

Augusta, Ga. December 14, 1944

Dear Friends:

I have just returned after being a Prisoner of War for 19 months -- seven months of this in Oflag 64. When I was exchanged, I promised the boys I'd tell the folks at home all the "dope on the dump." As I have over 300 addresses, I'm sure you will forgive the mimeograph form.

I have tried to answer every question I think you would ask if you could talk to me. If I have omitted anything you'd like to know more about, write me:

1st Lt. Leo W. Fisher
Ward 8, Oliver General Hospital,
Augusta, Georgia

and I'll be happy to give you more details. Best wishes to you.

Oflag 64 is about 90 miles due south of DANZIG, and about 120 miles due west of WARSAW. The nearest large town, 40 miles northwest of camp, is POSEN. The camp is in a town called SCHUBIN by the Polish and ALTBURGUND by the Germans. Before the war the camp was an academy for teen-agers. The town is on one of the most used Roman routes to the Baltic Sea. It is mentioned in history as early as 1055. Fire destroyed the town in 1840. With the growth of America, many of its inhabitants migrated to this country. The population now is about 3,000 Polish and German. There is a Nazi Youth Camp one-half mile from Oflag 64.

The Camp area is about five acres with fifteen buildings inside the wire. When I left the Camp on July 26, 1944, there were about 600 officers and 56 enlisted men inside the wire. Colonel T. D. Drake, who was Commanding Officer, was exchanged with us, and now Colonel Millett (pronounced Millay) is the Commanding Officer.

The physical treatment by the Germans has not been bad. There is no brutality or pushing around. Their only harsh treatment comes by the constant searches of personnel and property by the Gestapo, and by the severe ration of food and fuel. The German food ration for a day for one man is hot water for breakfast, barley and potato soup at noon and night, 1/7 of a loaf of black bread per day (about 2 slices) is issued. A weekly ration of 1/4 of a pound of beet sugar, small portions of jam, and some very valuable cheese (to judge by its smell it must be antique!)

This ration is supplemented by a food parcel from the American Red Cross, and it is this parcel which really feeds the men. It contains about 17 articles -- sugar, marg, biscuits, bully beef, spam, salmon, sardines, cheese, chocolate, and powdered milk. All this combined makes an adequate if monotonous diet. On Thanksgiving last year, the food for the day was: Breakfast, Oatmeal; Dinner, Meat and Vegetable Hash; Supper, Prem and mashed potatoes, peas and carrots (from British Red Cross Parcel, which we got sometimes in lieu of American).

The food is prepared in a main kitchen by officers and men, and served in a mess hall, eight and ten officers to a table. The cooking facilities are meager, but the boys have made their own utensils from tin cans from the food parcels.

Speaking of parcels, the next-of-kin parcels were coming through in fine shape and fairly regularly. Two months best time, and 19 months (my own) was the worst. The boys have no complaints of the things you folks are putting into them. Banana flakes make pies and cakes. Raisins, too, are versatile -- and can be distilled to make a paint remover called, "Oflag Gin".

In the summer, the diet is helped by carrots, peas, radishes, onions, etc., grown in the Camp Garden. The winter is the time when food becomes a problem, but not a too serious one -- no one starves -- but everyone is very hungry most of the time.

The winter also presents the cold. The climate in that part of Poland is about like Illinois. With adequate indoor heat, it would be all right. But the Germans issue one-half of a coal brick per man per day. The bricks are smaller than one regular house brick. They used a peculiar type of stove, which gets very hot even on the coal rations, but only throws the heat about six inches away. We take turns hugging this big pile of tile, but at least it gives us something to hug!

On each bed are two German and two American blankets. The mattress is straw, with straw pillows. The bunks are double and run from four to a room (for Colonels) to about 72 to a ward for other officers. The enlisted men have a separate building.

The water is good -- and cold. We get one hot shower of seven minutes' duration a week. The Germans furnish towels, sheets and pillow cases changed every two weeks-- maybe. Laundry is done mainly by the men, although it can be sent out. It returns after a month -- more or less. It's a great surprise when it comes back.

The Prisoners are dressed in American soldiers' uniforms, brought by the YMCA and the Red Cross. In most cases it is adequate.

Sports include handball, basketball, baseball, ping-pong, badminton, volley ball, horse shoes and various indoor games, all supplied by the YMCA.

For a while there were walks once a week -- five miles outside the wire, with guards, of course. Also for three weeks we were taken into Schubin to the local movie. These all were discontinued sometime ago. They may be in effect again.

Mail was coming through fairly well. It took an average of 90 days to arrive. The men beg for photos, and especially colored ones, those made with color films. Also they want longer letters and never mind what the Red Cross bulletin says.

We have a small theater built by the ingenuity of the officers. Also an excellent band, which gives us light and heavy music, of a good choice. Each Friday is play night and once a month we have a three-act play. The costumes are homemade. We have put on "Three Men on a Horse", "Brother Orchid", Variety Shows, "Pettrified Forest", and "The Man Who Came to Dinner."

We also have a newspaper, "THE ITEM" which is run by Frank Diggs, ex-city editor of the WASHINGTON POST. The paper is published once a month and will be a valuable file of camp events for the future.

Another news agency for news of the day is our OFLAG BULLETIN -- published also by Frank Diggs and his staff. This is published daily and converts German papers and radio to the American way of seeing things. We keep up with current events fairly well.

There is a good Hospital inside the Camp and we have nine American Doctors in charge. Over the period of the first year, less than 1% of the Camp population was hospitalized, and then only for colds, and minor injuries from playing games.

When your man comes home again (be he brother, husband, father or sweetheart), he'll have a few words in his vocabulary which you won't understand. Here are a few examples:

Bash	Meaning in American	"To eat"
Kriegie	"	Prisoner of War
Big Operator	"	"Big Shot" ie. Amon Carter
Kriegitis	"	Industrial decease caused by confinement in POW Camp
Beardless	"	Not dry behind the listening posts
Bashomaniac	"	One who "Bashes" with frenzy
Gefangeners	"	German for Prisoner of War
Rumor Bird	"	One who lays bad eggs, "The War is Over" type
Bash-Hound	"	The "don" who has food left on Friday
Firebug	"	One who hugs the stove like a lover
"Smokeless" Heater	"	Stove made of tin cans, makes fog like burning building.

And these are not all, but you'll know the rest soon, when the boys come back.

Many of you wonder if the Camp will be rescued by the Russians. My personal opinion is that the Germans will move the Camp further into Germany before this happens. They cannot afford to lose all these officers in one group.

Now in closing I must beg that this information be ONLY FOR YOU. DO NOT write of this to the boys over there. THIS IS IMPORTANT! I tell you all this in order that you may know and understand better how your loved one lives. Tell the boys you have heard from me -- but DO NOT discuss this letter.

My prayers are added to yours that your loved ones will soon be back in this, the best country in the world, and in the arms of those he loves and longs for every minute of the day and night.

A Merry Christmas and a hopeful, happier New Year -- And may God be with you all.

Amon was in the best of health and happy as he could be under the circumstances. When I was flown from Liverpool to Washington, G-2 asked me about him the very first thing. It was very interesting.

I heard over the radio that you were at the football game in N.Y. last Sunday -- hope it won't be too long until Amon can join you. Sincerely yours,
Les Fisher