Oflag 64: Every Kriegy Wanted to Escape

The Oflag 64 senior officers required that all escape plans be reviewed and approved through the Escape Committee that reported to the head of Security, Lt Col Alger. Final approval came for the Senior American Officer (SAO) in the camp. This was done for several reasons. They wanted to ensure the plan had a reasonable chance of being successful, that it would not endanger other, already approved plans and that if unsuccessful would not cause harm to the rest of the camp. Most plans consisted of small groups of two to five men. According to Kriegy Jack Van Vliet, “The man who originated an approved scheme had ‘ownership’ and could name as partners only those needed to make the plan work.”

A typical plan could take months of study and planning but once approved would become a “camp sponsored” effort to assist in the preparation. The Escape Committee would provide maps as well as the latest intelligence available on troop concentrations and areas to avoid. Much of the intelligence was gleaned by Lt Col Alger who interviewed all new arrivals as to what they had seen. Food was saved from Red Cross parcels. For instance, juice cans were saved by all Kriegies for use in making air pipes to support ventilation while digging a tunnel. Bed slats were donated to shore up the tunnel (many Kriegies slept on bunks supported by only three slats. Many feared falling through to the floor or the bunk below). It was truly a team effort.

While very few of the Oflag 64 POWs successfully escaped, there were a few attempts that came very close to success. But the planning, studying and preparing helped to pass the time and, oddly enough, contributed to morale and sense of cohesiveness among the POWs.

