so we can make life hell for the Hun ... In North Compound we are concentrating our efforts on completing and escaping through one master tunnel. No private-enterprise tunnels allowed. Three bloody deep, bloody long tunnels will be dug – Tom, Dick, and Harry. One will succeed!

#### Roger Bushell

Herbert Massey, as senior British officer, authorised the escape attempt which would have good chance of success; in fact, the simultaneous digging of three tunnels would become an advantage if any one of them was discovered, because the guards would scarcely imagine that another two were well underway.

However, the most radical aspect of the plan was not the scale of the construction, but the number of men intended to pass through the tunnels; in fact, while all previous attempts had involved up to 20 men, in this case Bushell was proposing to get over 200 out, all wearing civilian clothes and some with forged papers and escape equipment. As this escape attempt was unprecedented in size, it would require unparalleled organization; as the mastermind of the Great Escape, Roger Bushell inherited the codename of "Big X". More than 600 prisoners were involved in the construction of the tunnels.

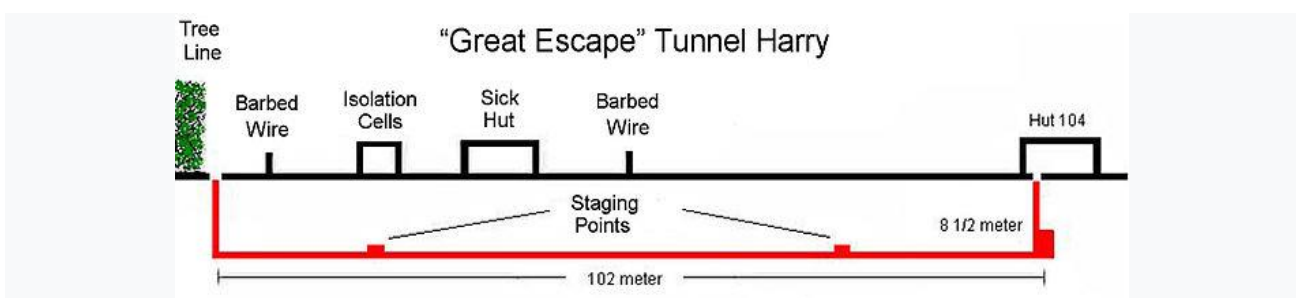
#### The tunnels

Three tunnels were dug for the escape. They were named *Tom*, *Dick*, and *Harry*. The operation was so secretive that everyone was to refer to each tunnel by its name. Bushell took this so seriously that he threatened to court-martial anyone who even uttered the word "tunnel" aloud.

**Tom** began in a darkened corner next to a stove chimney in hut 123 and extended west into the forest. It was found by the Germans and dynamited.

**Dick's** entrance was hidden in a drain sump in the washroom of hut 122 and had the most secure trap door. It was to go in the same direction as *Tom* and the prisoners decided that the hut would not be a suspected tunnel site as it was more inward than the others. *Dick* was abandoned for escape purposes because the area where it would have surfaced was cleared for camp expansion. *Dick* was then used to store dirt and supplies, and as a workshop.

**Harry**, which began in hut 104, went under the Vorlager (which contained the German administration area), sick hut and the isolation cells to emerge at the woods on the northern edge of the camp. The entrance to "Harry" was hidden under a stove. Ultimately used for the escape, it was discovered as the escape was in progress with only seventy-six of the planned two hundred twenty prisoners free. It was subsequently filled with sewage and sand and sealed with cement by the Germans.



After the escape, the prisoners started digging another tunnel called *George*, but this was abandoned when the camp was evacuated.

#### Tunnel construction

The tunnels were very deep – about 9 m (30 ft) below the surface. They were very small, only 0.6 m (2 ft) square, though larger chambers were dug to house an air pump, a workshop, and staging posts along each tunnel. The sandy walls were shored up with pieces of wood scavenged from all over the camp, much from the prisoners' beds (of the twenty or so boards originally supporting each mattress, only about eight were left on each bed). Other wooden furniture was also scavenged.



End of "Harry" tunnel showing how close the exit was to the camp fence

Other materials were also scavenged, such as Klim cans; tin cans that had originally held powdered milk supplied by the Red Cross for the prisoners. The metal in the cans could be fashioned into various tools and items, for example scoops and lamps, fueled by fat skimmed off soup served at the camp and collected in tiny tin vessels, with wicks made from old and worn clothing. The main use of the Klim tins, however, was for the extensive ventilation ducting in all three tunnels.

