

LAW OFFICES
WILLIS AND WILLIS
ROANOKE, VIRGINIA
MOUNTAIN TRUST BUILDING

HOLMAN WILLIS
HOLMAN WILLIS, JR.

March 8, 1945

Hon. Amon G. Carter,
Fort Worth Star-Telegram,
Fort Worth, Texas.

My dear Mr. Carter:

I thank you for yours of February 16th. For whatever it may be worth I am writing to say that every few days now some boy of our acquaintance, who was confined in Oflag 64, is either dropping in or reporting to his family that he is at liberty. Yesterday we got word that a Washington and Lees boy, a friend of Keith's who was in this camp, had landed in Miami. You may have seen it in the press. This was Bill Corey, whose father is a professor at the University of Maryland. His family did not know that he had been released until he landed in Miami last week and called them on the phone. Several days before that we got a report of a young man in Lynchburg, whose photograph was taken with Keith in the camp, who was reported safe in Russia and who had communicated with his family. Shortly before that Frank Hancock of Roanoke got through and reported ~~of~~ his escape.

Except for the above you doubtless have seen from the press all that we know and perhaps more. As we gather the story from the various reports it is that when the Russians approached Oflag 64 the German guards left ninety-one sick and wounded men in camp, divided the well men into two groups, viz., the ones who were able to march rapidly and those who could march slowly and started them on foot to the West. One group camped about fifteen miles from Oflag 64 and during the following morning some of them evaded the guards and got away, though none of the men who were released seemed to know how many or where they all went. All of the slow group was overtaken by the Russians and released but no complete list has been published, either of the men left at the camp, or of the slower group, or the ones who escaped the first night. I greatly fear that the faster group was not released, since up to now none of the men, whom we have heard were released, have reported that they were in that group.

As you know the Red Cross has reported that they were moved to Luckenwald about thirty-three miles South of Berlin. The closest camp to Oflag 64, in which Americans were confined, appears from the Red Cross maps to be Luft III, which was probably fifty or seventy-five miles Southwest of Oflag 64. It seems to us probable (though it may be wishful thinking) that some of the men from Oflag 64 were stopped there. The Russians took this camp very shortly after the overrunning of Oflag 64 and, from the report of the number of American prisoners released, it seems that they must have released some or all of the men from that camp.

It is probable that you have all the information and perhaps more but I detailed it for what it is worth.

With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

Harmon

P.S. Since the above was typed we have received a letter from Bill Corey in which he tells us that he saw Keith the night before he, Corey, escaped and that Keith was well and in excellent physical shape. We gather from what Bill says that the men up to that time had been well treated, had sufficient food, and were in good physical condition. Unfortunately, he gave us no further details and said that
 HW:P he was not permitted to report the means by which he escaped. In spite of accounts that have come out of Germany that have been many things in Keith's letters which would indicate that the German officer in charge of the camp must have been an old line German officer, too old to be on active duty, who observed the rules for the treatment of war prisoners pretty strictly and with all a fairly humane man. Knowing Keith as I do I am entirely positive that he might have refused to write anything about his conditions at all but he would not have written as he has unless it was true. For instance, he frequently told of taking part in athletic events and of his part in the musical programs. Much of the music was of a nature which must have required a great deal of practice on the part of the choir to render a creditable performance. He also told more than once of being permitted to take walks outside of the camp. In short, it is quite a consolation to us to know that while the discipline was strict and they were dependent almost entirely on the Red Cross for food they were not harshly treated and as a whole the prisoners were able to keep in good physical shape.

You probably heard the broadcast that came over Columbia yesterday to the effect that while the railway system in Germany is shot, the Red Cross has been permitted to take food to the war prisoners in large truck convoys. One of our friends called us to say that she just heard a broadcast over some station to the effect that the returning Red Cross trucks were picking up great numbers of straggling prisoners and bringing them out of Germany. This does not sound probable, as it would seem to be a violation of the pledges of the Red Cross when permitted to cross the German lines and, on the other hand, it could indicate that conditions inside of Germany are pretty well demoralized.

H. W.