

The Gnome Bookbinder's "Specially Bound" Books

From time to time the Oflag 64 Security Officer, LtCol Alger would task the bookbinding team to conceal secret material in books for use as evidence in future War Crimes Investigations of German treatment of POWs. As Lt Lussenden later explained, "The 'evidence' was carefully hand-printed on onionskin paper approximately 4 inches by 6 inches in size." Once the books were selected "we would rebind it using the original cardboards. We slowly and carefully split the edges of the front and back cardboard covers into two thin sheets apiece. Then we outlined a space on the inside surfaces of the split boards to accommodate the onionskin 'evidence'. After inserting the paper, a colorless glue was used to seal the halves back into the cover board and then sanded to remove any evidence of the insert. The boards were assembled into the split, then assembled onto the normal cover and attached to the newly bound book." The bookbinders let the Security Officer know when they were working on "special binding" so lookouts could be positioned to warn of any German guards approaching the shop. The "specially bound" books were assigned to Kriegies according to subject. For instance, a French dictionary would be paired with a Kriegy studying French so it made sense for him to have it. The hope was that when POWs were released they would take these books with them and when debriefed by Allied authorities provide evidence secreted in their books.

There is no report that any of the "specially bound" books ever reached Allied authorities but it is possible during RAMP (Recovered American Military Personnel) intelligence debriefings they may have been recovered. This effort by the Oflag 64 Kriegies is an example of the creativity and resourcefulness those men possessed using all means at their disposal.



Lt Don Lussenden