As the tunnels grew longer, a number of technical innovations made the job easier and safer. A pump was built to push fresh air along the ducting, invented by Squadron Leader Bob Nelson of 37 Squadron. The pumps were built of odd items including pieces from the beds, hockey sticks and knapsacks, as well as Klim tins.

The usual method of disposing of sand from all the digging was to scatter it discreetly on the surface. Small pouches made of towels or long underpants were attached inside the prisoners' trousers; as they walked around, the sand could be scattered. Sometimes, they would dump sand into the small gardens they were allowed to tend. As one prisoner turned the soil, another would release sand while they both appeared to be in conversation. The prisoners wore greatcoats to conceal the bulges from the sand, and were referred to as "penguins" because of their supposed resemblance.

In sunny months, sand could be carried outside and scattered in blankets used for sun bathing; more than 200 were used to make an estimated 25,000 trips. The Germans were aware that something was going on but failed to discover any of the tunnels until much later. In an attempt to break up any escape attempt, nineteen of the top suspects were transferred without warning to Stalag VIIIC. Of those, only six had actually been involved with tunnel construction.



Eventually the prisoners felt they could no longer dump sand above ground because the Germans became too efficient at catching them doing it. After "Dick's" planned exit point was covered by a new camp expansion, the decision was made to start filling it up. As the tunnel's entrance was very well-hidden, "Dick" was also used as a storage room for items such as maps, postage stamps, forged travel permits, compasses and clothing. Some guards cooperated by supplying railway timetables, maps, and

many official papers so that they could be forged. Some genuine civilian clothes were obtained by bribing German staff with cigarettes, coffee or chocolate. These were used by escaping prisoners to travel away from the camp more easily, especially by train.

The prisoners ran out of places to hide sand, and snow cover then made it impractical to scatter it undetected. However, under the seats in the theatre there was a large empty space, but when it was built the prisoners had given their word not to misuse the materials; the parole system was regarded as inviolable. Internal "legal advice" was taken, and the SBOs decided that the completed building did not fall under the parole system. A seat in the back row was hinged and the sand dispersal problem thereby solved.



As the war progressed, German prison camps began to receive larger numbers of American prisoners. The Germans decided that new camps would be built specifically for U.S. airmen. To allow as many people to escape as possible, including the Americans, efforts on the remaining two tunnels increased. However, this drew attention from guards and in September 1943 the entrance to "Tom" became the 98th tunnel to be discovered in the camp guards in the woods had seen sand being removed from the hut where it was located. Work on "Harry" ceased and did not resume until January 1944.

### **Tunnel "Harry" completed**

"Harry" was finally ready in March 1944. By then the Americans, some of whom had worked on "Tom", had been moved away; despite its portrayal in the Hollywood film, no American participated in the "Great Escape". Previously, the attempt had been planned for the summer for its good weather, but in early 1944 the Gestapo visited the camp and ordered increased effort to detect escapes. Rather than risk waiting and having their tunnel discovered, Bushell ordered the attempt be made as soon as it was ready.

In their plan, of the 600 who had worked on the tunnels only 200 would be able to escape. The prisoners were separated into two groups. The first group of 100, called "serial offenders," were guaranteed a place and included 30 who spoke German well or had a history of escapes, and an additional 70 considered to have put in the most work on the tunnels. The second group, considered to have much less chance of success, was chosen by drawing lots; called "hard-arsers", they would have to travel by night as they spoke little or no German and were only equipped with the most basic fake papers and equipment.



The prisoners waited about a week for a moonless night, and on Friday 24 March the escape attempt began. As night fell, those allocated a place moved to Hut 104.

Unfortunately for the prisoners, the exit trap door of Harry was frozen solid and freeing it delayed the escape for an hour and a half.

Then it was discovered that the tunnel had come up short of the nearby forest; at 10.30 p.m. the first man out emerged just short of the tree line close to a guard tower.

The tunnel reached the forest, as planned, but the first few trees were too sparse to provide adequate cover. As the temperature was below freezing and there was snow on the ground, a dark trail would be created by crawling to cover.

