

Gramophone Recordings in Oflag 64

In the early summer of 1944 the German YMCA office in Zagan, Poland received some gramophone recording kits with, when possible, to make recordings of life in POW camps. Countries that were contributing to the YMCA POW efforts were keen to hear from the POWs themselves how their resources were being used. On June 28, 1944 Henry Soderberg set off in his charcoal powered Opel Olympia for Oflag 64 with the gramophone equipment in the car. The Kriegies had already sent him their recording program which had been approved by Commandant Oberst Schnieder. Henry arrived in Szubin that evening. The next morning he went to Oflag 64 where he was greeted by Colonel Drake who “receives me with his staff of radio reporters and gramophone technicians. Really I did not need to do anything myself. They are taking over the whole show.”

Kriegy Howard “Boomer” Holder, an experienced radio announcer, acted as commentator and director. Colonel Drake kicked off the recording with a greeting followed by parts of a theater performance, the Kriegy choir, John Creech telling about his garden, a piece about their athletic program, talk of the Altburgund Academy, music by Bob Rankin’s band, greetings by representatives of all the States represented in the camp, etc. All in all they made 14 separate recordings which took them well into the evening. Everyone was very tired but also very satisfied, even the German commandant. Colonel Drake expressed the POWs gratitude by saying, “The best day so far in captivity.” The Kriegies had high expectations that their loved ones in the U.S. would hear the recording from “that mystical POW camp, Oflag 64 in Szubin, Poland” and that they would receive a letter from home saying that it had been heard and enjoyed.

Regrettably, because of German censorship, transportation issues, editing and distribution snafus the finished records did not get to the U.S. until the early months of 1945 when the POWs were either on the march to Germany, escaped to Russia, or repatriated.

The audio of the entire original recording can be heard here: <http://www.oflag64.us/audio.html>

