

Oflag 64 Kriegies' Great Friend, Henry Soderberg

Henry Soderberg was a young Swedish lawyer who started work in the summer of 1943 as one of the seven official YMCA delegates who were allowed to enter the prisoner of war camps in the German Reich to work for the benefit of foreign prisoners of war. He visited camps in eastern Germany and western Poland which included Stalag Luft III (of Great Escape fame) and Oflag 64. His first visit to Szubin was on August 13, 1943.

During that visit he met with LtCol John Waters (Gen Patton's son-in-law) since the Senior Officer, Col. Drake, was away in Poznan getting a medical check-up. In his diary Henry described the meeting thus, "I find that John Waters and the officers whom I met today are very fine representatives of the United States. I am meeting a new kind of camp and a different type of prisoners-of-war. Both the environment and the atmosphere is different to the many English camps I have visited, especially those with airmen. The Americans are not so arrogant toward the Germans as I am used to in British camps."

While the Red Cross provided food parcels and some clothing, the International YMCA was focused on providing material for cultural and leisure time activities. Over the next 16 months Henry would see to it that the Kriegies of Oflag 64 had musical instruments, athletic equipment of all kinds, material to build their Little Theater, play scripts, books for the library, sheet music, and even two pianos. The Kriegies always greeted him with other requests to the point that he almost felt like "Father Santa Claus". Colonel Drake put it this way "What you're doing for us will never be forgotten." After the war Henry visited the United States and made lasting friendships with the Oflag 64 Kriegies. He attended many of their POW reunions and helped plan their return to Szubin in 1971.



Henry Soderberg circa 1944