To avoid being seen by the sentries, the escapes were reduced to about ten per hour, rather than the one every minute that had been planned. Word was eventually sent back that no-one issued with a number above 100 would be able to get away before daylight. As they would be shot if caught trying to return to their own barracks, these men changed back into their own uniforms and got some sleep. An air raid then caused the camp's (and the tunnel's) electric lighting to be shut down, slowing the escape even more. At around 1 a.m., the tunnel collapsed and had to be repaired.

Despite these problems, 76 men crawled through to freedom, until at 4:55 a.m. on 25 March, the 77th man was spotted emerging by one of the guards. Those already in the trees began running, while a New Zealand Squadron Leader Leonard Henry Trent VC who had just reached the tree line stood up and surrendered. The guards had no idea where the tunnel entrance was, so they began searching the huts, giving men time to burn their fake papers.

Hut 104 was one of the last to be searched, and despite using dogs the guards were unable to find the entrance. Finally, German guard Charlie Pilz crawled back through the tunnel but found himself trapped at the camp end; he began calling for help and the prisoners opened the entrance to let him out, finally revealing its location.



An early problem for the escapees was that most were unable to find the way into the railway station, until daylight revealed it was in a recess of the side wall to an underground pedestrian tunnel. Consequently, many of them missed their night time trains, and decided either to walk across country or wait on the platform in daylight. Another unanticipated problem was that it was the coldest March for thirty years, with snow up to five feet deep, the escapees had no option but to leave the cover of woods and fields and stay on the roads.



Following the escape, the Germans made an inventory of the camp and uncovered how extensive the operation had been. Four thousand bed boards had gone missing, as well as 90 complete double bunk beds, 635 mattresses, 192 bed covers, 161 pillow cases, 52 twenty-man tables, 10 single tables, 34 chairs, 76 benches, 1,212 bed bolsters, 1,370 beading battens, 1219 knives, 478 spoons, 582 forks, 69 lamps, 246 water cans, 30 shovels, 300 m (1,000 ft) of electric wire, 180 m (600 ft) of rope, and 3424 towels. 1,700 blankets had been used, along with more than 1,400 Klim cans. Electric cable had been stolen after being left unattended by German workers; because they had not reported the theft, they were executed by the Gestapo. Thereafter each bed was supplied with only nine bed boards, which were counted regularly.

Of 76 escapees, 73 were captured. Adolf Hitler initially wanted them to be shot as an example to other prisoners, along with Commandant von Lindeiner, the architect who designed the camp, the camp's security officer and all the guards on duty at the time. Hermann Göring, Field Marshal Keitel, Major-General Westhoff and Major-General Hans von Graevenitz (inspector in charge of war prisoners) all argued against the executions as a violation of the Geneva Conventions.

Hitler eventually ordered SS head Himmler to execute more than half of the escapees. Himmler passed the selection on to General Arthur Nebe, and fifty were executed singly or in pairs. Roger Bushell, the leader of the escape, was shot by Gestapo official Emil Schulz just outside Saarbrücken, Germany. Bob Nelson is said to have been spared by the Gestapo because they may have believed he was related to his namesake Admiral Nelson. His friend Dick Churchill was probably spared because of his surname, shared with the British Prime Minister. Seventeen were returned to *Stalag Luft III*, two were sent to Colditz Castle, and four were sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where one quipped "the only way out of here is up the chimney." They managed to tunnel out and escape three months later, although they were recaptured and returned; two were subsequently sent to Oflag IV-C Colditz.

#### **There were three successful escapees:**

Per Bergsland, Norwegian pilot of No. 332 Squadron RAF, escapee #44.

Jens Müller, Norwegian pilot of No. 331 Squadron RAF, escapee #43.

Bram van der Stok, Dutch pilot of No. 41 Squadron RAF, escapee #18.

Bergsland and Müller escaped together, and made it to neutral Sweden by train and boat with the help of friendly Swedish sailors. Van der Stok, granted one of the first slots by the Escape Committee due to his language and escape skills, traveled through much of occupied Europe with the help of the French Resistance before finding safety at a British consulate in Spain.

