

## The Oflag 64 "Gnome Bookbindery" Keeps Overage Books Circulating

When the Kriegies of Oflag 64 arrived at the camp in June of 1943 they inherited a library of approximately 250 well-worn books from the British POWs who had been held there previously. Kriegy LeRoy Ihrle volunteered to be the camp librarian and take charge of the mostly English titles, that over time thanks to the YMCA, was complemented with books with American titles. Eventually the library grew to nearly 4000 volumes. All the books were machine bound and never intended to withstand constant handling by insatiable readers such as the POWs. Even the newer American books began to see wear and tear after only 15 to 20 readings. It was then that Lt Ihrle put out the word they needed a bookbinder.

Kriegy Don Lussenden volunteered. As Don put it "When there appeared to be no one who had that experience, I decided to try. My only knowledge in the field was a Boy Scout merit badge project." Fortunately the library staff, after seeing the condition of the older books, anticipated the need for bookbinding material and ordered bookbinding supplies from the YMCA at the same time they ordered new books. That was the birth of the "Gnome Bookbindery". With assistance of Kriegies Harvey Houschild, Bill Hanson and Vernon Paulson, Don set about to repair books. On reflection he said "I must admit that the rebound books were not pleasing to the eye, but were serviceable for the readers."

It was shortly after beginning their operation that the bookbinders were visited by Willi Kricks (see previous post) who not only operated a print shop in Szubin but also a bookbinding shop. Willi took interest in his only competition and offered to arrange for Don to come to his shop each day for two weeks to get lessons in bookbinding from his Polish employees. "It was a fine learning experience, and it also set up a useful working relationship between Willi and myself." Willi also found an old book press and book trimmer in one of the camp buildings that helped make their work look more professional.

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A great help in keeping Lt. Kriegie's favorite volumes in circulation is the bookbinding shop superintended by Lt. Donald Lussenden and staffed by Lts. Harry Hauschild, William Hanson, and Vernon Paulson — all without previous experience in bookbinding, but learning fast in the school of practical work. For bookbinding material they use wax paper from cigarette cartons and binding tape from old Red Cross boxes. A book trimming machine obtained from a German blacksmith shop, hammer, wooden clamps, a sewing frame and needles are the principal tools of this shop. More than 600 books have been salvaged and restored to circulation.



"Westerns," detective stories, and historical novels come into the shop most frequently.

More than 30 officers have applied to learn bookbinding as a hobby and Lt. Lussenden hopes that eventually he may provide facilities for them.