

Colonel Says Nazis Took Red Cross Parcels From U. S. War Prisoners

BY W. L. REDUS.

The paramount question among American prisoners at Oflag 64 in Poland was food, but their next biggest problem was keeping busy, Col. Thomas D. Drake, senior officer in the group that grew to nearly 1,500, said here Thursday.

Colonel Drake, in Fort Worth for a few hours en route to the West Coast on an inspection tour, now speaks of the camp in the past tense, for it is in an area that has been overrun by the Russian drive and has been abandoned by the Germans.

A few of the former prisoners in the camp have reached the United States. Some—like Lt. Philip G. Poteet of Fort Worth—have been liberated and are waiting in Europe for passage home. Colonel Drake hopes that this number includes many more of the American ground forces officers held at Oflag 64.

Prisoner 19 Months.

Repatriated last September because of illness, after 19 months as a prisoner, Colonel Drake said the men at the camp devised all kinds of activities to occupy their time during the long, dreary days of confinement.

"Since all the men at the camp were officers and could not be made to work for the Germans, it was up to them to find their own means to keep busy," he said. "Without something to occupy their time, the long, tedious wait would have been intolerable."

They read a lot (books were furnished by the American YMCA), had daily language classes, engaged in athletic activities, and cultivated a vegetable garden. The men put on skits and shows, sometimes working as many as five at a time, rotating the casts so more of them could take part.

Despite their isolation, they were well informed about progress of the war. Surprisingly enough, they got their information from German newspapers, which Colonel Drake said were astonishingly accurate, even though the news was colored with German propaganda.

The prisoners learned to read between the lines and get an accurate view of what had taken place, when the reports said the Germans had "shortened their lines and given up areas no longer useful."

Larry Allen, war correspondent confined at the camp, would take the German communiques, strip them of propaganda, and rewrite them into American news account form. To this, the Germans objected violently.

"Allen then would put his account and the communique side by side," Colonel Drake related, "and show them the facts were exactly the same. 'You don't even know what's in your own communiques,' he would tell them."

No radios were permitted in the camp, except a German propaganda radio attached to a single loud-speaker.

Kept Red Cross Parcels.

Last year, Colonel Drake said, the Germans began systematic interference with delivery of the Red Cross food parcels on which the prisoners depended to keep alive. They also took away any stocks of food that had accumulated in the camp.

"That was because the Nazi propaganda was telling the Germans that Americans were starving," he said. "The German newspapers would reprint pictures from American magazines, showing a queue of people lined up in front of a butcher shop in some Ameri-

can city, looking longingly at a single lamb carcass hanging there. The Germans would add that was the general condition in the United States. Seeing food parcels going to the American prisoners belied the propaganda."

In 26 days after the food parcels were cut off, Colonel Drake said, the average loss of weight in the camp was 8.76 pounds and some of the men lost as much as 30 pounds. The Germans made them stop weighing.

When they permitted a few food parcels to reach the camp, the Germans required that all the cans be opened on the first day, instead of lasting a week as they were intended.

Suffered from Cold.

Weather of 20 to 40 degrees below zero afflicted the men with chilblains, and they were constantly short of blankets, overcoats and woolen clothing. Few had more than one blanket.

Colonel Drake knew five of the seven Fort Worth men who were held at the camp. They are Poteet, Lt. Robert Henry Jr., Lt. John T. Jones of Fort Worth and Houston, Capt. George K. Emerson, and Lt. Amon Caer Jr.

Two others, Lt. Weldon Maples and Lt. Walter Parks, were sent to Oflag 64 after Colonel Drake's departure for a repatriation camp.

Reaching this country last September, Colonel Drake again is on active duty, assigned to the G-3 section of the general staff in Washington. With him on his visit here was Lord Grenfell, a British colonel serving as a liaison officer in this country.

Colonel Grenfell was attached to the same division in North Africa with which Colonel Drake was fighting when he was captured in February 1943.