#### **Aftermath**

The Gestapo investigated the escape and, whilst this uncovered no significant new information, the camp Kommandant, von Lindeiner-Wildau, was removed and threatened with court martial. Having feigned mental illness to avoid imprisonment, he was later wounded by Soviet troops advancing toward Berlin, while acting as second in command of an infantry unit. He surrendered to British forces as the war ended, and was a prisoner of war for two years at the prisoner of war camp known as the "London Cage". He testified during the British SIB investigation concerning the *Stalag Luft III* murders. Originally one of Hermann Göring's personal staff, after being refused retirement, von Lindeiner had been posted as Sagan kommandant. He had followed the Geneva Accords concerning the treatment of POWs and had won the respect of the senior prisoners. He was repatriated in 1947 and died in 1963 aged 82.

On April 6, 1944 the new camp *Kommandant* Oberstleutnant Erich Cordes informed Massey that he had received official communication from the German High Command that 41 of the escapees had been shot while resisting arrest. Massey was himself repatriated on health grounds a few days later.

Over subsequent days, prisoners collated the names of 47 prisoners they considered to be unaccounted for. On 15 April (17 April in some sources) the new senior British officer, Group Captain Douglas Wilson RAAF, surreptitiously passed a list of these names to an official visitor from the Swiss Red Cross.

Cordes was replaced soon afterwards by Oberst Werner Braune. Braune was appalled that so many escapees had been killed and allowed the prisoners who remained there to build a memorial, to which he also contributed. (The memorial still stands at its original site.)



The British government learned of the deaths from a routine visit to the camp by Swiss authorities as the protecting power in May; the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden announced the news to the House of Commons on 19 May 1944. Shortly afterwards the repatriated Massey arrived in Britain and briefed the Government regarding the fate of the escapees. Eden updated Parliament on 23 June, promising that, at the end of the war, those responsible would be brought to exemplary justice.

### **Post-war investigation and prosecutions**

General Arthur Nebe, who is believed to have selected the airmen to be shot, was involved in the 20 July plot to kill Hitler and executed by Nazi authorities in 1945. After the war ended, the Royal Air Force Police (RAFP) investigative branch began to research the Great Escape and launched a manhunt for German personnel considered responsible for killing escapees.

Colonel Telford Taylor was the US prosecutor in the High Command case at the Nuremberg Trials. The indictment called for the General Staff of the Army and the High Command of the German Armed Forces to be considered criminal organisations; the witnesses were several of the surviving German field marshals and their staff officers. One of the crimes charged was of the murder of the fifty. Colonel of the Luftwaffe Bernd von Brauchitsch, who served on the staff of Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, was interrogated by Captain Horace Hahn about the murders. Several Gestapo officers responsible for the murders were executed or imprisoned.

### **Survivors**

By September 2014, Gordon King of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, was the only prisoner still alive who had worked directly on the Great Escape, but was not one of the escapees. He had been number 141 to escape and operated the pump to send air into the tunnel. Speaking candidly of his low number and resulting inability to get out of the tunnel that night, he said he considered himself fortunate. King had been shot down over Germany in 1943 and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. He participated in the *Battle Scars* TV series in his home town of Edmonton.

Jack Harrison, who was one of the 200 men of the Great Escape, died on 4 June 2010, at the age of 97. Les Broderick, who kept watch over the entry of the "Dick" tunnel, died on 8 April 2013 aged 91. He was in a group of three who had escaped out of the "Harry" tunnel but were recaptured when a cottage they had hoped to rest in turned out to be full of soldiers. Ken Rees, a digger, was in the tunnel when the escape was discovered. He later lived in North Wales and died at age 93 on 30 August 2014. His book is called *Lie in the Dark and Listen*. A reunion of Stalag Luft III survivors was held in 1983 in Chicago, Illinois. The reunion included a mock interrogation between Hans Scharf and Col. Frances Gabreski.

Dick Churchill is the last of the 76 escapees still living as of March 2017; then an RAF Squadron Leader, he was among the 23 not executed by the Nazis. Churchill, a Handley Page Hampden bomber pilot, was discovered after the escape hiding in a hay loft. In a 2014 interview at the age of 94, he said he was fairly certain that he had been spared execution because his captors thought he might be related to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Paul Royle, a Bristol Blenheim pilot, was interviewed in March 2014 as part of the 70th anniversary of the escape, living in Perth, Australia at the age of 100. He downplayed the significance of the escape and did not claim that he did anything extraordinary, saying: "While we all hoped for the future we were lucky to get the future. We eventually defeated the Germans and that was that." Royle died, aged 101, in August 2015.

