

“I Gardened for My Life”, Kriegy John L. “ Carrots” Creech

First Lieutenant John Creech was captured in North Africa in early 1943 by Ewin Rommel’s Afrika Korps and sent to Oflag 64. By the end of 1943 the meals provided for the POWs by the Germans had deteriorated to the point of starvation ration level. Kriegy Creech, who had received a degree in floriculture from the University of Rhode Island, discovered a greenhouse on the grounds of the camp and with the help of the Senior American Officer, Colonel Drake, convinced the Germans to turn it over to the POWs. Colonel Drake put John in charge of the greenhouse and with seeds provided by the Red Cross and others, he immediately set about establishing seedlings so plants were available for transplanting to garden plots in the Spring. Since he did not smoke he traded his cigarette ration to the German Quartermaster for coal in order to keep the greenhouse warm enough in the winter for plants to survive. Working tirelessly during the winter, in all he produced 6000 tomato plants along with along with onions, beets, lettuce, leaks, radishes and carrots (hence he was given the nickname – Carrots). Under his supervision every piece of usable land within the camp was tilled and planted so that in the summer of 1944 the 1500 POWs could supplement their meager rations with fresh vegetables. Later he even produced flowers from seeds donated from Netherlands and the Royal Horticultural Society of London. As noted in a Bronze Star recommendation after the war, “Had it not been for Lieutenant Creech’s efforts and those of his assistants, the prisoners of war would have been without fresh vegetables of any kind.”

After the war John went on to get his PHD in Botany from the University of Maryland and worked for the U.S Department of Agriculture for 26 years eventually being appointed third Director of the National Arboretum, a position he held for many years. Captain John L. Creech died on 7 August 2009. He was buried with full military honors in Columbus, North Carolina. To read the full story of Kriegy Creech’s gardening in Oflag 64 as well as his Bronze Star recommendation and letter from one of his assistants, Kreigy Clarence Ferguson, please go to <http://defiantgardens.com/admin/pows/dr-john-creech-wwii/>



Lt John Creech, U S Army



Creech center in picture