Spy Joins Oflag 64

Kriegy Major Jerry Sage came to be in Oflag 64 through a much different route than the other POWs. A Washington State College star athlete and Phi Beta Kappa, Jerry had won an Army reserve commission and wassubsequently called to active duty in 1941. In early 1942 FDR tasked BGen “Wild Bill” Donovan to organize a paramilitary group, the OSS (Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner to the CIA and the Green Berets). Because of his size (6”3”, 200 lbs) and athleticism, Jerry was recruited by OSS and trained in the art of infiltration and sabotage. After months of training, in January 1943 he landed in North Africa in command of a special OSS unit. He organized numerous infiltrations through Allied lines to sabotage German communications, railroads, fuel dumps and other strategic targets. On one such mission he was captured by German forces. During his early interrogation Sage convinced the Germans that he was a downed aviator. Had they known he was an OSS operative, the Germans would have shot him immediately.

Major Sage was moved from North Africa to POW camps in Italy and then to Stalag Luft III in what is now Zagan, Poland. As a result of his paramilitary training, he became one of the main planners for the large-scale breakout from Stalag Luft III, later the basis for a 1963 film, The Great Escape with Steve McQueen. To keep the guards occupied during tunnel digging, Sage made several escape attempts which resulted in him being put into solitary confinement some 15 times. Because he was a serial escape artist, in the spring of 1944 the Germans decided to transfer Sage to Oflag 64. Luckily for him this was before the actual breakout occurred at Stalag Luft III as many of those who escaped were shot. On arrival at Oflag 64 he was unhappy to learn that no further escape attempts were authorized and so he turned to athletics. Sage was most proud of the no-hit baseball game he pitched while competing at the camp.

Major Sage finally did escape during the Long March, was repatriated and would spend 30 years in the Special Forces retiring as full Colonel. After the war, he became an instructor at West Point and attended the Army’s Command and General Staff College. Sage later deployed to Laos and trained with the Montagnards in the highlands during the Viet Nam War. Colonel Sage is such an icon in the Special Forces community that the final test, named *Robin Sage ,* before soldiers can don the Green Beret, is named for the town of Robins, NC near where it is held, and for Jerry Sage.