## Liberation in 1945

Having been already interviewed by a Commission for repatriation, On 20 January 1945 Day left Sagan for Friedrichshaven with others, loaded into cattle trucks to Oppeln where they stayed for a further ten days before boarding a German hospital train for a further four days via Vienna where they transferred to a Swiss hospital train to continue to Friedrichshaven.

As they arrived in Grenoble, he was able to send a telegram to Muriel saying he would be arriving in Marseille where he would transfer to an American hospital ship. Which on February 1<sup>st</sup> they transferred to TSS Letitia No. 2 Canadian hospital ship with some 200 medical staff and around 1,000 patients on board for the voyage to Liverpool.

Just before midnight on 27 January 1945, with Soviet troops only 26km (16 miles) away, the remaining 11,000 POWs were marched out of camp with the eventual destination of Spremberg. In below-freezing temperatures and 15 cm (6 in) of snow, 2,000 prisoners were assigned to clear the road ahead of the main group. After a 55 km (34 mi) march, the POWs arrived in Bad Muskau where they rested for thirty hours, before marching the remaining 26 km (16 mi) to Spremberg.

On 31 January, the South Compound prisoners plus 200 men from the West Compound were sent by train to Stalag VII-A at Moosburg followed by the Centre compound prisoners on 7 February. 32 prisoners escaped during the march to Moosburg but all were recaptured. The North, East and remaining West compound prisoners at Spremberg were sent to Stalag XIII-D at Nürnberg on 2 February.

With the approach of US forces on 13 April, the American prisoners at XIII-D were marched to Stalag VII-A. While the majority reached VII-A on 20 April, many had dropped out on the way with the German guards making no attempt to stop them. Built to hold 14,000 POWs, Stalag VII-A now held 130,000 from evacuated stalags with 500 living in barracks built for 200. Some chose to live in tents while others slept in air raid slit trenches. The U.S. 14th Armored Division liberated the prisoners of VII-A on 29 April.

## In popular culture

The POW camp was actually referred to as Stalag Luft 3 by the Germans, and Paul Brickhill, in his early writings about the escape, also wrote it that way. For his book *The Great Escape*, his English editors changed it to Stalag Luft III, and such has been its influence on popular culture that Stalag Luft III it has remained.

Eric Williams was a navigator on a downed bomber who was held at Stalag Luft III. After the war, on the long sea voyage home, Williams wrote *Goon in the Block*, a short book based on his experience. Four years later, in 1949, he rewrote it as a longer third-person narrative under the title *The Wooden Horse*, which was filmed as *The Wooden Horse* in 1950. He included many details omitted in his first book, but changed his name to "Peter Howard", Michael Codner to "John Clinton" and Oliver Philpot to "Philip Rowe". Williams also wrote a prequel, *The Tunnel*, an extended study of the mentalities of life as a prisoner of war. Although not an escape novel, it shows the profound urge to escape, and explores the ways that camp life affected men's emotions.

Paul Brickhill was an Australian-born Spitfire pilot, shot down in 1943 over Tunisia to become a prisoner of war. While imprisoned at Stalag Luft III, he was involved in the escape attempt. He did not take part in tunneling but was in charge of "stooges", the relay teams who would alert prisoners that German search teams had entered the camp.

He was originally scheduled to be an early escapee but when it was discovered he suffered from claustrophobia, he was dropped down to the bottom of the list. He later said he figured this probably saved his life. After the war, Brickhill co-wrote *Escape to Danger* (with Conrad Norton, and original artwork: London: Faber and Faber, 1946). Later Brickhill wrote a larger study and the first major account of the escape in *The Great Escape* (1950), bringing the incident to a wide public attention. This book became the basis of the film (1963).

The search for those responsible for the murder of the Allied officers, and the subsequent trials, was depicted in a 1988 television film named *The Great Escape II: The Untold Story* starring Christopher Reeve. Donald Pleasence in a supporting role plays a member of the SS (in the 1963 original Pleasence had played Flight-Lieutenant Colin Blythe, 'The Forger'). The murder of the prisoners in this film is more accurate than in the 1963 original, with the POWs being shot individually or in pairs, but other portions of the film are fictional.

## Notable prisoners

### Notable military personnel held at Stalag Luft III included:

- Fighter and test pilot **Roland Beaumont**, later to test fly the English Electric Canberra and Lightning, arrived at Stalag Luft III just after the "Great Escape", having been shot down in his Tempest by ground fire, while attacking a troop train near Bocholt while on his 492nd operational sortie.
- Australian journalist **Paul Brickhill** was an inmate at Stalag Luft III from 1943 until release. In 1950 he wrote the first comprehensive account about *The Great Escape*, which was later adapted into the film and went on to chronicle the life of Douglas Bader in *Reach for the Sky* and the efforts of 617 "Dam Busters" Squadron.
- **Josef Bryks**, Czechoslovak RAFVR fighter pilot and serial escaper, was held at Stalag Luft III from August 1943 to July 1944.
- **Col. Darr Alkire**, Commander of the 449th Bombardment Group. The senior officer in charge of the West Compound from April 1944 to release in April 1945. Future Brigadier General and Silver Star recipient.
- Flying Officer **Ray Grayston**, RAF, one of the "Dam Busters" who had bombed the Eder Dam, was an inmate at Stalag Luft III from 1943 to 1945.
- Flight Lieutenant **George Harsh RCAF** was a member of the Great Escape's executive committee and the camp "security officer". He was one of the 19 "suspects" transferred to Belaria compound shortly before the escape. Born in 1910 to a wealthy and prominent Georgia family, Harsh, a medical student, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1929 for the self-confessed thrill killing of a grocer. He saved the life of a fellow prisoner by performing an emergency appendectomy, for which Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge released him on parole in November 1940 and finally granted him a full pardon. He then joined the RCAF as a tail gunner and after being shot down in 1942 was sent to Stalag Luft III. In 1971 he published his autobiography which has since been translated into German and Russian.
- **David M. Jones**, Commander of the 319th Bombardment Group in North Africa, was an inmate at Stalag Luft III for two and a half years. According to his biography he led the digging team on *Harry*. In early 1942 Jones took part in the Doolittle Raid undertaken in retaliation for the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor.
- Squadron Leader **Phil Lamason RNZAF**, who was also the senior officer in charge of 168 Allied airmen initially held at Buchenwald concentration camp.
- **P. P. Kumaramangalam DSO, MBE** of the then British Indian Army, a future Chief of the Indian Army.
- Flight Lieutenant **Gordon "Moose" Miller RCAF**, helped carry the Wooden Horse in and out each day under the German guns without faltering with the weight of two concealed diggers and a day's worth of earth. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for repairing a damaged Wellington in flight and allowing the crew to parachute to safety.
- **Robert M. Polich, Sr.**, also of the United States Army Air Forces, who received the Distinguished Flying Cross, later featured in the short film *Red Leader on Fire* which was submitted for the Minnesota's Greatest Generation short film festival in 2008.
- **Col. Delmar T. Spivey**, who was, for a time, the Senior American Officer (SAO), was captured on 12 August 1943, while flying as an observer on a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress of the 407th Bomb Squadron, 92d Bomb Group. As the USAAF expert on aerial gunnery, Spivey was on the mission to evaluate possible improvements to gun turrets. (MACR 655) Spivey assumed command as SAO, in Centre Compound, in August 1943. Amazed by the prisoners' ingenuity, he had a carefully coded history of the camp created, so that future POWs would not have to "re-invent the wheel." This carefully hidden record was retrieved and carried at no little risk when the camp was hastily evacuated in late January 1945, as the Germans marched the prisoners away from the rapidly advancing Russian armies. The documents served as the basis and initial impetus for "Stalag Luft III – The Secret Story", a definitive history of the camp, by Col. Arthur A. Durand, USAF (Ret.).



- Wing Commander **Robert Stanford Tuck**, a British flying ace with 29 victories, was imprisoned at Sagan until shortly before the Great Escape; suspected of being a ringleader, he was transferred to Belaria, which Tuck credited with saving his life. (His mentor, Roger Bushell, was among those shot after the Great Escape). Tuck eventually managed to escape on 1 February 1945, during the evacuation of the camp, with the help of Polish RAF pilot Zbigniew Kuźniarski. Both made it to the Russian lines.
- Brigadier-General **Arthur W. Vanaman**, the highest-ranking USAAF officer captured in the European Theatre of Operations. Vanaman, an intelligence officer, succeeded Spivey as SAO in mid-1944. He had (like Spivey) been captured after flying as an observer on a bombing mission. The crew had advised Vanaman to bail out after his aircraft had been hit by flak and filled with smoke. This, ironically, had been caused by the ignition of a harmless smoke marker and the bomber had returned to base safely.

#### Some held at Stalag Luft III went on to notable careers in the entertainment industry:

- British actor **Peter Butterworth** and English writer **Talbot Rothwell** were both inmates of Stalag Luft III; they became friends and later worked together on the *Carry On* films. Butterworth was one of the vaulters covering for the escapees during the escape portrayed by the book and film *The Wooden Horse*. After the war and as an established actor, Butterworth auditioned for the film but "didn't look convincingly heroic or athletic enough" according to the makers of the film.
- British actor **Rupert Davies** had many roles in productions at the theatre in the camp; his most famous roles on film and TV may have been Inspector Maigret in the BBC series *Maigret* that aired over 52 episodes from 1960 to 1963 and George Smiley in the movie *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*.
- English writer and broadcaster **Hugh Falkus** was an inmate at Stalag Luft III from around 1943, after his Spitfire was shot down over France. Falkus reportedly worked on 13 escape tunnels during his time as a POW, although never officially listed as an escapee.
- American novelist and screenwriter **Len Giovannitti** was held in Stalag Luft III's Center Compound. A navigator with the 742nd Bomb Squadron, 455th Bomb Group of the Fifteenth Air Force, he was on his 50th mission when his B-24 Liberator was shot down over Austria on 26 June 1944. A POW for nearly a year, he incorporated his experiences, including the winter march to Germany and liberation in Bavaria, in a novel he wrote between April 1953 and May 1957, *The Prisoners of Combine D*.
- Singer **Cy Grant**, born in British Guiana, served as a Flight Lieutenant in the RAF and spent two years as a prisoner of war, including time at Stalag Luft III. After the war he qualified as a barrister but went on to be a singer, actor and author. He was the first black face to be regularly seen on British television, singing the news as "topical calypsos" (punning on "tropical") on the BBC *Tonight* programme.
- **Wally Kinnan**, one of the first well known U.S. television broadcast meteorologists, was also in the camp.

#### Life back in England

Flight Officer James Alfred Day was subsequently repatriated aboard SS Letitia arriving in Liverpool on 02 February 1945. His rehabilitation was at the RAF Medical Rehabilitation Unit at Loughborough and walking played a big part as well as cycling and swimming, in his strengthening exercises. He had a special boot constructed to help his future movement. In October 1945 he was awarded the Kings Badge for Disabled personnel of the Armed Forces.

On 19 November 1945 he was formally invalided out of the RAF which depressed him as he was unsure of what to do next. He joined the John Lewis organisation selling oriental carpets at Chadwickham House to earn some money. His residence at this time was with his parents at St. Denis Sandringham Road Laindon.



At the age of 22 years on 26 January 1946 at St. Michaels Church Golders Green London, he and Muriel Edenbrow were married.

On 29 April until 02 May 1946 he attended a Service Ordination Candidate Selection at Lichfield Theological College in Staffordshire which included study groups and interviews. After this he and Muriel moved on 20 May 1946 to 4a Dorset Parade in Laindon renting upstairs rooms from the owner a Mr. Coppin which they mention was not particularly nice as Mr. Coppin was a heavy smoker.



On 14 June 1946 he attended an interview for Kings College London, held in the Strand. The interview was conducted by the Dean and he was accepted to commence training in the October.

At this time he also now qualified for a Government Training Grant. Until the September he was still employed by the John Lewis organisation.

On 09 October 1946 at Kings College in London, he began a course leading to a Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) and A.K.C. Associate of Kings College which is also its own degree award. On 14 April 1947 he joined the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius which is an organisation working towards Christian unity.

He had also moved on 11 June 1947 to an upstairs flat at 58 Thurlby Road in Wembley and his father-in-law Arthur Edenbrow had bought a shop and Post Office at 152 Ealing Road Wembley. Their first child Hilary was born on 23 September 1947 at The Firs Maternity Home Roxborough Park Harrow on the Hill Middlesex.

In July 1949 James was elected Associate of the Kings College at the Strand in London and in the August, he had passed all the modules with the exception of those in the Old Testament.

However, in the October he went to St. Boniface College Warminster in Wiltshire for his Post Graduate Training Course. The College having re-opened after the war was a Post Graduate Missionary Training Centre for the Kings College and he continued on the course until the summer of 1950.



The February of 1950 had seen another move to the Church house in Thirlmere Gardens South Kenton in Middlesex where his Stipendiary Curacy was in charge of a small mission church in the parish of St. Augustine and from June 1950 at St. Ursula's Retreat House in Chiswick he attended, as Ordinands, Sunday services at St. Pauls Cathedral. On 04 June 1950 at St. Pauls Cathedral for his Ordination by William, Lord Bishop of London and he was formally to serve the Parish of St. Augustine Wembley Park living at his Thirlmere Gardens address. On 19 April 1952, his son Aidan Paul Day was born in Wembley and Baptised on 13 June.

On 19 November 1952, James was interviewed for the role of Civil Chaplain in Mauritius, firstly undertaking a medical examination. His appointment was accepted and confirmed on 18 February 1953 at the Colonial Office in Great Smith Street London and on 27 February attended and conducted his farewell service at SPG House in Tufton Street Westminster.

On 19 March 1953, the family commenced their journey to Mauritius on board the SS Ferdinand de Lesseps via Marsellies, Port Said, the Suez Canal, Djibouti, Mombassa, Daes Salaam, Madagascar, Reunion Island arriving in Mauritius on 15 April 1953. From 16 April, the family residence was Quatre Bornes, Plaines Wilhems staying with the Manton family whilst their house was being readied.

James commenced work on 29 April at St. Andrews School and Trinity Church Rose Hill Mauritius, licenced as Chaplain and Priest in Charge of Holy Trinity Church and Chaplain of St. Andrews School where he taught Religious Education.

Their house in Vandermesch Street Rose Hill was ready on 13 June 1953 where they also had two housekeepers. In 1955 they formally moved into The Pasonage at Beau Bassin which had four bedrooms and was a classic colonial style bungalow with additional accommodation for the live-in help.

On 23 June 1956 Muriel and the children departed back to London where she was in urgent need of surgery. The Island Governor invited James to attend a formal Garden Party with Princess Margaret in attendance. The 14 October saw James commence the long journey back to England via Reunion, Durban, East London, The Cape, Madeira then to Southampton arriving on 16 November 1956.



In May 1957 he resigned as Civil Chaplain C of E, Mauritius based upon family health reasons and on 28 May was appointed to Ravendale with Hatcliff in Lincolnshire where they moved into the Rectory in East Ravendale Grimsby. It is worth noting on 16 September 1957 at the Grimsby Centre he failed a Driving Test passing on the second attempt.

On 27 November 1958 he was appointed to the Parish Church and Rectory in Beelsby Lincolnshire remaining there until his next appointment on 15 November 1960 to St. Pauls West Marsh Grimsby in Lincolnshire. It was noted as a 'run-down' area.

Having moved to a new parish on 21 April 1966 in Coningsby Lincolnshire he was licensed to the Curacy of Tattershall and instituted into the parish by the Bishop of Grimsby and Archdeacon of Lindsey and James also became Chaplain to the RAF at Coningsby. On 27 July 1973 James was

appointed Rural Dean of Coningsby and on 13 June 1977 he was installed, aged 54 years, as Canon James Alfred Day of Lincoln Cathedral.

On 05 June 1980 he was instituted into the Parish of Heckington with Howell and East Heckington in Lincolnshire moving into the Vicarage in Cameron Street Heckington. In 1988 he retired from parish duties moving into his house at Ancaster Drive in Sleaford but he did remain as Chaplain to Raucby Hospital and took services in local churches.

On 23 October 1994 he travelled with Muriel, Hilary and others to Briey to visit the site of his wartime crash and to the graves of his crew.

A formal reception was held for him in the town of Abbeville les Conflans.

**James, Muriel and Hilary at anniversary of being shot down at Briey: being handed back part of his parachute.**



On 19 June 2002 at Grantham Hospital, Muriel passed away after a prolonged illness and following her cremation, her ashes were interred at Heckington Church and on 29 September 2011 James moved to a Church of England Residential Home in Hindhead where he remained until his death on 17 August 2016 in the Royal Surrey County Hospital. He was buried at Heckington Churchyard on 20 January 1917 his ashes also interred next to Muriel.